

*"How's it going over there, guys?"* I ask through our mental link. For a while, I don't get anything before Artemis finally spoke.

*"Lady Shiva is down. Everyone is alright,"* She explained. *"I don't see any more small-time ninjas or soldiers either."*

*"Great, everyone meet at the east side of the pyramid,"* I said, pushing as much urgency through the link as I could. *"Break out your beacons as you move."*

As I talk, I lead M'gann to our destination, reaching into my own utility belt and pulling out my beacon, a standard part of our kit for a while now. Hell, most of the League members carried one as well. With a simple twist, the egg-sized cube began screaming out our location in several different methods. It couldn't be turned off once it was activated and would continue to send out its information until it ran out of battery in a day and a half or was destroyed. We quickly threw them around the clearing to make them impossible to find.

*"This... is going to be rough,"* I admitted as we all met at the base of the pyramid, where we could see Klarion laughing maniacally, tossing Dr. Fate's helmet into the air. *"I'm taking a vote. We can either engage or retreat. I'm hoping we stopped the ritual, but Klarion is still a big fish if he isn't holding back, and he has Mauser backing him up."*

*"Do you really think any of us are backing down?"* Snapshot asked, shaking her head. *"What's the plan?"*

*"You five focus on distracting Klarion. Hit and run, stay out of his way, focus on keeping him from starting anything, and get Dr. Fate's helmet back from him."* I explained. *"I'll keep Mauser busy and keep them from teaming up."*

*"We should split the team evenly,"* M'gann said, but I shook my head. *"You-"*

*"No, Klarion is way too powerful. You're going to need everyone to stay ahead of him,"* I said. I could feel M'gann about to refute my statement, so I continued. *"Artemis, you can stay back and help me if you can, but your main priority is Klarion."*

The team felt off about leaving me to cover Mauser on my own, but we didn't have much of a choice. Klarion had clearly stopped messing around, making him more dangerous than ever before.

With a mental signal, we began to make our way up the eastern side of the pyramid, with M'gann carrying Snapshot and myself and Fire carrying Ice. Almost immediately Klarion and Mauser spotted us, but for some reason decided to let us come, patiently waiting at the top. When we got there, we flew around to create some distance between us, about twenty feet. The space on top was occupied by the crumbled remains of a smaller structure, some sort of temple

that had collapsed long ago. The floor under our feet was stable, even with the occasional missing stone or protruding chunks of rubble.

"Well, well, well, look who decided to ruin our fun!" Klarion said, one hand petting his cat, the other holding Dr. Fate's helmet. He looked over at Mauser with an exaggerated frown. "Are you sure we can't just activate the ritual?"

"No, they already removed many of the artifacts... and we probably don't have enough time now," Mauser responded, looking up as if expecting more people at any moment.

"Dangit!" He shouted with a huff before immediately smiling. "Well, at least we got rid of Nabu! Let's go and-"

"What?" Mauser asked, sounding shocked. "You don't want to teach the brats a lesson?"

"Weeeelllllll... Okay, but just for a bit," The Chaos Lord responded. "I do need to pay them back for attacking Teekl."

We all tensed, lowering ourselves into defensive stances when Klarion suddenly returned to his devilish, inhuman form. With a chuckle, he stepped forward, and the team jumped into action. Fire and Ice grabbed his attention by blasting him, while Snapshot and Tula hung back, the latter with glowing hands, waiting for an opening to attack. M'gann hurled chunks of stone at the chaotic being, which he responded to by falling through a portal he summoned, the other end appearing in the air twenty feet away.

"Not gonna help?" Mauser asked with a smirk.

"I am, by keeping you off their backs," I responded.

"Well, in that case..."

We stood quietly for a long moment before he lunged forward, laughing as he flicked his arms out, a dozen spikes of green energy appearing and firing at me, leaving a sickly pale energy trail behind them. Shifted back, lifting a large slab of stone up from the ground, blocking the spike before kicking the slab, launching it directly at the psychotic criminal.

Before the slab could slam into him, he reached into his jacket and pulled out a metallic blade, cutting through the stone with a flash. He smirked, shifting the simple-looking dagger he had pulled in his hand, the foot-thick stone slab slamming into the ground behind him, sliced clean through. I did not want to get slashed with whatever magic was on that blade.

Before he could say anything, I pulled out a few feet of cable from my spool, feeding it my energy and bending out spikes of my own, launching almost two dozen spikes of meteor metal, each coming from the end of the cable. Mauser dodged left, clearing most of the spikes,

one of them punching him in the shoulder. With a laugh, he yanks it out, a small spray of blood coming out before stopping completely. I could see his wound was already healing.

"Noticed that, didja?" He said teasingly, spinning his dagger around in a flourish. "At the risk of sounding cliché, you really can't win. Any damage you do to me, I will heal and get right back up..."

"You've got another thing coming if you think a healing factor and some fancy magic is going to stop me from taking you down," I responded, standing up and resetting my stance and bending my metal gloves, extending spikes along the "knuckles." "It just means I get to stop holding back."

I leap forward, using the stone under my feet to launch myself, crossing the gap between us in a blink. He managed to get his arm up to block my punch, but my enhanced strength and metal gauntlets were too much for an unenhanced to block. I could feel his arm crack, his bone snapping, unable to handle the strike. I followed up with a knee to his stomach, the blow lifting him off his feet. I followed up with a second punch, which caught him in the cheek. He tumbled backward, sliding to a stop before almost immediately returning to his feet.

I could only watch as the indent on his face healed and his arm cracked back into shape. He smirked and shook himself off.

"My turn."

Mauser snapped his fingers, and his hands caught fire with a deep blue flame that sparked and cracked. It swirled actively, and as he thrust his hands forward, a geyser of deeply blue flame shot at me. I spun quickly, dodging the initial blast and using the motion to pull chunks of stone from the ground, turning them to sand and catching the fire. I held the mound of sand in front of me, but I could feel myself losing control as the sand heated up, going cherry red and falling to the ground.

Before I completely lost control of my temporary barrier, I shoved it forward, firing the red-hot globe of sand and molten rock at Mauser, who nimbly dodged to the left, forcing him to pull his fire spray away from me. By the time he had recovered, I had a much thicker wall of stone summoned.

With a solid defense, I had the chance to look over at M'gann and the rest of my team. They continued to attack Klarion, trying to keep him off guard and snatch the helmet of fate back. So far, they seemed to be okay, though Fire and Tula had a few cuts and scrapes, and Ice was holding her already hurt arm against herself as she spread freezing energy at the Chaos Lord.

The magic-user clapped his hands, and suddenly, a half dozen stone golems rose from the ground, infused with red and black energy. I was about to try and help when I suddenly realized my fighting target was suddenly very quiet.

His attack, which had sounded like an angry jet engine a few moments ago, was not silent. I could feel the stone barrier I was leaning against getting hotter and hotter, the heat on one side sinking through. I cursed myself for getting distracted before peeking around the corner of the barrier, only to barely stop him from stabbing me in the face.

"Someone is getting distracted!" He shouted, thrusting his simple but most likely very dangerous dagger at me over and over.

I tried to bend the dagger out of his hands but quickly found that I couldn't affect it. I tried to bend any metal on his body, only for him to laugh.

"That won't work! Magic has all sorts of ways to keep your stuff from being used against you," He explained, all the while still trying to stab me, getting closer and closer each time.

While he wasn't what I would consider baseline human, he was no match for my strength. Unfortunately, between the fact that I couldn't block the blade directly and his unsurprising amount of combat skill, I couldn't disarm him quickly. Instead, I was stuck slowly backing away, trying to shove him back to give myself some breathing room. I finally bent out another few meters of cable, using them like a metal bending whip, driving him back. Finally, with a slap and a crack of my metal whip, I managed to shatter his hand, his dagger flying away off the side of the pyramid.

"I liked that knife!" He complained before reaching into his jacket and pulling out two more identical knives. "I like these ones too!"

I spun out another few feet of cable, my mission now to bind and knock Mauser out. I managed to wrap the cable around one arm, yanking it hard enough to pull the arm out of its socket, only for him to pop it right back without slowing down.

We traded blows a few more times, and each time I tried to wrap my cable around him, trying to disarm or even cripple him enough to take him down. I even succeeded a few times, breaking a bone or snapping something out of place, only for him to shake himself off, his regeneration fixing the injury before I could take advantage of it. Still, I could see him getting increasingly frustrated, clearly not used to people being fast or flexible enough to dodge his many, chaotic magical attacks. After launching a swarm of translucent insects at me, only to lose concentration on the spell when I wrapped my cable around his leg and yanked him off his feet, he had clearly had enough.

"Fine! You want to push me? I'll show you what happens!"

He climbed back to his feet and turned, reality seeming to fold as if he was hiding behind something, only for me to hear Klarion yell out. I turned to find Mauser leaning around the Chaos Lord, snagging the Helmet of Fate before sliding back through the fold, appearing right where he had been before. For a moment, I thought he was going to put the helmet on, which I couldn't imagine would have ended very well for him. Instead, he started chanting, holding the helmet with two hands. Realizing he was about to do something screwy, I jumped forward, only for him to teleport away, his hands now glowing. I jumped again, launching myself at him with a wave of earth, only for him to rise up out of the way.

His chanting reached a crescendo, and Dr. Fate's helmet flashed golden energy. A tendril of glowing energy began to form, extending a link to Mauser's chest. When it finally made contact, he released the helmet, which floated in place. A golden outline slowly appeared around his body, forming into a flickering, golden line form of Dr. Fate's uniform, flowing cloak included.

"Hmm... This is burning a lot of energy... Better make this quick," Mauser said, his voice echoing in doublespeak.

With a shout, he thrust his hands out, a large bolt of golden energy firing out of his hands and screaming across the gap towards me. I dove to the side, barely making it clear. I looked up in time to dodge another one, then a third and forth. He floated there, several meters above the ground, firing dozens of magic bolts, each glowing in gold as they slammed into the stone around me.

As I recovered from a roll, I whipped my hand out, grabbing hundreds of shards of broken stone he had made from his barrage, hurling them at him with my bending. Dozens of them slammed into him. One even cut along his face. I could only watch as the cut healed, leaving him laughing.

"Your fucked boy!" he shouted. "I'm gonna make you beg!"

The next barrage was too much. I rolled and jumped, used the stone to throw myself clear, only for more and more energy blasts to slam into me. I took one to my shoulder, my clavicle cracking, though not breaking as far as I could tell. The next took out my leg, making me stumble. He jumped at the opening, a massive blast smashing into my chest, burning through my suit, and smashing me along the ground. I slid to a stop along the edge of the stairs, my brain rattled from the impact.

With a groan, I tried to stand, only for him to kick out my arm, forcing me back to the ground. He kicked me away from the stairs, adding a flash of energy to send me tumbling along the ground until I came to a rest on my back.

"Not bad," He said as he moved to stand above me, putting his foot on my left arm. "You almost got me. Well... Kinda almost got me."

He stomped on my left arm, his foot glowing and energy crackling downward, the enhanced blow snapping my arm. I grit my teeth to keep from screaming, knowing my team would come rushing to me, giving Klarion an opening to hurt them. I looked up at him, watching him pull his pistol and aim it at my head.

"This feels like a much better moment to kill you," He said with a sinister smirk. "You know you really should have-"

I slammed my elbow into the ground, bending up a chunk of stone into my shoulder, spinning me around. I screamed, unable to hold it back when I dragged my arm out from under his foot, but it was worth it. I drove a huge chunk of my metal gauntlet through his foot, making a large spike and fusing it to the ground. I flared the top of the spike before snapping it off.

"YOU FUCKING-"

He bent over slightly from the shock and pain, bringing Fate's helmet close enough to grab. I tore it away from him, breaking the floating link and throwing it into the ruins of the pyramid-topping structure. I stood up more and delivered a savage uppercut with my right hand. As I struck him, I jammed a second spike up through his jaw, through his head, and out the top of his skull. I flared both ends of the spike, locking the rod of meteoric iron inside his head. The final twist to break off the spike from my gauntlet spun out a dozen sub-spikes inside his brain.

Blood poured out his eyes and nose, and his mouth was stuck open, frozen in mid-scream, but only a low, agonizing release of breath came out.

So I drove a third spike through his heart, locking it in place with spikes inside and flared heads on both sides. He fell backward, collapsing to the ground with a puff of dust, his eyes still open, blood leaking out onto the stone brickwork below.

"No no no no no!" Klarion shouted from behind me.

I turned just in time for the Chaos Lord to finish his tantrum, waves of energy blasting out from him as he stomped his feet. I struggled to stay standing as the pyramid shook with every stomp. Eventually, his cat licked the side of his face, and he finally started to calm down.

"It's not fair!" He shouted, pouting as his cat meowed at him, Klarion seeming to understand him perfectly. "So what if it was a bad idea, it would have been *fun!* ...No, I don't want to go back to the chaos plane... Fine! But this isn't over Titans! I'm gonna make you pay for ruining my fun twice now!"

Without another word, the powerful being disappeared into one of his portals, leaving the pyramid, his ritual, and his one-time ally behind. M'gann flew over to me immediately, landing beside me and wrapping her arms around me gently to avoid disturbing my arm. She gasped

when she saw what I did to Mauser, but her grip didn't loosen in the slightest. I held her close with a one-armed hug.