Shattered Timelines and Bad Decisions
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Shattered Timelines and Bad Decisions
by Katkee

Summary

Well. That Season 2 Flash finale went well. Except no, it didn't. Welcome to Flashpoint--where the Allens are alive, the particle accelerator never exploded, and, oh, look, there's a Time Wraith or twenty after Barry. Good thing Eobard Thawne came to this new timeline with him. Wait, did I say good? Yeah, right. And Time Wraiths are only the start of their problems. A Season 3 projection, continuing immediately where the finale leaves off.

Notes

(I pride myself on having the first fic up after a new episode. Here it is!) If it wasn't obvious already, all the spoilers.

Barry just broke the timeline. That doesn't come without some major repercussions. So! Let's see what they are! This continues immediately after the finale, and will probably end up very long because I need something to do while waiting for next season.
Really, Barry?

The timeline shattered.

The thing about time travel is that it always bends the timeline. Twists it into a damn pretzel. Some changes are small, and the universe has a way of working around those little curves. Speed bumps, if you like—they cause a minor amount of distress to the driver, but the passenger may not even notice.

Other times, however, the changes wrought are larger. The farther one travels back in time, the greater the likelihood of one of these shifts becomes.

And, in this case, the timeline bent so far that it shattered.

A history lesson:

S.T.A.R. Labs was built by Dr. Harrison Wells in the early 21st century in the middle of Central City. The major accomplishment driving the technological innovation of S.T.A.R. Labs was a particle accelerator.

The particle accelerator exploded worked perfectly, sending waves of dark matter across Central City physicists around the world into excited theorizing about the future. The future brought dozens of dangerous metahumans and a group of vigilantes stopping them vivid and fascinating changes in the world of science. Dr. Harrison Wells was really Eobard Thawne and his wife Tess celebrated their achievement and newfound fame.

Cisco Ramon became Vibe worked alongside Dr. Caitlin Snow and Ronnie Raymond, who died was one of the main engineers of the particle accelerator and so gained secondhand fame through his efforts. Hartley Rathaway was a dick and a villain helped the vigilante team claimed a great amount of media attention, proving a point to his parents.

On a cool night near the end of May 2016, after nearly a year of the particle accelerator functioning perfectly, Barry Allen raced out of a wormhole, wearing a suit that Cisco nobody ever built, back from his trip to the past that never could have happened because nobody ever got powers, dragging Eobard Thawne, a man who had not yet been born, along with him.

That was quite enough paradoxes for one day, thank you, and the universe began to plan its revenge. Quietly. Patiently.

But inevitably.

Barry sped down the streets of Central City, motivated by rage and grief. Thawne struggled against him but rage and grief were far too powerful, and Barry kept him firmly in check.

The one thing that gave Barry pause, at all, was that S.T.A.R. Labs looked different. Shinier. Newer.

But why stop to think about it? He’d just altered the timeline. Something was bound to be different.

When he entered the building, zipping through the hallways at Mach 2, there were people he passed, their hair and papers flying wild.

Barry tried to duck into the time vault for a moment to consider why things were different, who
were they, none of them were there S.T.A.R. Labs was empty, but the time vault wasn’t there.

Because Eobard Thawne was with him and Barry’s mother wasn’t dead and so Harrison Wells hadn’t died and so…

His mind could run a little faster than his legs so he stopped before he could enter the pipeline, and raced back out of S.T.A.R. Labs, sending papers flying again.


Thawne raced at him, furious, and without hardly thinking Barry ducked out of the way, pinned him to the wall, set his hand to vibrating before he even realized what he was doing. He paused, mind spinning with anger and grief, and now, finally, a bit of fear.

So:

If his mother wasn’t dead, and the particle accelerator never exploded, then there were no metahumans. No metas meant no pipeline to put them in.

And:

If the particle accelerator never exploded, the Flash was never born, therefore nobody knew about Barry’s powers.

Nobody but Eobard Thawne.

Barry stopped his hand’s vibration. Backed off a little bit. He’d shattered the timeline. The universe was not going to be happy.

“What Thawne,” Barry said.

Thawne glared. “Barry Allen.”

“I think we need to talk.”
Um. So I wrote that first chapter a little too fast and didn't fact-check. In the original timeline, the particle accelerator wasn't supposed to exist until 2020, which I misremembered as 2015. If you'll all indulge me a little, let's pretend really hard that all the changes to the timeline meant that it got built earlier. I would greatly appreciate that. The rest of this makes perfect sense, of course! Enjoy.

“What could we possibly have to talk about?” Thawne looked like he was about to run, but his eyes measured up Barry. “Where are we? When are we?”

“May 24, 2016.” Barry had to know, he had to, he couldn’t stand one more minute without seeing his father, his mother—

His breath caught in his throat because his mother? An unbelievably complicated moment in his mind, a beautiful thing of hope and desperation and joy and fear.

Thawne ran, and Barry chased, again more instinct than thought.

But Thawne stuttered to a halt a dozen paces away. The red in his eyes flickered out.

“Your speed’s gone,” Barry said, suddenly so tired, he’d done all this before. He had to know.

A blur, and Thawne was tied to a support beam and Barry was gone, running home.

He stopped outside his childhood home, pausing at a shop to throw on regular clothes. The night was quiet. Calm.

Barry, scared, knocked.

The door opened and he nearly fainted because it was his mother. He had saved her, that was the whole point, but seeing her here, now, was a shoved-into-cold-water shock.

“Barry,” she said, delighted, maybe a little confused. “What brings you by?”

Barry had never been good at hiding the remnants of his timeline alterations. Everyone always knew something was up, even if they weren’t aware of the cause.

“Hi, Mom,” he said. His voice shook. “I… I just wanted to come say hi, I guess.”

From beyond the door, someone shouted, “Who is it, Nora?”

Barry blinked quickly, fighting back tears. “It’s me, Dad,” he called.

Henry came to the door. “Good to see you, slugger. Come in.”

Barry stepped inside. The house looked so familiar that Barry had to blink back even more tears.
“Is everything okay, Barry?” Nora asked.

“Yeah.” Barry knew he sounded shaken. He made something up, hoping that he was still a CSI in this new world. “I… there was a murder today. A mother of a young boy. They think the father did it, but the boy claims it wasn’t. I couldn’t stop thinking of…” He trailed off, rubbing at his eyes. “I had to come see you.”

“Oh, Barry.” His mother pulled him into a tight hug. “We’re here.”

Henry put his arms around Barry as well. “I’m glad you came to see us, son.”

Barry nodded and just enjoyed the feeling of hugging his parents for a long, perfect minute.

He hadn’t done this for sixteen years.

Then he pulled away. “I should probably go home.” Before he started fully breaking down, yes. He should go.

“I’m glad you stopped by, Barry.” His mother’s smile was heartbreakingly beautiful.

Barry nodded and mouthed, “Yeah,” unable to actually say it.

On his way to the door, he realized he had no idea where he lived. Not with Joe, certainly. So, when he stepped around the corner, he flashed through the house in the moments before his parents could follow.

An address book was on the dresser in their bedroom. Barry found his name, memorized the unfamiliar address, and then rushed back to his spot near the door just as his parents joined him near the door.

“Come visit us again soon, Barry,” Nora said.

“We love you,” Henry added.

Barry nodded, too choked up to risk speaking. He smiled, wider than he had in what felt like days months years since Henry died, and left.

He walked, needing the time to process everything: his parents were alive and well, he had his own place, Thawne was still in the warehouse and what to do with him—

And then there was a screaming whine and a gap in the universe opened before him. Time Wraiths flooded from it.

Barry ran.

A single hand brushed his back, and Barry could feel a shift inside him. His pace slowed, and he nearly tripped before recovering.

The Time Wraith had ripped some of the Speed Force from his body.

Barry was, suddenly, terrified.

But there was one person who would know how to stop them, if anyone did in this new timeline without the Pied Piper.

He routed through the same shop he’d taken the clothes from, leaving them behind to reveal his
suit underneath. The tachyon enhancer boosted his speed, but a glance over his shoulder showed him that the Wraiths were still following.

So, instead of returning straight to the warehouse, Barry zigzagged a circuitous route through the city. The Time Wraiths fell further and further behind.

As he ran, Barry took note of the changes throughout the city. It was… in better condition. The particle accelerator’s explosion in his own timeline had wrecked so much of the city. Central City, in this version, was vibrant and put together. No shut-down factories, far fewer defunct warehouses.

If Barry had needed any other proof that he had made a good decision, this would have supplied it.

The Time Wraiths left far behind, Barry circled back to the warehouse, where Thawne still stood tied to the beam.

“Oh, you’re back,” he said, livid. “Now let me go.”

“Time Wraiths,” Barry said.

Thawne laughed, pure glee. “You don’t know what you’re doing, do you? Time travel is a messy business, Mr. Allen.”

“How do I stop them?”

“Let me go and I’ll tell you.”

“Not happening, Thawne.”

They glared at each other for a moment.

“If I die,” Barry pointed out, “you die too. You’ve lost your access to the Speed Force and nobody but me knows where you are. You think losing your powers is bad? Try your life.”

Thawne’s expression went enigmatically blank. Calculating. Barry had a brief and vivid memory of that same expression on Wells’s face. Back when Thawne was Wells which now would never happen.

“How do you get rid of them?” Barry repeated. In his mind, Wells’s voice mocked him. Scary, aren’t they?

Thawne scoffed. “You can’t get rid of a Time Wraith. There is a way to stop them. Not permanently.”

“How? They’ll be here any second, Thawne. If you want to live, tell me!” Barry’s desperation was taking over his elation at seeing his parents alive. “How do you stop them?”

“How do you stop time?”

“What?”

“Time Wraiths are guided by the Speed Force and constructed of time. Time personified. The universe’s way of keeping speedsters like us in check. How do you stop time?” Thawne smirked. “You take a picture.”

Barry stared. “You’re kidding.”
“Don’t you have cameras in this backwater time period? Take a picture of them. It freezes them in place. Suspends them in a moment in time. I don’t understand all the details. It’s not important how it works. But it does.”

Time Wraiths burst through the walls right then, leaving Barry with no time to think about it. He scrambled for his phone, silently thanking Cisco for including that pocket in his suit, and snapped a picture just before any of the Time Wraiths reached him. He could almost imagine Cisco’s reaction to this: “You stop dementors with selfies?”

The image appeared on his phone, and the Time Wraiths vanished.

No, they didn’t. They were still there, but Barry could only see them when he moved his head. They shimmered, negative images of themselves hanging in the air.

On his phone, the picture moved slightly. Barry jumped and dropped the device. He hurriedly caught it before it could hit the ground.

“They’ll slowly escape the picture,” Thawne said, bored, sounding on the verge of an eye roll. “When they’re gone from the image, they’ll return to reality. It should last a couple days. Won’t work as long the second time, or the third.” He pulled against his bonds. “Now, will you get me out of here? It’s not like I could run.”

Barry frowned. “Then what am I supposed to do with you?”

Thawne looked away from him and grimaced. “Look, Flash, I despise you.”

“I know.” Barry narrowed his eyes, remembering everything that Wells had done last year—that Thawne had done—that he would never do.

Thawne spoke through gritted teeth. “But you’re my only chance to get home. And you need to find a more permanent solution to your Time Wraith problem.”

“That’s not an issue,” Barry said. “I know someone who can get rid of them forever.”

Now Thawne rolled his eyes. “Does this person even know you in this timeline?”

Barry looked away.

Thawne let out an aggravated sigh. “No wonder the damn things are after you. You really don’t know what you’re doing.”

“Did you have a point, Thawne?”

“I understand time travel, Allen. If you want to keep from inviting any more Wraiths, and maybe stay discreet while figuring out this new timeline, you’re going to need my help.”

“You would help me? Not for nothing, I’m sure. What do you want in return?” Barry couldn’t imagine working with Eobard Thawne—but he could; he’d done that (never done that, he had to remember) for nearly a year.

“Untie me,” Thawne sighed. “I’d like my freedom. I’d like to go home. But for now, untie me. I don’t have many options, Flash.” He frowned. “I would like a burger. We don’t—”

“Have cows where you come from, yes, I know,” Barry said. He considered. He wished the others—Cisco, Caitlin, Joe, even Harry—were here to help him make this decision. Working with his
mother’s murderer? (Even if he hadn’t technically murdered her in this timeline?)

But Thawne had a point. Barry had no idea how to time travel. Thawne-as-Wells had never been particularly helpful on that matter.

He glanced at his phone. The Time Wraiths in the image had shifted, moving just a little bit forward toward the screen.

“All right.” With a flicker of yellow lightning, the ropes fell to the ground. Eobard Thawne, Barry’s most hated enemy, now his potential ally, stepped away from the support beam. “But if you betray me, Thawne, there’s a prison I know where you’ll never see the light of day.”

That was, if Oliver’s Lian Yu bunker even existed anymore.

Thawne smirked. “If the Time Wraiths don’t catch you first.”

He held out his hand toward Barry, still gloved in yellow.

Barry, hesitant and distrustful, took his hand.

The two speedsters, neither of whom should’ve even existed anymore, shook hands.

Chapter End Notes

Right. Perfect sense. Stopping Time Wraiths. With pictures. This makes sense! Science!

Hope you enjoyed. I’d love a review.
Barry’s apartment turned out to be relatively nice. His salary as a CSI (which he still was; the badge in the coat hung by the door told him that much) wasn’t much in any timeline, but it did get him a two-bedroom place, it seemed.

The fact that Thawne, with nowhere else to stay in a time when he hadn’t even been born, was walking in behind him pretty much ruined the effect.

Thawne stopped Barry before either of them could proceed further than the entry and whispered, “Do you live with anyone else?”

“No,” Barry answered immediately. He obviously wasn’t staying with Joe, and he’d never lived with anyone else.

Thawne gave him a frustrated look. “In the old timeline, maybe. In this one, Flash?”

“Oh, right.” Barry stared around the living room, visually CSI’ing it for any evidence of a second inhabitant.

He ignored Thawne’s inevitable comment. “You’re incompetent. If I hadn’t hated you before, Flash…”

The apartment was messy enough that Barry could tell he lived there. The few pairs of shoes by the door were all the same size, and there was only one coat hung up.

“Yeah. I live alone.”

Barry found himself oddly disappointed by that fact—well, his disappointment wasn’t really odd. It was just that, on Earth-2, where his parents weren’t dead, he and Iris had been married. Maybe he’d hoped…

But his parents were alive. One miracle was enough for today.

Barry started poking through the apartment. His bedroom was obviously the messy one—sheets crumpled on the bed, clothes strewn across the floor. The only time he had ever managed to be organized was when he had superspeed to do it, and even then he put off cleaning until one big burst of effort.

“You’ll need normal clothes, won’t you?” he called back to Thawne.

“Until the Time Wraiths catch up to you, you’re the speedster,” Thawne shot back.

Barry frowned. It took a moment to process his meaning. “No. I am not stealing anything for you, Thawne.” He found the other Barry’s—nope, his own—wallet on a counter in the kitchen and
tossed it at Thawne. He couldn’t believe he was trusting the man in yellow with his money, but what other choice did he have?

Thawne rolled his eyes. “And I’m supposed to go buy clothes dressed like this?”

“Well, weirder things have happened in Central City.”

“Maybe in your timeline.”

“Pretend you’re into anime or something. Just go.”

“What’s anime?”

Barry, sick of talking to Thawne as though they weren’t archenemies, used his speed to drag him out the door and shut it before Thawne could react, effectively ending the conversation. He confiscated Thawne’s Gideon interface too, in case the AI had any tricks up her sleeve.

Now alone in (not his) his apartment, Barry sighed. It had been a long day.

But if he went to bed, could he trust Thawne not to murder him in his sleep?

Stupid thought. Barry remembered the nine long months he was in a coma the last time Thawne lost his powers and wanted to get home. Thawne could have killed him at any time.

But his motivation was always to get home. He’d waited for fifteen years to do so. He’d murdered to protect Barry.

No matter how much Thawne hated him, he posed no threat to Barry.

So Barry went to sleep, a little unsettled by the strange new world he found himself in.

An alarm blared loud and annoying pop music at six the next morning. Barry groaned. Had he set an alarm? He couldn’t recall. Joe would—

His parents were alive.

Barry sat up and switched off the alarm, the events of the past day returning to his mind. Zoom, Thawne, Time Wraiths, the new timeline.

And in this timeline, he had to go to work.

Thawne was already up, sitting at the kitchen table. He was eating what appeared to be an omelet.

Barry paused in the door, frowning at the bizarre scene.


“Sure, but you cook?”

He rolled his eyes. “We don’t all have Big Belly Burger, Allen. Don’t you have a job?”

“Yeah.” Barry checked his watch. He was going to be late. Oh, well. He figured his other self, especially without superspeed, was usually late as well, so it would seem in character.

Thawne’s eyes narrowed. “Let me give you some advice, Allen.”

Barry stared at him, suspicious and confused. “What?”
“Don’t make assumptions.”

Barry was about to respond, maybe ask for clarification, but Thawne held up his hand.

“You are *pathetic* when it comes to timeline compartmentalization. We’ve been here for less than twelve hours and you’ve already proved that a dozen times over. Forget everything you knew about the old timeline. Don’t make assumptions.”

Barry gritted his teeth and reminded himself that, enemy or not, Thawne knew more than he did when it came to time travel. “So what do I do?”

“Just keep your damn mouth shut. Something you’ve never been good at, Flash. Let everyone else demonstrate the relationships you have with them.”

“That’s… actually good advice.”

Thawne scoffed. “Don’t be an idiot, Allen, and maybe you won’t ruin everything.”

That seemed to be a general rule of thumb, yeah.

“Got it, thanks.” Barry started toward the door, then paused and turned back with a frown. “What are *you* going to do all day?”

Thawne shrugged. “I’m sure I’ll figure something out.”

“Okay, whatever.” Barry turned to go, still frowning. Sure, he’d trusted Eobard Thawne (as Harrison Wells) for a long time, but this felt far more dangerous.

“See you soon, Flash.”

Barry shut the door behind him and leaned back against it for a moment, shaking his head.

One thing at a time. Thawne could wait. First, get to work, and maybe try not to give away the fact that he didn’t know the first thing about this new timeline.

Even though the precinct looked normal from the outside, Barry resentfully heeded Thawne’s advice not to make assumptions. He entered, bracing himself for anything.

The interior seemed just about the same. But, as Barry walked into the central hub, three faces caught his eye. None of the three were where they ought to have been.

First, a collection of images on a bulletin board, like Barry’s pinboard of his mother’s murder case, all the pictures of a man hooded, goggled, and unidentifiable to anyone who didn’t already know his alter ego:

Leonard Snart.

A couple of the newspaper headlines caught Barry’s eye—*Central City’s Vigilante Resurfaces, Citizen Cold Murders Rapist*—but he was quickly distracted by the second face he recognized.

This one was sitting calmly at a desk, hard at work, as though a speedster from the future had never caused him to kill himself (which he now never would), the sight of whom reassured Barry that he’d made the right decision, and now guess who was looking up and grinning at Barry:

Eddie Thawne.
Barry, maybe a moment too late, returned the smile, but only briefly. Now the whole of his attention turned to the third important face.

Barry approached said face slowly, for it was featured in the same place where Fred Chyre had been in the other timeline. Now there was a different image in the honored, never-forgotten place, neatly labeled underneath with an indifferent plaque:

Joe West.

For the first time since his arrival, doubt flickered in Barry’s mind. Fear, he’d felt, yes, with the Wraiths, but now he stared at Joe’s picture and the doubt was almost tangible, poisoning his mind with an unwelcome uncertainty.

Joe. Was dead. Directly because of Barry’s actions.

And worst of all, he couldn’t ask anyone how it happened. Because Thawne was right and he couldn’t ask anything that he should already know.

Okay. Okay, he could look up articles online later, when he was alone in his lab. Now. Better go there and get started on work, speed through it. Then look up absolutely everything about this world that he should already know.

He turned to go, holding back tears, and startled to a stop.

“Iris! Hi!” She wasn’t even looking at him, why had he said that, maybe they weren’t even friends in this timeline—but maybe they were more?

She glanced at him, and that distracted smile was definitely Iris and definitely proved that they were not anything more than friends. “Hi, Barry.” Iris continued to walk into the main hub of the precinct.

Why was she here? Was Iris a cop like on Earth-2? Was that why Joe was dead?

Barry rotated to watch Iris as she went—wait, why should he even be surprised—right to Eddie. The two of them smiled at each other, then Iris took Eddie’s face in her hands and kissed him.

Barry was about to turn away, simply for their privacy, and because he needed to get to his lab and find out about Joe, but as he did so something on Iris’s hand glittered in the corner of his eye.

A glance showed him what it was. A ring, on her left hand.

And there was another glimmer on Eddie’s, now that he was looking.

Iris and Eddie were married.

Before he had to deal with any more revelations, Barry retreated to his lab.

The work—and there were piles of it—could wait.

He loaded up his computer and started with the least potentially painful search. Citizen Cold.

Nothing emotional, just (appropriately) cold facts. Also known as the Central City Vigilante—differentiating him from the Starling City Vigilante—Citizen Cold was a well-known figure around town, constantly baffling police attempts to identify or arrest him. He ignored the law, but only ever targeted and killed criminals, and very specific types thereof: rapists, kidnappers, and most especially abusers.
Barry scoffed to himself. Yeah. Even if he ignored the vigilante’s parka and cold gun, this had Leonard Snart written all over it.

A quick search of the name Leonard Snart brought up two results. One was an archived article from nearly thirty years ago, talking about a tragedy regarding Lisa Snart: she’d been found beaten to death one night in her home. The father was suspected, but not enough evidence had been found to make the case. Barry winced as he read the article. That would explain the origins of Citizen Cold.

The other result for Leonard Snart was the S.T.A.R. Labs website. He was listed as one of the employees of the lab. That revelation was almost more startling than the fact that Snart was an Arrow-like vigilante.

Barry was going to have to have a talk with this Citizen Cold at some point.

While he had the S.T.A.R. Labs website open, he scrolled through the list of other employees, hoping that all of his friends still worked there in this new timeline. Had the different Harrison Wells made different hiring choices?

Cisco Ramon was the first familiar name he found. Then Hartley Rathaway, listed right below him. And, two in a row, Caitlin Raymond and Ronnie Raymond.

Barry smiled. They’d gotten married too. Another benefit of this timeline.

His smile vanished when he found himself again facing an empty search bar. He knew what he had to type in, but did so slowly, one key at a time.

j-o-e space w-e-s-t enter.

Now he couldn’t stop the tears from flowing down his face as he read the article about (his adopted father’s) Joe West’s death. It was just over two years ago, the night of the original particle accelerator’s explosion. He’d been shot by Clyde Mardon.

Barry took a shuddering breath and reminded himself, like a chant, of everything good in this timeline. Mom. Dad. Eddie. Ronnie. Not to mention the endless deaths due to metahumans that now never happened.

The door to his lab opened, and Barry quickly wiped his eyes and closed out of the tab. Then he spun to see who it was.

Captain Singh—if he was even a captain here—entered. He tossed a folder onto Barry’s desk.

“What’s this?” Barry asked. Then he wondered if he should have already known.

“The newest sighting of the vigilante. See if you can run it through that algorithm of yours and find a new possible location.”

“Algorithm?” Barry was too distracted, thinking about Joe’s death.

Singh frowned at him, and Barry could almost hear Thawne’s Just keep your damn mouth shut. “Yeah, the one you’ve been using. I know none of the locations you’ve found have been accurate yet, but the ninth time’s the charm, right?”

“Right, sure.” Barry nodded and picked up the folder. “Thanks…” He almost added Captain before remembering that he had no idea what was real here.
“Let me know as soon as you have something, Allen.” Singh exited, and Barry turned back to the computer.

He found the algorithm in a folder appropriately labeled ‘Vigilante Locator.’ As he input the information from the file, he absentmindedly wondered what Oliver thought about sharing his title of vigilante, before his mind returned to trying to get over a two-years-ago death.


The computer started to run the algorithm. Barry checked the picture on his phone—the Wraiths were closer to the screen, but he still had some time—and walked over to the door.

He locked it and immediately blurred into action, starting to work through the piles of folders other-Barry had left and maybe work through his grief at the same time.

By the time the algorithm finished compiling, Barry had finished all the backlogged work his timeline counterpart had left and he was effectively out of tears.

_**Mom. Dad. Eddie. Ronnie.**_ The words fell flatter now. Barry told himself that they were still true and checked the computer.

It offered a potential location for Citizen Cold, based on all the places he’d been spotted. Barry frowned at the data—the sightings of Cold were spread out all around Central City. The algorithm wouldn’t work. Snart was too intelligent for that.

But he had to pretend he had no idea who the vigilante was. So he left his lab and handed over the printout of the algorithm’s result to Singh (who, yes, was the captain, according to the plaque on the office door).

“Are you okay, Allen?” Singh asked after glancing over the paper.

“Yeah, um, why?” Barry’s heart raced with a combination of fear and self-consciousness.

“You look a little pale. And you’ve been acting stranger than normal.”

“I’m not feeling great?” Barry offered, the end of the sentence sounding a little too much like a question.

Singh didn’t even look up from the paper. “Then go home, Allen. Take the rest of the day off.”

“Okay, yeah, I’ll do that.” Barry started toward the door. “Thanks.”

He only managed to stumble once on his way out of the precinct, unable to believe his luck.

Time to go to S.T.A.R. Labs. Maybe he’d get an audience with the very people who could stop Time Wraiths.
Barry swung by his apartment to retrieve Thawne, wondering on the way what he was going to do about Thawne once the Time Wraiths were gone. Send him back to his own time, where he could easily attempt again to kill Barry’s mother? Unlikely. He’d made that decision last year: Thawne wasn’t going home. Barry knew what he was capable of.

After entering the apartment and explaining to Thawne what was going on, Barry gave a grin. “So, we’re going to S.T.A.R. Labs. Want to race?”

The look Thawne gave him was one of pure hatred.

And, after a year of Thawne-as-Wells being a step ahead of everyone, Barry couldn’t help but enjoy it.

“Maybe we should walk, Flash,” Thawne said. “You don’t want the city to start wondering about a red and yellow streak who shouldn’t even exist.”

Barry nodded. “Let’s go.” He just hoped he wouldn’t run into any police officers who thought he was home sick.

They started down the street, which was bizarre and yet felt oddly normal, after the eternity of chaos with Zoom and other worlds. If Eobard Thawne hadn’t been there, reminding him of the still-present danger of Time Wraiths, Barry might have even been able to relax.

“I’m curious,” Thawne said after a couple of minutes. “What was your timeline like?”

“Um, you’re from the future.”

“But not the future of the timeline you’ve experienced.”

Barry frowned at him. Thawne rolled his eyes.

“Do I need to draw you a diagram, Flash? In the timeline I experienced, your mother never died. You got your powers in 2020, when Harrison Wells and Tess Morgan launched a particle accelerator. You’ve happily spent your time fighting me ever since.”

Barry was about to protest that Thawne was more the one fighting him, but decided to leave the discussion to a later time. Thawne continued.

“Then I learned your name, Barry Allen. I traveled back in time to kill you. When that failed, I decided to kill your mother instead, and, judging by what you said to me right before knocking me out, I succeeded in the timeline you’re from.”

“You did,” Barry said, anger twisting his voice. “And you never will again.”

“So dramatic, Flash. So my question is, what happened in your timeline? You get your powers and immediately run back to stop me?”

“Not quite.” Barry paused and thought. Did he really want to give the Man in Yellow, the Reverse Flash, Eobard Thawne, any information about the alternative past he could have created?
“Well?”

The key word, Barry realized, was *past*. If they were going to be even close to allies, as it seemed they had to be, he might as well inform Thawne about what he’d done. It *was* the reason the Time Wraiths were after him.

“You lost your powers after killing my mom,” Barry said finally. “Same thing that happened this time.”

Thawne nodded thoughtfully. “How ironic. The only way home from my attempt to kill you was the very thing I despised. The Flash.”

“So you took over the body of Harrison Wells, killing his wife in the process, and pretended to be him for fifteen years. You built the particle accelerator in 2014 and promptly blew it up. I was in a coma for nine months, and in the meantime the city started filling with superpowered criminals. Metahumans.”

Barry paused for breath. Thawne didn’t comment, listening with what appeared to be detached amusement to the story, as though it was the tale of someone else’s life.

“When I woke up, you and I, along with Cisco and Caitlin, began to explore my powers and fight metas.”

Barry stopped abruptly, before he could begin to explain everything that Dr. Wells had been to them. A friend, a mentor, a teacher, an ally, a liar, a murderer, a traitor, an enemy. How could he tell this man about a year of their declining faith, their building suspicion? How he’d broken their trust and damaged all of them irreparably?

“Eventually, you betrayed us. I defeated you, but you’d already reactivated the particle accelerator. You offered me a chance to save my mother in return for sending you back to your time.”

“And then that timeline turned into this one,” Thawne finished. He frowned. “I didn’t tell you enough to prevent Time Wraiths from coming after you, I see. And why would I allow you to drag me here?”

“Because that timeline didn’t turn into this one. Not yet. I didn’t save my mother, not then.”

Thawne looked baffled. “Then why…”

Barry had to laugh. “It involved a year, a singularity, interdimensional breaches, Jay Garrick, an evil speedster known as Zoom, another particle accelerator explosion, and a conversation with the Speed Force. It’s complicated, Thawne.”

“Jay Garrick?”

“You know him?”

“Of him.”

Barry wondered exactly what Thawne’s home time period looked like. Maybe he’d have to visit one day.

“Now, I think you owe me a timeline explanation, Thawne. This is closer to your original timeline, isn’t it?”
Thawne shrugged. “According to the history books, the particle accelerator was turned on in 2020, like I said. Despite the lack of a meltdown, the Flash appeared soon afterward, battling metahumans. If I had access to Gideon, I could give you more information, but, as it stands…”

They were rapidly approaching S.T.A.R. Labs. Barry gazed at the building, awed by how non-damaged it was. He could feel a bit of the excitement he’d felt two years ago, the science-nerd eagerness of actually visiting the famed S.T.A.R. Labs.

The security at the entrance immediately stopped the two of them. Barry scrambled for his CSI badge.

“I’m here for a case,” he lied. “Captain Singh called ahead, didn’t he?”

The security guard shook his head.

Barry groaned. “There was probably another homicide or bank robbery. I’m Barry Allen, this is my…” How to introduce Thawne? “Associate. We needed to see a few people for a case. I’ll get the captain to call you as soon as he can.”

The man still looked doubtful. Barry was on the verge of just flashing past him when Thawne stepped in.

“I apologize for the inconvenience. It does happen to be a time-sensitive matter, as the chemicals within one of our decomposing bodies will result in a rather large explosion if we fail to find the formulae necessary to stop the reaction.”

“Yeah, it’ll be messy,” Barry added. He’d forgotten how good Thawne was at lying. “The captain should have called ahead, I’m so sorry…”

The guard sighed. “I’m used to miscommunications. Go ahead. Would you like me to page the techs you need?”

Barry nodded. “Dr. Wells, Mr. Cisco Ramon, Dr. Caitlin Raymond…” Hartley had been the one to defeat the Time Wraiths in the other timeline. “…and Mr. Hartley Rathaway.”

“All right.” He spoke quietly into an earpiece for a few moments. “They’ll meet you in the Cortex. It’s on level—”

“I know where it is,” Barry interrupted.

The security guard gave him a confused glance, and Barry could almost feel Thawne glaring don’t be an idiot at his back.

But the guard waved them through anyway. Barry entered S.T.A.R. Labs, an action which felt at once familiar and otherworldly. This wasn’t even Earth-2; why should it feel so wrong?

Thawne looked around, seeming unimpressed. “I could have built it better.”

Barry shook his head. “You couldn’t have.”

When they made it to the Cortex, Barry glanced around at the differences. No suit, no treadmill visible through a window. But the table of computers still dominated the room, and the screens scattered around the walls displayed shiny bits of technology.

The group he’d requested was already waiting for him. Hartley. Caitlin. Cisco. Dr. Wells—the real
“Mr. Allen.” Dr. Wells strode over and shook Barry’s hand, smiling.

Barry couldn’t help but catalogue the differences between this man and the two other Harrison Wellses he had known. This Wells smiled far more genuinely than Thawne ever had, and he didn’t have the same rough, desperate edge to his voice that Harry always did. He wore glasses and an actual suit.

“It’s an honor to meet you, Dr. Wells.” He remembered Thawne and added, “This is an associate of mine…” He wasn’t sure whether the name Eobard Thawne would be too strange for this time period, or if any of the scientists in the room would connect the name to Eddie.

“Edward Clariss,” Thawne said smoothly. “Mr. Allen already knows all of your names, but for those of us who don’t study the S.T.A.R. Labs list of employees…?”

“Of course.” Dr. Wells gestured to each of his employees as he spoke. “This is Hartley Rathaway. Cisco Ramon. Dr. Caitlin Raymond.”

Hartley gave a nod, appearing mildly irritated. Cisco waved. Caitlin smiled.

“I’d like to take this chance to thank you, Mr. Allen.”

“Thank me?” Barry’s brow knitted in confusion.

“Yes. About sixteen years ago, your family suffered an attack by something impossible. Though you may not have known it, the tale of these men made of lightning spurred an interest in the sciences, giving us far more funding than would have been otherwise possible. Without your family’s experience, our particle accelerator may not have been built for another five years or so.”

“Then I’m very glad I could help,” Barry said. He unconsciously glanced at Thawne, who he supposed was also responsible for the accelerator’s early creation. Maybe that was also why this timeline’s Barry became a CSI—surviving the impossible was perhaps just as motivating as the alternative.

“Now,” Dr. Wells continued, “I believe you had a case with which you required our assistance?”

Barry took a deep breath. “Yeah. About that… I don’t… really… have a case?”

Dr. Wells’s smile transformed into a look of confusion. He reached across a desk toward a P.A. system. “I’m sorry, Mr. Allen, I’m going to have to call security.”

“No, wait!” Barry insisted. He talked quickly without thinking much about it. “I’m here because I need your help. I time-traveled—”

He cut off when he saw the expressions of everyone in the room but Thawne shift to incredulity (though Cisco’s eyes might have widened with maybe a little bit of excitement). Thawne just rolled his eyes.

“You might want to call a psychiatric ward instead, Dr. Wells,” Hartley drawled.

“No, wait—”

“God, Allen, start at the beginning.” Thawne knocked something that looked very expensive and delicate off a desk on the far side of the room.
“Hey—!” Cisco said, moving instinctively toward it. The others in the room reacted too.

Barry blurred across the room and caught it, setting it back gently on the desk.

Dr. Wells stepped away from the P.A. system. Hartley blinked. Caitlin’s expression crumpled into baffled confusion. Cisco grinned.

“Cool,” he said gleefully.

“Mr. Allen, how…” Dr. Wells started, but trailed off before he could finish the question.

Barry had to smile. “I time-traveled. I’m from an alternate timeline in which…” Omit, omit, unimportant, maybe don’t tell Dr. Wells how Thawne took over his body and used his name and face to betray everyone. “…my mother died that night that the impossible attacked us. Your particle accelerator was built in 2014, and as soon as it was turned on it exploded, sending waves of dark matter throughout Central City. The dark matter gave people powers. In my case, speed. I used it to travel back in time and save my mother, which brought me here.” He glanced at Thawne, hoping the explanation was enough.

Thawne nodded, supporting the story. “It’s true.

Caitlin and Cisco looked at each other, shocked. Hartley crossed his arms and frowned, visibly in deep thought. Dr. Wells, wide-eyed, plunged his hands into hair, nearly dislodging his glasses.

“Do you know what this says about the very nature of reality?” Dr. Wells said excitedly. “The fact that time travel is possible will change the boundaries of science as we know it…” He continued to speak, but his voice dropped so that nobody else could hear him.

“Hold on, so, is this like, Back to the Future time travel, or Terminator, or Doctor Who? What exactly are we dealing with here?” Cisco asked.

Hartley groaned. “Must you discuss revolutionary scientific theories in terms of movies, Cisco?”

“Hey, one’s a TV show. And I don’t exactly see you proposing any theories of your own, Hartley.”

Caitlin ignored the discussion of science and focused on the practical. “Why bring this information to us, Mr. Allen?”

Hartley and Cisco quieted, looking at Barry for the answer. Dr. Wells still appeared consumed in muttering to himself when Barry glanced at him, so he forged ahead.

“In my timeline, after the particle accelerator explosion, S.T.A.R. Labs shut down, except for the two of you, Cisco, Dr. Sno—Raymond. Dr. Wells and the three of us worked together to protect the city from other people with powers who had turned criminal. Metahumans.”

“What about me?” Hartley asked drily. “Was I not a part of this wonderful new crimefighting team?”

“Not initially.” Probably not a good idea to tell Hartley Rathaway about his stint as a supervillain. “You suffered ill effects due to the accelerator explosion, so you weren’t in a state to help us out. Eventually, though, you joined the team, after assisting us with the same problem I’m facing now.”

“What might that be?”

Barry pulled out his phone. “The universe doesn’t like time travelers. These are called Time
Wraiths.” He clicked on the last picture he took and showed it to the group. Everyone, even Dr. Wells, leaned in.

“Is there something we’re supposed to be looking for?” Cisco asked after a moment. “Because it looks like an empty warehouse to me.”

“No, there’s the…” Barry glanced at the picture. “Time Wraiths…” He blinked and looked again. “Uh-oh.”

The Time Wraiths were gone from the picture. Barry spun to face Thawne. “I thought you said it would hold them for a couple of days!”

“Well, Allen, it looks like the universe hates you more than I thought!” Thawne spat back. “They’ll be coming here, then, better get ready…”

“What’s coming here?” Caitlin asked sharply.

Barry fumbled for the camera app and loaded it. There was a momentary pause.

“…What’s that noise?” Hartley asked.

It was a second before Barry heard it, a high-pitched keening, and then Time Wraiths swooped through the wall, dozens of them, all emitting what was now a piercing, drawn-out scream. Barry took a picture and they froze, flickered, and vanished into their inverted-color state.

A very long pause.

“Not only did you time-travel, but you have dementors after you?” Cisco looked nearly catatonic with happiness. “This is the best day ever.”

Dr. Wells walked over to where the Wraiths’ negatives hovered, his eyes wide and thoughtful, then turned to one of the offices adjoined to the Cortex—the place that, in Barry’s timeline, was Cisco’s workroom. He opened the door and called, “Tess! I need you to come here.”

Tess. Another name for Barry to add to his list of good in this timeline.

“Time Wraiths,” Barry said to the completely baffled Cisco, Caitlin, and Hartley. “They come after time travelers sometimes…”

“When said time travelers don’t know what they’re doing,” Thawne input. “As Mr. Allen decided to make major changes to the timeline with only a passing idea of how it all works, they have it out for him.”

“And you’ve stopped them by taking a picture?” Caitlin asked.

“You can defeat dementors with selfies?” Cisco added.

Hartley groaned.

Barry had to grin. “According to… Clariss, it’ll only last for… how long now?”

“It lasted for roughly twelve hours last time, and it usually diminishes by twenty-five to fifty percent each time. I’d estimate we have six to nine hours. Not a lot of time.”

“To do what?” a new voice struck in. Barry glanced over his shoulder—Dr. Wells had returned
with Tess Morgan, who was now interestedly examining the Time Wraiths. She looked away from them at Barry and Thawne. “And who are you?”

“Time travelers, Tess,” Dr. Wells said.

She looked at her husband with a smirk.

“Really,” Barry said. Not in the mood to explain everything again, he said, “We don’t have much time—”

“Rather ironic for a time traveler, don’t you think?” Hartley said.

“What can these… Time Wraiths do if they aren’t stopped?” Caitlin asked.

“And how do we stop them permanently?” Cisco added.

Thawne cleared his throat. “As to the first question, the Wraiths will focus on initially taking Allen’s speed and then killing him, all the while destroying any property—or people—that get in their way. The answer to the second question is why we’re here.”

“I’ve only faced a Time Wraith once before,” Barry said. “And the person who killed it in my timeline was you, Hartley.”

“That’s Mr. Rathaway to you, Mr. Allen,” Hartley retorted. “And how precisely did this alternative version of me defeat a Time Wraith?”

“Sonic frequencies,” Barry said.

Everyone in the room (except Caitlin with her biomedical degree) nodded as though that made perfect sense.

“Of course, because everything has a natural frequency,” Dr. Wells said.

“And matching that frequency would destroy it?” Cisco asked.

“Like an opera singer shattering a glass,” Tess said.

Hartley frowned. “What’s the frequency, Allen?”

Barry shook his head. “I don’t know. That’s why I’m here. In my timeline, you, Cisco, and Caitlin built a gun to stop a Time Wraith.”

“You didn’t help?” Caitlin asked. “If your story about us stopping these metahumans is true, I would assume you spent a lot of time with us.”

“Yes, but the Time Wraith came after me when I traveled to the past to talk to… an old acquaintance. Our past selves’ reactions to the Time Wraith changed the timeline, and when I got back the gun was built and I had no memory of the new timeline.”

Dr. Wells nodded. “Implying that we should assume you have no memories of our current timeline as well?”

Barry shrugged. “Yeah.”

“This gun took how long to build?” Cisco hurried over to one of the workstations. “Because we have six to nine hours.”
Barry winced. “Um… a year.”

Hartley stared. “We have six hours to build a weapon that took a year last time?”

“The good news is that the gun didn’t actually stop it!” Barry said.

“Mr. Allen, you have survived impossible events, you are the impossible, and yet I cannot understand how in any timeline, that is good news,” Dr. Wells said.

“Because Hart—Mr. Rathaway—had a pair of frequency-emitting sonic gloves that stopped it. All we need is some sort of sonic technology and to find the right frequency.”

“Yes, just the simple matter of nonexistent and potentially destructive technology,” Hartley drawled. “Not a problem. I’ll have that to you by noon.”

“Mr. Allen, is there any way we could access this other timeline?” Tess asked.

“It may be impossible to stop these Time Wraiths with no access to data about them,” Dr. Wells added.

“All I know is that it’s a low frequency, high intensity,” Barry said. “But the other timeline is gone. I’m the only one who can remember what we did.” His hopes were rapidly fading. Without the Cisco, Caitlin, or even Hartley that he had known…

Wait. There was one other member of the S.T.A.R. Labs team from that timeline.

He turned to Thawne, who had been watching their conversation with a wary amusement.

“Do timeline shifts also change other universes?”

Thawne frowned. “Allen…”

“Just answer the question.”

“Theoretically, the dimensional barriers should have retained the memories of transdimensional travelers. What’s your plan, Allen?”

Barry grinned. “In that case, there’s one person in the entirety of the multiverse who might just be able to help us.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who’s commented so far, especially multiple times! Your comments are how I make sure I’m not forgetting any important aspects of the new timeline, and they give me new ideas. I greatly appreciate them.
Time travel was an easy concept for this S.T.A.R. Labs team to grasp when compared with the idea of parallel universes.

Barry drew a few diagrams on whiteboards to demonstrate what he was talking about, but still, most of the people in the room thought he was crazy.

“All right,” he finally said. “I’ll just go breach the dimensional barrier and come back with someone from an alternate universe.”

“Sure,” Cisco said. “You do that.”

Barry glanced at him and briefly wondered about Vibe. Without the particle accelerator explosion, would Cisco ever have powers? If he did, would he be able to remember the previous timeline? If so, why had the other Cisco never remembered Thawne’s timeline?

“The last time I did this, I had a breach to work with,” Barry said. “This time, I think I need a running start.”

“How much of a start is required?” Caitlin asked.

Barry grinned. “Anybody need something from Keystone City?”

Before anyone could answer, he was gone. He stopped at the waterfront and then turned around and ran, pushing his velocity as high as it would go.

A breach opened up before him and he closed his eyes to better envision Earth-2. The sound of the breach around him hummed in his ears for a moment, and when it faded, Barry opened his eyes.

Welcome to Earth-2.

He was somewhere in the middle of Central City. Barry immediately raced up the side of a building and stopped on the roof, located the familiar shape of S.T.A.R. Labs, and started in that direction to find this Earth’s Dr. Harrison Wells.

Harry was not pleased to see him. Or at least he pretended not to be.

“It hasn’t even been a day, Allen,” he said. “Can’t you survive without me for one day?”

“Hello to you too!” Barry gave him a hug.

Harry pushed Barry away from him, rolling his eyes and seeming to resist a smile. “All right, Allen, why are you here?”

“I wanted to see you, of course.”

“It’s been one day. Why are you here?”

“You helped the team build the gun to take down the Time Wraith, right?”
Harry narrowed his eyes. “…Which would only be an important matter if a Time Wraith were currently after you, which would only happen if you time traveled. Allen…”

“Yeah… I might have done something to upset them?”

“And what did you do to screw the timeline today?” Harry crossed his arms and smirked.

“I saved my mom.”

The smirk disappeared. “You what?”

“It’s all gonna be fine! Thawne never killed your doppelganger now, and the particle accelerator never exploded. The only problem is the Time Wraiths, and we have about six hours to rebuild Hartley’s gloves or some other sort of sonic device to kill them before they can steal my speed and then kill me. And you’re the only one from the original timeline who actually remembers how the gloves worked, so…”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “I leave for five minutes and you’ve already created a new timeline. Nice going, Allen. Anything else you want to tell me?”

“Um… Eobard Thawne is alive, and working with me to stop the Time Wraiths.”

“…Eobard Thawne is alive.”

Barry couldn’t decipher Harry’s expression, some complicated thoughtfulness that revealed nothing about what was going through his mind. “Yeah. He doesn’t have his speed, though, and all he wants is to get home.”

“Jesse!” Harry called, and after a moment the door to his office opened. Jesse peered through.

“Oh, hi, Barry. It feels like only yesterday that I saw you.” She grinned at him. “What did you want, Dad?”

“I’ll be… out of town for a couple of days. No parties when I’m gone.”

“Really?”

“Really.” Harry grabbed the pulse rifle off his desk. “I’m going back to Earth-2.”

“Earth-1,” Barry corrected.

Harry smirked, a harsh edge to it. “Your Earth-1, Allen, is my Earth-2. And now that you’ve completely remade the timeline, I think I get to call it Earth-2.”

“That’s fair,” Barry allowed.

“What does my doppelganger and the new S.T.A.R. Labs team know about the old timeline?”

Jesse, still lingering in the doorway, crossed her arms and leaned against the doorframe. “Old timeline? You mean that you time traveled and created a divergent timeline, Barry?”

He nodded. “Yeah, basically.”

“Cool. I’m going too.”

“No,” Harry said.
“Come on, Dad, what’s the danger? Zoom’s gone. I want to see what this new Earth-2 is like.”

Barry shrugged. “The Time Wraiths aren’t after anyone but me, and there are no metahumans anymore.”

“It’s safer than this Earth is,” Jesse added.

“All right,” Harry relented. “You can come. The question, Allen?”

“I didn’t tell them about Thawne pretending to be Harrison Wells, if that’s what you’re asking. He’s going by Edward Clariss to avoid any complications. They do know that there were metahumans in an alternate timeline, but that’s about it.” It was getting hard for Barry to keep everything straight—all the separate timelines, what he’d told Thawne versus what he’d told Dr. Wells versus what he’d told Harry.

“Remind me to have a very pointed conversation with you about the dangers of time travel,” Harry said with a weary sigh. “Let’s go, Allen, before I change my mind and leave you to the Time Wraiths.”

Barry grinned. “You ready, Jesse?”

She nodded.

Together, the three of them went back to Earth-1.

(Or Earth-2. Depending on who was asked.)

“Welcome to the new timeline,” Barry said.

“So, your parents are alive, there are no metahumans, and the Time Wraiths are after you,” Harry summed up. “Plus, Thawne is alive and here and you’ve revealed your knowledge of alternate timelines to my doppelganger, Caitlin, and Cisco.”

“And Hartley,” Barry added.

“Am I missing anything?”

“Leonard Snart is a vigilante…” Barry hesitated. “…And Joe is dead.”

Harry and Jesse’s expressions fell.

“How did he die?” Jesse asked in a hushed voice after a moment.

“He was shot two years ago by a bank robber.” Barry grimaced.

“This is what happens when you mess with the timeline, Allen,” Harry said. “People get killed.”

“And other people stay alive. This is what the timeline should have been, Harry, before Eobard Thawne came from the future to ruin my life. It’s not all gonna be perfect, but I accept that.”

“Even the Time Wraiths?”

“Well, you’re going to help me stop them, right?”

Harry smirked. “Maybe I’ll let them steal your speed first. Teach you a lesson, Allen. Time travel is dangerous.”
“But I wouldn’t be able to visit you if I didn’t have my speed,” Barry said.

“Even better.”

Entering S.T.A.R. Labs this time was a lot easier. Walking next to Harrison Wells—any Harrison Wells—helped.

They headed up to the Cortex without much trouble. Barry held up a hand to caution Harry and Jesse to wait in the hallway for a moment and went in first.

“I’m back,” he said. Everyone stopped working and talking and glanced up.

He knew (almost) everyone in the room well enough to guess everything that had happened while he was gone. Cisco and Hartley had gotten into some sort of argument, judging by how they both sat at different tables across the room pointedly not looking at each other. Dr. Wells and his wife had scribbled a multitude of equations across one of the clear whiteboards in a mess of numbers and Greek letters. Thawne seemed to have reinvented at least half of the bits of tech scattered around the room. Caitlin was talking with someone who was hidden from Barry’s view, gesturing to the Time Wraiths.

At Barry’s words, the mysterious figure stepped into view. Barry broke out into a grin.

Ronnie Raymond.

“I hope you don’t mind, Mr. Allen,” Caitlin started hesitantly.

“No, that’s great. You can call me Barry, by the way. Nice to see you, Ronnie!”

Ronnie frowned. “Do I… know you?”

“Alternate timeline,” Barry said with a shrug. “Not really.”

“How was your trip to another universe?” Tess asked with a smile.

“Great. I brought back a couple of friends of mine. Remember, they’re from an alternate Earth, so don’t be surprised if…” Barry trailed off, gesturing vaguely, and glanced at Dr. Wells. “Well, you’ll see. Harry? Jesse?”

Harry stepped into the Cortex, gripping his pulse rifle with one hand, the other around Jesse’s shoulders.

The room went silent.

“Here we go again,” Harry grumbled. He raised his voice and said, “Yes, hi, I’m Harrison Wells, from what Allen insists on calling Earth-2. You can call me Harry…” He leveled a slightly accusing glance at Cisco. “…everyone else does. This is my daughter Jesse.”

Jesse waved. “Hi.”

Dr. Wells approached his doppelganger, taking off his glasses. “Fascinating.” He glanced over his shoulder and smiled at Cisco, who had abandoned his half-formed sonic device to approach the newcomers. “I’ll have to agree with your earlier statement, Cisco.”

“What do you mean, Dr. Wells?” Cisco asked.

“This is the best day ever.”
Harry rolled his eyes.

Tess came forward and offered her hand to Harry. “I’ll have to apologize for my husband. He often forgets there are real people behind science. It’s nice to meet you, Harry.”

Both Harry’s and Jesse’s faces shifted to anxious, almost terrified expressions upon seeing Tess. Jesse slid an arm around her father and hugged him tightly. Harry opened his mouth but couldn’t find words.

Barry suddenly recalled that Harry’s wife had died on Earth-2. Apparently both Earth’s Harrison Wellses had fallen in love with the same people.

Tess’s eyes widened. “Oh…” She began to lower her hand.

Harry cleared his throat. “No, no, I’m sorry.” He still looked scattered, but quickly shook her hand. “I just hadn’t realized that you would be…”

“…Alive?” Tess surmised.

“Oh. Yes. My wife is gone, and the last time I was on this Earth, you had died in a car crash fifteen-some years ago. It was unexpected. I’m sorry.” Harry composed himself. “Right. Allen. You mentioned Time Wraiths.”

Barry, knowing Harry well enough not to ask if he was okay, gestured at the far side of the room. Harry approached the negative-image Wraiths and frowned up at them. Jesse followed him.

“Barry said you know how to stop them,” Cisco said.

“We have five to eight hours,” Caitlin added.

“Rathaway, do you have any sort of sonic device?” Harry asked.

“I’ve started making one. So has Cisco, but he doesn’t understand the first thing about vibrations.”

Cisco glared. “I know just as much about sound waves as you do.”

Harry sighed. “Rathaway, Ramon, try to get over your differences and work together.”

“I don’t think I need his help,” Hartley said.

“I know firsthand how annoying Ramon can be—”

“Hey!”

“—but we don’t have the time right now. Dr. Wells, I presume you can keep your employees from killing each other.” Harry looked away from the Time Wraiths and directly at Thawne. He tilted his head, indicating the door to the hallway. “Can I talk to you for a minute?”

Thawne frowned. “Sure…” He set down whatever device he was messing with and followed Harry to the hall.

Barry was certain that conversation would go badly. He tried not to think about it—Harry probably wasn’t going to kill Thawne, though the way his grip had tightened on the pulse rifle couldn’t be good—and instead focused on Jesse. Cisco and Hartley started arguing immediately, with Dr. Wells and Tess mediating the conflict.
“How are you doing, Jesse?” he asked quietly.

“I don’t know,” she said, glancing over her shoulder at Tess. “It’s just… I haven’t seen Mom in ten years. It’s…”

“I’m sorry,” Barry said. “I didn’t think about it. Harry never talks about her.”

“I don’t think about her a lot anymore,” Jesse admitted. “You’re right, Dad rarely mentions her.”

Caitlin and Ronnie came over to join them.

“Can I ask a couple of questions about Earth-2?” Caitlin asked hesitantly.

Barry looked at Jesse, who was visibly glad at the change of subject. Her tone lightened. “What do you want to know?”

“Did you know me and Ronnie?”

Jesse and Barry exchanged glances and both had to resist laughter.

“Well,” Jesse started, “how do you feel about cold, Caitlin?”

“I assume we’ve met,” Thawne said to Harry.

Harry scoffed. “Once. Not that you would remember it. Wrong timeline. Have heard a lot about you, though.”

“You wanted to talk to me?”

“What’s Allen told you about the timeline he’s from?”

“That the particle accelerator was built in 2014 and made him the Flash.”

“Do you know who built the particle accelerator?”

A flicker of wariness on Thawne’s face. “…I did, posing as Harrison Wells.”

“Yeah.” Harry had been building up this particular anger for a long time, so his next action took precisely no thought.

He clenched his hand into a fist and punched Thawne in the face.

Thawne staggered and fell into the wall. Lightning flickered in his eyes for a moment before dying out. He came back at Harry with his own fists balled tight and attempted a returning blow.

Harry simply stepped to the side, neatly avoiding the punch. When Thawne tried again, Harry blocked and then held up his hands. “Hey. You don’t have your speed, you’re not winning this fight.”

Thawne glared at him, but lowered his hands. “The hell was that for?”

Harry smirked. “You being an asshole in an alternate timeline got me shot. I’ve owed you a punch
in the face for a long time.” He lifted the pulse rifle. “Just be glad you’re the one who knows the most about Time Wraiths, or this would get a little messier.”

Thawne’s face went deadly cold. “You’re threatening me?”

“Threatening? Of course not.” Harry shrugged. “I’m just saying that it’s very difficult to prosecute a man from another dimension.”

“You know, Harry, that goes both ways.”

Harry shrugged again. “I’m the one with the gun.”

“You sure you were shot because of me? Because it seems like you’re an asshole all on your own.”

Harry smiled innocently. “Let’s go rejoin the others. I’m sure they need our help.”

Thawne glared. “Watch your back, Wells.”

“You too, Thawne. Sorry—it’s Clariss now, isn’t it?”

“If I had my speed…”

“But you don’t. Let’s go stop some Time Wraiths.”

Chapter End Notes

I have a few other fics I’ve stolen ideas/headcanons from, so a couple shoutouts:
A Knotted Cord Untying by elrhiarhodan for the Tess/Harry dynamic.
Harmonize by phate_phoenix for any implied past-timeline information about Hartley.
Everything icarus_chained has ever written for any Harry/Cisco dynamic now or in the future.

I highly recommend all of these fics/authors!

Also, I may go on a brief hiatus to a) graduate, and b) catch up on Arrow and Legends of Tomorrow. Shouldn't be any longer than a week. Thanks for reading, and I'd love a comment!
Both men returned alive after a few minutes, so Barry supposed that counted as a success.

Cisco and Hartley were, resentfully, working together, with Dr. Wells and Tess overseeing their work. Their sonic device was shaped more like a rod than a gun, about six inches long and with various protrusions.

“It’s not pretty, but it’ll emit sonic vibrations,” Hartley said. “The frequency and intensity are programmable.”

Cisco smirked at Hartley and took the device, holding it out like a weapon toward the Time Wraiths. “You do realize we’ve just made a sonic screwdriver, right?”

Hartley rolled his eyes so fast that Barry wondered if he was secretly a speedster. Other than that, he didn’t acknowledge Cisco’s comment at all. “All that’s required is the correct frequency. What do we know about these Time Wraiths?”

“They’re made of time,” Thawne said. “The remnants of timelines that never existed. Which is why they come after time travelers.”

“They’re made of time?” Harry asked, crossing his arms.

Thawne shot him a glare. “They are. Far as I know, nobody’s ever been able to destroy one. But evidently you’ve lived through the timeline where it happened, so what’s the frequency we need, Harry?” Acerbic sarcasm dripped from every syllable. Clearly, the conversation in the hallway didn’t end with Thawne and Harry declaring their everlasting love.

“Ramon and Rathaway did most of the work,” Harry said. “I do know that the frequency is somewhere between twelve and fourteen megahertz. That discussion was quite loud enough for me to hear.”

Barry frowned. “Was this for the gun or for Hartley’s gloves? Because the gun didn’t work.”

“All that time spent on the gun and it didn’t work?” Harry scoffed. “Typical. Since when has one of our plans ever actually worked the way it was intended to?” He shook his head. “It was for the gun, but the principle is the same. The device just has to be very high-intensity. I don’t think your sonic screwdriver is going to cut it. Needs a wider range.”

“Let’s get back to work,” Dr. Wells said. He took the device and started unscrewing one of the sections. “Ronnie, your assistance would be appreciated.”

“Sure,” Ronnie said, joining the team at the workstation, which now consisted of him, Cisco, Hartley, Thawne, Harry, Dr. Wells, Tess, and even Jesse. Barry listened as they all started talking,
disputing the validity of different ideas. He glanced over his shoulder at the frozen Time Wraiths.

He had a few hours, assuming Thawne’s estimate was correct—which of course was never a guarantee. Still, Barry figured there was enough time that he could have a conversation with a certain employee of S.T.A.R. Labs.

“Cait—sorry, Dr. Raymond,” Barry said. She, like Barry, was standing off to the side and watching the other scientists work. “Do you happen to know where I could find Leonard Snart?”

“I do. Did you know him in your alternate timeline?” Caitlin asked.
Barry shrugged. “In a way.”

“He’ll be in his workroom two floors down on the left side. Number 52.”

“Thanks. I’ll be back in a couple minutes.” He glanced at the workstation. “I’m sure they won’t miss me.”

He started down the halls of S.T.A.R. Labs, marveling at how put-together it all looked. In his time, most of the rooms were closed off and completely barren, and at the sound of footsteps the walls always threw back hollow-sounding echoes of emptiness.

Here, people were actually working in the rooms. The large panel windows into each of the small labs displayed technologies that Barry had never seen before, proving concepts that in his timeline were either hazy theories or were inoperative prototypes at Mercury Labs.

Leonard Snart, in this timeline, worked in a little corner room without windows to the hallway. The plaque next to the door confirmed the identity of the occupant.

Barry knocked. Without waiting, he opened the door and entered.

Leonard looked up from his work, the wiring of some complicated machine. His eyes narrowed slightly and he returned to working. “What?”

Yup. Any timeline, Leonard still had the same sarcasm permeating his every word. Barry suddenly realized he had no idea what to say.

“I know,” he blurted.

No hesitation, no fear, no reaction at all. “You know what, kid? Be specific.”

Barry stepped inside the room and pulled the door shut. Snart gave him another irritated glance.
Barry lowered his voice to a whisper. “Citizen Cold.”

Leonard snipped a wire and raised an eyebrow, still totally impassive. “You accusing me of something, kid?”

“No, just… I’m sorry about your sister.”

Now Leonard looked up. A frown—of confusion, of grief, of anger—flickered across his face. “That was thirty years ago. Damn cold of you to bring it up now.” On the word ‘you’, he lifted something and pointed it at Barry accusingly.

Automatically, Barry moved, disarming him of his… screwdriver? He hurriedly replaced it on the table and returned to his position near the door, all before Leonard could even begin to react.
Leonard blinked at his empty hand and then glanced at the screwdriver on the table before him. He frowned momentarily and then seemed to dismiss what just happened as a trick of his mind, instead looking at Barry. “What do you want, kid?”

It wasn’t what Barry’d intended to say (what he had intended, he had no idea), but he found the words spilling from his mouth nevertheless, thinking of Lisa, thinking of vigilantes in masks and hoods and parkas. “My name’s Barry Allen. I’m a CSI with the CCPD. If there’s ever anything you need from the police…” He shrugged. “Let me know.”

Leonard stared at him. A bit of confused suspicion showed for a moment before his face shifted to his usual impenetrably blank expression. “Whatever you say. I’d appreciate it if you’d get out of my lab so I could work.”

“Sure. See you around, Snart.” Barry backed out of the lab, closing the door behind him. He wasn’t totally sure if he’d just sentenced himself to a quick and very cold death, but he figured helping out other vigilantes was part of the Flash job description.

He returned to the Cortex and joined the team working on the sonic device. Helping out the Central City Vigilante could wait—first he had to not die. And he sent a quick text to his parents, because what was the point of a new timeline if he couldn’t have dinner with his now-alive family?

By the time the Time Wraiths made their way out of the picture on Barry’s phone (now on display on the screens scattered around the Cortex), everyone was ready.

Sort of, anyway. Sure, the device was finished (now looking more like a wand than a screwdriver), and Harry held it at the ready (Cisco and Hartley had argued for a while over who should be the one to wield it, then Harry rolled his eyes and snatched it out of both of their hands).

But the proper frequency was still undetermined, no more specific than ‘between twelve and fourteen megahertz.’ The plan was for Harry to simply spin the frequency-setting dial as fast as possible until he stumbled across the correct one, while Barry would distract the Time Wraiths by simply existing in their general location. Definitely safe and one-hundred-percent guaranteed to work.

But, hey, it was better than a lot of the plans Barry and his friends had come up with.

“You ready, Allen?” Harry asked. He and Barry now stood in the center of the Cortex; everyone else had retreated to various positions along the outskirts of the room.

Barry’s eyes flicked up to one of the screens, where the Time Wraiths were obviously almost out of the picture, one of them actually seeming to press its hand against the inside of the monitor. “Doesn’t look like I have a choice.” He braced himself.

The Time Wraiths flooded back into reality and shot screaming straight at Barry. He tried very hard to hold his ground for approximately point-eight seconds, and then instinct took over and he ran, not far, just circles around the Cortex.

Harry flipped on the device, cranked it up to the highest intensity, and started scrolling through frequencies. An insistent hum emanated from it. Barry, still running, didn’t have a lot of time to observe them, but, judging by how they continued to follow him, the Time Wraiths were spectacularly unaffected.

He was reminded very harshly of the last time he tried to outrun a Time Wraith, in the accelerator trying to return to the future. The Wraiths actually tugged at his speed, slowing him down—as they
weren’t touching him, they weren’t actually taking his speed yet. Blocking it, perhaps. Now, knowing that they were made of time, he wondered if that ability worked at all like the Turtle’s did, manipulating time around him. Not that it mattered much, he just had to manage not dying for a few minutes, and why wasn’t the wand working yet?

The sum force of all the Time Wraiths around him was slowing him down too much, even with the tachyon enhancer. A ghostly hand brushed against his back, and some of the Speed Force drained out of his system.

He involuntarily slowed a fraction, and the shock of losing some of his speed startled him enough to slow down even more. And suddenly he was on the ground, the Time Wraiths all around him, he could feel the Speed Force draining from his system, and someone yelling “Barry!” (was that Thawne?), and then the cloud of Wraiths lifted off him, clutching at whatever passed for their ears.

Barry pushed himself to his feet just in time to see all the Time Wraiths disintegrate, bursting into scattered black clouds. Jolts of Speed Force lightning zigzagged among the clumps of dissolved Wraiths before shooting directly into Barry.

It didn’t hurt—in fact, the Speed Force returning to him was more than a relief. He let out a sigh and looked at Harry.

“Looks like it worked,” he said.

Harry smirked. “And here I was hoping I’d see you die.”

“Well did I bring you back again?” Barry returned the grin, and then looked beyond Harry to include the rest of the S.T.A.R. Labs team, who was now moving away from the walls, in the moment of victory. “Thank you all for helping me.”

“I have a request to make of you now that your present danger is gone, Mr. Allen,” Dr. Wells said.

“Anything,” Barry promised immediately.

Dr. Wells smiled a little sheepishly and glanced at Tess next to him. She laughed.

“He wants to study your speed,” she explained. “Harrison isn’t ever quite sure where the line between appropriate scientific inquiries and intrusive personal requests lies, so he leaves that up to me.”

Barry laughed. “I’d love to show you what I can do. If you want, I can come by every day after work.” It wasn’t like stopping by S.T.A.R. Labs daily would be a change for him.

“I would greatly appreciate that, Mr. Allen,” Dr. Wells said. He looked at his employees and clapped his hands briskly. “Now. I believe we all have projects to be working on?”

Hartley, Caitlin, and Ronnie left the Cortex immediately. Cisco hesitated.

“After what we just saw, I’m not sure I can go back to work,” he said, still gazing at Barry in awe. “That was cool.” At a look from Dr. Wells, he nevertheless hurried from the room.

Harry caught Barry’s eye and mouthed Vibe? at him with a curious quirk of his eyebrows.

Barry shook his head slightly. Not in this timeline.

“Allen, are we done here?” Thawne gave him a significant look. “I’d like to go home.” Slight
emphasis on the last word, accompanied by the subtlest of glares.

“We’ll stay for a couple of days, in case any other ill effects arise,” Harry said. “And because if we don’t, you’ll probably come visit tomorrow with a new crisis.”

“We have nowhere to stay,” Jesse reminded her father.

Dr. Wells and Tess glanced at each other. Neither needed to say anything; they rapidly and effectively communicated in a moment of eye contact.

“You could stay with us,” Tess offered.

“A little unorthodox, perhaps, but I feel as though I owe you,” Dr. Wells added. “Definitive proof of time travel is remarkable, of course, but the existence of alternate universes is even more so.”

“I assume you’ll also want to hear all about Earth-2?” Harry surmised.

Dr. Wells inclined his head in a nod, half-smiling. “I certainly wouldn’t turn down the information.”

Harry glanced at Jesse, who shrugged. He nodded. “Sure.”

“Allen,” Thawne said, more insistently.

Arrangements for Harry and Jesse made, Barry nodded. “Let’s go, Clariss.”

On the way out of S.T.A.R. Labs, Thawne stayed quiet, an imposing, weighty sort of silence. Barry knew the implied question.

“I’m not sending you home, Thawne.”

Thawne’s silence deepened. Barry could feel the fury Thawne was sending his way without even glancing at him.

“We’re enemies. We hate each other. Why would I send you back when you’ll only torment me in the future?”

No response.

“I appreciate your help with the Time Wraiths, and what might have been concern when they were attacking me, but that doesn’t counteract everything that you’ve already done to me.”

Thawne threw open the S.T.A.R. Labs door and stepped outside, not even glancing back at Barry.

“Well, yeah, I know, you don’t remember doing any of it, but I know what you would have done if I hadn’t stopped you. You killed, would have killed, did kill my mother. You would have posed as another man for fifteen years and murdered I don’t even know how many people.”
Thawne’s unspoken rage trembled in the air between them.

“I know everything you’re capable of. And I am not sending you home.” Honestly, Thawne’s deliberate silence was starting to scare Barry more than a shouting match would. He reminded himself that he was the one with superspeed. “At least say something, Thawne.”

There was another agonizing moment of silence between them before Thawne finally spoke, through gritted teeth and with enough seething rage in his voice that Barry flinched despite himself.

“What do you want me to say, Flash? Thank you?”

Startlingly, all the fury suddenly drained from his voice. His next words came out flatly. Hopelessly.

“You’re right. We’re enemies. I despise you. You’ve trapped me in this time period and there’s not a damn thing I can do about it.” He let out a long sigh, crossed his arms, and started to walk away.

“Where are you going?” Barry called after him. He could stop him, could easily stop him, but honestly the hopelessness, like the silence, was more terrifying than his anger.

“Who the hell cares? Obviously not home.” Thawne threw a final glance over his shoulder. “See you around. Or not. Rather not.”

Barry hesitated a moment longer on the sidewalk outside S.T.A.R. Labs before shaking his head and starting back to his apartment.

After all, he had dinner plans with his parents and work in the morning.

And surely, the slightest flicker of red in Thawne’s eyes in that last glance was a trick of the light.

Chapter End Notes

Having all three Harrison Wells in a room is really exhausting, wow. Thanks for reading!
Days passed in small moments, in stilted conversations and familiar faces, and time spent each day at S.T.A.R. Labs, showing off speed and talking alternate-universe science.

Day one: Dr. Wells and Tess drove Harry and Jesse to their home, a moderately sized house in the middle of Central City. Harry could feel the other Wells’s excitement hanging in the air like a physical force. Jesse shot him amused looks every once in a while, clearly feeling it too.

Harry let it linger until they arrived at the Wells’ house. “All right,” he finally sighed. “Your questions?”

The other Dr. Wells’s eyes immediately lit up, and Harry had to grin. It reminded him so much of himself, back before… his Tess had died, Jesse was kidnapped, Zoom had come to this Earth. Before everything. Back when his life was composed of science and Tess.

“First, how are alternate Earths differentiated? Second, how is travel between them possible?”

Harry and Jesse exchanged amused glances, both of them wondering exactly how long this list of questions would end up being.

“Well, each Earth vibrates at a different frequency…”

It was a long night, filled with scientific inquiries, laughter, and a few glasses of wine.

Day three: Barry was in his lab when there was the sharp rap of knuckles against the doorframe. He glanced over his shoulder to see Eddie there, who grinned at him.

“Iris wants to know if you’ll come to lunch with us.”

“Really?” Barry hadn’t been sure whether he was friends with Iris, let alone Eddie.

Eddie nodded. “You can’t hide out in your lab all the time. You’ve barely said a word to me or Iris the past three days.”

“Yeah, sorry, I’ve been… kind of sick.” Barry shrugged sheepishly.

“Glad you’re feeling better. So are you coming?”

Barry nodded immediately. “Sure.” He closed the file he was working on and joined Eddie and Iris, ignoring the twisting in his gut at the thought of having to make it through a whole lunch with no idea of their shared history.

“How have you been, Barry?” Iris asked once they were settled in at the restaurant.

“Um, fine,” Barry said. “What about you two? Everything going well?”

They glanced at each other with near-identical smiles. “We’re doing great,” Iris said.

“We’re thinking about buying a house,” Eddie added.

“Eddie’s apartment is great, but you know we’ve wanted more space for a while. The house is a first step…”
“And then Iris insists we should start thinking about having kids,” Eddie finished. He raised his eyebrows at Barry, miming terror.

Iris hit him in the arm. “Consider yourself lucky that I haven’t started insisting on having kids yet, just thinking about it.” She flashed him a smile.

Barry laughed, ignoring the two brief spikes of emotional anguish that jolted through his heart at a pair of memories. One, Iris, *And when you get back I’ll be here*. It was sadness at the knowledge that she now would never be, all twisted up with happiness for her and Eddie because Eddie was a hero and deserved to be happy, and *wow* was that complicated so it was much easier to focus on the second note of grief.

And that was Joe, *My grandkids are gonna call me Poppa*, and again the knowledge that they now never would. Less complicated, but because of that a lot more intensely painful.

Before Barry could think too much about it, the words burst from his mouth. “I’m sorry that your dad won’t be able to meet his grandkids.”

Both Iris’s and Eddie’s expressions fell.

“I know,” Iris said softly. “I miss him. I wish there was some way…” She trailed off.

Barry twitched toward her, instinctively wanting to comfort Iris. He stopped when Eddie put an arm around her shoulders and pulled her to him. Iris leaned her head against his shoulder, tears glimmering in her eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Barry said. “I shouldn’t have brought that up.”

“It’s all right,” Iris said after a moment. “I don’t think about him enough. Joe was… a wonderful father. He was always willing to help anyone, not only as a cop but as a person.”

Barry couldn’t help but feel like this was his fault. If he hadn’t erased the other timeline…

“It’s not your fault,” Iris said, and Barry’s gaze snapped to her.

She wasn’t looking at him. She was focused on Eddie, who had stiffened next to her.

“Hey, I mean it,” Iris insisted softly. “I’ve told you a hundred times. You were new, he ran in ahead of you. It’s not your fault.”

“I know,” Eddie said, his voice tight. “But I was his partner, I should have… I wish I could go back in time and change things.”

Barry had to remind himself, very strictly, of how going back in time would only result in Eddie dying instead.

All in all, it wasn’t the best lunch Barry had ever had.

Day four: Barry returned to his apartment after work to drop off his CSI gear before going to S.T.A.R. Labs, an action which was becoming habit after only a few days.

The routine was interrupted when he walked into his living room and jumped probably half a foot in the air.

“I’m back,” Thawne said.
“And you decided to just let yourself into my apartment and give me a heart attack?” Barry demanded.

“Turns out, it’s impossible for even a genius scientist to get a job or a place to live with no Social Security number and a birth date the computers won’t even display.” He rolled his eyes. “So, feel free to gloat. You and S.T.A.R. Labs are my only hope.” He paused. “The heart attack was just a bonus.”

“Sure. Just invite yourself in.” Barry was on the verge of forcing him to leave, but… well… it was Barry’s fault that he was stuck here. He imagined the situation in reverse, him trapped in a time far from home with no recourse. He considered the other timeline, Thawne saving his life again and again—for his own reasons, of course, but what counted more, intentions or actions? Besides, all he’d ever wanted was to go home.

And then again, Barry had created this timeline so he could return to his parents (and they were his home, in a way, weren’t they?), not caring about the cost (which was Joe), so how different really was he from Thawne?

It was all far too complicated, as many things in this timeline seemed to be, so Barry chose the path of least resistance. “I’m going to S.T.A.R. Labs, are you coming?”

At least there was no sign of red lightning anywhere around Thawne.

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Every day: A treadmill in one of S.T.A.R. Labs’ many basements. Barry not only demonstrated his speed, but also some of the tricks that he had learned—phasing, running up walls, throwing lightning. His audience always consisted of Harrison (Dr. Wells insisted they call him that), Tess, Harry, Jesse, and now Thawne. Cisco, Caitlin, Ronnie, and Hartley dropped by sometimes whenever they could sneak away from their real work, Cisco the most and Hartley the least.

Harrison gave Thawne a job, and offered Harry one as well. Harry turned it down on the grounds that he would be going home soon, which seemed less and less likely as each day passed.

Both Harrison Wells got along splendidly. They enjoyed playing pranks on the other employees of S.T.A.R. Labs. Jesse informed Barry that rumors, ranging from secret twins to secret passages to time travel, were flying around the labs about how Dr. Wells could manage to be seemingly everywhere at once.

Every day, Barry informed Harry about the newest difference he’d found in the timeline. Day two, “Guess who I saw working at Big Belly Burger?”

Harry would never, of course, deign to guess, so Barry continued with hardly a pause. “Griffin Grey. Still eighteen. I have to admit, I panicked a little bit.”

Harry gave him an insufferable smirk. “Good. There are consequences when you mess with time.”

Barry gave him a ‘really?’ look. “Thanks. I’m so glad you care about me.”

Day three, “Looks like Vandal Savage killed Kendra and Carter in this timeline. According to the baristas at Jitters, Kendra disappeared suddenly with no warning.”

“You know, Allen, there are consequences when you mess with time.”

Barry shot him the same look. “Why do I even talk to you?”
Day four, “I looked up Professor Stein and I don’t think he’s even visited S.T.A.R. Labs.”

Harry didn’t even have to say anything, just smirked at Barry, who immediately rolled his eyes in return. From then on, it became a daily event—Barry would find something to share about the new timeline and they would exchange smirks.

Day ten, “Apparently Tina McGee is a prostitute here.”

Harry, who’d automatically started his usual self-satisfied expression, froze and blinked confusedly at Barry. “What?”

Barry laughed. “Kidding. Just wanted to see if you were still paying attention. She’s still running Mercury Labs. I assume that’s a constant in every timeline on every Earth.”

Harry snickered. “Go back to running, Allen.”

Barry went back to the treadmill, laughing to himself. Despite scattered tragedies, this timeline wasn’t too bad.

Day sixteen: When Barry woke up, he found Thawne in the living room, staring at a laptop he’d pilfered from S.T.A.R. Labs. It must have been too early in the morning for Barry to process properly—he could have sworn he heard high-pitched voices speaking in another language coming from the laptop.

Staying a few steps back, he peered over Thawne’s shoulder and had to stifle a laugh. Nope, he wasn’t hearing things. The self-proclaimed genius from the 22\textsuperscript{nd} century, evil speedster, Barry’s arch-nemesis, was watching anime.

Barry shook his head and gathered his things, not commenting. He’d found his new-timeline factoid to share with Harry, that was for sure.

When he arrived at his CSI lab, a very familiar face was already occupying his chair. Someone in a parka and goggles. Barry struggled to suppress his instinctive urge to flash into action.

“I hope you were serious about your offer,” Leonard drawled, slowly spinning the chair to face Barry. “Because if not, I’ll have another body to dispose of, and that’s just inconvenient.”

“Jeez, what is with everybody just showing up places?” Barry demanded. “Haven’t any of you heard of knocking?” It didn’t help that both Snart and Thawne had been his enemies. At some point, Barry was going to accidentally hurt somebody on instinct.

Leonard just stared at him, expression unreadable—either because of the goggles and hood, or because his expression was always sarcastic anyway.

“Yes, I meant it.” Barry lowered his voice to a whisper and approached Leonard. “What do you need?”

He dug in a pocket and pulled out a small vial of what looked like (and probably was) blood.

“Need you to run some DNA.”

Yup. Blood.

“Sure.” Barry hesitated, suddenly understanding what Felicity must have felt like the first time
Oliver approached her with odd requests. “Is this person dead?”

“No yet.” Leonard tossed him the vial. Without his speed, Barry definitely wouldn’t have caught it. “He’s not a good guy, if you were wondering. Your conscience can remain clear.”

Barry nodded. “Okay.” He went to the DNA analyzer and emptied the vial into it. “It’ll take a few hours. I’ll bring you the results after work.”

“Thanks, kid.” Leonard stood up and started toward the door.

“Wait, how did you even get in here without anyone seeing you—?” Barry asked, but Leonard was already gone, with no more reaction than a hand raised in farewell.

Barry stared after him for a moment, and then shrugged and started his actual cases for the day. His amount of work was relatively the same as the other timeline—fewer metahumans, sure, but also fewer cases that the Flash solved. It had been a long time since Barry had to do any more than five seconds of forensics and five minutes of running to solve a case. This was a lot more tedious.

The DNA sequencer beeped its completion in early afternoon. Barry eagerly ran the results through the police database.

When it printed a result, Barry frowned at the paper. That didn’t make sense. Leonard Snart asking for an ID of this DNA?

Yeah, things were definitely different in this timeline.

He didn’t get much work done the rest of the day, too busy thinking about the eight-letter name on that printout. The moment the clock reached five, Barry was out the door—maybe using just a bit of superspeed.

Just a bit. It was five-oh-one when Barry entered Leonard’s lab, not even bothering to knock.

“Why did you have me search Mick Rory’s DNA?” He tossed the paper onto Leonard’s desk.

Leonard looked up, tilting his head. “Is that the name it came up with?” He rolled his eyes and picked up the paper, examining it. “I should have guessed.”

“What’s going on, Snart? Who’s Mick? Why did you have me run his DNA?” Barry crossed his arms. “What’s your end goal as Citizen Cold?”

“To save my city, of course.”

Barry squinted at him, trying to discern whether he was serious. “You’re ripping off the Arrow’s motivation?”

“It’s the Green Arrow, kid, don’t you read the news?” Leonard smirked and slammed the DNA results back onto the table. He leaned forward. “Look, Barry, I don’t know who you are. Why don’t you tell me how you knew who I was? Then maybe, depending on the answer, I’ll give you some answers in return. Sound fair?”

“Sure.” Barry hesitated, trying to think of something believable.

“Let me remind you, I have a very deadly gun, and I don’t like lies,” Leonard added coolly. “If you know about my sister, you know about my dad. The cops believed him, I didn’t. Now he’s a liar and a popsicle.”
“All right.” Barry took a deep breath. “Time travel.”

Leonard gave him an incredulous look. “Have to give you credit, kid. I didn’t expect insanity as an alternative to lying.”

“Really. In another timeline, I have superpowers, and we’re…” Barry couldn’t come up with the correct word. Enemies? Allies? Friends? Heroes? All true on occasion. None totally accurate. “Acquaintances. You’ve got your cold gun, and I have…” He demonstrated with a lightning-blazed circuit of the small room. “Superspeed.”

Leonard looked, for the first time, disconcerted. “All right. Go on.”

“I ran fast enough that I traveled back in time. I changed something in the past and when I returned to this time period, I saw the newspapers about somebody in a parka with a cold gun.” Barry shrugged. “Same methods, same outfit, same person.”

“Were we fellow vigilantes in your timeline?” Leonard was back to lining every word with scorn.

“Well, I was a vigilante in Central City, known as the Flash, and you were a criminal for a while, known as Captain Cold, and then you were only sort of a criminal, and then you started time-traveling with this guy from the future in order to kill an immortal sociopath, and then…” Barry trailed off, neither wanting nor needing to finish the sentence. That was probably enough to absorb.

Leonard let out a dry laugh. “Sure. Sounds like me. I do like the name Captain Cold. Maybe I’ll start using that.”

“So, Mick Rory…” Barry started.

Leonard’s expression darkened and he glared down at the paper. “That son of a bitch is the reason I became a vigilante. Sure, Lisa… she was part of it. But a couple of years ago, young girls started disappearing. When I began to investigate, I found a far deeper conspiracy going on. A human trafficking ring, being run out of Central City.”

“Seriously?”

“I got one of the smugglers alone, politely asked him a couple questions. He wasn’t very willing, but I got an alias out of him with a bit of persuasion. The ringleader of the whole thing goes by Heat Wave. Probably because any evidence of theirs, along with any bystanders, ends up in ashes. Finally got to meet him face to face recently. Got that blood. Mick Rory.” Leonard shook his head. “Recognize that name from my first week on the job. Arson. No wonder.”

He tilted his head and looked at Barry. “You recognized the name too. Who’s he where you come from?”

Barry stumbled over his words. “Your partner in crime… and time travel. He was never very nice, but I can’t believe that he’s…”

“Well, welcome to this timeline. We can’t all time travel, kid, and we’re not all heroes. Thanks for your help.”

Leonard made a shooing motion. Barry started to back out of his lab, and then paused. “You will let me know if you need any more help, right? I still have superspeed. And it’s still my city.”

“It’s my city, kid.”
“Well?”

“We’ll see,” Leonard said, returning to work on some device.

Good enough. Barry left, headed down to the basement, and thought about a human trafficking ring in Central City.

He’d assumed, with no metahumans around, Central City would have no need of the Flash.

But now… maybe he should make sure his suit was still in the closet. He might need it again soon.
Leonard didn’t contact Barry again.

And Barry had never been very patient.

So that was why, a few days after their conversation, Barry was suited up in the dead of night and following Citizen Cold into the bad part of Central City.

He was just there to watch, not interfere. Unless of course Leonard needed help.

Leonard threw open the door to a very shady-looking bar and stepped inside. Barry sped around the building and phased through a wall into a dark corner, staying out of sight.

The first thing Leonard did upon entry was shoot a blast of ice at the ceiling. The bar, filled with a scattered bunch of lowlife criminals from the looks of them, immediately fell silent.

“That’s better,” Leonard said, using a voice modifier. His voice was distorted just enough that Barry could tell it was him, but nobody else would easily put it together. “Now. How many of you have heard the name Heat Wave?”

There was no response. Barry could see some of the people at the bar trying to make the calculation—who was more dangerous, Citizen Cold or Heat Wave? Or maybe he was misreading their expressions and they were just drunk.

“Nothing? What about Mick Rory? Sound familiar?”

A few murmurs at the name. Nothing concrete.

Leonard, even with his face masked by the hood and goggles, didn’t look happy. He lifted his gun and aimed it at someone at a nearby table. “Johnny Denetto, isn’t it? Crime boss, all-around pathetic excuse of a citizen?” His gun let out a low whine as it powered up.

“I don’t know anything about Heat Wave,” the man said, holding his hands in the air. “And if I did, I don’t know why I’d tell you, Cold.”

“Maybe because I’m holding the gun. Now, I’ve got a proposal. You tell me everything you know about Mick Rory and this won’t have to get ugly.” Leonard took a few steps closer to Denetto.

The moment he did, at least half of the patronage of the bar pulled guns and aimed them at Leonard. Barry tensed, ready to flash into action if necessary.

“I’ve got a proposal of my own, Cold,” Denetto responded, suddenly cheerful. “You put down the gun, and maybe I’ll have my friends kill you quickly.”

“Tempting. But I’ll pass.”

“You’re outnumbered, Cold.”

“Then it’s a good thing I’m a lot smarter than all of you.” Leonard pulled the trigger of his gun. All twenty or so of Denetto’s friends shot as well.

Barry saw all of it happen in slow motion. Ice swirled from the barrel of the cold gun—aimed not at Denetto, but instead at the floor—spiraling out in a wide stream. Ice piled up, forming a barrier.
between Leonard and the rapidly approaching bullets.

When the bullets hit the ice shield, the metal shattered upon contact with the absolute-zero surface.

“You’re gonna have to do a little better than that!” Leonard leaned out from behind the wall and took out six of the gunmen before having to duck out of the way of returning fire.

Barry relaxed a little. Clearly, Leonard could handle himself.

Within thirty seconds, Denetto’s friends were all out of action. Incapacitated, not dead, at least from what Barry could tell. The other people in the bar fled through a side exit, and even the bartender ducked into a back room.

Leonard stepped out from behind his barrier of ice. He and Denetto were the only ones in the room—aside from Barry, of course, who remained hidden in the shadows.

“Now. Where were we?”

Denetto seemed to be on the border between frightened and terrified.

“Mick Rory,” Leonard repeated. “Who is he and where can I find him?”

“He’s an arsonist,” Denetto said. “Never bothered recruiting him, he didn’t seem to care about anything but fire. Last I heard, he spends his time in that old abandoned fire station downtown.”

“When exactly was the last you heard?”

“I haven’t thought about Mick Rory since 2012 or so. That’s all I got for you.” Denetto stood up and made to leave.

Leonard leveled the gun at him, and Denetto paused. “What now? I gave you what you asked for, Cold.”

“Tell me, do you remember Erin Cooper?” Leonard asked. “Cause she definitely remembers you. Hard not to, after you raped her and left her for dead two weeks ago.”

Denetto frowned thoughtfully. “That blonde, right? She was asking for it.” There was no denial, and no remorse in his voice.

“Lucky for you, she’s still alive.” Leonard pulled the trigger, and Denetto was immediately encased in ice. “Otherwise your death would be a lot slower.”

He maneuvered around his wall of ice and left the bar.

Stepping out of his shadowy corner, Barry looked at the frozen corpse and winced. Still, even as Captain Cold, Leonard hadn’t killed without reason. And if this man did hurt an innocent girl, it was hard to say he didn’t deserve this.

Barry phased out of the bar and stayed a block behind Leonard, trailing him down a dark alley. Central City was quiet at night, and in this new timeline that felt far more sinister than it used to.

Suddenly, Leonard spun in Barry’s direction and lifted his gun.

Barry’s hands flew into the air. “Hey, don’t shoot, it’s me!” He pulled off the mask.

Leonard lowered the gun. “What do you think you’re doing, kid?”
“I just want to help,” Barry said honestly. “You’re doing good work, standing up for people who can’t stand up for themselves. You’re a good man. A hero.”

“I don’t know where you’re getting this from, kid, but I’m not a hero.” He turned away. “If you keep following me, I will shoot you.”

He walked away. Barry hesitated for a moment and then replaced his mask and continued to follow anyway, a little more stealthily.

Or so he thought. They made it three blocks before Leonard turned and, unhesitating, shot Barry.

He hadn’t expected Leonard to actually do it. Startled, Barry didn’t move in time, and the blast hit him right in the chest, coating the front of his suit in a thick layer of ice.

“Crap.” Leonard actually dropped the gun. “I thought you were gonna move, Barry, what happened to superspeed?”

Barry held up a hand. “Don’t worry.”

The tech in his suit detected the abnormally low temperature and began to heat up, melting the ice. Within moments, the only trace of it was the small puddle at Barry’s feet.

Barry pulled off his mask again and openly grinned at Leonard. “Looks like you actually care about me.”

Leonard let out a long, slow sigh. “I really hope that there’s some timeline where I killed you.” He picked up his gun. “C’mon. If you’re going to insist on doing this, you might as well see my headquarters.”

Leonard’s lab at S.T.A.R. was abnormally small for a reason, it turned out. A Time-Vault-esque hidden switch on the wall opened a doorway into a secret room.

Citizen Cold’s hideout was nearly bare. There was a hook for the parka, a table for the goggles and gun, along with a computer and various other tech, and a chair.

“You don’t get a lot of visitors, do you?” Barry asked.

“I can’t say that hosting an acquaintance from another timeline who I’ve never met before has been a problem in the past.” Leonard threw the parka across the chair and removed his goggles. “Why? You’re not impressed?”

“I mean, have you seen the Green Arrow’s headquarters?”

“As a matter of fact, I have. We can’t all be billionaires.” Leonard crossed his arms. “Why, have you seen his headquarters?”

“Which one? Oliver’s had, like, four.”

Leonard lifted an eyebrow in confusion. “Oliver? Oliver Queen? That kid who died three years ago?”

“Wait, what? Oliver’s dead? If he’s dead, who’s the Green Arrow?” Now Barry was the confused one.

“Not my secret to tell,” Leonard said. He turned to the computer on the table, shoving his parka
from the chair to the floor so he could sit. “I planned to check out that old fire station tonight, but that was before you started following me. I suppose it’ll have to wait until tomorrow.” He started to type.

“Can I ask you about something?”

Leonard didn’t look up from the computer. “Would it stop you if I said no?”

Barry took that as the invitation it was surely not meant to be. “The police are determined to find you. They think you’re an unstoppable, indiscriminate murderer.”

“I am an unstoppable murderer. I’m a murderer and they can’t stop me.”

“But you’re not indiscriminate,” Barry pointed out. “You only kill abusers and rapists—I assume it’s to get revenge for your sister.”

“Justice, not revenge. There’s a difference.”

“And your goal is to stop this human trafficking ring. Why don’t you ask the police for help, or support, or something? You don’t have to work alone.”

“You work with the police, Barry. Do you really think that they’d work with the Central City Vigilante?” Finally Leonard looked up from the computer. “I’ve killed a lot of people. That doesn’t bother you at all?”

Barry winced. “No, it’s definitely getting to me. But, unless I’m wrong, you have a code that you live by. I don’t think you’d kill anyone unless you felt like they deserved it. I looked you up, you know. You’ve never killed police officers or innocent civilians.”

“Doesn’t mean I won’t tomorrow.”

“I don’t think you will,” Barry said. “I really do believe that you’re a good man.”

There was silence for a moment.

“Get out of here, kid. Go home.”

“I can come back tomorrow, right?”

“Allow me to repeat: would it stop you if I said no?”

Barry grinned and started out of the room. “See you tomorrow, Snart.”

He started to sneak out of work at weird hours, just to drop by and see how Citizen Cold’s work was going. At first, Leonard seemed to barely be able to endure his presence, but, as the days ticked by, he thawed a little and progressed to tolerating him. Barry made sure to keep the S.T.A.R. Labs team out of the loop, including Thawne. He still showed up to the treadmill room in the basement at five-thirty every day as though nothing had changed.

The lead Leonard got from Denetto didn’t end up going anywhere, so he started to pursue new avenues. Barry still tagged along, but mostly stayed out of the way—except for one time when Leonard absolutely would have gotten shot (though he would have insisted otherwise).

Everything went perfectly fine for a week.
Then he visited S.T.A.R. Labs at five rather than five-thirty, intending to talk to Leonard.

Unfortunately, on the way, he ran into Thawne.

“Allen?” he asked. “You’re here early.”

“Oh, hi,” Barry said. “I’m just…” He gestured vaguely. “Yeah, I’m here early.”

Thawne frowned. “Where are you going?”

They were nowhere near the basement, and Barry knew S.T.A.R. Labs too well to be able to claim that he was lost. “Um…”

Confusion (and maybe a bit of suspicion) showed clearly on Thawne’s face. “Let’s go down to the basement, and then you can tell me what’s going on.”

Good. That gave Barry a little more time to come up with a story. They reached the basement and Barry opened his mouth to spout something off.

“Don’t lie,” Thawne said before he could. Barry spluttered. Thawne just rolled his eyes. “You’re about to lie, and you’re still a terrible liar.”

“Fine. Fine, I’m working with Citizen Cold.”

Thawne blinked. “You’re what? He’s a killer.”

“You’re one to talk!” Barry said.

“I’m your nemesis. I’m the bad guy. What happened to you being a hero? He’s not a good person, Barry.”

“Did you even know him?” For some reason, Barry found that to be unlikely.


Now it was Barry’s turn to demand, “You what?”

“He kept trying to kill me. It was self-defense. Besides, he’s a murderer.”

“And that justifies it? He’s trying to save the city.”

Thawne shrugged. “Not in my timeline. I don’t regret killing him, either. He was really annoying. Kept making cold puns.”

Hearing Thawne’s utter lack of remorse was bizarre. In the past three weeks, he and Barry had become—certainly not friends, but it felt, at least to Barry, like they’d stopped being enemies. It was hard for him to remember sometimes that Thawne was still the Reverse-Flash.

“I can’t believe you’re even arguing with me about this,” Barry managed after a moment.

“What?” Harrison’s voice chimed in from behind Barry. He spun to see that the others had come in—Harrison, Tess, Harry, Jesse, Cisco, Caitlin, and Ronnie.

“Nothing,” Barry said hurriedly.

Thawne, on the other hand, didn’t let it go. “Barry’s decided that he wants to work with Citizen Cold.”
Harrison looked utterly unmoved, beyond a note of curiosity. He shrugged. “Citizen Cold protects the city. He helps those who can’t—”

“He’s Leonard Snart,” Thawne blurted, glancing around at everybody.

One short beat of silence, then—

—from literally everyone in the room—

“I know.”
Barry, who’d been speed-planning an angry rant at Thawne, stopped before the first word could reach his mouth and blinked.

He wasn’t the only one shocked by the revelation, either. Everyone in the room stared at someone else in surprise.

Eight overlapping voices—everyone but Harrison—said, “Wait, you know?”, each directed at someone different. A couple of them started explanations that got lost in the hubbub.

“Everyone calm down!” Harrison ordered. They all fell silent immediately. Harrison, unlike everyone else, looked more amused than anything by the turn of events. “Now, one at a time, explain how you know the identity of Citizen Cold. Mr. Allen, if you would begin.”

“Um, sure,” Barry said. “Alternate timeline. He’s not quite a vigilante where I’m from, but he’s got the same M.O.”

“That’s the same reason I know,” Thawne inserted.

“Alternate universe,” Harry contributed. “Barry told me and Jesse about Citizen Cold when informing us about the differences in the timeline.” He turned to Cisco and raised his eyebrows.

“Yeah, um. I know because I help him out sometimes?” Cisco said, his voice petering out near the end of the sentence. “The cold gun was mine, originally, and then Leonard took it. When I tracked it down I meant to turn him in but… it needed repairing, so I…” He looked down. “…fixed it instead. It just kind of happened. And then…” He glanced at Ronnie.

“And then Leonard was having problems locating one of his targets. So he went to Cisco, and Cisco came to me,” Ronnie finished. “So I started consulting when necessary.” Like Cisco, he didn’t look at Harrison or Tess.

“Ronnie told me about Leonard,” Caitlin said.

“Wait, you told Caitlin?” Cisco demanded.

“Of course I told her. She’s my wife,” Ronnie said. “I wasn’t going to keep a secret like that from her.”

Caitlin pursed her lips. “I don’t particularly approve of working with a murderer, but I wasn’t going to reveal his secret. Except…”

Tess laughed. “Except she told me.”

“I wanted to make sure we were safe,” Caitlin said at Ronnie’s and Cisco’s indignant looks. “And someone in charge of S.T.A.R. Labs should know about vigilantism happening within it.”

“Yes, and I appreciated you telling me,” Tess said. “But what I fail to understand is how you know about Leonard, Harrison. I certainly never told you, and I doubt Leonard did either.”

“Yeah, I was kind of wondering that too,” Cisco added.

Harrison crossed his arms and smirked at all of them. For the first time, he looked exactly like Harry. “It’s my lab. I know everything that goes on within it.”
“So you’ve known the whole time?” Ronnie asked.

“Mr. Snart’s hidden lab didn’t build itself, Mr. Raymond.” Now Harrison laughed outright. “I wondered how long it would take for you and Mr. Ramon to discover that I knew.”

“Leonard never mentioned it,” Cisco grumbled.

“No, of course not. I told him a secret for a secret.” He smiled, a little abashedly, and glanced at Tess. “I didn’t think my wife would approve.”

Tess shook her head, faking disappointment. “I thought you knew me, Harrison.”

“Yes, and I know you don’t like Citizen Cold.”

“I don’t like his methods, but his mission is worth fighting for.”

“What exactly is his mission?” Harry asked. “Because if Allen’s going to be working with him, and Ramon and Raymond already are, seems like it’d be a good detail to know.”

Barry suddenly found everyone looking at him. He shrugged. “I’m not the one to explain it. The running can wait.” He grinned. “Let’s go talk to Leonard.”

Leonard wasn’t particularly pleased when the whole group piled into his small lab.

“So who talked?” His accusing gaze traveled over Cisco and Ronnie to land on Barry.

“It wasn’t me,” Barry swore.

“I told them,” Thawne said. “But they all knew already.”

“All of you?” Leonard rolled his eyes. “Great.” He scanned the group and began to say to Thawne, “I don’t even know who you….” His eyes narrowed in confusion and he stopped talking when he saw both Harrison Wells. “Wait. How…?”

Harry and Harrison exchanged identical grins.

“I was wondering when he’d notice,” Harry said.

Leonard stared. “Is this more time travel?”

Barry couldn’t resist a grin. It was pretty nice to see Leonard Snart for once at a loss.

“Alternate universe.” Harry raised a hand. “Jesse and I are both from one.”

To his credit, Leonard didn’t even blink. “And I suppose I should just accept that, same as a man with superspeed.”

Harry shrugged. “Yeah, basically.”

“On our Earth, you’re the mayor of Central City,” Jesse offered.

“Wait, he is?” Barry asked, glancing at Thawne, who looked as baffled as he was.

“Can’t really see myself in politics,” Leonard said. “But nothing about this situation makes any sense, so why not.” He looked at Thawne. “Who are you, how’d you know, and why exactly did you reveal my identity to a group of people who already knew?”
“Edward Clariss.” Thawne didn’t even bother looking apologetic. “I know your identity for the same reason Allen does. I told them who you are because I know you’re dangerous. You’re a murderer.”

Leonard nodded. “Yup, sounds about right. I keep trying to tell him that. Honestly, I don’t know why anyone puts up with me.”

“Mr. Allen says you have a mission,” Caitlin said. Her arms were crossed in the ‘I don’t approve’ stance that Barry recognized from two years of making terrible plans around Caitlin. “What is it?”

Leonard gave a very long sigh. “All right.” He got to his feet and opened the entrance to his other lab. He gave a sarcastic gesture of invitation into the room. “Welcome to my lair.”


Leonard raised an eyebrow. “Caves?”

“Yeah. I’m officially terming this the Cold Cave.” Cisco nodded to himself.

Harry scoffed from behind Cisco, looking amused.

Cisco turned on him. “What, you don’t like it?”

Harry shook his head, grinning. “No, I think it’s great.”

“What’s your deal with me, Harry?” Cisco threw his hands into the air in frustration. “Half the time I feel like you hate me and the other half it’s like we’re best friends, and I have no idea why.”

Harry hesitated. “I knew the you from the alternate timeline,” he admitted. “I wasn’t very nice at first—if you hadn’t noticed, that’s sort of my default—but eventually we became good friends. I’ve been doing my best to remember you’re not him, but…” He gestured vaguely. “Sometime you’ll say something that could have come from him and I forget. I’m sorry.”

“Wait, Harry, did you actually just apologize?” Barry asked, smirking.

Harry rolled his eyes at Barry. “Why are you listening in, Allen?”

Barry gestured around the newly designated Cold Cave. All the others were watching Harry and Cisco, waiting for them to finish their conversation.

Harry sighed and turned back to Cisco. “How about this. If I’m ever nice to you, go ahead and hit me in the face.”

“Does that offer apply to everyone?” Thawne asked drily.

“Doubt I’ll ever be nice to you, so, why not,” Harry said. “Sound fair, Ramon?”

Cisco squinted suspiciously. “Are you sure you won’t hit me back?”

Harry smirked. “I won’t.”

“Then sure.”

“Great,” Leonard inserted in his usual so-done-with-this voice. “Now that you’re done with your sentimental conversation, can I show you what I’ve got?”
“Excited to hear it, Snart,” Harry said.

“Wonderful.” Leonard shoved the stuff on the desk to one side, pulling a large map of Central City out from underneath it. He pinned it to one of the blank walls and stepped back.

The map was scattered with red dots, some of them clustered close together, others far apart.

“For months, girls have been taken from all around the city. There have been fifty-nine disappearances so far, all of them between the ages of fifteen and twenty-eight. Every dot represents a place a girl was kidnapped.”

“What have the police done about this?” Tess asked.

Barry actually knew the answer to that one. “The police don’t think they’re all related. Some of these girls are thought to have run away, others to have committed suicide, and the rest were taken in different enough circumstances that they don’t appear to be the same person.”

Leonard nodded. “Back when this all started, I came across a member of their crew in a bar one night, drunk off his ass and bragging about how he’d managed to drug these two chicks. Almost killed him on principle, but then he started rambling about how the boss was impressed. So I listened. Decided to start paying more attention to missing girls. Then I killed him.”

The group winced at the mention of killing, but none of them protested aloud.

“How do you know they’re related?” Harrison asked.

“They use a very distinctive chemical,” Barry said. He’d been asking Leonard much the same questions.

“You can smell it in the air at the location for days after a kidnapping,” Leonard added. “The one detail that ties all the cases together.”

“Do you know what the drug is?” Caitlin asked with a thoughtful frown.

“No idea. The only things I know about this whole conspiracy are that they ship the girls away by boat at random intervals and that the leader is Mick Rory, going by Heat Wave.”

“And his mission—our mission, if you guys want to join us—is to stop him and every other member of this crime syndicate,” Barry said. “What do you think?”

“You already know I’m in,” Cisco said immediately.

“We are too,” Jesse said after glancing at her father.

Thawne narrowed his eyes at Barry, but nodded. “I’ll help.”

There was a brief pause.

“Ronnie, you’re still on the team, right?” Cisco asked.

Ronnie hesitated and looked at Caitlin.

Caitlin had returned to her arms-crossed I-don’t-approve position. But her expression was more sympathetic than before. “If Dr. Wells approves of it, then I would like to help prevent any more young women from being taken. But only if you’re going to seek real justice, Mr. Snart.”
“After everything these bastards have done, Caity, they don’t deserve to live,” Leonard countered.

Caitlin’s expression hardened. “Don’t call me Caity. And that’s for the courts to decide. If you’re willing to turn these criminals over to the police, then I am willing to help you.”

“Fine, whatever. I’ll give them to the cops, and they’ll even be in one piece. Happy?” When Caitlin nodded, Leonard turned to Harrison. “So, boss, it’s your lab. What do you say, you gonna let us take down a human trafficking ring?”

“I’m not going to let you.” There was a crestfallen moment of silence before Harrison continued. “I’m going to help you. Tess?”

“I’m in,” she said readily. She looked at Leonard. “Tell us what you need.”

Cisco, Caitlin, and Ronnie were dispatched to the location of the most recent kidnapping to see if they could figure out what kind of drug was used on the victims.

“So, let me get this straight,” Cisco said to Caitlin. “You think that you can identify the type of drug just by the smell?”

“If it’s as distinctive as Snart claims, then I should have no problem doing just that. You really didn’t need to bring that.” Caitlin glanced at the device in Cisco’s hands with a roll of her eyes.

“Hey, it was Ronnie’s idea,” Cisco said.

Ronnie threw a jokingly offended look at Cisco. “Go ahead and throw me under the bus.”

The device was a sensor that Cisco and Ronnie had hurriedly thrown together from spare bits of tech around S.T.A.R. Labs. Theoretically, it would analyze the air and determine the chemical makeup of any foreign substances, then cross-reference it with the formulas for every drug the internet could identify. Technically, it hadn’t been tested yet, but Cisco had faith in his and Ronnie’s abilities.

“As long as we figure out what the drug is and where they’re getting it, it doesn’t matter whose method works,” Caitlin said rationally. “Of course, I’ll be able to identify it faster.” She tried to hide the small smile rising to her lips.

“Ohhhh, you want to play it like that?” Cisco said, grinning in return.

“Oh, Cisco, maybe don’t do this,” Ronnie suggested, but nobody could stop Cisco when his pride was insulted.

“All right, Dr. I-can-identify-drugs-by-scent, how about if I can get it quicker, you buy me coffee for a week?”

“How about buying the whole team coffee for a week?” Caitlin asked mildly.

“Oh, you are on, Caitlin.”

“This is going to end badly,” Ronnie muttered to himself.

Barry and Jesse were relegated to witness interrogation, as Barry’s CSI badge had CCPD on it and, if nobody looked too closely, would probably convince people to talk to them. They started at the street corner that had the most disappearances and began to knock on doors.
The first few people they spoke with were remarkably unhelpful. One of them was clearly high at the time, but, as Barry wasn’t technically there on police business, he couldn’t very well arrest him for illegal possession. He also had a gun and didn’t seem to much like talking to the police.

They left in a hurry.

Barry was starting to regret bringing Jesse along. Harry was going to kill him if anything happened to her.

The fifth house they approached had a window directly overlooking the corner. “If anyone saw the kidnappings, this guy probably did,” Jesse said.

Barry knocked and showed his ID to the woman who opened the door.

“Four girls have gone missing in this area recently,” he explained. “Have you seen anything suspicious?”

He didn’t expect the woman to burst out in tears.

“Hey, woah, I’m sorry,” Barry said immediately, starting to back away.

Jesse grabbed his arm and spoke to the woman. “I’m sorry if we brought up bad memories, ma’am. Did you know one of the women who disappeared?”

She gathered herself a little and nodded. “Come inside,” she managed.

Once inside, Barry and Jesse introduced themselves. The woman introduced herself as Mallory Alexander.

“One night, my daughter went outside late at night. She was just getting the mail. I watched her through the window—” Mrs. Alexander smiled slightly through her tears. “I always do, ever since my husband went overseas. It’s a dangerous neighborhood, a dangerous world, and I can’t watch over Tyler but I could certainly watch over Lucie.” Her tears started falling faster. “But it didn’t make any difference in the end. She was taken. I saw it happen and called the police, but they couldn’t find her…”

Her words dissolved into tears.

“Ma’am, I’m so sorry about what happened to Lucie. We’re going to find her, I promise you,” Barry said. “Anything you can tell us about what happened when she was taken, who took her, what direction they went, could help.”

Mrs. Alexander nodded and wiped at her eyes. “Yes. Yes. There were four of them. Four men, all of them wearing all black, and ski masks. They came out of nowhere. One injected Lucie with something in a syringe and she collapsed. They dragged her off, going that way.” She pointed. “That’s all I know about it.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Alexander,” Jesse said. “If there’s anything else you think of, please let us know.”

“I will. I hope you can save her.”

Barry and Jesse made their exit as the woman began to cry again behind them.

They had an eyewitness. It wasn’t much information, but it was more than they had before.
Harrison, Tess, Harry, and Thawne remained in the Coldcave with Leonard, discussing theories.

“There must be a pattern to their targets,” Harrison said. “Leonard, do you have a list of all the girls taken?”

Leonard spun the monitor of his computer around. “Here.”

The scientists all started poring over the list. Leonard just rolled his eyes.

“There’s no pattern,” he said. “Trust me, I’ve been looking for one. Far as I can tell, their plan is no more sophisticated than lurking in dark alleys and grabbing any girl that comes along.”

“What about the timing? Are there particular days that more are taken?” Harry asked.

“I haven’t made a time table,” Leonard said. He tossed a notebook at Harry. “The dates and times, as close as I can figure them.”

“On paper?” Harry’s scorn was clear.

“I only have the one computer, Wells. Technology’s not my thing.”

“All right. Tha—Clariss, come help me figure this out.”

Thawne scoffed. “What, you want my help?”

“You claim to be a genius. Prove it.”

Thawne rolled his eyes, but came over and started examining the dates and times.

Harrison and Tess started tossing half-formed theories back and forth over the list of names, in fragments of phrases, completing each other’s sentences.

“There’s no concrete pattern in the names themselves—“

“The ages, of course, but we’d already…”

“Yes, and the ages would be necessary if…”

“If they’re being sold in other countries.”

“If we had more information about the lives of the girls…”

“What sort of circumstances they came from.”

“Or the reasons they were on the streets at night.”

“They were all taken at night, weren’t they?”

“Most of them were,” Harry inserted, glancing up from the paper. “Not all.”

“We should digitize the entirety of the information,” Harrison said.

“Have Ronnie or Cisco, even Hartley write an algorithm…”

“To determine with certainty whether a pattern exists or not.”

Leonard, looking for proof that someone else was hearing this bizarre conversation, made eye
contact with Thawne. They both smirked.

Citizen Cold wasn’t used to working with others.

But he had to admit, this wasn’t that bad.

And maybe, with everyone on the case, they could end these kidnappings.
I'm getting seriously excited about where this fic is going. I mean, I have actual plans for every chapter to the end of June, and then after that, things will really get interesting.

Hope you enjoy!

When Ronnie, Cisco, and Caitlin returned to the Cold Cave, Caitlin was smirking and Cisco grumbling behind her.

“It was literally two seconds’ difference, Caitlin. Two seconds!”

“I wonder if Jitters will give you any discounts for buying so much coffee in one week?” Caitlin smiled at everyone in the room. “We’ve determined the drug that the Syndicate is using.”

“Syndicate?” Leonard asked disapprovingly.

“Cisco’s name for the group running the trafficking ring,” Ronnie explained.

“What is your obsession with naming everything?” Leonard demanded.

“Says the guy who named himself Citizen Cold,” Cisco said. “Syndicate is a good name. They’re literally a crime syndicate.”

“What’s the drug?” Harrison asked patiently.

“It’s called clonazolam,” Caitlin said. “It’s a highly potent benzodiazepine that, at the right dosage, can be an effective sedative.”

“It’s also very rarely used commercially,” Ronnie added. “Which means that it’ll be a lot easier to track where it’s coming from.”

“I can get in touch with some of my contacts from med school, see if any of them know about a lot of clonazolam going missing,” Caitlin walked away, already dialing a number on her phone. “Oh, and if anyone wants coffee, Cisco’s offered to buy it.”

Barry and Jesse returned just in time to see Cisco groan and bang his head into the wall.

“This is going to be a long week,” he muttered.

Days passed, Cisco bought coffee, leads didn’t pan out. Harrison moved more computers into the Cold Cave. Barry’s suit went on display next to the parka, despite the fact that the city hadn’t even seen the Flash yet. Everyone started to pin newspaper articles and witness quotes to the walls, forming a network of potential leads.

The Cold Cave was almost always crowded now, a far cry from when Leonard worked alone in
silence. They rarely did any more than theorizing, though.

“Maybe we could lure them into a trap,” Eobard suggested.

“We’d need someone to act as bait, though,” Tess said. “Maybe—”

She was cut off when all the computer screens suddenly switched their images.

It was a video, apparently live, of a man outside somewhere in bright sunlight. Most of his face was obscured by a mask and hood constructed of what looked like a million tiny mirrors, all of them throwing back harsh reflections of grass or the sun.

“Hello, Central City!” he said cheerfully. His voice was that of a man who was seriously deranged.

Everyone looked at each other in confusion.

“What’s going on?” Barry asked.

“Judging by how everyone’s live-tweeting, he’s on every TV and computer in the city,” Cisco reported, looking up from his phone.

They all refocused on the screen as the man held up a mirror, and simultaneously all of their expressions changed to horrified. The reflection in the mirror showed four hostages behind the camera—it looked like a family, a man, a woman, and two children—all of them bound and gagged.

“You’re probably wondering who I am and why I’m doing all this,” the man said. He angled the mirror so it showed a reflection of his face. “You can call me the Mirror Master, or you can call me crazy, I could care less. The only name I care about,” he grinned humorlessly, “is Citizen Cold.”

Dead silence in the room. Leonard glowered and grabbed his parka.

“See, Cold, in one of your little vigilante sprees, you killed my brother. Not very cool, wouldn’t you agree? So. Leawood Park. One hour. Just you, Citizen Cold. Anyone else, any police, and the family dies.”

The transmission cut off. Leonard didn’t say a word, didn’t hesitate. He threw on the parka and his goggles, shoved on his gloves, and grabbed the cold gun.

“What happened to you not being a hero?” Barry asked.

Leonard paused just long enough to throw him a truly murderous glare and see Barry’s reactionary expression of apologetic terror before stalking out of the room.

“I could go too. You might need backup,” Barry said, starting to follow.

Already halfway through the door, Leonard turned and pointed his gun at Barry. “You deaf, kid? You’re not coming.” He slammed the door behind him, took his secret exit out of S.T.A.R. Labs, and started toward Leawood Park.

The Mirror Master had set up in the dead center of the park. Staying true to his name, he’d constructed a wall of mirrors blocking any outsiders from seeing what he was doing. That hadn’t stopped reporters and bystanders from forming a circle of spectators about fifteen feet away from the enclosure. Police held them back, none of them daring to engage with the maniac inside the mirrors.
Citizen Cold shoved his way through the outer layers of the crowd—only the outer portion, as the inner ring readily parted to let him through, their expressions awed or terrified. Cameras flashed and journalists scribbled.

When he finally made it through the circle of observers, Leonard glanced at the police officers. They stared back, a couple halfheartedly reaching for weapons. They looked nearly as frightened as the crowd. Made sense—they were relying on their archenemy, the Central City Vigilante, to rescue an innocent family. Not a great position to be in for the cops.

Leonard looked away and aimed his gun at one of the mirrors. He pulled the trigger. The mirror froze so fast it shattered. Leonard stepped inside.

Within the circle of mirrors was another, smaller enclosure, presumably housing the captive family. Leonard took a single step toward it and raised his gun.

The Mirror Master appeared in front of him—not walking into sight or anything; one moment he wasn’t there and the next he was in all his sparkle-suited glory. Leonard shot.

The ice went straight through what had to be an illusion. He was the Mirror Master, after all—(Leonard made a mental note to stop mocking Cisco’s names; none of them were as bad as ‘the Mirror Master’)—that was presumably his area of expertise.

Leonard grimaced and pressed his back flat against one of the mirrors forming the exterior wall. If he couldn’t trust his own eyes, he had to be ready for danger to come from anywhere.

He edged his way along the wall for a minute before gritting his teeth and releasing a long breath. The family was in the center. He couldn’t stay on the outside for much longer if he wanted to save them.

Fine. If that was how this lunatic wanted to play it, Leonard would play.

He stepped away from the wall, bracing himself for an immediate attack.

When none was forthcoming, he proceeded forward.

Then bam, the Mirror Master was everywhere at once, surrounding Leonard, dozens of copies scattered across this small section of the park. All of them raised pistols, and Leonard certainly couldn’t shoot fast enough to protect himself from every angle. Only one of them could be real, but —

Leonard threw himself to the ground as fifty illusions pulled their respective triggers. A mirror shattered behind him, and a single glance was enough to determine the angle it must have come from. He launched himself forward off the ground and toward the real Mirror Master. The others vanished and Leonard grinned, vindicated, underneath his hood.

Then his head and very shortly the rest of his body impacted with a resounding smack against something in his way.

Stunned, Leonard reeled back and took a moment to regain his balance. He tentatively reached out to brush against the smooth, invisible surface blocking his path.

A bullet flew by his head, the buzz of its travel audible even through the thick hood of the parka, and blasted apart the glass in front of him. Leonard ignored the shards of glass that lodged themselves in his face and spun around, instinctively shooting a protective layer of ice before him. Nobody was visible. No target to aim his cold stream at.
Forget about the Mirror Master. Rescue the family. Leonard continued to shoot ice behind him and ran toward the central circle of mirrors, ignoring the insistent ringing in his ears. A single kick and one of the mirrors swung inward so easily it could have been on hinges.

Leonard stepped inside and had to pause a moment, his possible head injury making the situation much more confusing than it should have been.

No family inside these walls of mirrors. No Mirror Master either. It was entirely empty but for the grass and Leonard’s own reflection staring back at him an infinity of times. A quick spray of ice in a wide arc confirmed it wasn’t a trick—there truly was nothing but the mirrors.

The mirror behind him swung shut—(it was on a hinge?)—and Leonard lifted his gun to shoot his way out of there but suddenly everything felt so hot, sweltering, and a wave of dizziness overcame him.

Leonard glanced up and instantly threw a hand up to shield his eyes from the impossibly blinding brightness that was the sun, more powerful than it had any right to be. This wasn’t just his imagination—the grass was yellowing with the intensity of the heat.

An understanding of mirrors, Leonard was suddenly and painfully realizing, also lent itself to an understanding of lenses. Like those used in magnifying glasses.

Leonard had never been one to fry ants beneath magnifying glasses, he’d always preferred the cold, but he’d seen other boys do it—

And now he knew exactly how the ants felt.

The concentrated heat was unimaginable. Leonard deeply, deeply regretted his choice of a parka and gloves as his disguise, but the fear of cameras was too real for him to remove them. He aimed his gun at something, anything, to freeze his way out, but the ice melted before traveling even a foot.

Leonard turned the gun on himself, frosting his clothes in hopes of not dying of heatstroke. Helped for about three seconds.

He let out a heavy sigh and imagined the Mirror Master, wherever he was, waiting to hear Citizen Cold’s last words. He was going to be very disappointed.

“All right, kid!” he called. “Now would be the time!”

He went back to dying slowly, trusting that his instincts weren’t wrong.

One of the mirrors shattered, and a red streak blazed into the enclosure. The Flash dragged Leonard out and blurred away.

Leonard used his gun to cool himself off. He retched, feeling faint, probably aftereffects of the heat. Barry returned within thirty seconds.

“The family’s safe. The Mirror Master diverted the police with a couple of illusions and got away.”

“You let him get away?” Leonard griped.

“A thank you would be nice.”

“Thank you,” Leonard muttered sincerely. “But if you say ‘I told you so’, I will shoot you.”
Barry grinned. “It’s not like it would be the first time. Come on, let’s go, before the police decide to catch a vigilante instead of a psychopath.”

Without waiting for Leonard’s approval, Barry picked him up and sped back to S.T.A.R. Labs.

The S.T.A.R. Labs team was frantic when they returned. Caitlin immediately took charge of Leonard, pulling off his parka and gloves.

“You could have gotten killed,” she chastised Leonard. “Tess ran the calculations based on the video. Two more minutes and you’d need to be hospitalized, five minutes more and you would be dead. And then what would we do?”

“Video?” Leonard asked hazily.

“That Mirror Master creep took over the transmissions again,” Cisco said. “Bro, he was livestreaming your death.”

“There were bets going on all over Central City as to whether you’d die or not,” Ronnie added.

“You’re very lucky that Mr. Allen doesn’t actually listen to you,” Harrison said with a wry grin.

“He doesn’t listen to anyone,” Harry said.

“Which is a good thing in this case,” Barry defended.

While the others explained, Caitlin had put one of Leonard’s gloves on and taken his gun with the other hand. She fired ice into the glove.

Leonard watched her, bemused. “What are you doing, Caitlin?”

“You have heat exhaustion at the very least, more likely heat stroke. What do you think I’m doing?” she asked tightly. “Take off your shirt and lie down.”

“Think Ronnie’ll be jealous?” Leonard asked. He did as she said, stretching out on the floor.

“Shut up.” Caitlin spread ice across his face and chest. “I wish I had a thermometer.”

“Give me the cold gun,” Ronnie said, kneeling at Leonard’s side next to Caitlin.

She handed it over with a frown. “Why?” Ronnie began to take apart the gun.

“Built-in thermometer,” Leonard told her. “Not exactly medical grade…”

“But it’ll do,” Caitlin finished. Ronnie handed her the thermometer. She took Leonard’s temperature and sighed in relief. “You’ll live.”

“Always good to hear,” Leonard said.

“But if you're not putting on that parka for the next couple of days?” Caitlin smacked Leonard’s arm as he started to sit up. “And lay back down! You’ve got a head injury too from the looks of it.”

He rolled his eyes but slumped back to the ground. “Whatever you say, doc.”

“If he’s not putting on the parka, what happens if this Mirror Master strikes again?” Barry asked.

The others hesitated and glanced at each other. Jesse finally told him.
“Well, Barry, it’s a good thing that you’ve already got a suit.”

“What do you mean?” Barry asked. He realized what must have happened moments before Jesse confirmed it.

“Remember the cameras? The Flash just broadcasted his existence to all of Central City.”
Flicker? Seriously?

Chapter Notes

Fair warning: There will be lots of slightly-to-moderately faked science in this chapter. In my defense, I asked my mom if making up science was okay, and she said sure, so. Also, guys, I am so good at typing the word mirror now, you don't even understand.

Enjoy, and I'd love a comment!

Well, as an unwitting introductory video, it wasn’t that bad.

It wasn’t hard for Barry to find it on TV that night. Every news station in Central City—and even one over in Star (Starling, he reminded himself; it seemed that Ray hadn’t had the misfortune to “die” in this timeline)—was showing the clip.

Barry had to admit that, for a city that had never seen a single metahuman, the video was strange. It showed Citizen Cold curled up on the ground, dying, when suddenly he called out a vague SOS to a mysterious partner. Then a red blur zoomed in with lightning flickering behind him and in an instant (one could even say in a flash), both of them were gone.

The clip ended there, and a screencap took its place, the clearest single frame of Barry from the video. It showed his hazy outline surrounded by lightning, the emblem on his chest prominently visible.

“Ever since the confrontation between Citizen Cold and the self-proclaimed ‘Mirror Master’ in Leawood Park this afternoon, the question plaguing Central City has been ‘What is this streak?’” the reporter said. “Some have claimed the video to be fake. Some say it’s an illusion, proof of the Mirror Master’s… mastery of mirrors, as it were. But this ‘Flicker’, as many blogs have taken to calling it, due to how it—or he—flickers in and out of the frame, is undeniably in the shape of a man.”

The TV turned off without Barry touching the remote. He glanced up at Eobard, who tossed the remote back onto the coffee table just out of Barry’s reach. “Hey, I was watching that.”

“You’ve seen the clip a hundred times,” Eobard said flatly. “You lived it. If you want to watch it again, it’s all over the internet.”

“You’re just jealous that I’m getting all the attention,” Barry said with a smirk.

“Yeah, jealous of the Flicker.” Eobard snickered. “Your image hosting capabilities are really enviable, Barry.”

Barry rolled his eyes. “Yeah. I’m going to have to do something about that name. I should talk to Iris, see if she’s planning to write an article. Maybe I can subtly suggest a name change.”

“Don’t,” Eobard advised.

“Why not?” Barry frowned, wondering what effect on the timeline it could possibly have.
Eobard smirked. “Because it’s funny.”

“Careful, Eobard, that’ll make your past, or future, or alternate self the Reverse Flicker eventually.”

He grimaced. “You’re right.” He thought for a moment and then shrugged. “Oh well. I’m a time remnant now; that other Eobard Thawne won’t be me anyway. Screw him. He can go by the Reverse Flicker. Better than the Reverse Fridge.”

“The what?”

Eobard shuddered. “Don’t ask.”

“…I won’t. What do you think about the Mirror Master? You know anything about him?”

Eobard shook his head. “The Flash from my timeline never fought him. It’s possible Citizen Cold did. I’m sure it’ll come as a huge surprise to you that I wasn’t exactly interested in studying the 21st century unless it involved the Flash.”

Barry nodded. The relationship he was gaining with Eobard was strange—neither of them acknowledged the fact that they’d both completely despised each other about a month ago. Even when tidbits from their past lives were brought up, it led to nothing more than a momentary pause in the conversation.

It started out of mutual need and resentment, but now it felt like something frighteningly close to friendship. Nothing was forgiven, per se, but much was left unmentioned.

“Oh well,” Barry said in response to Eobard’s lack of knowledge. “I’m sure it won’t be too hard to track down his real identity.”

Eobard scoffed. “After all, how many people could there be with a vendetta to pursue against Citizen Cold?”

The police station the next morning was all abuzz with rumors and speculation. Iris was there, talking with Eddie. She waved Barry over the moment he entered.

“Did you see the news last night?” she asked.

Barry decided to play dumb. “No, what happened? Everyone’s clearly excited about something.”

“Wow, you’re really out of it, Barry,” Eddie said. “It’s all over the internet and everything.”

Barry lifted his hands and made a ‘what can you do?’ expression. “Enlighten me, please.”

“You’re so lucky you’ve got friends like us, Barry,” Iris said. She showed him the video on her phone. “They’re calling him the Flicker.”

“How do you even know it’s a him? It could be a hoax.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying!” Eddie said. “I think Citizen Cold orchestrated the whole thing just to get the cops thinking about something else. And…” He gestured around the precinct. “It’s clearly working.”

“Well, for my sake you’d better hope it’s really a person,” Iris said. “My boss wants an article about this ASAP. And if I can get an interview with this guy, I get a raise and a huge bonus. Which
would be a welcome boost to our house fund, right, babe?” She kissed Eddie on the cheek.

“Good luck,” Barry said. “Hey, what do you guys think about what they’re calling him?”

Iris and Eddie glanced at each other, puzzled.

“What do you mean?” Eddie asked.

Barry shrugged casually. “I mean, it’s just that ‘Flicker’ sounds a little…”

He was cut off when Captain Singh banged on the wall to get everyone’s attention. The precinct went silent, everyone immediately looking at him.

“Everyone stop talking about the Flicker and get back to work or I’m assigning all of you traffic duty. That includes you, Mr. Allen,” he added, pointing at Barry with his pen. He moved the pen to indicate Iris. “And you, Mrs. West-Thawne, out of the precinct. Your husband has a job to do.”

“Bye,” Iris said in the rustle of papers and murmur of complaints that followed. She kissed Eddie and smiled at Barry on her way out.

Barry smiled back and retreated to his lab before he could get fired. All he wanted to do—aside from convincing someone to change that name—was hurry back to the Cold Cave and track down the Mirror Master.

But in this timeline, he had a real job. He’d have to ask Eobard whether it was possible to travel forward in time without anyone finding it suspicious. It would really speed up the boring parts of his day.

_How many people could there be with a vendetta to pursue against Citizen Cold?_ Eobard had asked the night before.

The answer turned out to be a lot.

“So you have absolutely no idea whose brother it could be?” Ronnie asked.

“Nope,” Leonard confirmed.

“How many people have you killed?” Cisco asked, a bit sarcastically.

“I don’t keep a list, Cisco.” Probably because of his injuries, Leonard was a little more irritable than normal. Which was saying something. “Fewer than the Green Arrow his first year.”

“Who is the Green Arrow, by the way?” Barry asked casually.

Leonard gave him an annoyed look. “Nice try, kid.”

Cisco was still focused on the Mirror Master. “Then how are we supposed to find him?” he demanded.

“How should I know?” Leonard sniped back.

“Let’s think about this logically,” Harrison said, his calm-down-and-do-science voice defusing the building tension in the small room.

Tess, as always, understood Harrison’s meaning. “Where exactly would one acquire a vast quantity
of mirrors?”

“According to recent shipping manifests,” Harry smirked and looked up from the computer, “which I may or may not have hacked into, nobody’s delivered a ton of mirrors by boat, air, or train in the past year.”

“There aren’t any mirror or glass manufacturers in Central City,” Ronnie added.

“And I checked police records today,” Barry said. “Nobody’s reported mirrors being stolen.”

“Then how did my good friend the Mirror Master manage to almost kill me?” Leonard asked.

Quiet for a moment as they all considered the question.

Then Jesse thoughtfully hummed a few bars of something—calliope?

“A carnival,” she said. “Hall of mirrors.”

Eyes widened in realization all around the Cold Cave.

“That makes sense,” Cisco said. “They wouldn’t need to deliver on a boat or train.”

“And there was a carnival in town recently,” Caitlin said. “Ronnie took me for my birthday.”

Leonard scoffed. “I remember that carnival. It was run by a bunch of psychopaths sneaking drugs into the cotton candy.”

Caitlin frowned. “I’m glad I didn’t buy any cotton candy. I assume you…” She gestured vaguely, meaning did your thing.

“Yeah, I shut it down,” Leonard said, meaning killed all the perpetrators.

Tess, at a computer, found a list of everyone involved with the carnival. Leonard looked over it.

“Him, him, and him.”

Keyboards clattered as everyone searched the names he’d indicated.

“Jeremy Tell doesn’t have any siblings,” Ronnie reported.

“Neither does Clay Parker,” Harrison said.

“John Scudder does,” Cisco said. “His name is Sam, and get this—he worked at the carnival too… in the Hall of Mirrors.”

“That has to be him,” Barry said. “How can we find him?”

“A missing person’s report was filed for him in Keystone City a week ago,” Harry said.

“Which doesn’t help us at all,” Ronnie said. “Can we track his cell?”

“It’s been inactive ever since he’s gone missing,” Harry said.

“I would offer the S.T.A.R. Labs satellite, but I don’t think it has the ability to search for a lot of mirrors,” Harrison said.

“Mirrors,” Eobard said thoughtfully. “Barry, Leonard, how old were these mirrors?”
Barry shrugged. “Various ages, I guess.”

“Sorry,” Leonard said flatly. “It was on my to-do list to carbon date them, but I must have forgotten with all the near dying.”

“How could the age of the mirrors possibly matter?” Caitlin asked.

Cisco sucked in a breath in realization. “Silver nitrate.”

Eobard nodded. “That’s right. Mirrors these days are typically made out of…” He paused. “I’m not sure. What’s the 21st century process for making them?”

Harrison and Tess gave him curious looks, but the others didn’t notice Eobard’s minor anachronism.

“Usually just silver,” Cisco said. “But they used to be made of silver nitrate, and some still are.”

“So…” Barry prompted, glancing at Caitlin, who was as puzzled as he was. The other science brains in the room were already catching on.

“Silver nitrate is the same substance used in cameras,” Harrison explained, starting to get excited.

“So if it was ever exposed to light for long periods of time…” Tess said.

“Or rather, variances in light, then the shapes of its surroundings—”

“Would have been captured the same way as a photograph,” Tess finished.

“Exactly,” Cisco and Eobard said in unison.

“I’ll go get you a mirror,” Barry said, rushing from the room. The police had taken down the elaborate structure in the park, of course, but forensic analysis of those mirrors was left up to Barry. Nobody else was going to notice one missing out of the dozens.

He picked the one that looked the oldest and sped back to S.T.A.R. Labs. After a month of hiding in the shadows whenever he was in his Flash suit, it was a relief to be able to run straight down the streets of Central City.

Back in the Cold Cave, he set down the mirror, leaning it carefully against the wall. “What next?”

“We’ll need materials to build something to develop the images,” Cisco said.

Eobard rattled off a long list of the necessary pieces of tech. Harry tagged on a couple more, smirking at Eobard. Eobard gave him an ‘I hate you, but you’re not wrong’ look in return.

“Let’s go find what we need,” Cisco said, unaware of the wordless exchange going on between Harry and Eobard.

The team dispersed around S.T.A.R. Labs, a high-stakes scavenger hunt to win a life-or-death game of hide and seek.

They reconvened before long and quickly assembled the device. Cisco carefully lowered the mirror into the solution.

“The images will be layered on top of each other. It’ll take some clever digital manipulation to
separate them,” Harry said.

“And even the initial image will probably take a couple of days to fully develop,” Cisco said.

“That’s a good thing,” Caitlin said with a deliberate glare at Leonard. “He shouldn’t be out chasing bad guys until he recovers.”

Leonard rolled his eyes at her.

Barry snickered. “I recommend not getting injured if you can help it. Caitlin gets very upset.”

Caitlin pointedly ignored Barry. “I do have a lead for us to follow on the Syndicate after the Mirror Master is taken care of. One of my contacts finally got back to me about the clonazolam. A few months ago, a huge shipment was delivered to one of the warehouses on the edge of town.”

“What’s the address?” Barry asked.

Caitlin shook her head firmly. “I’ll give you and Leonard the address after we deal with the Mirror Master.”

“So now we wait?” Barry said.

“So now we wait,” Leonard confirmed.

Two days later, with the city still buzzing about the Flicker and the Mirror Master still at large (though he hadn’t been seen since Leawood Park), the images finally developed.

Everyone on Team Cold knew that the result would be a jumbled mess of images, but they all crowded around nonetheless to see it.

Yup, that was exactly as expected—a hazy blur of dark and light patchworked over each other, a brief history of everywhere the mirror had ever been.

Cisco and Ronnie scanned the result into a computer, running it through the software they (with heavy input from the rest of the team) had created in the past two days. Hopefully, it would isolate the separate images and allow them to determine Sam Scudder’s hideout.

Took nearly an hour, but finally the computer dinged to announce the program’s completion. Everyone again crowded around, examining the five images.

The first picture, the most recent, was easily identifiable as Leawood Park. Next was a blurry frame that looked like motion—the mirror being transported. The fourth was approximately the same, and the last was obviously the carnival’s Hall of Mirrors.

The third one was what they’d been looking for.

It showed a multitude of dim reflections of itself, of other mirrors. But more importantly—

There was a window.

Through the window, in the grainy black-and-white quality, there was a chain-link fence. Everyone leaned in slightly closer as Cisco zoomed in on the sign hanging on it.

“What does that say…”? Harry asked, putting on his glasses and squinting.
Leonard stepped away from the screen to get his parka, only to have Barry hand it to him instantly, already suited up.

Barry grinned as Leonard threw on the parka. “Let’s go catch Scudder.”

Barry did a quick loop around the exterior of Petersburg Electrical in order to find the right building—an abandoned warehouse. Another one.

“How many of these does one city need?” he asked Leonard conversationally as they walked toward it.

Leonard didn’t respond. Barry figured he was probably rolling his eyes underneath the goggles.

They entered the warehouse, and suddenly Barry didn’t feel like making any more jokes. He’d fought a lot of bad guys, but this hideout was pretty well up there in terms of creepy lairs. The Hall of Mirrors was never Barry’s favorite carnival location as a kid, but this place was dark and silent and lacked any of the typical distortion mirrors. The ones in here threw back reflections at angles that were ever-so-slightly off, so that Barry would catch a glimpse of an unfamiliar shape moving and jump before realizing it was his own reflection, just a bit shorter or wider or stranger.

He snuck a glance at Leonard to see if the notorious Citizen Cold was feeling just as creeped out, but it was impossible to tell with his hood and the darkness.

“Scudder!” Leonard called suddenly, his voice sharp and loud in the eerie silence. “Hear you want to kill me. Well. Here I am.”

“I see you brought your friend,” came the response. Scudder’s voice echoed endlessly around, but came from straight ahead—or as close as possible in the weird pathways of mirrors. “The Flicker. I have to admit, when planning to kill you, I didn’t quite expect that one.”

“Actually, it’s the Fl—” Barry started, stopping when Leonard threw him a look. He whispered harshly, “Why are we doing this? I could just run ahead and capture him.”

“You’ll run into a mirror, I can guarantee it,” Leonard muttered. “Let him show himself. He won’t be able to resist showing off for long.”

They rounded a corner and both stopped and stared, awed by the sight before their eyes.

They’d reached what had to be the central portion of the lair, judging by how large the space… might have been? It was hard to tell, due to the intensity of Scudder’s chosen décor.

Everything in sight was plastered with bits of broken mirrors, attached onto the walls, the floor, the ceiling, and anything else that might have been in the room. Every piece was set at a different angle in a baffling optical illusion of light and perspective. It was like a disco ball had been turned inside out, sent across the dimensional barrier four or five times, put through a blender, and then dumped into the room.

Barry took a single hesitant step into the space and winced at the reflections that swirled around him like rough seas. Leonard followed him.

Then some of the reflections moved on their own, and both Barry and Leonard went on guard immediately. By squinting really hard, Barry could just make out the edges of the moving figure—
a human silhouette. The Mirror Master, now wearing a full suit of mirrors rather than just a hood and mask. Barry raced at him, full-speed.

But before he got more than a few steps, he slowed and found himself too dizzy to resist sinking to the ground. The movement of a million tiny reflections was too much.

Was he really getting motion sickness from mirrors?

Leonard shot a stream of ice at the figure, but the ice stopped before reaching Scudder, instead piling up on the surface of… Glass? Another mirror reflecting his image? The room was far too trippy to accurately tell. He squinted through the ice to see what Scudder was doing, which way he could be coming—

Hold on. Leonard’s mind worked through the logic.

If he had to squint to see through the ice, then the ice wasn’t perfectly clear.

If it wasn’t perfectly clear, it could block out the mirrors.

Block out the mirrors and this creepy-ass lair would become an ordinary room.

And if this was an ordinary room, Sam Scudder had no chance.

So Leonard started shooting. He avoided Barry on the floor—who the kid was on the floor, he had no idea—and simply covered every mirrored surface with a thin sheet of ice.

Barry got back to his feet and blurred into action as soon as the room was partially covered, motion sickness suppressed now that some of the mirrors were blocked.

Honestly, compared to the metas he’d fought, Scudder himself was easy to subdue once Barry found him sequestered inside a tangram of mirrors. He dragged him out to Leonard—very grateful that Leonard had iced all the surfaces in the room—and held onto the back of his collar while Leonard looked him over.

“What?” Scudder spat when Leonard didn’t immediately say anything. He pulled his mask off and stared Leonard in the eyes (well, goggles). “What are you waiting for? Aren’t you going to kill me like you did my brother?”

Leonard aimed his cold gun at Scudder’s face. Despite his bravado, Scudder flinched.

Leonard smirked. “Apparently,” he said, very slowly, “I don’t kill loser criminals like you anymore. You can thank my friend here for that.”

“What, speed means that you can give Citizen Cold morals, Flicker?”

“What, speed means that you can give Citizen Cold morals, Flicker?”

“Actually, it’s…” Barry started again.

“I always had morals,” Leonard interrupted. “Your brother didn’t. Seems like that’s a family trait.” He nodded at Barry. “Go ahead.”

Barry took off with Scudder in tow. It had taken them most of the two days to get Leonard to agree to it, but finally he’d conceded and written the note. The same note Barry now placed on Scudder’s lap when he dropped him handcuffed into a chair at the precinct, the one that said only:

Sam Scudder. Don’t thank me. —Citizen Cold.
Back in the Cold Cave, the mood was actually cheerful. Leonard might even have smiled, though he certainly would have denied all accusations of doing so.

“Caitlin, what was the address of the clonazolam warehouse?” he asked.

“You’re not going there tonight,” Harrison insisted before Caitlin could respond. “One enemy is enough for today.”

“Caitlin and I have already placed a takeout order for everyone from Big Belly Burger,” Jesse added.

Leonard, exasperated, looked at Barry for support.

Barry shrugged. “Even vigilantes get to celebrate.”

“Fine,” he relented. “So long as you got my order right, Caitlin.”

“Two #1’s, no ketchup,” Caitlin said. “Let’s go pick up the order, Jesse.”

When she passed Leonard on her way out the door with Jesse, she murmured, “The address is in the top drawer. But you’ve been enough of a hero for tonight.”

And okay, maybe Leonard smiled again. But there was certainly no evidence proving that.

On the walk to and from Big Belly Burger, Caitlin and Jesse discovered that they’d both majored in biochemistry. So of course, they started discussing differences between their respective Earths in terms of medical history.

“So, wait, on your Earth really they haven’t cured the common cold yet?” Jesse asked.

“No. They’ve cured it on your—” Caitlin said doubtfully, and then her eyes narrowed. “You’re kidding, right?”

Jesse snickered. “Yeah.”

Caitlin had to smile. “Okay, then, what about—” she started.

She didn’t get to finish.

Because one of the six men, clad in black, swarming out of the alley behind her, stabbed her in the arm with a syringe.

Jesse dropped the takeout bags and screamed.

Caitlin fell unconscious into the arms of one of the men. The other five advanced on Jesse, who stood frozen.

A hand clamped around her arm, the tip of a needle an inch away, and something deep within Jesse sputtered to a start. She automatically flinched away—

And found herself half a block from the street corner, her clothes sizzling and sparks skittering between her fingers.

“What,” she gasped to herself, heart pounding.
It took her a moment to collect herself and another moment to understand the correct course of action, and then she was blazing back toward where Caitlin was taken.

Two moments too late. A van drove away and Jesse hesitated, knowing she couldn’t catch up to it.

Memorize the plate—FFT 2914—and then she ran, feet pounding, clothes smoking, lightning trailing behind her, back to S.T.A.R. Labs.
The mood in the Cold Cave was still celebratory when Jesse entered. It quickly shifted when everyone took in how frantic she looked.

“Caitlin,” Jesse choked out. “She’s been taken.” She breathed in shakily. “By the Syndicate.”

An explosion of sound, everyone shouting in panic and disbelief. Harry hurried to Jesse’s side and enfolded her in a hug. Leonard yanked open the top drawer of his desk. Ronnie looked almost catatonic with shock and grief.

“Which way did they take her?” Leonard asked, his voice almost a growl but still rising above the rest of the noise in the room.

“A van drove off south down Cedar Valley. I got the license plate number.”

“How did you get away?” Eobard asked.

“Um…” Jesse pulled away from her father. “Like this.”

Instantly, she was on the other side of the room. Everyone jumped. Barry gaped.

Harry spluttered. “You—Jesse—what—did you know?”

She shook her head. “It happened when they were trying to capture me. It’s not important right now. We need to save Caitlin.”

“We need to save Caitlin,” Ronnie echoed. “Now.”

“I’ve got the address for the warehouse where the drugs are stored,” Leonard said. “Come on, Barry.”

Barry nodded.

“I’ll go too,” Jesse said.

“Absolutely not,” Harry retorted.

“Dad, I can help.”

“You don’t have any training. Besides, you were almost kidnapped five minutes ago. You’re not going.”

Barry nodded at Jesse. “He’s right. It’s too dangerous.”

Jesse frowned, irritated, but nodded her agreement.

“We’ll look over everything we know about the Syndicate again,” Harrison said. “We have to be missing something.”

“We’re going to find her,” Ronnie said as though convincing himself.

Barry and Leonard left in a blur.

“So how exactly do you have superspeed, Jesse?” Cisco asked.
Yet another abandoned warehouse that had been commissioned for criminal purposes.

“So, what’s the plan?” Barry asked. “You distract them, and I’ll take them out?” Something in his voice was slightly off, different from usual.

“You distract them,” Leonard countered. “You’re the one who can dodge bullets.”

“Fair enough.” They approached the entrance, where two men with machine guns stood guard. Barry lowered his voice to a whisper. “Can I at least take out these guys?”

Leonard was feeling generous—there would be plenty of Syndicate members to go around. “Sure.”

Within moments, both guards lay on the ground unconscious.

“Give me five seconds, then go inside,” Barry said. Leonard realized what the difference was. The usual cheer in his voice was gone, replaced with a tense solemnity.

“Will do,” Leonard agreed.

Barry sped away in a bright blur, and Leonard counted to himself.

On the other side of the warehouse, Barry phased through the wall into the Syndicate’s headquarters. He paused a moment to take in the room.

Despite the size of the warehouse, everything within it was contained to one corner. The central focus of the space was a long table housing a complicated system of tubes and flasks. Blue liquid flowed slowly and steadily through it, some sort of dilution or modification of the clonazolam. Seemed a little complex for the Mick Rory that Barry knew. Against the far wall, large crates were stacked high, the only other objects in the warehouse.

Eleven men, all of them dressed in black, stood guard around it. Their stances were casual, weapons held loosely at their sides, and all of them laughed in response to some joke.

Barry stepped into the light. “Sorry to interrupt,” he said.

The Syndicate members immediately spun to face him, lifting their guns. They all shot at Barry, who stood without retreating.

As the bullets neared him, Barry lifted a single hand and caught each one, his arm blurring in front of his head and chest.

A momentary silence fell over the warehouse as the men waited to see the effects of their shots.

Barry opened his hand and the eleven bullets fell, tinkling merrily against the concrete floor.

Then swoosh, swoosh, swoosh, swoosh, swoosh. Five shots from Leonard’s cold gun, freeing the heads of five members of the Syndicate.

Barry gave Leonard a ‘what happened to no killing?’ glare. In response, Leonard dropped the next five with precisely calculated shots that clipped their temples, rendering them unconscious.
He turned his cold gun on the one remaining man just in time to freeze his bullet. Leonard frosted the man’s gun (and maybe a couple fingers too, but who was counting) and then advanced on him, lifting the cold gun threateningly.

“Where are all the women you’ve kidnapped?” he snarled.

“I don’t know.” The bastard didn’t even have the decency to sound frightened. “Really,” he added quickly at Leonard’s flatly doubtful expression. “They spread them out around the city so they’re harder to track. Only time the boss tells us where they are is when we ship them out.”

“And when exactly is the next one of those?” Leonard asked.

“I don’t know,” the man said, so easily and fervently that Leonard knew he wasn’t lying.

He was all set to knock him out and move on when he noticed the man’s free hand moving toward another gun holstered at his side. Exasperated and furious, Leonard shot him in the head and glared at Barry, daring him to say anything.

“I honestly can’t blame you,” Barry said, glowering at the corpse. He looked away after a moment. “We need to destroy this.” He gestured to the table of drug-refining equipment.

“Go ahead,” Leonard invited.

Barry didn’t need any more encouragement. He didn’t settle for just knocking over a few of the pipes—instead he started circling the table as fast as possible, feeling electricity crackling through his hands, and finally hurled a bolt of lightning at the setup.

The table collapsed immediately. Most of the glass shattered, but a good portion of it disintegrated entirely. The drug vaporized into smoke.

“Wow,” Leonard said in the aftermath.

“Yeah,” Barry said, lacking a better response. “Let’s check out what’s in these crates.”

He retrieved one from the top row and Leonard pried it open. They both peered inside.

Barry had expected more drugs or weapons or even bombs. Instead, he was faced with… lipstick? Another crate held eye shadow; a third, mascara. In fact, they all held makeup of different kinds.

“What does the Syndicate need with forty-eight cases of makeup?” Barry asked.

Leonard looked just as baffled. “No idea. Let’s take a sample from each box and go back, see what the others have to say.”

“Did you find her?” Ronnie demanded immediately when they entered the Cold Cave.

Barry shook his head. “Just drugs and some crates.”

“We figured out the pattern,” Harry cut in before Barry could explain what was in the crates. “To when they take the victims out of the country.”

“There’s a pattern?” Leonard asked, hurrying over to look at the computer.

“You’ve tried looking at the dates or intervals or days of the week, of course,” Harrison said. “But
“Every twelve,” Tess elaborated. “We’ve examined all the complicated data but missed the obvious—the night they take the twelfth girl, they transport them.”

“I don’t know how we overlooked it for so long,” Jesse said.

“But the worst part—” Ronnie said. He was suddenly choked up, unable to continue.

Leonard knew what he meant to say. He’d studied every detail of the data too. There had been fifty-nine girls kidnapped as of yesterday. Which meant— “Caitlin’s number sixty.”

“So there’ll be a shipment tonight?” Barry asked.

Leonard nodded and checked the clock. “We have some time to plan, though. It’s two in the morning and they always leave the dock at midnight.”

“How do you know?” Ronnie asked.

“Rory always sets something on fire at the docks, coinciding with the departures. I’ve done the calculations a hundred times. The fires are set shortly after midnight.”

“The coastline is miles long,” Cisco said. “How are you going to know where to be to stop them, even if you have the time right?”

“The makeup,” Barry said.

“The what now?” Cisco, along with the rest of the team, gave Barry an ‘are you crazy’ look.

Leonard pulled the cosmetics from his pockets. “We found these at the warehouse. Crates of them.”

“…Forty-eight crates of them,” Barry said. “One for each of the girls already smuggled out of the city.”

“They’re using makeup shipments to hide them,” Harry said. He typed rapidly for a moment. “There’s a cosmetics shipment scheduled for tonight. Dock 52.”

“This ends tonight,” Leonard said.

There was a monumental pause.

“We have twenty-two hours until midnight,” Harrison said finally. “And it’s a Saturday. I suggest that we all get some sleep.”

Everyone generally nodded and drifted from the room. It had been a very long day.

Cisco caught up to Ronnie, who still looked completely shell-shocked, and put a hand on his shoulder.

“Hey, man,” Cisco said seriously. “Come crash at my place for tonight. You shouldn’t be alone.”

Ronnie nodded absently, staring straight ahead.

“Hey,” Cisco said more firmly. Ronnie finally looked at him. “We’ve got two superheroes on our side. We’re going to save Caitlin. I promise.”
“Hope so,” Ronnie muttered. “Thanks.”

The team dispersed.

Twenty-two hours.

Zero hour.

Midnight.

Dock 52.

Leonard and Barry watched from the shadows of a nearby building. Syndicate members, a hundred of them or so, lined the pier.

Heat Wave stood a little separated from them, on the end of the pier near the beach. He wore a thick brown leather coat and heavy black gloves, along with huge dark goggles. His heat gun was held at the ready.

An armored van rumbled onto the beach, one just about large enough to hold twelve terrified, captive girls. It swung around so the back would open toward the pier and stopped near Heat Wave, who took a step toward it and made as if to open the door.

Before he could, Leonard fired a single short stream of ice into the sky. The Syndicate looked up at it, reaching for their weapons.

Leonard and Barry ran toward the dock, one of them much faster than the other. It was Barry’s job to take out the typically-weaponed members of the Syndicate. Leonard would focus on Heat Wave.

Whatever the Syndicate might have been prepared for, they certainly were not ready for the Flash. Barry neatly avoided bullets and blows, knocking out criminals ten a second. This world hadn’t heard of even a single meta, let alone the Flash, until a few days ago, not nearly enough time to prepare defenses. Their sheer numbers might have been a problem if Barry had given them enough time to coordinate.

Leonard, for his part, drew Rory away from the van and the pier, until they both stood on uneven sand, a few paces away from each other. Then Leonard waited, and sure enough, Heat Wave fired first, a jet of white-hot flame, the temperature so blisteringly high that Leonard could feel the heat before he saw the fire.

He immediately pulled his own trigger, matching the stream of fire exactly. The two streams sizzled loudly when they met, zeroing out the two extremes.

“Looks like we’re evenly matched,” Heat Wave called over the sounds of their guns.

“Not quite,” Leonard shouted back. “I’m a lot smarter.”

He stopped shooting and in the same instant dropped to the ground. The fire passed over him, crackling menacingly and very hot, but Leonard certainly wouldn’t die from that. Stretching out flat on the sand, he shot at Rory’s legs.

Boom. Instant icicle. Still shooting, Heat Wave fell, the line of fire going wild. Leonard froe the jets of flame that came toward him and rose to his feet. He coated the heat gun with ice and the fire died.
A glance behind him showed that Barry had knocked out the rest of the Syndicate, and, as planned, the police had arrived and were taking charge of the girls in the van, Caitlin, scared but unhurt, among them.

Leonard smirked and turned back to face Heat Wave, a snappy line on his tongue.

Before he could utter it, or even take in the sight of a second man clad in a black leather coat and mask now standing next to Rory, something—what the hell?—lightning hit his cold gun, flinging Leonard backwards.

He threw the now-sparking gun aside, glad his gloves provided some insulation, and rose to face the newcomer, who lifted his lightning gun and prepared to shoot again.

Leonard didn’t have enough time to move, just enough time to brace himself for the impact. A crackling cylinder of lightning blazed out of the barrel of the gun.

And then Barry was in front of Leonard, and the electricity slammed into him instead. Barry flew backwards, barely missing Leonard, who snatched up his cold gun and rushed to Barry’s side.

Barry, amazingly, struggled back to his feet with hardly a pause and sped himself and Leonard away from Heat Wave and the other man—not too far, but behind them, close enough to hear the words exchanged.

“…out of here before the police take notice,” the newcomer said, his voice obviously modified. He pulled Rory’s gun, which was already melting the ice around it, from his hand and started to defrost Rory’s legs.

“What about Cold and that Flicker?” Rory demanded.

“They’re gone. They don’t matter. The end of this whole thing has been coming for a while.” The man pulled Rory to his feet.

The conversation seemingly over, Barry prepared to go before they turned and noticed them, but Leonard held up a hand and leaned forward. Barry followed his lead.

Softly enough that they would have missed it if they weren’t listening closely, the newcomer murmured, “It’s time to start phase two.”

Rory snickered.

And then, before Leonard and Barry could be caught by either the criminals or the police, Barry sped them away from the pier.

The only thought on both their minds was:

Phase two?
An unspoken, mutual agreement between Leonard and Barry meant that they waited until Caitlin had been released from police protection and everyone had gotten a bit of sleep before Leonard announced to the team, “We need to talk about what happened at the docks two nights ago.”

“Why?” Ronnie asked, pulling Caitlin closer to him protectively. Barry doubted that he had let her out of his sight since she’d returned. “It’s over. The Syndicate has been destroyed.”

“It’s been destroyed,” Barry said seriously, “but this isn’t over. Mick Rory still hasn’t been apprehended… and there was someone else at the docks that night.”

“There were a lot of people there,” Caitlin said.

“Right, but this one was in charge,” Leonard said. “From the way he talked to Rory, he’s at the very least his partner, but it seemed to me that this new guy was calling the shots.”

“He mentioned how the end of the Syndicate had been coming for a while, and that it was time to start phase two,” Barry explained.

“He was wearing a huge coat and a black leather mask,” Leonard said. “But more importantly, he had a gun that shot lightning.”

“Lightning?” Harrison asked, intrigued.

“If it wasn’t for Barry’s apparent ability to absorb electricity, I would be dead,” Leonard said. “By the way, Cisco, I’ll need you to build me a new cold gun.”

“What happened to yours?”

Leonard dumped the burned-out husk onto the desk. “Lightning.”

Cisco picked up the gun and examined it, looking offended. “I haven’t even met him and I already hate this… Weather Wizard.”

“You can’t call him that,” Barry said.

Cisco blinked. “What?”

“Weather Wizard. That name’s taken in my timeline.”

“How could that name be taken?” Cisco demanded.

“The guy could literally control the weather with his hands.” Barry made an apologetic gesture.

Cisco huffed. “Fine. We’ll call him Deathbolt.”

“Nope, that’s taken too.”

“Seriously? What could he do? Never mind, I don’t want to know. What about Deathstorm?”
Harry hummed in dissent. “Nope.” He gave a sideways glance at Ronnie. “That one’s from my Earth.”

Cisco threw his hands in the air in frustration. “Your timeline takes all the good names.” He thought for a moment. “Is Black Lightning taken?”

“No, that one’s fine,” Barry said. Harry nodded.

“Finally.” Cisco sighed dramatically.

“…I think we should be more focused on who this man is rather than what we’re calling him,” Harrison said wisely. “Barry, do you have any experience with him from your timeline?”

“I’ve never heard of him.” Barry glanced at Eobard.

Eobard shook his head. “The name sounds vaguely familiar, but I don’t know anything about him. You didn’t recognize the voice?”

“Modified,” Barry said.

“So how are we supposed to find him if all we know is that he has a lightning gun?” Caitlin asked.

“And that he wears black!” Cisco added. “It’s all in the name: black, lightning.” He nodded to himself. “I wasn’t sure about that name, but it’s growing on me.”

Everyone else totally ignored Cisco.

“I doubt we need to worry about finding him,” Leonard said. “I get the feeling Black Lightning’s phase two will be hard to miss.”

“That’s ominous,” Harry muttered.

Barry’s voice lightened. “In the meantime… Jesse.”

Jesse raised an eyebrow. “Yeah?”

He grinned at her. “I think we need to talk about the fact that I now have some competition.”

She snickered. “You sure do. Wanna race?”

Barry shook his head at her and managed to look appalled. “After Zoom? Too soon.”

“I think you’re just scared you’ll lose,” Jesse retorted.

Barry laughed. “I don’t know about a race, but there’s still a treadmill in the basement. If it’s okay with Harry, let’s go see what you can do.”

Harry nodded his assent. “Let’s go.”

Jesse stepped off the treadmill, and everyone appropriately applauded. “How fast am I going?” There was a note of glee in her voice, a sheer excitement that Barry recognized from his own experiences with speed.

“Well, you’re slower than me,” Barry said, unable to resist a grin.

Jesse rolled her eyes. “You’ve had your powers a lot longer, and you’ve got that tachyon device.
Cheater.”

Barry laughed. “You have a point.”

“So how do I get faster? How did you train?”

“Mostly by fighting criminals and metas.” Barry purposefully didn’t look at Eobard—no point in mentioning the part he had played in Barry’s training. “Not sure Harry will let you do that.”

Jesse glanced at her dad, who was already glaring in disapproval. She turned back to Barry with a shrug. “Teach me how to phase through things and he can’t stop me.”

Barry hesitated. “…I’m pretty sure Harry would literally kill me if I taught you that.”

“You’d be right,” Harry said cheerfully.

Jesse laughed. “All right, I’m going to try again.” She gave one last glance around at everyone—even Leonard had come to watch her run—and climbed back on the treadmill.

They all watched her run. It was bizarre for Barry, seeing another speedster with yellow lightning trailing behind them. He was so focused on watching Jesse that he almost didn’t notice the door opening behind him.

But the sound of the creaking hinges caught his attention, and Barry frowned as he turned. Everyone who knew about his speed and this room was already here, so who—

Everyone except Hartley, that was.

Jesse stopped the treadmill and joined everyone else in staring at Hartley. His intrusion wouldn’t have been a problem… except that Leonard was in the room too.

Barry could see Hartley figuring it out. His gaze traveled from Jesse to Barry to Leonard, expression shifting into a frown.

“So you’re the Flicker, Barry, that much is obvious—or Jesse, though her speed is newer, so I doubt that,” Hartley said slowly. “Either way, the Flicker works with Citizen Cold.” He narrowed his eyes at Leonard. “And I don’t recall you being in the loop on Barry’s speed. Leonard, you’re Citizen Cold.”

A million retorts and dismissals rushed through Barry’s mind, but he had no idea which of them to say, what would convince Hartley that he was wrong. The others seemed caught in the same maze of possibilities.

Jesse ended up being the first to speak, and the pause before her response was almost unnoticeable. “Good to see you again, Hartley, but I’m a little worried about your mental state. Leonard is Citizen Cold?”

Hartley looked at her, unamused. “You’ve claimed to be a genius, Jesse. Surely you know that you’ll have to be smarter than that if you want to fool me.”

She shrugged. “Worth a try.”

Leonard pushed through the others to face Hartley directly. “So, Rathaway, you think I’m Citizen Cold. What are you going to do about it?”

“Call the police,” he said, tone implying that it should be obvious. He started backing out of the
room, reaching for his phone.

“Hartley.” Harrison started toward him, waving off Leonard, Barry, Ronnie, even Jesse, all of whom had moved to stop Hartley. He made eye contact with Tess, and their expressions shifted in silent conversation before Harrison left the room.

“What’s he going to do?” Barry asked.

Tess shook her head and smiled wryly. “Something stupid. Hartley won’t make the call.”

Harrison closed the door behind him and quickly caught up to Hartley, putting a hand on his shoulder.

Hartley shrugged it off and turned to face Harrison with a glare. “You can’t stop me.”

“Hartley, I know you’re upset, but please think about this.”

Hartley shook his head. “Unbelievable. You’ve been working with him. How long has this been going on? Since he started this whole one-man crusade?”

Harrison was simply, calmly honest. “Yes.”

“You know he’s a murderer, right?”

“I do.”

“Then why would you support him?” Hartley still had his phone in his hand, thumb poised over the number pad.

“Because I believe he’s doing a lot of good,” Harrison said. “I’m not entirely comfortable with the murder, but I trust Leonard not to do so without reason.”

Hartley looked utterly betrayed—shock, confusion, anger, horror, all of the above. “I’m calling the police,” he repeated after a moment, shaking his head.

Harrison grabbed his arm. “I can’t stop you.” Hartley snatched his arm away and began to dial. “And I don’t blame you, Hartley. But before you make that call, let me tell you what my plan is if you do.”

“What, are you going to let Leonard come after me with his cold gun? Or will you just fire me, say we had a disagreement?”

“Neither.” Harrison spoke very calmly and seriously. “I’m not going to do anything to you, Hartley. As I said, I can’t blame you. What I will do is walk into CCPD and confess to being Citizen Cold.”

Hartley actually dropped his phone. “You’ll what?”

“I’ll confess to being Citizen Cold,” Harrison repeated patiently. “Tess can run S.T.A.R. Labs without me, and Leonard is worth far more to the city than I am.”

“Why would you do that? Did he convince you to?” Hartley picked up his phone, but didn’t move to redial, instead turning it over and over in his hands.

“He didn’t tell me to. I haven’t told him or asked for his permission. I’ll do it because Central City
needs Citizen Cold, more so now than it ever has before. We’re facing dangers that the police can’t stop, and Leonard and the rest of us are working to oppose these dangers. Turning myself in is my way of helping to save my city.”

Hartley was slowly shaking his head. “I can’t believe this,” he muttered. His eyes darkened and he opened his mouth, a thought striking him.

“No,” Harrison said immediately. “No, I know what you’re about to say, Hartley. Please,” his expression conveyed an intense sadness, “don’t resign.”

“You don’t deserve a life in prison, Dr. Wells, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to work for a man who supports a killer,” Hartley spat. “I respect you, or at least I used to, but either way I won’t continue working here.” He spun and started down the hall.

“Hartley,” Harrison said sharply, the first time in the conversation he’d been anything but calm. Hartley turned, teeth gritted. “Take a couple of days and think about it. I don’t want to lose an employee, especially one with a brilliant mind like yours.” He paused briefly. “I don’t want to lose a friend.”

Something flickered in Hartley’s eyes, sadness and—maybe—hesitation?

But it lasted only a moment before he set his jaw, glowering. “Then maybe you shouldn’t have thrown in with the Central City Vigilante.”

He started off again, and Harrison let out a deep sigh and returned to the treadmill room.

“Do I need to get out my cold gun?” Leonard asked, sarcastic as ever despite the slight fear in his eyes.

“You don’t even have one anymore; it’s broken,” Barry pointed out.

“Hartley’s not going to call anyone.” Harrison threw Leonard a sharp look. “And no. What you need is to stay away from Hartley Rathaway.”

Leonard held up his hands in surrender. “I plan to.”

“We might have bigger problems than Hartley, or even Heat Wave and Black Lightning, right now,” Ronnie said, staring up at the TV across the room. It was set to a news channel. The others gathered around.

“…and police are now saying that the attack at the Vogue Theatre may in fact have been orchestrated by the notorious Santini crime family, intended as a blow to the Royal Flush Gang, who are famously affiliated with the theatre. Thus far, first responders have confirmed eight dead and at least twenty-four injured…”

“That’s not good,” Leonard said, all traces of his usual flippancy gone. “Why would they do that? This is going to start a war between the Santinis and the Royal Flush Gang.”

“What does that mean?” Cisco asked.

Leonard shook his head. “It means that a lot of innocent people are going to get hurt. We’ve got to stop them both before the city pays the price.”

Despite the seriousness of the situation, Barry had to laugh. “Leonard, you’re not even trying to pretend you’re not a hero anymore.”
Leonard gave him an unamused glance. “Shut up, kid.” He thought for a moment, eyes narrowing. “There are too many of them for us to stop, even with two speedsters. You’re not that fast.”

“So what are you going to do?” Tess asked.

He pulled his phone from a pocket. “I’m going to make a call to Starling.”

Barry’s mouth dropped open. “You mean…?”

Leonard nodded. “We need the Green Arrow.”

Chapter End Notes

Edit (11/14/17, though I’ve been thinking about it for a while): I wrote this fic before knowing anything about Black Lightning as a character—I literally just scrolled through hundreds of names of DC characters and picked that one because it fit the aesthetic of my made-up character. I want to acknowledge that I should have done more research and it was really inappropriate to take the name of a canonically black hero and make him a) white and b) a villain. I’m not going to change it now in the name of accountability, but I did want to own up to it. Enjoy the rest of the fic, and enjoy Black Lightning when it comes out!
Barry was seriously impatient. He kept pacing around the treadmill room, occasionally adding a couple of laps at superspeed—which really just made the time seem longer.

They’d gathered in the treadmill room rather than the Cold Cave because the ten of them already made that small room crowded, and Leonard claimed that five people would be coming from Starling.

Finally, finally, the door opened. In walked five people, just as promised. Barry’s gaze darted from one to the next, mentally identifying them.

Diggle, the ever-present staple of Team Arrow, looked no different than the one Barry had known. Thea, though her hair was longer and pulled back into a bun. Roy, with a long scar across his face. Ray, apparently in the present day for now and cheerful as ever.

Barry’s eyes landed on the last of them, the one clearly in charge judging by how he was approaching Leonard and shaking his hand—the Green Arrow.

He was an older man, probably in his late fifties, carrying a large bag—and Barry didn’t recognize him.

“Robert,” Leonard said. “Glad you could make it.”

“Always happy to help out Citizen Cold,” the man said.

“Robert? Robert Queen?” Barry did know the name, but only from vague memories of news reports and maybe a passing mention or two from Oliver. He glanced around at the room—Harry and Jesse were unsurprised; Harrison and Tess both looked curious; Ronnie, Cisco, and Caitlin were all wide-eyed with amazement.

“This is the guy I warned you about,” Leonard said, gesturing to Barry. “He’ll know an impossible amount about you and he’ll ask obnoxiously personal questions to fill in the rest.”

“Barry, right?” Robert asked. “Leonard told us you time traveled?” He glanced around the room, nodding slowly. “I doubted it, but that would explain why there are two Harrison Wells.”

Harry nodded and explained the Earth-2 thing. (“Cool,” Ray inserted with a geeky smile.) He also mentioned that Robert was the Green Arrow in his universe as well.
“As opposed to who? Barry certainly seemed surprised,” Thea said. “If Dad’s not the Green Arrow where you come from, who is?”

“It’s—wait, Dad?” Barry frowned. “Don’t you know—what about—” He realized he probably shouldn’t be giving away family secrets if Thea didn’t know about her true heritage.

Robert grimaced. Thea just rolled her eyes. “Malcolm Merlyn is not my father. I don’t care what my genes say. He was never my dad.”

“Oh—wait, was?”

“You never answered the question,” Roy pointed out. “Who was the Green Arrow in your… timeline?” He frowned and muttered to himself, “This is weird.”

“Oliver was.”

All of Team Arrow’s expressions faltered. Robert and Thea winced.

“Ollie died in the Undertaking,” Thea said. “I don’t think he ever touched a bow.”

“He was stranded on Lian Yu for five years; he learned.”

“He went on the Gambit with me?” Robert asked.

Barry nodded. “And…” He didn’t finish the sentence.

Robert took his meaning regardless. Probably knew himself well enough to understand what his alternate-timeline self would do. “And I made sure that he made it to the island instead of me.”

“Basically.” Barry raised his eyebrows at the rest of the team. “So, correct me if I’m wrong—Spartan, Arsenal, Speedy, and the Atom?”

They nodded.

“I keep trying to tell everyone to call me Red Arrow,” Thea muttered. “I was a member of the League of Assassins, you’d think I’d be able to choose my own code name.”

Barry was trying to figure out four years of a different Arrow protecting Starling City. “Wait, Ray, if Robert’s still here in this timeline, then Queen Consolidated should still be around, meaning you don’t own Palmer Tech, and… how did you build your Atom suit?” Maybe he should have done a little bit more research on Starling before this meeting.

Ray snickered. “Mostly secondhand parts. It required a lot of trips to Home Depot. I rebuilt it better when I joined… wait, Palmer Tech?”

“Yeah, you gained ownership of QC because of a long series of events that involved this evil Russian woman and a lot of death. I think. Oliver didn’t explain it very well.” Barry shook his head. “Hey, what about the Black Canary?”


“Sara, or Laurel, or both. Are they not…” Barry realized that, if Oliver wasn’t on the boat with Robert, Sara certainly wouldn’t have been. “Never mind.”

“Sara and Laurel,” Thea said thoughtfully. “Those are Captain Lance’s daughters, aren’t they? Oliver had a thing with Laurel. And with Sara. That got him in a lot of trouble.”
“Well, I’d love to stand here and talk about the history of your team all day, but we have a real problem to solve,” Leonard said. “The Santini crime family and the Royal Flush Gang are officially at war, and we need to prevent them from harming any more innocent people. I wouldn’t mind them tearing each other apart, but I can’t have the city in danger because of this ridiculous rivalry.”

“That’s why we’re here,” Robert said. “What do you want us to do?”

“Police scanners are picking up reports of an attack at a nightclub,” Cisco said, looking up from his computer. “A nightclub owned by the Royal Flush Gang.”

Ronnie, next to him, read over his shoulder. “And some battle with vehicles and a lot of guns has started on the corner of 5th and Cambridge. That’s definitely the Santinis’ neighborhood.”

Everyone looked at Leonard, who let out an aggravated sigh. “Why do they always coordinate their attacks?” He reached for his parka and the new gun Cisco and Ronnie had built for him. “Barry, Diggle, Ray, head to 5th and Cambridge. The rest of us will take on the nightclub.”

They nodded. Robert set down his bag and all the members of Team Arrow pulled their respective disguises and weapons out. Robert’s was green leather, of course, and he had an impressive compound bow. Diggle’s was exactly what Barry was used to—there was one constant across timelines, it seemed, and that was Diggle. Roy and Thea had almost identical red leather suits and matching sleek black bows. Ray took his Atom suit out of its small case and switched it to its full size, which had some cool-looking modifications Barry had never seen.

“Here.” Robert held out a pair of earpieces toward Leonard and Barry. “ Courtesy of our tech support queen back in Starling.”

“Don’t I get one?” Jesse asked.

“You’re not allowed to run around the city until you have a suit,” Harry said.

Jesse groaned.

Robert frowned. “When we get back, we’ll have to do a full round of introductions. I don’t even know your name.”

“When you come back,” Jesse promised. “Now hurry. I hear there are people who need saving.”

Team Cold and Team Arrow both raced from the room.

The nightclub doors were blocked, trapping not only the Royal Flush owners but also the patrons of the club inside. The problem was easily remedied with one of Robert’s exploding arrows.

Inside was pandemonium. Screaming clubgoers raced in every direction, mostly pressing themselves against the outer walls. Strobe lights still blared, giving the entire club a ghostly, staggering quality.

In the center of the open space, two distinct groups fought against the backdrop of some far-too-loud pop song. The music was deafening enough that Leonard and the others wouldn’t be able to hear each other, and the lights were too low for them to communicate even with gestures.

But Leonard and Robert had fought together enough times to fall into an instinctive pattern, and Roy and Thea were so in sync that they didn’t need sight or sound to communicate.
The latter two fell to the edges of the room, blocking wayward gunshots with their bows and guiding the terrified clubbers out of the building.

One of the gang members—Royal Flush or Santini, it was too dark to tell and it didn’t matter anyway—moved to stop Roy, and he blocked two bullets with his bow and then knocked the gun out of the man’s hand. A few brisk hits with his Kevlar-reinforced bow and the man collapsed, leaving the path to the exit clear.

Roy and Thea made sure every last patron was safely out of the club before slamming the doors shut again and turning to rejoin the action.

Meanwhile, Leonard and Robert fought back-to-back, Leonard blasting countless enemies with his cold gun (being sure to aim for non-fatal parts of the body, or at least trying, it was hard to tell with the strobe lights) and Robert firing arrow after arrow, also aiming to wound rather than kill.

Enough of their members had fallen that both enemy groups backed off a little to regroup before resuming their attack. Roy and Thea joined the other two in the momentary reprieve.

“How’s it going?” Thea shouted, a lull in the music allowing her words to be audible.

“Well, good news, they’ve stopped trying to kill each other,” Leonard shouted back.

“Bad news, now they’re trying to kill us,” Robert added. “Duck!”

The last word was lost in the opening bass of the next song, but everyone got the point—the gunfire was still louder than the music. Leonard blasted a circle around the foursome with ice, creating a low shield to use as cover. It was just high enough that they could safely crouch behind it, but low enough to make it easy to shoot arrows over.

Leonard and Robert, without discussing it, positioned themselves on the side of the small bunker closer to where the Santinis had retreated. As the attackers in this situation, they were the greater danger, and both vigilantes wanted to protect the younger members of the crew.

Robert’s quiver seemed endless as he shot arrow after arrow at the Santinis. Leonard devoted himself to blocking any returning fire, as well as freeing the legs of any opponents foolish enough to try approaching their barricade. Roy and Thea alternated shots on the other side of the circle of ice, spamming the Royal Flush Gang with arrows faster than any single person could.

When bullets stopped coming toward them, Leonard nodded to Robert, who fired a pair of exploding arrows at the ceiling. One took out the speaker, leaving a high-pitched ringing in everyone’s ears at the sudden quiet, and the other shattered the strobe light.

The sole light remaining was the faint blue glow of Leonard’s gun. He contributed the sole noise in the room as well by yelling, “If you’re affiliated with the Santinis, I suggest you clear out now, before my friends and I are forced to drag you out.”

A minute later and they were gone. The lights in the club switched on, and while everyone winced at the sudden brightness, one of the Royal Flush Gang members approached the circle of ice.

“We didn’t ask for your help, Citizen Cold. Or you, Green Arrow.” He was glaring and holding his gun, despite the fact that it had to be out of bullets.

“Good thing we’re not here to help you,” Leonard said. “What’s the deal with your gang and the Santinis? You had a truce that lasted years, what changed?”
“None of your business. Get out of my club, Cold.” The man threw down the gun and cracked his knuckles threateningly.

“Ooh, scary,” Leonard mocked.

“It became our business when bystanders got killed,” Robert said in his Green Arrow growl.

“We’ll stop both of you if we have to,” Thea added with a glare.

“It was self-defense. Blame the Santinis for any casualties tonight.”

“What about the attack at 5th and Cambridge?” Leonard asked. He gestured to the others, signaling them to leave. “Next time, it won’t matter who started the fight. We’ll be the ones to end it. Permanently.” They walked out without a backwards glance.

Diggle was very clearly impressed by Barry’s powers. And jealous.

“So you have superspeed, Ray can fly and shrink, and all I have is a gun. That doesn’t seem at all fair. Please tell me I have superpowers in another timeline.”

“Sorry,” Barry said.

“Actually,” Harry contributed through the comms, “on my Earth, you’ve got laser vision.”

“Really?” Diggle and Barry asked in unison.

“No,” Harry admitted. “Just wanted to make you feel better.”

“Didn’t help.”

“All right, I’m at the intersection,” Ray reported through the comms. “Guys? Where are you?”

“We haven’t left the building…” Diggle started, before Barry picked him up and raced down to the intersection. “…yet,” he finished, swaying on his feet for a moment.

“You good?” Barry checked.

“I’ll be fine.” Diggle glanced around and shook his head in disbelief. “Your speed is unreal.”

“Ray, can you see our targets?” Barry asked.

“Yup, I’ve got eyes on them from above. There are four Royal Flush Gang vans—no, sorry, five. The Santinis have two vans and twelve motorcycles. They’re spread out around the city and all shooting at each other. The two groups are each shooting at the other respectively, I mean, they aren’t all—”

“Ray?” Diggle interrupted.

“Yeah?”

“Shut up.” He turned to Barry. “If you can get me to a rooftop, I can—”

He didn’t finish the sentence, as he found himself suddenly on a rooftop.

“This building has the best view of the area,” Barry said before taking off again.
Diggle watched the red and yellow streak for a moment. “I am never going to get used to that.” He shook his head and went to the edge of the roof, readying his sniper rifle. The Royal Flush vans were easy to identify—they had playing cards painted on top. He aimed and shot, taking out the jack of clubs.

Barry sped down the street, headed for one of the Santinis’ vans. He slowed when he passed a flying blue figure and kept pace with Ray for a couple blocks.

“You have a plan?” Ray asked.

“If you’ll take the motorcycles, I can get the vans,” Barry said.

“I’m on it.” Ray swooped away, rising up to scan the streets for motorcycles. There, two of them. He dove back down and faced the bikes head-on, firing two shots. The first one caught a front tire perfectly, and the motorcycle flipped end over end and off the street.

The second shot, however, missed, and the smile dropped off Ray’s face as he found himself with a motorcycle headed straight for him. And the rider was shooting at him now too. Oh, joy. Ray slammed down the button to shrink his suit and darted out of the way just in time. The motorcycle circled back around and again would have hit Ray—but a sniper shot courtesy of Diggle blasted the bike off the road.

“Thanks!” Ray shouted upward, switching back to normal size. He went back to searching for motorcycles, promising himself that he’d do better on the next one.

Barry, after a couple of attempts that ended with moderate-to-severe damage to poor, unsuspecting buildings, decided that the best way to disable vans was not to take off all the tires. Sure, it had worked once in the other timeline, but it turned out to generally be a pretty dangerous move.

Instead, he fell into a pattern of flickering into the vans, wondering when he’d started using the word *flicker* even mentally, tying up the occupants, shoving them in the back, and then safely parking the vehicles. It was marginally slower, but this new strategy broke eighty percent fewer windows.

“Got ‘em all,” he said into the comms after parking the last van outside what might have been a daycare. Possibly not the best spot to leave a van full of tied-up gang members. He considered moving it, but when Ray responded, “The last motorcyclist is headed your way,” he decided it could wait.

He raced down the strangely familiar street in the direction Ray pointed him. The rider was swerving, avoiding shots from Diggle while still managing to remain on his bike. Barry waited on the sidewalk down the street until the motorcycle drew even with him, and then he shot straight ahead and grabbed the man off his ride. They both tumbled to the ground on the opposite side of the road.

Ray landed next to Barry and held up his hand. Barry high-fived him before crouching down next to the man.

“Hi,” he said. “I’m…” He had to pause for a moment; was nobody going to interrupt him? “…the Flash,” he finished. Finally! “You’re a Santini, right?”

He didn’t respond, so Barry took that as a yes. “Any idea why the Royal Flush Gang is after you and your friends?”

“How should I know?” the man grumbled, his voice heavily accented.
“All right, then why are you after them?” Ray asked. “Why not just call off a truce and end this whole war?”

“Boss doesn’t want to,” the man said. “Are you going to kill me? Because if not, I have things I’d rather be doing, and you have no evidence on me. I didn’t even shoot anyone.” He stood up, rubbing at an already-forming bruise on his arm.

Barry and Ray exchanged a look. They weren’t going to get anything more from him, that much was clear.


Barry paused a moment before leaving, instead glancing up at the building right in front of him. The neighborhood had seemed familiar, and now he understood why. Just his luck.

Directly in front of him was Central City Picture news, and staring through the window was Iris.

And, judging by her expression, regardless of the mask, she definitely recognized Barry.

Barry ran. Okay. One more complication of the new timeline. Maybe Iris would get her interview with the Flicker after all.

At least he could finally change that stupid name.

The whole group reconvened back in the treadmill room. After a round of introductions (during which Cisco and Ronnie admired Ray’s suit, and Ray geeked out over formally meeting not one but two Harrison Wells), they discussed the separate attacks.

“Both groups seemed far too eager to attack each other. I mean, the Royal Flush Gang was upset when we stopped the Santinis,” Thea said.

“Usually, there would be an action from one group that starts a war,” Diggle agreed. “But both of them seem to be initiating the conflicts.”

“We need to figure out why they’re both so intent on destroying each other,” Leonard said.

“How?” Robert asked.

Leonard frowned at him. “You really can’t think of anything?”

Robert shrugged and grinned at Leonard. “I know how I would do it, but this is your city.”

“I learned from you.” Leonard smirked. “We’ve got to ask the people in charge.”

“You’re just gonna go talk to the heads of the two most notorious crime organizations in the city?” Ronnie asked doubtfully.

Leonard frowned. “When you put it that way… I think maybe we should stop for dinner first.”

“I’ll cover it,” Robert said. “No point in being a billionaire if I can’t treat my friends to a meal. Is there a Big Belly Burger in Central City?”

“You wouldn’t come visit if there wasn’t,” Leonard said.

Harrison glanced at Harry. “I suppose we’re brothers?”
Harry tugged on his cap. “You don’t have brothers. Cousins, if anyone asks.”

“Sounds legitimate enough, so long as nobody looks too closely.”

As they exited, Cisco whispered to Caitlin and Ronnie, “I can’t believe I’m about to have dinner with Citizen Cold and the Green Arrow.”

Eobard caught Barry’s eye before he could leave and tilted his head, indicating to Barry to stay for a moment.

“What is it?” Barry asked once the others were in the hall.

“Look.” Eobard held up a hand, which started vibrating. Barry tensed automatically.

But there was no malice in Eobard’s demonstration—and besides, the vibration was unsteady and stopped after a moment.

“It comes and goes,” Eobard said by way of explanation. “My connection to the Speed Force… it’s weak. Unreliable. If I tried running, I wouldn’t even get out of the building before my speed failed.” He shrugged. “I certainly wouldn’t be able to travel through time.”

“What show me?” Barry asked, baffled and a little suspicious.

Eobard shrugged again. “We live in the same apartment; you’d have noticed sooner or later. I’d rather be honest with you up front. We’re not enemies anymore. No point in acting like we are.”

Barry… honestly wasn’t sure what to make of this. This wasn’t any version of Eobard Thawne he’d ever dealt with before.

“Thank you,” he said sincerely. “For trusting me.”

“Sure.” Eobard started toward the door. “Come on, Flicker, let’s go to dinner.”

“I’m changing that name!” Barry said, following him out the door.

After a nice dinner (during which the presence of a billionaire distracted everyone from noticing that there were two Harrison Wells), it was time to get back to work.

The Royal Flush Gang used a casino as a façade for their headquarters; the Santinis had a hidden basement beneath a restaurant.

“How do you know where they’re located?” Barry asked Leonard.

“I make sure to keep track of where the most dangerous people in the city spend their time,” Leonard said. Barry noted that his response wasn’t exactly an answer to how he knew.

Regardless, the plan was to talk or fight their way to an audience with each of the heads of the organizations. Barry and Leonard would take on the Royal Flush Gang; Team Arrow would take on the Santinis.

Leonard slung his cold gun over his shoulder, parka already in place. “Let’s go.”

Robert gave Leonard a nod. “See you on the other side of this.”
When Robert and the others walked in, all conversation in the restaurant immediately stopped. Everyone looked up at them.

“Table for five?” Robert asked.

The silence broke. The patrons, all Santinis, reached for weapons and started shooting.

All the masked vigilantes immediately went into action, rolling out of the way of gunfire and returning their own bullets or arrows or blasts.

“To the kitchen,” Robert muttered into the comms. “That’s where the entrance to the basement will be.” He fired a precisely aimed arrow, throwing a woman backwards with enough force to knock down three other men.

The others nodded in agreement. Ray launched himself into the air, drawing the majority of the gunfire toward him. The dwarf star alloy in his suit could take it, and it gave the others the cover they needed to make their way to the kitchen. Once they were safely there, he dropped a stun grenade and booked it into the kitchen too.

Chefs defended themselves with knives and blowtorches, using both with severe accuracy. Diggle still used his gun, but the archers had all put away their bows—useless in the close confines of the kitchen—and had resorted instead to hand-to-hand combat. As usual, Roy and Thea fought back to back, doling out blows and kicking knives from their opponents’ hands. Robert ducked out of the way of flames and blades, disabling enemies with briskly efficient hits.

Though Santinis were falling rapidly, the kitchen seemed to be getting more crowded rather than less, a seemingly endless stream of enemies.

“They’re coming up from the basement,” Diggle said, dropping two opponents with a quick duo of shots. “Over here.”

The others fought their way through to him—all but Ray, who simply shrank and darted through the crowd. They went through the door, Diggle guarding their backs, and locked the heavy basement door before making their way down the stairs.

The basement was all but abandoned—seemed like all the Santinis had come up to the kitchen to fight them. The few people still present among the vast stores of weapons were easy to drop with a couple of well-placed arrows.

They burst into the farthest room, and there was the boss himself. Santini glanced up and was immediately met with the sight of three drawn bows, the barrel of a gun, and a pulse-blasting glove. He raised his hands.

“You really need better customer service,” Ray quipped. “I’ll be leaving a poor review.”

“We just have one question and then we’ll be on our way,” Robert said. “Why are you so intent on fighting the Royal Flush Gang?”

“We were offered a lot of money if we could eliminate them,” Santini responded.

Across town, Leonard and Barry opted for the back entrance to the Royal Flush Gang’s casino. The huge metal door was locked, so Leonard gave it a harsh blast of ice, freezing the metal right off its hinges.
“You know, I probably could have done that less conspicuously,” Barry said, amused, as the door started to fall.

It landed with a booming crash. In the echoing noise, Leonard said, “Probably, but this way you can’t steal all my fun.”

The instant he finished the sentence, Barry was already zipping inside. He came back out and dumped a huge pile of guns next to Leonard. “Every weapon in the building.”

“Case in point,” Leonard muttered. He stepped over the fallen door and into the building, readying his gun.

Everyone in the expansive back room of the casino was just getting to their feet, reacting to the door’s implosion and the blur that had rushed through the room. Each of them had a tattoo on their forearms of a specific card, marking their membership in the Royal Flush Gang.

“So where can I find the boss?” Leonard asked.

They all scowled and reached toward holsters, only to find them empty.

In their confusion, Leonard shot, the stream of ice just barely missing the Six of Spades’s head. “I hope I don’t have to ask again.”

The gang members shot each other glances and then, as one, rushed Leonard. Barry swept back into the room and knocked whole rows of them down easily.

“This is my friend the Flash,” Leonard said. “He and I are going to make life very difficult for you if someone doesn’t tell me where your leader is.” He aimed his gun at the highest-ranking person in the room—the King of Hearts. Really easy to tell who was in charge when they literally wore their hearts on (well, under) their sleeves.

The King glowered. Without looking away from Leonard, he called, “Ace? You’d better come out here.”

The door to a small side office opened, and an elegantly dressed woman stepped out. She eyed Leonard and aimed a gun of her own. (“Every weapon in the building, Barry?” Leonard muttered under his breath.)

He immediately shifted targets to her, waving off Barry with a dismissive gesture. “Don’t worry, we’re not here to call your bluff. We just wanna know why you’re so hell-bent on slaughtering the Santinis.”

The woman, eyes narrowed, considered for a moment before answering. “Someone offered us a lot of money to take them out. It seemed worth the gamble.”

In two different places, at the exact same moment, Leonard and Robert asked the same question.

“Who offered?”

Two different answers came back.

From Mr. Santini: “Heat Wave.”

From the Ace: “Black Lightning.”
“Pardon me a moment.” Leonard stepped back and murmured into his comms. “You catch that, Green?”

“And I got something similar,” Robert replied.

“Can you cover?”

“I’ll write it off somehow. Philanthropy, maybe. But you’re paying me back for dinner.”

“Will do. Thanks.” Leonard glanced at Barry, who frowned back at him in worried confusion, before returning his gaze to Miss Ace. “I’ll pay you more to stop attacking them.” Through the earpiece, he heard Robert offering Santini a similar deal.

“You good for it, Cold? Don’t think vigilantism is an especially lucrative career.” She smirked.

“I’ll have the money to you within twenty-four hours.” Leonard tilted his head at Barry, and they left.

Lots to discuss.

Back at S.T.A.R. Labs, Teams Cold and Arrow discussed the new information.

“But they’re working together. Why pay rival organizations to kill each other off?” Caitlin asked.

“Maybe they don’t like competition,” Leonard suggested.

“But the Syndicate’s gone,” Barry pointed out. “They can’t have rival organizations if they’re not even an organization.”

Leonard shrugged.

“Who is Black Lightning?” Roy asked. “Robert told us about your battle with Heat Wave a while back, but I haven’t heard of this other guy.”

“He’s working with Heat Wave,” Leonard said. “We don’t know who he is.”

“But he has a gun that shoots lightning,” Barry said.

Ray looked up. “Shoots lightning?”

“Yeah, why?”

“My old employer, Kord Industries. They were working on tech like that. As far as I know, it didn’t go anywhere, but maybe they’ll know something about it. This Black Lightning might be a previous employee.”

Barry’s eyes widened in excitement at the possible lead. “I’m sure I can get permission from my real job—Black Lightning is a police case too, after all. Leonard—you want to go to Starling?”

Leonard glanced at Harrison. “So long as I can get permission from my real job.”

Harrison smirked and nodded.

Cisco immediately started coughing. When everyone looked at him in concern, he said, “Dr. Wells, I’m feeling ill all of a sudden. I don’t think I’ll be able to come into work for the next
Harrison laughed. “Of course not. Take all the time you need, Cisco.” He looked at Ronnie and Caitlin. “Anyone else have this mysterious illness?”

Ronnie was already shaking his head, but Caitlin nodded and added a cough of her own, smirking a little. At Ronnie’s protective frown, she gestured to Team Arrow, Leonard, and Barry. “If they’re all in Starling, it’ll be safer than here.”

Ronnie nodded slowly, conceding the point.

“With that in mind, Jesse and I had better stay,” Harry said. “Central City ought to have at least one hero protecting it.”

“Wait, so you’ll actually let me help?” Jesse asked. “Anyone have paper and a pen…?”

“No, I’m not signing anything to verify that,” Harrison grumbled.

Tess clapped her hands with an air of finality. “We’ve stopped a war and determined our next move. I think that’s enough for one day. Let’s all get some rest and enact our various travel plans in the morning.”

Everyone nodded and filed out of the room. Barry checked his phone and found eighteen missed calls from Iris and three from Eddie. He winced.

He was going to have a lot of explaining to do in the morning.
Barry left a note for Iris at Eddie’s apartment.

*I hear you want an interview. Meet me on the roof of CCPN as soon as you get this.*

It was signed only with a scribbled lightning bolt.

He didn’t have to wait long before Iris showed up. That seemed to be another certainty across timelines—Iris would come when the Flash called.

“Barry?” she called into the early morning light. “That’s you, right? Eddie says I’m crazy, but I know what I saw. You’re the Flicker.”

Barry darted from one side of the roof to the other. “It's the Flash, actually.” He kept his voice disguised, even though she knew.


He moved to a different point on the roof. This whole sleepless night and he still hadn’t figured out what to tell her. “There are things that you can’t understand, Iris. About me, about what’s going on in Central City. Things are more complicated than you realize.”

“Then explain them to me.” Iris took a step forward. “That confrontation with the Mirror Master. Heat Wave and Black Lightning at the docks. The turf war between the Santinis and the Royal Flush Gang. You were there for all of those.”

“All you need to know is that there are people—heroes—willing to protect this city.”

“People don’t see Citizen Cold as a hero. They don’t know what to make of you yet.”

“That’s why I contacted you,” Barry said. “You’re a good reporter. You can tell the city that we’re doing our best to save it.”

“Citizen Cold is a killer. Barry, I don’t want you to be a part of this!”

“There are bad people out there, Iris. Citizen Cold and the Flash are exactly what Central City needs right now.”

“What is going on? You’re my best friend, Barry. At least tell me when all this started. How you became a part of it.”

Barry hesitated, looking at Iris with the rising sun framing her outline. She was beautiful. And he
couldn’t tell her anything.

“Look. Iris. I’ll be out of town for a couple of days for work.” He’d stopped disguising his voice. No point in it.

“You real work or your… Flash… work?”

Barry ignored the question. “Write a blog. Don’t put your name on it. You don’t need to be put in danger because of me.”

“What do I write?”

“That there are forces out there battling the darkness in this city.”

“And what are you going to do?”

Barry shook his head. “Don’t worry about me. I trust you, Iris, not to give away my identity. You can trust Eddie, but nobody else. Please.”

“Barry—”

“I have to go.” Barry sped away, hoping he had made the right decision. He had to believe that Iris’s faith in him would remain one of the constants of every timeline.

After a trip in Robert’s private jet, they landed in Starling. Robert led the group off the tarmac and directly into the Queen Consolidated building. Down a couple of elevators and through a couple of hand scanners, they arrived at an underground bunker.

“Welcome to my headquarters,” Robert said, pushing open the door.

“Sweet,” Cisco said behind Barry, drawing out the word. Barry felt inclined to agree. This place was huge, filled with workout equipment and high-tech gear.

A pair of people were conversing on the opposite side of the room. The voices stopped as they entered.

“I brought some friends,” Robert said, gesturing the others over. Diggle, Roy, Thea, Ray, and even Leonard spread out across the bunker, already familiar with it, but Barry, Cisco, Caitlin, and Ronnie followed obediently behind Robert.

A pair of semi-familiar faces greeted Barry’s eyes. His gaze immediately went to the blonde woman, eyes widening in shock.

“Moira? You’re—” Barry shut up before he could say anything stupid.

“I’m what? Who are you?” Moira looked at Lance, who shrugged back at her, just as confused.

_Courtesy of our tech support queen_, Robert had said when giving them the comms. Not Felicity, then—tech support _Queen_.

“We should probably do introductions first this time,” Robert said. He waved Leonard over.

“I’m Leonard Snart. You probably know me better as Citizen Cold.” He raised an eyebrow at
Lance, eyeing his police badge and daring him to comment.

Lance gave a little scoff. “So you’re the one who’s been baffling my counterparts in Central City. They’ll probably have the same luck I did catching their vigilante.” He offered a hand. “Captain Quentin Lance, SCPD.”

“Cops and I don’t usually get along. Hope you’re the exception.” Leonard shook his hand. He nodded to Moira—presumably, they’d already met.

“I’m Barry Allen,” Barry said. “If you’ve paid attention to news from Central City lately, you’ve probably heard about a red flicker. That’s me, though I prefer the Flash.”

“Moira Queen… though you seemed to already know that.”

“It’s a very long and complicated story,” Robert cut in before Barry could begin his alternate-timeline spiel. “I’ll explain it later.”

“Dr. Caitlin Raymond,” Caitlin said next. “It’s very nice to meet you, Mayor Queen.”

“Please, call me Moira.”

*Mayor?*

Barry seriously needed to do some research on Starling.

Ronnie and Cisco introduced themselves too. Introductions done, Robert turned to Lance. “What brings you by, Captain?”

He grimaced. “There’s this new group out on the streets. A bunch of girls wearing cat masks, of all things, killing police officers and their families.”

“I’m sorry to hear it,” Robert said with a frown. “How can we help?”

“Their leader, she goes by Cheshire, she uses these poisoned swords. I gave Moira a sample. We have forensics working on identifying the poison, but your team usually works faster.” Lance checked his watch. “I better be getting back. Let me know what you find.”

“Of course. Thank you, Captain.”

Lance nodded. “Nice meeting all of you.” He left the bunker.

“We’ll head over to Kord Industries, see if they can give us anything,” Leonard said. “Let us know what we can do to help you out with Cheshire.”

“Sure. Best of luck,” Robert said.

Barry, Caitlin, Cisco, and Ronnie followed Leonard out of the bunker.

“Did you see all the tech they had in there?” Cisco asked excitedly.

“I wish I had connections to the QC Applied Sciences Division,” Ronnie agreed.

Even Caitlin seemed unable to resist a grin. “I can’t believe the mayor of Starling City is married to the Green Arrow.”

“We need to build you a new Cold Cave like that one,” Barry said to Leonard.
Leonard just sighed and rolled his eyes. “We’re here on a mission to find out who’s trying to tear apart Central City and I feel like I’m babysitting a bunch of children.”

“Children who have repeatedly saved your life,” Ronnie pointed out.

“Really annoying children.”

Kord Industries was a huge skyscraper only a few blocks south of the QC building. Barry pushed past Leonard once inside, flashing his CSI badge.

“I’m here on a case for the CCPD. We’d like to look at your employee records.”

“I’m sorry,” the woman said. “Kord Industries is not permitted to disclose any records without a warrant or police authorization.”

Barry glanced at his friends for support. “Didn’t you hear me? I’m with the Central City Police Department.”

“I apologize, Mr. Allen. Inquiries from other cities require five forms and three types of identification. It would be easier for you to go to the SCPD and have one of them make the request.”

Barry rolled his eyes. “Okay, we’ll do that.”

As they left, Leonard muttered to Barry, “We should have just broken in and taken the records.”

Barry shook his head. “We can do this legally. Let’s go down to the precinct. Captain Lance will help us.”

Captain Lance was less than helpful. “Any friend of Robert’s and all that, and I’d love to help, but this Cheshire thing has got the whole department in a state. As soon as it’s over, I’ll be glad to assist, but until then…”

“We understand,” Leonard said. He muttered to the others, “Stealing is looking pretty good right now, don’t you think?”

“We don’t need to steal anything,” Caitlin said.

“Besides,” Ronnie added, “we asked first. Now if they find anything missing they’ll know it’s us.”

“Guess we better help solve this Cheshire problem,” Barry said. “Let’s go see what we can do to help out Robert.”

Back in the Arrowcave, Team Cold wasn’t the only vigilante team dissatisfied with how the day was going.

“Kord won’t give up their employee list without a police officer present, and they’re all too busy with Cheshire,” Barry complained.

“Well, Cheshire won’t be caught until we can figure out this poison, and I’m getting nowhere with it,” Moira said with a sigh. “Technology is more my area.”

Caitlin, Ronnie, and Cisco exchanged smirks.

“Then it’s a good thing that we’re here,” Ronnie said confidently.
Caitlin smiled. “If you’ll give us the sample, we can have it identified and tracked down within an hour.”


Moira laughed and handed over the vial. “Have at it.”

Caitlin took it. “Can we…?” She gestured to the elaborate display of shining machines.

“Of course.”

“While you all are working on that, Barry and I will patrol,” Leonard said. “Doubt we’ll run into our crazy cat lady, but we might at least foil a mugger or two.”

Barry nodded. “Give us a call when you find a lead.”

They headed out on the streets. Barry checked his phone—nothing posted yet on the Flash—and shook his head. Iris would come through for him.

Six hundred miles away, Jesse was back on the treadmill and running, the basement room empty except for her. In all her time with Barry, in all her time with Zoom, neither of them had ever mentioned the sheer thrill of the Speed Force. Now, with lightning crackling behind her, filling every vein in her body with a rich, fluid energy, she could understand why someone could get addicted, why someone would feel overconfident.

Jesse felt invincible.

Her father entered the room, and Jesse stopped the treadmill, a slight scowl already forming on her face. Dad was probably here to remind her that, speedster or not, she wasn’t invincible.

She stepped off and turned to face him. She was already opening her mouth to refute his warnings of caution when she noticed what he was carrying.

“Dad? Is that…” Jesse stopped when he held it up.

Her father had brought her a suit—a concoction of Kevlar and leather and who knew what else, in a similar red and yellow to Barry’s, but markedly distinct from it.

He smiled, a little wryly, and tossed it to her. “I don’t think Cisco has slept at all since you got your speed. Harrison told me he found this in his workroom.”

“It’s great,” Jesse enthused, examining it closely. Not only did it have vital monitors and a comms system, there was also a defibrillator, a complex temperature regulation system, and more pockets than she had on five pairs of jeans.

In a blur of lightning, she changed into it. The perfect fit made her hesitate and shoot her father a suspicious glance.

“I’m guessing Cisco didn’t do this alone.”

Dad gave a small laugh. “I might have made the suggestion to him, and maybe gave him your measurements. I got the feeling that you’d be running around trying to save people no matter what I
said. I want you to be safe, Jesse. That’s all I’ve ever wanted.” He smiled in that sad, sincere way. “And you’ll be safer if you’re out there with a disguise and a little protection.”

Jesse sped forward and hugged him. “Thank you, Dad.”

He jumped at the suddenness of her embrace, but then hugged her back.

“Jesse Quick,” he murmured. “More literal than I ever expected.”

She laughed softly. “You and me both, Dad.”

Two robberies, a mugging, and half an hour later, Leonard and Barry returned to the Arrowcave at Ronnie’s report that they had figured it out.

“The poison is actually from a very rare species of snake,” Cisco explained excitedly to the assembled teams. “It’s called Darevsky’s viper, and it’s only lives in—”

“The point is,” Caitlin interrupted, “Starling General Hospital is the only place in the country that’s doing testing with the venom.”

“And some of it was stolen last week,” Ronnie said. “They didn’t report the robbery, because the venom was acquired through a black market dealer.”

“I got the security footage from the hospital,” Moira said. She turned to the computer and pulled up the footage—a group of women wearing cat masks. The one with the most elaborate disguise pulled off the mask momentarily to yell at one of the others. Moira paused the video and zoomed in on her face.

“We’ve been trying to run it through facial recognition, but so far, no match,” Cisco said. “It’s obviously really low quality—I don’t know whether we can get a match off it.”

“Keep searching,” Robert said. “I’m sure you’ll—”

“Hang on,” Roy said, leaning closer to the screen. “We don’t need facial recognition. That’s Jade Nguyen.”

Thea frowned at him. “How do you know her.”

Roy hesitated. “She’s my ex-girlfriend.”

“Your ex is now killing police officers?” Ray asked. “And I thought my love life was bad.”

“Jade was never very… stable, but then, nobody from that part of town was,” Roy said.

“Jade Nguyen,” Thea said, her tone bitter. “Yet another part of your past that you’ve never mentioned to me, Roy.” She walked away. Everyone stared after her.

“Thea!” Roy called, turned to follow her. Robert put a hand on his arm and shook his head.

“Trust me, that’s her ‘don’t-talk-to-me’ style of walking away. Don’t go after her right now.”

“What’s going on between the two of you lately?” Moira asked, frowning. “You two always seemed like a perfect couple.”
“The only times she acts like this is when someone’s been lying to her,” Robert added.

“I… I don’t know.” Roy shook his head. “Look, if I give you Jade’s number, you can track her location, right?”

“Of course,” Moira said. “I can find her.”

Roy gave her the number from his phone and Moira went to work. The team dispersed around the Arrowcave.

Barry approached Roy. “Hey, so, about Thea…”

“She’ll calm down. She always does eventually.” Roy sighed. “I wish she’d at least tell me what she’s angry about.”

Barry tilted his head and frowned thoughtfully. “I think you already know.”

“Well, yeah, she thinks I’m hiding something from her. But I’m not.”

“You’re not hiding anything?” Barry asked. “or is it just that you don’t think she could know about it?”

Roy didn’t respond.

Barry thought of Iris from the other timeline, and even Patty, when they figured out that he was the Flash. “Look, our line of work is a weird business. With all the layers of secrets piling up, the truth can come through in the least likely ways. I don’t know what you’re keeping from her, but my guess is she already know the truth. She just wants you to trust her enough to tell her.”

“But, what I want to keep secret, it’s…” Roy gestured helplessly. “She would hate me.”

Barry shook his head. “Roy, Thea already knows. And she obviously doesn’t hate you for it. She just hates that you haven’t told her. I know you don’t really know me, and I don’t really know you, but take it from someone who’s been in your position before. A lot. Honesty is the best way to go here.”

Roy considered for a moment before nodding. “Okay. Thanks, Barry.”

Barry grinned. “Anytime.”

“Oh no,” Moira said from across the bunker.

Immediately, everyone looked at her. Even Thea, reentering the room, snapped to attention.

“I have Jade’s location.” Moira looked up. “She’s at Captain Lance’s house.”

Iris found herself suddenly swarmed at work. She’d only made the blog post a few hours ago (signing her name to it, of course, because how else would she and Eddie buy their house?), but everyone at CCPN and seemingly in the city already knew about it. The blog had gone viral within minutes as the first real information anyone knew about the Flicker—er, the Flash.

Not that it was that much information. Iris had merely reported the few concrete facts that Barry had given her—he was working with Citizen Cold, they were trying to protect the city, dark forces
were at work here, that sort of thing. Next time, she swore to herself, she’d get a picture.

The CCPN door opened, and a deep voice said, “We’re looking for Iris West.”

Seriously? This guy was probably the hundredth person to come in here wanting to talk to Iris about the blog. Maybe this was why Barry had warned her to leave it anonymous. She glanced up, intending to give this guy and his friend a piece of her mind—

Only to see two men, one in a brown leather coat and goggles, the other in a black coat and a mask, both with huge guns in their arms.

Oh. This was why he wanted her to keep her name off.

Heat Wave and Black Lightning.

They looked in her direction, both raising their weapons.

So Iris did what any fearless, intrepid reporter would do in that situation.

She ducked.

The computer across the room from the treadmill let out a loud series of beeps. Harry and Jesse glanced at each other and then simultaneously rushed over, one much faster than the other, to see what was going on.

Jesse, with her speed-reading, understood much quicker. “An attack at CCPN. Heat Wave and Black Lightning.”

Harry looked at her, a combination of panic and terror and determination in his expression. “Go.”

Jesse’s eyes widened with matching panic, matching determination. Then she was gone in a blur.

A wave of flame curled around the desk Iris was currently crouching underneath. The desk caught fire immediately, and Iris instinctively reached up to grab her laptop, clutching it to her chest to protect it from the heat. Because seriously, she wasn’t going to sacrifice her works-in-progress just because she was in mortal danger. It had been hard enough to write those articles once.

Everyone else had already fled the building. The two maniacs shooting various combinations of fire and electricity at Iris didn’t seem to care much about anyone but her. Which, good for them, but yeah, she was gonna die.

She stayed close to the floor and slid her way behind another desk, making sure not to leave herself exposed to shots from the attackers.

“Why don’t you call your friend?” one of them shouted, his voice a menacing growl.

Iris didn’t respond, sitting still and tight underneath the desk. She could feel her heart pattering far-too-fast in her chest.

“I’m sure the Flash would be happy to help you out,” the other voice said.

There was a rush of wind and the sound of the door opening.
“Actually,” a light and cheerful female voice inserted, “he couldn’t make it. Guess I’ll have to be the one kicking your asses today.”

Iris peered over the top of the desk at the newcomer, a young woman with a killer red costume and a mask disguising her identity. Heat Wave shot at her immediately, and she zipped out of the way with a flash of lightning.

This city was getting weirder by the day. Iris held up her phone and snapped a picture, right before the woman sped out of the building. Heat Wave and Black Lightning, apparently more interested in this new Flash than Iris, followed.

Iris took the opportunity to run out the back door, still holding onto her laptop. Where was the nearest coffee shop with wifi? She had a blog post to write.

Okay, so the obvious first step of getting them out of the building was done. Jesse didn’t know Iris very well, and didn’t know this timeline’s version at all, but she certainly couldn’t leave two maniacs in the building with her. That much was instinct.

Now that they were on the street, though, with two superpowered guns aimed directly at her, Jesse was a lot less certain that this was a good idea.

Getting the guns sounded like a logical next step. They weren’t metas—without their weapons, they wouldn’t pose a threat.

Jesse sped toward Heat Wave first—the flames were much wider spread than the lightning was; he could do far more damage.

As she approached, he pulled the trigger, and fire blossomed out of the barrel. Jesse cursed the fact that she didn’t have a tachyon enhancement device like Barry’s—she should be faster, she should have been able to disarm him before he could even react.

As it was, she had to drop to the ground, sliding underneath the flame. She crashed hard into Heat Wave’s legs, still moving at over a hundred miles an hour, and he fell on top of her, flames going wild.

Jesse extricated herself from him and got to her feet, reaching down to pull his gun from his hands.

Then suddenly she found herself on her back twenty feet away, stunned, feeling like she’d been plunged into freezing water and set on fire at the same time. Electricity sparked between her fingers, and she realized what must have happened—Black Lightning’s gun.

“Jesse! Jesse, are you all right?” her dad asked in her ear.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m okay…” Jesse managed to get to her feet, which were unsteady beneath her.

“That’s not fun.”

“You’ve got to disarm them.”

“Thanks, I got that.” Jesse watched the two criminals warily. They watched her just as warily.

She tried another pass at the two of them, this time aiming for Black Lightning. There was the smell of ozone in the air. Jesse saw the lightning coming and leapt out of the way immediately, but the electricity darted through the air straight toward her, throwing her back again.
Jesse groaned in pain, forcing herself back to her feet. Okay. Running at them head-on wasn’t working. And clearly, she couldn’t run fast enough to avoid the lightning.

“Jesse, listen to me,” a voice said in her ear—not her father. It took her a moment to place the voice. “Every time he pulls that trigger, the lightning will hit you. The electricity is attracted to the Speed Force in your system. It doesn’t matter whether it’s aimed at you or not.”

Wait—she knew that voice. Eobard.

“So what do I do?” she asked.

Black Lightning pulled the trigger again, and time seemed to slow down for Jesse—the lightning shooting from the gun like a bullet, even with her heightened speed.

Despite the fact that she was in high-speed perception, Eobard’s voice sounded normal—he was talking at a speedster’s pace. “I recommend ensuring the lightning hits something else first.”

Okay, so move. Think about why Eobard, evil speedster from the future, could talk at a superspeed pace later. The wall of CCPN was the closest potentially-protective object, but Jesse didn’t know how to phase through matter yet, and she didn’t want to risk it for the first time when there were two maniacs with guns right behind her.

Second-closest thing to her, well, wasn’t the best option in terms of being a hero, but the lightning was approaching and she didn’t have much time.

So Jesse darted behind Heat Wave in the split second she had as the lightning approached. The electricity jolted into his leather jacket instead of her.

The leather, as a poor conductor, absorbed the majority of the blast, but the arcing electricity ripped a smoking hole into the thick material. Good. Heat Wave was a criminal, but Jesse still didn’t want him to die because of her.

While she was behind him, and he was still recovering from the lightning bolt, she reached out to take his gun.

“Jesse, stop,” Eobard said sharply.

Jesse hesitated for a moment, indecisive. Eobard Thawne, from what she knew of him, had killed a lot of people—he was Barry’s nemesis. But then, he’d also helped stop the Time Wraiths—and he was Barry’s mentor too.

Eobard, taking her momentary pause for compliance, continued, “Hear that buzzing? The electricity did something to the heat gun. From the sound of it, it’s about to go critical, and you do not want to be anywhere nearby when that happens.”

“So—” She could hear it now, an uncanny humming noise coming from the gun. Both Heat Wave and Black Lightning seemed to realize it, too, as they both stopped focusing on Jesse and instead stared at the gun.

“So, run, Jesse!” not only Eobard but also her father shouted through the comms.

Jesse immediately sped half a block away. Not too far—she wanted to see the fallout and take them in when it was over.

The fallout… wasn’t what she’d expected. Heat Wave threw the gun with casual accuracy—onto
the threshold of the café next door. It exploded on impact, shooting flames in every direction.

The café immediately caught fire. Heat Wave and Black Lightning ran off down an alley, both seemingly confident that Jesse wouldn’t pursue.

They were right. She could hear screaming from inside the café, and her higher priority was saving those within the burning building.

“Jesse?” Dad asked. “Jesse, what’s happening?”

“The building caught fire,” she said. “I’m going in.”

Before either he or Eobard could respond, Jesse was inside the café and back out, transporting the café’s patrons one at a time to a safe distance on the sidewalk.

“Be careful,” Eobard warned. “You consume far more oxygen than a typical person does, and the building is emptying of oxygen fast. You’ll start feeling lightheaded in thirty seconds; you’ll pass out in forty-five.”

“Just a couple more people,” Jesse muttered. She sped in and out. The last woman was trapped beneath a collapsed shelf. She couldn’t lift it off, and, yup, there was the lightheadedness Eobard had warned her about.

Okay. She was a scientist. She snapped the leg off a nearby table and shoved it beneath the shelf, using it as a lever to lift the shelf. The woman scrambled out from underneath, and the moment she was out of the way, Jesse buffeted her outside in a spiral of lightning.

She ran a couple of blocks away and paused to catch her breath. Maybe it was the dizziness, but Jesse found herself smiling.

So this was what being the Flash was like. With the Speed Force and the rush of saving lives, Jesse understood why Barry never wanted to quit.

And maybe she didn’t feel quite so invincible…

But damn, this was addicting.

Harry waited until he’d congratulated Jesse and, of course, chastised her a little for her recklessness. But eventually, he knew he had to have a talk with a certain speedster.

He caught up to Eobard before he could leave the Cold Cave and head to… wherever it was he spent his time when he wasn’t at S.T.A.R. Labs.

“Wait,” Harry said.

Eobard turned and raised his eyebrows expectantly, leaning against the corridor wall.

Harry couldn’t believe he was saying this to Eobard Thawne, but it had to be said. “I appreciate what you did today.”

Eobard narrowed his eyes, confused, and then an expression of wicked humor darted across his features. He took a step closer to Harry, and then suddenly his fist was moving, and Harry staggered back when Eobard hit him across the face.

“Wh—I—” Harry couldn’t come up with a proper sentence, but there was an anger burning inside
him. He tried to say thank you and the bastard punched him? His own hands clenched into fists automatically and he moved to reciprocate.

Eobard stepped back and held up his hands, an insufferable smirk across his face. “Hey. I owed you that one. Besides, I seem to recall you saying that if you were ever nice to me, I could hit you.”

Harry gaped for a moment, so taken aback that he still couldn’t find words, and then he found himself laughing ruefully, despite the pain now throbbing in his face. “Well. You’re right, I did say that.” He shook his head. “And feel free to do it again, because I’m not done, Thawne.”

“Oh?” Eobard crossed his arms, still smirking.

“No.” Harry set his jaw and braced himself. “Thank you. Without your advice, Jesse would be seriously injured, if not dead. And I don’t care how many times you hit me—because of that, I owe you. I’m glad you’re here, Eobard.”

Eobard didn’t hit him again, gratifyingly enough. Instead, he let out a long sigh. His smirk shifted to something less sarcastic—an actual smile. “I’m glad I was here today too.”

Harry had to laugh again, just at the bizarre thought that this was his reality now. Thanking the man who, in another time, had stolen his face and used it to murder countless people.

Well. Consequences when messing with time, indeed.

The Lances were enjoying a family dinner, all four of them seated around the table.

“So, Laurel, when do we get to meet your boyfriend?” Dinah asked. “The last time you had a billionaire heir for a suitor, you never brought him around.”

Laurel and Sara exchanged awkward glances.

“Well, that’s because Oliver never wanted to come over. Probably had something to do with the fact that he was dating both of us.” Laurel shook her head. “But Tommy wants to, he’s just really busy with running Merlyn Global Group.”

Lance’s phone rang. He frowned at the screen. “I have to take this.”

He stepped away from the table and answered the phone.

“What’s going on? Did you find Cheshire?”

“Yes.” Robert spoke calmly, but there was an underlying tension in his voice that immediately set Lance on edge. “She’s in your house, Captain. We’re coming in.”

Lance stabbed the button to end the call and hurried back into the other room, reaching for his gun. “We need to—”

Before he could complete the sentence, a swarm of cat women burst into the dining room, fully armed and headed straight for his family. Lance started firing.

The noise of the gun and the shrieks of his suddenly terrified family masked the sound of glass shattering as the Green Arrow, Citizen Cold, and the rest of their combined teams joined them. Immediately, a blur sped Laurel out of the room and Ray in his Atom suit flew Sara out as arrows peppered the attackers.
One of the assassins moved toward Dinah, raising her sword. A blast of ice stopped her in her tracks before anything could happen, and the blur—the Flash—immediately returned to sweep Dinah out of the room.

Lance spun around as soon as his family was safe and found himself face-to-face with Cheshire herself. He could see her scowl beneath the cat mask and he ducked as she swung her sword, blade dripping with poison, at him.

An arrow knocked one of the swords from her hand. Lance glanced over to see Robert fighting alongside him, shooting arrows two a second at the woman. She blocked them with her sword and continued to aim for Lance, who backed away, letting Robert take over the fighting. He turned and shot, knocking down another girl who was rushing toward them, her sword raised high.

Once Cheshire was too close for arrows to be effective, Robert used his bow as a defense against the sword rather than shooting with it, using his other arm and both legs to strike his opponent.

“Green, freeze,” a voice said behind him, and Robert obeyed, despite the fact that Cheshire was in the middle of swinging her sword toward his head.

Leonard shot an inch over Robert’s shoulder—he could feel the cold as it brushed by him—and the ice froze Cheshire’s hand and sword. Robert ducked out of her path as the momentum and weight of her newly frozen arm dragged her to the ground.

With seven vigilantes and one police officer, even the thirty cat women didn’t stand a chance. They lay on the ground in various states of unconsciousness and injury.

Lance crouched beside Cheshire. “What are you and your friends doing killing police officers?”

She didn’t even look at him—instead, she glowered up at Robert and the other members of Team Arrow who had gathered around him.

Through her elaborate mask, she smiled wide and murmured, “Tartarus will rise.”

Leonard frowned in confusion, but all the Starling vigilantes looked shaken. Tartarus obviously had far deeper meaning for them than it did for him.

“Well, you’re annoying,” Leonard said. He hit her across the head with his gun, and she passed out.

Day saved.

Once everything with Cheshire had been squared away, Lance visited the Arrowcave and nodded at Leonard and the rest of Team Cold. “I hear you need something from Kord Industries.”

They all perked up and followed him. On the way out of the bunker, they passed Roy having a very intense conversation with Thea. Roy raised an eyebrow at Barry when they made eye contact, and Barry smiled and nodded back at him. Seemed like he was taking Barry’s advice.

The process at Kord was a lot easier with the police captain present. Within fifteen minutes, they were looking over a list of previous Kord employees.

Ray Palmer was on there, and a couple names below that was Felicity Smoak. Barry grinned in recognition at the name, but nobody else caught it.
Leonard, after skimming the names, shrugged and started to tuck the paper in a pocket of his coat. “When we’re back in Central, we can go through them, see who might line up with Black Lightning…”

“Wait.” Barry had read the names a little slower, but he thought—he thought he might have glimpsed something, the very last name on the list. His heart pounded as Leonard handed him the paper. Surely it couldn’t be—and if it was, it probably had nothing to do with—but the body shape was right, and he was wearing black…

Impossible to know if he was Black Lightning, and he really shouldn’t make assumptions based on the name. But there it was, in black and white, last on the alphabetical list:

Hunter Zolomon.
On the train back to Central City, Barry continued to insist that Black Lightning had to be Hunter Zolomon. The others, with their lack of knowledge about Zoom, weren’t very quick to agree.

“So, because Zolomon’s doppelganger from this other Earth was an evil speedster who wanted to kill you—” Leonard said slowly.

“Well, to steal my speed and use it to destroy the multiverse, and then kill me, but basically, yeah…”

“Because of all that, you’re convinced that this Earth’s Hunter Zolomon is a criminal with a lightning gun?” Leonard finished doubtfully.

“I guess it’s not conclusive evidence, but, yeah, I do think so.”

“How similar are these universes?” Ronnie asked. “Because if Leonard was the mayor…”

“And Jesse told me that I’m a…” Caitlin hesitated, trying to come up with the right way no phrase it.

“A supervillain who could control ice,” Barry supplied, his certainty fading slightly as he realized how different the two Earths were.

“Caitlin’s doppelganger is a supervillain?” Cisco asked, a little dejectedly. “She gets all the fun.”

“Oh, don’t worry!” Barry reassured him. “You were a supervillain too.”

Cisco’s face lit up. “ Seriously?”

Barry nodded. “Reverb. Your other self could control the vibrations of the universe.”

“A supervillain who could control ice,” Barry supplied, his certainty fading slightly as he realized how different the two Earths were.

“Caitlin’s doppelganger is a supervillain?” Cisco asked, a little dejectedly. “She gets all the fun.”

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Barry nodded. “Reverb. Your other self could control the vibrations of the universe.”

“Awesome! What about Ronnie?” Cisco nudged Ronnie, who was sitting next to him.

“Also a bad guy—well, half of one. He merged with another person to create Firestorm, who could shoot fire from his hands. All of you worked together—actually, all of you worked for Zoom. If one version of Hunter Zolomon persuaded all of these metas to work for him in an effort to destroy every Earth in existence, I think another version could easily manage the Syndicate and… whatever else it is he’s trying to do.”

Everyone seemed to ignore the second half of Barry’s speech.

“So why are we all evil there?” Caitlin asked. “What about you, Barry?”

Barry, still impassioned, considered launching into a second tirade, but after a moment he deflated and admitted, “I was a CSI. I didn’t get any superpowers.”

“Reverb,” Cisco said slowly, as though trying it out. He looked doubtful.

“I prefer Vibe,” Barry said.
“Vibe?”

“That’s what the you from this Earth, from my timeline,” and wasn’t *that* a complicated clarification, “called himself. He had the same powers as Reverb, but he was just starting to figure them out.”

“So there was a *good* superpowered version of me? *And* an evil one?” Cisco was starting to get *really* excited. “Did they ever meet? Did they battle? That would be so cool—”

“I think you’re getting a little too eager about the prospect of you potentially killing another you,” Leonard inserted with a sigh.

“Maybe,” Cisco allowed. He leaned a little closer to Barry, in the seat across from him. “But did they fight?”

When the whole team was assembled again in the Cold Cave, and Cisco was finished celebrating the fact that Jesse’s suit worked, and Barry was finished being terrified about Iris’s safety, everyone settled down enough for Leonard to share the ex-employee list.

Before anyone could read more than a name or two, Barry blurted, “Hunter Zolomon is on the list.”

Harry’s and Jesse’s reactions were immediate—their eyes widened in fear. Harry put an arm around Jesse’s shoulders and pulled her closer, some mix of protectiveness and comfort. Jesse was nearly vibrating with what seemed to be a furious determination.

Even, oddly enough, *Eobard* looked startled, and what might have even been horrified.

Harrison glanced among them. “I suppose that name is significant to those who have lived another timeline?”

“Very,” Harry said. “The Hunter Zolomon from my Earth…”

“Let me guess,” Leonard interrupted. “He became a speedster because of your particle accelerator and set out to destroy the entirety of the multiverse, recruiting all three of their,” he gestured to Cisco, Caitlin, and Ronnie, “doppelgangers to help.”

Those who hadn’t been present on the train stared at Leonard in surprise.

He rolled his eyes. “It was all Barry would talk about on the way back.”

“This other man’s crimes, however, don’t prove that Hunter Zolomon is in fact responsible for what’s going on here,” Tess said rationally.

“However, your suspicion of him means he would be a good place to start,” Harrison said.

Eobard was already at a computer. “Hunter Zolomon—he was the subject of a lot of media attention about a year ago—in fact, exactly a year ago. He was released from prison a year ago today after eight years of serving a sentence for a murder that he didn’t commit.” Eobard glanced up. “Yeah, I’d want to shoot a few people with a lightning gun after that if it were me.”

“Where is he now?” Jesse asked, her voice coming out steady.
Eobard typed a bit more and frowned at the screen. “There are no records of him at all, dating back from a few months ago. Not only police records—no job, no bank statements, no address. He’s off the grid completely.”

Leonard pushed his way past everyone (seriously, ten people in the Cold Cave was too many for the small room) to look at the dates. Last record of Zolomon—

“Same day the Syndicate took their first victim.” Leonard nodded grudgingly. “All right. This is probably our guy.”

Jesse went to another computer. “I’ll check the other names on the list, just to make sure.” Her fingers flew lightning-fast over the keys. Hardly twenty seconds later, she glanced up with a shake of her head. “Everyone else on there is accounted for.”

Barry nodded seriously. “That means Zolomon is Black Lightning.”

“But he’s not Zoom,” Harry said. Barry wasn’t sure whether he was trying to remind him, Jesse, or himself. Harry probably didn’t know either.

“No,” Barry agreed regardless. “In the same way that you’re not him.” He gestured between Harry and Harrison.

“So what do he and Rory want?” Caitlin asked. “The Syndicate obviously wasn’t their end goal.”

“No, that was only ‘phase one’, ” Cisco agreed, putting air quotes around the words.

“And phase two had to be setting the Santinis and the Royal Flush Gang against each other,” Barry said. “But we still don’t know why they did that.”

“Phase two of a plan usually involves whatever was gained in phase one,” Eobard said thoughtfully. “The money they gained from the Syndicate—that’s what Rory and Zolomon would have used to pay off the crime organizations.”

“So the Syndicate was just a…” Barry couldn’t figure out the right word to complete the sentence.

“A business,” Leonard finished, disgust written clear in his tone. “A setup for the more important parts of their plan. Not that we know what those are.”

The room fell silent for a moment. Barry tried to consider it, from everything he knew about Mick Rory, and the very little he knew about this Earth’s Hunter Zolomon—what were they trying to gain? Not money, they wouldn’t have another step after the Syndicate. Not power, they could have bought their way to the top of one of the crime groups instead of turning them against each other.

So, what?

Barry checked his watch and frowned. He was going to be late for work. Again.

“I have to go,” he said into the quiet of the Cold Cave. “I’ll be by later—when all of you have hopefully solved this.”

Harry followed him out of the room. Barry glanced over his shoulder and saw him before taking off in his usual blur.

“What’s up, Harry?”

I just wanted to let you know before the next huge battle that we face.” Harry smirked
momentarily, but then his face returned to his serious-talk-time expression. “When this whole thing with Black Lightning and Heat Wave is over, Jesse and I are going home.”

“Oh.” It made sense, of course—they’d only intended to stay for a day or two and it had been almost two months. But still—“I’ll miss having you around.”

Harry grinned. “I hope you won’t come running back to my Earth after only a day this time.”

“Nah, I’ll let you and Jesse be the ones dimension-jumping to get my help this time.” Barry smiled back. “You’re going to let her use her powers on Earth-2, right?”

“I’ve told you before, this Earth is my Earth-2, Allen.”

Barry smirked; he’d been waiting for Harry to say that. “I seem to remember hearing something about how one particular Earth was the center of the whole multiverse. Now, let me think about which Earth that was…”

Harry gave him a supremely irritated look. “I can’t wait to go home.”

Barry snickered. “But really, you’re not just going to lock Jesse up so she can’t be in danger, are you?”

Harry shook his head. “No. In fact, that’s part of the reason we need to return. There are still a lot of metahumans on the loose back home, and there’s a power vacuum now that Zoom’s gone.” He shrugged. “Every world needs a Flash.” He nodded at Barry. “This one’s already got a pretty good one.”

Barry smiled. “Thanks, Harry. Though you know, you won’t get to confuse quite so many S.T.A.R. Labs employees.”

Harry snorted. “One Harrison Wells is probably enough for this universe.” He paused. “Speaking of which, what are you planning to do about Eobard? You tore a hole in the universe to keep him from going home last time.”

Barry hesitated. He… hadn’t allowed himself to give much thought to it. With all the crises going on every day, it was easy to ignore the reality—that he was still keeping Eobard trapped in this time.

It was… different, considering it now, without all the betrayal or hatred or both surrounding the idea. Eobard… had still murdered Barry’s mother.

Had also saved Barry’s life, repeatedly, and Jesse’s to boot. Had willingly shown Barry the slight bits of Speed Force he’d recovered.

Had become… Barry’s friend?

“I don’t know,” Barry said finally, the most honest thing he could manage. “It’s complicated.”


Barry simply blinked at him for a moment. “Thanks,” he said finally and then ran out of there.
Who’d have thought saving his mother’s life would lead to this sort of impossible decision?

After work, he opened the door to leave his lab, only to find Iris and Eddie standing there with identical crossed-arms postures.

Barry stepped back and sighed. “Come in.” He couldn’t say that this was a surprise.

They entered. Iris looked very tense, but Eddie was bordering on furious.

Barry returned to his chair, spinning slightly in it. “So?”

Iris and Eddie started talking over each other immediately. Iris seemed to be asking more ‘how could you not tell us’, ‘how did this happen’ type questions, whereas Eddie went or ‘what the hell is going on’ and ‘what gives you the right’.

Barry held up his hands. “Woah, woah, okay.” He was far too tired for this. Seriously, when was the last time he’d slept? If only caffeine worked for him. “One at a time, please. Eddie first, you already got some answers, Iris.”

He resolved to be as honest as possible, just like on that roof with Iris the other morning. Maybe avoid the alternate-timeline bit, as that would only be way too confusing, but aside from that.

“So you’re really the Flash?” Eddie started.

Barry nodded. “I am.”

“Why have we never seen your speed before?” Iris asked. “When did this start?”

“It only started recently.” Here, anyway. “I ran into some people who helped me figure it all out, helped me build a suit. You know me, Iris, I’ve always wanted to help people.”

Eddie scowled. “So you decided that the best way to help people was to ally yourself with known murderer Citizen Cold?”

“I told Iris this already. His methods aren’t… ideal, but he’s trying to protect the city from danger, from a lot of danger,” Barry said firmly.

“What kind of danger?” Iris asked.

Barry could only shrug helplessly. “We’re trying to figure that out. It has to do with the two men who attacked you, Iris. I’m so sorry about that, by the way. I swear, I didn’t mean for it to happen, I should have been there.”

“It’s okay,” Iris said. “Your other fast friend in red helped me out. Who is she, by the way?”

Eddie frowned at Iris. “You’re missing the point, Iris. Who is Citizen Cold? We’ve been trying to catch him for months—I thought you were helping us, Barry.”

“I was,” Barry insisted. “Until… until I wasn’t. But…” He channeled Leonard. “His identity, and the identity of the other speedster, those aren’t my secrets to tell.”

Eddie looked annoyed. “Barry, you can’t protect him. I should be arresting you right now, honestly. If everyone with a hero complex and a gun thought they had the right to defend Central
City however they want—"

Barry thought briefly about how, over in Starling, the police actually helped their vigilante.

Eddie continued, “—then the city would descend into anarchy.”

Barry sighed. “I see your point, but…” He trailed off, finally hearing the end of Eddie’s sentence. Anarchy.

Anarchy.

He suddenly knew what Hunter Zolomon wanted. What Mick Rory wanted.

“I have to go.”

“Barry, did you even hear me?” Eddie demanded.

Barry didn’t acknowledge him, instead rushing from the room in a flicker of lightning.

Barry’s explanation was rapid and bordering on frantic, but it made sense.

“The Syndicate was to get money to pay off the crime families. Like with Zoom on Earth-2, it would create a power vacuum.”

“Maybe when it comes to the criminal side of things, but that in itself wouldn’t lead to anarchy,” Jesse said. “It just helps the people in charge of the city, actually.”

“And why would Rory and Zolomon want to incite anarchy anyway?” Caitlin asked.

“Zolomon’s imprisonment,” Harrison said.

“Lashing out at the system that wrongfully incarcerated him,” Tess added.

Barry nodded. “And Mick Rory, he just likes to blow stuff up.”

“It’s a lot easier to do that if there’s no one who’ll stop you,” Cisco said.

“But there still are people who’ll stop him,” Ronnie said.

“They’re not done,” Leonard said. “There’s more to this grand plan, and, unlike the Santinis and Royal Flush Gang, I get the feeling we won’t be tipped off this time until it’s already too late.”

“We have to find where they’ve been hiding out,” Barry said.

“I’ve been trying to do that for months.” Leonard sighed.

“But you didn’t know about Hunter Zolomon then,” Eobard pointed out. “He might have slipped up in a way Rory didn’t. There are a lot of security cameras around Central City.”

“I—well, the old version of me, anyway—wrote an algorithm to track Citizen Cold based on where he was spotted,” Barry said. “You were always too careful for it to work, Leonard, but if Zolomon doesn’t know that we know, we might be able to track him.”

“We don’t have access to every security camera in Central City over the past year,” Harry pointed
out. “For your algorithm to work, we’d need to have every single location he’s been, and we don’t have the time to hack into every camera individually.”

“But how can we hack them all at the same time?” Jesse asked.

There was a short, uncertain pause.

“Frequencies,” a voice chimed in from behind all of them.

Everyone turned to see none other than Hartley Rathaway leaning against the doorframe, arms crossed, expression irritated.

“Hartley,” Harrison said eagerly. “I’m so glad you’re—”

“With all due respect, Dr. Wells,” Hartley interrupted acerbically, “shut up.”

Harrison, obviously deciding not pushing his luck, fell silent immediately.

Leonard narrowed his eyes suspiciously at Hartley. “What changed your mind, Rathaway?”

“I happen to like living in Central City. Not a fan of the idea of these maniacs trying to run it.”

Hartley let out a deep sigh. “And if I can’t turn you over to the police, I can at least do my best to keep you from killing anyone else.”

“So—” Barry started.

“So, the frequencies.” Hartley went to a computer. “CCTV cameras all function within a select range of frequencies. Most of the ones in Central City were made by the same manufacturer, which narrows their range of frequencies even further. Take an example of one of the cameras, like the ones we have at S.T.A.R. Labs, and we can extrapolate from that one the approximate range.” He sounded far less resentful once he started talking science, though there was still a harsh edge to it.

“Now, if only we had some device that emits sonic frequencies, because it would be very simple to retrofit it to scan for specific ranges instead. Oh, wait, we do.” He held up the sonic device they’d built to combat the Time Wraiths.

“Brilliant, Rathaway,” Harry said, unsarcastic for once.

Hartley didn’t even look up. “I know.”

Cisco scoffed.

Hartley disassembled the sonic device with nimble fingers, pulling out a small chip and plugging it into the computer. Small dots appeared, scattered across a map of Central City. Hartley leaned back in his chair with a satisfied smile.

“Now we just need to run the image of Hunter Zolomon through the camera footage,” Ronnie said, pushing past Hartley, who went back to looking annoyed.

“And then I’ll put all his appearances into my algorithm,” Barry said.

“And we’ll catch ourselves a criminal.” Cisco held up his hand for a high five. Jesse obliged him.

A grand total of five minutes later, the sonic scans, camera searches, and triangulating algorithms yielded their intended result.

“Got the address,” Barry reported, and a collective cheer went up around the Cold Cave. Even
Hartley looked pleased, albeit in an incredibly smug way.

Leonard shrugged on his parka. “Come on, Flash.” He glanced at Jesse. “Both of you. Let’s go catch ourselves some criminals.”

This lair turned out to be not a warehouse, surprisingly enough, but rather an abandoned house. It was set up with enough weapons and tech that it had to be the correct place.

It was also empty. Neither Black Lightning nor Heat Wave was present, making Team Cold’s dramatic entry largely wasted.

“They’re gone,” Jesse said needlessly.

“That can’t be good,” Leonard muttered.

“If they’re not here, they’re probably about to start whatever their phase three is,” Barry agreed grimly. “And after the first two, that certainly means disaster for the city.”

“Uh-oh.” Jesse had drifted over to check out the papers displayed prominently on the desk, and she now frowned down at one in particular.

“What is it?” In an instant, Barry was at her side. “Uh-oh,” he echoed, understanding her fear.

Leonard joined them. He didn’t vocalize it, but his eyes narrowed in worry.

“Um, for those of us not there, care to elaborate beyond ‘uh-oh’?” Cisco asked through the comms.

“That whole anarchy thing?” Barry said. “Yeah, they’re about to try to make that happen.”

“How?” the whole team in the Cold Cave asked.

“They’re planning to assassinate the mayor—” Leonard started.

“—and burn down the precinct—” Jesse added.

“—tonight,” Barry finished. “We’ve got to stop them.”

“Seems like Heat Wave is in charge of the burning part of it, unsurprisingly,” Jesse said. “Leonard, you’re the one with the cold gun.”

“And the two of you have faced Hunter Zolomon before,” Leonard said.

Barry nodded. “We’ll stop Black Lightning; you take care of Heat Wave.”

“We’ll help however we can,” Eobard said in their ears. “Go!”

They tore out of the old house and down the street in their separate directions. Time to save Central City.

As Barry ran, he pulled a little ahead of Jesse. But this was too urgent for him to slow down for her.

So he was surprised when he sensed another speedster beside him. He glanced over, unsure what to expect (Zoom? Eobard?), and his eyes widened.
Worse.

Another Flash, another Barry, was right there staring back at him for a fraction of a second before he vanished.

Not an optical illusion, not a speed mirage.

Barry got the sinking feeling that something was about to go horribly wrong with their plan.

After all, looked like he was about to time travel.

Chapter End Notes

A couple of notes!

One, I think I'm officially the first person to ever use Earth-1 Hunter Zolomon in a fic. Probably because we saw him for five seconds and he was just sitting in a park wearing glasses.

Two, I have an official explanation for Arrow and Legends of Tomorrow in this universe! The Arrow explanation got really sarcastic and the LoT one got really self-important, but here is the link!

Three, there are two more chapters before this part of the storyline wraps up and the next part begins. After that, if it's okay with you guys, I'll probably slow down my updates to once a week or so. You'll get about the same amount of content word-count wise, but seriously, updating every other day is killer. That cool with everyone?

Thank you for reading, and please leave a comment!
Boss Battle—Take 1

Barry stopped just outside City Hall, both to allow Jesse to catch up and to take a moment to think about the implications of seeing his time-traveling self.

Last time that happened, Vandal Savage killed everyone in Central City. Time before that, a tidal wave was on the verge of destroying the city.

So what new disaster was about to strike?

Barry sighed and squinted through the suddenly-pouring rain to look for Jesse. Why couldn’t these time mirages of his ever explain the situation?

He saw the flashes of Jesse’s speed lightning headed toward him. And, okay. Whatever went wrong, he’d have another chance to fix it. A free do-over.

Still, it might be nice if he didn’t have to witness the deaths of his friends this time.

“Ready?” Jesse asked when she reached Barry’s side, the tension in her voice clear.

“Sure,” Barry said, feigning casualness. “We’re just going to face the doppelganger of Zoom. No problem.”

“Come on,” Jesse said, darting into the building. Barry kept pace with her. “We don’t have much time.”

Inside the building, nearly a dozen bodies unmistakably marked with lightning-shaped burns were strewn across the marble floor of the lobby.

Barry and Jesse didn’t need to discuss it. They exchanged a single glance and then tore through the building. Barry would have gone straight to the mayor’s office if he’d known where it was, but city leadership being attacked was always more common on Oliver’s side of things, and he’d never been past the lobby. So searching the building would have to suffice.

Nevertheless, their speed got them to the third-floor mayor’s office not quite too late—Zolomon, in full Black Lightning getup, had just pulled the trigger of his gun, aimed at the startled mayor.

In Barry’s slowed-down perception, he could see the path of the lightning from the gun shift. It redirected itself away from the mayor (who Barry vaguely recognized, but worry about that later) and slammed into Barry’s chest instead, knocking him backwards.

Jesse caught Barry and set him back on his feet. “The lightning will always hit one of us, it’s attracted to the Speed Force,” she told him.

Hunter turned, and now Barry wondered how he’d failed to recognize him before, because that face was so clearly Hunter Zolomon, even with the mask. He glared at Barry and Jesse.

“Thought you might show up,” he snarled. He pulled something out of his pocket—it looked like a glass sphere. “I built something new since the last time I—”

Speaking at superspeed over the end of Zolomon’s sentence, Barry told Jesse, “Get the mayor out of here. I’ll distract him.”

Jesse, at the same speed, said, “Are you sure? Whatever new thing he’s got, it probably won’t be
fun for you.”

“I’m sure,” Barry said with more certainty than he felt. “Go!”

“—saw you,” Hunter finished.

In a blur, Jesse grabbed the mayor (was that Axel Walker?) and rushed out of the room.

Barry raced toward Zolomon before he had a chance to shoot any lightning. When he got within five feet, though, he was suddenly blasted to a stop by a pulse shooting out of the glass ball.

It wasn’t lightning that was crackling out of the device, but a purple-tinted plasma. And it didn’t have the same effect—where the lightning felt like every cell of his body was on fire, the plasma deadened his nerves into a fierce numbness that subsided after a long moment.

Barry shook his head to dismiss the odd sensation and moved to snatch the gun again. He immediately stumbled.

His speed was gone.

Not fully—he found himself still able to vibrate, and he was certainly processing everything around him at superspeed. But when he tried to actually run, nothing.

Hunter let out a gleeful laugh that immediately had Barry wincing at how much it sounded like Zoom. He held up his gun again and pulled the trigger.

Barry tried ducking, which of course didn’t help, and the lightning slammed into him. Without the Speed Force lending him some cushioning, the jolt hurt a lot worse than usual. Barry found himself sprawled across the floor on the opposite side of the mayor’s office, groaning in pain.

Jesse sped back into the room and to Barry’s side. When she passed Zolomon, his device went off again, hitting her with the plasma too. She slid to the floor behind the desk, all momentum gone.

“What—”

Speed Force crackled in Barry’s eyes again as the pain from the lightning faded, and he realized what was going on. The plasma was triggered by their proximity to the device, and it somehow deactivated his and Jesse’s powers, but only the abilities that involved lightning. When he was hit with the electricity from Hunter’s gun, it jumpstarted the Speed Force in his system.

Barry grabbed Jesse’s hand and pulled her to her feet. A spark passed between them, same as it had been when he’d awoken her from her coma, and her eyes flickered with lightning too.

They again dropped into their high-speed perception to converse.

“The plasma,” Barry said.

“I know. It’s neutralizing our electricity generation somehow.” Jesse frowned. “We can’t get too close to him.”

“We’ve got some other tricks. Just as long as we don’t both lose our speed at the same time. He recharged me accidentally with his lightning the first time; I doubt he’ll do that again.”

Jesse looked at Zolomon on the other side of the office, his figure frozen in their superspeed perception, and laughed a little. “What is it with Hunter Zolomon mimicking games? You played tag with Zoom for the fate of the multiverse, and this is just freeze tag.”
Barry shrugged. “Let’s just win.”

He dropped back into normal perception and spun his arms in wide circles. The force of the wind knocked Zolomon backwards and into the wall of the office, but he didn’t let go of either the gun or the plasma ball.

Barry tried again, but Zolomon just braced himself against the wind. His thumb shifted on the plasma device and he depressed a button.

The device sent out wide waves of the plasma, expanding in a circle rather than the directed stream it had displayed thus far. Jesse dove behind the desk. Barry followed her, but didn’t quite make it in time, and the electricity in his eyes faded out the moment the plasma touched him.

The wood of the desk sizzled and mostly dissolved, collapsing the piece of furniture entirely and sending papers and office supplies scattering across the floor. Jesse made sure to touch Barry’s hand, restoring his speed, before standing up behind her now-useless makeshift cover.

She quickly considered her options. Run at him, and the plasma ball would react to either her proximity or her speed, however it worked, and disable her powers. Stay where she was, and she had no chance of stopping him.

Jesse settled for the same move Barry had made, spinning her arms to buffet him backwards. The wind pinned Zolomon against the wall.

Barry sped out of the office. A glance showed Jesse that he was running down the hallway, though he’d failed to inform her of the reason for his retreat.

She realized it in a moment—he wasn’t retreating. She stopped her gusts of wind (moving her arms like that was getting exhausting anyway), allowing Hunter to take a couple of steps away from the wall.

He blasted her with lightning that she didn’t bother to avoid. The impact forced her backwards, but she stayed on her feet. At least his back was to the door.

So when Barry sped back in, moving much faster now with the buildup of momentum from his run down the hallway, Zolomon didn’t even notice until he was already on the ground.

The plasma device, predictably, sent out a targeted surge that sent Barry a few feet back, but that wasn’t a problem.

The problem was that it then, whether at Zolomon’s direction or simply because Barry was still within its range, shot out a wide circle of the plasma. With no desk to duck behind this time, Jesse couldn’t avoid it.

She and Barry exchanged a worried glance across the room.

They sucked at freeze tag, apparently. Both of them were effectively powerless.

Hunter struggled to his feet, tucking the plasma ball in a pocket of his coat, and in the same motion pulled out a pistol.

“The lightning might restore your abilities,” he said smugly. “But I doubt a bullet will.”
Leonard hesitated at the doors to the precinct. Nothing was on fire, and he heard no screams, though the sound of the rain sheeting down around him could very well be muffling any cries.

He shrugged and walked directly inside. No point in doing this if he wasn’t going to announce his presence.

The moment he entered, Leonard found a whole precinct’s worth of guns pointed directly at him. He didn’t bother to raise his hands in surrender—in fact, his grip on the cold gun only tightened.

“Put down the weapon, Citizen Cold,” the captain demanded.

“I’m looking for Heat Wave,” Leonard said. “You know, Mick Rory? He’s planning to burn this place down tonight.” He raised his voice. “Mick! Come on out, I know you’re here.” There was no way Leonard could have gotten here before him.

“The only criminal in the building is you, Cold,” the captain said. “Now either put the gun down, or I’ll shoot you. Even if Heat Wave showed up, we wouldn’t need your assistance.”

Leonard gave him an irritated look that was largely wasted with the hood and the goggles. “In case you haven’t noticed, Captain, I’ve been on your side. I stopped the Mirror Master, brought down the Syndicate, and kept two crime families from destroying the city with their war. None of which are feats your brave officers could complete. Forgive me if I don’t think you’re quite able to manage Heat Wave without me.”

The captain fired. Leonard, luckily, was tense enough that his reaction was automatic and instant. He fired in return, just one small spiral of ice. It caught the bullet in midair, sending it crashing to the floor.

“I’m not exactly the good guy here, but I’m not your enemy,” Leonard said, frustrated.

“What you are is under arrest.”

“Captain Singh, maybe we should listen to him,” some blond detective said, holstering his gun.

“Thank you,” Leonard said with a gesture in his direction. “Anyone else?”

“Are you crazy?” Singh demanded, looking at the blond.

“He would have killed us all if that’s what he wanted to do,” Blondie reasoned. “Why make up some story about Heat Wave?” He looked at Leonard. “What do you know? What’s about to happen?”

(“Score one for the Thawne family,” Eobard muttered with a smirk back at S.T.A.R. Labs.)

“He’s coming here tonight. I thought he’d be here already,” Leonard said. “Black Lightning is currently trying to kill the mayor, but the Flash is doing his best to prevent that.”

“And why should we believe you?” Singh demanded. He was beginning to lower his gun anyway.

Just then, the door behind Leonard blew off its hinges. He turned to see a cloud of fire blossoming out around it.

Leonard swung his gun around and shot the door, which shattered into ashes at the impact, before it could hit him. “That’s why.”
Their speed-talking didn’t require lightning to maintain, so Barry and Jesse easily fell back into it while Zolomon lifted his gun slowly and aimed it at Barry.

“Got a plan, Flash?” she asked.

“You’re the genius!”

“You’ve been doing this longer!”

Through the comms, Eobard laughed. “You both need to stop wasting time you don’t have.”

This time, Jesse actually paid attention to the fact that he was matching their conversation speed. “How are you—” She looked at Barry. “How is he talking to us?”

“Surprise,” Eobard said wryly. “I’m not totally an ex-speedster. You need some sort of spark, don’t you?”

“Yeah, but we’re both out of Speed Force,” Barry said. “Care to stop by and lend a hand?”

“Do I need to repeat the part about not being able to run very far?” Eobard asked. “Wouldn’t make it.”

The sound of a gunshot reached all of their ears. Zolomon had pulled the trigger, and a bullet started out of the barrel of the gun, headed for Barry.

Jesse winced. If it’d been aimed at her, she could probably duck in time and let the bullet shatter the window behind her. Then she might be able to pull off something with the storm outside, specifically the lightning… but it wasn’t aimed at her.

“Brace yourself, Jesse. It’s at the lowest setting, but…” Eobard didn’t finish the sentence.

“What?”

She didn’t have to wonder for long. An odd heat built up in her suit and then the sensation of electricity jolted painfully across her abdomen, knocking the breath from her lungs.

“Ouch,” she gasped when she could breathe again, and realized, “The defibrillator.”

“Um, Jesse, hurry,” Barry suggested.

“Right.” She stopped talking and started moving. Was she faster than a speeding bullet?

The answer, thankfully, was yes. She snatched it from the air moments before it would have hit Barry, and grabbed his hand to help him to his feet and give him back his speed.

“So how do we stop him?” she asked.

Barry’s eyes narrowed as he considered Zolomon. “I think we better fight lightning with lightning. Can you lure him to the middle of the room?”

Jesse shrugged. “I’ll get him there somehow.”

Barry nodded in thanks and again sped from the room.
Jesse considered rapidly—sure, if she got close to him, she’d lose her speed, but she could probably land one blow. That would have to be enough.

She could pretend she was calculating trajectory and angle, but honestly, she was offering a prayer up to whatever gods there might be in the multiverse that this would work. Jesse took a lap around the room to build up her speed and then raced straight at Zolomon. The plasma deadened her speed, but couldn’t stop the entirety of her momentum, and she crashed into him.

It was less glamorous than she had expected, ending with both of them simply stumbling to the floor in the middle of the office. Jesse scrambled for the guns—if she could get them away then they could dispense with the rest of this plan—but only managed to get the pistol kicked out of range.

Barry blurred back into the room, already moving faster than Jesse ever had, and built up even more speed with a couple of laps around the room. Zolomon just looked confused, but Jesse got to her feet and ran normal-speed to the edge of Barry’s lightning circle.

She watched as Barry stopped right behind her, shifting his arms in a throwing gesture. Jesse ducked. Lightning made of pure Speed Force flew straight at Zolomon.

Its approach triggered the plasma sphere, and when the neutralizing purple met the electrifying yellow, the collision exploded in a concussive blast of pure white.

Barry gripped Jesse’s hand and, as the explosion was between them and the door, they both sprinted to the far corner of the room.

The blast didn’t seem to have any effect on Zolomon, but the lightning gun and the plasma sphere, along with the pistol and the computer when the explosion reached them, let out fountains of sparks. Barry and Jesse were just out of range of the blast, which was good, as Jesse was certain the assorted devices built into their suits wouldn’t have reacted well to it.

Zolomon, getting to his feet, tried to fire his lightning gun, but there was no reaction. The electronics were completely fried.

Barry and Jesse looked at their now-powerless enemy and high-fived.

Leonard matched Mick’s constant stream of fire with a symmetrical stream of ice. The police tried to contribute by shooting (thankfully, around Leonard rather than at him; it seemed Blondie’s faith was enough to sway them, either that or the ashes of the door), but whenever a bullet approached either of the two weapons, it froze or melted before reaching a target.

“Hey, Captain!” Leonard yelled, not taking his eyes off Heat Wave. “You and your men ought to clear out. It’s about to get real messy in here.”

Even though Leonard wasn’t looking, the pause before the response told him that Captain Singh was carefully considering whether to leave two criminals with elemental guns alone in the precinct. Leonard could also pinpoint the exact moment the captain decided that his men’s lives were worth more than the pride of staying.

“Everyone out!” Singh shouted, and the police officers made a hasty retreat out the back door.

Leonard and Mick now stood alone in the precinct, their weapons neatly cancelling each other out.
Leonard narrowed his eyes behind his goggles. “I’ll stop if you will,” he called over the noise of their constantly-firing weapons. “Let’s talk about this.”

Mick nodded, expression unreadable behind his own goggles. Slowly, both men eased off their triggers. The twin streams weakened and then stopped entirely. Neither lowered their gun.

“Nice plan,” Leonard offered. “Let me enter the precinct first when you realized I was coming, distract the police for you. Hunter’s idea, wasn’t it?”

“You know his name?” Mick asked, sounding genuinely surprised.

“I know lots of things.” Leonard’s statement, gratifyingly enough, was punctuated by a clap of thunder from the storm raging outside. “I know you’re trying to incite anarchy, for one.”

Mick grinned, all teeth and no humor. “What can I say? I like chaos.”

“You like fire.”

“Fire is chaos. Things turn to dust, go up in smoke. This building could use a little more chaos.” Mick shifted the aim of his gun and shot one of the desks. It instantly caught fire.

Leonard resisted taking the obvious opportunity to freeze Mick where he stood and instead shot at the same desk, smothering the flame in a layer of frost.

“We cancel each other out, Mick.” Leonard smirked, a plan forming in his mind. “Only I’m still smarter, and your friend won’t be coming to help you out this time.”

Mick’s expression darkened, and he reacted to Leonard’s insult not with his words but with his gun —

But he didn’t shoot at Leonard. Instead, he fired a wide arc around the precinct, letting all of it go up in flames.

Leonard refused to let himself be distracted. He kept his eyes on Mick, despite the fire—and then glanced up, let out a loud curse, and fired at something above Mick’s head.

When Mick’s gaze instinctively went up, Leonard took two brisk steps forward and slammed him across the face with his gun.

Mick collapsed immediately, and Leonard smirked, allowing himself another glance up at the ceiling. Yup, still nothing there. Just an easy way to distract Mick.

His smirk disappeared as he gazed around the burning precinct. Time to cool this place down.

He went to work with his gun. It was only a minute before people flooded through the entrance. Leonard automatically went on guard—but they weren’t police there to arrest him. No, these were firemen, bearing hoses and spraying the place down.

One of them paused long enough to offer Leonard a grateful nod. He returned the gesture, smiling despite himself, and went back to work.

Later that night, once the precinct fire was out and Zolomon and Rory safely in custody, most of the team gathered at Jitters to celebrate their success.

Most of the team, because Harry and Jesse had already returned home. Barry lent his speed to help
them open a breach and promised that they could come by anytime—at least when Jesse got enough speed to open breaches of her own.

Harrison, Tess, and Eobard turned down the invitation to Jitters. From the looks they were all exchanging, Barry guessed that they wanted to give the younger members of the team the time to enjoy themselves. Despite the fact that Leonard was less than ten years younger than them.

That left Leonard, Barry, Caitlin, Ronnie, Cisco, and even Hartley (who complained a lot but eventually agreed to come) at Jitters. It was an odd collection of people at one table, but Barry had long since gotten used to weird circumstances in this timeline.

The weirder thing, though, the issue that wouldn’t stop plaguing him even as he contributed to the conversation and laughed along to jokes, was that their final confrontation had gone fine. On both sides of it. Barry had waited, the whole time, for the huge explosion that he’d have to outrun, or the major tragedy that would terrify him into fleeing, but they’d saved the mayor and the precinct, and Heat Wave and Black Lightning were both safely in custody.

So why did he time travel?

Or, more accurately, why was he about to? Would something go horribly wrong tomorrow? Maybe he would accidentally burn his breakfast in the morning, and it would be traumatic enough that he would run back in time to try again.

Whatever the reason, Barry couldn’t fully relax.

Still, he was determined to enjoy himself. He was surrounded by some of his best friends in the world, whether or not they knew it in this timeline, and he was going to have a good time.

So he relaxed and drank coffee and laughed at Cisco and Hartley when they inevitably started to argue.

And then.

And then.

They had a table near the window, so they had a nice view of the rain that had slowed to a gentle patter against the glass. The lights of Central City in the background provided a soft glow behind it.

They also had a nice view of S.T.A.R. Labs in the distance.

So they were the first people in Jitters to notice when—

When a white-gold plume shot into the air out of the top of S.T.A.R. Labs.

When a cloud of dark matter mushroomed above it.

When a golden sphere expanded outward across the city.

Barry, already on high alert, saw the first step. Leonard and Cisco, on the side of the table facing the window, saw the second. And by the time the sphere formed and spread outwards, everyone was watching.

Barry didn’t hesitate. He leapt out of his seat, not caring about anyone around him finding out his identity, and tore out of Jitters. He raced through the city—not trying to avoid the dark matter, that
wasn’t the priority.

No, he had to get to S.T.A.R. Labs and find out what went wrong.

The sheer shock of seeing the particle accelerator explode again had cleared all thoughts of time travel from his head, but when the rain pounded down faster around him, he glanced to his right.

Another Flash was running beside him, giving him a baffled look, and then vanished.

Barry skidded to a stop outside City Hall, hardly able to breathe.

…Okay. Stop Zolomon, find out what went wrong with the accelerator. Two goals.

No—not just *find out* what went wrong.

Barry had to stop it.
Take 2; Crisis Averted

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Time travel. All right. It wasn’t like he hadn’t dealt with this before. Just—stop Zolomon, he told himself again. Worry about the other part after he was safely in custody.

This time, running into the building with Jesse, he guided her directly to the mayor’s office. Their quicker arrival time meant that they intercepted Zolomon before he entered the office.

Barry stopped about halfway down the hallway. Jesse, unaware of the plasma device, kept going, automatically trying to stop Hunter. Barry winced as the purple energy shot from the device, disabling her speed moments before she reached him. Her momentum sent her crashing to the ground.

Hunter, who’d been about to open the door to the office, smirked and stepped back, turning to face Jesse. “Thought you might show up. I built something new since I—”

“—last saw you,” Barry muttered along with him. He knew the script. But the situation was different—there was less room to maneuver in the hallway. He wouldn’t even be able to get to Jesse without putting himself in the range of the plasma ball.

Last time, though, Zolomon had shot Barry with his lightning gun, not realizing that it would serve as a jumpstart to the disabled Speed Force. Hopefully—

Yup, he was already aiming squarely at Jesse, who threw Barry a frantic look in the brief moment before he pulled the trigger.

The lightning sent her tumbling backwards into the wall, but Speed Force crackled in her eyes. In an instant, she was twenty feet down the hall.

Now Barry was on one side of Zolomon, Jesse on the other. Hunter glanced back and forth between them and reached for his plasma ball. Barry recalled the every-direction pulse it had shot out last time and tensed, ready to speed around the corner if necessary. The deadly game of freeze tag was back on.

The office door opened, and the mayor (definitely Axel Walker, aka Trickster Junior, interesting change of career) looked out with a frown, probably curious about all the noise.

Hunter turned with a smile, raising his gun, and Barry took a few rapid steps forward, being sure to stay at least five feet away from Zolomon. That way, when he pulled the trigger, the lightning shot toward the nearest speedster instead of hitting Axel.

Barry winced at the lightning blast, but managed to at least stand his ground this time. He dropped into superspeed to talk to Jesse. Same thing as last time:

“You need to get the mayor out of here.”

“What are you going to do? Whatever that purple stuff was, it took away my powers.”

Barry unintentionally echoed Jesse’s words from before. “It neutralizes our electricity generation. Triggered by proximity…” He realized there was no way he should have known that, and hastily
tagged on, “…if I had to guess.”

“Then how can we stop him?”

“We’ll improvise,” Barry said with a shrug.

“That’s not a great plan,” Jesse muttered. “But let’s try it.”

There wasn’t enough room for Barry to throw lightning, so he settled for the wind tunnel effect again, knocking Zolomon backwards toward Jesse. She stepped back to avoid setting off the plasma, and then ran straight at a wall and leapt, pushed off the wall, and did a neat flip over Hunter’s head, landing on her feet in front of Barry. All the while staying out of range.

Barry stared at her wide-eyed, forgetting for a moment about the fight with how impressed he was.

Jesse shrugged. “I used to do gymnastics.” Then, in a blur, she grabbed the mayor and was gone.

Zolomon got to his feet and pulled out the plasma device, setting it off manually. Barry darted into the mayor’s office to avoid the shot, which also had the lateral benefit of coaxing Hunter into the room.

At Zolomon’s inevitable second attempt to hit Barry with the plasma, he avoided it by ducking behind the desk. The side effect being that the mayor’s desk was destroyed for the second time. At least now Barry could justify it as some belated justice for Axel’s actions as the Trickster in the other timeline.

With Hunter now in the larger space, Barry had no problem running literal circles around him. He threw a bolt of lightning, triggering the same white explosion as before, just as Jesse returned. Zolomon collapsed.

Mark Mardon, Vandal Savage, and now Hunter Zolomon—everyone was easier to defeat the second time.

On the way back from Earth-2, Barry decided not to tell anyone about the time travel.

In the heat of the (second) fight, he’d been too focused on Zolomon to talk about the future. And there was no point telling Harry and Jesse about it, not when they wouldn’t be in the same universe anyway. And now that he took the time to consider what he would say, he decided telling them nothing would be the best course of action.

After all, he knew the S.T.A.R. Labs team well enough to know that they would all want to be heroes. If he tried to warn them to get out of town immediately, they’d demand an explanation, and then they’d help him try to figure out what went wrong.

But if whatever caused the accelerator to blow was irreversible, all of them would be at the epicenter of the explosion. As of now, the majority of his friends would be at Jitters—not a safe distance, of course, but far safer than right next to the accelerator.

So he stayed quiet and turned down the Jitters invitation this time around, citing exhaustion as the reason. It wasn’t even a lie—having lived this night twice over, Barry was on the verge of collapsing. Not that that was going to stop him from solving this.
He blurred into S.T.A.R. Labs, staying out of the way of the few employees still working late, and, for the first time in this timeline, entered the particle accelerator.

He’d never seen it active before, at least not from this close. There were all sorts of lights and sounds, all of it lending a cheerful everything’s-in-order sense to the machine.

Barry did a lap of the pipeline, looking for any irregularities or warning lights, anything that seemed out of place. Another lap to confirm—still nothing. Of course, he wasn’t well-versed on what a fully functional accelerator should look like. Frustrated with his inability to spot the problem that had to be there, Barry did a third lap.

This time, when he returned to his starting place, the door back to the lab proper was opening. Barry darted around the curve of the accelerator, staying just out of sight. He peeked around and blinked in surprise, coming out of hiding.

“Eobard?”

Eobard jumped and spun in his direction. “Barry?”

Simultaneously, they each asked the other, “What are you doing here?”

Barry answered first. “I’m here for the same reason you are, I would guess. Something’s wrong with the particle accelerator, isn’t it? It’s about to blow up.”

Eobard’s face showed about a hundred expressions at once, and then understanding dawned. “You time traveled, didn’t you?”


Eobard looked at once proud and vaguely upset. “You managed to keep from giving it away. I taught you well.”

Barry gave a short laugh. “Yeah, I guess you did.” His expression sobered. “So, do you know the problem?”

“Come here.” Eobard waved Barry over with one hand; with the other he gestured to a panel on the wall.

Barry blurred to his side and pulled open the panel. He squinted at the wiring and switches inside, wishing he had brought a flashlight or something. “Why’s it going to explode?”

Eobard took a moment to respond, and when he did he sounded absolutely certain, though there was an odd edge to his voice—regret?

“Me.”

The answer was so completely unexpected that it took a full second for Barry to process it, and it cost him another half second to turn to look at Eobard, to see if he was serious.

The second and a half was more than enough time for Eobard, even with his unreliable speed, to slap a thick metal cuff onto Barry’s arm.

Barry felt his connection to the Speed Force shudder and fade away, but that wasn’t even half of the reason for the shock flooding through his system. He looked down at the cuff and then up at Eobard, eyes shining with an expression of utter betrayal.
“What…?”

Eobard took a deep breath and his face went completely blank. He shoved Barry away from the panel, almost throwing him to the ground, and then reached into the circuitry himself and flipped a few switches, shifted a few wires.

“No,” Barry said, putting a hand on Eobard’s shoulder. Without his speed, he couldn’t do anything to prevent Eobard from shrugging his hand off and moving to the next panel down. “No, Eobard, don’t do this! I—you—why?”

“Why do you think?” His voice was as blank as his expression. “I want to go home, Barry.”

“You’re going to destroy the city!”

“No. I’ve recreated this accident before. The explosion will be contained.”

“It won’t be.” Barry’s voice was broken, desperate, a stark contrast to the unmoved, unwavering quality of Eobard’s. “I time traveled, remember? I’ve seen it happen. You couldn’t contain it!”

“Then I’ll be more careful.” Eobard moved to another panel, still not looking at Barry.

Barry continued to follow, helpless to stop Eobard. He could try to change the panels back to their original settings, but he had no idea what the original settings were and he certainly didn’t want to make it worse.

“I would have taken you back to your time,” he tried.

“That’s a lie.”

“It’s not.” The words came out surprised; Barry hadn’t even been sure until he said it, but now he knew it was true. He would have taken Eobard home.

“I killed your mother.”

“No, you didn’t. Not in this timeline.”

“But I would have.”

Barry couldn’t stand his nonchalance anymore. He burst into furious yelling. “Have you been planning this from the beginning? You build the cuff to disable my powers in your spare time, you wait for the perfect moment you can blow up the particle accelerator.” His useless fury descended into sadness. “Was every moment of—of our friendship a lie, then?”

Now Eobard turned, and the expression on his face was desperation, doubt, grief. “No—no, Barry.” He plunged his hands into his hair and tipped his head back. “No—I designed that bracelet to restore my speed, but it failed and became that instead. I came up with the idea to use the particle accelerator, to make sure it would go off with no damage. Clearly I failed the first time, thank you for the warning, I’ll double check this time. But, Barry,” his expression was savage, maniacal in its determination, “I need to go home.”

Barry stared back at him, his emotions roiling in a stew of anger, fear, guilt, sadness. When his words came out his tone settled on hurt. “And you really didn’t think I would ever take you?”

Eobard looked simply confused, as though the answer was obvious. “No. Why would you?” He paused, let out a short laugh. “I killed your mother. Killed a lot of people. I’m your archenemy, the
thing you hate, the Reverse Flash.” He laughed again, sadly, and shook his head. “I can’t blame you. I understand why you wouldn’t take me home. I don’t blame you, but I…” He trailed off and looked distantly at the last of the panels.

“Please,” Barry begged. “Don’t do this. I’ll take you to the future right now. Just leave the accelerator.”

There was a long pause.

Then Eobard looked back at Barry, expression set, and Barry’s heart dropped.

“You’d better get out of here.”

Barry opened his mouth to refuse, but in a blur of red lightning he found himself outside the accelerator, the transparent door closing behind him.

Barry banged on the door hopelessly. “Eobard!” He could see him at the final panel, flipping one last switch and then closing it with an air of finality. “Don’t do this.” From the way Eobard’s shoulders stiffened, he knew he could hear him. “Please, Eobard, I’m begging you.”

“It won’t explode,” Eobard called back to him.

Barry hoped he was right.

An alarm suddenly started blaring. Eobard glanced up, shocked, and Barry slumped against the door, the confirmation of his worst fear proving too much for him.

“No,” Eobard said flatly. Disbelievingly. “That shouldn’t…” He turned to the nearest panel, examining it rapidly, and his eyes widened. “It was built differently in my timeline. I didn’t account for—”

He broke off and reached into the circuitry, working quickly, yanking wires, flipping switches, every other movement framed in red lightning. He blurred to the next panel, superspeed stuttering in and out. “No, no, no…” He slammed the panel closed. “It won’t shut down.”

“Of course not,” Barry said bitterly.

Eobard spun, met Barry’s eyes, expression conveying nothing but shock and sincerity. “This wasn’t supposed to happen.”

Barry glowered at Eobard. “I told you.” Eobard would still get his powers back—but the rest of the city would pay.

Eobard kept eye contact and, more genuinely than Barry had ever heard him speak, said, “I’m sorry.” He dug something out of his pocket—a remote—and hit a button.

The cuff fell off Barry’s arm. He glanced down at it, then back up at Eobard. He tried the door—locked, of course.

Eobard shook his head, coming to the other side of the door. The two of them were inches apart, separated by the impenetrable clear material. He spoke softly, just loud enough for Barry to hear it, and with sincere apology in his tone.

“Run, Barry…”

Behind him, Barry watched as a bright glow started, the beginnings of the explosion.
He returned his gaze to Eobard and they stared at each other for a fraction of a second.


Barry just had time to see the explosion overtake Eobard, to see the flicker of red lightning start in his eyes, and then he ran.

He didn’t stop until he was outside Central City, until the blast radius finally quite chasing after him. He turned and watched the light of the explosion fade, and then he headed back into the city.

Last time, he’d been in a coma while others picked up the pieces.

Now it was Barry’s turn to deal with the fallout.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, the chapter title was a lie. There will be no crises averted.

As a reminder, my update schedule will be changing. I'll do one or two a week, and they'll be longer chapters to make up for it. Also gives me a chance to leave you with this beautiful cliffhanger for a little longer. *smiles innocently*
After

Chapter Notes

In which all of the characters go through their own specialized brand of torture.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In some timelines, Harrison Wells’s particle accelerator never explodes.

In some timelines, it explodes in 2020.

In others, it does so in 2014.

And, in a few very rare timelines, it happens to explode in 2016.

For example, in this one.


At S.T.A.R. Labs, the destruction was inevitable. The few people in the building ran for exits as soon as they realized what was going on. Some made it. Others didn’t. All across the lab, disparate experiments collided, with frequently detrimental results.

At Jitters, about half the patrons watched the colorful explosion through the windows, with no idea what they were seeing. One table had a slightly better idea than the rest of them—not that the knowledge protected them when the expanding golden sphere of dark matter reached the coffee shop. The window broke. Tables collapsed. People screamed. Between the light of the blast and the rain and the sparks flying from every electronic device in the café, it was impossible to tell who had crumpled to the ground in the aftermath—though there did seem, oddly enough, to be an entire person missing from that one particular table.

At an apartment across town, a police detective and a reporter looked up at the muffled boom and frowned at the dishes rattling within their cabinets. When the window shattered, Eddie automatically moved to shield Iris from the golden light.

At a house in the center of the city, the founders of S.T.A.R. Labs understood almost immediately the cause of the energies and forces radiating through their home. The explosion sent furniture tumbling down around them. A particularly heavy bookshelf collapsed—directly on top of Tess.

Mere moments after the glow of the explosion faded, a red streak trailing yellow lightning was visible running down the streets of Central City—ducking into and out of buildings, helping people to their feet, making frequent trips to the nearest hospital. He rectified all the damage he could, but it was a large city and he was only one person, however fast.

On a trip into Mercury Labs, he exited with not only a dozen injured people over the course of five minutes, but also a particular piece of technology that he figured they wouldn’t miss and hoped he wouldn’t need.

Then he set course for Jitters, fear for his friends overtaking him. Barry burst through the door and went directly to their table.
Leonard was picking himself up off the ground, rubbing his head. Caitlin was crouching at Cisco’s side, who was in the midst of a seizure. Ronnie had his hands to his head and a look of severe confusion on his face. Hartley was… nowhere to be found.

Barry went to Caitlin’s side. “How can I help?”

“I don’t know.” Caitlin sounded on the verge of tears. “This started immediately after the explosion—what happened?”

“I’ll explain later,” Barry said hurriedly. “Do you think I can safely transport him to a hospital?”

“You’d better try,” Caitlin said. “He hasn’t stopped—it’s been ten minutes—” In her panic she couldn’t complete a sentence.

Barry carefully, carefully lifted Cisco into his arms and ran, at a slow pace compared to his usual, down to the hospital and back.

“Where’s Hartley?” he asked, glancing around Jitters.

“I’m…” Ronnie started—at least, the word came from Ronnie’s mouth. He looked even more confused and glanced down at his hands.

“Firestorm,” Barry said, resigned.

Caitlin looked baffled. “What? Ronnie—where is Hartley?”

Barry cut in to explain—he guessed even Hartley wasn’t sure. “Firestorm occurred in my timeline—if I’m right, and I think I am, they’ve merged.”

“Merged?” Leonard asked.

“Hartley’s mind is in Ronnie’s body,” Barry clarified.

Ronnie suddenly caught fire. Barry pulled Caitlin back, next to Leonard. The fire died down after a moment.

“That’s the other detail about Firestorm,” Barry said. “You okay, Hartley? Ronnie?”

“I’m all for being inside a hot guy, but this is just ridiculous,” Firestorm said—obviously Hartley’s words. “Ronnie is fine, he won’t shut up, though. Keeps yelling at me to get out of his body. He wants to know if you’re okay, Caitlin.” Seemingly to himself, he rolled his eyes and said, “You can see her, she’s clearly okay.”

“I’m fine, Ronnie,” Caitlin said. She frowned and turned to Barry. “How do we separate them?”

“I have some tech that might help, but it’ll need to be modified for this purpose,” Barry said. He pulled out the quantum splicer he had taken from Mercury Labs. “It might… It might be better to wait until tomorrow. It’s been an exceptionally long day. We can meet at S.T.A.R. Labs in the morning.”

“Cisco is in the hospital and my husband is half not here and half on fire,” Caitlin said sharply. “And you expect us just to go home?”

“We’ll be fine for the night,” Hartley said—and wow, it was strange looking at Ronnie and knowing Hartley Rathaway was the one speaking. Dr. Stein had been hard enough to reconcile. Hartley glared upward, as though at Ronnie. “Oh, and you think it’s fun for me being stuck in your
body?” He smirked sideways at Caitlin. “I’m sure your wife is jealous.”

Caitlin looked like she was about to explode into flames. “Hartley Rathaway, when you and Ronnie are separated, so help me…”

Barry stepped between them. “Hartley, maybe it would be better if you stayed at your place tonight.”

“I’m sure your neighbors are used to seeing strange men walking in and out,” Leonard added.

Hartley rolled his eyes more exuberantly than Ronnie surely ever had.

“Everyone get some sleep,” Barry insisted. “Meet me at S.T.A.R. Labs as soon as you can tomorrow.”

“What about Harrison and Tess?” Caitlin asked. “Have you made sure they’re all right?”

“Not yet,” Barry said. “It’ll be my next stop.”

Leonard narrowed his eyes at him. “You ought to get some sleep too, Barry. I’ll check on Harrison and Tess. You don’t even know where they live.”

“I… no, I don’t,” Barry admitted. And he seriously was exhausted. “All right.”

So it was Leonard who knocked on the Wells’ door less than half an hour later, after retrieving his cold gun from S.T.A.R. Labs. When he got no response, nobody would ever say that he wasn’t justified in blasting the door off its hinges with his gun.

“Dr. Wells?” Leonard retreated to formality despite his abrupt entry, a reaction to the sound coming from the other room.

The sound of sobbing.

Leonard dropped the gun and ran toward the origin of the noise.

The sight that went along with the sound stopped Leonard dead in his tracks, and for a long, helpless moment he just stared blankly at the scene before him.

Furniture was strewn haphazard everywhere, a particularly tall bookshelf on its side right next to the two scientists in the center of the room. That was… that was Tess lying in a pool of her own blood. That was Harrison, kneeling at her side, clutching her hand and sobbing incessantly.

Leonard crossed to them in unsteady steps and sunk to the floor on the other side of Tess. He reached out to take her pulse, pausing when Harrison looked at him with such an incredibly grief-stricken face that Leonard knew there could be no mistake.

Tess was dead.

Leonard reeled back.

There was an incredibly long interim before anything changed. Harrison continued to cry, Leonard sat immobile with shock.

Tess continued to be dead.
Finally Leonard shifted. Stood. Grasped Harrison by the shoulders and wrenched him bodily away from Tess’s…

From Tess’s…

Just away. Harrison was in no state to be left alone. And Leonard couldn’t stand one more minute in this room or in this house or in this city, if that was an option, but it wasn’t, so at the least Leonard would get out of the room out of the house as far from this as possible.

He kept an arm wrapped tight beneath Harrison’s shoulders, bearing him up. More carrying than supporting.

Leonard was shaking, under the weight. Not just Harrison’s, Harrison was thin despite Tess’s best efforts

—and would he even remember to eat without her—

but the weight of Harrison’s grief, of his own.

He picked up his cold gun on the way out (and God help anyone who dared to get in his way now) and they stumbled down the ruined streets of Central City.

Despite the late night, it was before dawn when the majority of the team gathered at S.T.A.R. Labs. That was when Cisco’s seizures abruptly stopped, and the rest of them readily used that as an excuse to convene. Ronnie and Hartley were completely sick of each other. Caitlin was of course impatient to see her husband restored to himself. Barry needed only a speedster’s few hours of sleep. Leonard was there before all of them, sitting in the newly barren Cortex in an immutable silence.

The notable exceptions to the cohesion of their team were Harrison and Tess.

Explanations were quick and terse.

“The seizures stopped on their own an hour ago. I doubt they’ll return,” Cisco said. He glanced at Barry and confusion flickered briefly across his face.

“Ronnie and I are unfortunately fused,” Hartley said.

“Harrison will join us as soon as he can,” Leonard said. “Tess… will not.”

Caitlin let out a sob and fell into Ronnie. Hartley, who would have shoved her away under any other circumstances, put his arms around her and hugged her instead. Cisco put his hands to his temples, stunned. Barry clapped his hands over his mouth, tears shining in his eyes.

“…We need to,” Barry said after an eternal moment, lowering his arms. “Um. To separate Firestorm.” His words fell flat into the silence.

“Yeah,” Hartley said numbly. He repeated it with more conviction. “Yes, please, get me out of here.” He seemed to notice that he was still hugging Caitlin and immediately pushed her away, though he did so gently.

“You’ll need a quantum splicer,” Cisco said absentmindedly, as though he wasn’t even totally focused on the situation.
“Exactly,” Barry said with a frown, pulling the necessary technology from his pocket. “How…” Vibe, he remembered, and didn’t finish the question.

“We’ll need to enhance the quantum superposition so it’ll align properly with the Firestorm matrix,” Cisco said, taking the splicer from Barry.

“We can do that with the help of a proton transfer pack,” Hartley said. He paused and let out a long-suffering sigh. “Ronnie insists I tell you that was his suggestion.”

“Let’s get to work,” Leonard said.

The work… helped. Refocused all of them on something other than the tragedy. They made the necessary adjustments to the splicer and then carefully set it on Ronnie’s chest.

“I hope this works,” Hartley muttered.

“It will,” Caitlin said fiercely.

Harrison entered then, lingering at the door, uncertain, unsteady.

The splicer shot out its bracing straps and then Firestorm lit up with white flame. Both Ronnie and Hartley screamed as they returned to themselves. Ronnie cut himself off with a gasp and patted down his body, immensely relieved.

Hartley, however, immediately collapsed.

And he didn’t stop screaming.

His hands were clenched tight to his ears, eyes squeezed shut, glasses askew, and he gasped for breath and looked up at all of them, even Harrison, as they rushed to his side.

Caitlin went into her medical mode instantly. “Hartley, what hurts? How intense is the pain?”

He gazed up at her uncomprehendingly, teeth gritted against whatever agony he had to be feeling.

“…I can’t hear,” he said, a little too loud. “I can’t—” He interrupted himself with a broken growl, what would have been a scream if he’d had the breath to manage it. He gestured helplessly at his ear with one hand before wincing and clamping it protectively against his head again. “It’s ringing… It hurts… I…”

Ronnie knelt at his side and held out his hand, expression set. He was still wearing the quantum splicer.

“…What?” Hartley gasped.

“Merge with me again. Until we figure out a better solution,” Ronnie ordered.

Oddly, Hartley seemed to understand his words. He looked on the verge of protesting, but then sucked in another sharp breath of pain and hurriedly took Ronnie’s hand. Firestorm fused back together.

“He’ll be all right,” he said, his mannerisms indicating Ronnie was in control this time. “We have to figure out something for his tinnitus before we split again.”
Harrison let out a loud moan and slumped into a chair, fingers knotted in his hair. “How did this happen?” he whispered. “The accelerator shouldn’t have malfunctioned. This is all my fault.”

“No, it’s not,” Barry said before anyone else could protest. He spoke with a mixture of certainty and resignation that indicated his words were more than idle reassurance. “I know why the accelerator exploded.”

It took a moment for everyone to turn slowly toward him.

Barry looked horribly guilty. “I need… I need to tell all of you the truth.” His eyes briefly closed, and then they flicked open with a new look of resigned determination. “Edward Clariss… that wasn’t his real name. It’s Eobard Thawne, and he’s from the future.”

Slowly, Barry explained everything. How Eobard and Barry were enemies in the future. How in the other timeline, Eobard had used the body of Harrison Wells. How they started becoming friends in this timeline despite that. How Barry had seen the accelerator explosion, traveled back in time, and tried to stop it.

How Eobard had deliberately, unintentionally, some combination thereof, caused it.

Barry’s voice cut off sharply after the last sentence. He swallowed. “I… I’m sorry.”

Everyone stared at him, shocked, upset, mournful.

Cisco spoke first. “You always want to see the best in people, Barry. I don’t blame you.” He looked disgusted. “Eobard Thawne, on the other hand…”

“Thank you for telling us the truth,” Ronnie said. “This sucks, a lot, but I think we can—”

“…No.”

They all turned to see who had spoken.

Harrison stood up from his seat behind the computers. His face was frighteningly blank.

“No,” he repeated, with that expression that looked like Eobard, in a rasp that sounded like Harry. He crossed the Cortex with quick, clipped steps, and stood right in front of Barry. “You brought this man into our lives, knowing full well who he was, knowing full well what he was capable of, and you lied to us to protect him, this enemy of yours.”

Barry stumbled a couple of steps back, unable to look Harrison in the eye.

“Dr. Wells, he couldn’t have known…” Caitlin started hesitantly.

Harrison threw her a glare with enough venom in it that she fell silent, eyes widening in terror. She exchanged fearful glances with Cisco, Leonard, and Ronnie-slash-Hartley.

None of them had ever seen Harrison angry before. And this level of fury was almost physical in its intensity. Leonard subconsciously tightened his grip on his cold gun.

“He couldn’t have known?” Harrison’s gaze snapped back to Barry. “You admitted it yourself—Eobard Thawne did the exact same thing in your timeline. Yet you still manipulated all of us into trusting him. You couldn’t have known?” He took a step closer to Barry. “Bull. Shit. And now my wife—” He choked on a sob, rage giving way to grief. “Now my wife. Is dead. Because of you. Because you decided to trust your mortal enemy.” He fell back a step and put his head in his hands.
“Dr. Wells, Harrison, I’m so sorry.” Barry, tears streaming down his own face, moved forward to comfort him.

Before he could, Harrison wrenched himself back to full height and glared at Barry, renewed fury shining in his eyes. He took a single step forward, closing the distance between them, and growled his next words into Barry’s face.

“Get out.”

Barry blinked. “H-Harrison…”

“Get out!” Harrison snarled, throwing out an arm to point at the door. “Out of S.T.A.R. Labs, now, and I swear on my wife’s dead body that if I ever see you on these premises again, Barry Allen, I will ensure that you join her.”

Barry met Harrison’s eyes for a fraction of a second and then ran.

Harrison stared after him, breathing heavily through gritted teeth, and then returned to his seat by the computers and dropped his head again into his hands.

Barry walked away from S.T.A.R. Labs, hands in his pockets, head bowed. He couldn’t blame Harrison—he was right. This was Barry’s fault. If he’d remembered who Eobard was, if he hadn’t deluded himself into believing the Reverse Flash had changed, this wouldn’t have happened.

“Barry!” a voice called after him, cutting into his introspection. Barry glanced over his shoulder at the figure running to catch up with him.

“Cisco?”

Cisco slowed to a stop in front of him. “Barry, it wasn’t your fault. None of us blame you.”

“Really?” Barry said flatly.

“Well, okay, Dr. Wells might.” Cisco winced. “I’ve literally never seen him get angry before. That was actually terrifying.”

“Yeah.” Barry sighed.

“I can’t believe we’ve been working with Eobard-freaking-Thawne this whole time.” Cisco shook his head.

“Yeah…” Barry repeated. Then he blinked. “Wait, Cisco, can you…?”

“Remember?” Cisco grinned. “Hell yeah, I can. And there’s someone who wants to talk to you.” He closed his eyes.

“What do you mean? Who wants to talk to me?”

Cisco’s eyes opened and his stance shifted. There was something ever-so-slightly different in his voice when he spoke. “Barry, I am seriously pissed at you right now.”

“You—Cisco?” Surely what Barry thought was happening couldn’t be happening.
“Yeah! It’s me! From the timeline you abandoned!”

Okay, so it was.

“Cisco, how are you—what?”

“Turns out when you erase a timeline, Barry, it doesn’t just disappear. So when this other version of me got hit with the dark matter, he became Vibe.” His voice changed. “And then I started having seizures, my mind trying to reconcile the timelines—” Another shift. “—speaking of which, Barry, you changing the timeline nearly killed me. Remember when we captured the Reverse Flash? It was worse than that. A couple more timelines and I’ll have died more times than the Doctor.”

“Woah, slow down.” Barry held up his hands. “I can’t tell which of you is which. This is seriously confusing. We’ve gotta come up with some way to tell you apart. And how are you even talking through this Cisco, other Cisco?”

“We have some sort of mental connection,” Cisco said. Either one, maybe both, Barry couldn’t tell. “I think I could always do it, but I’ve never had the chance. This is the first time you’ve changed the timeline where both versions of me have powers and aren’t dead. And me, from the old timeline, I call being Cisco Prime.”

“That’s not fair, why do you get to be Cisco Prime?” the other Cisco complained.

“I’ve known Barry for longer.”

“Um, I remember your timeline, which means I’ve known him for just as long. Actually, I’ve technically known him for longer, because I remember yours but you don’t remember mine.”

“Well, Barry’s known me for longer, so, I get to be Cisco Prime.”

Barry’s eyebrows had been climbing higher and higher during this whole debate. “Um, Cisco, as much as I like hearing you argue with yourself, you sound really crazy right now.”

“Yeah, if you’re not going to talk to Barry, get back to your own timeline,” Cisco said to Cisco Prime, who immediately rolled his eyes at… himself.

“Right. I’ve been trying to get through to you the past couple of months to say seriously? What the hell? I thought you decided last year that you weren’t going to save your mom! And now—”

“Cisco, I had both of my parents taken away from me. I couldn’t just…” He gestured helplessly. “But yeah, I made a mistake, and now Tess is dead and Harrison hates me and Ronnie and Hartley are Firestorm and who even knows about the rest of the city…” Barry sighed. “And I’m sure your timeline’s Central City has been taken over by metahumans without the Flash there to stop them.”

“Well, I don’t know what’s going on in your timeline—Ronnie and Hartley are Firestorm? I’m sure they’re both ecstatic about that—but don’t worry, our Central City is fine. We found a new Flash.”

Barry frowned. “Wait, who?”

“Wally.” Cisco shrugged. “Turns out, when he was hit by the dark matter when Harry tried to restore your powers, it affected him. Some meta attacked S.T.A.R. Labs and Wally just…” He made a ‘swoosh’ gesture. “I wouldn’t be surprised if Jesse—”
“Jesse’s a speedster too,” Barry interrupted. “I brought her and Harry back to help me stop the Time Wraiths.”

“Really? No wonder I haven’t been able to vibe Harry. And they remembered you?”

“Yeah, separate Earths’ timelines aren’t linked. Eobard said something about how the dimensional boundaries preserve the timeline.”

“Eobard.” Cisco scoffed. “The other me was telling me how you worked with him.”

“Yeah.” Barry sighed. “I already feel terrible about that, so please don’t start.”

“I know. I heard what Harrison said.” Cisco winced in sympathy. “I can tune in to what’s going on in your timeline. Kind of like vibing, but I can only see through Cisco Two’s eyes.”

“And you can hijack my body,” Cisco Two interjected. “When I let you.”

“Right. Which could be useful if you ever need your old friend around.”

“I have literally all of your memories!” Cisco Two said. “For example, Barry, I can’t believe you never told me that Leonard kidnapped me in your timeline.”

Barry shrugged. “There’s a lot I didn’t tell you, and surprisingly enough, that particular fact wasn’t really high on my list.”

Cisco shrugged. “All right. But I expect you to tell me next timeline if I’m becoming friends with a bad guy.”

“I’ll do my best.”

His expression crumpled to a frown. “Hey, Cisco Prime talking. I have to go. Meta alert at CCPD. If you need me, Cisco Two knows how to contact me.”

“See you… or something,” Barry said.

“I should get back,” Cisco Two said, tilting his head toward S.T.A.R. Labs. “We have to figure out how to help Hartley.” He hesitated.

“Go,” Barry urged. “You have my number. Let me know if there’s any way I can help… if there’s any way I can help without actually entering S.T.A.R. Labs, I guess.”

Cisco winced. “We’ll talk to Harrison,” he promised. “He’s upset, and grieving—we all are—but he’ll come around.”

“I hope so,” Barry muttered. “Let me know how it goes with Hartley.”

“Will do,” Cisco said. He started to jog away, but called over his shoulder, “I have been and always shall be your friend.”

“Which one of you was that?” Barry called.

“Both!”

Barry stared after him and shook his head, disbelieving.

This timeline, often painfully, sometimes entertainingly, never failed to surprise him.
I would like it to be on the record that I did not want Tess to die. When planning the aftermath of the explosion a while back, I went back and forth about her and Harrison (Should they both live? Should one die? Both?) before realizing that I loved both of them too much to choose and flipped two coins. Harrison's was heads. Tess's was tails. That wasn't fun to write. Most of this chapter wasn't fun to write.

Anyway. Happy 4th of July! Even if you're not in the US, it's still July 4th, so have an awesome, non-holiday day anyway! (Unless it's July 5th in your time zone. Or another date by the time you read this. You know what, just have a nice day.)
Cisco didn’t hesitate when he ran back into S.T.A.R. Labs. He hauled an armful of materials from his workstation and set them down on the floor of the Cortex.

The others frowned at him—all but Harrison, who hadn’t moved from his spot behind the computers. He didn’t seem to be furious anymore, but had retreated into an expression of deep grief.

“For Hartley,” Cisco said by way of explanation. Sure, the guy was a bit of an asshole in every timeline, but Cisco remembered the basics of his earpieces. “Hearing dampeners.”

Ronnie’s (or Hartley’s? Firestorm’s, anyway) frown deepened into a scowl. “Cisco…”

“I got this,” Cisco said, his voice coming out a little sharper than he meant it to. Hold it together, Cisco. So he’d just seen his greatest achievement literally blow up in his face, and he now remembered a whole Back to the Future 2’s worth of alternate timelines. He could deal.

“Cisco, that won’t help.” Might have been Ronnie’s voice, but that irritation was absolutely Hartley. “You’re solving the wrong problem.”

“Then what is the problem?” Cisco’s hands still and he looked up at Firestorm, confused. If it wasn’t the agonizingly enhanced hearing other-timeline!Hartley dealt with, what was up with his ears?

“I couldn’t hear anything.” Hartley grimaced. “There was an awful ringing in my ears, but not loud enough to account for it. I just can’t hear.”

“Why would your ears be ringing if you can’t hear?” Leonard asked.

He shrugged.

“Tinnitus can occur even if you’re… well, even if you’re deaf,” Caitlin said.

Hartley sighed deeply. “I could get used to being deaf, but please tell me there’s a way to stop the tinnitus.”

Caitlin noticeably hesitated. Hartley stared at her. “Just tell me the truth, Caity.”

She didn’t even comment on the nickname. “There’s not a lot that can be done for it.”

Hartley looked away. “Of course.”

“What about that Time Wraith wand of yours?” Leonard asked. “Sound’s just vibrations.”

“It’s worth a try,” Caitlin agreed. “We left it in the Cold Cave.”

Their quest to retrieve the sonic device from the Cold Cave was less than successful. Leonard’s lab had been totally devastated by the explosion, machine parts strewn everywhere in diverse states of broken, burned, and melted. The entry mechanism into the Cold Cave itself took three tries to work, and when it finally did, wood and metal avalanched from the doorway. The floor above had
collapsed into the room, utterly destroying everything within it.

“Wonderful,” Hartley said.

“We could rebuild it,” Cisco said.

“I know.” He let out a long sigh. “But until then? No offense to my dear bodymate, but I really don’t want to be in Ronnie’s body any longer than I have to.” He glanced at Caitlin. “His influence isn’t good for me—I’m starting to be attracted to girls.” He shuddered.

Cisco frowned, considering. He’d never tried something like this before, but he figured he could manage it.

“I think I need to introduce myself,” he said. “I’m Cisco Ramon. Also known as Vibe—as in, vibrations. I have powers.”

“Like the other timeline?” Caitlin asked, understanding dawning in her eyes.

He nodded. “Hartley, Ronnie, if the two of you want to try separating again, I think I can help with the tinnitus? If I can get the right frequency.”

“You’re a…what was the word? Metahuman?” Hartley said with a raise of his—Ronnie’s—eyebrows.

“And my powers are cooler than yours,” Cisco said. “You can light yourself on fire? I can manipulate the vibrations of the multiverse.” He paused. “Although, you can fly, so I guess the competition is pretty close…”

“Do you really think you’ll be able to help me?” Hartley asked skeptically.

“I’m gonna go with probably yes. Emphasis on the probably.”

“Great. Really looking forward to staking my health on those odds.”

“I’ll try not to kill you.” Cisco shook his head. “Really, it might take a couple of minutes, but if you’re willing to risk it, I can help you. I’m sure Ronnie wants his own body back too.”

“He does.” Hartley considered for a moment. “Fine.” Firestorm went up in flames, and then two separate bodies stumbled from the inferno. Hartley, expecting the pain this time, valiantly managed to resist the screams that were obviously building up in his throat.

Cisco hurriedly focused. He’d never tried anything with vibes other than opening breaches, at least not before the timelines diverged. The other Cisco (he refused to acknowledge him as Cisco Prime) had, with his Hartley’s help, started to fine-tune his control of the vibrations, but it was still theoretical to this Cisco.


He held out a hand, wishing for his Vibe glasses, and vibed.

The vibrations lingered on the boundary of not-quite-visible as they pulsed their way across the room. Hartley let out a short gasp as they hit him and shook his head. Cisco, gritting his teeth together to keep his focus, changed the frequency slightly, moving up through the register.

Finally, Hartley let out a staggered sigh of relief and got to his feet. “Thank you,” he said in a more sincere tone than Cisco had ever heard from (this version of) him.
Or was it? Wait, yeah, that other moment was the other timeline. He was going to have to draw a diagram at some point.

“The tinnitus is completely gone?” Caitlin asked.

Hartley’s gaze went to her and he frowned. “Still deaf. Don’t know how to read lips.”

Cisco thought about making some sarcastic comment, but it was taking too much focus to maintain the vibe. He slowly lowered his hand, but kept the same frequency emitting in Hartley’s direction.

Yo, he thought in the direction of the other timeline. Sending his thoughts across the time barrier was nowhere near as hard as opening breaches through the dimensional barrier, so he definitely had this part down. Is there a way to keep this going without having to think so much?

The other Cisco responded after a moment, the words echoing through his mind in a voice indistinguishable from his own inner monologue. It’s like a bug bite. You have to keep remembering not to scratch, and then eventually the itch goes away and it’s automatic. You’ll stop having to think about it in probably an hour or so.

Their communication happened faster than any real-world dialogue, meaning that Cisco tuned back in just after Caitlin’s hurried and deliberately mouthed apology.

Ronnie turned to face his newfound partner. “But you can understand me.”

Hartley nodded, face crumpled in confusion. “I can’t quite hear you, but your meaning comes through.”

“It’s the Firestorm matrix,” Cisco said. “Same thing happened after the accelerator explosion in the other timeline. Not with Hartley, though. But congratulations! The two of you have an empathic connection now. I expect an invite to the wedding.”

Caitlin looked highly offended. Ronnie held back a laugh and summarized Cisco’s words so Hartley got the joke.

“You’ll be the first on the list,” Hartley assured Cisco.

There was a burble of noise from the hallway leading into the Cortex—voices conversing, mostly sounding confused. Cisco jumped at the sound, nearly dropping Hartley’s frequency in his surprise. He’d forgotten, somehow—he’d forgotten that it wasn’t just their small team. That the S.T.A.R. Labs here was still active, at least up until last night. He had another brief sense of disorientation, trying to keep the timelines straight. Barry must have had such a headache doing exactly that for the past couple of months.

When the employees responsible for the conversation entered the Cortex, Harrison dragged himself out of the little bubble of mourning he seemed to have enclosed himself in. He stood. The newcomers, a few of the lab techs from two floors down, looked at him immediately, ignoring the group still gathered in the middle of the room.

“Go home,” Harrison said quietly. “Spread the word—post it on the front door if you have to. You’ll hear everything on the news tonight, I’m sure.”

“Dr. Wells, if there’s anything we can do…” one of the techs, Karen, started.

He shook his head. “Thank you, but no.” His voice was subdued. “Go be with your families.”
“I have no doubt that there will be people coming in and out all day. I am not a psychologist, but I’m certain I will be in no state to discuss the events of last night calmly and rationally.”

He paused for a moment. Everyone else was gracious enough not to agree aloud. Ronnie whispered to Hartley, serving as an interpreter.

“The particle accelerator failed due to a routine fluctuation in its power consumption coupled with unexpected levels of electromagnetic induction from the storm.” He locked eyes with each of the scientists in the room. “Do you understand?”

They all nodded. The implication was clear—there would be no mention of speedsters from the future in the official report about the incident.

Harrison gave a grateful nod.

His timing couldn’t have been more precise, as, at exactly that moment, more voices resounded in the hallway leading to the Cortex.

Cisco gently tugged Hartley away from the middle of the room and toward the exit on the opposite side of the Cortex. With Hartley’s deafness and Cisco struggling to stay focused, neither of them would be able to contribute much. Leonard dropped a few steps back as well. Of course—the others in the room were head scientists, but Leonard had a low profile at S.T.A.R. Labs. His presence was out of place, and it would raise questions that would be difficult to answer. He’d kept the Citizen Cold secret for too long to risk it in this way.

As they made their escape, Caitlin and Ronnie effortlessly began to evade questions from the incoming surge of reporters.

The rest of the city took the day off.

Aside from hospitals, of course. And the police. Both of which were inundated with floods of injured people and reports thereof, respectively.

Luckily for the entirety of the city, the hospitals had been majorly unaffected by the accelerator explosion—or, at least, the destruction within was quickly and curiously undone moments later by a mysterious blur that witnesses who weren’t on painkillers might have sworn was yellow.

The police, however, were not quite so fortunate. Due to its proximity to the blast, the precinct had been utterly ripped apart. The building had stopped just short of collapsing, but everything inside was in a state of complete disrepair. Captain Singh, with the approval of Mayor Walker, ordered a temporary relocation to City Hall until a suitable replacement could be constructed.

When Barry showed up, late as usual, Singh waved him away.

“I doubt there’ll be any crime scenes, Allen. Right now all of our emergencies are just the aftereffects of whatever the hell happened at S.T.A.R. Labs. And that investigation will be done by the Feds, I’m sure. People who rank higher than you or me.”

“So…”
“So go be with your family and friends,” Singh ordered, turning away to converse with one of the detectives.

Barry had visited his parents last night to confirm that they were both safe, so instead of going there he went to find Iris and Eddie. He’d checked on them last night too, of course, but he still owed them an explanation.

A lot of explanations, actually. Last night, with Eddie hurt from the explosion, and Iris still in full-on reporter mode when it came to interrogating him, Barry had promised to tell them everything. Iris, in return, had promised to leave the apartment’s largest window open.

So Barry breezed right into their living room, right in the middle of an argument between the married couple. Eddie was insisting that a broken arm and a few cuts did not mean that he was unable to get up off the couch, and Iris told him firmly that no, a broken arm definitely meant he was required to do nothing for at least twenty-four hours.

Seeing their casually in-love interactions, Barry couldn’t resist thinking of Iris from his timeline, promising to be there when he got back.

“…Am I interrupting anything?” he asked.

They both jumped.

“Barry, nice to see you,” Eddie said. “Tell Iris that a broken arm won’t prevent me from going to work.”

“Singh gave him the day off,” Iris said. “And he still wants to go.”

“Right now, I’m more interested in what Barry has to say, actually,” Eddie said. “You promised to tell us what the explosion was.”

“Yeah.” Barry hadn’t thought about what to tell them.

But he was sick of lying.

“The particle accelerator at S.T.A.R. Labs blew up last night. It released dark matter into the air, and it’s going to create metahumans—people with powers, like my speed.”

He explained everything. Okay, most things. He didn’t go into details about the alternate timeline, he certainly didn’t talk about who caused the accelerator to explode, and he didn’t mention names when referring to Citizen Cold or any of the S.T.A.R. Labs team. Eddie was still a cop, after all, and Iris was still a reporter.

Iris and Eddie exchanged doubtful and confused looks with increasing frequency, but neither of them interrupted until Barry was done.

“So,” he summed up finally, “Life in Central City is about to get a lot weirder.”

A week later, Barry decided that, with the support of S.T.A.R. Labs or without it, he had better start preparing for the inevitable metahuman attacks that were sure to come.

But he had few allies—Iris and Eddie had said that they would help out as much as they could, but even that was a tenuous promise that Barry wasn’t sure he could afford to rely on. Besides, he had
no base. No place to go. In the other timeline, Oliver had set up a secret basement beneath a nightclub when he was on his own, but for some reason Barry doubted that would work for him.

He went running. Looking for a building that he could use, something that wasn’t just a bleak, empty warehouse. He’d never chosen S.T.A.R. Labs to be basically his second home, but he was used to having ready access to its technology—and its people, too. Now, he might have lost all of that.

In his frustration and loneliness, his feet took him down familiar streets. Joe’s house. Jitters. The old precinct, now an abandoned mess that nobody had been in since the explosion.

Wait…

Barry circled back and stopped on the sidewalk outside the precinct, gazing up at it.

Before the lightning, before S.T.A.R. Labs and the Flash, all Barry had wanted was to find his mother’s murderer. He had eagerly taken the CSI job and thrown himself into his work. S.T.A.R. might be his place now, but the precinct was originally his second home.

And now here it was, left empty, surely a mess on the inside… but still standing.

Barry blurred inside and surveyed the chaos within. A couple of pillars had crumbled. There was shattered glass everywhere, and the desks were as shredded as the papers that had been on top of them.

Upstairs, his CSI lab was in slightly better condition, but that wasn’t saying much. At least most of the tech seemed to be intact, though the mixture of chemicals that had toppled from his shelves had burned a crater halfway through the floor.

Barry got to work. Soon he was nothing more than a blur around the precinct, straightening the place up. He’d have to somehow convince Singh not to tear this place down once everything returned to mostly-normal. Or maybe Iris would write a piece about how the CCPD precinct was an important landmark and shouldn’t be destroyed.

He was ripped from his thoughts when a voice called from the entrance, “Love what you’ve done with the place.”

Barry dropped out of superspeed and stared at the intruder. “Leonard? What are you doing here?”

“Wanted to talk to you.” Leonard was in full Citizen Cold regalia, though his cold gun was tucked away inside the parka. “Cisco told me where to find you.” He grimaced. “What that kid can do is creepy.”

“Why would you want to talk to me?”

“Haven’t seen you around in, what, a week? Thought you might call or stop by or something. Didn’t seem like you to just vanish.”

“Yeah, well, I think Harrison made it pretty clear that he didn’t want me around. Unless he’s changed his mind…”

“He hasn’t,” Leonard admitted. “Which is why I wanted to talk to you. If you and Cisco are right, and I’m inclined to trust that you are, metas are going to be running rampant through the city any day now. I figure you’ll need some help containing them.”
I’m the fastest man alive!” Barry said. “I don’t need… okay, yeah, that might be nice. So what does that mean? You’re joining my side?” He frowned to himself. “I didn’t think we needed sides…”

Leonard nodded. “I’m not the only one. Cisco, Caitlin, Ronnie, even Hartley—they’ve all promised their support. But they’re going to play both sides. They’re still needed at S.T.A.R. Labs. The media is taking a lot of interest in the events of last week.”

“I can’t believe we have sides,” Barry muttered, shaking his head. More seriously, he said, “Thank you. I honestly don’t know what I would have done—I’ve never tried the whole superhero thing on my own, other than a really awful six months a while back.”

“I can’t imagine you without allies, kid.”

Barry shrugged. “I’m glad I don’t have to be.” He decided that tomorrow, he would approach Iris and Eddie and formally ask them to join the team. Even if the rest of his friends weren’t available full-time, he would create a new Team Flash. Different timeline, different team.

“I’ll get the others to come by in a couple of days,” Leonard said. “The other reason I came by was to tell you that Tess’s funeral is tomorrow.”

Barry frowned. “I’ll send flowers. I don’t think…”

“You should go,” Leonard insisted. “You knew her too, Barry, and despite what Harrison thinks, this isn’t your fault. He doesn’t have a sole claim to grief.”

“Okay,” Barry said. “Just—bring your cold gun, okay? I don’t know that even speed would be enough to stop Harrison Wells if he wanted to try to kill me.”

Leonard scoffed. “I’ll bring the gun. Good luck with your renovations.” He headed out, and Barry returned to zipping around the room, putting the precinct to rights.

It didn’t rain, which seemed like a cruel betrayal on the part of the universe. Honestly, where was a Mardon brother when you needed one?

The crowd of mourners that came out was a large one, all of them pressed close together around the grave. The funeral itself was brief, no more ceremonial than it was by nature required to be. This was partially out of necessity—there had been a lot of funerals in the past week, and they would continue; another was slated to begin within the hour.

Harrison stood just apart from the crowd, hands wrapped tightly around a bouquet of gladiolus flowers, Tess’s favorite.

“Tess Morgan always believed in practicality over sentiment. The future rather than the past. I know if she were here, she would laugh at this collection of scientists spending time in mourning when we could be changing the world instead. Tess was always one for science—she always dreamed that we could create a better future. Her achievements have saved countless lives—”

“And ended others.”

Everyone turned, stunned by the intrusion. It came from a man at the back of the crowd, dressed in all black like the rest of them. His goggles and boots, however, showed that he wasn’t there to
mourn anyone.

He looked vaguely familiar to Barry, though he wasn’t quite sure why—he wasn’t a meta Barry had ever faced.

The man took a step forward, and everyone swayed, nearly losing balance, as a harsh tremor ran through the ground beneath their feet.

Earthquakes? Barry met Cisco’s gaze across the open grave. Neither of them had been present to fight this particular metahuman—they’d been busy on Earth-2, after all—but they’d heard plenty about him from those left behind.

Geomancer.

“My particle accelerator killed my best friend and nearly killed me,” he growled.

Barry found Leonard’s eyes in the crowd. They exchanged a nod, and Barry sped the pair of them away so they could switch into their superhero modes.

Cisco tried a vibration blast just as another tremor rocked through the ground, this one strong enough to knock nearly everyone over. The blast went wild. Ronnie and Hartley reached toward each other, but were too far apart to merge.

Harrison remained on his feet, staring right at Geomancer. “You weren’t the only one to lose someone,” he said, as everyone else struggled to stand.

Geomancer started around the grave, picking his way through the mostly-prostrate crowd.

Harrison didn’t flinch as he approached. He held his ground and said, “My wife died too.”

Another earthquake hit, strong enough that the ground ruptured and the few who managed to get to their feet fell again. Harrison collapsed this time as well, and Geomancer was at his side in a moment, reaching down to grab his throat, earth shaking with every movement.

Just as his fingertips made contact, a blast of ice hurled him away. Geomancer rolled across the grass, nearly falling into the chasm he’d created only moments ago. Barry blurred over, ending the brief fight with an abrupt blow to Geomancer’s head.

To the eyes of the confused crowd, Citizen Cold and the Flash nodded cordially at each other and then parted ways, Citizen Cold walking to a dramatic fade-out in the shadows of nearby trees, the Flash speeding off with the metahuman criminal in tow.

None of them, besides those already in on the secret, took note of the two faces missing from the crowd.

Harrison got to his feet, staring down at his wife’s grave in the still-slightly-trembling earth. He murmured a few last words to her—“Someday, I know we will meet again.”

It was later that day when Dr. Harrison Wells called a press conference. It would be the first time he would discuss in an official capacity what had happened to the particle accelerator, as well as what, if anything, he intended to do about it.

Iris was the CCPN reporter lucky enough to be chosen to attend, in part because of her promotion
after breaking the Flash story. She’d heard Barry’s side of the accelerator incident, of course, but all of that was off the record. She, along with the rest of the city, was eager to find out what the record would be.

The press conference was held outside S.T.A.R. Labs, at that time of day where the almost-setting sun cast the sky into a rich blue. Dr. Wells wasn’t alone—behind him stood S.T.A.R. Labs’ four senior scientists, CCPD Captain Singh, and Mayor Walker, all clearly showing their support for whatever Dr. Wells was about to say.

“Thank you for coming,” he began. A few camera flashes went off. “As you all know by now, the S.T.A.R. Labs particle accelerator destabilized on the night of August 8th, 2016, as a consequence of unforeseen electromagnetic interference from the storm. It exploded, releasing dark matter into Central City. My top scientists,” he gestured to them, “and I have been working in the past week to understand what ongoing ramifications this may have on our city, aside from the immediate destruction. One of our hypotheses was proved true earlier this afternoon when my wife’s funeral was attacked by a man possessing the apparent ability to cause earthquakes.”

At that, the throng of reporters, who had stayed mostly silent thus far, burst into questions and exclamations, many of disbelief, some of fear.

Dr. Wells calmly waited for the group to quiet before going on, which they did eventually.

“I realize this sounds like the stuff of fantasies, or barring that, science fiction,” he said. “But we have all been made privy to the sight of a man running at impossible speeds these past few weeks, not to mention a woman doing the same. They saved the mayor’s life last week, and stopped the earthquake man today.”

Iris, glancing past Dr. Wells, saw Cisco literally cringe at the name ‘the earthquake man’.

“My team of scientists and I believe that there are more people—metahumans—out there who have been affected by the dark matter, giving them similarly unlikely abilities.”

That statement caused another uproar, this time more composed of fear. Iris noticed some of her colleagues shooting distrustful glances at one another, shying away from those around them.

At their reactions, Dr. Wells’s voice hardened, and he spoke above the clamor rather than waiting for it to subside. “I have approached city leadership and the CCPD about this issue, and all of us are in agreement that those who have been affected will not be discriminated against because of this accident. People do not change their natures simply because of the abilities they possess.”

Behind him, Captain Singh and Mayor Walker nodded, in firm agreement with Dr. Wells.

“Furthermore,” Wells pressed onward, “these newfound powers may also have adverse effects on the health of those who have them. With that in mind, we at S.T.A.R. Labs have developed technology that can effectively purge dark matter from the human body, negating unwanted abilities and effects. This would be an entirely voluntary process,” he clarified at the beginnings of murmurs about metahuman rights. “Those interested would simply need to visit S.T.A.R. Labs. The procedure should take no more than ten minutes. No appointment necessary, and there will be no records kept of those who have visited. It is my intention that nobody will be revealed as a metahuman without their consent.”

He paused for breath. “Questions?”

Everyone immediately started shouting over each other.
“What if people want to keep their powers?”

“Again, removal of the dark matter would be a voluntary procedure,” Dr. Wells said. “However, for those who find themselves having trouble controlling their newfound abilities, S.T.A.R. Labs is prepared to offer a space to learn the scientific principles behind their powers and practice using them in order to avoid unwanted accidents.”

“What about those who use their powers for evil?” seemed to be the most frequently asked question.

“The CCPD has commissioned S.T.A.R. Labs to create metahuman containment technology, for use solely in the case of metahumans using their abilities for criminal purposes.”

Iris couldn’t resist. “Will Citizen Cold and the Flash stop evil metahumans?” she called.

To his credit, Dr. Wells didn’t hesitate in the slightest. “I am not affiliated with either Citizen Cold or the Flash, so any guess as to their intentions would be no more than a conjecture. I can say that Citizen Cold has proven himself rather obstinate in his dedication to vigilantism, so I have little doubt that he will continue to do what he believes is best, regardless of whether his objectives are legal, moral, or neither.”

“Will S.T.A.R. Labs be paying for the destruction to the city?”

“The outside scientists who have investigated the incident have declared it to be an unforeseeable accident; therefore, insurance should cover the expenses for any necessary repairs.” Dr. Wells paused briefly, adjusting his glasses. “However, I would like to take this opportunity to personally offer my sincere condolences to anyone who has lost someone dear to them, or suffered in any way due to the particle accelerator. I wish there were some way to revert more than just metahuman abilities.” He laughed shortly and sadly. “If anyone finds themselves with the power to bring the dead back to life, I urge you to stop by S.T.A.R. Labs.” He nodded to the crowd. “Thank you. This will conclude the press conference.”

Barry and Leonard watched the press conference from the only not-destroyed TV in the precinct. They glanced at each other when it was over.

“You thinking what I’m thinking, kid?” Leonard asked.

“If it involves a visit to Captain Singh, then yes.”

They suited up and paid a visit to City Hall.

“Nice to see you again, Captain,” Leonard said, glaring at the guns that were pointed at him. “Why do you always insist on threatening me?”

“We need to talk,” Barry said.

Singh was one of the few policemen not aiming a gun at the pair of masked vigilantes. “About what?” He sounded tense, but not entirely dismissive.

“A metahuman task force.”
The second major announcement of the day, then, came just after nightfall and was made with the help of a single TV camera.

Leonard and Barry stood before it and they both smiled at all of Central City—not that anyone could tell, with Leonard’s face shadowed by his hood and Barry’s vibrating.

Captain Singh stood just off to the side, the mayor right next to him. It had taken a while and a vote by the city council to come to an agreement that wouldn’t put their identities at risk, but they’d eventually reached it.

“Hello, Central City,” Leonard began. “You know me as Citizen Cold.”

“And I’m the Flash,” Barry added. “With all the talk about dark matter and metahumans—”

“—and that inspiring speech Dr. Wells gave earlier tonight about protecting those affected by the blast,” Leonard said.

“—we’ve made an agreement with CCPD.” Barry gestured to Singh behind him. “For Cold, it’s kind of like community service—”

“Because I’m a criminal, and all that,” Leonard said. “We’re forming a metahuman task force, as a sort of rogue branch of the CCPD. It’ll serve as an option for those who want to use their newfound abilities to take down metas who use their abilities to commit crimes.”

“Basically, a squad of superheroes,” Barry summarized. “We can also help train you in your powers so you can make the city a safer place.”

“If you’d like to join our little band of rogues, stop by City Hall or the new precinct, once it’s completed, and register with Captain Singh,” Leonard said. “The only identity required is your metahuman one, not your real name, in keeping with what seems to be our new city policy of not outing metahumans without their consent.”

Singh stepped forward. “That said, be warned that if you attempt to abuse the privileges this position grants you, Citizen Cold, the Flash, and all of CCPD will not hesitate to stop any destruction you cause.”

“Hopefully that won’t be an issue,” Barry added. He grinned at the camera. “So who wants to be a superhero?”

Chapter End Notes

Your intermittent reminder that comments give me life.
Rogue Time!

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long break! Here’s a nice long chapter to make up for it, in which I accidentally ship two metas, one person is generally very obnoxious (that’ll be funny later), and Donald Trump is offhandedly insulted.

“Okay, everyone, welcome to the…” Barry, suited and masked, glanced at Leonard. “Are we really calling it the Rogues? I liked Superhero Squad.”

“We’re calling it the Rogues,” Leonard confirmed.

“All right, welcome to the Rogues,” Barry said, turning back to the others in the room. Aside from Barry and Leonard, there were nine people gathered in the old precinct—technically, ten, as Ronnie and Hartley were still two people even in their combined state. Or maybe one and a half?

Three of the nine-point-five were not metahumans—Eddie, present as the liaison to CCPD; Iris, in the role of a reporter; and Caitlin, in case a doctor proved to be necessary.

That left six metahumans (or six and a half), wearing a variety of masks, helmets, and glasses to disguise their identities. Even Barry wasn’t sure he knew everyone there.

“Maybe we should do introductions,” he suggested. “Just your ability and meta name, unless you want to share your real name too.”

“It’ll be off the record,” Iris assured everyone.

“I’m the Flash, the fastest man alive.” Barry looked at Leonard. “Citizen Cold, if you hadn’t guessed.” Leonard lifted his gun. “I freeze things.”

“Vibe,” Cisco offered next. He’d recreated the Vibe goggles from the other timeline. “I can manipulate and weaponize the vibrations of the multiverse, along with seeing into alternate Earths and glimpsing the future.” He shrugged. “Yeah, I’m pretty awesome.”

“Firestorm.” Ronnie and Hartley hadn’t bothered to conceal their identity past the whole glowing-eyes thing. “There are actually two of us, linked via the Firestorm matrix. We can light on fire, fly, throw fireballs.”

The next person in the small circle wore a very familiar-looking helmet. “I’m Doctor Light,” she said. “I can channel starlight and blast it from my hands.”

Barry couldn’t deny that the next person’s presence made him a little anxious—he was wearing a pair of dark sunglasses, but the rainbow outfit was a giveaway, even before his introduction: “Rainbow Raider. I can influence emotions by making eye contact.”

Barry reminded himself that this was a different timeline, and thus Roy G. Bivolo, aka Rainbow Raider, aka the guy who made him fight Oliver, was most likely genuine in his support for their
“I’m Bette Sans Souci. I don’t have a meta name that I’ve come up with, but I can turn anything into a bomb just by touching it.” She raised her hands. “Thus, the gloves.” Bette didn’t have anything concealing her face, the only meta in the room to do so.

“Plastique,” Cisco offered. “As a name.”

Bette shrugged neutrally. “If you think so. I haven’t put a lot of thought into it. I’m not a big fan of my powers, but I’d rather use them to help the city than just have them removed.” She looked to her left and waited expectantly for the man there to introduce himself.

“Doctor Alchemy.” The man wore a green cloak, hood pulled low enough to shadow his face. “I can transmute materials into other ones, so long as I know the precise chemical formula for both the original and what I want to change it into.”

That was a new one for Barry. He exchanged a glance with Cisco, who looked just as intrigued by the meta neither of them had ever met before. Whoever this Doctor Alchemy was, he was particular to this timeline.

Introductions complete, Leonard said, “Let’s go over the rules. Detective Thawne over there can attest to the fact that these all come directly from Captain Singh.”

Eddie nodded, his arms crossed. “Rule one—”

He, Leonard, and Barry all spoke in unison. “No killing.”

“That can actually be extended to no felonies,” Eddie added. “This whole agreement will inevitably end in the breaking of laws, but the CCPD draws the line at committing felonies.”

“We’ll avoid those,” Barry assured him. “Rule two is try to keep collateral damage to a minimum. We’re all going to have to practice using our powers so that we don’t inadvertently destroy the city.”

“Sounds like a good plan,” Bette said, tensely rubbing her gloved hands together.

“Rule three,” Leonard said. “Don’t disclose any identities of other Rogues to outside parties. If we’re going to be a team, we ought to trust each other.”

“So are you going to tell us who you are?” Doctor Light asked.

Leonard stared at her. “With a cop and a reporter in the room? Thanks, Light, but I’ll pass.”

“All that about trust and you won’t tell us your identity?” she asked doubtfully.

Rainbow Raider nodded in agreement.

Leonard opened his mouth to respond, probably with something biting and dismissive, but he was cut off by a loud ding from the nearest computer. Every head turned in that direction, and Barry blurred over to check it out.

“Metahuman alert at Central City National Bank,” he read. “Someone reported fog—indoors.”

Cisco’s face lit up, his excitement only slightly masked by the goggles. “It sounds like we’re dealing with a—”
“Don’t say it,” Barry muttered into Cisco’s inevitable pause for effect.

“Weather Wizard!” Cisco finished dramatically.

Barry only just managed to refrain from rolling his eyes while everyone else looked at least marginally impressed by the name. “Sure, Vibe. Weather Wizard. The bank is only a couple blocks away. Let’s go, now, before the robber gets away.”

The Rogues exchanged nods and glances, conveying various combinations of nervousness and excitement, before heading out.

Barry kept pace with the rest of his team as they ran toward the bank. He wondered if CCPD would be willing to fund a van or something. Sure, he could run, Firestorm could fly, and Cisco could probably open a portal or something, but the rest of them had no faster form of transport than running.

Regardless, the robbery was still in progress when they arrived at the bank, judging by the caustic mix of fog, sleet, and wind swirling around the building.

“Do we have a plan?” Leonard asked Barry.

Barry glanced pointedly around at the other Rogues. Firestorm set their head and hands ablaze, Bette tugged off her gloves, and Rainbow Raider tucked his sunglasses into a pocket. All of them wore determined expressions.

“We’ve got a squad of superheroes,” Barry said. “We don’t need a plan.”

“We’ll see,” Leonard muttered. Barry barely heard him, too busy dashing into the bank in a flash of gold lightning.

He skidded to a stop inside, staring around in indecision. He’d intended to get an idea of the status of the robbery-in-progress, as well as identify which of the Mardon brothers they were dealing with, but that looked to be a difficult task now. A thick fog filled the room to bursting, dense enough that Barry couldn’t see more than an inch in front of his face. He blinked a couple of times and heard the others come in behind him.

Doctor Light released a blast of starlight that mostly reflected off the fog rather than casting any beneficial illumination, but it was enough to snap Barry out of his momentary confusion. He whirled his arms in wide circles, causing enough wind to clear the fog from the lobby of the bank.

The Weather Wizard, whichever one it was, stood near the counter, lightning crackling around him. He turned to face the doorway, fog already gathering again around his hands.

Leonard was the first to react, shooting a blast of ice at the Weather Wizard. Mardon matched the shot with an identical stream of ice. Firestorm launched into the air and shot a clumsy fireball at him. Mardon simply shifted one of his hands upward and cut off the flames with a second stream of ice.

Both of Mardon’s hands occupied, Barry decided it was a good time to get the civilians to safety. He transported the three tellers and two customers out of the bank and returned just in time to see Bette throw the nearest object to her, a pen, at the Weather Wizard. It glowed purple and Mardon, baffled at the strange attack, didn’t even bother to knock it away.

The now-explosive pen detonated against his chest, blasting him backwards and into the counter. The explosion had been small, but it did its job. Cisco cheered. Leonard lowered his gun and
Firestorm landed on the floor with a slight stumble.

Then a familiar face stepped out from the vault area of the bank, drawn by the loud crash.

That… was Mark Mardon. So then…

Barry looked closer at the man they’d just taken down. Without the lightning or ice shrouding his features, he was undeniably recognizable as Clyde Mardon.

*Both Weather Wizards. And Clyde was already getting to his feet.*

This was shaping up to be either a very fun day or a very painful one, depending on how well their newly formed team could work together.

The Mardon brothers gave the Rogues nearly identical glares and raised their hands.

Clyde immediately began to move his arms in a circle, and wind rushed around him, forming a vortex. Barry tried his proven method of running around the forming tornado in the opposite direction, but a huge hailstone from Mark threw him to the floor before he could get enough speed to stop it.

Firestorm swooped into the swirling vortex, but Doctor Alchemy also tried to intercede at the same time. The air in the cyclone transformed into some sort of metal. It did manage to stop Clyde’s tornado, but the collapsing spiral of metal knocked Firestorm to the ground, pinning them beneath a long segment of iron.

On the other side of the lobby, Cisco sent a Vibe blast just as Bette tossed a set-to-explode chair at Mark. The vibe hit the chair rather than the Weather Wizard, sending it spinning away across the bank. Rainbow Raider’s attempt to induce fear in whichever Mardon he could make eye contact with first ended with him meeting Doctor Light’s gaze instead. It sent her into a blind panic where she shot blinding rays of light at the nearest person. The nearest person being the Flash, who stumbled, temporarily blinded, into a wall, at superspeed.

Leonard observed the mess that was being made of their attempted heroics from a position near the door and sighed. Deeply.

When the older Weather Wizard turned toward him, lighting gathering in his palms, Leonard shook his head and gestured *just go* at the door. Clearly, his Rogues were in no state to stop them, and Leonard knew he couldn’t take on two weather-controlling metas on his own. Better to let them go now before someone died.

The two robbers, both looking amused by the situation, took Leonard’s invitation and left. Before gathering his team to do the same, Leonard blasted all the cameras in the room with enough ice to ensure the footage would be unrecoverable. Screw ‘no collateral damage’—he was going to make sure there were no records of the first official Rogue mission.

It took nearly ten minutes, but eventually all the Rogues stumbled back into the old precinct. Caitlin, Iris, and Eddie looked shocked at their various states of injury.

“What happened?” Caitlin asked sharply, immediately going to Barry, who was the most injured. She opened up her medical bag and shone a flashlight into his eyes, testing his response.

“Well, good news, I know who the robbers are,” Barry said. “Bad news, there were two of them, and our team was… less than prepared?”
“We sucked,” Doctor Light moaned.

Firestorm split into their two halves, and Ronnie and Hartley glared at each other.

“If you’d just listened to me, we could have stopped them!” Hartley spat.

“Sorry that I don’t happen to like the plan that ends with me getting struck by lightning!” Ronnie retorted.

“Okay, calm down,” Barry told both halves of Firestorm.

“Whatever happened to ‘we don’t need a plan?’” Leonard asked him.

The tumult of people talking over each other continued for a few more seconds before Caitlin interceded by shouting, “Stop!”

Everyone slowly quieted and looked at her.

Caitlin put her medical bag down on a table. “Everyone who was injured in some way, stop arguing and come over here so I can treat you.”

They all shuffled over, Ronnie dragging Hartley in that direction until he got the point. Barry, with the most severe injuries, was pushed to the front of the line. He told Caitlin about his blindness.

“It’ll heal pretty quickly, though,” he assured her. “It’s not as bad as the last time it happened.”

“The last time?” Caitlin glanced at Doctor Light with a frown.

“It wasn’t me the last time,” she swore.

“It wasn’t her,” Barry confirmed. He muttered something that sounded a lot like ‘technically’.

Caitlin resumed treating Barry. In the meantime, Eddie asked, “So now that you’re all done arguing about it, what actually happened at the bank? From the looks of it, I’m guessing you didn’t catch the bad guys.”

The Rogues let out a collective groan.

“We didn’t,” Leonard said. “Not because the robbers were especially powerful. We just managed to be so incompetent that we took each other out rather than them.”

“Seriously?” Iris asked.

“We had no coordination, we got in each other’s way, and none of us knew how to use our powers effectively,” Doctor Alchemy recited.

“Who were the robbers?” Eddie asked. “Did you get a look at their faces?”

Barry hesitated before responding, recalling the news article he’d looked up back at the very beginning of this timeline. One that described the death of Detective Joe West, who’d been shot by Clyde Mardon.

He spoke softly, looking in Iris’s general direction. “The Mardon brothers.”

He still couldn’t see her outside of a slight blur of color, but he could imagine the expression on her face. First it would be shock, and then a stunned grief. She would go to Eddie’s side without
conscious thought, and he would hug her protectively.

“The Mardon brothers are back?” Eddie’s voice was hard, upset.

“Who are the Mardon brothers?” Bette asked carefully.

“They’re bank robbers,” Leonard said.

“One of them killed my father,” Iris added, her voice coming from right next to Eddie.

“And now they’re bank robbers and murderers, who can also control the weather,” Rainbow Raider said with a sigh.

Caitlin finished checking Hartley for injuries, the last of her patients. “How are we going to find them?”

Doctor Light looked at her phone. “I don’t know about the rest of you, but I have a day job that I need to get to. I don’t think being a top-secret special forces cop will be a good excuse.”

“Most of us probably have jobs to get to,” Barry agreed. His sight was returning enough that he could probably fake his way through a day at the precinct. “The Mardon brothers won’t show their faces for a while, I’m sure. For now, let’s not get fired.”

The Rogues muttered in general agreement and headed out.

“Are you going to be all right going to work today?” Eddie asked Iris.

She nodded slowly. “I’ll be fine,” she told him. “See you later, babe.” She kissed him quickly and left.

Eddie turned to Barry, who’d waited for him. “We’re headed in the same direction. Think you could give me a lift?”

Barry smirked. “Sure, but only if you give me directions.”

At the precinct, Eddie and Barry paused just inside the entrance.

“Are you seeing this?” Eddie asked in a low voice.

Barry nodded, not taking his eyes off the scene within.

There were nearly double the usual number of people in the new precinct. The added number were all wearing military-grade camo. And right at the center of it all was a man in a general’s uniform having a very aggressive discussion with Captain Singh.

Eddie, though he knew he probably wasn’t meant to join the conversation, nevertheless approached, trying to hear the argument.

“…can’t storm in here with your men and demand access to them!” Singh said.

“David, I am a general with the United States military. I have the right to participate in any cases that are of interest to the safety of this country.”
“This isn’t a case at all. This is a task force that specializes in a certain type of cases. If there were anything posing a threat to the security of our nation, I assure you that I would call you. But as there is no such threat, get out of my precinct!”

The general turned toward the door, which unfortunately put Eddie directly in his field of vision. To Eddie’s surprise, instead of looking irritated at his obvious eavesdropping, the general glanced at his name badge and broke into a wide grin.

“Detective Thawne, is it?”

Eddie, unsure how to respond, was relieved when Singh spoke before he had to say anything. “I told you to get out of my precinct, unless you produce some sort of documentation of permission to be here from someone with about the same security clearance as the President.”

“I’d just like to speak with—it’s Eddie, isn’t it?” The general smirked. “I’m General Wade Eiling of the US Army. I have a very vested interest in the new metahuman task force that’s been created as a branch of the CCPD. I hear you’re the one in charge of it.”

Eddie gathered himself, standing up a little taller. It was clear to him that this General Eiling was nothing more than a power-hungry man who wanted to somehow control or use the metas.

“I’m not in charge of it,” he said coolly. “That would be Citizen Cold and the Flash.”

“But you are the liaison.”

“Yes. Do you have a point, General?”

“You realize that all of these metahumans have the power to control the city if they wanted to? That they could easily kill all of you? I’d like to protect the good people of Central City from that fate.”

Eddie shrugged. “It seems to me like the only one interested in endangering the people of Central City is you. You do realize that metahumans are also citizens of the city, right?”

“I’m more interested in those who have no method of defense against these overpowered criminals.”

“They’re not criminals, General.” Eddie put as much sarcasm as he could muster into the title. “Powers don’t turn people into criminals, just as military service doesn’t turn people into bigoted assholes. Not necessarily, anyway—I can think of a few examples.”

All pretenses of a smile were gone from Eiling’s face. “With the way you’re defending them, I’m inclined to think you’re one of these metas, Detective Thawne.”

Eddie shrugged. “And what if I am?”

“I’d just like to know where this metahuman task force meets. In case superpowered lunatics start attacking innocent civilians, it would be nice to know where exactly they report back to.”

“I don’t think that’s something I’m likely to tell you,” Eddie said.

“Then when metahumans inevitably start destroying the city, I’ll be forced to assume you’re one of them,” Eiling spat. He spun to face the rest of the precinct. “The same goes for anyone who gets in my way.”
Eddie put on his best expression of sarcastic terror and exchanged a look with Singh, who resisted a grin.

“Well, you offer a very tempting bargain,” Eddie said, looking back at Eiling. “Unfortunately, I think I’m going to pass on that one. Now, I believe Captain Singh asked you to leave the precinct…”

Eiling glared. “I’ll be back with written permission from an authority too high for you to blow off,” he said. “You’ve made a very powerful enemy today, Eddie Thawne.”

He stormed out of the precinct, his soldiers following after him.

Eddie sighed in relief and caught Barry’s gaze across the room. They shared as expression of genuine fear, and then went to their actual work.

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The flow of visitors had been rather steady at S.T.A.R. Labs. Most of those who came by simply wanted their powers removed, but a few were eager to learn how to use them without causing disastrous accidents.

Their current visitor, for example, was explaining how she kept getting stuck places.

“I can’t control it sometimes—if I’m looking at a place I’ll just end up there, whether I want to or not,” she explained. “And then sometimes I can’t make it work when I actually want it to, so I’ve gotten stuck in trees like a stupid cat. I almost broke my leg getting down.”

Just as she finished the sentence, Shawna disappeared with nothing more than a slight ‘poof’ sound.

“Like that,” she said, frustrated, from the other side of the Cortex.

“All right, let us run some tests on your cells and see if we can’t figure out how your powers work,” Caitlin said, leading her into the med bay.

Cisco followed after, excitedly asking, “Have you thought about a name? Because I think Peek-a-Boo sounds…”

Another person entered, a young man who made all the lights flicker as he walked by them. Judging by the way he flinched at each momentary spurt of darkness, he didn't want his powers.

“Can I please get these abilities removed?” he asked, sparks darting around his fingers.

“Of course,” Harrison said. He glanced in Ronnie’s direction, as he was nearest to the table holding the device, and Ronnie tossed it to him.

The dark matter remover, or the Neutralizer, as Cisco was fond of calling it, was about the size of a cell phone, but a lot thicker and with wires curling around it on all sides. It wasn’t the most beautiful piece of technology S.T.A.R. Labs had ever developed, but it did look very ‘sciencey’, as one of the now ex-metas had called it.

Harrison gestured to the young man, and he approached.

“What do I have to do?” he asked. With a glance at the Neutralizer, he added, “If I touch that thing, I’ll probably drain the battery.”
“You won’t,” Harrison promised. He reached toward the meta with his free hand. “Give me your hand.”

The man hesitated, but put his hand, still generating sparks, in Harrison’s.

Harrison didn’t flinch at the electricity. He placed the end of the Neutralizer against the inside of the meta’s wrist. “Are you sure? This can’t be undone.”

The meta nodded.

Harrison pushed the button on the Neutralizer. The sparks stopped.

The young man sighed in obvious relief. “Thank you.”

Harrison offered the closest thing to a smile he ever got nowadays. “My pleasure.”

Cisco poked his head out of the med bay. “Um, Dr. Wells, we have a problem.”

“What is it?” Harrison asked.

Ronnie also looked up, nudging Hartley, who was studying a book of sign language.

“General Eiling is coming. And he’s not a big fan of metas.”

“Eiling?” Harrison grimaced. “I haven’t heard that name in… twelve years, I’d estimate. Has our teleporting friend made any progress?” He tilted his head at the young man beside him.

Cisco took his meaning. “She’s able to at least do it when she wants to now, though she still can’t stop it. The nearest window—”

“Down the back hall and to the left. If she won’t mind escorting this young man.”

Cisco ducked back into the other room for a second, asking Shawna if she’d agree to help the other meta escape before Eiling came in. There was a response, and Cisco looked back out. “She says sure.”

He fully exited the med bay, quickly followed by Caitlin and Shawna.

“What’s going on?” the man next to Harrison asked.

“Hi, I’m Shawna. I think we’re running for our lives.” She smiled at him.

He looked stunned—not only by the news but also by Shawna herself. “Farooq—and I’m willing to run for my life so long as I’m running next to you.”

Shawna glanced away, smiling to herself.

“Flirt later, escape now,” Cisco advised. He pointed at the back exit of the Cortex. “The first lab on the left down that way has a window. Shawna…”

“Great.” She only sounded a little bit sarcastic. “Let’s do this.”

“Do what—are we jumping?” Farooq asked, suddenly worried. “Running is one thing, heights are another.”

“Don’t worry.” Shawna grabbed his hand, and instantly the two of them were in the hallway. “I’ll
be back if I need more help,” she said. Farooq just looked startled, and then they were gone.

Just in time, too. Hardly two seconds passed before General Eiling and a whole troop of his men barged into the Cortex.

“Have you come to get your powers removed?” Harrison asked innocently.

“Dr. Wells. It’s a pleasure to see you again.”

“I wish I could say the same.”

Eiling glanced around, observing Cisco and Caitlin, both of them with their arms crossed, staring at him expectantly, and Ronnie, murmuring translations to a glaring Hartley. “Last time I was here, you had a few more employees.”

“Last time you were here, you asked me to begin immoral experiments on animals and people. We don’t exactly have the staff to do that now even if I wanted to, so why are you here, Eiling?”

“I hear you have some method of removing a metahuman’s powers.”

“I’ll ask you again—are you here to get metahuman abilities removed? Because if not, I see no reason that anything we’re doing here should be of your concern.”

“I’m curious—does this device of yours have the ability to restore dark matter as well as remove it?”

“No. Nothing can restore or synthesize the dark matter’s effects once it’s been removed from a human host. And, if there were some way to do so, I can think of no worse person to grant that sort of potential to than you.”

“I understand that you’re not particularly fond of me, and I return your lack of regard, Doctor. But you have to understand that these abilities could give the United States army the edge we need to better defend our liberties. That has always been my main concern.”

“And you don’t believe giving soldiers these powers, even if it were possible, would result in them misusing them?”

“I think these abilities would be better used by the army than by civilians who could easily destroy the city, were they so inclined.”

“You would do better approaching the CCPD about these fears,” Harrison said dismissively.

“I already have. Captain Singh is in full agreement with me.”

“That’s not true,” Cisco blurted. “He refused all of your proposals and kicked you out of the precinct.”

Eiling turned to face him, a savage curiosity on his face. “How might you know that, Mr. Ramon? Do you have a direct line to CCPD? Or did you learn that through some sort of metahuman ability?”

Cisco looked off guard. “Um, I have friends at CCPD?” It came out sounding like a question.

Eiling spun again, now casting an accusing glare at Hartley and Ronnie. “And I find it interesting that you, Mr. Raymond, find it necessary to repeat everyone’s words to Mr. Rathaway,” he gestured at the abandoned sign language book, “who by all appearances seems to be deaf. Another
metahuman ability? You know, Harrison, I find it highly coincidental that your unconditional support of metahumans conveniently protects your favorite employees.”

Harrison spoke with a ‘don’t try to outsmart me’ edge to his voice. “We received a call just a few minutes ago from Captain Singh, informing us of the outcome of your visit to them. Had Cisco not pointed out your obvious lie, I would have. As for Ronnie and Hartley, we were in the middle of testing a new form of hearing aid. It hadn’t worked with normal speech, so Ronnie hypothesized that its design may be better suited to amplifying lower-decibel sounds. He was repeating our conversation in order to continue testing despite your interruption.”

As Ronnie got to Harrison’s last few lines, Hartley leaned back from him and pulled the tinnitus-blocking earpiece they’d designed out of his ear in order to show it to Eiling as proof. The only indication of his pain at the ringing now audible in his ear in order to show it to Eiling as proof. The only indication of his pain at the ringing now audible in his ear was an almost-unnoticeable tightening of his jaw. He replaced it in his ear the moment Harrison continued speaking and Eiling’s attention was off him.

“Whether my employees are metahumans or not would change nothing about their positions at S.T.A.R. Labs, and it would change nothing about my stance on metahumans. Now, why are you here, Eiling?”

“I’m going to show Central City that metas are dangerous,” Eiling promised, glaring at Harrison.

“Ah, so you’re here to make vague threats. Make up your mind, General,” he said acerbically. “Do you want them gone, or do you want to use them?” He held up a hand before Eiling could respond. “No, I understand. You want the military to be the only location of metahuman power in the country. You can’t stand the idea that someone else might be able to use their powers and do more good than the army could ever achieve.”

“Are you speaking from experience, Dr. Wells?”

“Yes,” he said firmly, ignoring the obvious ‘you’re a meta’ insinuation. “I have seen the Flash save this city. I have yet to see you do the same, even with a whole army on your side.”

“Some of us prefer to stay out of the spotlight for the good we do.”

“You’re right, for perhaps the first time in this conversation. Unfortunately, you are not one of those people. You, General Eiling, have always taken credit for everything you can, including many things that are not at all your doing. Now, if you would, General, get out of my lab.”

“I can get authorization to be present while you do whatever it is you do with metahumans who come by,” Eiling threatened.

“No matter the authorization you get, the most time you’ll be legally allowed in S.T.A.R. Labs is six hours a day,” Ronnie pointed out. “I’ve done my research on the military. You’re not allowed to access civilian space without their consent for any longer than that.”

“And I can assure you that for those six hours, there will be no metahuman visitors,” Harrison added. “It won’t be difficult to set up some online notification system to advise them of when to come by.”

“You don’t want to make an enemy of me, Dr. Wells,” Eiling growled.

“I really do. Now, until you get that authorization, you’re legally not allowed to be here at all without my consent. And I do not consent. Would you like me to call the police, or do you just want to walk out?”
Eiling, for the second time that day, stormed out of the building. A couple of the soldiers threw vaguely apologetic glances at the S.T.A.R. Labs team before following him.

Harrison sighed. “Did he leave any cameras behind? I wouldn’t put it past him.”

He addressed the question as though to the room, but Cisco knew it was directed at him. He closed his eyes to vibe it. “No.”

“Good.” Harrison shook his head. “I get the feeling that this is certainly not the last we’re going to see of General Eiling.”

“We’ll find a way to keep him from harming any metas,” Hartley said, glaring at the exit as though Eiling could feel the weight of his stare even from outside the building. “Are you sure we can’t just blast him with a fireball? It would put an end to this whole mess.”

“I think the Rogues would probably have to stop you,” Caitlin said regretfully.

“CCPD would feel very bad about locking you up, though,” Cisco added.

“Honestly, it might be worth it,” Ronnie said.

“Let’s leave the attacks for another day,” Harrison advised. “We’re scientists. We can fight him with facts rather than fire.”

“Hopefully,” Hartley muttered after Ronnie repeated Harrison’s words.

Later, the Rogues met up again. This time it was just the Rogues and Caitlin; Eddie and Iris weren’t present. Leonard had been waiting for a couple of hours, while Rainbow Raider had just arrived.

“We need some kind of a signal,” Leonard muttered. “Or at least a group text.”

“We have a bigger problem than meeting up at the same time,” Barry said.

“Can there be a bigger problem than that?” Leonard, still annoyed, asked.

“I’m serious,” Barry said. “His name is General Eiling.”

Everyone but Doctor Light, Rainbow Raider, and Doctor Alchemy winced.

“He is a problem,” Ronnie agreed. “Eiling visited S.T.A.R. Labs today, trying to get Dr. Wells to help him create metas for the army.”

“He also visited CCPD.” Barry realized saying that would easily give his identity away to any of them who cared to look up employees of CCPD, then decided that he would trust his teammates and continued. “There, he was insistent about metas being a danger to the city. He tried to get Eddie to tell him where Rogue headquarters are.”

“Eiling’s bad news,” Bette said. “I used to serve under him in the army. He’s very willing to do whatever it takes to get his way.”

“He’s definitely capable of blackmail, kidnapping, and murder. I don’t know what he’ll do to try to find us,” Barry said.
There was a heavy silence for a moment, broken by Leonard clearing his throat and announcing, “Well, right now we have a more urgent problem to deal with. Two of them, actually.”


“Yup. And we’re not going to be able to take them down unless we do some serious training,” Leonard said. “I’m used to working alone, so I didn’t expect how catastrophically bad it would be if we didn’t coordinate our attacks.”

“So what are we going to do?” Doctor Alchemy asked. “It’s not like we can just battle each other to practice.”

“Good question, Alchemy.” Leonard stood up from his position on top of one of the desks. “In order to get better at working together…” He smirked. “We’re going to battle each other to practice.”

“This sounds highly dangerous,” Barry said.

“That’s what makes it fun, Flash. Come on. We’re going on a little field trip.”

Leonard had somehow acquired a van. “I’m driving,” he said. “And yes, Flash, before you ask, you do have to ride with the rest of us. Team building.”

Barry, who had been about to ask, got in the car and sulked. Caitlin came along too, claiming shotgun and holding an even larger medical bag than the one she’d had that morning.

Leonard was, shockingly, a good driver. He actually obeyed the speed limits, which shouldn’t have surprised Barry but did anyway.

“I think,” Cisco announced after a couple minutes, “this van needs a name. And some decoration.” He paused, considering. “We could call it the Roguemobile! And we can paint the name on the side!”

“We’re not calling it the Roguemobile,” Leonard said from the front. He wasn’t the only one to protest the name—Rainbow, Light, and Ronnie all contributed the same opinion.

“Fine.” Cisco settled back into his seat, crossing his arms.

Light felt bad, so she whispered to Alchemy next to her and offered her helmet as the object necessary. Alchemy changed it into some material that was very glittery, and he reached up to transform a little bit of the van’s ceiling into glue. Light stuck the no-longer-a-helmet to the ceiling and blasted it with a very low-level light beam.

The van now had a low-budget, meta-powered disco ball.

Cisco cheered considerably and pulled out his phone to start blasting music. The van soon became an impromptu, mobile disco party.

Leonard focused on driving and looked very annoyed. Caitlin, next to him, laughed.

Finally, they arrived at the intended destination—the Badlands. It was a huge, empty wilderness thirty miles outside of Central City, a perfect place for inexperienced metas to practice their abilities without destroying anything. Leonard yanked open the door to the back of the van and confiscated Cisco’s phone. He wasn’t smiling. Definitely not. Not even a little. He switched off the music and continued not to smile.
The others tumbled out of the van, a lot happier than they’d been after there rousing defeat that morning. Even Bette, who’d been the most sullen about her place among the Rogues, was laughing.

“On the way back we should do dubstep,” Cisco suggested cheerily.

“Glad you’re all having fun,” Leonard said. “Now seriously, we need to practice. Preferably without killing each other, but…” He shrugged. “We could probably spare one or two.”

“You can admit it, Cold. You’d be so bored without us.” Barry smirked.

“Vibe, Light, as the two instigators of this whole disco crusade, you two can be team captains.”

“What are we doing?” Cisco asked.

“It’s like dodgeball, but with superpowers.” Leonard grinned, in a good mood despite himself. “Like I said, let’s try to keep the casualties to a minimum.”

“Aw, man, I hated dodgeball in school,” Light complained. “Though it will probably be more fun with powers.”

“Dodgeball was the worst,” Cisco agreed.

Firestorm, who’d joined up at some point during the ride, nodded. “I was always picked last. My other half, though, he was actually good at dodgeball.” He glared upwards jokingly.

“Light, you pick first,” Leonard said.

She frowned, thinking about it. “I’m gonna have to go with my fellow doctor. Alchemy, you’re on my team.”

Cisco didn’t even wait for Leonard to turn to him before he said, “My lovely friend Bette, of course.”

“Firestorm,” Light said.

“Flash.”

Light made a ‘yes’ fist-pump. “Rainbow!”

“Really?” Leonard, the only one left, asked, moving toward Vibe’s team.

Light shrugged. “I doubt you ever had to deal with getting picked last, Cold. Deal with it.”

“All right, I know who my first target is.” Leonard shot her a glare, which didn’t have much effect with his goggles and hood still in place. As Light’s helmet was still busy being a disco ball in the van, he could see her roll her eyes and stick out her tongue in return.

“Yo, Cold, stop staring at the enemy,” Cisco ordered. “Come on, Team Vibe, let’s make a plan.” He grinned to himself. “I’ve always wanted a Team Vibe.”

Both teams whispered to each other for a minute before Leonard pulled away and announced the rest of the rules.

“There are no boundaries. If you get knocked down, you’re out. Caitlin is the referee and also the medical support. Best two out of three, and then we’ll switch teams and go again. Caitlin, if you
wouldn’t mind counting us down…”

The two teams moved away from each other, shifting into fighting stances. Leonard made sure his gun was on a non-lethal setting.

Caitlin, who’d perched herself on top of the van, looked very excited. She shouted down, “Three! Two! One! Go!”

The battle began.

Leonard, as promised, aimed directly at Light. She rolled out of the way of his first shot and countered the next one with a blazing blast of light. They slowly circled each other, their beams cancelling each other out.

Then someone hit Leonard from behind, just hard enough to make him stumble sideways a few feet. Still shooting at Light, he turned to try some sort of defense against whoever it was, only to see a huge fireball hit the place he’d been standing moments earlier.

Cisco grinned at him before running off to pull Bette out of the way of Firestorm’s next blast.

That was right. The kid could see the future. Lucky. Leonard ducked behind a rock to end his impasse with Light and aimed for Firestorm instead.

On the other side of the field, Doctor Alchemy battled with the Flash, transforming the air around him into a variety of uncomfortable elements. When Flash sprinted away to get a running start, Alchemy encased himself in a 360-degree wall of solid steel. There was a very satisfying thunk from outside of it, and Caitlin yelled, “Flash! You’re out!”

Firestorm, hovering above it all, was more threatened by internal arguments rather than external attacks. Neither of them had full control of the body, so when Hartley tried to go left and Ronnie right, they nearly fell out of the air.

If you’d just listen to me—

We would have gotten hit by the ice!

We could have melted it, except you don’t know how to throw fireballs! So how exactly do you expect to win?

In their turmoil, they landed on the ground and nearly burst into their separate halves, which probably would have counted as ‘knocked down’ and led to disqualification. But Rainbow seized them by the shoulders before they could separate and looked them in the eye.

Rainbow’s eyes glowed blue for a moment, and Firestorm’s shifted from the usual white to flash blue as well for a moment. Their internal discord ceased.

Behind you.

Firestorm spun and blasted Bette’s explosive rock away. They launched back into the air and sent a fireball calculated to be just large enough that it knocked Bette down before burning itself out. “Bette!” Caitlin called.

Then the air beneath them seemed to change, and the fire wasn’t enough to keep them up.

Across the field, Cisco whooped and punched the air, watching Ronnie and Hartley fall to the
ground. Different frequency air equaled different buoyancy equaled Caitlin yelling, “Firestorm!”

In Cisco’s celebration, he wasn’t prepared when Light let out an intense beam in all directions, and the overwhelming glare brought him down, even with his goggles.

“Vibe!” Caitlin announced.

Leonard, who’d seen Light gearing up for the blast, had pulled his hood down enough to shield his eyes. He shot Light before she could try again, smirking at his success, then turned to bombard Alchemy with ice. Alchemy turned it to air for as long as he could before running out of energy and collapsing.

Leonard was about to celebrate victory when he recalled he was forgetting someone—just as a hard kick to the back of his knee sent him tumbling to the ground.

He glanced up to see Rainbow Raider grinning at him. “Who needs superpowers?” he asked.

“Citizen Cold, you’re out!” Caitlin really was having far too much fun with her role as referee. “Team Light wins!”

Leonard sighed and accepted the hand Rainbow offered to get to his feet. “All right, I accept defeat. Let’s take some time to reset before Round Two.”

About twenty minutes later, Caitlin declared them all cleared to go again. That was also about the time that Doctor Light stopped gloating to Leonard about her triumphant victory.

“Let’s not forget that I personally got you out,” Leonard said. “That counts as a victory to me.”

“Mhm. Keep telling yourself that, Cold.”

They headed to their opposite sides of the field.

“Three, two, one, go!” Caitlin shouted, and Round Two began.

This time, Leonard was pleased to see, the two teams worked closer together. On his side, Cisco stayed busy telling him, Bette, and Barry where the other team was about to be, so they could aim more effectively. On the other side, Rainbow kept the two halves of Firestorm in agreement, while Light and Alchemy worked together to create blindingly reflective surfaces, disorienting the other team.

“Firestorm, right above you, ten seconds,” Cisco advised him. Leonard nodded and pretended not to notice Firestorm swooping closer from the corner of his eye.

He counted to nine and then shot upwards. Firestorm shuddered in place, seeming unsure whether to go left or right, and finally decided on left just as they released a ball of flames.

The fireball went wide, a fact which wouldn’t have been so bad in and of itself, were it not for the direction it spun off in.

Because it was headed straight for the van—no, the angle was a little higher than that: it was headed straight for Caitlin.

The Flash was busy navigating the shiny maze Light and Alchemy had set up and didn’t see the fireball. Leonard didn’t even have time to lift his gun, let alone shoot.

Caitlin held up her hands to block her face and braced herself as the fireball slammed into her,
knocking her backwards off the van.

The battle stopped within seconds. Firestorm actually fell out of the air and into their separate bodies.

“That was your fault!” Ronnie screamed at Hartley, dragging himself to his feet. “If you hadn’t—”

“If you had just gone along with me—!” Hartley yelled back. Both of them were breathless, both panicking about equally with their shared emotions, both sprinting toward the van as fast as possible. They rushed around the front of it and both stopped dead, staring.

Caitlin was sitting, staring at her hands, at the base of a long curl of ice. Hartley thought back to the trajectory at which she’d fallen, and his eyes tracked a potential path down the smooth slope of ice. It would be the perfect shape to catch her, absorb her momentum, and deposit her gently in her current position. She wasn’t even burned.

“How—” Ronnie was the first to say it; he was already kneeling at her side, taking her hands. On instinct, he flinched back from her touch and Hartley could feel it too, and he knew even before Caitlin held up her hands to show them both—her fingertips were covered in frost.

“You’re a meta,” Hartley said, just as everyone else came rushing around the side of the van, terrified, marveling. They all began talking at once, but Ronnie said nothing, so Hartley heard nothing.

After a long moment, of frantic chatter, of nothing being said, Ronnie helped Caitlin to her feet and enclosed her in a hug—and that, at least, Hartley could feel, because Caitlin was freezing.

“I love you,” Ronnie whispered to her, the only sound cutting through the cold silence of Hartley’s head.

Hartley cleared his throat, and that was an odd sensation, feeling his skin grinding against itself but not hearing the sound. “This is really going to screw up our teams, you know.”

They did not play any more dodgeball that day. Instead, the Rogues returned to the old precinct and started searching for the Mardon brothers. Caitlin’s near brush with death had reminded them all of the dark side of metahuman powers. So now it was back to work.

With the sheer number of scientists in the Rogues, it wasn’t too hard to come up with a way to search for barometric pressure fluctuations. The data brought them right to a barn on the outskirts of Central City.

“I should have known,” Flash said, then refused to elaborate when they all looked at him for clarification. Vibe threw him a sympathetic glance, however.

The doors were padlocked, but Bette simply smirked and touched the lock. Everyone ducked for cover as it exploded, taking half the door with it.

As they entered, the air started to shift around them. It took only moments for it to rise to gusts of wind so forceful it nearly shoved them all out the door. The Flash started to spin his arms, matching the wind with some of his own.

“Have I ever mentioned that doing this is seriously not fun?” he asked conversationally.
“Shut up, Flash,” the Rogues as a whole muttered.

Caitlin, tense, dripped little balls of ice from her fingertips. They tinkled against the floor as the Rogues proceeded forward a few steps.

“It is way too dark in here,” Doctor Light decided. She sent a ray of light upwards, where it tore through the roof. She maintained the light, casting illumination across the barn and revealing Mark Mardon standing in the center.

“Couldn’t stay away, could you?” he asked, crossing his arms. Fog swirled around him, starting at his feet and climbing upwards. “Even after we beat you the first time.”

He raised his arms, and lightning jolted across the barn toward them.

Caitlin and Leonard simultaneously shot ice at the lightning. The ice absorbed the voltage, shattering into a million tiny shards.

“I can do that too,” a voice said from behind them—Clyde. The Rogues turned in time to see a huge ball of ice, at least ten feet in diameter, barreling toward them.

Firestorm leapt to the front of the group, going up in flames intense enough that those closest had to back away. The ice melted into water as it approached.

Vibe turned to Light suddenly. “There’s two of them.”

She was too focused on maintaining the light to understand what he meant. “What?”

“We’ll take Mark,” Vibe said. He shot her a smile. “I bet my team defeats him first.”

Light caught on. “Ha. You can even take Caitlin.”

“Yo, Team Vibe!” he said. “Let’s go!”

The barn was filled with fog by the time he finished talking, but he could still see his teammates nod in understanding.

Light turned off the beam, leaving the barn in darkness except for what little leaked through the hole in the roof and, as Firestorm lit up, the illumination their flame gave.

Team Vibe moved further into the barn, toward Mark. Flash continued to spin his arms, clearing the fog from the area.

Leonard and Caitlin again shot streams of ice toward Mark, preempting any lightning he could send. Mark narrowed his eyes, and then the air near him became swelteringly hot, melting the ice before it could reach him.

“Nice try,” he said. The effect was a little ruined by the fact that he was sweating from the heat.

Flash darted toward him, and Mark defended himself with a bolt of lightning, knocking the Flash away and into the wall.

“He’s about to try acid rain,” Cisco hissed to Leonard and Caitlin. “I never thought I’d say this, but we need to build a wall.”

Caitlin worked faster—just as Leonard started to shoot, a wall of ice sprung fully-formed from her palms. A moment later, water pelted against the front of their shield.
“Give me some ice,” Bette said, holding out her hand. Caitlin dropped a baseball-sized globe of ice into her hand. The ball glowed purple, and Bette lobbed it over the top of the wall. The wall ruptured with the force of the explosion, revealing Mark lying unconscious against the far wall. Flash scrambled to his feet, sporting only mild burns from the acid rain, and slapped a pair of anti-meta cuffs (courtesy of S.T.A.R. Labs) on Mark. Team Vibe exchanged high fives.

On the other half of the barn, Clyde had abandoned the ice attacks in favor of blasting Team Light with intense winds. Alchemy threw up his hands and transformed the approaching air into water, which swirled around their feet before evaporating from Firestorm’s heat.

After a couple of minutes of this standoff, Light shot out a bright ray, purposefully aimed to force Clyde to look away—directly at Rainbow Raider, whose eyes glowed with the dull gray of apathy. Clyde, losing all will to fight, didn’t resist when Firestorm powered down to approach and cuff him.

Team Light exchanged their own round of high fives, at just about the same time as Team Vibe.

“How about we call this one a tie?” Light offered when she turned and saw the other half of the Rogues’ success.

“You’re just saying that because we won.” Vibe grinned at her.

“Let’s just get the Mardons down to CCPD,” Flash suggested. He paused, then added, “But we totally won.”

“Winning team gets to pick the music!” Vibe called as they returned to the van.

Cold sighed. “Driver gets to pick the music.”

Chapter End Notes

I have a Tumblr now? http://literallyflashtrash.tumblr.com/ Feel free to follow me (I'll follow back!), talk to me about my fic/fics, and send prompts--I can't promise I'll complete the prompts, but I might!
Sorry for the long delay between chapters (yet again). I have actual plans for the rest of this, though, so there's that! And I've been revitalized by the just-released trailer for Season 3 (look it up! It's awesome!), so you can expect faster writing. Hopefully.

“Despite being formed just over a week ago, the self-named Rogues have already proven themselves to be dedicated and worthy protectors of the city.” Iris put down her laptop. “Sound good to everyone? I’m about to submit it as the first news article about the Rogues.”

“Sounds great to me,” Barry said, glancing around at his fellow Rogues. The article described the capture of not only the Weather Wizards but also Tar Pit, a murderer who’d been easy to subdue with a few blasts of ice to cool him down.

The others nodded in agreement.

“I’m still not sure about the name Plastique, but it’s as good as any other,” Bette admitted. “I don’t want my family targeted to get to me, and I doubt Eiling would hesitate.”

They all grimaced at the reminder of Eiling. He hadn’t gone away—in fact, he’d been hanging around Central City nonstop since he’d first arrived a week ago.

“I don’t particularly like the name Killer Frost either,” Caitlin told Bette.

“I told you I could come up with a better name if you wanted!” Cisco said.

“Sorry, but as bad as Killer Frost is, Snow Girl and Ice Queen are far worse.”

Cisco just shook his head sadly. “Ice Queen would be great. I told you, you could wear a crown made of ice! How many people get that chance?”

Iris laughed. “I’ve heard this argument before, so unless it’s going someplace new, I’ll go ahead and submit the article.” She packed up and left.

“I’ve been thinking,” Leonard said when she was gone.

“That’s a first,” Firestorm said. Cisco leaned across and gave them a high five, ignoring Leonard’s glare.

“Really. We talked on day one about trusting each other, and I’ve realized you have a point, Light.” Leonard glanced at her with a sarcastic glare—after seven days, their semi-friendly rivalry was still going strong. “Don’t expect me to ever say that again.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Well, we all know Bette and Caitlin. You’ve alternated wearing and leaving your helmet, and we’ve seen both halves of Firestorm with no disguises. So…” He reached up, tugged off his
goggles, and pulled down his hood. “I’m Leonard Snart.”

Most of the room paused in surprise, but Barry didn’t hesitate before pushing back his cowl. “Barry Allen.”

Light shrugged. “I’m Linda Park.”

Cisco pulled off his goggles. “Cisco Ramon.”

“Ronnie Raymond and Hartley Rathaway,” Firestorm volunteered.

“Roy Bivolo,” Rainbow said.

Doctor Alchemy lowered his hood. “Albert Desmond.”

“Nice to meet all of you,” Leonard said. “Now remember the rules, and that if any of you give away my identity, I’ll kill you.”

He spoke like he was deadly serious, but the others just laughed. Barry punched him lightly in the shoulder.

“You like us all too much to kill us,” he said.

Leonard rolled his eyes. “We’ll see.”

“We need to get to our real jobs,” Cisco said, gesturing to Caitlin and Firestorm. He touched the side of his head as though vibing, though he wasn’t wearing his goggles. “Using my amazing powers, I foresee that the rest of you also need to get to work, or you’ll be fired.”

“Your powers are truly remarkable,” Linda said drily.

“Finally someone appreciates me!” Cisco said as they all moved toward the door.

When they arrived at S.T.A.R. Labs, none of the Rogues were surprised to find Eiling already there. He had indeed obtained the permit he swore he would, and he was always at S.T.A.R. Labs for the maximum amount of time allowed by law. Not for the first time, Cisco muttered something to Caitlin about whether it would really look all that suspicious if Eiling just disappeared.

Eiling greeted them all by name as they entered, which they all ignored, as per the usual. Generally, everyone ignored Eiling whenever he graced S.T.A.R. Labs with his presence.

They all got to work on their separate projects, as they’d grown used to doing when the general was present. Out of spite, none of the projects had anything to do with metahumans, weaponry, or especially metahuman weaponry. Cisco hadn’t actually asked, but he highly suspected Ronnie and Caitlin were very busy designing a talking toothpick dispenser, while Hartley worked extremely hard on his prototype of an automatic card shuffler.

Nobody would ever accuse Cisco of being petty, though. He was writing a complex algorithm that would predict the exact location of every Ditto, Charizard, and Vaporeon in Pokémon Go. That wasn’t out of spite. It was simply a very high priority.

Eiling looked increasingly annoyed by everyone’s lack of attention toward him, but he didn’t say anything about it.

Harrison entered and looked surprised to find Eiling there. He turned away, his faked expression of
shock already dropping off his face, and gave a brief flick of his eyes that could be interpreted as an eye roll.

Cisco stifled a laugh and went back to his algorithm. The program seemed to be working out—if it was actually accurate, he could probably adjust it to locate Mewtwos as well. Maybe Barry would give him a ride to some of the locations.

“Still haven’t changed your mind about helping me?” Eiling asked coolly.

“I’m still not entirely clear on how I’m supposed to be helping you,” Harrison responded, matching Eiling’s tone. “After all, you’ve already confiscated the excess metahuman containment technology from me, with the very shoddy justification that it was necessary to promote public safety.”

“It is,” Eiling said. “But you insist on informing every metahuman who would otherwise come by to delay their visit until I leave.”

Harrison shrugged. “I inform them of the circumstances of their visit. They make the decision about what time to come based on those facts.”

“This is really starting to get tedious,” Eiling said, growing more frustrated.

“What is?” Harrison asked innocently.

“Your employees wasting their time solely to annoy me. And your insistence on playing the fool, Harrison.”

“I only wish to know what you expect from me. As for my employees, S.T.A.R. Labs has a reputation to uphold—or rebuild, as the case may be—that involves creating things to help people, even if it’s in small ways. That has always been our goal.”

Cisco held up his phone toward Eiling. “Hold on—” He shook, and pumped his fist in victory. “I caught a Jigglypuff!” He turned his phone around, displaying the picture of the puffy pink fluff ball neatly balanced on top of Eiling’s head.

The general fumed. He turned back toward Harrison and asked, “Would Tess have allowed the lab to be run like this?”

Harrison, who’d already turned his back on Eiling, stiffened. When his voice came out, it was carefully controlled. “I understand precisely what you’re trying to do by mentioning my wife’s name. You think that referring to her will grant you some semblance of power in this situation. I refuse to grant you any. You have five hours and forty-two minutes before your time for today is up, General. I suggest you use it to think of a more intelligent attempt at an insult.”

Harrison, still not even glancing back at Eiling, left the room. Eiling glared after him.

In the silence that followed, Hartley slowly lifted his phone and caught the Jigglypuff on Eiling’s head as well.

Over at CCPD, Eddie sighed at the huge pile of folders on his desk. Even though he was organizing the Rogues, it seemed like Singh wasn’t giving him any leeway on his real job.
He took a few of the folders off the top of the stack and started to sort through them. They were mostly missing person’s cases from within the last couple of days. Ralph Dibny, Patrick O’Brien, Edward Slick. Eddie began to look for any similarities between them, when he was interrupted by an alarm starting to blare.

He glanced in the direction of Singh’s office, where the alarm was coming from, and instead of seeing the outside of his office, for a moment, it seemed like he was viewing directly through the door. Eddie blinked, his vision returning to normal, and shook his head. He needed more sleep.

Singh exited his office and waved off all the officers already moving to get their guns and head out to whatever the alert was coming from. Instead, he looked at Eddie.

“Jewelry heist on Sycamore. The robbers are metas. Call the Rogues.”

Eddie scrambled for his phone. “How many?”

“Four. No confirmation of their abilities.”

Eddie texted the Rogues. Four metas, working together to hold up a jewelry store. Plus the pile of folders. This was going to be a hard day, wasn’t it?

At S.T.A.R., all four phones went off simultaneously, letting out a variety of sci-fi themes (Cisco) and normal ringtones (everyone else). They all read the text from Eddie and glanced at each other.

Eiling, eyes narrowed, looked around at the four of them. He had to be suspicious at the synchrony of their notifications.

Ronnie was the fastest at thinking of a cover story. “The dark matter sensors we put around the city.”

“They’ve finished analyzing the extent of the damage,” Cisco agreed. He saved his algorithm and joined the others on their way out of the Cortex. None of them looked back to see the surely-still-skeptical expression on Eiling’s face.

“Did he fall for it?” Caitlin muttered when they were far enough down the hallway.

“No idea,” Ronnie said. “But let’s hope so.”

They got to Rogue headquarters as fast as possible. Leonard already had the van started and ready to go. Linda muttered something about how her boss was going to start suspecting something. The S.T.A.R. Labs crew retorted with their own fears about Eiling finding out.

“Oh, that’s worse,” Linda allowed.

They arrived at the scene of the jewelry heist with only a few speed limits broken and red lights run. Leonard parked the van at the end of the street and they approached the jewelry store.

Three of the four metas stood guard outside the shop. As the Rogues grew closer, a man dressed all in green threw out a hand.

Vines sprouted from the street, pulverizing the concrete with the force of their growth. They whipped around the Rogues, restraining them.
Firestorm burnt through the vines immediately. Caitlin made sure she was between the flames and the other Rogues, protecting them from the heat. They were free within moments.

The plant meta, who’d only been effective for six seconds and therefore gained the nickname of Vine as far as Cisco was concerned, sent out another pulse of meta-fertilizer. This time, trees burst out of the ground.

Leonard shot the saplings before they could grow any taller than waist height, freezing them. Barry raced toward the three metas.

One of them started spinning—seriously spinning, like, tornado levels of speed. If there were lightning, Cisco would suspect he was a speedster, but as there was none, maybe he could just spin really fast?

Regardless of the meta’s status as a speedster-slash-spinner, the wind from his movement threw Barry off balance, sending him tumbling to the ground.

The rest of the Rogues surged forward, half out of concern for Barry and half just to stop the band of metas.

And then—oh, crap. The third meta stepped into the range of Spinning Guy (which was an awful name, he would heretofore be known as Top), and Cisco didn’t have to struggle to come up with a name for this guy—he recognized him. Henry Hewitt. Also known as Tokamak.

Tokamak stepped into Top’s range and flared up, a darker form of Firestorm. Top’s vortex whipped the fire into a spiral, a blazing firenado. The intensity drove all the Rogues back a couple of steps.

Leonard fired his cold gun, but the flames melted away the ice immediately. Of course it did—Citizen Cold was one of the two members of the Rogues whose abilities were common knowledge. Anyone sensible planning this heist would make sure their crew could counteract Cold’s gun.

They might not have, however, accounted for Caitlin. She walked forward, entirely unafraid of the tornado of flames swirling in front of the entrance to the jewelry store. Extensive and mostly accidental testing had proven that her abilities always protected her from fire, even flames as intense as Firestorm’s. Tokamak—hopefully—wouldn’t even be an issue.

Cisco’s gaze drifted behind her when a glimmer of light caught his eye. His first thought was Linda, but she was focused on Caitlin and the firenado, ready to help if anything went wrong.

No, the shiny thing was a massive conglomeration of jewelry, what looked like every piece in the store. All of it was wound together tightly into a ball and floating, seemingly of its own accord, behind Tokamak, Top, and Vine. It was headed toward a getaway car parked nearby.

Cisco held out his hands and focused on the vibrations of the air. This seemed like a Weather Wizard kind of trick, some sort of manipulation of the air beneath the jewelry. Change the frequency and the fourth meta of this little band would be unable to make the jewelry float. Hopefully.

He changed the frequency. The meta… was still controlling it. Somehow. The jewelry continued to make its leisurely escape.

Okay. Maybe stop the other metas first and then worry about the jewels? He looked back at the firenado just in time to see the flames die out. Top stopped spinning and backed away from Caitlin, who held out her hands threateningly, a visible aura of cold drifting off them. Tokamak, flame
extinguished at the moment, eyed Caitlin nervously.

The pavement exploded around her suddenly. Thick brambles bristling with thorns wrapped around Caitlin. They froze upon contact with her skin, but not before tightening enough to draw blood.

Firestorm lit up and shot toward Caitlin, using their flame to boost their speed. Tokamak intercepted them, and the two flaming metas launched into the air, beginning to fight twenty feet off the ground.

Barry went to Caitlin instead, vibrating at the right speed to safely pull her from the nest of thorns. Another bramble began to sprout, and Barry sped the two of them away before they could get tangled up again. Top started to spin again.

“Close your eyes,” Linda muttered through the comms. The Rogues, who’d all experienced what would happen if they didn’t listen, obeyed.

She let out a bright blast of light in all directions. Vine crumpled, but Top’s spinning meant that he wasn’t exposed to the light for long enough to incapacitate him.

Linda scowled, and then yelped in surprise as her helmet was ripped forcibly off her head. She wasn’t the only one—Cisco’s goggles, Leonard’s gun, and all of their earpieces flew away from the Rogues and skittered across the ground.

Courtesy of the fourth meta, who’d finally seen fit to leave the jewelry store and was now controlling everything made of metal in the vicinity. Cisco took in her goth outfit and multitude of piercings and instantly decided on the nickname Metallica.

As the Rogues’ assorted metal accessories reached her, one of the earpieces glowed purple. It exploded, knocking her backwards and disrupting her hold on various bits of metal. The entire ball of jewelry a few feet away fell and scattered across the ground.

The Rogues generally winced. That would be a hassle to clean up.

But Barry swept back in. He detoured just long enough to slap meta handcuffs on Vine and Metallica before devoting himself to reorganizing the jewelry back where it belonged.

Top, who’d been thrown off as well by the blast, resumed his spinning. Roy took a couple of steps forward, bracing himself against the wind, and slid off his sunglasses. Before he could make eye contact, he stumbled backwards and flinched as Top, now spinning with enough force to start drilling through the sidewalk, bore down on him.

Leonard scrambled to reclaim his cold gun and shot a stream of ice, shoving Top aside just enough that it gave Roy time to regain his footing and stare Top down. Even though he was rotating, Top’s momentary glimpses of Ray’s pale green, glowing eyes invoked an intense nausea that forced him to stop spinning.

One of the two versions of Firestorm battling above them came crashing back down to Earth, just far enough away that it was impossible to tell which it was. At least until the other landed over the first’s groaning body.

Firestorm snickered. “Two heads are better than one.”

Cisco was certain that line came from both Ronnie and Hartley, and that if they’d been in separate bodies they would have spoken it in unison and then high-fived afterwards.
He’d never been prouder.

Most of the precinct celebrated the Rogues’ decisive victory. Eddie, however, complained to Barry about the added paperwork he now had to do.

“Hazards of being the manager of a metahuman task force, I guess.”

“I’ll look through the missing person’s cases if you want,” Barry offered. “I work fast.”

Eddie smirked. “That would be great. Thanks, Barry.” He brought up the folders and Barry riffled through them.

His expression changed as he read them, shifting from his usual CSI detachment to shock and actual fear.

“What is it?” Eddie asked.

“The names,” Barry said slowly. “Eddie Slick, Al Rothstein, Hannibal Bates?”

“And Ralph Dibny, Patrick O’Brien, Bea Da Costa, and about half a dozen others. What about them?”

“I’m not sure about the others, but those three? They were all metas in my timeline.” Barry looked up from the pile of folders. “That can’t be a coincidence. Someone is targeting metas.”

“Are you sure?”

Barry nodded firmly. “Good news for your workload, I guess. If they’re all metas, then it becomes Rogue business. We can talk to the families of the missing people to confirm it, but I’m pretty sure we’ll find that all of them are metahumans.”

Eddie glanced over his shoulder to confirm that they were the only ones in Barry’s crime lab. “You know what this sounds like, right? I already have a suspect.”

Barry nodded. “I think we have the same idea.”

At S.T.A.R. Labs, once Eiling was finally gone for the day, meta visitors started to trickle in again.

Today, within the course of two hours, three non-metas stopped by with questions the S.T.A.R. Labs team hadn’t heard before—all the same question.

“I know it sounds weird,” the first one said.

“I don’t know if it’s ever happened to anyone before?” the second said.

“You might think I’m crazy,” the third said.

But all of them told the same story.

“I had metahuman powers.”
“Invisibility,” said the first.

“Night vision.”

“Breathing underwater.”

And all three again said the same thing:

“I woke up this morning and my powers were gone.”

The scientists exchanged confused looks. As far as they knew, only the Neutralizer could remove powers.

But they could all think of at least one person who would’ve tried to replicate it.

When the Rogues next met up, the mood was a lot grimmer.

“Eiling is becoming an actual threat,” Barry said.

“You too?” Caitlin asked.

“What’s he done now?” Bette grumbled.

“Well, we don’t have proof of anything,” Barry backtracked.

“Okay, but we all know that it’s got to be Eiling,” Cisco said. “What do you think he’s responsible for, Barry?”

Barry sighed. “There are all these missing person’s cases, and all of them are metas. It has to be Eiling. I don’t know of anyone else who would target metas specifically, or have the resources to figure out who’s a meta in the first place. What’s going on at S.T.A.R., what do you have reason to suspect Eiling of?”

“A few people have shown up, claiming that their meta powers disappeared overnight,” Ronnie explained. “I have no idea how he managed to pull that off, but if he’s been making some metas disappear and taking others’ powers, we need to do something about it.”

“Bette, what do you know about Eiling?” Leonard asked. “Is there any way we can get to him, ask him about what’s going on?”

“Hold on,” Linda interrupted. “You want to just go up to Eiling, who’s already been kidnapping metas, and ask him about it?”

Leonard shrugged. “What else are we going to do? We outnumber him, and we can overpower him if necessary. He might be smart, and ruthless, and whatever else, but we’re the Rogues. If anyone’s going to ask him about it, it’s going to be us.”

“He respects strength,” Bette added. “I mean, he’ll try to be the most powerful person in the room no matter what, but we’ll get some sort of an answer if we confront him directly. It’s more effective than subterfuge will be.”

“Right, well, we can confront Eiling tomorrow,” Ronnie said. “But as for tonight—everyone remembers what we talked about, right?”

Everyone nodded except for Hartley, who only looked at Ronnie questioningly.
“Field trip,” Leonard said. “Civilian identities.”

They put their various costumes, hoods, and goggles away in various desk drawers and climbed into the van. Everyone ignored Hartley’s repeated questions about where they were going.

The answer turned out to be Central City Community College. The more specific answer, to Hartley’s great surprise, turned out to be a class—

A beginner’s American Sign Language class.

Hartley, whose usual method of communication was a mixture of sarcasm and insults, honestly had no idea what to say. He’d been slowly learning sign language from a book, but hadn’t expected that any of the Rogues would bother to learn it.

Ronnie grinned at him and very slowly and distinctly signed, *It was Caitlin’s idea. Everyone agreed. We wanted to surprise you.*

*I’m surprised,* Hartley signed back. Then he threw his arms around both Ronnie and Caitlin and hugged them tightly.

He saw the rest of the Rogues applauding out of the corner of his eye. After a moment, Hartley stepped away from his friends (and his eyes might have been a little blurry with tears, but shut up). Leonard led the way into the classroom.

Chapter End Notes

(spoilers for season 3)

(seriously, stop reading now if you don't want to know anything)

I'm really excited about this! We might very possibly be getting Dr. Alchemy in canon, which I am so psyched for, and Wally is of course going to be a speedster, and that's not even mentioning Cisco in this new timeline. And Eobard's showing up too... I already fangirled myself mostly out on my tumblr, but I'm always up for more talk about this. Hit me up in the comments if you want to discuss anything that's been revealed so far about season 3!
The next morning, the Rogues did another field trip. This one was guaranteed to be a lot less fun.

The military bunker was a few brief miles outside of town, secured by a fence and guarded by soldiers. Leonard, as he drove toward the security checkpoint, found himself taking note of the way the place was guarded.

Just in case.

Hopefully, his methodical cataloguing of the guards’ weapons, their positions, their weak points, wouldn’t be necessary. If all went well, they’d be able to successfully bully Eiling into getting the hell out of their city.

But how often did anything go well?

“State your name, rank, and business,” the soldier at the checkpoint said stiffly.

Leonard rolled his eyes. “We’re the Rogues. We’re here to speak with Eiling.”

He was already reaching for his cold gun stashed beneath his seat, expecting resistance. His companions tensed in the backseat, preparing for a fight.

He hadn’t expected the soldier’s eyes to brighten in understanding, or for him to nod and wave him ahead. “Go on in. The general has been expecting you.”

That didn’t bode well. Leonard didn’t put his cold gun back—in fact, his grip on it only tightened as he drove into the compound. The other Rogues exchanged uneasy looks.

There were at least a hundred yards of open land between the fence and the bunker itself, unoccupied, but easily observable through security cameras affixed to the top of intermittent posts. The road led directly up to the bunker, where it split into two to follow along the outside of the massive concrete building in both directions. At the intersection was another security checkpoint. This time, the soldier instructed Leonard to park in a small off-road section. He parked in between a Jeep and a tank.

The Rogues entered the bunker, a soldier guiding them to Eiling’s office. Though they only passed a few people, Leonard continued to note the security cameras everywhere. He was glad that Bette, Caitlin, and Firestorm had all scrounged up masks to hide their faces. Eiling was the last person who they wanted to know any of their secret identities.

Eiling’s office was at the end of a nondescript hallway on the right side of the building. The soldier who’d served as their guide knocked on the closed door.

“The Rogues have arrived.”

Eiling, when he responded, sounding like a shark might have when he was inviting a swimmer into the water. “Send them in.”

The soldier stepped back and gestured to the door. Leonard shoved it open and entered.
The room was just large enough for all the Rogues to comfortably fit inside, though small enough that if Firestorm wasn’t fused, it would be a tight squeeze. As it was, they readjusted themselves so they all had enough of a view of Eiling to cast a collective, venomous glare.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?” Eiling asked.

“You know exactly why we’re here,” Barry said. “Metahumans are going missing.”

“And you want my help to find them? What about your friend, Detective Eddie Thawne?”

“Don’t play dumb, Eiling,” Bette said sharply. “We all know you’re responsible for it.”

“Metahumans going missing? I have absolutely no idea what you mean.” Eiling leaned forward. “And I invite you to produce a shred of proof. Do you have any evidence linking me to this case?”

There was half a beat of silence, long enough for Eiling to lean back in his chair and cross his arms, smug satisfaction written all over his face.

That was enough for Leonard. He lifted his gun and aimed it directly at Eiling’s head. “Tell us where they are, Eiling, and this won’t have to get messy.”

Eiling, the insufferable bastard, just smirked. “The infamous Citizen Cold interrogation tactic. Unfortunately, I understand that a term of your task force’s formation was that you would refrain from killing… Mr. Snart.”

Leonard nearly shot on instinct, his already high-strung nerves jolted at the name. He barely managed to restrain himself, though he was certain Eiling didn’t miss the way his gun wavered at the effort.

Eiling’s grin widened. “I haven’t properly welcomed you, have I?” His gaze flicked from each Rogue to the next as he rattled off a list of names. “Mr. Allen, Mr. Raymond and Mr. Rathaway, Dr. Raymond, Mr. Ramon, Ms. Park, Mr. Bivolo, Mr. Desmond, and of course ex-Sergeant Sans Souci.”

They all reeled. How could he—some of their names may be easy to uncover for someone with his resources—but all of them?

“Don’t bother denying it,” Eiling added. “I can already tell I’m right.”

It was Bette who recovered enough to speak first. “So what are your intentions, General? You’ve made your stance on metahumans quite clear. Do you plan to make our identities common knowledge?”

“That would be inconvenient, as I have no doubt that you’ll be joining me within the next few weeks,” Eiling said. “Your secrets are nothing more than… insurance.”

“Insurance,” Firestorm said flatly. “So you can blackmail us whenever you want?”

“There’s no need to be hotheaded,” Eiling said, then laughed at his own joke.

“You’re a little late. Between Cold and Vibe, all the possible puns about our powers have already been made,” Firestorm said, entirely unamused. “Are you planning to answer the question?”

“Blackmail is a crude word. I merely like to ensure that all the stakes are laid out before my opponents decide to gamble.”
“So, blackmail,” Leonard said coldly. He hadn’t lowered the gun.

Eiling shrugged. “If you like. Now, unless you can produce some evidence for these crimes you claim I’ve committed, I’d like you out of my office.”

“Why did you kidnap some metas and remove others’ powers?” Roy asked.

“What?” That time, Eiling’s question didn’t seem like cocky denial, just confusion.

“Some metas have vanished,” Caitlin elaborated. “Others have reported their powers disappearing overnight. Why the distinction?”

“I don’t know anything about powers disappearing,” Eiling said. “As far as I know, S.T.A.R. Labs is the only place with the technology to do that. Maybe I should be asking you that question, Dr. Raymond. Now, out of my office.”

Leonard genuinely considered reneging on all his promises to CCPD and the mayor and just shooting Eiling here and now. It would be doing the city a favor, honestly.

But he didn’t. He, and the rest of the Rogues, left the bunker, maintaining a stormy silence under they were in the van, safe from any surveillance.

Then they all exploded into talking—complaints, fears, swears, threats.

“We’re going back there,” Leonard said once the cacophony had generally subsided.

Barry understood immediately. “To find the missing metas. Eiling will want to keep them close. I bet they’re in the bunker.”

“Tonight?” Bette asked.

“Tonight,” Leonard and Barry said together.

They all found black clothes and masks to wear that night. If something in the plan went wrong and they were spotted or caught on camera, at least they’d have some semblance of plausible deniability.

The plan relied heavily on Linda—specifically, the extension of her powers that she’d recently discovered.

“I’m still not sure about this,” she said. “It takes a lot of focus, and if I get distracted or nervous, it’s not gonna work.”

“I’ll keep you calm and focused,” Roy offered.

“Okay. But if my light-bending skills flake out halfway through and we’re all caught, don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“I’m sure you’ll do fine,” Caitlin assured her.

“Bette, you said you know where to go, right?” Barry checked.

“I said I know how to navigate the bunker,” Bette corrected. “I think that the metahumans will be
in the top-security section of the left wing, but there’s no way to know for sure until we’re inside.”

“Then let’s get going,” Cisco suggested.

Leonard had acquired a different van, muttering something about how Eiling or his men would recognize the other one. This one matched the Rogues’ all-black outfits.

He parked a little way off the road, half a mile from the fence surrounding the bunker. Despite the distance, all the Rogues pulled their masks on before getting out of the van.

They stayed away from the road, using the half-mile of leeway to circle around to the side of the compound. When they were close enough, Leonard indicated to everyone to stop.

All the Rogues turned to Linda.

She took a deep breath and turned to Roy.

His eyes glowed a peaceful blue, and all the tension and fear bled from Linda. She giggled, almost lightheaded in her sudden and utter relaxation.

“This is so great,” she said languidly. “You all look so worried, what are you worried about?”

“Keep looking at me or it’ll wear off before we’re done,” Roy ordered. He kept up the blue for a few more seconds, and then switched to a sharp grey. Linda stopped giggling and set her shoulders—still not tense, but definitely focused.

“Okay,” she said. “I can do this.”

She held out her hands toward the rest of the group and twisted the little bit of moonlight around them. Turning the Rogues invisible.

In the time between one heartbeat and the next, the Rogues were suddenly not there.

They all stood still for a moment, gazing around at where their friends should have been. All of them were beginning to realize that it would be very hard to pull off their plan if they couldn’t see each other.

“You know,” Cisco said reflectively, “we didn’t think this through very well.”

There was a pause, and then Barry said, “If we stay in contact with each other, we don’t need to worry about losing track of where we are.”

Caitlin stifled a snicker. “So we’re going to break into a high-security military bunker on a top-secret, unauthorized rescue mission… while holding hands?”

“Unless you have a better idea.”

“I’ll be in the front,” Bette said decisively. “Keep Linda in the back so she can redo the invisibility if it starts to slip.”

They fell into line with a few muttered complaints and exclamations of pain as toes were stepped on and rocks tripped over. Eventually, they settled into position with Bette at the front, followed by Leonard, Barry, Cisco, Firestorm, Caitlin, Albert, Roy, and finally Linda at the back.

For Barry, who had once navigated a whole date while blind, this wasn’t the weirdest thing he had done as the Flash. The sound of his teammates resisting laughter or groans, however, indicated that
they were far less accustomed to odd situations like this one.

They approached the fence and paused just outside it. Without speaking, all of them very aware of the cameras, they readjusted. Firestorm pulled Caitlin, the only one immune to their flames, aside and flew over the fence with her. Barry took the rest of their team members one at a time and phased through the fence. Impressively, Linda’s light manipulation disguised even Firestorm’s flames and Barry’s lightning.

Once everyone was safely on the inside of the fence, they fumbled to get back into their line and proceeded as silently as possible toward the bunker. Even Barry wasn’t sure he wanted to risk phasing through solid concrete, so it was a good thing the bunker had a window.

Albert ditched the line and went to the front. He’d been memorizing the most common formulas for bulletproof glass all day, and it only took a few tries before the window transformed into a light aluminum compound. He’d thought about just changing it to air, but they did want to put everything back the way it was afterwards, and air was too fluid to be certain what shape it would take.

The aluminum rectangle wasn’t in Linda’s bubble of invisibility, so it was easy to see when Albert caught it as it fell out of the frame and placed it on the ground. Hopefully, nobody was watching the cameras closely enough to catch the slight movement.

He returned to his spot in the line and the Rogues climbed one by one through the window and into the bunker.

There hadn’t been very many people in the building during the day, and nighttime only exacerbated the emptiness of the bunker. They only encountered one person on their way toward the left-hand wing of the building, and he was easily avoided by the Rogues pressing themselves flat to the side of the hallway.

Bette led them through a twisted, intentionally confusing labyrinth of corridors, until they arrived at a locked door with a keycard reader and keypad next to it.

Bette tugged on Leonard’s hand and continued to pull until the Rogues got the message and gathered around her, close enough that she could whisper to all of them.

“This is just the first level of security clearance. There are going to be more, each of them more extensive than the last. We’ll have to disable the cameras, and then we’ll have a maximum of five minutes before the soldiers arrive. If we’re lucky.”

“I can handle a lot of the security,” Cisco whispered. “The cameras, the card reader, and the keycode, at least. No guarantees on anything past this door.”

“We’ll have to work fast,” Barry muttered. “Luckily, fast is my specialty.”

“Take out the cameras, Cisco,” Leonard said. “Let’s get started.”

There was a pause, and then a slight crackle of electricity. “We’re good,” Cisco said at a normal volume. “Linda?”

The Rogues dropped into visibility and Linda sighed in relief as Cisco went to the security panel. “I don’t care how focused I am, that’s exhausting,” she said.

Cisco sent little vibrational pulses through the keycard reader until it lit up green, then vibed on the keypad to get the right number. It beeped and the door clicked as it unlocked.
Before anyone could even move to walk through the door, Barry blurred into action, taking the others in twos down the hallway and to the next closed door.

This one was an eye scanner. Cisco tried to vibe it, and he could see what the correct eyes would look like, but the mechanism was buried too deep in the wall for him to access with vibrations.

“I can’t do it,” Cisco said.

Barry reached out and tried phasing, but the wall was too thick—taking anyone else along with him would be dangerous.

Bette pounded on the wall in frustration. “We don’t have enough time to find another way in! And if we can’t find the metas, Eiling can’t be prosecuted.”

“Roy,” Leonard said. He dragged Roy in front of the retina scanner. “You can do colors. Do you think you can mimic an actual eye?”

“Um…” Roy looked panicked. “I don’t know. Maybe?”

“Well, try.”

Cisco did his best to describe the correct eye shape and colors. Roy’s eyes emitted quick flashes of different colors.

The door didn’t open.

“I can’t do any more than one color at a time,” Roy said finally, taking a step back. “If it were human, I could….” He trailed off, frowning thoughtfully, and stepped forward again. His eyes glowed a bright green.

The door opened.

“How did you do that?” Firestorm asked.

Roy shrugged. “Computers work on binary, right? 0 if the door is closed, 1 if it’s open—I thought the number 1 really hard. Computer hypnotism.”

Barry moved to again chauffeur the Rogues to the next destination, but Bette held up her hand. “Wait.” She tilted her head at the hallway ahead. “Hear that?”

After a moment, they did—quiet murmurs from far off.

“How do you do that?” Bette said grimly.

“How do we get by without them noticing us?” Caitlin asked.

“It’ll be slower,” Leonard said, “but Linda can turn us invisible again and Barry can run us through.”

The others hastily nodded. It had already been at least three minutes. Time was running short.

Barry picked up Linda and summoned the strength to take Leonard as well. He still thought it was dangerous to try phasing through these walls, but there wasn’t an easier way—they wanted to get by unnoticed, and leaving the soldiers’ unconscious bodies would be very conspicuous. The moment they were invisible, he sped down the hall, headed toward the voices.
There were four soldiers standing guard outside of—of course—yet another closed door. Barry braced himself and, without slowing down, phased through it.

He didn’t take the time to look around—instead, he set Leonard down and ran himself and Linda back to the others.

One at a time, he escorted them through to the next part of the bunker, all without the soldiers noticing anything. If they’d been paying attention, they might have heard the sound of feet against the concrete, but they didn’t seem to notice.

When they were all through, Linda dropped the illusion and the Rogues considered their next obstacle.

This time, it wasn’t a door, but rather a whole wall, made up of what looked like smoky glass. Behind it, there were hazy figures moving just the slightest bit.

There were no openings in the glass barrier. No doors, no seams, nothing.

“Over here,” Firestorm said from the right-hand, normal concrete wall, waving the others over. Set into the wall was a single keyhole.

Cisco brushed a hand against the hole and closed his eyes. “It’s mechanical, not electronic,” he reported. “And surprise, surprise, Eiling has the only key.”

He got all that from a single touch. Leonard shook his head. Not for the first time, he was glad Cisco was on their side. An evil Vibe would be terrifying to try to fight.

“I got this,” Barry said. He backed up to the door and ran at the glass barrier, vibrating his molecules even faster than he had done to get through the door.

Bang. He stumbled back from the wall, stunned. “Ouch.” He tried again, this time without the running start, just a hand pressed against what couldn’t be glass.

He shook his head. “Nothing. It’s got to be meta-proof glass, like—”

“Like what S.T.A.R. Labs provided for the police, and Eiling confiscated,” Firestorm finished, annoyed. They tried a massive fireball. No damage to the wall. “Albert, the chemical formula for the material, it’s…”

As Firestorm rattled off a long list of elements, Bette went up to the glass, pulling off both gloves. She so rarely touched things safely anymore that it was almost a relief when she pressed both palms flat against the hazy surface and got no reaction.

Almost. Because it meant whatever—whoever—was back there, and it had to be the missing metas, was still trapped.

Albert took her place when she back away from the wall. He had exactly as much luck as she did.

“Either Eiling changed the formula, or it just doesn’t work on this stuff,” he said.

Caitlin blasted the wall with ice in frustration. “This isn’t why we built this technology! We wanted to keep people safe, not imprison them.”

Barry phased through one of the normal walls, and returned through the opposite wall after a few seconds. “The glass goes all the way around. Even on the roof. We’re not getting in there without
The Rogues took a moment to just stare in frustration at the glass. All this way just to be beaten by a stupid wall of metahuman-proof material.

They snapped out of their purposeful glaring when shouts rang out in the hall behind them. The Rogues gathered in a corner just as the door burst open.

Soldiers looked around—and their eyes passed right over the Rogues.

Leonard glanced down and found that they were invisible again. He sent a silent wave of gratitude in Linda’s general direction.

The Rogues scrambled to clasp each other’s hands and snuck behind the frantic and confused soldiers, going back out the way they came.

Getting out of the bunker, even in its full-on panic mode, was a lot easier than getting in. There still weren’t many occupants of the building—certainly not enough to notice or guard the one window letting in the cool night air. The Rogues climbed back out, Albert replaced the pane and transformed it back to bulletproof glass, and they made it out of the compound alive, unseen, and free.

Once outside the fence, Barry and Firestorm sped up the process of returning to the van. For the second time that day, the Rogues drove away from Eiling’s bunker in a worse mood than when they came.

“The worst part is,” Barry said, “we can’t even get a warrant and bring the CCPD down on Eiling. We’d need probably cause, and breaking in means our testimony can’t count for anything.”

There was a long moment of resentful silence before Albert said, “Barry, you’re a CSI, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Please. Find some evidence and bring him down.”

“I hope I can,” Barry muttered.

Later that night, General Eiling held an impromptu meeting with his most trusted subordinate, Lieutenant Shrieve.

“It could have just been the cameras acting up—a power surge, perhaps,” Shrieve suggested.

“It could have been. But it was the Rogues.” Eiling crossed his arms. “Make preparations—we’ll have to be ready to move the subjects at a moment’s notice.”

“Of course, General. I’ll inform the medical staff at once.”

“How is the reconditioning going?” Eiling asked.

Shrieve grinned. “Very well. The subjects given the latest treatment show no sign of regaining their former faculties.”

“Good. Now, you understand, Lieutenant, that should any part of the plan go awry, the culpability
will fall directly to you. You are still willing to assume the blame?”

Lieutenant Shrieve nodded firmly. “Anything to serve my country, General Eiling. Your name will never be mentioned.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant. Your country will thank you as well one day.” Eiling dismissed him and sat back in his chair, reviewing the footage. It still showed nothing of interest, but he knew it was the Rogues.

Nearly time to proceed to the next stage of the plan.

Chapter End Notes

To absolutely no one's surprise, General Eiling is evil.
Eddie was having a whole series of weird days. And living in Central City, that was saying something.

He was tired all the time, no matter how much sleep he got. He found himself eating enough to feed an army and still remaining hungry.

And most of all, he kept seeing and hearing things that weren’t there.

Take this morning, for example. He was talking to Singh, and, as usual lately, the subject of Eiling was brought up. Eddie automatically glanced at the empty desk in the corner where Eiling spent most of his time in the precinct. He knew full well that Eiling was currently at S.T.A.R. Labs, and despite that, he still saw Eiling sitting there in the exact same position as yesterday. He jumped, and blinked, and the desk was exactly as empty as it should have been.

He finished his conversation with Singh—and yeah, he might have halfway alluded to the break-in the Rogues pulled off a few nights ago. Singh might have, if one listened carefully, expressed sincere regret that they couldn’t find any concrete evidence. It was also possible that Singh encouraged another attempt if they could figure out a way through that wall.

As Eddie went to his desk, he heard the last few words of his conversation with Singh echoing behind him. He refused to look over his shoulder, worried that he might see something impossible and certifiably crazy if he did.

He was seeing into drawers before they opened, through walls as though there were windows there, and he could see Iris’s hand whenever they played cards.

And he was always, always tired.

In his constant exhaustion, it took Eddie far too long to put the pieces together. When the thought finally floated into his hunger-addled mind, he cursed himself for not realizing what was happening to him earlier and went to see the Rogues.

They greeted him, their lingering frustration at not being able to prove anything about Eiling still clear in their voices.

“Is there news from CCPD?” Leonard asked.

“No—well, actually, kind of. I told Singh about your night at the bunker, and he urged you to try again, but that’s not why I’m here.” Eddie took a deep breath. “I think I’m a metahuman.”

There was a pause as everyone took that in, Ronnie signing Eddie’s words to Hartley. And then the Rogues burst into applause.

“Are you joining the Rogues?” Barry asked.

“You’re not going rogue, are you?” Cisco asked.

“Is the pun really necessary?” Ronnie asked Cisco.

“What are your powers?” Linda said.

“Is there any way we can use them to take down Eiling?” Bette demanded.
Eddie blinked rapidly, trying to process one question at a time. “Um, I’d like to join the Rogues, if I can figure out how to control my powers. If not, they’re driving me crazy and I’ll just get them removed. I’m not planning on becoming a criminal. I have no idea if they can help with Eiling.”

“But your powers are…” Leonard prompted.

“Well, I’ve been seeing and hearing things that aren’t there—well, they are there, but they’re behind a wall. Or things that were there, but they happened yesterday. I’ve also been really tired, and hungry, and I feel like I’m losing my mind.”

“Tell me about it,” Cisco muttered. “Do you blank out from the real world? See things halfway across the city?”

Eddie shook his head. “It’s always been in the same room, except one time when I glimpsed the end of the street I was walking down. But I don’t blank out at all. It’s just there, like someone decided to put a window into a solid wall.”

“A window into a solid wall, huh?” Leonard gave Bette a sideways glance. “You thinking what I’m thinking?”

Bette smiled. “This could be what we need.”

“I can’t control it,” Eddie warned. “At all.”

“Then it’s obvious what we need to do!” Albert said.

Eddie looked confused as the Rogues all sing-songed in unison, “Field trip!”

“The dodgeball teams would be even again,” Linda pointed out when they arrived at the Badlands.

“We’re not going to try dodgeball until Eddie can handle whatever it is he can do,” Leonard said.

“So, how do we start?” Eddie asked. He hadn’t had any weird visions on the way over, and he was starting to worry that maybe he didn’t have metahuman abilities after all. Maybe he was just crazy.

“First, we need to make sure you don’t pass out,” Barry said. “Trust me, I’ve had a lot of experience with exhaustion because of my powers. Here.” He passed Eddie what looked like a normal granola bar. “Don’t eat it too fast, there are two thousand calories in there. Some serious caffeine, too.”

Eddie considered it. “Do you really think I need that much energy?”

“You said you were tired all the time. However your powers work, they obviously take a lot out of you. Take it from someone with a speedster’s metabolism—you won’t have to worry about eating too much ever again.”

“All right.” Eddie took a bite and nearly gagged, but managed to force himself to swallow. “These taste awful, Barry.”

“I know,” Barry said grimly. “Welcome to my world.”

Eddie choked down half of the bar, finding himself not hungry for the first time in days. The caffeine started to buzz through his system, and he actually felt ready for whatever was coming
next. He stuck the rest of the bar in his pocket.

“Now what?”

“Now, well, I don’t know.” Barry gestured to the expansive open space all around them. “Can you do your thing?”

“I don’t know how to make it work, it just happens,” Eddie said.

“That’s what happened to me,” Albert said. “When I went back to work after the accelerator explosion, I would touch one chemical while thinking of another, and it would change without any conscious intent.”

“I nearly burned down my apartment on accident when I got my powers,” Linda contributed. Eddie looked at her, eyes wide, and Leonard and Barry tossed incredulous stares in her direction.

Linda raised her hands in apology. “Sorry. Not helpful.”

Eddie turned back to Albert. “I guess that’s kind of what’s happening to me. I mean, I usually get glimpses of things that I was already thinking about, just with weird angles or of moments that already happened.”

“Let’s try something stupid,” Cisco suggested. “How many fingers am I holding up behind my back?”

Eddie squinted in his direction and tried to imagine seeing Cisco from the other side.

For one fleeting moment, Cisco was replaced with the image of him from the back.

Eddie did a double take. The vision ceased immediately and a wave of wooziness went through him, but the momentary glimpse was enough.

“Four. Though it’s anyone’s guess why you’re holding them up in the Vulcan salute.”

Cisco’s eyes widened. He brought his hand out from behind his back and displayed the four-finger Vulcan salute.

The Rogues clapped in amazement. Ronnie whistled appreciatively.

Eddie couldn’t resist a grin. “But it only lasted for a second,” he said. “And unless any of you can see what I’m seeing, I don’t think it’ll help us with Eiling at all.”

“Don’t be so pessimistic,” Caitlin chided. “Try again.” She had her hand behind her back, but before Eddie could even try to induce one of his visions, she pulled her hand back in front of her.

Eddie looked at her in confusion.

She shrugged. “You said that you can see things that already happened. How many fingers was I holding up?”

Eddie took a deep breath and remembered what his reality warping was like with Cisco. It had been the mental equivalent of lifting a heavy weight.

This time, it felt like the mental load had doubled its weight. But he saw it—and this time, Eddie managed to keep his little hole in reality open for a moment or two longer.
Barry, still standing next to him, gasped. The sound broke Eddie’s focus, and the vision ended.

“Two!” Barry said excitedly. “I saw it!”

Caitlin nodded, eyes bright with excitement.

“So it’s definitely not just you hallucinating,” Leonard said encouragingly to Eddie.

“Hey, didn’t we already prove that with my test?” Cisco asked, offended.

Roy snorted. “Cisco, I’ve known you for like two weeks and even I would have guessed that you were doing the Vulcan salute.”

“He has a point,” Ronnie said.

Cisco made a face at both of them.

Eddie put a hand to his head, suddenly exhausted and starving again. He pulled the energy bar from his pocket and ate the rest of it as fast as he could manage, both because he felt like he was about to pass out, and so he wouldn’t taste it as much.

“You okay?” Leonard asked him.

“We don’t need to do anything else today if you don’t want to,” Barry added.

Eddie shook his head as the caffeine jolted through him. “I’m good. But I hope you have a lot of those energy bars, Barry, because I’m going to need them.”

Barry grinned. “Got you covered.”

Ronnie looked up from his signing to Hartley and said, “Hartley’s got a theory.”

Everyone quieted and looked at Hartley. Half signing, half speaking, he communicated, “You said that you weren’t just seeing things, but hearing them as well.”

When Eddie nodded, Hartley continued, “If sound waves can travel through your little visions, and others can see them, maybe it’s not just an illusion. Maybe objects can actually travel through them like portals.”

Everyone, once Ronnie had finished translating Hartley’s signs, turned to Eddie eagerly.

He shrugged. “If I can make one big enough, for long enough, maybe.” He glanced around for something to test it on.

There was a pile of loose gravel about twenty feet away. Eddie had seen further than that before, and with a wall in the way, so there was no reason he couldn’t…

The image of the gravel appeared before him, like he was seeing through binoculars. Eddie struggled under the mental weight, holding tight to it and gritting his teeth with the effort. He could actually feel his energy leaking away, leaving him lightheaded, so he hurriedly stuck out a hand, right into the portal.

His hand still looked attached to his arm as he reached toward the gravel directly in front of him, but, twenty feet away, it was also reaching out to the gravel.

Eddie snagged one of the bits of rock, snatched his hand back to himself, and promptly passed out.
He came around a couple of minutes later to the sensation of very cold hands on his forehead and neck.

“The one day I forget to bring my medical bag…”

An energy bar was shoved into his hand—his left hand, the other one was still clenched into a tight fist—and Eddie ate it in two quick bites before even opening his eyes.

Then he sat up, gently pushing a protesting Caitlin away, and opened his right hand, palm up.

Sitting in his palm was a tiny, assuming, piece of gravel.

The Rogues cheered. Linda jumped up and down in excitement. Bette, for all her military-gained composure, looked like she might join in. Leonard too.

“Now let’s just hope I can do it again,” Eddie said. He tossed the rock aside and held out his hand to Barry instead. “Give me another bar. I’m starving.”

That was all the practice they did that day, at Caitlin’s insistence. But the Rogues, plus Eddie, returned every day for the next week. Iris joined them on the second day and came along each day as well, cheering on her husband.

Eddie got better. He generally stopped passing out on day five, and by then he was tossing rocks into portals that transported them a hundred yards away, and opening holes big enough to let the other Rogues travel through.

Day seven was when the time travel started.

It was innocent enough to begin with. Eddie had mastered manipulating space, and they already knew he could see things in the past, so why not test his abilities with time?

Eddie did a few repeats of Caitlin’s how-many-fingers-was-I-holding-up trick. Iris was the one to make the dangerous suggestion, though all the Rogues were considering it to some degree.

“So, if you can grab things that are physically far away, could you grab things that are… temporally… far away?”

“You’re talking time travel,” Barry said. “And that’s dangerous, that’s—”

“Kind of why we’re all here,” Cisco interrupted, raising his eyebrows at Barry, who had the grace to look abashed.

“What does that mean?” Linda asked.

“Don’t worry about it,” Barry said. “I’m not saying you shouldn’t try it, I’m just saying that time travel can be… messy.”

There was a momentary, ominous silence, and then Cisco said slowly, “You’re still gonna do it, right?”
“Right,” Eddie agreed.

Linda knelt, picked up a rock, and held it out toward Eddie for a few seconds before letting it fall to the ground.

Eddie opened a portal immediately, the effort more strenuous than creating spatial holes was. He reached toward five-seconds-ago Linda and took the rock from her hand. Letting the portal close, he held up the stone for the others’ inspection.

The world didn’t end, which was a nice bonus.

They passed the rock around, examining it like it was radioactive and could possibly kill them.

Leonard noticed it first. “The original rock is still here.” He picked it up from the ground and showed the others.

“So now there are two of them?” Barry asked slowly. “Time remnant?”

“Pass it here, I want to try something,” Albert said. Leonard tossed it to him.

Albert took up another stone and hit the first hard enough that a little chip fell off.

Roy, who was holding the second version, squinted at the rock in his hand. “Woah.” He showed the rest of the Rogues—there was now a chip on the exact same spot.

“ Weird. They must still be linked somehow,” Cisco said. He glanced at Barry. “Not a time remnant.”

Roy tried chipping his version of the rock, and the same nick appeared on the other one.

“They’re the same rock,” Leonard concluded. “Just… in two places at once.”

“What happens if they touch?” Bette asked.

“We’ll probably all die,” Cisco said. “Let’s try it!”

“Um, Hartley and I should do that,” Ronnie said. “At least if there’s an explosion, we have a chance of absorbing the excess energy.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Barry asked after Firestorm merged.

They shrugged. “Sure. It seems unlikely that we’ll die, based on the way Eddie’s powers have worked so far. And we’re curious.”

The other Rogues backed away to what was probably a safe distance. Firestorm held one of the rocks in each hand. Bracing themselves, they slowly brought their hands together. Everyone tensed, watching intently.

When they touched, the rocks let out a slight click at the contact.

There was no other reaction. Firestorm separated them and brought them together again, still with no more effect than would be expected by gently tapping two stones against each other.

“Well, that was anticlimactic,” Linda said.

“You sound disappointed,” Caitlin said. “I’m glad that my husband is uninjured.”
“Yeah, but it would have been pretty neat if there were some other reaction,” Barry said. “This isn’t any sort of time travel that I’m used to. This is just… sloppy. It’s a paradox, but a really lazy paradox.”

“Something in two places at once, with no adverse effects?” Cisco shrugged. “It’s more of a loophole in the laws of reality than a paradox.” His eyes widened. “Loophole! What do you think, Eddie? As your Rogue name?”


“I like it,” Iris said decisively.

“It’s more descriptive of what you can do than ‘portal’, anyway,” Bette said. “That’s what they are—loopholes in time and space.”

“I think we’ve skipped a step,” Leonard said. “Before we decide on your name—Eddie, would you like to officially join the Rogues?”

Eddie grinned. “Now that it looks like I won’t accidentally end the world? I’m in.”

Leonard returned the grin. “Welcome to the team, Loophole.”

“Now, I think we have a bunker to break into,” Barry said.

So that night, they put on their all-black outfits again and prepared for Round 2.

The plan was nearly the same as last time, mostly because Eddie could open loopholes that were either large enough for a human to pass through, or over a great distance, but not both. The only way he’d be able to get them through the meta-proof wall was if he was right next to it when he tried.

The major difference in the plan was due to the fact that Eddie hadn’t been the only one pushing the limits of their abilities that week. Linda had practiced and practiced until she finally felt certain that she could not only maintain the Rogues’ invisibility, but also project a static image of a closed door. That way, there would be no need to disable the cameras until the very end of their break-in, lessening the pressure of a time limit.

The security measures hadn’t changed at all since the last time they were there, so it was easy for the now-practiced Rogues to slip through the halls like ghosts and arrive again at the meta-proof glass.

Now Cisco disabled the cameras in the vicinity, and Linda stopped her light manipulation. The Rogues watched Eddie, holding their breath. His powers didn’t need to interact with the wall at all, so hopefully…

Eddie could feel the glass trying to snap his loophole shut, like a rubber band straining to retain its shape. It was more mentally exhausting than any of his loopholes had been since that first day, but he won the psychic tug-of-war and opened a gap straight through into the room beyond the wall. The hole was barely large enough for a person to pass through, but it did its job. The Rogues scrambled to get through it, and Eddie dove through last just as the loophole closed.

Beyond the meta-proof glass was some horror-movie excuse for a lab. Lit by dim fluorescents, it
looked as sterile and clinical as any hospital—but for the metahuman containment cells lining the walls.

Barry counted the occupied cells and muttered, “Eighteen,” to Eddie. To date, it was exactly the number of missing metahumans.

The metas were all standing within their cells—none sitting or trying to rest. And none moving. Aside from the occasional blink or slight twitch, the metas could very well be statues.

“What’s wrong with them?” Albert asked hollowly, standing in front of one of the cases. He knocked lightly on it, earning no reaction from the woman within. She didn’t even turn her head.

Roy stared into one of the men’s eyes, beaming a variety of colors at him. “The glass is blocking me, or maybe they’re brain-dead…”

“They’re not,” Caitlin said grimly from the table of medicines at the center of the space. She held up a vial of some murky solution. “I don’t know exactly what this cocktail of drugs is, but it’s got a lot of chemicals commonly used to induce highly suggestive states.”

“Are you saying they’ve been brainwashed?” Cisco asked, horrified.

“It looks like it,” Caitlin said. She slipped the vial into her pocket.

“Can you figure out a cure?” Bette asked.

“Probably, but it’ll take time,” Caitlin said.

“Time we don’t have right now,” Firestorm pointed out. “We need to get the metas out and leave, now.”

Leonard held up a small video camera and panned around the space, keeping the Rogues out of the frame. He stopped the video and stuck the camera in his pocket. “Eddie?”

Eddie went to the nearest cell and started to open a loophole, only to wince at the reminder of how mentally draining the meta-proof glass was.

“I can’t,” he said. “I’m hardly sure I can get us out of here, let alone trying to free eighteen others.” He glared at the cell as though sheer force of will would break it open.

“It’ll be fine,” Barry said. “We’ll get the evidence to Singh, do a legal raid of the bunker.”

“We need to leave before the soldiers arrive,” Linda added. “Eddie, just get us out, and hurry.”

Eddie nodded and opened up a way out of the small lab. He held it open just long enough that they could all get out, starting to sway on his feet, and then fell through the loophole himself and passed out.

Leonard lifted Eddie over his shoulder, momentarily reflected on the fact that two months ago he never would have expected to be carrying a police detective out of a military bunker, and followed the Rogues as they escaped the building.

Once they were safely back in their headquarters, Leonard sent the video to Moira. She’d be able to upload it anonymously, making it a legitimate source of evidence with no blatantly illegal origin. The others focused on waking Eddie.

When both tasks were accomplished, Caitlin said, “I should start analyzing the chemical Eiling
used, find a way to counteract it…” She cut herself off with a yawn.

“Everyone go home,” Leonard ordered. “The CCPD will investigate tomorrow, and until then, we can all get some rest. The metas will still be there in the morning.”

Barry remembered that line, with more than a trace of bitterness, the following morning, when CCPD did go to investigate following a tip from an anonymously posted video. The meta-proofed lab was still there, yes. But when Singh demanded that Eiling open it up—

The room was entirely empty.


Barry fumed. And he could have sworn that Eiling smirked at him as CCPD exited empty-handed.

Late that night, he could just picture that same insufferable grin back on the general’s face, when reports started flooding in about a breakout at Iron Heights.

It had to be Eiling.

Because the only ones who’d ‘escaped’ were metahumans.

Eiling was obviously preparing for something.

And Barry was not looking forward to finding out what.
Eiling didn’t show up to S.T.A.R. at all that day.

As gratifying as his absence was, it could only be an omen of far more sinister plans to come. And when Barry texted Cisco and the others with the news about the empty lab, their fears were confirmed.

It took all day to identify the precise mix of drugs in the sample Caitlin had taken from the bunker. Even with the combined intellect of everyone still working at S.T.A.R. Labs, including Harrison, the formula was too complex to quickly unravel.

Once the correct ingredients were identified, they turned all their efforts to extrapolating a cure. Caitlin even recruited Albert to come help them—as a chemist at Mercury Labs, he had vital expertise and understood the urgency of the situation.

They were still working when the news broke about the escape from Iron Heights. The Rogues stared wide-eyed at the TV as the reporter announced that the metahumans were the only missing prisoners.

Cisco stepped away from the workstation and called Barry.

“It’s Eiling,” they both said the moment Barry picked up, skipping any greetings.

“What’s the situation?” Barry asked.

“We’re working on it. And we found something out about the drugs—I didn’t expect it to be an important detail until just now, but we ran some simulations, and, Barry, the chemicals take twelve hours to work.”

“You mean before the metas are…”

“Completely brainwashed, yeah. Remember what Eiling said? He told us that we were going to join him before long. Barry, I think he’s going to try to brainwash us next.”

“He’s going to use the metahuman army he’s created to try capturing us,” Barry said, horrified.

“And we have twelve hours to prepare.”

Barry thought for a moment, the only sound the slight static of the phone. The numbers didn’t look good—ten Rogues against twenty-six of Eiling’s brainwashed drones, the eighteen he’d already kidnapped plus the eight metas the Rogues had defeated. “Okay. You guys keep trying to find a cure. I’ll talk to Leonard, and we’ll see about getting more allies.” They were going to need all the help they could get.

“Sure. Keep us posted if there’s any news.”

“You too.” Barry hung up.

Cisco returned to the workstation. As they continued to test compounds, he explained what was going on. They all grimaced at the thought of defending Central City from over two dozen metas under Eiling’s control.

“We better work faster,” Harrison muttered.
“So, tell me how you really feel,” Barry said drily after Leonard’s immediate, outraged reaction was over.

Leonard slowly lowered his gun, staring at the ice now coating the wall of the old precinct. “Peachy.”

“We have under twelve hours, and Eiling will have double the numbers we do.”

Leonard squinted at Barry. There was a catch in the kid’s voice that made it sound like he had an idea. “So what are we going to do?”

Despite the circumstances, a smile flickered across Barry’s face.

“At some point they’re going to stop letting us just bully our way onto TV,” Leonard muttered to Barry.

“But for now, they are, so just be grateful,” Barry told him.

They’d talked their way into the KSFZ broadcast station—truthfully, all they really had to do was show up and ask for an emergency broadcast. Their reputation had done the rest.

The cameraman counted down and pointed at them to signify that they were live.

Barry spoke first. “We know it’s late, Central City—”

“But wake up,” Leonard interrupted. “Because we’ve got a problem on our hands.”

“I’m sure some of you have seen General Wade Eiling around town lately,” Barry said. He was in his Flash persona, unwavering and more confident than he ever was without the mask. “It’s not that we enjoy making unsubstantiated accusations, but—”

Leonard cut him off again. “But unless we’re very much mistaken, our dear friend the general has an army of brainwashed metas that he intends to set upon the city like a pack of dogs under his control. And they will tear us apart unless—”

“Cold!” Barry chastised. “Don’t be pessimistic, there are probably kids watching.” He turned back to the camera and shook his head. “Look, despite what my overly dramatic friend here says, we’ll be fine. We’re just asking for a little extra backup. If there are any metahumans out there…”

Leonard cleared his throat and Barry glanced at him and his gun before continuing, “Or normal humans with especially clever tech, come help us out for a day.”

“This doesn’t make you a part of the Rogues,” Leonard added. “No obligations other than to show up and help—we won’t even ask your name. And there’s a reward.”

“How did I forget the reward?” Barry asked. “$500 cash, funded by S.T.A.R. Labs, just for helping out and ensuring no casualties. If that sounds like a good deal, meet us in ten hours at the new precinct.” They had approximately eleven hours left. Hopefully, the hour of leeway would be enough time for them to prepare.
Ten hours later, the Rogues had gained five allies. It wasn’t especially comforting to know they’d still be outnumbered by eleven, but it was far better than before.

The five newcomers, wearing various, colorful disguises, introduced themselves as Peek-a-Boo, Girder, Double Down, the Bug-Eyed Bandit, and the Trickster.

(And if the Trickster bore a certain resemblance to the mayor, well, nobody was about to point that out.)

Citizen Cold explained the situation in a bit more detail, then Killer Frost, dressed up in blue leather and a blonde wig, stepped forward.

“The drug Eiling used to brainwash our fellow metahumans also blocks complex thinking. They’ll follow orders, and they’ll be able to fight—they’ll be able to fight longer, past the normal pain threshold of even a metahuman. What they cannot do is any sort of higher reasoning. That includes collaboration.”

“Meaning…” Peek-a-Boo prompted.

“Meaning they’ll all be fighting as individuals, unaware of their allies.”

“Which gives us an advantage,” Cold added. “We’re able to work effectively together. So long as we watch each other’s backs, we’ll have the upper hand. The Rogues have had some practice with that already, and I need all of you,” he nodded at the newcomers, “to trust us, and each other.”

“If we can all do that,” Flash inserted, “we’re sure to win.”

The others just seemed nervous, unmoved by his stalwart optimism. They spread out across the street and waited.

Eiling’s army arrived at precisely noon, and they were a sight to behold. The streets had been cordoned off, of course, but that didn’t stop news helicopters from swooping overhead and residents of nearby buildings sticking phones through curtains.

Twenty-five strong, they all marched in perfect unison. The Rogues readied themselves. They’d split into little teams based on who would work well together, groups of two or three, all of them anxious to start the fight.

Eiling’s army halted at the opposite end of the street from the Rogues. There was exactly a second of silence, whether hesitation or simply preparation.

And then both sides charged.

Firestorm and Killer Frost fought together, blasting metas with alternating fire and ice, always carefully tailored to do no lasting damage. They glimpsed two metas on fire at the back of the enemy army, and without needing to discuss it, Firestorm gave Frost a short ride there.

The two flaming metas were Tokamak, predictably enough, and a woman exuding green fire from every part of her body. Firestorm left Frost on the ground with the green woman, trusting she could hold her own, and baited Tokamak into the air.
They battled as they had before, each dodging fireballs while trying to land blasts of their own. It was a complex task, to perform aerobic maneuvers while still aiming and releasing fireballs.

As they’d done last time they fought Tokamak, the two halves of Firestorm split the tasks. Hartley devoted himself to analyzing trajectories and flight paths, using their shared left hand to adjust course when necessary. Ronnie, meanwhile, concentrated on offensive maneuvers, timing fireball launches with their right hand to hit Tokamak.

They’d overpowered Tokamak that way before, when he’d still had full control of his mental faculties, so it was no surprise when a brainwashed Tokamak fell out of the sky after only a couple of minutes. Firestorm dove after him, ensuring his fall would be hard enough only to knock him unconscious, and rejoined Killer Frost.

After Firestorm had flown off, Frost had instantly engaged in battle with the green flame woman. She was sure Vibe would have thought up a cleverer name, but she decided just to refer to her as Green Flame. Hopefully the Arrow wouldn’t mind sharing an adjective.

Frost was safe from the flames, but she made sure to orient herself so that Flame was facing away from the rest of the battling metas. She sent a wide spray of ice at the other woman, just wanting to test the reaction.

Flame responded with an inferno of fire ten times as powerful as the ice, and Frost was glad she’d ensured they were facing away from the other Rogues. She threw up her hands, forming a wall of ice in front of her. The fire melted it down to water within moments.

Frost focused, and an igloo formed around Flame. It started to melt as well, but it gave her enough time to form a large ball of ice above the igloo, letting it expand so it wouldn’t melt on contact with Green Flame’s burning head.

Flame must have absolutely exploded into fire, because the igloo suddenly half-shattered, half-melted, some of the ice turning almost immediately to steam. Frost released the ball of ice from her hold and watched it fall. It melted as it went, but enough of the water stayed liquid long enough that it doused the flames completely. Flame started literally steaming, but Firestorm contributed a hit from behind, knocking her out.

Killer Frost and Firestorm exchanged a smile and turned just in time to see all the melted ice rising up and advancing threateningly toward them, courtesy of some water meta nearby.

Firestorm and Killer Frost raised their hands and fired.

Nearby, Plastique and Girder were fighting back to back, against two metas that seemed tailor-made to their weaknesses. Plastique’s current opponent just absorbed the energy from her bombs—in fact, he seemed to grow larger and more powerful each time one went off. And Girder might be able to turn to metal, but it didn’t help if his enemy kept turning to sand before his punches could land.

“Let’s switch!” Plastique shouted over the noises of battle around them.

“Yeah,” Girder agreed.

They spun 180 degrees around each other. Plastique immediately seized a handful of the particles from the sand demon she was now facing. When she released them, the bits of sand went skittering
back to rejoin their owner before exploding, leaving a large chunk of Sand Demon’s chest missing. He looked startled and attempted a punch, his arm dissolving into sand as he did. Plastique winced at the impact, but stuck her hand into the midst of his arm and smirked as it exploded.

Behind her, Girder taunted the huge man until he tried to hit him, pounding down with both fists. Girder turned to metal and smirked when the giant atom smasher cried out in pain. Girder wasn’t the smartest guy, but Atom Smasher might have had him beat, as he continued to try the same thing over and over, with the same results. He kinda felt bad for the guy—he was brainwashed, after all. Still, Atom Smasher, due to the pain and the lack of energy sources available to absorb, slowly shrank. Once his head was within reach, Girder landed a single solid blow and sent Atom Smasher out for the count.

He turned just in time to see a particularly large explosion send Sand Demon’s cells blasting apart. The sand slowly reformed into a human shape, which remained unmoving on the ground.

Plastique high-fived Girder, who, when he started to glow purple, changed from human to metal. They’d discovered through a frantic, panicked test that his shape shifting disrupted her bomb making, leaving him unaffected by her powers. Plastique had been very relieved to find someone she could safely touch.

She looked less relieved when that someone was rapidly dragged backwards by seemingly nothing. A glance around informed her that it wasn’t just him—anything metal nearby was moving toward one meta. That included cars, the helicopters above, and even some of the buildings were starting to groan and shift.

Metallica stood at the center of it all, eyes unfocused. She tossed a large chunk of metal at the nearest Rogue, Trickster.

Doctor Alchemy threw himself in front of Trickster and made desperate guesses as to the composition of the metal. There was a limited number of magnetic elements and alloys—iron, steel, cobalt, nickel—

Nickel was the right material. The piece of metal was on the verge of knocking him down, but at the last moment Alchemy managed to turn it to oxygen. He ducked a second projectile and then waited until Metallica started gathering metal around herself again. Alchemy focused. It was difficult to change only a specific amount of air into the right shape, and if he got it wrong, everyone would suffocate. He carefully transformed some of the air into iron, and it flew toward Metallica. The misshapen lump of metal was too heavy for her to stop it, and it struck her in the head, knocking her out.

Trickster tapped Alchemy on the shoulder, holding his boots in his other hand. “I need more fuel.” The boots ran on a very specific, very rare chemical, which had made using or selling them impractical. But with a literal alchemist, it was easy to fill up, and the boots, when filled, could fly.

Alchemy put his hand over the fuel tank to seal it off from the outside environment. Transmuting a specific shape was far easier in an enclosed space. Within moments, the fuel was refilled.

Trickster nodded his thanks and pulled the boots back on. He launched into the air and fired contained energy pulses at the enemy metas from above with a device attached to his wrist.

He grinned to himself when he hit one of the Weather Wizards. Being mayor was great and all, but helping the city more directly felt wonderful. And this was fun.
On the other side of the street, Rainbow Raider and Peek-a-Boo were making the most of their alliance. Peek-a-Boo jumped back and forth across the battlefield with Rainbow in tow, always positioning them so he could make eye contact with their opponents. They were quickly becoming experts at momentarily incapacitating metas and then teleporting away, leaving the actual knockout blows to their allies.

“Over there,” Rainbow said, pointing to where Top was literally stirring up trouble for Plastique. Peek-a-Boo zapped him over, where he repeated the same strategy he’d used last time he faced Top.

The moment Top was sinking to the ground, overcome with the effects of nausea, a fist came out of nowhere and hit Rainbow across the face, sending him sprawling.

Peek-a-Boo teleported to his side. “You okay? I would have covered you, but I didn’t think there was anyone around…” She looked up and trailed off, noticing that there was, in fact, nobody around. Rather, there was a meta whose limbs were stretched like putty, fighting three Rogues at once, extending twenty feet in all directions.

“Stay here,” Peek-a-Boo said to Rainbow. “I’ll be right back.”

She jumped to the end of the elongated man’s right arm and grabbed his hand just before it could hit Alchemy. Hoping her guess was right and she wouldn’t just transport all of Elongated Man along with his arm, she teleported to his left elbow, ducked underneath his left arm, and then jumped to his right leg. There, she grabbed his foot and went through a similar process—tangling up his limbs like she was tying a very large bow.

It only took a minute before Elongated Man was trussed up like a turkey, and maybe she felt a little bad for him, but, hey, war was one half of the all’s-fair thing.

She teleported back to Rainbow. “Who’s next?”

Doctor Light was getting very irritated.

She was fighting in the shadows, which wouldn’t have been so bad—she could illuminate them, after all—except that these shadows weren’t cast by buildings or trees or people.

Well. They were cast by one person in particular. If ‘cast’ meant ‘controlled’, because that’s absolutely what Mr. Shade over here was doing. He counteracted every blast of light with puddles of darkness. Light, in turn, erased his shadows with bright beams of light. They were locked in a standoff, their little corner of the street flickering faster than a strobe light.

All right. Light was done with this impasse. Her partner Vibe was off chasing down some shapeshifter, but she didn’t need him to bring Shade down. Time to get creative.

She steeled herself and stopped all of her light manipulation in hopes of conserving power. The shadows crowded in around her eagerly. Their presence was suffocating, starting to physically choke her.

Light held on and projected an image as far away as she could put it. The image was of her with her hands raised, as though about to send a blast of light.
Predictably, the shadows skittered away from her and toward the false Light, giving her a moment to breathe. She set her stance and readied herself, watching Shade intently.

When the shadows reached the fake Doctor Light, the mirage disintegrated like cotton candy in water. Furious, Shade spun to locate the real Light.

The moment his eyes locked on her, Light released the largest surge of brightness yet, nearly blinding herself in the process. Shade’s patches of darkness protected him somewhat from the full effect, but it was still enough for him to fall backwards, moaning in pain.

Doctor Light for the win.

Vibe glanced over his shoulder at the sound of someone approaching. He grinned when he saw it was Light.

“Hey! You take care of Shade?”

She nodded and continued to approach him.

A vision momentarily took over Vibe’s mind, a rapid-fire sequence of faces, and his smile faded. He rolled his eyes.

“Come on. This is like the fifth time you’ve tried this.”

‘Light’ pulled a knife and leapt at Vibe, who knocked her away with a vibe blast.

“I realize you’re brainwashed and can’t understand me, but dude, we beat you, like, a year and a half ago. You’re old news.”

Light’s body warped, and Vibe found himself facing an exact replica of himself.

“Really? I’ve already met my evil doppelganger, and… well, actually, I think I prefer you. But he was a better conversationalist. Even if he kept going on about the whole ‘we could be gods’ thing.”

As he spoke, Vibe carefully timed his attacks to push the meta—who could only be Everyman—into a corner. He’d kept running off and changing shape, making him hard to track down and stop.

Everyman flickered through faces and settled on Plastique, even though assuming her shape wouldn’t give him her powers. His abilities were far better for running than fighting. Poor guy.

“You think that’ll stop me?” Vibe scoffed. “That woman could kick my ass any day, so I don’t feel at all bad about this.” He finally landed a hit to Everyman’s head, specifying the frequency to send him right to Dreamland.

Light—the real one this time—ran up to him. “There’s another shapeshifter, and this guy isn’t sticking to looking like people.”

“Let’s go.”

At the center of the whole fight stood Loophole, one hand holding his supply of energy bars and the other opening loophole after loophole for his allies. He’d teamed up with Double Down and
Bug-Eyed Bandit, both of whom were greatly enjoying how Loophole allowed them to attack enemies from behind while standing right in front of them.

At the moment, they were battling the plant meta Vibe had termed Vine a while back. Bandit had declared that they ought to be rivals, as she controlled bees and he controlled plants and they were natural enemies, and she’d dragged the others into her pledge of undying enmity.

To that end, Bandit sent her mechanical bees flying toward Vine, who with a wave of his hands summoned a patch of flowers. The bees diverted to the new target and flocked around the flowers.

“Bandit! Get your bugs under control!” Double Down snapped, tossing a couple of playing cards at Vine. He blocked them with vines moving of their own accord.

Bandit tapped frantically at the phone she was using to control the bees. “Sorry! It’s a sensory override—base part of their programming. The bees are drawn to flowers.”

Double and Loophole both stared at her in astonishment, forgetting about Vine for a moment.

She shrugged defensively. “I wanted them to be realistic! It’s not like I was planning to fight people with them, especially a guy who can make flowers grow on command. I’ll reprogram them. Buy me some time.”

Double and Loophole shrugged at each other and returned their attention to Vine. He’d taken their temporary distraction to construct a thick wall of tightly woven thorns. Double flicked a card at the thicket to check its structure, and the card wedged itself only half an inch into the plant.

Vine retaliated by lashing out a barb bristling with thorns. They ducked out of the way, Double tossing cards with remarkable strength to force the thorns away from them.

Loophole opened a hole through to the other side of Vine’s little shelter, and Double Down tossed a couple of cards through. He still wasn’t used to the visual warping that happened whenever he looked through a loophole, though, so his accuracy was less than ideal. One of the cards grazed Vine’s arm; the other wasn’t even close.

Vine jumped at the contact and glared through the loophole. He sent a long sprig of poison ivy through the loophole the other way, forcing Loophole to close it quickly or allow the ivy to touch him.

The ivy, only a little way through the loophole, was immediately severed. The end left on their side, disconnected from Vine’s powers, fell to the pavement.

“Got it!” Bandit said finally, her cloud of bees leaving the flowers alone.

“Still can’t believe that was ever a problem,” Double muttered.

Bandit shot him a glare and directed her robots toward Vine’s protective thicket. They wormed their way through the network of thorns and made a beeline for the meta.

Loophole opened just a little gap to watch Bandit’s bees as they swarmed Vine and stung him repeatedly, each bee releasing its little bit of sedative. Vine swatted some of them, both with his hands and by swinging vines and tree branches around, but ultimately succumbed to the small doses of drugs.

His plants broke down and disintegrated when he went unconscious. Bandit grinned smugly.
“Round one with my archnemesis goes to me,” she said.

“Congratulations,” Double said sarcastically, already tossing cards at the next meta.

Throughout the whole battle, the Flash and Citizen Cold moved through metas efficiently, watching each other’s backs and often tossing pointed remarks at each other.

“Bet I’ll take down more metas than you,” Flash said in between punches.

“Not a chance, Flash.” Cold blasted two metas in a row to prove his point.

“Really? Here.” In a swirl of lightning, Flash dropped an enemy at Cold’s feet and pressed something into his free hand. A glance down showed him that it was a cup of coffee.

“Really, Scarlet? You leave in the middle of a battle—’” Obligatory pause to defend himself from a flying—was that a cat?—and also to take a sip of the coffee, which really wasn’t bad. “—to go to Jitters?”

“Hey, this is easy. I need a fight with a speedster to keep me entertained.” Flash ducked a blow from the nearest enemy and grimaced. “Actually, scratch that, other speedsters are mostly insane.”

“Your Earth-2 friend seemed nice.” Cold fired a shot over his shoulder without looking. “And for the record, I prefer iced coffee.”

“She was the first. And why does that not surprise me?”

“Watch out.”

Flash sped out of the way as Cold fired at one of the Weather Wizards, freezing the downpour of rain into bits of hail and startling the meta, who stumbled backwards. Flash was there to catch him and deliver the knockout blow.

“You’re right, Flash.” Cold took another sip of the coffee, which was now pleasantly cold due to its proximity to his gun, and smirked. “This is easy.”

Flash surveyed the street. The only metas left standing were the Rogues and their allies.

“It’s nice having a team.”
“No,” Linda said. “No way.”

Hartley, once Ronnie finished translating for him, shoved a whole mess of papers off the nearest desk in fury.

“I know,” Barry said grimly. “But Lieutenant Shrieve confessed. He claimed full responsibility for the brainwashing and the attack on the Rogues. He signed a confession.”

“He’s lying,” Leonard said.

“I know Shrieve,” Bette agreed. “He’s mindlessly devoted to Eiling. If the general wanted him to claim responsibility, he would.”

“But there’s nothing we can do about it, even if that is true,” Eddie said.

Cisco blinked a couple of times, coming back to reality. “It is. I just vibed it. It was Eiling’s plan from the beginning.”

Caitlin gestured to him. “Can’t we use that as evidence?”

Barry looked doubtful. “I don’t think a judge would allow accounts of vibes as evidence, especially if Cisco wants to keep his face hidden throughout the trial. Besides, Shrieve confessed. They won’t be looking for another explanation.”

“I doubt that’ll work,” Roy said. “He’s not likely to fall for it, and he still knows our identities.”

“We should go talk to him,” Leonard said. “If only because he does know our names, and he’ll be expecting us.” He rolled his eyes. “Who’d like to go pay a visit to our old friend?”

There was a lot of grumbling, but all the Rogues conceded and went, even Eddie.

Eiling was expecting them, of course. Leonard didn’t even have to introduce himself to the guards this time—the soldiers waved him right in.

“Here to apologize for your false accusations?” Eiling asked.

Leonard gritted his teeth. “Cut the crap, Eiling. Shrieve might have the city convinced, but we’re not. We know the truth.”

“We beat you, Eiling,” Barry said. “It’s over.”

Eiling laughed, shaking his head. “The interesting thing about your little battle is that it never mattered who won.” He leaned back, expression a picture of innocence. “From what I understand… those poor, brainwashed metahumans are still without a cure for their condition.”

The Rogues stared at him suspiciously, unsure where he was going with that.

“S.T.A.R. Labs is working on a cure,” Caitlin said flatly.

Eiling’s innocent expression took on a smug edge. “You know, the army has resources that S.T.A.R. Labs and even CCPD can only dream of. And Iron Heights clearly can’t hold metahumans forever—all the evidence suggests that they broke out on their own. So, on behalf of
the US government, I’d be willing to take custody of them and assume the responsibility for finding a cure. The police will have no reason to deny my request.”

Leonard spoke through gritted teeth. “And let me guess—it turns out that there is no cure.”

He shrugged. “It is a distinct possibility, yes. And in fact, it is possible that the horrific mixture of drugs Shrieve injected into those unfortunate metas will cause something akin to spontaneous combustion. I wouldn’t be surprised if there were no bodies left.”

The Rogues looked at each other in disbelief. They hadn’t thought it was possible for Eiling to get any more smugly pretentious, but they’d been wrong.

“So they disappear,” Barry said, anger simmering in his voice, “and you have a squad of superpowered, brainwashed soldiers.”

“Insinuations, Mr. Allen. I had nothing to do with Lieutenant Shrieve’s actions. You’re lucky I’m not suing you for slander. Continuously coming in here with all your claims and no proof—not to mention your blatant insults on television.”

All the Rogues were openly glaring.

“We know it was you,” Cisco said. “Thirteen days ago, in this very room, you told Shrieve this whole plan, up to and including him taking the fall for it.”

Eiling sneered. “That’s a lovely story, Mr. Ramon. I doubt anyone would be persuaded by your testimony.”

There was a moment of silence. Eiling had a point—it would be impossible for Cisco to prove it. And Eiling had phrased every single threat carefully enough that he hadn’t actually admitted to anything. With Shrieve’s confession, no court would convict Eiling without solid evidence. Cisco’s evidence wouldn’t count…

Then, slowly, but with increasing conviction, Eddie asked, “What about mine?”

Before Eiling could respond, Eddie opened a loophole. Thirteen days. He’d never created one so far in the past, but it was small and it felt no different than a far-off spatial one. He put his cell phone on video and stuck it through.

Eiling, never having directly seen Eddie’s powers, squinted in confusion at first. But when his own voice came through the loophole—“You understand, Lieutenant, that should any part of the plan go awry, the culpability will fall directly to you”—he understood.

At least enough for fear to show on his face for the first time. Rising to his feet, he pulled out a gun and fired three shots at Eddie, who jumped at the noise. The loophole wavered and shrunk, but didn’t close.

Barry grabbed the bullets before they could reach Eddie. Bette leaned across Eiling’s desk and touched the gun.

Eiling tossed the gun into a corner, where it exploded harmlessly. Eddie finished the recording and closed the loophole, turning pale from the effort.

Leonard, fearing Eddie would pass out and ruin the effect, took the phone from him and examined it calmly. He kept his tone casual. “Now, General, it seems to me that a video of you explaining your sinister plan would be more than enough evidence to put you away for a very long time.”
Barry knew Leonard well enough by now to catch on to what he was thinking, and he continued, “But it would be a real nightmare to go through that whole legal mess, especially if Lieutenant Shrieve is dedicated to insisting you’re innocent.”

“If your loyal underling is willing to take the blame, fine,” Leonard agreed. “So how about this: you stay away from Central City. Leave its citizens alone. And should any of them just so happen to learn our identities from an unknown source—”

“—or if we see you around again—”

“—well.” Leonard smirked. “We are technically cops, after all.”

Eiling was now the one glaring. He slowly sat back down, visibly thinking hard, presumably trying to find a way out of the trap he’d baited himself.

“You’ll still need my help to cure the metahumans,” he said. “I’m the only one who has the antidote.”

“Actually,” Firestorm said cheerfully, holding up his phone, “we just got a message with some news you’ll be happy to hear. Our mutual friend Harrison Wells just managed to successfully synthesize an antidote.”

“We don’t need anything from you,” Cisco said.

“So, do we have a deal?” Barry prompted.

Eiling raised his eyebrows. “I have to admit, I wasn’t expecting this.” There was a grudging admiration in his tone. “Well done. I accept your terms.”

“It’s been fun.” Leonard turned to go.

“Hold on, Cold.”

He turned back to see Eiling holding out a business card. “What, you want to keep in touch?”

“You came in here last time accusing me of two things—kidnapping metas, and stealing their powers. Now, we’ve thoroughly discussed the former, but neither I nor anyone in my command is responsible for the latter. I suspect when you find out what the source of that is, you’ll need more than the Rogues. You’ll need an army. And that’s when you’re going to call me.”

“Right.” Leonard glanced over his shoulder. “Firestorm?”

Firestorm took the card and let their hand light up. The card crumbled to ashes.

“Pleasure doing business with you.” Leonard turned again to go. This time Eiling didn’t stop him, just shook his head.

On their way out of his office, Barry placed the bullets on Eiling’s desk and offered him a sarcastic smile.

“There are far worse enemies than me,” Eiling called after them.

“Not likely,” Leonard muttered.
The brainwashed metas were cured by the end of the day. The criminals went back to their cells at Iron Heights, and the normal citizens returned to their lives.

The Rogues started to hang out together after their shifts at real jobs, despite the newfound lack of metahuman attacks. In fact, even non-metahuman crime was at an all-time low. The Rogues had made their strength quite clear to Central City—nobody was about to try going up against them.

So they convened at bars and coffee shops, just a totally normal group of friends, just enjoying spending time together.

But when Eddie got a call from CCPD, the first meta alert they’d had since Eiling’s army last week, they all jumped to their feet.

“Look at us.” Barry laughed. “We’re all so eager for a fight.”

“It’s been a while,” Leonard said. “I’m bored.”

“It’s only some guy breaking windows downtown,” Eddie said. “We probably don’t all need to go.”

Now all the Rogues laughed.

“We’re going,” Albert said.

The meta was indeed doing nothing more than breaking windows, using bolts of electricity to do so. He was dressed all in black, gloves covering his hands and a mask hiding all of his face but the eyes.

“Is there a more complex plan going on, or did you just want to get our attention?” Leonard called as the Rogues approached.

The meta turned, firing one of the bolts of electricity at the Rogues. They all ducked out of the way.

(Cisco was facing an intense dilemma—this meta’s powers seemed just like those of Blackout, and he was even wearing all black, but Blackout, aka Farooq Gibran, had come to S.T.A.R. Labs and gotten his powers removed. So what to call this guy?)

Leonard shot a stream of ice at not-Blackout’s legs. He moved out of the way, faster than should have been possible.

Barry sped toward him, and had nearly reached him when an odd—but familiar—sensation hit him. The meta had done nothing more than look in Barry’s direction, but Barry was suddenly moving far slower than before, all of his kinetic energy gone.

The Turtle? He had to be around somewhere. Barry had hoped never to face him again, but he could get through this. He just needed—

The meta took a casual step forward, closing the distance between him and Barry. He pressed a gloved hand to Barry’s chest. Barry braced himself for the electricity that was sure to come—but nothing happened.

The meta tilted his head in apparent confusion, just as the Turtle-like sluggishness began to wear off. Barry pushed through the last of it and reached out to grab the meta, who immediately…
Turned into green vapor?

Maybe the Turtle wasn’t around somewhere. Maybe this guy had just demonstrated the powers of Blackout, Turtle, and now the Mist. Okay. What else could he do?

He reformed behind Barry and approached the rest of the Rogues. As he did, the ground shook so violently that they toppled down like dominoes, their various blasts going wild. Firestorm launched into the air as the ground trembled again. The meta picked his way through the fallen Rogues, walking no differently than he might if they were stones on a garden path.

Firestorm swooped down, flying parallel to the ground to keep from burning any of the Rogues. Without letting their hands flare up—they didn’t want to kill the meta—they reached out to him, intending to grab him and fly him away from the rest of the group.

The meta turned and seized Firestorm’s wrists. He spun around, dragging Firestorm along with him. He released his grip, flinging Firestorm into a wall across the street. Another tremor ran through the ground, sending the Rogues who’d managed to stand up back down to the ground.

Barry scrambled to his feet and tried another pass at the man, who without even looking sent a stronger pulse of lethargy in his direction and continued on his way. He went blurry around the edges for a moment, like a lens went out of focus, and then solidified back into clarity.

Barry struggled against the inertness as the Rogues tried to gather themselves. Caitlin, as the meta passed by her, grabbed his ankle with an icy hand. Frost spread across his black clothing and icicles stabbed through the fabric for a moment before stopping their spread. The man glanced down at her, pulled his leg free, and vanished.

The Rogues got to their feet. Caitlin pointed at the ground beside her.

“I don’t know what’s going on, but we have a blood sample.”

They returned to their headquarters and went up to Barry’s old lab to test the blood, all of them abuzz about this new enemy.

“So, how many different abilities did he use?” Roy asked.

Barry counted on his fingers as he named them. “Electric bolts, kinetic energy absorption, turning into poisonous gas, earthquakes, possibly superstrength, whatever that blurriness was, and either teleporting or turning invisible at the end there.”

“He’s like a whole legion of metas wrapped up into one,” Leonard complained.

Cisco’s expression brightened. “Legion! Leonard, you’re a genius. That’s what we’re calling him.”

“Forget about what we’re calling him—what did he want?” Ronnie asked.

“He went right up to Barry,” Linda said. Everyone looked at Barry.

He just looked baffled. “It seemed like he was trying to kill me—he put his hand on my chest—and then he just walked away.”

“Maybe he changed his mind?” Albert said.
Barry shrugged.

“How’s the bloodwork coming?” Cisco asked.

“I’m running it through the CCPD and FBI databases,” Caitlin said. “Should be only a couple more minutes.” She was staring at her hands.

“You okay, Cait?” Ronnie asked.

“Yes—um, I’m not sure.” She looked up. “I’ve been trying to use my powers, but they’re not working for some reason.”

Barry’s and Leonard’s eyes widened in realization at the same moment, and they made eye contact, horror mirrored on each other’s faces.

“We’re such idiots,” Barry said.

“Speak for yourself, Barry,” Leonard said without any real conviction behind it.

“How did we not—” Barry collected himself and turned to face the other Rogues. “Metas’ powers have been disappearing. This guy—Legion, that’s what we’re going with? Legion—he touched you, Caitlin, and now your powers are gone. He touched me to try taking my powers, but it didn’t seem to work, and so he walked away.”

“He broke the windows just to get our attention,” Leonard agreed. “He knew we’d come after him.”

“So he wanted Barry’s powers?” Eddie asked. “Why?”

They both shrugged.

The computer beeped, and Caitlin checked the screen. “No matches in either the CCPD database or the FBI.”

“Hey, as long as we have some of his blood, maybe we can test to see if he’s actually somehow assimilated the metas’ powers,” Cisco said.

The Rogues crowded around a table—the scientists to contribute to the testing, everyone else just to watch.

Barry placed a few drops of Legion’s blood under a microscope. He and the other scientists took turns looking through it.

“There is something very wrong with that blood,” Hartley signed.

“Very wrong,” Ronnie agreed, glancing through the microscope lens again.

The boundaries of the blood cells were wavering, as though the cells were about to rupture—and then, like nothing had happened, they were back to being normal cells. They oscillated between the two states.

“I’ve never seen anything like this before,” Caitlin said. “Normally I would assume this is some rare disease, but given what we’ve seen of Legion so far, it’s something to do with his metahuman ability.”

“So how do we test for his powers?” Linda asked.
“Ronnie, come here, please,” Caitlin said, rifling through her medical bag.

Ronnie looked suspicious, but did so. Caitlin took his hand and stabbed it with a needle.

“Ow,” Ronnie complained halfheartedly. Caitlin gave him a small, apologetic smile and used a slide to collect the blood. She carefully placed a drop on the slide next to Legion’s blood and peered through the microscope.

“Look,” she said after a moment, stepping back. The rest of the Rogues, regardless of whether they were scientists or not, looked.

Ronnie’s cells were easy to identify—the Firestorm matrix made them a paler shade of red, and they didn’t pulse weirdly like Legion’s did.

Whenever the two different types came into contact with one another, Legion’s briefly took on the attributes of Ronnie’s, and Ronnie’s lost their strange color and looked like normal cells. After a moment, Legion’s went back to their wavering, whereas Ronnie’s remained normal.

“They’re taking his powers,” Barry said.

Cisco and Hartley had been fiddling with something a few steps away, signing arguments back and forth about the best way to make it work. Now Cisco came over, bearing a flashlight of some sort.

“Is that Barry’s UV light?” Eddie asked.

Cisco nodded. “But Hartley and I made some adjustments. It should be able to scan for dark matter within human cells now.”

He turned it on and shone the light on the microscope slide. Now the view revealed the dark matter buzzing around in the blood cells. In Ronnie’s, it was a minor amount, but even that was sucked out the moment it came into contact with Legion’s blood, leaving no trace of the dark matter in Ronnie’s cells.

As for Legion’s, however, they were full to bursting with dark matter, lit up in a dim white glow. The reason the cells were pulsing was now readily apparent—the dark matter was straining against the cell membrane.

Albert, curious, took a needle from Caitlin’s bag and added his own blood to the slide. There was approximately the same amount of dark matter in his cells as Ronnie’s, and the same thing happened when it came into contact with Legion’s blood.

Barry contributed a sample of his blood. Unlike the others’ the dark matter in his cells showed up as grey rather than white, and nothing happened when Legion’s blood touched his.

“I was in a different particle accelerator explosion,” Barry realized. “The dark matter in my cells is somehow incompatible with Legion.”

“Meaning that he can’t take your abilities,” Leonard said.

“We need to find this meta,” Bette said. “It’s not right that he’s forcibly removing metas’ powers without their consent.”

“Definitely not,” Roy agreed.

“I wonder what he wants,” Cisco said. “Like, he could have leveled the city with his powers, but he
didn’t. He seemed to want Barry’s powers in particular.”

“I don’t know why he would,” Barry said. “He already has the ability to sap kinetic energy, which is close enough to a speedster’s power that I don’t know why he’d need mine.”

Caitlin frowned. “Barry, you heal fast, don’t you?”

“Yes…” Barry wasn’t sure where she was going with this.

“The dark matter in his cells—it’s overloading them.” She peered through the microscope again. “The way his cells are stretching—I think he’s dying. I’d give him two weeks, maybe three.”

“It’s not the speed he wants,” Barry said slowly.

Caitlin nodded. “It’s the healing.”

Leonard frowned. “Whether he’s dying or not, he’s still a criminal. We need to find and capture him.”

“How?” Eddie asked. “He knows that Barry’s powers won’t help him. And none of the rest of us have superhealing. I don’t think we can lure him out of hiding.”

“Isn’t pessimism usually my job, Eddie?” Leonard asked.

Eddie shrugged. “Just being realistic. I mean, I’m a detective, I know how criminals think. If he didn’t come to us or S.T.A.R. Labs for help when he realized he was dying, he’s not planning to change his strategy anytime soon. He’ll probably go back to stealing metas’ powers, and we have nothing he wants.”

“What if we do?” Linda asked.

Eddie frowned at her, confused. “…We don’t.”

“But Legion doesn’t know that.”

A brief, baffled pause, and then everyone got it.

“Nobody knows what our powers are,” Cisco said.

“Other than Citizen Cold and the Flash, the Rogues are a mystery to the city,” Roy agreed.

“Our code names are public knowledge, but our abilities…” Linda said.

“So we make our abilities public knowledge—Iris can publish an exposé on the Rogues,” Eddie said.

“And we claim one of us has healing powers,” Leonard said.

“And what, wait for Legion to destroy more windows?” Hartley signed.

“No. We can announce that we’ll make a public address about what happened with Eiling!” Barry said.

“Use ourselves as bait,” Albert said thoughtfully. “And then if he shows up, we tell him we can help him.”
“But if he fights, we’ll be ready for him,” Linda said.

“And, worst-case scenario…” Ronnie hesitated for a moment and then pushed on. “S.T.A.R. Labs has a sure-fire way to stop him.”

“The Neutralizer.” Cisco looked doubtful. “Only as a last resort. But the stolen powers weren’t his anyway, so if we do take them, it would be a taste of his own medicine.”

“Plus, it would probably save his life,” Caitlin said.

Barry wasn’t sure he wanted to try the fight-fire-with-fire strategy of the Neutralizer. He was determined to stop Legion before it came to that.

But, worst-case scenario, it might be nice to have it on hand.

He turned to Eddie. “Call Iris. I hear she has an exposé to draft.”
The Rogues gathered outside City Hall a couple of days later to put on their official press conference about Eiling’s (or, legally, Shrieve’s) army.

Iris’s exposé had gone viral. Mere hours after the newspaper came out, there were already a dozen blogs discussing the powers of the Rogues and what that meant for their ability to protect the city. Another few hours, and there was fanfiction. Some very graphic fanfiction, too—Barry was seriously starting to wonder why so many people shipped the Flash with Citizen Cold, and why some of it was so well thought out.

He closed that tab in a hurry.

Most of the information Iris had volunteered was true, with the distinct exception that Doctor Alchemy had accelerated healing capabilities. With so many people obsessing over every word, Legion had to have heard about it.

So now, the press conference. It would have been better to keep innocent bystanders (and cameras, honestly) as far from the fight as possible, but the necessity of announcing their location to Legion had required them to let the rest of the city know as well. So press attention was unavoidable.

Leonard did most of the talking for the actual press conference part of it, explaining how Shrieve had brainwashed the metahumans in hopes of taking over the city, and how the whole ‘Eiling’s responsible’ thing had been a misunderstanding on the part of the Rogues.

 Mostly lies. A little truth.

“And rest assured, the city is safe,” Leonard said. As he did, he glanced beyond the reporters. On the roof of a building across the street stood a figure clad all in black. Legion.

Mostly lies, a little truth. Hopefully, ‘the city is safe’ would be one of the truths.

“Pardon me,” Leonard said into the collection of microphones, and then lifted his cold gun and shot.

As expected, the reporters went wild; as intended, the shot did too. It was a signal, not an attack.

Barry ran and Firestorm flew to the roof. Eddie opened a loophole for the rest of the Rogues. Maybe Legion would be polite enough to keep this conflict on the roof, out of the way of civilians.

Legion immediately turned invisible. The Rogues crowded closer together, with Barry, Leonard, and Firestorm in the front to protect the others. Barry and Leonard didn’t have powers Legion could steal, and they’d tested Firestorm’s blood—in their combined state, their cells weren’t quite human and didn’t react with Legion’s cells.
“We don’t want to fight you!” Barry called, his arms outstretched to cover the rest of the Rogues as best he could. “We know you’re dying, and we want to help you. But you can’t keep taking people’s powers.”

“There!” Linda said from behind him. At the same moment, Legion popped back into view, mere inches from Barry. He was blurry and out of focus, like he had been the last time they fought.

Barry reacted faster than Legion, surging forward and gripping him by the shoulders. “Hey, calm down for a moment and listen. We can save your life!”

Legion dissolved into mist and Barry spun his arms so the wind forced Legion to return to human form or be scattered. He reformed in the center of the roof, still fuzzy around the edges, and then multiplied into dozens of copies of himself.

The Rogues tensed, their hands held out defensively and filled with fire or ice or light. If each of Legion’s copies had access to all of his powers, this would go very bad very quickly.

“We need to get the real one,” Barry told the others.

“On it,” Cisco said. “Guard me?” He fell back to the edge of the roof. The Rogues stayed in front of him as Legion’s… legion… swarmed toward them.

The copies, thankfully, didn’t demonstrate any meta abilities of their own. The Rogues—even Caitlin, who was still getting used to the ice-emitting gloves that Leonard, Ronnie, and even Hartley had collaborated on—managed to hold off the legion of Legions for the few seconds it took for Cisco to finish his vibe.

“Back left corner.” Cisco didn’t let anyone else take advantage of the information before he aimed a blast that way himself. The rest of the Rogues followed his example, turning toward the real Legion.

“Quality over quantity,” Leonard informed the copy he was fighting before slamming him over the head with the cold gun. He glanced at Legion, but the others could handle him. Now that the copies were retreating, dedicated to protecting the original, Leonard had time to reach down and start removing Legion’s mask. Might as well find out who he was.

Before he could, the copy vanished. Ice spread across the surface of the roof in its place.

Legion had his hands held out in front of him—probably. It was hard to tell through the thick wall of ice that had just generated in front of him.

“You think we don’t know how to deal with ice?” Firestorm asked, sounding on the verge of laughter. They just had to walk up to the wall for it to start melting away.

Legion vaulted over the remnants of the wall before it could completely melt. He started shooting electric blasts at the nearest Rogues.

Eddie hurriedly opened a couple of loopholes, redirecting the electricity into the ground below. Albert, next to him, tossed a couple of chemical bombs, little spheres that ruptured on impact and released gases to knock Legion out.

At least, they would have, if Legion hadn’t casually displayed his time-stopping abilities again. He stepped around the slowly expanding clouds of gas and started toward Albert, pushing the rest of the unmoving Rogues out of the way.
As he did, though, he glanced up at each of them—most importantly, at Roy, whose eyes were beaming a blaring red stop.

Legion shuddered. Not a normal human shiver, but a full-body ripple that made it seem like every cell in his body was dedicated to ripping itself away from the others. His eyes, rather than mirroring the red, went hazy and almost translucent for a moment before he turned away and continued toward Albert.

Barry struggled through the lethargy, making slow progress, but he could tell that even he wouldn’t make it to Legion in time. Legion was going to take Albert’s powers, and they’d be back to square one.

Legion proved this by taking one last step and lifting his hand to touch… Eddie?

Caitlin, the one person who’d been far enough away from Legion not to get hit with his Turtle blast, snatched the Neutralizer from Albert’s hand and pressed it to Legion’s back. She hit the button.

Legion froze with his hand still an inch from Eddie and turned to face Caitlin, eyes narrowed.

Caitlin allowed herself a small smile as the rest of the Rogues shook off the lethargy. She raised her hands and fired a small, concentrated blast of ice from one of her gloves, intended to knock Legion unconscious.

Legion blocked it. With an identical stream of ice.

Caitlin’s smile disappeared. The Rogues, who’d been on the verge of congratulatory high fives all around, stopped and stared.

Legion spun, gripped Eddie by the shoulder for a moment, and then launched himself forward and off the roof.

Barry sped toward where he’d left, glancing down and then up as Legion started flying.

Firestorm immediately pursued. Barry did his best to follow on the rooftops and walls of skyscrapers.

Legion didn’t fly very fast, but after a moment, he disappeared. Firestorm stopped in midair, looking in all directions. After a moment, Legion reappeared, a lot closer to the ground but rising quickly. When he glanced back and saw Firestorm still in pursuit, he vanished again.

He can turn invisible or fly, Hartley realized.

But not both at the same time, Ronnie finished.

So, as long as we can extrapolate and track trajectories… Hartley started running equations through their shared mind.

Ronnie preferred visuals. He sent Hartley an image of a dotted white line following Legion’s path, how gravity would drag him down and momentum carry him forward. We can follow.

Legion seemed to realize it too. He led them a little way further, Firestorm constantly gaining, and then transformed into gas and entered a vent on the side of a building.

Barry caught up a moment later. He took one look at Firestorm’s expression and searched the
building in a swirl of lightning.

“Nothing,” he reported grimly. “Maybe Cisco can vibe him later.”

“Let’s hope so.”

The Rogues returned to their headquarters, all of them frustrated by the lack of success.

Eddie demonstrated—or, rather, didn’t demonstrate—his complete lack of power.

“I was just starting to get used to being a Rogue,” he said.

“Tell me about it,” Caitlin said with a sigh.

“I don’t understand what happened,” Albert said. “Why did he go for you, Eddie, and not me?”

Eddie shrugged. “Maybe he got confused.”

“The green hood is pretty distinctive,” Linda pointed out.

“Not to mention that he should have noticed he wasn’t healing immediately after taking your powers,” Bette added.

“Nothing about this makes sense,” Cisco groaned.

There was a general murmur of agreement.

“My powers didn’t work on him,” Roy said. “Though it might be because of the blurry thing he kept doing. My ability didn’t connect somehow.”

“Maybe that’s how we’ll find him,” Leonard said. “See if anyone reports someone who looks like they came from an amateur YouTube video.”

Caitlin was examining the Neutralizer. “I don’t understand why the original plan didn’t work. What happened to the Neutralizer?”

Cisco held out his hand to Caitlin, and she tossed the device to him. He started looking it over.

“Maybe it wouldn’t work for the same reason Roy’s powers wouldn’t,” Barry said. “Legion wasn’t quite in the physical plane.”

“But it’s meant to pull dark matter out of human cells,” Caitlin said. “Whatever else Legion is, he’s still human. It should have worked.”

“We can take it apart, see what went wrong,” Ronnie offered. “Cisco and Hartley and I.” Hartley nodded.

Cisco looked up suddenly. “No need. I know who Legion is.”

Everyone turned to him.

“Did you vibe it?” Barry asked.

“No. But I figured it out. There’s only one thing that makes sense.” Cisco glanced around at them all and tossed the Neutralizer onto the nearest desk, looking unhappy. “And you’re not gonna like it.”
“Who?” all the Rogues asked.

Cisco wasn’t smiling. “It’s Harrison Wells.”

A beat.

Another.

The silence in the room stretched out. The S.T.A.R. Labs Rogues stared at Cisco, waiting for him to retract the bizarre statement.

“I know,” Cisco said at their disbelief. “But it’s the only thing that makes sense. The Neutralizer didn’t work on Legion because the Neutralizer doesn’t work. It never did.”

Hartley’s eyes widened. He started signing rapidly. Ronnie translated for those he hadn’t learned quite enough sign language to keep up with him.

“None of us ever used the Neutralizer besides Harrison. He was always in physical contact with the metas as he removed their powers. It makes sense…” Hartley’s hands slowed at the end of the sentence, a physical trailing off.

“But why?” Caitlin asked softly.

“I don’t know,” Cisco said. Hartley shrugged.

Barry was shaking his head. “This is crazy. There’s no way Harrison would—” He look beseechingly at Cisco. “Not again.”

“He helped us with Eiling,” Linda said.

“We don’t know what he wants. Maybe he needed Eiling out of the way to do it,” Bette said.

“You just believe it’s Dr. Wells, Bette? After everything he’s done for metahumans?” Albert asked.

“Most of what he’s done for metahumans is take away their powers,” Roy pointed out.

“We work at S.T.A.R. Labs with him every day,” Ronnie said. “If he is Legion, why wouldn’t he have already taken our powers?”

“He’s smarter than that. That would immediately give away his identity,” Eddie said.

Leonard frowned. “Barry, remember the meta we fought at Tess’s funeral?”

“Yeah, Geomancer,” Barry said.

“Geo—well, whatever you call him, he was the only meta we took down who didn’t show up as part of Eiling’s army.”

Barry thought back to the funeral. After Geomancer had nearly killed Harrison—after he started to strangle him—he hadn’t started any more earthquakes. Barry hadn’t realized at the time how easy it was to stop Geomancer. But maybe that was because—
“Harrison took his powers,” Barry said slowly.

“That’s what I’m thinking,” Leonard confirmed.

“We need some proof,” Albert said. “I can’t understand why he would do something like this.”

“Neither can I,” Linda agreed.

“I can take apart the Neutralizer, but I don’t know what that would actually prove,” Ronnie said.

“We still have some of Legion’s blood,” Leonard pointed out. “If one of you could get a DNA sample without him realizing that we’re onto him…”

“That would look suspicious no matter how we did it,” Hartley signed flatly.

“Well…” Caitlin looked doubtful about the situation, but continued anyway. “He does donate blood.”

Eddie looked at Barry. “Hey, Barry, isn’t your dad a doctor?”

Barry nodded. “I’ll call him.”

He went into another room and dialed.

“Hi, Dad, it’s me.”

“Barry! It’s good to hear from you. How are you?”

Hearing his dad’s voice, even after months of this new timeline, was still amazing. Right now, though, it didn’t make Barry feel any better.

“I’m fine. Actually, I’m calling because I have a… case, and I need your help.”

“What can I do?”

Barry hesitated. “Well, I have a blood sample I’m trying to ID, and I think it might match someone who’s donated blood in the past.” Barry was a horrible liar—even when he was technically telling the truth, he sounded like he didn’t even believe himself.

“Uh-huh.” His dad had that ‘keep going, maybe you’ll dig yourself deeper’ quality to his tone.

So Barry did the smart, responsible thing and dug himself deeper. “It’s really urgent, and we don’t have time to wait for a warrant, so if you could help me get a sample of his blood—”

“Barry,” Henry interrupted calmly. “This is related to that red mask you like to run around in, isn’t it?”

Barry made a noise halfway between ‘um’ and ‘gah’ and tried to cover it with a throat clearing and awkward laugh. “What do you mean, Dad?”

His father spoke patiently. “Barry, your mom and I know you’re the Flash.”

“I am not”—Barry gave up. “So, can you help me?”

“Son, you work for the police. You know how illegal it would be for me to give you any donated blood—”
Barry’s shoulders slumped in disappointment, but Henry kept talking.

“—which we keep in the cold storage unit in the east wing of the hospital, in an unlocked case that’s organized by blood type and the donor’s last name.”

Barry couldn’t keep the grin off his face. “You’re right. You’d never do something like give me blood that’s stored on the… first floor?”

“Third. I’m sorry, slugger, wish I could help you out more.”

“It’s no problem, Dad. I love you.”

“Love you too, Barry. Be careful running around out there.”

The next morning, if a bag marked WELLS at Central City General Hospital was a few milligrams short of O-negative blood, nobody noticed.

Eddie entered Barry’s CSI lab at dawn to find Barry already there, spinning incessantly in his chair while a machine ran the samples against each other. He paused in the doorway, watching Barry make about two hundred revolutions a minute.

“You’re starting to rival the Top,” he said finally.

Barry looked up. “Hey, Eddie.”

Eddie frowned at him. “Did you sleep?”

Barry shook his head. “I was too…” He gestured vaguely, and Eddie didn’t need to ask for clarification. Barry was only an honorary member of the S.T.A.R. Labs team, but he might feel the most betrayed out of all of them.

“We still don’t know Legion’s identity for sure,” Eddie tried. Barry didn’t even bother to respond. It was a useless reassurance, and they both knew it—Ronnie had taken apart the Neutralizer, and there was nothing inside but scrap metal to make up the weight.

“Placebo?” Albert had suggested halfheartedly. “The metas thought their powers were gone, so they subconsciously buried them?”

“Occam’s razor,” Bette countered. “The simplest solution is usually the correct one.”

“And right now, that means Harrison is Legion,” Cisco had said.

Eddie pulled himself back to the present as the machine beeped. In an instant, Barry was across the room, reading the results. His miserable expression told Eddie the answer without him having to say a word.

“It’s a match?” Eddie asked.

Barry nodded. “I still don’t understand why.”

“Well, we can call the Rogues together, make a new plan…” Eddie trailed off as Barry rushed from the room, lightning trailing behind him. The same electricity flared outside the window.
Eddie tracked Barry’s path through the streets, trying to triangulate where he seemed to be going, and groaned. “Oh, no.” He pulled out his phone and texted a code red to the Rogues:

*Barry’s going to S.T.A.R. Labs.*

Barry slowed for a moment outside of S.T.A.R. Labs. There was something strange about the air—there. At one of the ends of the parking lot, the pavement and landscape and backdrop of trees was interrupted with a weird circle of blue hanging in the air.

He frowned and tossed a twig at the anomaly. It was visible against the blue for a moment, then flew back to the parking lot and dropped to the ground there.

The weird angle confused Barry enough that it took him a moment to orient himself and realize what was happening. It was a loophole—it had to be. The other end of this one pointed straight up somewhere, so the blue was sky, and the twig had come falling back down, obeying a different gravity.

Barry couldn’t understand why Harrison—or *Legion*—would open a loophole to nowhere, but it didn’t matter right now. The burning question *why do any of this* pushed him away from the parking lot and, for the first time in over a month, into S.T.A.R. Labs.

The building was eerily quiet. Barry had gotten used to having other employees around in this new timeline. And even the other timeline had Cisco, Caitlin, Harry, and sometimes Joe and Iris hanging around.

Not anymore.

He ran instead of walking so he didn’t have to linger in the silence, stopping at the entrance to the Cortex.

Harrison stood on the other side of the Cortex, facing away from Barry. He turned at the sound of Barry’s entrance, and when he saw who it was, his face contorted into fury.

“You’re back?” His tone was disbelieving and his eyes were alight with anger.

“You’ve been stealing powers,” Barry said softly.

“You figured it out.” Harrison didn’t sound like he cared that much. He raised his hand and fired one of his electric blasts at Barry, the lights flickering as he did so.

Barry ducked out of the way behind the table of computers. He’d known this was going to happen, but he needed answers.

“Yeah, well, I had an advantage. It’s not the first time I’ve been betrayed by someone wearing your face.” Barry jumped as another bolt hit the table, knocking one of the monitors to the floor. “…Or the second.” He stood up, raising his hands pacifyingly. “Please, I just—I want to know why.”

Harrison advanced toward him with quick steps. “You know, I haven’t killed anyone yet.” His form blurred, the same way Legion’s had during their fights. “You’ll be the first.” He stopped on the other side of the table, watching Barry.

“You’re not yourself, Harrison. We can help you!”
He laughed then, just one short burst, punctuated by another moment of blurring. “I haven’t been *myself* since the particle accelerator exploded.”

Barry swallowed hard. Somehow, Harrison *not* actively trying to kill Barry was more worrying than when he was.

“You’re dying,” Barry said.

Harrison’s response was immediate and fluid, with no trace of insincerity. “I don’t care.”

“That’s why you keep looking out of focus,” Barry said insistently. “Your cells are tearing themselves apart!”

Each syllable was biting. “I. Don’t. Care.”

For the first time, Barry looked into Harrison’s eyes—and there was no trace of the scientist who’d been amazed by Barry’s speed, no trace of the man who’d worked so hard to defeat Time Wraiths, the Syndicate, Eiling. His eyes were just blank. Barry had seen that before, with people like Clyde Mardon and James Jesse.

“You’re insane.”

“Maybe,” Harrison allowed, his eyes narrowed. “But *you*, Barry Allen, despite what I told you, you came *back*.”

Barry took that as his cue and ducked, avoiding a stream of ice. He darted toward the exit, still wondering what Harrison’s goal was, but understanding that the knowledge probably wasn’t worth his life. His exit was less than graceful.

It was, in fact, less than *successful* as well. When he rounded the corner outside the Cortex, he found himself back within it, this time across the room from the exit. He glanced back just in time to see a loophole closing.

Harrison grimaced. “That’s harder than most of my other powers. I’ll have to practice.”

Barry blazed toward him, and was met with a pounding wave of slowness. Harrison approached him at normal speed and struck him across the face with incredible strength.

Barry flew into the wall and crumpled to the floor. Before he could get up, Harrison was already leaning over him, gripping his throat with ice-cold fingers, his whole body fading out of focus. Barry struggled for breath, but the mix of adrenaline and cold gave his mind a moment of clarity.

For a speedster, a moment was enough.

“You’re doing this for Tess,” he choked out.

The pressure on his throat relented. Harrison staggered a few steps back, turning away, and his blurring stopped completely.

“…Tess…” He murmured her name so softly Barry wasn’t sure if he’d meant to say it aloud or not.

Barry slowly got to his feet, watching Harrison cautiously. “That’s why you’ve been taking powers. That’s why you went after me and Loophole instead of Alchemy. It was never the healing you wanted—it was the time travel. You want to save Tess from dying.”

Harrison turned back viciously. “She’s not dying—she won’t have died. I’ll make sure of that.”
“What about you? This is killing you!”

“Didn’t you hear me?” Harrison snapped. “I don’t care. I can die. You can too. The whole world can burn for all I care, so long as she goes on living.”

“You can’t change the laws of reality like that,” Barry insisted. Maybe he should be taking Harrison’s emotional turmoil as the opportunity it was and running, but he didn’t.

Harrison laughed shortly, going fuzzy around the edges again. “I don’t need to change the laws.” He held up his hand, and a tiny hole in reality formed around it. “I’ve got a loophole.”

“No, but—” Barry could understand exactly what Harrison was feeling, but he knew this wouldn’t end well. “You can’t do this.”

“Why not?” Harrison closed his hand into a fist, the loophole disintegrating, and looked up at Barry. There was fury in his eyes again, along with that ever-present edge of madness. “You did.”

Barry fell back a step, guilt and shame washing over him in equal measures. Harrison was right, of course, but…

Harrison advanced a step, keeping the distance between them the same. “I suppose you’re the only one allowed to change the timeline? The only one permitted to save those you love?” He brought his hand up in a quick, furious motion and a bolt of electricity darted toward Barry, who barely managed to dive to the floor, moving just far enough to the side that the attack missed. The lights went out completely, and in the darkness Harrison asked, “What gives you the right to decide who lives and who dies?”

Barry squinted up from the floor, trying hard to make out any shapes in the too-sudden blackness. Harrison didn’t seem to have a problem with it, though, meaning that Barry was almost immediately hit hard in the stomach. He pushed away the instinct to curl up on his side and instead got to his feet, running off in the direction he thought the exit was. The lightning from his movements illuminated the room enough that Barry knew he was about to crash headlong into the wall, a split second before he did just that.

Harrison sent another wave of the damn Turtle lethargy his way, and Barry immediately slowed to the speed of a normal person walking. Maybe even a little slower.

Harrison slammed him into the wall as the lights flickered back on. For a moment, Barry didn’t even register the messy smear of colors in front of him as Harrison, before the blur solidified into something at least resembling human.

“Forget ice,” he growled, gripping Barry’s head with both hands. “Let’s try an earthquake.”

Barry braced himself.

Then something heavy and blue, and very cold, shot between them, knocking Harrison’s arms away from Barry. They both spun to face the entrance to the Cortex, Harrison grasping confusedly at the ice now coating his left arm.

Leonard kept his gun aimed right at Harrison. “You never want to forget ice when I’m around.” His quip didn’t have the usual smugness behind it—it was delivered flatly, edged with bitterness.

The rest of the Rogues were crowded at the entrance, all of them in their disguises except for the S.T.A.R. Labs employees. Barry winced at the familiarity of the expressions on Cisco’s and Caitlin’s faces. After Thawne, after Zolomon, how many more betrayals would they have to suffer
Harrison turned into gas momentarily, the ice falling to the floor, and reformed. He scowled at all of them—at least, that was what it seemed like; he was back to blurring, so it was hard to tell.

“You won’t stop me,” he said, looking directly at Barry. Then he opened a loophole and stepped through, vanishing from the room.

“I’ll go search the city for him,” Barry said, starting toward the exit.

Leonard shifted the cold gun to point it at Barry. “Not happening, kid. You just went after Harrison alone, and you’d be dead if Eddie hadn’t called to tell us how much of an idiot you are.”

Barry sighed. “Yeah, okay.” He pulled a chair out from the computer desk—navigating around the fallen monitor—and sunk into it. “I’m sorry for running off like that, Eddie—did Eddie even come?”

“I’m here.” Eddie pushed through the other Rogues, who were still crowded in the doorway. He gave Barry a half grin. “I figured that even if I’m not a meta, I can still use a gun.”

“I’m glad you came. I shouldn’t have left, I just… I had to know.”

“Did you at least find out what Harrison wants?” Firestorm asked, fully entering the Cortex.

The rest of the Rogues gave up on lingering at the threshold and piled into the Cortex. As there were nowhere near enough chairs, they formed a half-sitting, half-standing circle in the open space of the room.

Barry waited until everyone was settled before answering Firestorm’s question. “Yeah, I know what he wants.” He told them about Harrison’s plan to bring back Tess.

“That explains why he wanted your powers,” Cisco said.

“It also explains Harrison’s behavior since Tess died,” Caitlin said. “There’s no one way people grieve, but he was completely heartbroken before the funeral, and after it, he rarely showed emotion.”

“After he took Geomancer’s powers,” Leonard translated. “And when he realized what his abilities were, there was no point in grieving if he could bring her back.”

“We still can’t believe Harrison would fixate so completely on such a desperate gambit,” Firestorm said.

Leonard scoffed. “Remember what he was like in the months leading up to the launch of the particle accelerator? He worked twenty-five hours a day, seven days a week. Harrison doesn’t know how to back off from projects.”

“S.T.A.R. Labs was half his life, and Tess was the other half,” Caitlin added. “He lost both on the same night. It’s not hard to imagine that he’d do anything to get at least one of them back.”

“Not to mention that blurring thing he keeps doing,” Linda said. “We’ve seen the effects on his body, but imagine that happening to his mind.”

They all grimaced, considering it. There was a moment of silence.

“So now what?” Bette asked finally. “We can’t let him go just because he’s got a tragic backstory.”
“I’m not a scientist,” Roy added, “but I’m kind of worried about the dark matter in his cells. It seems like the more powers he takes, the more unstable he becomes, and if his cells can’t contain the dark matter…”

“Boom,” Cisco said, his eyes widening in fear.

“It could be like another particle accelerator explosion,” Firestorm said. “We’ll have to run the calculations, it could be even worse…” They split apart. Ronnie pulled one of the clear whiteboards closer and he and Hartley started scribbling equations across it.

“We should stake out S.T.A.R. Labs,” Caitlin said. “Those of us who don’t have other day jobs.”

Leonard nodded. “He’s bound to return eventually. Like Caitlin said, this is half his life.”

“What if he doesn’t come back before it’s too late?” Albert asked.

“Loopholes,” Barry said. “Harrison’s figured out some way of keeping them open without having to be there—there’s one outside S.T.A.R. Labs right now. And he mentioned that he’d need to practice using Loophole’s powers.”

“So we watch out for them, and when we start seeing loopholes show up, what then?” Linda asked.

“Barry’s got an algorithm to track down people based on known locations,” Cisco said. “We put the loophole locations in there, we can figure out where Harrison’s staying.”

“In the meantime, I should tell Captain Singh about this,” Eddie said. “We’ll get the police looking for him as well.”

“And what happens when we find him?” Roy asked. “We haven’t been able to defeat him so far. What are we going to do?”

A grim silence fell over the Cortex.

Bette was the one to break it. “Speaking as a former soldier…” She hesitated a fraction of a second. “We do what we have to.”

The following night, they met up at S.T.A.R. Labs instead of their usual headquarters, not wanting to leave the building unguarded. None of them had seen even a trace of Harrison in the past thirty-six hours—aside from a loophole or two.

Ronnie reported the outcome of the calculations he and Hartley had made. “Basically, even if he doesn’t take any more powers, when his cells break down after—how long did you say he had, Cait?”

“A couple of weeks,” Caitlin said.

“When his cells break down after a couple of weeks, all of the dark matter within them will scatter in every direction.”

“Like the particle accelerator explosion,” Barry said.

Ronnie shook his head. “The accelerator was different—there were a lot of normal elements, mainly radioactive isotopes, bonded with the dark matter. If Harrison…” He winced and made a
vague exploding gesture. “…it’ll be pure dark matter. We don’t really know what the fallout will be—our most optimistic guess is that it’ll wipe half of Central City off the map.”

Linda didn’t allow the ominous silence to fall this time. “So we should probably find him, huh?”

Her attempt at humor didn’t break the tension so much, but it released a bit of it.

Then Iris walked in.

“Iris?” Barry asked. “What—how did you even know we were here?”

“Eddie told me.” She set her laptop down on a table and opened it. “CCPN has been getting a lot of reports of similar strange occurrences, and I figured you would be the best people to talk to about it.”

The Rogues crowded around her to read the screen over her shoulder. There were more than a dozen reports, wildly varying in length and grammatical accuracy.

_I crossed the street and ended up in another neighborhood._

_um so yesterday i was going to see my bae and i was about to go in his house but then i saw another girl leaving? but then when i was yelling at him he said she left an hour ago but idk i’m still single now but anyway maybe there’s something weird going on_

_The hell is happening in this city?? Forget about the election, why don’t you report about how everyone I know keeps getting transported to bizarre locations all the time!?_

They went on like that, complaints about spontaneous transport through space or time.

“What’s happening?” Iris asked.

“This is insane,” Barry said, ignoring Iris’s question for the moment. “I’ve only seen a few loopholes, and I didn’t even think about people stumbling into them.”

“We need to tell Central City what’s going on,” Leonard said decisively. “Unless we want to keep getting reports like this.”

“How about you tell Iris West-Thawne what’s going on?” Iris asked.

“Eddie, explain it to her,” Leonard said. “The rest of us need to go address the city again. Barry, you think that TV station’s sick of us yet?”

Even with the city warned, the loopholes didn’t stop forming.

Over the next week, the city was peppered with them. It was like reality had turned into a giant sieve. Barry couldn’t run a normal patrol of the streets without having to dodge around a loophole or two.

He catalogued them all, but the algorithm other-Barry had designed didn’t yield any results. The same thing had happened when CCPD had used it to track Citizen Cold—Leonard had been too smart to allow his sightings to enable the police to find him. Harrison was the same.

Most of Central City was used to avoiding them by now—it helped that Cisco and Hartley had
designed an app to notify people when temporal or spatial anomalies were nearby. The vast majority of citizens learned to stay away.

But it didn’t avert all the incidents. In his CSI job, Barry investigated deaths that were clearly caused by loopholes—people killed by falls when there were no buildings or structures around, or starved to death because of strange time loops.

Harrison hadn’t lied—he truly didn’t care about others dying.

The Rogues abandoned their post at S.T.A.R. Labs and instead patrolled the streets, not only in a fruitless attempt to find all the loopholes, but also to search for Harrison. It wasn’t entirely unsuccessful—each of them glimpsed him at one time or another. But, each time, they’d only just noticed him before he turned invisible, transformed into mist, or just opened another loophole and left.

“We need a new plan,” Leonard said at the end of the week when the Rogues gathered at the precinct. “This clearly isn’t working.”

“So what do we do?” Albert asked. “He’s not going to show up unless he wants to, and he obviously doesn’t.”

“The only reason he’d ever face us again is if we had something he wanted,” Barry said. “And the only thing he wants…”

“Is Tess,” Cisco finished. He looked like he was about to say more, then his eyes rolled back in his head, he turned deathly white, and he started convulsing violently.

“Cisco!” Caitlin rushed to him, carefully laying him down on the desk he was sitting on. She turned him on his side and reached for her medical bag.

The rest of the Rogues panicked. A few of them reached for phones, intending to dial 911. Nobody took their eyes off Cisco.

The convulsions stopped just as suddenly as they started, and Cisco sat straight up.

“The other timeline,” he said. “It’s gone.”
“What does that mean?” Barry demanded. “How could it be gone?”

“Do you think I know? It’s just—I’ve been able to talk to the alternate me ever since the accelerator explosion, but he’s not there anymore. And I still remember what happened in the other timeline, but I can’t vibe there anymore. It’s gone.”

Barry glanced around at the other Rogues, They, without ever having experienced time travel, understood even less than he did.

“We need to figure out what this means,” he said.

Cisco tossed his hands in the air. “I know! But what do I look like, Professor Stein?”

Barry’s eyes widened. Stein would understand time travel…

…if he was the same as his alternate version, that was. Besides, it would take too long to get him up to speed.

“Other timeline?” Roy asked.

The S.T.A.R. Labs group, plus Eddie and Iris, generally rolled their eyes at the mention of it. Leonard started explaining the whole alternate-timeline thing to the rest of the Rogues. Barry paused in his thoughts for a moment to consider that maybe Leonard being the one to explain it wouldn’t paint him in the best light.

But at the moment, it was a little more important to figure out why the other timeline had vanished, and none of the Rogues, even Barry, fully comprehended how the timelines worked. Harry had understood time travel pretty well, maybe him…

No, trying to bring Harry back to help would only put him and his daughter in danger. Not to mention what could happen if Harrison got into other universes.

“Isn’t that exactly what Harrison’s doing?” Albert asked when Leonard finished his abbreviated explanation.

“No,” Barry said defensively. “I knew what I was doing—at least, sort of, there’s only one person who really understands what he’s doing… when it comes to time travel…” He started trailing off near the end of the sentence.

No. No.

But…

“Desperate times,” Barry muttered, changing into his suit.

“Barry, what are you planning?” Cisco asked sharply. “That’s your I-have-a-bad-idea look!”

“Nobody move,” Barry said. “If everything goes well, I’ll be back in a second.”
Before anyone could ask more questions, or try to stop him, Barry was off, tearing through the streets. He ducked out of the way of a loophole in the middle of the road, and opened something quite like a loophole of his own.

A breach to the future.

He focused on his target and emerged, gasping, in an alleyway.

Barry hadn’t specified a place or time, but based on who he was looking for, he could guess where he’d ended up.

Central City. 21-something.

The home of the Reverse Flash.

His vague focal point had served him well. He only had to wait half a second before a yellow blur streaked around the corner—and stopped dead in his tracks.

“*Barry*?” Eobard, his voice distorted and his eyes glowing red, sounded completely shocked.

“Thanks for shouting out my identity in the middle of the street,” Barry said casually. “Very thoughtful of you, Eobard.” He had to admit, it was nice having one-up on the Reverse Flash. That was rare.

His momentary triumph immediately fell flat when Eobard blurred toward him. Before Barry could defend himself, before he could even begin to react, he found himself pressed flat against the alley wall, one of Eobard’s hands vibrating and ready to strike. “If you’re here for revenge, let me warn you…”

“Hey, woah, woah, woah!” Barry raised his hands. “I thought we’d moved past the trying to kill each other! I’m not here to fight you!”

In the blink of an eye, and Barry could blink fast, Eobard had moved back, standing against the wall on the other side of the alley. His eyes stopped glowing and he spoke normally, clearly confused. “Then why are you here?”

“First things first, holy cow, Eobard, you’re *fast*!”

“Holy cow? Very insensitive choice of words, Barry, we don’t have cows here.”

“Never heard that one before.”

A trace of a smirk flitted across Eobard’s face. “To answer the implied question, on average, I’m twelve times faster than your top recorded speed.” He shrugged. “Proximity to the explosion; does wonders for the Speed Force. So why are you here?”

“Kind of a long story, but it ends with the old timeline disappearing, and you’re the only one I know who—”

Before he could finish the sentence, Barry found himself whisked away. Even his quicker senses couldn’t process the blurs of color around him, until he found himself motionless again on a couch somewhere. He blinked.

“Now I understand how disorienting that is…”

Eobard, mask pulled off and expression serious, sat in an armchair across from him. He leaned
forward intently. “Tell me the whole story.”

Barry glanced around. “Nice place.” It was as spacious as Eobard-as-Wells’s house had been in his time, but there was far more warmth and character (not to mention the future tech, which Barry would be far more interested in if he wasn’t so worried about the timeline). Not just a house—this was Eobard’s home. What he’d tried to get back to for so long.

Eobard waved a hand dismissively. “Yes, yes, thanks. What’s going on?”

Barry explained. The aftermath, the Rogues, Tess, Harrison, Legion, Loophole’s powers, and the chaos in the city because of it.

Eobard nodded slowly throughout the tale, wincing occasionally. “I’m truly sorry to hear about Tess, and what’s happened to Harrison because of it.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” Barry said, even though, technically speaking, it was.

“No,” Eobard agreed offhandedly, looking in deep thought. “It was yours.”

Barry’s jaw dropped at the audacity. “Seriously? How is this my fault?”

Eobard fully focused on him. “You created this timeline, Flash. Remember the Time Wraiths? Those were your formal warning on the part of the universe. You shouldn’t mess with time.”

“You’re one to talk!” Barry couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Yeah, he’d come to ask for help, but that didn’t mean he was going to put up with this. “You hijacked my whole timeline and altered it at your whim for fifteen years.”

“So I’ve heard. And you saw how well that ended for me.”

Barry blinked. He was certain he’d never told Eobard about his real fate in Barry’s timeline. So how…?

Eobard saw Barry’s confusion and gave a wry smile. “I’m sure you’ve noticed that the same people have ended up with the same powers, despite the different circumstances. Time wants to happen. The universe tries to keep events the same in each timeline.”

“And?” Barry didn’t see the link.

“Eddie Thawne. My ancestor wasn’t a metahuman in my timeline, yet here he is manipulating spacetime into contradictions of itself—paradoxes. His origin story had to happen in your timeline, and given his powers plus what you’ve already told me, it’s not a hard conclusion to draw. He had to have created a paradox in your timeline to end up with those powers in this one. He killed himself to stop me.” Eobard didn’t sound resentful, just vaguely tired.

“Well, yeah,” Barry admitted.

Eobard laughed drily. “I change time, and I’m erased from existence.” He met Barry’s eyes steadily. “I wonder what your punishment will be.”

Barry flinched. There was a long moment of silence before he finally said, “We should go back. I still don’t understand what’s happened to the other timeline.”

“Right!” Eobard said, entirely too cheerfully. He stood up and gestured toward the door. “I knew something had to have gone wrong in 2016—every anime stopped production in that year,
disappointing, My Hero Academia was truly inspirational—but if I had known how bad it was, I would have come back myself…”

Barry stifled a laugh. “You actually watch anime? Still?”

Eobard fixed him with a deadly glare. “You might have just destroyed the entire universe, Barry, I don’t think you get to judge me on my hobbies.”

“It’s still mostly your fault,” Barry pointed out.

“I’ll settle for half the blame.”

They started running, Eobard keeping to a slower pace to follow Barry back to the right time and place. There was a strange resistance from the timestream as they got closer to 2016, and Barry fell more than ran into the street outside the old precinct.

Eobard arrived next to him and shuddered. “No more time travel.”

“What do you mean?”

“Part of the explanation. Do you happen to have a whiteboard in your headquarters?”

“I’ll see what I can find.”

They entered the precinct, twin and opposite blurs.

The Rogues jumped at the sight of Eobard. Leonard, Caitlin, Hartley, Ronnie, and Cisco especially looked absolutely furious.

“What is he doing here?” Leonard demanded, raising his gun.

“Calm down!” Barry said, holding his hands up pacifyingly. “He’s here because he understands time travel and he wants to make sure the world doesn’t end.”

“Who is he?” Eddie asked.

“This is Eobard Thawne. A speedster from the future… and your great-great-great-great-grandson, Eddie.”

Eddie stared at Eobard, eyes wide. Eobard didn’t react beyond a slight, sarcastic twitch of an eyebrow.

“He’s also Barry’s mom’s murderer in the other timeline, and the reason the particle accelerator exploded,” Cisco said, voice brimming with anger. He held up his hand and shot a highly focused, high-power vibe blast at Eobard.

Eobard, as he’d done throughout the conversation, just stood unmoving. The blast sent him flying into the opposite wall.

“Cisco!” Barry said.

“Yeah, I’m not sorry. I’ve owed Thawne that for a few timelines now.”

Across the room, Eobard got to his feet, and in an instant he’d blurred over to Cisco, staring him down, his face inches away and his hand knotted in Cisco’s shirt.
Barry tensed. Everything was already falling apart. This was a mistake.

But when Eobard spoke, it was calm, albeit very intent. “I understand that I probably deserved that. But I am here to help you. I could simply run to another Earth and leave you to your fate, but I’m here. Attack me again and I’m done.”

Cisco shoved Eobard’s shoulders, scowling, and Eobard released his shirt and stepped back, adding, “Same goes for all of you. Now, does this place have a whiteboard? I have some diagrams to draw.”

The closest they could find was a chalkboard, which Eobard scoffed at but deemed good enough. He started sketching across it immediately and stepped back to reveal a series of timelines across the board. The Rogues all watched him, their expressions mixtures of suspicion and confusion.

“This is reality. More or less. I have no idea how many timelines are out there, but it’s enough to give you an idea. This,” he indicated the bottom one, “is our timeline.” The next one up. “This is the one Barry’s from and Cisco remembers,” one more up, “and this one’s mine. Roughly. I’m sure there are a few more timelines squished in between somewhere, but you get the picture.”

He flipped the blackboard around and drew a single timeline on the other side. “This is what happens to the timeline when Loophole’s powers are used.” Eobard dragged his finger through the line vertically, leaving a small gap. He repeated the action until there were about a dozen holes up and down the timeline. He nodded toward Eddie. “From the way I understand it, your powers are the worst kind of time travel. Your loopholes—well, Harrison’s, now—they punch holes through the timestream and don’t patch them up. They don’t create new timelines, and they don’t even bother changing the current one. Loopholes indeed.”

He tapped the chalk against the holes in the line. “It wouldn’t have been as much of an issue if you’d retained your powers, Eddie. Your effects were much smaller. But Harrison is bound and determined to rip the timeline to shreds if necessary. And time can’t just not exist. So.”

Eobard began to draw little slashes in the gaps, leaving tiny bits of space between each diagonal line. “So the timeline tries to mend itself. Little fragments of spacetime, maybe bits of the timestream, I’m not sure precisely what, but something is trying to fill the gaps, to stabilize the timeline.”

“So it’s going to be fine?” Barry asked hesitantly.

Eobard snorted. “Not even close. Two effects.” He flipped the chalkboard back to the side with multiple timelines and replicated the gaps-and-slashes design on the bottom line. “Effect one.”

He erased the other timelines with a wide sweep of his arm and started to redraw them, with one distinct difference: whenever a line reached one of the gaps in the current timeline, Eobard jagged the chalk down into a V before resuming its path across the board.

The effect, when he was done redrawing them, was that all the other timelines were being sucked into the holes in the current one.

Eobard glanced among the frightened and confused Rogues. “Nature abhors a vacuum. Whatever it is that tried to plug the gaps, it didn’t do a good job. Defunct timelines are being dragged into the absences like water in a whirlpool, which destabilizes them. One by one, they’re falling apart.”
“So it’s gone,” Cisco said hollowly. “Everyone we knew there, everything that happened, it’s just… gone?”

Barry looked as shell-shocked as Cisco.

“But we don’t care about the other timelines,” Leonard said.

Cisco and Barry both threw him offended glares.

“What?” Leonard shrugged. “I’m sure it sucks for them, but right now I’m a little bit more concerned about what happens to us. You said there were two effects, Thawne, what’s the other one?”

Eobard nodded and flipped the board back over to the single line. “The larger the loophole, the more foreign time material the universe crammed in there as a fix-it.” He scrubbed at both sides of one of the gaps, blurring the chalk. “This timeline will start to deteriorate around the loopholes. Any time travel will put even more strain on the timeline. The fact of the matter is, unless we can stop Harrison…” He swept his fingers vertically across the line, again and again, until the timeline was nothing more than a series of irregular dashes. “…every timeline is going to shatter. This world will stop existing. And there will be nothing we can do about it.”

Barry stepped forward. “There is something we can do. I can stop all of this now. I can go back and —”

“No,” Eobard interrupted.

Barry frowned. “You don’t even know what I was going to say.”

“I know exactly what you were going to say. You want to run back, stop yourself from stopping me from killing your mother, as though that’ll set the timeline to rights. No. It won’t work. That new timeline will fall to shreds too.”

“Why? Isn’t it only previous timelines that get sucked into that whole mess?”

Eobard let out a deep sigh. “As far as I know, yes. But you’re missing a vital point.” He erased the timeline completely and began to draw again, hand blurring to speed up the process. “We already know thanks to Cisco that aborted timelines keep going. What you’re failing to see…” He stepped back from the chalkboard, revealing five timelines all sprouting off one point in the top timeline. Eobard labeled the divergence point ‘March 18, 2000’. “…is that they were all one timeline. Right up until 2000, when they split.”

He erased the line second from the bottom, following it backwards, up to the top line and tracing back from there, leaving the other four timelines hanging unattached. “Nothing before 2000 will exist in your newly created timeline. Which will also destabilize the timeline and bring the very fabric of reality crashing down around you.” Eobard tossed the chalk onto the nearest desk. “Any questions?”

“Yeah,” Cisco said, the only one not thrown into silence by the threat of their imminent demise. “How do you get your suit into the ring?”

Eobard rolled his eyes. “Any real questions?”

“What happens to the timeline if we do stop Harrison?” Caitlin asked.

“Is the damage already done enough to destroy the timeline anyway?” Ronnie added.
Eobard grimaced. “Honestly? I don’t know. But we don’t have any options. Either we stop Harrison and take our chances, or we wait until all of time shatters around us.”

“He’s right,” Barry said.

The nearest computer let out a loud series of beeps. Eddie checked the screen. “Cisco and Hartley’s app is sending in reports of a temporal anomaly at S.T.A.R. Labs. A huge one.”

“The readings are off the charts,” Caitlin said.

“I’m betting Harrison’s decided it’s time to save Tess,” Barry said.

“Eddie, you’re not going, are you?” Iris asked when he moved toward the exit.

Eddie paused, glancing back. “I should. I’m still a part of the team.”

“You’re not going,” Eobard told him. “Stay here with Iris.”

Eddie glared at him. “What gives you the right to tell me what to do?”

“The timeline’s in enough danger as it is. If you die, I’m erased from existence, forcing a paradox. Barry can tell you the devastation that causes in an intact timeline. If it happens now, all of reality presumably falls apart. So do everyone a favor, Eddie, and stay alive.”

Eddie sighed. “Fine.”

Leonard lifted his gun over his shoulder. “Let’s suit up. We have a world to save.”

Eobard watched the Rogues file out of the room. Cisco waited a moment longer than the others, shooting Eobard a glare before walking toward the exit.

Eobard considered whether to ask the obvious question, going back and forth. When Cisco was nearly out of the room, he decided he might as well.

“So what did I do to you?”

Cisco paused, and Eobard waited patiently as Cisco made his own decision about whether or not to engage.

Finally, he spoke, turning back and crossing his arms. “You mean aside from murdering Barry’s mom and the original Harrison and Tess, lying to all of us, betraying us, and causing Eddie’s and Ronnie’s deaths?”

“Well, that would be enough on its own. What is there aside from that?”

“You killed me,” and it sounded like Cisco had been bursting to say that ever since Eobard arrived, “in an alternate timeline.”

“Well, that would be enough on its own. What is there aside from that?”

“You killed me,” and it sounded like Cisco had been bursting to say that ever since Eobard arrived, “in an alternate timeline.”

“I’m sorry,” Eobard said, startled. With no idea of the circumstances, he could think of no justification other than, “I must have had a good reason.”

Which was, apparently, the wrong line. Cisco threw his hands in the air and turned away. “I don’t know why I ever bother talking to you. Any version of you.”

“Cisco!” Eobard didn’t know why he cared so much about Cisco’s opinion of him. Maybe because it irked the supervillain in him not to have consciously earned the fury on his face. Maybe the other
timeline was leaking in, lending this version of Eobard his alternate self’s fondness.

Whatever the reason, he was across the room in an instant, grabbing Cisco’s arm to keep him from leaving.

“Don’t touch me.” Cisco instantly snatched his arm away, his other hand coming up as though about to blast Eobard. He gritted his teeth and clenched his hand into a fist, slowly lowering it.

Eobard backed off immediately. “That was inappropriate; I apologize.” He sighed and looked away. “…I don’t know how not to be a villain.”

Cisco scoffed. “Is that supposed to make me feel sorry for you?”

“No. Here.” Eobard tugged off his ring and tossed it to Cisco, who caught it and squinted at Eobard, some mixture of suspicious and intrigued.

“If there’s some semblance of a timeline still intact at the end of this, I’m sure you’ll remember: look into nanotechnology. Specifically how it applies to extradimensional spaces. Ray Palmer will have some revolutionary ideas.”

Cisco turned the ring over in his hands for a moment, considering, before sticking it into his pocket. “We should go. The others will be waiting for us.” He didn’t say thank you, but then, Eobard didn’t expect that he would.

He nodded. “What was it that Citizen Cold said? We have a world to save.”

Cisco and Eobard joined the Rogues at the threshold of the precinct. Barry gave them a glance—he didn’t even want to ask what they’d talked about—and then returned to staring out at Central City, like everyone else was doing.

This was his home. He’d seen it wracked by the devastation of the particle accelerator, twice, the effects as clear nine months later as they were moments after. He’d seen it torn half to shreds by the singularity. He’d seen it set upon by metahuman after metahuman, Weather Wizard to Black Siren, Reverse Flash to Zoom.

But even Barry had never seen anything like this.

They set out. Walking rather than running; silent rather than cocky. Toward S.T.A.R. Labs, where everything had begun and now, everything had to end.

There was enough time, therefore, especially for one with a speedster’s senses, to take in the sight of Central City more thoroughly broken than it had ever been before. There was nobody on the streets—most of the city had holed up in their homes, afraid to venture outside for fear of the loopholes that fragmented the city.

The loopholes were everywhere. Holes ripped straight through the fabric of spacetime. Breaches to Starling, gaps into yesterday. The abandoned streets were filled with the noise of a thousand other places and times, all ringing hollowly into here and now.

Barry felt the weight of the chaos this world had become settling in on him. Blame Eobard, yes—but when it came down to it, Barry was the one who’d created this hell of a timeline. He’d been the one to fashion Central City into this—this flashpoint of the fire that was set to consume all reality.
He cast his eyes heavenward, hoping for a miracle.

The glance upward did nothing to reassure him.

The skies were red.

Chapter End Notes

Why yes, I did just name-drop Flashpoint (it only took 29 chapters) and reference Crisis on Infinite Earths.

Anyway, one chapter left. I'd intended to post it on Saturday, but there was an incident with my laptop (okay I was watching The Flash and walking with it and dropped it) that may/may not require a postponement. I'll try really really hard to avoid that, so you should, depending on time zone, expect the chapter Saturday!

Hopefully I explained the time travel problems well enough, but if not, hit me up in the comments or on tumblr and I'll throw more words, and maybe diagrams, at you until you understand.
Their path to S.T.A.R. Labs passed Barry’s apartment. In a surge of defiant hope—or a defiant need for hope—Barry detoured into his apartment. He dug in his closet until he uncovered a small blue chip he’d taken from Eobard so long ago.

“Gideon…” Barry paused, the hesitation negligible to any but a speedster. “Show me the future.”

Gideon’s head appeared immediately, and she spoke in her usual cheerful tone. “I’m sorry, Mr. Allen. The future does not appear to exist.”

Barry had to remind himself that he needed air to live. “…Right,” he gasped breathlessly. “Thank you, Gideon.”

He darted out of his apartment for, perhaps, the last time, rejoined the Rogues, and mentioned nothing of what he’d just done.

…Who cared about the future. The present—that was all that mattered now.

S.T.A.R. Labs loomed on the horizon.

Barry tried to hope.

As they drew near S.T.A.R. Labs, the app wasn’t the only warning they had about the weirdness inside the building. The air smelled like some unidentifiable material burning, and there was a strange, heavy sort of energy hanging about the building. Even ignoring the red skies, the atmosphere was surreal.

“Okay, plan,” Cisco muttered. “Linda and I will try to close the loophole. Maybe with our sound and light manipulation combined, we'll be able to make it work.”

“The rest of us can focus on defeating Harrison,” Barry said.

There was a brief pause, one that felt more significant than usual because of the odd weight of the air.

“I don’t like this.” Caitlin had her arms crossed, held tight against her body.

“The air feels…” Albert trailed off as all the Rogues nodded, not needing clarification.

“The temporal disruption.” Eobard spoke through gritted teeth. “The human body is used to experiencing time linearly. A nearby disruption this large, it unsettles our senses.” He rubbed his head, looking annoyed. “I’m already temporally displaced, which only exacerbates the agitation.”
“I feel so bad for you,” Leonard said. “We better hurry. Don’t want to miss the end of the world.”

The interior of S.T.A.R. Labs was worse than the outside. Barry felt like the not-quite-electricity in the air was on the verge of setting his skin on fire. The state of the building itself was startlingly intact—there was minor damage along a few of the hallways, and broken glass lined the floor in some places, but aside from that the building looked almost normal.

The Rogues paused in the hallway leading to the Cortex. The burning smell was sharper in the air, and the temporal disruption was now nearly audible—a low drone on the very edge of hearing.

“Remember,” Barry murmured, “he’s not the same Harrison Wells we knew before. Don’t expect—don’t expect anything.”

They nodded. Leonard took the lead, stepping into the Cortex and immediately shooting at Harrison. Only after he pulled the trigger did he even pause to notice the difference in lighting on the other end of the room, the only sign of the loophole that bisected the Cortex—half in the present, half in the past.

Harrison, whose back was to the entrance, casually lifted a hand at the sound of Leonard’s gun firing. A second loophole opened in between Harrison and the stream of ice, and the other end, judging by what Leonard was seeing through it, was...

He looked to his right. Damn it. He knew his gun, and he couldn’t move fast enough to get out of the way in time.

Colors blurred around him suddenly, and Leonard found himself safely out of the way, back with the other Rogues near the entrance. He nodded gratefully at Barry. “Thanks.”

Barry returned the nod, more focused on Harrison. Leonard took a moment to study the opponent they hadn’t seen in a week.

It was obvious that Harrison had stolen more powers, judging by the furthering of his condition. The blurring effect hadn’t relented since they entered, and it might have just been an illusion, but he looked almost transparent because of it.

He wasn’t concerned with the Rogues at all—in fact, he was hardly even looking at them, far more focused on the loophole before him. He seemed to be struggling to keep it open, meaning that if they distracted him enough, it might just close without Cisco and Linda needing to do anything.

Not that they weren’t going to try. While the rest of the Rogues eyed Harrison tensely, Linda nudged Cisco. They linked hands, and Linda turned them invisible. They had no idea how to close the loophole, but proximity to it would help both of them grasp the necessary frequencies to make an attempt.

They started edging toward it, going around the left edge of the Cortex. A murmured word to Barry and Leonard, and the Rogues shifted rightward, drawing Harrison’s attention with them.

Albert was the first to make a move. He made a sharp throwing motion, and a long ribbon of air turned to metal, the strip starting at his fingertips and extending across the Cortex, the end circling around Harrison and binding his arms to his torso.

Harrison, seeming almost bored, flicked into his gaseous state for a moment and the metal clattered to the floor.

The rest of the Rogues burst into action then, throwing a variety of attacks at Harrison. He froze
them all with his Turtle powers and sent a wide spray of ice at the Rogues.

Eobard, still moving at nearly Barry’s speed despite the lethargy, pulled the Rogues out of the way—except Firestorm, who was on fire and would surely be fine. He started toward Harrison and then hesitated, instead circling around him and tossing lightning.

Harrison’s form flickered and his eyes lit up white for a moment when the lightning made contact. His eyes glowed red and a plasma beam shot from them directly at Eobard, who dodged and returned to the rest of the Rogues, now freed from the Turtle’s lethargy.

“I don’t want to near enough that he can touch me,” he muttered to Barry.

“If he got speedster powers as well…” Barry could understand Eobard’s thinking. “Yeah. Stay away.”

The Rogues took a moment to regroup and then began firing again, keeping Harrison’s attention. Barry spun his arms, the wind forcing Harrison backwards. Before he could recover, Bette leapt at him—she’d been slowly sneaking up behind him, averting notice from both him and the Rogues. Bette—of course she would believe that killing him was justified in this case—closed her ungloved fingers around Harrison’s arm.

Instead of glowing purple, to Barry’s mixed relief and disappointment, Harrison’s hazy outline blurred even further—taking her powers rather than letting her use them.

And then, to Barry’s horror, Harrison pried Bette’s fingers off him with his other hand.

And she glowed purple.

She stared down at her fingers, shocked, and staggered back to the others.

“Get me out of here. Far away. Hurry.”

Barry was too shell-shocked to obey. Harrison had threatened to kill him, of course, and his loopholes had caused people’s deaths, but to casually and directly murder someone?

Eobard didn’t hesitate. He scooped Bette up and was gone in an instant.

The rest of the Rogues stared around at each other, all of them stunned, a few tears escaping some of their eyes.

Leonard shifted his gun, his teeth gritted and his eyes unreadable through the goggles. “Roy, we—we can’t be distracted. We need to keep going.”

Roy took his meaning and made eye contact with each of the Rogues in turn, his eyes glowing blue. The sadness and shock faded to the back of their minds, still present, but far more subdued.

For Barry, Roy’s emotional adjustments wouldn’t take hold. So instead he focused on doing this for Bette, making her sacrifice worth it, and returned to the battle.

The Rogues spread out more, giving Harrison too many people to target at once. Leonard, Caitlin, and Barry held to the left side of the room, trying to subtly guard Linda and Cisco.

Just in time, too—Linda dropped the invisibility to concentrate more of her powers on cloning the loophole, which began to shudder and contract. The view of the Cortex in the past began to fade.
Harrison spun to face their side of the room, face contorting in fury. He shot a blast of electricity at Cisco and Linda, and Barry quickly threw himself in front of it. Leonard, at Caitlin’s hurried insistence, dropped back to also focus on defending Linda and Cisco from any attacks Harrison might attempt, leaving Caitlin the sole offense on that side of the room.

Firestorm started over to help her as Caitlin blasted ice from her gloves. Harrison countered it with ice of his own—the powers he had stolen from her.

Caitlin, frustrated by all of this, furious about Bette, turned the gloves up to their highest setting and tried again, the air around her dropping in temperature.

Harrison ducked the ice instead of blocking it and threw out a hand.

Caitlin’s gloves let out a low whine and the ice slowed down. He was draining the power.

She messed with the settings and tried firing again, but the gloves didn’t work. Harrison didn’t even hesitate before sending a barrage of ice her way. Without the gloves, Caitlin had no defense.

Firestorm threw themselves into the path of the ice. Half of it melted away immediately and they held up their flaming hands to counter the remainder. Harrison, eyes narrowed, increased the intensity of the ice until the whole left side of the room was overtaken by cold blue ice. Leonard constructed a barrier to protect Cisco and Linda. Caitlin shrieked. Barry sped her out of the way.

And when the storm of ice subsided, it revealed Firestorm frozen in a huge block of ice.

Barry staggered to the block and started vibrating his hands against it, half trying to melt the ice and half trying to phase through it.

Eobard and Albert, on the other side of the room, threw everything they could at Harrison, trying to prevent him from doing any more damage to the others. Barry kept working, melting the ice, trying not to listen to Caitlin’s sobs. Leonard was too stunned to do anything but maintain the wall separating Cisco and Linda from the rest of the room.

Cisco and Linda ignored everything else going on. Both of them were semi-aware of the tragedies happening around them, but they blocked it out as much as they could, needing to focus.

They were making slow progress. They sent out little blasts of sound and light waves, testing the effects on the loophole, and now they’d settled on a combined set of frequencies that was slowly, slowly closing the loophole.

An earthquake rocked through the Cortex, fracturing the concrete floor and throwing Cisco and Linda off. They hurriedly refocused, kneeling together on the floor, sending out pulses and watching the loophole shrink.

Then a cloud of green gas condensed back into human form in front of Linda, who scrambled to her feet to defend herself.

Harrison opened another loophole behind Linda and seized her by the shoulder. His fingers glowed with light, and he shoved her hard into the loophole and walked away.

Linda screamed as she fell into it—the other side of the loophole was positioned on the edge of a roof somewhere, she would fall she would fall she was gonna die—and Cisco dove for her, grabbing her hand. For a moment it worked, but then their combined momentum propelled both of them forward, tipping them over the edge.
“Cisco!” Barry, overwhelmed and desperate, abandoned his attempt to defrost Firestorm and scrambled across the Cortex toward the pair of falling Rogues.

Harrison waved a hand and the loophole snapped closed, moments before Barry could get there.

The world seemed to pause for a moment, Barry’s grief over Bette, Ronnie, Hartley, and now Linda and Cisco sending him spiraling into superspeed thought. They couldn’t be—this couldn’t be happening. Harrison couldn’t have done this.

They’d never really fought him before, Barry realized dully. All their fights with Legion and he hadn’t ever been trying to kill them. But now—now it wasn’t even that Harrison wanted them all dead—he just didn’t care enough about them to keep them alive.

He didn’t care.

And the world was going to end because of it.

The loophole, the one Cisco and Linda had shrunk down to a quarter of its previous size, burst back to its original scale. The feeling of temporal displacement in the air doubled, and the whole building shuddered with the force of it.

Bits of the ceiling started to fall. With first the earthquake, and now the loophole’s reinstatement—

Barry locked eyes with Eobard, and they both blurred into action, transporting the other Rogues out of the building.

Once Leonard, Roy, Albert, and Caitlin were clear, Barry returned to Firestorm, dodging the collapsing walls, and started dragging the ice block out. It was going too slowly, but he was going to save them—he had to. Harrison was still there, forcing the loophole wider and blasting away anything falling near him, but he didn’t matter right now, not if Ronnie and Hartley could still be saved—

Eobard came back in after a moment when Barry didn’t return.

“It’s not going to work,” he told Barry.

“I have to save them, Eobard. Maybe it doesn’t bother you, you’ve killed people, you might not care, but Bette’s gone and Linda’s gone and Cisco—” Barry took a deep, shuddering breath. “And if there’s still a chance then I can’t let them die.”

Eobard let out a short sigh. “Stand back.” The building rumbled around them, larger pieces of the ceiling falling in, and Eobard raced around the ice in a storm of flickering red lightning.

The rest of the ice melted away, and Barry grabbed Firestorm—despising how limp their merged body was—and the two speedsters ran out of the building just in time.

Outside, Barry took Firestorm to Caitlin, who immediately shut off her own emotions and went into her clinical doctor mode, feeling for a pulse. The Rogues crowded around, watching, hoping—

Before there was a verdict one way or the other, S.T.A.R. Labs imploded with a cacophonous crashing sound.

Caitlin didn’t even look up, but the others turned to see the destruction.

“Is he…?” Leonard paused, glancing back and forth between Firestorm and the building, unable to
decide who to ask about.

Luckily, he didn’t need to clarify. Both questions were answered almost immediately.

“They have a pulse,” Caitlin reported, relief plain in her voice. “Weak and erratic, but it’s there.”

The Rogues—those of them who were left, anyway—let out sighs of relief.

Then the air shifted—it felt thicker, filled with a heavy electricity.

Another loophole.

Harrison was still around.

They sighed again, this time regret.

“Let’s end this,” Barry said.

Leonard, Roy, Albert, and Eobard—the remnants of the Rogues—nodded.

They turned and approached Harrison, yet again.

This time, driven by their grief and desperation, and a shot of fierce invigoration from Roy, the Rogues worked closer together and much more intently.

Leonard and Albert unleashed a barrage of liquid nitrogen at Harrison, forcing him to duck out of the way. Barry and Eobard made sure that they were present wherever he turned, driving him toward the huge mounds of rubble, where they could corner him.

Harrison defended himself as best he could, but the liquid nitrogen ensured that he couldn’t turn to gas for fear of being frozen, and whenever he tried to open a loophole, Barry or Eobard cut off his access to it. Earthquakes rumbled and lightning struck, but the Rogues were far too angry to let that stop them.

Harrison stumbled a final step backwards and tripped over one of the loose chunks of metal on the ground. He threw it away from him furiously, and it landed at Leonard’s and Albert’s feet.

Leonard raised his gun, lining up the shot, grief and anger and regret pooling in his stomach. “I’m sorry about this,” he muttered.

Then the chunk of metal exploded, sending Leonard and Albert flying in different directions. Leonard slammed hard into a huge piece of concrete. His head and leg pulsed in agony. Broken leg, probably, and maybe a concussion. Lucky him.

Barry went to Albert and sped him over to Caitlin, so it was Eobard who came to Leonard and tried to help him up.

Leonard shoved him away—“Stop Harrison, worry about me later”—but then they both noticed the bolt of electricity darting toward them.

Leonard braced himself—in his state, it would probably kill him—but Eobard cursed, dropped Leonard (painful, but better than the alternative), and took the lightning himself.

The foreign electricity buzzed through Eobard’s body, leaving him dizzy. Harrison’s eyes started to glow red, the precursor to his plasma shooting.
Eobard could run, he knew that, but he didn’t have the energy necessary to drag Leonard out of the way as well. He wasn’t about to leave Cold to die, so he gritted his teeth and stood his ground. He had no idea when he’d started to care so much about these people, but by the goddamn Speed Force he did. Great. Now he was gonna die.

He didn’t die.

A gunshot, of all things, was what saved him. At the sound, Harrison transformed to mist so the bullet passed harmlessly through him and turned his attention to the source of the shot.

Eobard felt the Speed Force surge back into him, and he seized the opportunity to speed Leonard away, taking care not to aggravate his broken leg and possible concussion. On the way, he snuck a glance at the shooter—and honestly, why was he not surprised?

Eddie shot again. Harrison stopped the bullet with a quick blast of ice. His eyes glowed again and this time, undistracted, plasma blasted from them.

“No!”

The word ripped from Iris’s throat as she ran out of nowhere, shoving Eddie out of the way.

“Iris!” Eddie and Barry shouted simultaneously. Barry raced toward her, but he was too far away and just—one—moment too late.

The plasma hit Iris full in the face and she crumpled to the ground, a faint sizzling sound emanating from her skin.

Iris. No. No. No.

Barry just ran. He couldn’t process this loss. He couldn’t. He stopped on the roof of a nearby building and just stood there, thinking at superspeed, feeling like he needed to scream but unable to summon the energy to do so.

Bette. Linda. Cisco. Ronnie, Hartley, and Leonard badly injured. And now Iris?

“You can’t just leave,” Eobard said from behind him, speaking at superspeed.

“Watch me,” Barry muttered. He sat down on the edge of the roof, dangling his legs over the side.

In a swirl of red lightning, Eobard was sitting beside him. “There are still people you care about in this city,” he said sharply. “I don’t care what you’re feeling right now, Barry. We have to stop Harrison before it’s too late.”

Barry wiped away tears. “He’s not even Harrison Wells,” he said bitterly. “He’s just… dark matter taking human form. Killing everyone and taking their powers? It’s not just his body that’s unstable. It’s him.” He had no idea if any of Harrison was left, actually, but he had to believe—he had to believe that Harrison wouldn’t have done this.

Eobard stared blankly at the ground below for a second, and then he turned to Barry, expression bordering on maniacal. “Barry, I know what we have to do.”

Barry looked at him and saw on his face the same intensity as when he was about to set off the accelerator. He knew what Eobard was about to say before he said it. “No!”

“We have to let him die. We have to force him to explode.”
“Eobard, you’re insane.” Below them, the loophole widened. Everyone was injured, dead, or depowered. There was no time.

“I know. But it’s the only way. He can’t destroy the timeline if he’s gone, and once he is you can fix it. All of it. Save your friends. Prevent this from ever happening.”

Barry processed what he was saying. “What happened to no more time travel?”

“Doesn’t apply to a clean break. Jumping around in time, that’s one thing. Create a totally new one, abandon this one, that’s another. It’ll work.” There was a desperation leaking into Eobard’s voice, something quite like madness.

Barry decided to ignore that. He couldn’t deny that the prospect was tempting. More so than it had even been in this new timeline. Go back, reset, save his friends—but at the cost of his parents?

He pushed that away for now and focused on the how. “Okay, assuming that’s true, if we do this, how do we get Harrison unstable enough to…?” He couldn’t even say it.

Eobard took a moment to respond, and when he did he sounded absolutely certain, though there was an odd edge to his voice—

Resignation.

“Me.”

“What—” Barry’s eyes went wide. “You can’t be saying what I think you are.”

Eobard spoke faster, as though trying to convince himself of it. “I was at the heart of the particle accelerator explosion. I’m saturated with dark matter. It’ll be more than enough to overload his system.”

“It’ll cause an outburst of dark matter worse than the accelerator. You’ll die.” Barry couldn’t believe he was arguing with Eobard Thawne about sacrificing his life to save the world.

“So? You’re about to change the timeline. Doesn’t count anyway.”

“Eobard, it counts! And you don’t exist in my timeline—whatever part of you does, we’re not friends!”

Eobard stared out at the city for a moment, watching the movements of the city, the citizens seeming abnormally slow in his Speed Force perception. He spoke after a moment, thoughtfully.

“…I used to want to be just like the Flash.”

Abruptly, he turned to Barry, no trace of hesitation or doubt in his expression. “Isn’t that what you would do? Heroic sacrifice? Blaze of glory?” He nodded once, sharply. “I stop him, you change the timeline. Let’s save the universe, Flash.”

His voice shifted to a Speed Force growl on the last word, and Barry shuddered slightly out of habit. He considered asking if Eobard was really going to do this.

But he didn’t.

He just got to his feet and offered a hand, helping Eobard to his.

“When you see the explosion, run.” Eobard smirked halfheartedly. “I always win, Flash.”
All Barry could think to say was, “Wherever you end up next timeline, I hope it has cows and anime.”

Eobard laughed and ran off the side of the roof, streaking across the street toward the lone standing figure next to the huge loophole.

Barry braced himself.

Eobard skidded to a stop just behind Harrison Wells.

He knew Barry wasn’t sure he was going to go through with this. Honestly, Eobard wasn’t quite certain either, and he figured he would probably know once he was dead. Well. It would be hard for him to know anything when he was dead. So maybe he’d never know.

His speed made it possible for him to consider and reconsider and re-reconsider dozens of times in a single second, and that was precisely what he was doing. How far he had fallen. He used to be the villain, the Flash’s reverse, and now here he was sacrificing himself for the good of the world?

How far he had fallen.

Was he really doing this?

He better get a statue or something.

Or he could run. Jump to another Earth. It wouldn’t be home. But he’d be alive.

“You seem upset, Harrison,” he said.

Well, crap. He seemed to be doing this. Eobard found himself genuinely surprised.

Harrison spun to face him, his whole outline flickering oddly. “You.”

“Me,” Eobard said cheerfully.

Harrison closed the distance between them with a single step and reached out. Eobard focused on his hand, and the world seemed to slow to a crawl.

Time to make a decision. Yes or no, save the world or let it burn.

He thought about Tess, who had died because of him, and stood still.

Harrison’s hand brushed his shoulder, and Eobard felt the Speed Force drain out of him.

Red lightning crackled in Harrison’s eyes, and then he blurred even more than he was already doing. He let out an anguished cry, his form now nothing more than a few smears of color, and then every particle of his body tore itself away from the others.

Eobard had always figured everything would go black when he died.

But everything went white instead.
The explosion was enormous. It was a pure white, unlike the particle accelerator, and it was spreading much, much faster.

Barry ran.

He should be going back in time, he knew. But he couldn’t—he couldn’t just leave. He’d lost too much. And his parents’ house was on the outskirts of Central City, on the other end of town from S.T.A.R. Labs. If anywhere in the city would be safe from the explosion, it would be there.

And he had to—he had to talk to them.

Barry didn’t bother with knocking. He didn’t even bother to open the door. He phased straight through and into his parents’ living room.

“Everything’s gone wrong,” he said to his stunned and confused parents, tears streaming down his face already, “and if I fix it I lose you.”

“Barry, what’s going on?” his dad asked.

“What happened?” his mom added.

They both hurried to embrace him, and he hugged them back, tight and desperate, explaining the situation as best he could through sobs.

“It’s all my fault.”

He pulled away from the hug, unable to look either of them in the eye. He had no idea how many people had died—and it was because of him.

“Barry, if you’re right about this whole other-timeline business, you need to go back,” Henry told him firmly.

Nora nodded, gently putting a hand on Barry’s face. He turned back to look at her, his mother, who he’d spent sixteen years living without and now would have to give up again.

“It’s not fair,” Barry said. “There has to be a way I can save everyone, including you. I can’t lose both of you again.”

“You have to,” she whispered to him. “Barry, I am so proud of you, but the rest of the city is more important than me and your father.”

“You have to go, slugger,” Henry agreed.

Barry couldn’t stop crying. “But how can I be the Flash without you?”

His mother kissed his forehead. “Barry, we’ll always be with you.”

“And we’ll always be so proud of our son,” his father said.

They enfolded him in another hug, and Barry allowed himself to enjoy the feeling of his parents’ embrace.

It was the last time he would ever feel it.

“I love you,” Barry sobbed.
“We love you too, son,” his father said.

“Now run, Barry,” his mother murmured.

She and Henry stepped back, intertwining their arms. Together, they said, “Run.”

Barry ran.

He closed his eyes tight, remembering that night, and when the air changed, he opened them.

The same street, sixteen years prior. Barry knew where he had to be and when. He was glad the mask disguised the tears still running hot down his face.

First. Into the house, where his future self and Eobard were fighting in vivid red and yellow lines. He ran a few circles around the room, trying not to look at his mother, and then paused to look at where the version of him from 2015 would be. He held up his hand and shook his head, cautioning him not to save her, and then ran. He wasn’t going to be there while his mother died.

Then. Outside. He waited where he knew his other past self would come running down the street. When the breach opened, Barry stepped in the path of his previous self.

“Don’t,” he said.

“What—what version are you?”

Barry winced to hear how completely furious his past self sounded. He remembered that blind anger, the feeling that had sent him running sixteen years back, willing to change the entirety of the timeline to save his parents.

“The version that’s done what you’re about to do. And let me tell you…” Barry shook his head, tears still streaming down his face. “Don’t. It ends with most of our friends dead and Eobard Thawne sacrificing himself to save the world.”

“Oh.” The antagonism faded from the other Barry’s stance. And then the other Barry faded from existence altogether.

Barry’s eyes widened. That… that had to be because of the destroyed timeline. Which meant… he had no idea.

Nothing to be done about it now.

Barry ran. Down the street, through the years, almost seventeen years into the future, and to S.T.A.R. Labs.

The building was intact. There was damage, of course—the same damage that had been done when the particle accelerator exploded.

He was back in his original timeline, or something approximating it.

Before he could think too much. Into the Cortex.

He stopped at the entrance, mind spinning at the sight. The room was crowded with people. With everyone.

Wally and Jesse were talking tensely, both of them in speedster suits. Oliver was hooded and vaguely menacing, nodding at something that Caitlin was saying. Both halves of Firestorm—in this
universe, Jax and Professor Stein—were about to merge. Was that Supergirl demonstrating her laser eyes to Joe? And Cisco, his Vibe goggles on, was watching, looking impressed.

Barry, stunned by the sight of so many people he hadn’t seen in so long, just stared.

“Barry!”

Iris was the one to say it, Iris the first to run to him and enclose him in a tight hug. Then, as though she couldn’t resist, she kissed his cheek.

Barry hugged her back, running on autopilot. “What—?”

“I’m so glad you’re back, but there’s no time to explain,” she said, pulling back from him. “There’s a new speedster, he dresses all in white, super evil, go!”

“Here,” Cisco said, tossing Barry something small and gold.

Barry caught it and blinked at the object in his hand. It was a ring, decorated with a bolt of lightning.

“Some improvements to the suit,” he said.

Barry couldn’t think of anything to say that would sum up everything he was feeling, so he settled for sliding the ring onto his finger. He squeezed his hand into a fist and the new suit sprung out.

A swirl of lightning, and he’d discarded the other suit, which was dirty and torn and now the one remnant of the other timeline, and stepped into the new one.

“I’m back,” he said softly.

And he joined his friends, his fellow superheroes, as they ran from the Cortex to save the world.

Chapter End Notes

A million thank yous to everyone who's stuck through this story. It's the longest fanfiction I've ever written, and getting awfully close to the longest thing I've ever written. I had a lot of fun, and I couldn't have gotten through it without your support.

For those of you who are interested, this is what a 100k, mostly handwritten, fanfic looks like. That’s 3.5 full-size notebooks, 3/4 of a small notebook for planning, and 87 (I counted) index cards with various scenes and scene details written on them. Oh, and there's probably about 12 hours or so of audio notes on my phone.

Now that this huge thing is done, I'm taking prompts on tumblr. Probably nothing multi-chapter, but I'll do one-shots of basically anything but smut. Warning: fulfillment might take a while--I'm off to college tomorrow!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!