

When we had recovered from Ghost's dramatic exit, Robin pulled up the map that she had shown us, expanding it and increasing the detail by laying it over another map. He then shifted its orientation, laying lower along the ground so we could look down at it. He then turned to Kaldur, who nodded.

"Thank you, Robin, this will make things easier," He acknowledged, before looking at the rest of us. "Our mission has two win conditions. The first is protecting the Colonel for four hours, the second is locating Ghost before she has a chance to complete her task. My first instinct is to split the team into two groups, the protection detail and the canvas group. The former will stick close to Colonel Clayden, while the others spread out to hunt for Ghost."

"Colonel... What are your plans for the next few hours?" I asked, Kaldur nodding at my question.

"Well, it's getting to be about lunchtime..." He started, looking at his watch. "So I think I will head out to a sub shop to get something, before heading to the park to eat it."

"Could... could we convince you to take lunch at a particular location?" Robin asked, before pointing to a particular series of benches.

The park was structured in such a way that one side was higher than the other, and cut in along that high area was a path. A stone retaining wall kept the earth at bay along that path, and that was lined with a series of benches, facing toward a row of buildings. Ordinarily, that would have left him extremely open to anyone in those buildings, but it just so happened that those buildings were out of bounds for the test.

"That would be the most secure location for you to have lunch, sir," Kaldur said. "It would prevent her from attacking long-range from two directions at once."

"Hmm... I suppose the view there is as good as anywhere else," he said, before nodding with a chuckle. "Alright, I'll eat there."

"Good. Superboy, Ice, Skarn, you three will play bodyguard, while M'gann, Robin, Wally, and myself will canvas the area," Kaldur said, crushing any lack of confidence in his position that he might have.

We talked for a few more minutes about strategies, what to look out for, and how we could keep the Colonel safe from the "assassin." The Colonel answered some of our questions about Ghost, confirming she was capable of donning a new look in around a minute, that she was capable of playing both genders easily, and that she had no real powers. He refused to answer a few of our questions though, including if she was likely to re-use old looks, and if there were any she liked to use that we should know about

When we finally had a decent plan laid out we stepped through the Zeta-Tube and out into Central City. The canvassing team immediately headed out to the park area, M'gann turning invisible as she flew up into the air. The Colonel stepped out last before the four of us slowly made our way to a sub-shop that was part of the commercial area inside the boundaries. The Colonel was a decisive man, and that showed in how he did all his business. He wasted no time ordering his meal, the three of us ordering something as well to keep from looking suspicious. With our bags of food, we walked once around the park before settling on the agreed-upon location.

All the while M'gann and I were talking as they cleared shops around us, pre-clearing the sub shop and the paths we were taking. When we sat at the benches, Superboy sat on one side, while Tora and myself on the other.

*"Kyle, keep your eyes peeled but try not to look too suspicious,"* I instructed him, M'gann having connected us a while ago. *"Focus on the right side and buildings, Tora and I will focus on the left."*

We did our best to keep our eyes open, checking out people who got too close or that looked suspicious. I knew that, realistically, it was most likely futile, as Ghost was no doubt professional enough to *not* look suspicious doing something as simple as walking down a park path, but I was assuming this was less about being good enough to actually spot her coming, and more about proving we could at least do a decent job coming up with a plan. Further, I half expected her to take it easy on us and purposely give herself away in small ways.

A few times members of the canvas team walked by, mostly not making eye contact with us, even as we talked through M'gann's connection.

Eventually, the path became more and more populated as people around the city stepped out for their lunch breaks, making it harder and harder for us to keep track of everyone.

*"If I was going to strike,"* Robin thought to the team. *"During lunch rush would be a perfect time..."*

*"A good point. Canvas team, pull in tighter around Colonel Clayden. Keep a closer eye on the crowds,"* Kaldur ordered. *"M'gann, stay hidden and do your best to scan the crowd for anything off."*

Various conformations came through and the canvas team moved closer, though I could only see Wally as he sat down by a nearby tree, facing our general direction, just along the border of the out-of-bounds area. We sat there, tense and anxiously scanning the crowd. Superboy got more than a few strange looks as he was having a hard time regulating his facial expressions and his intense face was making pedestrians nervous.

Eventually, after another hour and a half, the lunch rush died down, the crowds slowing down considerably. I could see that Wally was starting to look frustrated, while Tora was having a hard time staying focused, her eyes wandering around occasionally before she would remember to focus up. When the lunch rush was truly over Kaldur spoke up.

*“Canvas team, spread back out, stretch your legs and stay focused. We-”*

Kaldur’s words faded into the background as an older gentleman caught my attention. Something was off, but I couldn’t quite put my finger on it. He was dressed in business casual, had a messenger bag around his shoulder, and walked with purpose, checking his watch as he did. He got closer and closer before my brain finally realized why he was standing out to me. I stood and intercepted him.

“Got you.” I said, smiling as I looked down slightly at him, or rather her.

“What? I’m not sure-”

“I am, your sounds don’t match. I can hear your suit moving but it doesn’t look like you are wearing anything like that. Not to mention you were very tense and getting more so as you got closer. So either I stumbled on a very nervous person with a secret leather fetish or...”

For a moment the man continued to look confused and nervous before her body language shifted drastically, and they smiled.

“That is a good catch. Not many people could pick out that sound from that far away, even if it was quiet out,” They said, their voice still masculine, but now with the same, modulated undercurrent they had had before. “Shall we sit?”

*“I got her guys,”* I said, everyone acting shocked before Kaldur ordered them to close in.

Once the team had assembled, with Ghost sitting where I had been moments before, she smiled.

“Congrats, you passed. And in case you were wondering, not just because you actually caught me. Kaldur, your strategy was sound, and with some more training to spot body language, you would have caught me while I was following you earlier. Everyone else played their roles well, and the spot you picked for him to stay was well thought out, even if those buildings would have been a sniper’s dream if this was a real-life scenario,” She explained, gesturing to the buildings that were outside the bounds of the test. “That said, you did not get a perfect score.”

She leaned over and reached under the bench, tugging something off of the bottom. She threw it at me and I caught it easily. It was a brick of tan clay, with a picture of a cellphone taped under it. Written on the screen of the image was the word “BOOM!”.

“You pre-checked every area Colonel Clayden went to, but not nearly well enough,” She needlessly pointed out, her smile gone.

I smashed the clay in my hands to make it less recognizable as a fake bomb, idly noting that it must have been some sort of synthetic clay because I couldn't feel it with my energy.

“Kyle would have been the only one to survive that,” I explained, mostly for Kyle, Tora and M'gann's sake, as I was sure the three more experienced heroes knew exactly what that much damage that amount of C4 could have done.

“We have room for improvement,” Kaldur said diplomatically, and Ghost laughed.

“That you do. Don't fret though, you did better than I thought, anticipating me during the lunch rush was a good idea, plenty of assassins would have taken advantage of that.”

We talked a bit more before Colonel Clayden sent us back home, him and Ghost staying behind. We had the rest of the day off, mostly because they needed to discuss training schedules and ideas, but also because we had just had a mission, and they both agreed that the day after a mission should be spent unwinding the tension whenever possible.

As we stepped back into the cave, Wally let out a cheer, turning around and giving me a high five.

“Nice catch Warren, I was really starting to think we wouldn't find her in time.” He said, zipping away. “I'm getting us pizza to celebrate, my treat!”

I looked at Robin, who looked equally surprised at Wally's exuberance. I shook my head and chuckled, before following everyone else as the group made their way to the living area. Wally was already on the phone ordering an ungodly amount of pizza.

We relaxed for a while, debating if we wanted to take Bioship into space, deciding to stick to the cave, since I wanted to do some light training when we were done. After a while Kaldur and Wally left, going through the Zeta-Tube to get the pizza. When they returned we had the table set and ready.

“If I had my x-ray vision, it would have been easy,” Kyle said when we started talking about the test. “Or if had better control over all of my senses.”

“Then maybe your senses are something we should add to your training,” I pointed out. “We've already talked about things that everyone needs to work on, or at least be aware of, but personal wants are also something we should focus on.”

“You already fixed what your biggest issue was, right?” Tora pointed out, everyone looking at her, making her wilt for a second before speaking much quieter. “You were in pain, from going fast?”

“That’s true.”

“I’ll do some research and see if there aren’t some easy ways for you to work on getting your senses more precise,” I said, mentally adding a note to my list. “We will have to adapt them to work for you, but who knows what we will find. As for your x-ray vision... it sucks but it sounds like you’re just going to have to be patient.”

“That’s what Superman said,” He responded with a sigh.

“I’m hoping to focus on melting ice faster,” Tora volunteered. “I still feel like I’m missing something, like there is a part of the trick I haven’t realized, but I’m close!”

“I’m still working on my shape-shifting. I want to start making abstract forms like Uncle J’onn can. After that... I want to try density shifting, but I get the feeling that it might still be too advanced for me.”

“One step at a time,” I said, getting a smile in return before I focused on the rest of the group. “I’d like to bring recruitment up again. Originally I was thinking of a ten-person team, but recently I realized that that was way too many people. I think a team of eight should be the highest we go for now.”

“I agree. Eight seems like a good amount given how it can be broken down into groups or pairs,” Kaldur agreed. “Do you still have the list of possible candidates?”

“I do, on my phone. But we should renew our listings and-”

“Shit. I knew there was something I was forgetting!” Robin said, shaking his head. “Misfit, the second choice that Batman agreed to? She stopped showing up. Batman was worried she... got caught, but we haven’t heard anything that says she was. Batman is hoping she had a scare and retired, or someone talked some sense into her. Either way, we have no way of getting in contact with her as we don’t know who she really is.”

“How long has she been quiet?” I asked, a little confused. “We only put her on the list a few weeks ago.”

“She had already stopped at that point, we just hadn’t realized it,” He explained, leaning back in his chair. “She stopped about the same time the team formed.”

"Damn... well there's nothing we can do about it either way I guess," I said, shaking my head. "If she starts popping up again let us know. Even if we don't have space on the team, it sounded like she needed some guidance."

Robin nodded, and we talked about recruitment efforts. We agreed that, whoever was training us tomorrow, when they were done we would meet up in the library and see if anyone new had popped up. Robin volunteered to talk to Batman and see if there was anyone on his radar for our group.

When we had finished eating, and Wally had left with the leftovers, I made my way down into the grotto. It had been a few days since I had gotten any training in, and I needed to fix that. I started by going through some earthbending workouts, the same thing that fake Toph taught me. After I felt sufficiently warmed up I started metal bending.

I wasn't working toward any particular goal, instead, I was focused on my connection to metal, my general metal bending ability. I sat, cross-legged, on my stone and sand pedestal and worked with the majority of my unrefined meteorite metal. I focused on the feeling of controlling the metal, of sinking my energy into it, and how it felt to shift and bend it to my intent.

It was definitely slow going, but over time I could feel it getting easier. I could feel the metal responding to me more and more, though in all honesty, it was only a small difference. Still, progress was progress. I decided to forgo cable training as trying to control my wires at this point was useless, at least until I got better control over metal in general.

When I finally called it, reshaping the chunks of metal I had been manipulating into separate ingots before putting them away in the crate that Batman had sent them to me in, it was around ten in the evening. Kaldur, Robin, and Tora had already gone to bed, and M'gann was dozing in the living area, laying on the couch with a blanket over her. She heard me as I walked into the room.

*"Hey, all done?"* She asked, sitting up and stretching.

*"Yeah, figured it was time for bed,"* I said with a shrug. *"You didn't have to wait for me."*

*"I know,"* She answered simply, folding the blanket up and laying it on the back of the couch.

I chuckled as she flew away from the couch and over to me, landing and taking my hands.

*"How are you feeling?"* I ask.

*"Good, better than I have in a while,"* She responded with a smile. *"The extra connections, even if they are only on the surface, have really helped."*

*“That’s good,” I said, leaning down to kiss her cheek. “I think it’s time to get some sleep though. I have a feeling that Ghost is going to be teaching us tomorrow, and I have no idea what kind of training she is going to put us under.”*

I walked M’gann to her room, where she kissed my cheek and wished me a good night, giving me a tight hug before I made my way to my own room, just across the hall.