

The projection "Leading" us turned out to be glowing directional lights pulsing on the path we were supposed to take. All of us ran together, making quick time through several rooms, a few of which made very little sense. One was upside down, while another was the shape of a giant sphere, forcing us to slide down one side and jump and pull ourselves up the other. The last room, the one with the exit, was a massive kitchen, but not in terms of usable space. Instead, the room was twice, maybe three times to scale, and the counters raised higher than I could reach. The exit was a massive door that Superboy had to strain again, creaking open just wide enough for us to run through a single file line.

We stepped into the cool night air of Salem, Massachusetts, pausing just long enough to hear the sound of sparking magic slamming into the tower somewhere around the corner of the massive building. Aqualad held up a hand and gestured forward twice, signaling everyone to be quiet and make our way to the corner. Mentally I was counting down, and when we reached two minutes remaining, I caught Aqualad's attention and signed that to him, getting a nod in return.

Another blast of red magic, radiating enough light to cast a shadow around the corner, crashed into the side of the tower. At the sound, Aqualad led us around the corner, all surging forward. Aqualad and his team led the pack, charging forward to attack Klarion. As we got closer, I got a good look at the deceptively young-looking magical being. He was a disturbing facsimile of a person. His arms were just a bit too stretched out, his face just a bit too long, and his mouth, which was open with a wide, shark tooth grin, was just a bit too big for his face. Each abnormality was subtle, but it came together to foster a sense of wrongness that seemed to resonate with an old, primal fear. He was wrong and dangerous and had an equally disturbing kitten perched on his shoulder.

The Chaos Lord turned to us, his smile turning into glaring as Aqualad smashed a spiked mace of water down on him, the vaguely human-looking creature raising his hand to block it with a burst of red magical energy. He followed it up with a swipe of his other hand, smacking Kaldur aside with a casual laugh.

"Really? C'mon, you think you little kiddies are enough to stop me?" He asked, laughing as Kaldur landed and rolled, getting back up with Tula and Garth standing on either side of him. "I don't know how long the ritual he is working on will last, but-

Before he could continue, the kitten on his shoulder batted at his collar, meowing loudly.

"Oooooohh!" The Lord of Chaos said, seemingly able to understand his cat. "They just need to slow me down, gotcha. Well, no dice, kiddies, because I came with backup!"

He gestured to the left, and two portals opened up with black centers and blood-red swirling edges. The portals moved to reveal two people, each of them staring us down. The first was a man dressed in classic dark wizard fashion, with dark robes covering him and a hood that cast a shadow over his face, making his already gaunt features look haunted and sallow. A thick gold band with a ruby in the center sat on his head, with a golden bronze raiment covering his

neck and upper chest. The second was a decrepit, plant-covered man with red eyes and a long white beard. He was wearing ragged clothes that barely covered him, and as he looked at us, he sneered in contempt.

"Alright, Felix, Briar, put the children in time out, and you can loot the tower," Klarion said with a wicked grin. "I don't care about any of it except the Helmet of Fate!"

Both of the new villains, of which I only recognized Blackbriar Thorn, nodded in agreement and focused on us.

"Change of plans! Group one, keep Klarion busy! Group two, focus on Felix Faust!" Aqualad shouted, already turning toward the ragged, almost wooden-covered man. "Tula, Garth, with me!"

I nodded in agreement and kicked up a chunk of stone, spinning and slamming my fist into it, shattering it into a dozen fragments, all of which hurtled towards the Chaos Lord, who was already turning back the Tower of Fate.

Even as he angrily turned back to us and blocked the stone shrapnel, I reached out mentally to M'gann, who quickly linked our group up. When I felt the connection sink into place, I quickly spoke through it.

"No pulling punches, we couldn't kill him if we wanted to!" I informed my group, pausing as I rolled to the side, an arc of black and blood-red magic lancing out from Klarion's hands at me, smashing a crater into the ground. "Snapshot, step back and keep him off of us! Miss Martian, back me up!"

As M'gann and I ran towards the Lord of Chaos, I could see Artemis backing off, already nocking a new arrow and letting it fly. The magical villain raised his hands to block it, but the arrow kept going, missing him and hitting the ground just behind him. It exploded, knocking him forward and off-center, giving me an open opportunity. I summoned an earthen wave, launching me forward to slam a now metallic pile driver-encased fist into his stomach. The blow knocked him back, his cat hissing and spitting as it struggled to stay in place. Meanwhile, Klarion recovered, his stomach visibly dented backward from my rapid strike. Unfortunately, rather than having actually hurt him, he just looked down and scoffed before shaking out the dent and returning to normal.

"Not bad, but-"

M'gann, feeling my urgency to keep up the pressure, hefted every sizable loose rock she could find with her mind, her eyes glowing green as she raised her hand. A third of what looked like fifty rocks, ranging from the size of my fist to the size of my head, fired out at the magic user, forcing him to raise both his hands. Most of the rocks smashed into the protective barrier, but a handful went over it, missing completely. Of course, this was intentional, as M'gann was still

controlling those rocks and immediately pulled back, slamming four head-sized chunks of rocks into Klarion's back. The suit-wearing being of magic was knocked completely off his feet, tumbling forward and falling to the ground. For a moment, his kitten was knocked loose, landing easily beside him before a portal swept over them both, depositing them back to where they were.

Somehow the cat was already back on his shoulder.

"Haha, good one, now it-"

I stamped my foot and kicked forward, causing a pillar of stone as big as my fist to rise up out of the ground at an angle, slamming into Klarion's chest. Instead of taking the blow, however, a hole opened up in his chest, and the pillar of stone passed through him without ever making contact.

"Will you STOP DOING THAT!" The Lord of Chaos shouted, a massive, angry wave of red and black magic exploding off him.

I had just enough time to watch the stone pillar disintegrate before the wave of energy reached me, slamming into me and lifting me off my feet. The blast carried me a dozen or so feet away before I hit the ground and tumbled. When I finally slid to a stop, I quickly looked around to check on my teammates. Snapshot had been far enough away that she had just managed to outrun the wave, now standing even further back with an arrow ready. M'gann hadn't been very far behind me and had been shoved backward as well, though she had taken flight, so she hadn't hit the ground.

"Jeeze, why do all you heroes have to be so annoying!" Klarion said, pouting as he reached up to pet his kitten. "I just want- Huh? But what about... I just wanted to have a little fun... Oh, alright, I'll ignore them."

Klarion turned back to the tower and stretched his arms out, a massive hammer forming above him, radiating the same black and blood-red magic. With an off-kilter swinging motion, the massive hammer, which was easily three or four times my size, slammed into the side of the Tower of Fate. A golden yellow shield appeared just before the hammerhead slammed into the actual stonework, stopping it dead with a massive slamming sound that vibrated through the ground. Already I could see cracks starting to form from the impact.

"Oh, you were right, Teekl," Klarion said with a happy giggle. "We are getting close!"

"Hit him! Everything you've got!" I mentally called out, pulling my shield from my back and bending the rest of my meteor metal into a seriously sharp blade. "Don't let him breakthrough!"

I got a sense of confirmation from M'gann, and Artemis responded by firing two more arrows, both exploding next to the magic user. Both of the explosions simply washed over him, and the spooky humanoid wound up for another hit. I launched myself with a massive slab of stone, sending a mental image to M'gann as I flew across the gap, slicing at him with my sword.

While I knew I wasn't an expert with a sword or any melee weapon beyond shield bashing, I knew enough to slash out efficiently, brutally slicing at his legs. My sword cut through both of his legs, my forward momentum and enhanced strength letting me amputate them both easily. Unfortunately, it barely affected him, as instead of blood pouring from his wounds, his limbs simply fluttered in the passing breeze before reconnecting. He didn't even pause, instead slamming down the hammer again, the cracks in the protective barrier getting worse.

He pulled the hammer back, only to let it fade and jump back when the slab of stone I had used to boost me forward slammed down where the magic user had just been, levitated and dropped by M'gann, both hands out and her cape fluttering in the wind as she focused, her eyes glowing green.

"Hey! Watch it!" Kalrion shouted, once again reaching up to pet his cat.

"Why did he work so hard to dodge that one?" I asked everyone. "He didn't even flinch before."

"You kids are creeps; you haven't said a single word...." He muttered to himself, raising his hand again; this time, a huge mace appeared, winding back to smash into the tower. "Just buzz off, you can't do anything to me. Why don't you go help your friends or something?"

"The cat!" Artemis called out. "He only cares when the cats are in danger."

I slam my foot into the ground and slide it around, pulling up a massive wave of sand before punching at it as it settles. Three clods of compacted dirt fired out in a tight arc, two slapping into the witch boy, the one just managing to clip the cat.

"Teek!" He shouted, his arms bending at an impossible angle to catch the falling cat before whirling on me. "What's wrong with you!? Attacking a harmless kitten like that?"

The small cat, which was covered in black markings, hissed at me before licking at Klarion's cheek. The witch boy seemed genuinely concerned about it, to the point I started feeling a bit guilty for attacking it.

"Just leave then, Klarion," I said, standing up straight. "We won't attack your cat if you just leave."

"No! I want the Helmet of Fate!" He shouted back like he was throwing a tantrum, except his already disturbing features got more extreme, his anger and frustration affecting his form. "Just go AWAY!"

He lashed out with dark bolts of magic, throwing them as fast as he seemed able, dozens of them arcing out to hit M'gann, Artemis, and me. All of us did our best to dodge, all while attacking as best we could, trying to aim at his cat to keep him off guard and angry. Every second he was attacking us was another second he wasn't trying to get into the tower. After a dozen waves of energy blasts, the ground around us was cratered and smoking, and all of us, including Klarion, were breathing heavily. For a moment, I thought we were doing well until suddenly, he stopped breathing hard and stood up straight.

"Alright, I'm done," He said, shaking his head. "Vandal can't even keep our friends out of jail, why should I listen to him?"

"Does... that mean you are leaving?" I asked hopefully.

"No dummy! It means I'm done holding back."

I barely had a chance to even consider what he said before a whip of energy lashed out and slammed into my chest, punching me downward into the ground. I opened my eyes just in time to watch him do the same to M'gann, a tendril of energy punching up from underground to yank her from the sky, slamming her into the ground. He waved his hand, and a blade of red energy sliced out, arcing toward Artemis, who just barely managed to dodge out of the way, her bow getting destroyed in the process.

I lashed out, firing one of the pieces of armor on my arm at Teekle the cat, only for a portal to appear and swallow it, the chunk of metal repairing and hitting Artemis, lodging itself in her arm at least an inch deep. She let out a shout of pain, which Klarion only laughed at.

"Careful dummy, you hurt your friend," He said to me, still laughing. "Alright, Let's finish this; I want the helmet, and worse, I'm starting to get bored. Goodbye forever!"

He raised his hands again and summoned a massive red railroad spike, holding it up above me while he laughed and laughed. I was still struggling to get up and wondering if I could tunnel down quick enough to keep from being impaled. I took a deep breath, ready to do my best when he thrust downward...

Only for a yellow blur, trailed by glowing sparks or orange and gold lighting, to grab me and carry me out of the way, the railroad spike slamming several feet into the ground. It then zipped around and started harassing Klarion, hitting him a dozen times before zipping away, staying a few steps ahead of the magic user, even now that he wasn't holding back.

"Wally, the cat!" I shouted out when my brain finally realized what was going on.

The blur zipped around in a tight turn, changing directions on a dime, before picking up even more speed and snagging the little orange cat from the Chaos Lord's and zipping away, stopping beside me as I finally stood up straight.

"No! Give Teekl back!" Klarion screamed, his voice starting to distort, slighting a hint of demonic depth that promised pain and suffering. "I will-"

Before he could finish a second blur, this one red and missing the lighting that was still cracking around Wally, stopped next to his protege. Klarion turned, looking back to find the front door of the tower open, with Queen Mera, Aquaman and Kent Nelson all standing there, looking serious and aggressive.

"Oh phooey... looks like my chance is gone," He said, his form almost instantly returning to his "normal" vaguely troubling look. "Dangit... Oh well!"

He snapped his fingers, and a tiny portal appeared below the orange cat, dragging upward and depositing the cat in the Chaos Lord's hands. Wally's hand blurred as he tried to reach into the portal to snag the cat back, but Flash grabbed his wrist just in time to yank it back before the portal snapped closed.

"Smell you later!"

A final portal appeared behind him, sweeping over him and shrinking to nothing, the dangerous magic user vanishing in a split second. The entire field was silent for a moment, only broken by a string of curses coming from one of Klarions "allies" who had just watched their ride abandon them.