

The next four days were spent focusing on training, both bending and team training, with our instructors. I made solid progress in my overall dexterity in metal bending, becoming much more familiar and connected with metal in general. I was at the point where I could easily shape meteorite metal, the metal flowing in a very different way from bending stone. I had already replaced my shield and the metal plates that were connected to my uniform with meteorite metal, meaning I could move and reshape them freely now.

Robin also pointed out that if I replaced the cable, which I was still working on bending competently, with meteorite metal, I would have a much easier time working with it. Unfortunately, while my control was steadily improving, and I was at the point where metal bending meteorite metal was good enough to use in the field, forming that many fine wires and weaving them together in a cable was beyond me. I was tempted to ask Batman if he could find a way to make custom cables, but I realized that I would be bending them into different forms constantly, so it didn't make much sense for me to have them until I could make them myself. With this in mind, I put wire practice on pause until my fine metal bending control improved.

I could already hear Toph complaining that always carrying around meteorite metal like that would be cheating, but I didn't particularly care. When I was on a mission, I wanted every edge I could get, and having a large amount of metal that would respond to my bending as efficiently as breathing was a substantial edge. I wasn't at that point yet, but I would be eventually.

Besides, it wasn't like I would stop practicing to bend non-meteorite metal. I was determined to master all aspects of bending I was capable of. I just wasn't going to make it harder for myself when there was no reason to, especially when I was on a mission.

The instructor training was also going well, with our current instructors moving their lessons along and proving themselves experts with plenty of valuable experience. Colonel Clayden had begun explaining the importance of having pre-determined actions for specific situations so that we could reliably predict what each of our other teammates would do. He used the example of being separated on a mission that required radio silence or who would do what in an ambush. He suggested that we start creating a standard playbook for specifically dangerous scenarios and then work our way out from there.

Ghost began an extended lesson plan on *forcing* people to ignore you rather than trying to hide by seeming inconspicuous. It was fascinating listening to her talk about the psychology behind people ignoring things that made them uncomfortable. She told a few personal anecdotes where she had used it to her advantage, particularly about running away from a compound, having been spotted by a guard stepping out of a bathroom. She escaped the compound, broke the line of sight from the police chasing her, and borrowed some clothes from a homeless woman. The police overlooked them both, ignoring them as the existence of the homeless makes many people uncomfortable. Ghost spent the night in a homeless camp and paid the woman for helping her before disappearing into the city.

It was after one of Colonel Clayden's lessons that Artemis called me, asking if the offer was still open and if she could come to meet everyone. After a quick conversation, she agreed to come in for sparring the next day. I warned everyone that we would have a potential teammate stopping by, including shooting a message to Wally.

After finishing our early morning routine the next morning, I stayed behind at the cave to wait for Artemis while the rest of the team headed to the quarry to get started with sparring. I didn't have to wait long before the Zeta-Tube activated, and both Artemis and Green Arrow arrived.

The first thing I noticed was how nervous she looked, though she was clearly doing her best to cover it up with fake confidence. The second thing I noticed was her uniform.

"If this goes well, the first thing we are doing is redesigning your uniform," I warned her, getting a confused look in return.

"What?" She asked, looking down at herself. "I designed it myself. I think it looks good."

"It does, but your midsection is showing," I explained, raising my hand to hold off a retort. "Part of my job as base leader is to make sure that everyone has the resources and equipment to be effective and safe. You are *not* coming on missions until you are wearing, at least, a uniform that fully covers your torso with some sort of bullet-resistant material."

"Wow there, Skarn, coming off a little harsh there," Green Arrow pointed out. "Maybe try not to scare away the talented hero?"

I looked at Green Arrow before looking back at Artemis and wincing. She seemed shocked, nervous, and confused, but she looked like she was about to snap back at me for my tirade.

"Sorry, your right," I admitted, rubbing my face. "It's just an old argument with a few of my teammates. Some of them have enhanced durability, and all of them have started wearing bullet-resistant uniforms, but I'm still working on getting Robin and Kid Flash to wear helmets. I apologize for the bad start."

I gestured away as if brushing aside the conversation, shaking my head. Kaldur, who agreed with me to a degree, and I already had plans to eventually put our feet down and instruct everyone that a prerequisite of being mission ready was wearing proper protective gear, depending on personal durability. Still, for now, it wasn't important.

"We can talk about this later. For now, it's good to see you again. I'm glad you decided to take us up on our offer," I said with a smile, reaching out to shake the young heroine's hand. "The rest of the team is already at the quarry, where we do our sparring."

“Well... you can thank my sister for that, actually,” She said ruefully. “She stopped by the other night and tried to recruit me. It... well, it made me realize what I wanted and needed.”

“It also meant that the League is paying for her and her mother to be relocated,” Green Arrow volunteered. “They clearly weren't safe in Gotham.”

“Damn, well, I'm glad you're safe now,” I said with a nod. “How about we head to the quarry? Everyone is eager to meet you.”

Green Arrow said goodbye before stepping back through the Zeta-Tube, after which I picked the quarry as its new destination, and we stepped through. As we emerged into the warehouse, Artemis looked around as we made our way out and into the sunlight.

“Have you picked a codename?” I asked. “Half the team doesn't wear masks, but everyone has a codename.”

“Really? I thought secret identities were a big deal for heroes,” She asked as we made our way up the rocky road.

“If you plan on having a civilian life, then yes, they are. I don't see the point, but it's up to you,” I explained. “I could see it being a problem for a solo hero, I suppose...”

I waved to M'gann, who had reached out and connected to me as I stepped out of the warehouse. I sent an image of us gathering around to introduce Artemis, and she sent a vague agreement. I could see her get everyone's attention, including Tora and Wally, who were in the large ring.

“I'll have to think about it, but for now, I don't mind everyone calling me Artemis,” She responded, muttering to herself when she spotted everyone stopping and watching us. “Here we go...”

“Alright, guys, this is Artemis, and no, that's not a codename. As I'm sure you could tell, she is an archer, though I'm told she is highly trained in several other fields as well,” I explained. “We already went over this, but she is interested in joining the team.”

“Hi, Artemis!” M'gann said, making her way to us. “I'm glad you decided to give us a chance!”

“Well... I'm glad you guys decided to give me one as well,” The blond archer admitted, a hand nervously fiddling with her compound bow. “Skarn painted a pretty interesting picture of what you guys are trying to achieve, and... well, it sounded interesting.”

“We understand. Skarn is the one who convinced us of this path. He has a way with inspiring words,” Kaldur said, reaching out and shaking Artemis's hand. “I am Kaldur, the team's combat leader.”

The group stepped closer and started introducing themselves, with Wally being last. He had been holding out the position of team archer for Speedy, the clone that he had actually known, but Green Arrow had shut that hope down recently. The clone and the original were both taking time off heroing to find themselves and adjust to what they had been through.

Apparently, the original Speedy had been spitting mad when he had woken and realized what had happened. He blamed Green Arrow for his prolonged freezing and demanded he leave him alone. Green Arrow almost did until it was pointed out that he was still a minor and that it didn't particularly matter if he wanted nothing to do with him. He was still his responsibility. He forced him to get proper psychological help from a trained, unbiased professional. Progress was slow, but Green Arrow was optimistic about his old protege's mental recovery.

After a few minutes of conversation, Artemis looked around and took a long breath before speaking up a bit louder.

"Before... Before we get too far into feeling this all out... You guys should know something about me," She said before pulling off her mask, letting her long hair flow back. "My name is Artemis Crock. My... My family is... Well, my dad is Sportsmaster. My sister-

"WHAT!" Wally said, his eyes wide, turning to look at me. "Did you know that?"

"I did. So did Batman, Green Arrow, and Kaldur," I explained. "I made it clear when I invited her that she would need to tell everyone, but I wasn't going to spill her secret if she never joined."

"He trained you?" Robin asked, cutting off Wally's response.

"Yeah. I got some of my bow training from other people, but yes, he trained me," She answered. "And my sister. Cheshire. She... She is an assassin for the League of Shadows."

If Wally's eyes were wide before, I was worried they would roll out of his head now. Before he could respond, I cut him off.

"While legitimate concerns will be recognized when we vote to let her in later," I said, giving him a glare. "Blaming the child for the sins of the father, or siblings for that matter, is a concept I find highly offensive, and it is not an acceptable reason."

"Of course not! I'm not saying we should throw her in jail or anything!" Wally responded energetically. "But... I don't know...."

"Kid Flash, my biological father beat me like a cheap drum, then left my family when he got bored," I explained, looking him dead in the eye. "I take that kind of thinking personally."

Wally looked at me with surprise on his face before looking down for a moment. M'gann gave me a tight hug, her presence close and supportive. Eventually, the speedster nodded and looked up.

"Your right. I'm sorry," He apologized, looking at me and then at Artemis. "I'm sorry, it was a knee-jerk reaction and the wrong one."

"Its... It's fine," She responded, looking at me for a moment before nodding. "This is honestly a better reaction than I was hoping for."

We settled down, talking a bit more about the basics of what Artemis's family was like. She admitted that she would have no issues fighting her father. Unfortunately, while she wasn't the biggest fan of her sister, especially after her manipulative recruitment attempt, she wasn't sure she would be able to fight her all out. Nobody pried too deeply, and while she wasn't enjoying the process, she had accepted that it was information they had a right to know.

Once the questions were answered, we made our way back to the general sparring area. Tora and Wally continued their match, ending with Wally tripping her up and putting his hand on her face, which we were counting as a knockout since we had mostly stopped counting the boundaries as outs.

After that, I faced off against Kaldur, who was a solid match-up against me. His ability to manipulate water and electricity was less than my skill and potency with stone, especially considering where we were, but his strength was higher than mine by a significant degree. We fought for a full ten minutes before I managed to catch him off guard, dragging his foot out from under him and pinning him to the floor.

We went through a few more matches before I looked at Artemis, who was chatting with Robin.

"Artemis, you ready to have a go?" I asked. "You said you had training arrows over the phone."

"I did, but Green Arrow pointed out that what I used for training with my Dad were still kind of dangerous," She admitted sheepishly. "But he gave me some of his own to use, so I'm good."

As she talked, she pulled out an arrow from her quiver, showing off a normal-looking arrow that ended with some sort of rubber tip. She tapped it against her head before putting it back in her quiver.

"I'll be avoiding headshots, but fair warning, they will bruise," She warned before looking around. "So, who am I up against?"

"Me," I said with a smile. "I'd say hitting me with an arrow would also mark me out."

She simply nodded before walking across the clearing, stopping and waiting for me to get into position, pulling an arrow from her quiver and nocking it. After a short countdown, Kaldur called for us to begin, and we moved.

I lunged forward, wanting to see how she fought without the distance advantage, and was rewarded by having to dive and roll past her to avoid her first arrow and the kick she lashed out with as I got closer. As I stood, I was forced to bend back, as she had pulled an arrow out of her quiver and tried to poke me with it. I rolled and manipulated the ground to carry me further, ending up a dozen feet or so away.

I pulled out my shield, using it to block arrows as I turned back, my enhanced reflexes and speed meaning I could easily keep up with them. After I stopped four, she mixed it up, grabbing two arrows and firing them simultaneously. They separated enough that I wouldn't be able to block them both, so I stopped one and snagged the other out of the air. I was preparing to throw it back at her when the rubber tip exploded into a cloud of smoke.

It took me completely off guard, shocking me long enough that her follow-up shot, which she had already been preparing, hit me in the leg. My uniform blocked a lot of the impact, but it definitely would leave a bruise.

With a defeated groan, I flicked my hand out, waving and pushing a bunch of sand around to whip and whirl away the smoke, revealing Artemis looking smug, her hip cocked and bow at her side.

"Not bad, Artemis. I was definitely not expecting the smoke arrow," I admitted, throwing it back to her. "Caught me by surprise."

"Thank Green Arrow for that. My training arrows weren't nearly as fancy as that," She explained. "They were just normal dulled arrows."

We made our way to the arena, Robin and Wally taking out places. Typically we would have started setting up challenge scenarios to push us to our limits, but we were taking it easy with Artemis there. We kept going for a while, everyone enjoying the more casual sparring. Eventually, Colonel Clayden arrived, and we stopped for the day.