

Our day went by slowly, patrolling the area directly around the large estate, keeping an eye on anything suspicious while doing our best to remain unseen, by both the owners and anyone looking to steal the gem. We patrolled around the home, keeping our eyes peeled and occasionally switching the ground squad with the Bioship stationed reaction squad. We pulled heavily from Ghost's lessons, working hard to stay incognito.

During our first day, we had two tense moments. One when someone approached the building with a large instrument case of some kind. Ordinarily, that wouldn't have been such an issue, but M'gann sensed a significant amount of stress and anxiety coming from them, so we were all on edge. Thankfully they only stuck around for a few minutes before leaving the vicinity. Not long after that, a delivery was made to the home, two large boxes unloaded and carried inside. We would have been a lot more worried about them if M'gann didn't clear the delivery staff and a quick scan from Bioship didn't reveal the contents of the boxes to be large appliances.

After our first day was over, we arrived back at the cave after being relieved of the stakeout by the Alpha team. Their job was marginally more complicated than ours since they had to utilize the Bus instead of Bioship. Once we arrived back at base, I called Batman, who confirmed they were still working on an emergency order to confiscate or destroy chaos-aligned artifacts of a particular power level.

He also filled me in on how the rest of the teams across the world were doing. So far, only a few more artifacts had gone missing, most of them minor, and not nearly enough to complete the ritual Dr. Fate was sure Klarion was trying to perform. Still, if enough of the minor artifacts went missing, Klarion would be capable of completing his ritual.

"We have had some luck purchasing a few of the known artifacts that people refused to hide or loan out," Batman explained. "But the owner of the Chaos Gem is still uninterested in selling."

"Did they give a reason as to why?" I asked. "Maybe there is something they need it for?"

"According to Zatarra, if it was being used in some manner, we would be able to tell," Batman explained. "They claim it is too important to their family to give up."

"Batman... if-"

"If the situation becomes more dire, there are... alternative methods available," Batman said, giving me a look that answered my unspoken question clearly. "Kent Nelson is getting closer to designing a ritual to cleanse a variety of these artifacts, and Dr. Fate is still searching the planet for Klarion. He believes he will also be able to spot the ritual if Klarion starts it. The League is determined to keep this ritual from being completed. We are considering *all* options available to us."

We talked a bit more about our options before we disconnected, and I headed to my room to get some rest.

The next morning we repeated the previous day's preparation before heading out to New Orleans again, relieving Alpha team. Before leaving, Kaldur joined us in Bioship to report on what had happened during their watch.

"Tula noticed the chaos magic coming from the interior of the home increases in tandem with the temperature," He explained. "Not at a level to be worried about, but enough to be noticeable."

"That matches what we were told about its nature, it seems to be connected to heart and fire," I said, scratching at my chin. "Let Batman know about this, he can pass it on if he feels it's important... I don't like it, though. Fire, Ice?"

I called out, getting Beatriz's and Tora's attention. They were both talking to Superboy, all three of them standing to the side, waiting to deploy on the ground for their patrol.

"I want you, Fire, to stay away from the gem, no direct contact or using your fire on it. It seems to be reacting actively to heat, and I don't want to find out the hard way it interacts poorly with your powers," I explained, the young Brazilian hero nodding. "Ice... the same goes for you, for the opposite reason. But... as a last-ditch effort, if something goes wrong, you have permission to try and cool it off. Do *not* make physical contact with it, though honestly, none of us should touch it. "

"...I guess that means no heat vision?" Superboy asked, and I nodded.

"Yeah, that was well," I said, Superboy nodding in confirmation. "I'm probably overreacting, but this chaos magic makes me nervous. Kaldur, could you mention all this to Batman as well?"

Kaldur nodded, as did my team members, who, only five minutes later, were on patrol, walking through the streets. Today, they were wearing minor disguises as tourists who were exploring, wearing tourist trap t-shirts and carrying cameras, snapping pictures of the classic New Orleans architecture. M'gann Garth and I remained in Bioship, peering at several screens showing live scans of the area.

*"Do you really think they would attack during the day?" M'gann asked through our connection. "The League of Shadows is more about stealth in the dark, right?"*

*"By the sounds of it, the League of Shadows was just a go-between," I said, shaking my head. "Anyone could show up to try and take the stone, so no guarantees it's a stealthy approach."*

*"Do you think they know we are here?" She asked. "Or would they notice us?"*

*"If they sent a group of experienced League of Shadows members? Probably," I admitted with a frown. "We have gotten good at hiding in crowds, but some of the Shadow members have spent dozens of years plying their trade. Kinda hard to trick that level of experience. If it's just a group of random villains, then it depends on who, but I give us a fair shake if its-"*

"Uh... guys? Are you picking up anything?" Superboy asked through our comms. "I just heard something weird come into my range... sounds kinda like mud? Big though, like massive."

M'gann frowned and closed her eyes, opening them after a moment, her usually red-amber eyes glowing green as she focused her mental abilities. I turned to one of the Bioships screens. I couldn't see anything, but M'gann quickly spoke up.

"There, they are underground. Maybe in the sewers?" She guessed, the glow in her eyes fading as she adjusted something with her hands.

The main screen shifted to a wireframe, and its view sank down, now showing four people walking underground. Three of them were relatively normal in size, but one of them was massive, seemingly to hardly fit in the tunnel. They were walking casually, making their way through a hive of large sewer and drainage tunnels.

"Okay. Let's intercept them before they can even get close." I said, looking over at M'gann. "Link us up."

M'gann nodded and closed her eyes, the familiar connection expanding to include the rest of my team.

*"Superboy and Ice, meet me on the main street west side, Fire you're staying topside. I don't think fire mixes well with raw sewage," I said, turning to look at M'gann, standing from my seat. "I need you to stay up here and direct us, as well as keep an eye out for anyone else coming in. I don't want anyone sneaking in while we are distracted. Garth, you're staying up here too."*

"Alright." She said, her hands shifting, piloting the ship until we were over the street. *"Be careful."*

"Of course," I replied with a smile before hopping down through the hole she opened through the Bioships floor.

I dropped for fifteen feet before landing and rolling, bringing my shield up. I could already see Superboy and Ice running through the streets, shedding their civilian disguises. Fire was behind them somewhere, fading into the crowd to keep watch above ground. As the two others got closer, I stood and stepped forward, stopping by a manhole. I slammed my foot next to it, the large metal disk popping up and over to slam into the ground a foot or so away.

*"We are following them into a sewer?"* Tora asked. *"God, this is going to be gross."*

I said nothing because she was probably right. Instead, I stepped forward and dropped into the hole, falling into the sewer. It was a surprisingly open space, making me think that it was a main access line or something. I could see relatively well through what looked like a low-level lighting system attached to one of the walls. There was also an amazing lack of feces or even water.

*"Pretty sure this is an abandoned sewer,"* I mentally sent through M'gann's link.

*"Still smells bad..."* Ice said, even as both her and Kyle slowly floated down, the Kryptonian hybrid carrying the cryokinetic.

*"Masks on, that might help,"* I suggested, pulling mine from my belt and clipping it to my face.

*"I can hear them. They are together somewhere down here,"* Superboy said as he clipped on his own mask. *"Echo is messing me up, I can't pinpoint them."*

*"That's fine,"* I assure him. *"M'gann, you're our eyes."*

*"Okay, head straight about fifteen feet..."*

M'gann guided us through the damp, smelly, and just generally foul tunnel for five minutes before my enhanced hearing finally picked up what Superboy had been hearing the whole time.

*"-been right happy never seeing this side of the city,"* A female voice said in a thick southern drawl. *"Shoulda asked for more money."*

*"Still could, once we have that big ole rock, I say we keep it,"* A male voice responded, his accent just as thick. *"I bet they drop a pretty penny to get it."*

*"They already are,"* Another voice said, in an accent I didn't recognize. *"Trying to dupe the League of Shadows is how you wake up with a dagger in your chest."*

*"Maybe for you, pipsqueak,"* the second voice responded. *"Rest of us ain't worried don't gotta worry about getting poked. Ain't that right big guy?"*

"The Shadows pay good, have resources, and always have work for people like us, only a moron would mess that up," A gravely, deep, almost wet voice responded.

"Are you calling me stupid?" The second voice said, sounding angry. "I-

"Brother, will you stop! Yer echo is giving me a headache."

The voices got louder and louder as we walked until M'gann finally stopped us, our targets just around the corner.

*"You have ten or fifteen seconds until they come around the corner into your section,"* She warned. *"Be careful, three of them are hoping for a good fight."*

All three of us silently moved around, with Ice and I sliding behind the structural supports that ran along the brickwork walls of the sewer while Superboy floated upwards into a nearby pipe. After a few seconds, we could hear the group come around the corner. I slowly shifted my head to peek around, spotting the four would-be thieves before smoothing back.

*"Okay, Ice, you have the opening move,"* I said, outlining my spur-of-the-moment plan. *"The big guy is Clayface, I want you to freeze him as solid as you can. You don't need to worry about hurting him, he comes back when you thaw him out. Superboy, cover her until she is done. After that, Ice, I want you on Abra Kadabra, he is the one who looks like he forgot what buttons are, and he uses advanced tech while pretending to do magic. Superboy, you've blonde guy. Careful, I don't recognize him or his female doppelganger. I've got her."*

*"Copy."*

*"Roger."*

*"Wait ten seconds, then we go on your move, Ice..."*

We silently waited in cover, the footsteps getting closer and closer. After about ten seconds, Tora seems to ready herself before stepping around the corner. Immediately she jammed her hands out and let loose a massive blast of cryokinetic energy, way more than she would normally use on anything alive. I come out of cover to see Clayface, the large muck and mud monster being frozen solid, ice growing around him at a prodigious rate

"Ngghhooooo...."

"What the"

"Who-

“-tarnation!”

I jumped forward to take away attention from Ice, Superboy doing the same, flying through the tunnel. He reached the quartet first, rolling under Ice's blast of energy to punch the male blonde, clearly making sure to keep it gentle enough not to hurt him. Unfortunately, because he was holding back, it seemed to do absolutely nothing to the young man, who honestly couldn't have been much older than any of us. He let out a laugh and slammed a punch into Superboy's chest, the young superhero flying into the wall of the sewer, making a crater in the process.

By then, Tora had finished freezing Clayface solid and turned her attention to Abra, who was cursing and trying to defrost the large mud man. She sprayed her ice energy at him, forcing him to stop and defend himself rather than free his ally. This just left the young woman, who was turning to focus on me, dismissing Superboy as a nonthreat since his target had handled his opening attack seemingly easily. She smirked as she leaped forward at me, coming in at a low arc and landing roughly on her feet.

I stopped and slid to the side, dodging her opening punch and following up with my own, punching her in the shoulder and trying to counter her attack. She smirked and tried to backhand me, as my underpowered punch did nothing.

*"They are both durable, Superboy. Go heavy!"* I said, though I was sure he had already figured that out.

I leaned back out of her range, grabbing my shield and tearing it in half with my bending, reforging the metal into thick pile drivers on each hand. I swung my right arm out, catching her eye before I slammed my left fist into her stomach, pushing my energy into the strike to get some extra oomf.

The obvious meta-human let out a ragged gasp as I knocked the air out of her, stepping back. I could see Superboy grappling with his target, putting his knowledge to use and outmaneuvering him easily with his own super strength. The woman tried to recover before I could follow up, but I reached out and slammed into her again, this time into her shoulder, trying to disable her arm. I rolled back, using a kick to her stomach to push myself out of range of her wild, telegraphed swings.

"Why, you little-"

When she recovered from my kick, she tried to jump forward at me again, and I couldn't help but smirk. Both she and the boy Superboy was fighting reminded me of Kyle when I first met him, all direct violence, no holding back. As she was in the air, I slid back, using the movement to create a pitfall. When she landed, both her feet cracked through a thin brick layer into the cavity I had created, forcing her to stumble forward. I met her forward momentum with my own, stepping into an upwards punch with a flattened metal fist, slapping into her forehead

with a harsh ringing metal sound. She tumbled to the side, coming to a stop and trying to stand immediately, though she was clearly stumbling.

I glanced over at Tora to see her dodge a blast of electricity from Abra's glowing metal wand, waving and freezing it in a block of ice. The villain cursed and clutched his hand, trying to break it free. Unfortunately for him, his distraction was all Ice needed to freeze him in place, taking him out of the fight.

Satisfied that she had her adversary handled, I turned back to my own, I walked over to the slowly standing villainess, who had blood dripping down into her eye. I reached down into my belt and whipped out a coil of metal, flicking it out and wrapping it around her legs, yanking them off from under her. I was wrapping her arms and legs up when M'gann reached out through the connection.

*"Another team spotted!"* She sent, sounding tense but under control. *"Moving to intercept!"*

*"Roger that! I will assist when we are done here!"* I replied. *"Keep us updated!"*

I focused back on my target, binding her up quickly before signing her into the floor, sealing the bands of metal around her with stone, making it as dense and tough as possible. With any luck, the lack of leverage would keep her from breaking free.

I turned to watch Superboy finish off the second blond metahuman and Tora strip the last bit of tech from Abra Kadabra. I moved to repeat the capture process for his target, using up almost seventy percent of my metal between the two. When he was properly sealed, I turned to both of my teammates.

"Superboy, Tora, stay here and keep an eye on them, but be ready to assist," I instructed out loud, not wanting to distract M'gann, Garth, and Fire. "I'm going to see if they need any help. I'll call you two in if it's needed."