

By the time I woke up, the rest of the team had already finished their morning workout. Thankfully, M'gann promised to let everyone know I was up late so would be skipping. I woke up and headed out into the living space, grabbing a bowl of cereal and a banana before heading out into the main room to watch everyone spar.

M'gann and Tora were facing off in the ring, with the latter blasting chunks of ice at the Martian, who was using the stone plates I had installed to block them. I stopped and sat on the bench next to Kaldur, who nodded in greeting. The match continued before Tora managed to freeze M'gann's legs enough to pull her to the ground, though I had seen her lift much more than that before so I assumed it was from surprise, not being overloaded.

"I thought we had agreed on no flight?" I asked Kaldur as M'gann managed to snap her legs free by morphing their shape.

"Tora asked that she use her flight," He explained, eyes still locked on the ring. "She wanted more experience fighting flying combatants."

I nodded and continued watching while I ate my breakfast. I was just about done when Tora was knocked out of the ring and M'gann rushed over to give me a hug.

"How did it go?"

"As well as it could have gone," I said with a smile, returning her hug. "I sent Batman a message last night... well this morning really, asking for him to deliver the meteorite whenever he could so I can practice it for real, so I'm just waiting for that."

"If you are waiting for something to be delivered, I think it is already here," Tora said, pointing off to the side. "I noticed it this morning when I was practicing my ice melting."

I turned, my eyes following her finger point. Sure enough, not far from where she had been doing her practice was a large metal crate, about three feet wide and two tall. I put the cereal bowl down on the bench and walked briskly to the box, the sound of many footsteps following behind me. In all honesty, I had been expecting a large chunk of possibly strange-looking rock, not a neat-looking box.

I quickly clicked open the latches and lifted the lid, going through the packaging, and pulling out its contents. In total, I pulled out two dozen dark metal ingots, two dozen light metal ingots, and a dozen metal ingots that had a slight blue tone to them, as well as a few large chunks of completely unprocessed meteorite. I also picked out the note attached to the lid of the crate.

Apparently, he had taken my description of metal bending and ran with it, wanting to give me as many tools as he could to help me train and equip myself. The dark ingots were almost completely unprocessed, simply melted down and poured into ingots moulds. The lighter ingots

were more heavily processed, with most of the impurities removed until it was a stable alloy. The blue-tinged ingots were a special alloy that was apparently developed by Wayne Tech. Apparently, it was a particularly strong alloy that had been tested for armor plate inserts and tank armor. Unfortunately, the fact that it was as pure and refined as possible meant I was far from using that in my arsenal.

I picked up one of the darker, pitted ingots and held it in one hand, closing my eyes and focusing as I had last night in my training meditation. It took a moment for me to latch on but with a quick twist, I had shifted its shape, twisting and stretching the bar.

I opened my eyes to M'gann clapping and Tora gasping while Robin, Kaldur, and Wally looked on in surprise. I focused my energy again, slowly stretching and working the metal into a long stretch before pulling and crushing it back together in a clump, the metal protesting its brutal shifting.

"That is impressive," Kaldur eventually said. "It certainly expands your capabilities."

"It's going to be a bit before I can reliably use metalbending in the field," I explained. "But yeah, eventually it will be as easy as earthbending."

I slowly worked the metal in my hands for a few more minutes, discussing the limitations and explaining how the purity level of a metal was the main restriction at this point, though that would lessen. I left out the mention of platinum. The fact that it was so rare and much more expensive in most worlds than it was in the Avatar's world, meant the likelihood of running onto someone with, say, platinum armor, was astronomically low. Especially if no one knew it was immune to my powers.

After a while, I put the metals back into the crate, and Kyle volunteered to carry them down into the grotto. I kept one ingot with me, continuously manipulating it as we returned to the sparring area. We weren't there long, however, before Colonel Clayden arrived through the Zeta-Tube.

He stepped in with a leather messenger bag strapped on his shoulder that M'gann quickly offered to carry. He nodded and the bag floated off his shoulder, catching him a bit off guard, but he laughed it off. Instead of sticking around the cave we immediately headed to the quarry, following the Colonel to the shoot room. As we left the warehouse he had us grab several mannequins and a can of black and green spray paint.

"Alright, today we are going to start off with the basics, room clearing," He explained, sitting down on a small closed-off area before the shoot room clearing. "This is a soldier's bread and butter, being able to sweep through an occupied building and reliably pacify the combatants with minimal casualties. Later, when I finally get in touch with the woman who will be training you in stealth, you will learn how to clear a building without anyone even knowing you're there. But for now, the order of the day is shock and awe."

He began explaining the basics of clearing rooms and breaching a structure. A lot of it fit cleanly with the remaining knowledge I had from Steve, but even he had been a bit old fashion for some of the more modern methods.

Eventually, we moved into the shoot room structure itself, and in step-by-step slow motion, he ran us through the basics. He had us place mannequins in a few rooms, marking a few with green paint.

“Normally, this whole process starts with someone shooting the lock and hinges off of a door, or planting an explosive charge to take it down entirely,” He explained, standing back slightly as we were all lined up along the wall next to one of the entrances. “But chances are, you guys don't need that. Most of you could take down an armored door with your abilities. But that leaves you with a problem... Any guesses?”

“...Less shock and awe,” Robin guessed, our instructor pointing to him and nodding.

“Exactly. Tearing a door off its hinges might be impressive to a baseline, but it's not going to stop them from emptying their magazine. The key to a breach is throwing your targets off enough to give you time to move in. Even if you're bulletproof, that split second might be the difference between you and a dead civ. Now how many of you carry flashbangs?”

I couldn't help but smirk when everyone raised their hands, including Tora. Colonel Clayden looked surprised, his eyes focusing on me with a wordless question.

“I put together a standard equipment list early on,” I explained, touching my utility belt, a close copy of what everyone was carrying. “Flashbangs are on the list.”

“Ah, right, your circumstances are a bit stranger than everyone else's, if I remember correctly. Good job, we will go over what's on the list eventually,” He said, before turning to the whole group. “Flashbangs are the bread and butter for breaching and clearing. They hurt, stun people pretty harshly and most importantly give you precious seconds to move in and take out a target before they can hurt anyone, including themselves.”

We made our way through a slow-motion play-by-play breaching and clearing, going from room to room as he explained each step. I dipped my arms into the ground before we entered the structure, copying the Dai Li's technique from the Last Airbender. Instead of using the chunks of rock as restraints, however, I just hit them hard enough to knock someone down or even break a bone or two. It was more than a bit rough, but as Colonel Clayden pointed out, a loud breach and clear is usually done when time is of the essence and shit is going down, not a time to pull punches.

After making our way to and through the second floor, which involved learning how to properly clear a stairwell, we headed back down and out, resetting the mannequins as we went.

“Alright... Now, tell me the first problem,” He said, looking at Kaldur. “It should have been obvious by the time we were done.”

“There were too many of us,” Kaldur said, getting a smile and a gesture to continue. “If the goal of clearing a building in this method is ‘Shock and awe’ as you describe it, then moving as fast as possible while remaining cohesive is important. If we were breaching a building of this size and design I would only send four of us in.”

“Well if that's true why wouldn't Kid Flash and I take care of it?” Kyle asked. “I'm bulletproof and Wally can move as fast as one, why wouldn't we just blitz through the whole building?”

“First, that's exactly the answer I was looking for Kaldur,” Our instructor said, giving our combat leader a nod. “As for your question Kyle, the easiest answer to that is, what if you're busy? That said, we may find that the two speedsters are your best options for building clearing. Or after some practice and training, we may learn that tanks are better suited, or one tank and one speedster. As I mentioned before this is a learning process all around, and all I can offer you is my experience.”

“Understood sir,” Kyle responded, seeming satisfied with the answer.

And in all honesty, I was as well. Originally Kaldur, Robin, and I had been worried about the abilities of Colonel Clayden. But now that I had experienced a proper lesson from him or at least part of one, I was starting to realize that he wasn't playing it loose, he was purposely staying flexible. I looked over at Kaldur, who nodded subtly.

And as if to emphasize our realization that this man knew what he was doing, he easily noticed the exchange and only smirked.

We ran through the training a dozen more times, switching out who was on point, and what variation of abilities we used. When he was up, Kid Flash tried to zip away to prove he was fast enough to do it on his own, but Colonel Clayden was ready. He stepped closer to the wall and waited silently. When Wally zipped back out he stuck his can out into the doorway, tripping the speedster. He tumbled a dozen or so feet before coming to a rest on his ass, covered in dirt.

“Your powers are downright impressive,” He said, leaning back on his cane. “But there is such thing as too fast, even for a speedster. In tight spaces like these, a single misstep could mean disaster. What if my cane had been a tripwire? A garrote? An infrared sensor? The whole building would have been blown sky high.”

Robin helped his friend back, who dusted himself off. He looked annoyed that he had been gotten like that, but clearly understood the point the Colonel had been making. The lesson continued on for another few hours, ending with us running the drills as fast as possible, with the

Colonel watching from the camera room in the small building just outside of the shoot house clearing. Everyone not running would function as hostiles, moving the dummies around, marking some as civilians, and using paintball guns to keep the clearing team on their toes. It was fun, exhilarating, and energy-intensive, enough that even my enhanced stamina was starting to feel it.

When we were done, the Colonel fiddled with his messenger bag and pulled out a stack of booklets, handing them out to each of us.

“This is the US Ranger handbook,” He said as I paged through the first chapter. “This is your homework. Read it, know it, talk about it. I’ll be gone for two days trying to get in touch with your stealth instructor. While I’m gone I want you to spend four hours each day running the drill we ran today. When I get back we can start talking about ambush tactics, assuming you manage to keep up with it. Any questions?”

When none were forthcoming he nodded, grabbed his now empty bag, and headed straight for the Zeta-Tube, disappearing in a flash of light.

“I kinda feel bad for doubting him,” I admitted, scratching my head. “He knows his stuff.”

“Not sure about the homework,” Wally said. “But yeah.”

“In hindsight, it was probably dumb to doubt a recommendation from Batman,” Robin pointed out with a smirk.

We all winced at that, realizing that that had been a bit on the stupid side. After a moment I looked at Robin, holding back the retort that he had doubted him too.

“Speaking of him, does Batman have any idea who he is getting as his stealth tutor?”

“Yeah, but he wouldn’t tell me anything,” Robin replied with a shrug. “Not even a hint. I kinda assumed he would end up teaching it to be honest. Who else could you get, you already have access to the best.”

Once again Kaldur and I shared a look, which this time went undetected. Whoever the Colonel was looking for to fill in the stealth instructor position would have their work cut out for them when it came to Robin.

We made our way back to the cave, traveling through the Zeta-Tube. M’gann and I started on dinner, two large trays of lasagna. As we worked together to layer the bechamel sauce, long flat pasta, and bolognese sauce and cheese, I brought up her agreement.

*“Over dinner would be a good time to bring it up,” I pointed out. “Everyone will be here, even Wally is sticking around.”*

*"...Yeah, your right,"* She admitted hesitantly.

*"I don't want you to feel like I'm forcing you, M'gann, it's ultimately your choice,"* I assured her, sending a wave of support. *"But I do think it would be good for you. You said it would help and... well it's not a bad idea for you to get support from places that aren't me."*

*"What? What do you mean? Do you-"*

I could feel her rising fear and I put down what I was doing to wrap her in a hug.

*"No. Nothing like that, I promise. But... If I am your only consistent connection... It feels unhealthy if we are in a relationship, like a codependency issue."* I pointed out, quickly continuing to cut off any panic. *"I like our link M'gann, and I won't lie, a can feel a very small part of me wanting it to stay between us. But you shouldn't depend on me completely for your own mental health."*

As I talked I did my best to open up my emotions as well, letting her feel the growing feelings I had for her, the desire for her to be happy and healthy, and the worry that any long-term commitment we made to each other would be thrown off by her *need* for our connection. She stepped back and looked into my eyes before nodding.

*"Okay. I will talk with them tonight."*

*"Thank you. Now grab the oven door will you?"* I said with a small smile, nodding my head to the oven while reaching over to grab the trays of Lasagna. *"Wally might start eating the table if these aren't done soon."*