

I couldn't help but smile at Robin's response. They were interested, and now it was time to sell the details.

"Well first, I think it needs to be said that we would do this openly." I explained. "We aren't doing anything wrong and I doubt we could really hide it for long anyway. We are doing what they want, we are just taking it several steps further than they might have expected."

"Right, Batman probably already knows something is up." Robin said, shrugging when we looked at him. "The whole team, disappearing together? I mean if I figured out we are here to keep from being overheard, Batman has as well."

"I just wanted everyone to speak truthfully, without having to worry about it getting back to your mentors or the League." I explained when everyone shifted back over to looking at me.

"Back to the topic at hand." Kaldur said after a moment. "You were elaborating?"

"Right, yes." I said with a nod before continuing. "I have a few ideas about what we could do, about what we would need to do. For example, I think we should try and recruit a few more people."

"Why?" Wally asked in confusion. "More people would just be more complicated, besides Speedy of course."

"Because as it is the team is too small to be split and perform large tasks." I explained. "Optimally being able to split the group would leave two teams that are capable of handling themselves. My suggestion is we strive for ten, then we can break into groups of five easily."

"Ten is a large group to coordinate." Kaldur pointed out.

"It is, but it's not an insurmountable challenge." I said with a shrug. "If we set up a solid chain of leadership it wouldn't be that hard. But that's part of the details. Let's focus on the big picture for now."

"Agreed. I would like a better image of what taking this path would entail."

"Well, we would train in a combination of military, stealth and super power tactics, blending them together with a solid team dynamic. I know that 'military' sounds like a scary word to heroes but that's mostly for group based tactics. Simultaneous take downs, covering fire, things like that."

"And where would we get access to that?" Kaldur asked with a nod of agreement from Robin.

“Best case scenario?” I said, getting a few nods of confirmation. “We do some research and hire someone ex-military, someone who is flexible enough to work in our abilities. Same for the stealth and possibly the superhero tactics. If that gets shot down by the League then I could cobble together a serviceable military training program, Robin could be our stealth expert and the group could work together to keep our power usage creative, flexible and effective. Honestly, that might be the best option for super hero tactics. Frequent brainstorming sessions where we workshop our abilities and ways to make them more effective.”

“And what do you know about military tactics?” Wally asked with a bit of a scoff.

“Part of my powers came with something of an information dump.” I explained, smiling when M’gann mentally reached out and gave me a reassuring hug. “Most of it has faded but with enough research I could put something effective together.”

“Okay, so say we have part of our training set up.” Robin said. “What else?”

“Well for one, we see if we can't convince Batman to set us up some patrols to help us work together.”

“That kind of goes against what the group is, doesn't it?” Wally asked . “Covert? On the sly? Ringing any bells?”

“If we hold back some of our more obvious abilities and add a few costume changes we could easily create some secondary hero identities.” I explained. “The hardest part would be Wally. Me and Kaldur would just need to stay away from our elements and everyone else just needs a color pallet swap. M’gann might need to hold off on obvious shape shifting as well, save for a single new form to patrol in. Hell it would be a good way to train away power dependency and work on our undercover skills.”

“I... don't know if Batman would go for that or not.” Robin admitted.

“There are other ways to get that kind of live, realistic training if he doesn't. Everything from hiring our own mercenaries to asking if the U.N. would like to have a team trained in metahuman response. Worst case is we take turns playing the villains and set up our own scenarios.”

“So... Where would we start?” Robin asked. “What would be the first step?”

“Step one is setting up a schedule. If we are going to be a team we need to be spending time together. Optimally that would mean you guys moving into the cave, but right now we could settle for just spending more time together training. After that we need to work together to recruit a few more people.”

“How would we even do that?” Wally asked skeptically.

“We do our research.” I said firmly. “There are bound to be other metahumans our age, just looking for a way to do some good. We get in contact, maybe do some observation from a distance. If we like what we see we can ask if they would be interested before passing it up the chain, probably to Batman, to do a background check.”

“And what if he says no?”

“Then we ask why. If he has a legitimate reason, even if it's a bit of a stretch then we say alright and move on to the next candidate. The league *is* funding us after all. If he says no for illegitimate reasons, then we might have to remind him what Superboy said when they first met.”

The three looked confused for a moment before I gestured to Superboy, who had so far been perfectly silent.

“Get on board, or get out of the way.” He said with a grin that promised trouble for everyone who didn't.

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The team had split up not long after that. We had discussed a few more concepts, but ultimately decided that rushing to set up a schedule would probably just mean we would have to change it. So Kaldur, Wally and Robin had all returned home to think on my proposal and to figure out what their schedules were like. The three had agreed to keep the concept itself to themselves until we got together again to make a final vote, after which they could share it with whoever they liked. They agreed that when their mentors inevitably asked what the meeting was about, that we were discussing the specifics of the team and that nothing had been decided yet.

When those three left the cave via the Zeta-Tube, Wally leaving with the leftover Chinese food while M'gann, Superboy and I walked back to the communal living area. Superboy plopped down on the couch while I stood by the entrance into another hall.

“I need to go do some meditating.” I explained. “I'll probably be down in the grotto for the rest of the day.”

Superboy simply nodded and waved lazily, already reading his book.

“Oh, do you mind if I come down and read?” M'gann asked. “I don't want to distract you or like...”

“M'gann, you're more than welcome to, but I'll be meditating pretty deeply, like I was after tryouts.” I explained as I paused by the hallway.

“That’s okay, the grotto kind of reminds me of home anyway, well except for the water, and it’s a nice place to read.” She said with a smile. “I’ll meet you down there, I just need to get my book!”

I smirked and watched her fly down the hall, back to her room before turning and heading down to the grotto. I was already sitting, cross legged, on my meditation platform by the time M’gann floated down to the chair I made a few days ago. She was carrying a book, a pillow and a blanket as well. She waved when she settled in, but otherwise focused on her book. I sent a wave happiness through her presence, like a mental smile, before closing my eyes and focusing on my breathing.

Slowly I felt for my energy, pulsing with each long breath. I could feel the stone around me, feel its strength, the different blends of minerals. I smiled as I pushed the pulse as far as it could go, feeling almost half the cave. Then, between pulses, the rock changed. For one pulse I was sitting on my platform, the soft sound of water filling the cavern, and the next I was sitting on a flat area, one made of almost entirely hexagonal formations of basalt.

“Took your time Mopey!” A familiar voice called out. “I don’t experience the passage of time and I was still bored waiting for you!”

I opened my eyes to find Toph standing only fifteen feet away, tapping her foot impatient, her arms crossed. Seeing my eyes were open she stomped her foot casually, lobbing a rough chunk of rock at me. I caught it easily before looking back up at the training construct.

“Show your work Mopey.” She said, gesturing for me to stand.

I nodded wordlessly and stood, holding the chunk of stone before closing my eyes again. I took a deep breath and focused, envisioning the process of the carving and chiseling that I wanted my energy, my chi to do. With a confident strike I started shaping the large rock into a general sphere. I kept it simple, not letting my energy go much further than my hand. Even so, it only took me a few minutes to bend the stone into a rough sphere. I smiled as I threw it back to Toph.

“Well at least the time you did spend practicing was effective.” She admitted with a shrug, turning the rock over in her hands. “Not bad, all things considered. It could be better though. I want you to keep practicing this, until your sphere is perfect and you can do it in only a few strikes. This is your control exercise, and it belongs in your daily routine. Before you leave I’ll show you your endurance exercise.”

“Alright. What’s next then?”

“What’s next is you’re going to learn the basic forms.” She answered, before adopting the basic horse stance. “Get into position Mopey.”

From there we spent a few hours going through some basic earthbending techniques, working through forms and kata's, correcting my stance occasionally. At first we went through them without bending, before she slowly introduced bending through those forms. Step by step I learned a few dozen moves, some I even recognized from the shows. In truth, all of it felt vaguely familiar, and none of the basics took long for me to get down. Eventually she seemed satisfied that I had at least the basics down.

"I want you to practice these forms more outside, they should feel completely natural." She said. "Moving rock should be like breathing to you."

"I will." I said with a nod, pausing for a long moment. "What's next?"

"What's next is I teach you your endurance training exercise." The knock off Toph answered, as she made her way to one of the large boulders that littered the training space.

"So far, you've been doing some basic bending. Chi is inside you, you connect to the rock and earth around you, then you push chi out of yourself and into the stone" She explained. "Your next challenge is to learn how to keep that energy flowing. No more bursts that send stones flying, or massive blows to carve out chunks."

As she talked she reached out and put her hand on a boulder that was as tall as she was. She focused for a moment before using her flat hand to lift the boulder from the ground. She didn't grab it, stomp to shoot it up or anything else, just focused and lifted. For a full five second she held a rock the size of a small car up and over her head, one hand behind her back as she concentrated. Eventually, after about thirty seconds she lowered the boulder back down, almost gently placing it back.

"People assume that earthbenders have some sort of super strength when it comes to rock, stone and earth." She said, before repeating the move all over again, this time talking with the boulder over her head. "The truth is we don't, it just looks like it because of our bending abilities. Water bending can do something similar, it's just not as obvious because people don't immediately connect water with heaviness."

With a single punch she splits the boulder in half before putting both palms flat against its surface. Focusing again she lifted both halves off of the ground, holding them out perpendicular to the ground on either side of her.

"By controlling your chi, focusing on its flow and holding it steady and constant you can lift the stones with barely any physical effort. At first it takes a bit of learning to get the open palm lift technique down, but after you do it becomes much more about endurance and less about precise control. Give it a try on your sphere."

Toph kicked my stone sphere back to me, not phased in the slightest by the two large chunks of rock she was essentially floating. I caught my rock, having to jump into the air to do so, while the Toph shaped construct placed her demonstration rocks back on the ground.

“Instead of envisioning the change, or how you get that change, try focusing on your energy itself and how it connects you to the rock around us..”

I nodded and closed my eyes, putting my palm on the side of the rock. I focused on my breathing for a moment, feeling my energy expand and contrast with each deep breath. Finally, I focus on the stone, pushing my energy into it slowly. I can mentally see the energy, the glow flaring with every deep breath. Finally, after another moment or two I released the rock from my other hand. For a moment, barely more than a few seconds, my energy held and the rock was suspended in the air with my hand resting against it. Unfortunately the surprise that it was working was enough to distract me and I lost it, the stone falling to the ground with a crack and thud.

Silently I bent down and tried again, this time leaving the stone on the ground and lifting it. I managed to pull it off the ground, standing straight again before my control slipped and the stone fell to the ground again.

“Keep trying.” The construct said encouragingly, watching from a few feet away. “Keep the stream of energy constant, any large disruptions will-”

Her warning was cut off as I accidentally pushed too much energy into the spherical stone, causing it to crack in half, both pieces falling to the ground.

“Do something like that.” She said with a smirk, looking down at the broken chunks of rock. “Well, it could have been worse Mopey, it could have exploded.”

“... Yeah, that would have been worse.” I agreed, looking down at the rock. I looked up just in time to catch another chunk of stone from hitting me in the chest.

“Don’t mope Mopey! Try again.”

I shook my head before following her direction and trying again. It took a while for me to get the delicate balance down, but eventually after a few dozen tries I could hold the stone up in front of me consistently, with nothing but my bending. It was difficult to maintain though, and after a few seconds the stone would drop back to the ground. Eventually the Toph construct called for me to stop.

“I think that's enough for today.” She said, stepping closer. “I want you to keep practicing this, the sphere exercise and your basic forms. Come back when you can bend the stone up for more than a solid minute consistently.”

Before I could say anything, in the span of a blink, I was back in the grotto. I took a long deep breath, before slowly letting it out. As I was decompressing I felt stirring next to me, the weight of someone leaning on me shifting slightly. I looked over to find M'gann, covered in her blanket, leaning on my side. It looked like she had been reading, as her book was still open on her lap, but she clearly fell asleep at some point. For a bit I debated if I should try and carry her to her room, or just wait here for her to wake up, but before I could decide the choice was made for me. She stirred again and opened her eyes, looking around for a moment before noticing I was looking back at her.

"Oh! I-umm I uhh- Oh gosh!" She said, blushing deeply. "I'm so sorry but when you were meditating you got really distant and I lost contact with you and I got so used to you being connected and- and well I'm really sorry!"

The words flowed from her rapid fire, her nervousness and anxiety bleeding through. She started to pull away, lifting into the air. As she moved I uncrossed my legs and reached, grabbing her arm and holding her for a moment.

"M'gann... M'gann it's okay! Calm down, you didn't do anything wrong." I said as calmly as possible, gently pulling her back down.

I slid forward and sat at the edge of the platform, and she floated back down, still blushing, her panic and anxiety buzzing against me through our connection. I focused on sending acceptance and understanding back to her through her presence.

"C'mon, take a deep breath and tell me what happened." I said softly.

She nodded and slowly took a few breaths. I could feel her mind slowly calming, though a new nervousness leaked through. After a minute or so of her breathing slowly she started talking.

"When you started meditating your presence went really distant." She explained. "I knew it was going to happen but it felt really weird because we were linked when you went under. It kind of freaked me out."

She started nervously rubbing her elbow, and I sent another wave of reassurance, which she responded with gratitude.

"I came over to check on you after a little while and... well I was getting really nervous. I had forgotten how quiet it was without someone to be connected to, especially when you were right here. I sat down here to keep an eye on you and one thing led to another...I'm sorry I fell asleep on you."

“Thank you for being concerned.” I said, giving her a side hug, my arm around her back. “I’m sorry I put you through that, we will have to come up with a solution to keep that from happening again. Maybe I’ll meditate when you’re asleep?”

“That... That might work.” She said, a pensive look on her face, still blushing a bit. “We don’t keep direct contact when we are asleep usually, that’s a good way to project your dreamscape and that can be... embarrassing.”

“Yeah, I can imagine.” I said with a chuckle.

After a few moments of silence I realized my arm was still around her, but before I could pull it back she rested her head on my shoulder. I could feel her nervousness about it through her presence and on a whim I shared my own, before replacing it with happiness. Her nervousness faded, and she shifted just a bit closer, before using her telekinesis to lift her blanket and wrap it around both of us.