

It felt good to slide back into the morning routine, after having a few days where we were too busy to fit it in, or we wanted to take a break and unwind. The feeling inside the gym was of eager self-improvement, as all of us did our best to push ourselves even further. Tora had expressed interest in learning a specific martial art, rather than the basics of Judo that a family member had taught her. Robin offered to help her find one that fit her but explained he would be a terrible teacher for just a single style, as he had been trained in so many for so long, and a lot of his moves were amalgamations of a few styles. We all agreed that a martial arts teacher was next on the list of instructors we needed.

When our morning workout was complete we went our separate ways before rejoining in the living area. Instead of sparring in the cave, we decided to try something different, all of us stepping through the Zeta-Tube to the quarry, where we could all fight a bit more openly, without worrying about damaging the base.

We started with one on one sparring, before eventually mixing it up. First, we tried two-on-two, before eventually starting three-on-three, with the last person sitting out to be the ref. After that we started really mixing it up, making the teams uneven to really push the disadvantaged side. Those matches were usually done with a timer, with the smaller team tasked with surviving an allotted amount of time, rather than actually coming out on top. I was refereeing a match that had Kaldur and Wally desperately trying to hold off everyone else when I spotted Black Canary making her way toward the area we were using for our spars.

She was out of costume, or maybe in a different version of her costume, with a leather jacket instead of her usual blue. It was more conservative, and more casual, something that wouldn't look out of place on the street, but with a few changes would look like a hero's outfit.

"Skarn, how are you?" She asked, stopping and turning to watch the fight with me.

"I'm doing alright," I said, tilting my head to see if Wally was out of bounds as he blurred for a moment to dodge a chunk of stone M'gann threw at him. "What can we do for you? I have to warn you, we are only going to be out here for a bit longer before we head back to the cave to meet our instructor for the day."

"That's fine. I heard you had a new instructor and I wanted to come and check to make sure everything was alright." She explained with a friendly smile.

"Yeah, everything is fine. We passed Ghost's test yesterday, and I trust Colonel Clayden to have found someone who could teach us what we need to know," I responded, opening my mouth to call out to Robin, staying silent when he managed to twist in midair to land on his feet. "Plus she made one hell of an impression."

"I've heard she does that. Well, if you have any problems, let me know," She said, reaching out and touching my arm. "I want to make sure you are all taken care of."

I turned to look at the older blond woman, looking into her eyes before turning my foot and pushing my hand down, the earth softening under her and grabbing at her feet and legs. She was quick, managing to just pull her left foot free before the earth solidified into stone. She looked up at me, an eyebrow raised. She wasn't panicking, or even upset, just curious as to what I was doing.

"You messed up her eyes," I said with a smirk. "Black Canary has blue eyes, not green."

"Good catch!" She said with a wink, before her eyes flicked to blue, then back to green. "Gotta give you guys a chance at least, right?"

I chuckled and nodded, before turning the stone encasing her foot back to dirt and calling out to the group.

"Times up!" I called out, everyone stopping pretty much immediately. "Someone is here to see us."

The team gathered around, making their way to us, greeting Ghost as if she was Black Canary. Superboy was the first to spot it, as Ghost started asking questions about how everyone was doing, and what they thought about their new instructor. Luckily, since he was in the back I was able to get his attention and get him to stay quiet before anyone noticed his confusion. M'gann was next, followed by Robin. Unfortunately, Tora had never met Canary, and Kaldur seemed too distracted to notice, as did Wally. Kaldur surprised me, and I tried my best not to judge Wally.

It wasn't until she started blatantly asking for passwords and about security measures that she should absolutely already know that everyone caught on.

"And there it is, the last one of you just realized," She said with a nod, her voice suddenly returning to the flat modulated voice she had used the day before. "Not the best time, but it could have been worse, especially since you are all relatively untrained. Skarn spotted that my eyes were the wrong color, was that anyone else's tell?"

Robin raised his hand, and Ghost nodded at him. Superboy looked hesitant, and Ghost picked up on it.

"Superboy, you noticed first out of those of you who were sparring, what did you spot?"

"Uh... I've been experimenting with my supervision. I zoomed in on your eyes, they aren't real,"

"...Different, but effective I guess. Ice, you took a very long time to realize something was up..."

"I... I have never met Black Canary," She admitted, looking disappointed with herself.

"Ah, that is less surprising then. Well, still, a halfway decent job, the fact that some of you realized so quickly is a good thing." She said with a single nod. "Let's get back to somewhere we can all sit down. I want to start this off with a short explanation of what I will be trying to teach you all."

We made our way to the warehouse that contained the Zeta-Tube, which also had a few tables and chairs. We all sat down while Ghost sat back against a table, her hands on the edge.

"Right, so Colonel Clayden called in a pretty big favor to train you, and potentially the next few groups of your organization since he seems to think this is just the beginning," She explained. "To be honest, having seen you guys spar, and having seen some recordings of your last few fights, I'm curious myself. So I'm going to do this right."

She pushed off of the table and started to walk away, grabbing a large whiteboard that had been pushed against the wall not far away. When she had pulled it back, she grabbed one of the markers in the tray.

"The word stealth has been thrown around a lot, but honestly it's a poor description of what I plan on teaching you. Or it's at least limited," She explained as she popped off the cap and started writing on the board. "I break up my expertise into four categories: Combat Stealth, Espionage, Urban, and Psycho. Combat stealth is what Robin and his mentor specialize in. Ambushes, sneak attacks, silent take-downs."

As she spoke Robin leaned forward, clearly curious about where she was going with her lecture. I just hoped he stopped looking down his nose at her now that she was explaining everything, and how she was different from his mentor.

"Espionage is spycraft. While you may think this isn't important for heroes such as yourselves, the ability to find a spy is directly tied to the ability to *be* a spy. Not to mention going undercover," She explained, tapping the whiteboard with the marker. "Urban is the ability to blend into populated areas, something important for stakeouts or protection details, escaping a tail or even keeping up a secret identity, though most of you don't seem to be worried about that. And finally Psycho is Psychological warfare. How to make your enemies scared, how to make them underestimate you, how to get them to give up before you even step into the room. Batman is a master of this as well."

As she described each category she pointed at the bullet point on the board. It was a bit weird to see Black Canary but hear Ghost's robotic voice but I quickly got over it.

"I expect you to practice a lot of this on your own," She said, looking at each of us. "How you do that is up to you, but I'm not gonna sit here and check your homework. If you want to get good, you need to put in your own time."

I could feel M'gann's excitement and see the rest of the teams nodding seriously as they listened to the strange but clearly skilled woman. She continued to talk about what she would teach us, going into a little more detail before. Eventually, she stopped, and threw the marker at Wally, bouncing it off his forehead.

"Alright, since some people clearly can't handle prolonged talking, let's try something more practical," She said, turning and walking to a far corner, slapping a light switch as she did.

The lights along the far end of the converted warehouse went dark, but the lights over our half stayed on, dimming to about half strength. Ghost hid in the far corner, as far back in the darkness as she could get. She started to explain the difference between stark darkness and total darkness, explaining that suddenly being plunged into darkness is disorientating, making it a great way to start an attack or ambush. But, unless you're in total darkness, your target's eyes will start to adjust.

"Eventually, given enough time they will be able to see better, making it much easier to spot you. Which is why you should consider darkness as short-term camouflage by itself," She explained. "Kid Flash, how would you make it last longer?"

"Uh... turning the lights on and off again?"

"That would work, but that's hard to emulate naturally," She responded. "Robin?"

"Wear something dark?" He answered, struggling to keep the boredom from his voice and failing in the end.

"That is the standard. From camo patterns to simply wearing black, that would work. You could also..." She trailed off as she moved further into the darkness, finding a shadow that was cast by something behind us and becoming a lot harder to see. "Double up on the darkness."

I could tell Kaldur, Superboy could still see her, but Wally, Robin, Tora, and M'gann all leaned forward, squinting as they struggled to see her from this distance and difference in the light levels. Robin didn't look surprised, even if he was struggling to see her. As she stepped back into the light she gestured at Kaldur, Superboy and myself.

"It's not foolproof, your own teammates are proof of that as a few of them have considerably better night vision than basic standard humans, but if you're fighting against standard people, and you know they don't have night vision."

As she explained she walked back to the light controls, stopping with her hand on the switches.

“There is also another way, instead of hiding deeper in the darkness...” She slid the sliders all the way up for the lights that were already on, drastically increasing their brightness.

Superboy and Kaldur winced, and while I could feel it my eyes rapidly adjusted. Only to find that I couldn't see her in the dark half of the warehouse. Not even my enhanced vision could pick her out of the shadows.

“All of your eyes are adjusting to the bright lights, which means they aren't prepared to handle the trying to pick up details in darkness,” She explained, before hammering her point home by stepping into the light in the opposite corner of where she entered.

The lesson continued for another hour, our eccentric instructor going over the various issues that normal human eyes had, discussing just exactly how our eyes worked, and how you could fool them. She covered the basics before moving on to blind spots, the effectiveness of flashbangs, and what was the best way to disable someone's vision without permanently damaging it.

When she eventually decided that she was done for the day, she pulled a smooth wooden cube out of her pocket and threw it at me. I caught it easily, looking down at it before looking back up at her.

“I said I wouldn't give you any homework, but I can offer a few ideas that should help you practice in a way that is at least mildly entertaining,” She explained. “You could even make it a game. The objective is to steal that paperweight from your teammates. You can't keep it in your pockets, you can't hide it and you can't bring it where people wouldn't be able to get it, like your personal rooms or the bathroom. I suggest you pause the game when you're sleeping or away from the cave, but that is up to you.”

We all talked a bit more, and I passed the cube to M'gann, who looked at me with wide eyes. I shrugged, chuckling as Ghost explained that Colonel Clayden and her would be switching back and forth, so we should expect to see him tomorrow, before making her way through the Zeta-Tube.

We headed back to the cave after that, Robin laughing as he immediately stole the wooden cube from M'gann, who looked annoyed but already eager to get it back. After sharing an early dinner I headed down to the grotto to practice metal bending more, wanting to get a real handle on metal manipulation as soon as possible.

After about an hour of practice, M'gann joined me, sitting down on the bench and reading a book. For the next few hours, I alternated between working on the cable manipulation and the metal shaping. I was making solid improvements to both, finally managing to push my energy down the cable a dozen or so feet, and to reliably force the metal into decent shapes.

Eventually, Robin came down, calling out to us by the stairs.

“Warren, Batman is here, says he wants to talk to you and Kaldur,” He said, waving to M’gann.

I quickly wound my cables back up, putting them away with my practice materials before following Robin up the stairs.

“Any idea what this is about?” I asked as we left the grotto behind.

“I think it has to do with me asking if he knew of any young heroes we should look into,” he admitted. “He was vague about it but it sounded like he had someone in mind.”

I followed Robin back up to the living area, where he plopped down onto the couch, throwing the cube up into the air and catching it again. On the third throw, I lunged and snagged it out of the air, walking past him with a smirk, and heading out to the main area, where Batman, Kaldur, and Green Arrow were already waiting. As I stopped beside Kaldur I placed the cube in his hand, ignoring the look he gave me.

“Thank you for joining us,” Batman said, before pulling a file out from inside his cape and handing it to me. “Robin informed me you were looking to establish your next recruit.”

“And the last one, until we have this concept hammered out and are ready to form a second team,” I explained, opening the folder.

Inside was a small packet, an image of a blonde girl dressed in a green outfit and wielding a bow clipped to the front. I looked at it for a moment before looking up at Green Arrow.

“One of yours?” I asked, before starting to read through the information.

“No, she popped up a week or so ago, started taking down small-time crooks around Gotham city,” He responded. “I’m here to help convince her to join up if you’re open to it.”

“How good is she?” I asked, reading through a scan of a police report before handing it to Kaldur.

“Really good. Not on my level quite yet, but she could be, eventually.”

“Well, that’s a pretty solid endorsement. I would be willing to meet her, and have her join a sparring session or two maybe, but the team would need to vote on it first. Can you contact her? Does she have parents we need to convince?”

“Yeah... about that...”