

Chapter 58 - Mauser

Detective Reza led us to her personal office, which was in a small room off of an open floor. M'gann and I both sat down in front of her desk as she took her seat, booting up her computer.

"The name Daryl gave you, Mauser, is relatively well known around here as a small-time but unfortunately competent arms dealer," She explained as she started typing, looking at us around her computer. "We've been trying to catch him out for a while, but he is careful. I don't know much about him past that, unfortunately."

As she talked, her printer started to clip and move, sucking in paper and printing out the weapons dealer's file. Detective Reza leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms as the printer did its job.

"I do know that we aren't currently running any operations to try and find or capture him specifically," She admitted. "He is wanted, obviously, but since we have no idea who he is..."

"Why is that?" I asked. "Seems like you know a lot about him..."

"See for yourself," She responded, grabbing the now-finished pile of papers and sliding them to me.

I accepted the stack and started flipping through it. The first page showed an image of a masked man in a trench coat, accompanying text describing him as our mysterious weapons dealer. It was interesting that in a world with superheroes and supervillains, more criminals didn't wear masks to protect their identities, but I wasn't going to complain. Altogether, they only had a few images of the weapons dealer, and most of them were blurry and barely recognizable, but the information they had would no doubt be helpful.

"Thank you, Detective Reza," I said, standing up and shaking her hand again. "We will likely go after him within the day. Once we have the information we need, we will turn him over to the CCPD."

"Of course. Some of my coworkers might not like it, but I recognize that we aren't equipped for certain scenarios," She admitted. "I can only hope that changes eventually, but for now, we depend on heroes like you."

The Detective walked us out of the precinct, saying goodbye before heading back inside to get back to work.

"She seemed... nice?" M'gann asked.

“She clearly takes her job seriously,” I said with a shrug. “Some people don’t like mixing their professional and personal lives, and to be honest, that makes sense since our team is like a separate but collaborative entity....”

We didn’t take long to get back to the cave and gather everyone up again. I read the file while we were waiting, using the conference room’s projector to display the few pictures of the weapons dealer the police had. Front and center was an image of his masked face, which was a simple white harlequin mask with a black highlights around the eyes and a wide black grin.

The following picture showed his complete outfit, which was a green trench coat over a dark gray military uniform, including an armor plate carrier on his chest. However, it wasn’t nearly as bulky as standard military fare. As Kyle entered, I pulled him aside.

“Hey, Kyle. Just wanted to let you know M’gann and I met Detective Lily Reza today. Apparently, she was in charge of the bank robbery case.”

“I... didn’t know that. I hadn’t read that file yet,” He admitted, shaking his head. “I was more focused on the potential injuries and the accident. I mean, I would have heard from them if they were hurt, but...”

“Yeah, I get it,” I assured him, patting his shoulder. “Just wanted to let you know. She seems very intent on being professional.”

“Yeah, Sarah teases her about it because it makes her no fun to eat with at lunch,” Kyle explained with a smile. “Why did you want to tell me?”

“Because you’re my teammate, and some people react badly to little stuff like that, as well as what I’m about to tell you,” I explained with a shrug. “Detective Reza also mentioned that her wife was on site for the weapons meltdown.”

I explained how apparently Sarah had been in the same building as the malfunctioning gun when it had melted down but that she was fine. I could hear his knuckles pop when I talked, the half-Kryptonian doing his best to control his anger. It took a bit for him to calm down all the way, by which time everyone else was starting to arrive. I patted his shoulder, getting a nod in return before he took a seat, a steely determination now etched on his face.

I retook my position by the projected images, waiting for everyone else to sit down. When everyone was ready, I gestured to the projected pictures.”

“This creepy bastard here is Mauser, a weapons dealer who has, up to now, dealt in standard small arms and low-level explosives,” I explained once everyone was settled in their seats. “He popped up about two years ago selling pistols and ammo to a small-time gang. He still keeps his sales small, but he quickly graduated to larger, more dangerous weapons. And now we’ve connected him to selling the super tech used in a recent bank robbery.”

“Why didn’t the cops get this info?” Artemis asked, arms crossed.

“They hadn’t connected the dots yet,” I explained, pulling up a calendar marked with all four events, the robbery, the drug bust, the first shooting, and the shooting Artemis and I stopped. “The shootout was only the fourth separate instance of this specific brand of super tech, with the first instance being less than five days ago. This problem is new, and with any luck, we can stop it before it spirals out of control.”

“So... we think this guy is selling this stuff... does he have a supplier?” Robin asked, leaning back in his seat. “A small-time gun dealer suddenly having access to super tech? That paints a bad picture.”

“That is a fair point,” Kaldur said, leaning forward. “Is he the only source of this super tech, or is he simply the first lead we have on people who are selling it?”

“We don’t know,” I answered honestly. “It could be that we catch him, and we solve Central City’s problem. Unfortunately, even if that were the case, we would still need to find his supplier. Anyone willing to sell unregistered weapons like that needs to be stopped, if for no other reason than the weapons dangerously poor quality.”

“So, we track down this weapons dealer, catch him and then what, interrogate him?” Wally asked.

“More or less. If we can’t get him to sell the supplier out, then I think M’gann should read his mind,” I said, sending an apologetic mental wave to my girlfriend. “I know you’re a bit iffy on forcing yourself in that deep, but this is a pretty serious circumstance. We need to stop the leak of these weapons from spreading. Not to mention how important it is to contain super tech scientists as quickly as possible if they go bad.”

“What do you mean?” Tora asked. “I mean, I know getting a criminal off the street as soon as possible is good, but how is this different?”

“Building super tech has a curve of difficulty,” Robin explained, looking at his teammate. “The longer you let someone like that tinker, the better their ability to make super tech will get. They can start small time, but left alone they will start producing more dangerous stuff, and often with more frequency. That goes double if they have support goons because they can start arming them with super tech.”

We talked a bit longer, talking through what the police knew about Mauser and how we would go about catching him, which is where we hit our first snag. According to his file, Mauser only met with potential customers through recommendations. He would then set the meeting locations at random locations on the outskirts of Central City, where there were plenty of abandoned

warehouses and buildings to do business in. He only did business out of his car, meaning there was no place for us to raid or stake out.

We tossed around the idea of maybe trying to find someone who would be able to recommend us, maybe by capturing a different criminal, but quickly put that idea to the side. Eventually, Robin spoke up, shaking his head.

"I honestly think the only thing we can do is cast as big a net as possible and hope we come up with something," He said. "We know where he usually does business, we know he works out of his car, and we know the general location of where he likes to set up meetings. Judging by the steep increase in sightings of this new terrible tech, chances are business is doing good. I say we spread the net as wide as possible and hope for the best."

"A wild shot in the dark is far from the optimal option... But I do not see any other way to locate him," Kaldur admitted with a frustrated frown. "He has obfuscated his identity and business too well."

We discussed our plan a bit more, eventually coming to the conclusion that M'gann and Kyle would patrol the skies, using their super senses and psychic abilities to monitor large swaths of land. Robin, Artemis, and I would find someplace nice and high to monitor prime locations. At the same time, Tora, Kaldur and Wally would remain on Bioship, who would be landed and invisible, monitoring a considerable chunk of the city outskirts with their sensors.

If one of us spotted the weapons dealer, we would contact the others, who would all converge on that person. Superboy and Kid Flash could be on site fast, while the rest of the team would most likely be able to converge after some time, depending on where everyone was. Unfortunately, no one could fly Bioship without M'gann present, at least not yet, an issue we should have seen coming.

With our plan sketched out, Robin contacted Batman to inform him of our plan. He agreed that without more time, there was little we could do but stake out likely areas in hopes of catching him in the act. He also agreed to start looking into possible alternatives, promising to keep us in the loop should something turn up. Robin shrugged when I asked what the bat-themed hero meant.

"I don't know what half the stuff he says means," Robin admitted with a shrug. "I think half the time he doesn't either. He just says stuff like that when he doesn't know what to do yet."

I chuckled, and we went our separate ways, both of us headed to prepare for the stakeout.

The hardest part of setting up the stakeout was picking out everyone's positions. Artemis, Robin, and I picked out three taller buildings, Bioship silently dropping us off on the top of each. Superboy dropped from the ship mid-flight to start patrolling his section. It was nice to see that even though he had had his flight for a while now, he still smiled a bit every time he got to do it.

Since Bioship was invisible, I couldn't see it as it flew away. Still, I knew it was headed for a parking lot near a series of warehouses, where M'gann would leave to fly around invisible, scanning the area with her psychic senses, looking for anything out of place. I could feel she had been a little nervous about being disconnected from everyone, but she assured me she could do it.

Just about five minutes after we arrived, we had cast a net as wide as possible, at least without making it incredibly obvious what was happening. After that, it was a waiting game.

Hours passed, the moon moving across the sky, the stars barely visible through the city's light pollution. M'gann passed within mental range a few times, partially to check in on everyone and partly because she needed to get to another section of the city to scan. She gave me a mental hug, and I could feel she was handling the disconnect pretty well, enough that she was surprised at how easy it was. I could only guess she had underestimated herself or that having more people to connect with had made being disconnected easier for her.

The night passed, and unfortunately, by the time the sun was rising, nothing of interest happened. Everyone returned to Bioship as stealthily as possible, and we headed home. Everyone crashed into bed immediately and slept all the way until late afternoon. As we gathered in the kitchen, Robin returned with some news from his mentor.

"Batman did some digging and managed to find a more comprehensive list of reported sightings of Mauser, as well as a detailed description of his vehicle," Robin said, passing Kaldur a folder. "According to Batman, we should focus on the outskirts' eastern side."

"Pretty much the opposite side of where we were yesterday." I pointed out with a groan. "Why wasn't this part of his folder before?"

"It was 'misfiled,'" Robin explained, making actual air quotes. "Batman had a long conversation with a cop connected to the initial Mauser investigation. He suddenly came into a bit of wealth that caught Batman's attention. About five thousand dollars appeared in his account just about when the investigation ended."

"So he bribed a cop to keep details from being filed.... That shows he's a bit more than just some dude who is selling guns for a quick buck," Artemis said. "Bribing a cop is much more difficult than you might think... or so I've heard...."

“Agreed, we must stay on our toes when apprehending him,” Kaldur said, passing me the file, everyone pointedly ignoring the last bit Artemis had said.

The way that the file described his car, it sounded like some sort of older, pre-2000s Cadillac, all angular and boxy, though the brand name wasn't one I knew from my world. The sightings were also varied but definitely leaned toward the area that Batman suggested. We spent a while longer developing a new deployment spread, this time with the sightings in mind. When we did eventually set out to Central City, we were all hopeful, despite it ultimately being up to luck.

We deployed without much trouble, all of us spreading out as much as possible. I was on the roof of an office building now, surveying the area with binoculars. About three hours into our stakeout, Kyle contacted us through our communicators, broadcasting his location as well.

“I think I've spotted him,” He said. “I see a car matching the description we got from Batman's investigation, moving east directly under me. I'm getting closer to use my X-ray vision for visual confirmation.”

I tensely waited from my rooftop, looking out into the night, despite the fact that Superboy was a few miles away.

“Identity confirmed. It's Mauser. Or at least someone dressed up as him.”

“Roger that Superboy, follow from a distance. We are converging,” Kaldur said. “Notify us if he stops or starts activating strangely.”

Since our target was still on the move, the plan was for deployed team members to converge on the bioship rather than Superboy. It took everyone two minutes to group up for pickup, immediately heading to Kyle's location. By then, the target had stopped, parking inside of a run-down parking structure. He was waiting in his car, listening to music, according to Superboy, who had returned to Bioship, entering silently from the bottom.

“What's the plan?” Kid Flash asked as we all watched the familiar wireframe display our target. “Seems kind of cut and dry. Just one dude.”

“Who has been selling super tech,” Robin pointed out. “Who knows what he has up his sleeve.”

“What little we know about this guy makes it seem like underestimating him would be a terrible idea,” I pointed out. “That said, overcomplicating things is rarely a good thing....”

Kaldur stared at the display for a few seconds before nodding.

“Alright, everyone, here is the plan....”

