

The next few days was a combination of hanging out around the cave, practicing my earth bending and trying to get in contact with my team and Black Canary, the latter of which eventually did respond to my message. Unfortunately, it was only to apologize for taking so long to do so and to explain she would be around “soon” to start our training. I wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt as she had been very nice during tryouts, but “soon” felt an awful lot like “When I don’t have anything else important to do.” A day after her reply I was still debating if I should complain to someone, most likely Batman, about the lack of contact.

My training was going well though, and I was finally happy about my progress in shaping a sphere. I had finally got the visualization of the process down, my mind controlling the chips and chunks my bending was taking off. Most of the progress had come when I realized I was trying to find tricks or mental strategies to make it easier when instead I needed to attack the problem directly. The last thing to do was to meditate and enter back into my training trance, or whatever it was. Unfortunately the afternoon that I had finally managed to shape a sphere was also the day the team was meeting, so it would have to wait until the next day

It took all together way too much time to finally corral the entire team into one place. M’gann and Superboy were easy obviously, especially since M’gann was eager to get the team together as well, though she mostly wanted to socialize. I ended up having to bribe Kid Flash, promising as much Chinese food as he could eat. When the meeting time finally arrived M’gann, Superboy and I were all waiting in the main cavern, discussing what I had ordered for dinner, which was enough to feed the team twice over, then a bit extra. Superboy had pointed out that we both had enhanced metabolism as well.

A few minutes after the order was placed Aqualad arrived, precisely on time. When the flash of the Zeta-Tube faded the three of us stepped forward, and I reached out to shake the Atlantean’s hand.

“Good to see you again, Aqualad.” I said with a smile.

The young hero was dressed in civilian clothes, though if the two subtle bulges on his sides were any indication, he was still armed.

“It is good to see you all, as well.” He responded with a small smile and a nod to M’gann and Superboy. “How are you three settling into Mount Justice?”

“The cave has been great.” I said with a smile. “Much better than the dump I was living in before.”

“The company has been amazing.” M’gann added. “Even if it is still a little empty.”

“The library is nice.” Superboy finished, getting a smile from M’gann and I.

“That is all good, I am glad you are all comfortable.” He said with another nod. “But please, call me Kaldur. If we are to be on a team then it is only appropriate.”

“Call me M’gann!” M’gann said, floating over beside me, landing softly.

Kaldur was about to respond when the Zeta-Tube began warming up behind him, prompting him to turn slightly.

“Recognized, Robin, B-01.” The Zeta-Tube computer announced, a flash of light depositing Robin into our midst.

“Hey guys, how’s it going?” The young hero asked, a grin on his face. He walked further into the cavern and stopped beside Kaldur. He was also dressed in casual clothes, though still wore his signature eye covering.

“It’s going well.” I said, M’gann nodding beside me. “Thanks for coming.”

“Well, you did seem dead set on getting us all together.” He pointed out. “Wanna tell us what this is all about?”

“I’m just curious about some things.” I admitted, telling a half truth. “I wanted to get together and talk about the team. But that can wait for after we have eaten.”

I felt M’gann’s presence against my mind, just a reassuring touch. She had been the one to suggest we get dinner first, to let everyone unwind before I started asking my questions.

“Fair enough.” Kaldur said with a nod. “Are we simply waiting for Kid Flash to arrive?”

“Yeah, he said he would be here.” I said with a shrug. “I had to promise him as much Chinese food as he could eat.”

“Uhh... How much did you get?” Robin asked, his eyebrow raised, the movement somehow transferred to his domino mask. “Cause Kid Flash eats a lot.”

“I got enough for all of us, then doubled it.” I said with a smirk. “Then added a few extras”

“That should suffice.” Kaldur said, pausing for a moment. “Probably.”

The five of us chatted for a while, chatting about what we had been up to the past few days. Apparently the other three young heroes had continued working with their mentors, essentially returning to their sidekick roles, though they didn’t say or even seem to realize that. I kept my frown to myself, nodding along as Kaldur described stopping a boating crew from illegally dumping waste into the ocean. Eventually Kid Flash arrived, zipping out of the Zeta-Tube, skidding to a stop next to Robin. He was in civilian clothes as well, though he was still pulling on a jacket.

“Hey! What's up everybody?” He said with a smirk and a wave. “Guess who has two thumbs and just stopped Mirror Master from stealing a whole bank's worth of silver? This guy!”

“Congratulations Kid Flash, Mirror Master has been causing you and the Flash trouble for a few months now.” Kaldur said with a smile.

“Yeah, and we finally caught him!”

“Why don't you tell us the story on the way to the restaurant.” I suggested. “We can pick up our delivery and find someplace to eat.”

“I was wondering about that.” Kaldur said. “How are we getting to this restaurant? I was under the impression you do not have a license to drive, and our special permits to drive while in costume does not apply when we are not.”

“But mine does!” M'gann said, her happiness almost tangible through our connection. “I have a special permit to fly Bioship whenever I like.”

Kaldure, Robin and Kid Flash all shared a look before looking back at M'gann.

“Bioship?” Robin asked with another raised brow.

“Mhmm!” M'gann said, already flying. “C'mon! I'll introduce you.”

The group made their way to the caves hangar, where Bioship was resting. Since my first encounter with the shape shifting, sentient vessel, M'gann had explained that while the ship had no verbal name, she did have a mental equivalent. She linked our connection to the ship as we got closer, using her own connection to let me partially connect with the ship. She had already tried linking us directly, but it hadn't worked. I could still mentally connect to her by placing my hands on the glowing spheres that served as the physical interface, but without being actually psychic I couldn't do it remotely like M'gann.

Even so, the weak partial connection let me feel her excitement as we approached, with M'gann already talking to her, though she remained in her ovoid, egg-shaped dormant state. M'gann landed and turned back to the rest of the group. As we entered I walked to a nearby panel and opened the hangar doors and set them to close after we had left.

“This is Bioship.” She said with a smile, mentally telling the ship to leave its resting state.

The ship quickly grew into its basic form, an impressive shape that was both angular and organic, similar to the interior. Kaldur, Robin and Kid Flash all took an instinctive step back as it rapidly changed shape. I could feel her preening under all the stares and dropped jaws.

“Whoa.... That is impressive.” Robin said. “How fast can it go?”

“She is a bit limited in atmosphere, but pretty fast, fast enough to break the sound barrier... though we aren't allowed to do that unless it's an emergency.” M'gann responded, before frowning. “And she isn't an it. Bioship is sentient.

She looked mostly calm about being so direct with Robin, but I could feel her nervousness. I gave her a reassuring hug through our connection, and she stood a bit straighter.

“That is truly impressive.” Kaldure said, admiring the large spaceship.

“Sorry, I didn't realize.” Robin said, rubbing the back of his head.

“It's alright, I know it's a bit of a weird concept for Earth.” She said with a smile, internally relieved. “C'mon, I'll show you inside!”

M'gann turned and with a gesture, and a thought, the ship spun quickly, the back hatch opening up and sliding down to the ground. The Martian walked up the ramp, with Superboy and I right behind her, the last three lagging behind just long enough for M'gann to set up the ship to hold six people, five in the front with her seat still in the middle.

“Woah... so cool!” Kid Flash said, zipping ahead to claim one of the seats, quickly followed by Robin.

Each seat morphed slightly to better hold each of us as we sat down, before seat belts wrapped around us, getting a few surprised words.

“Umm, not to rain on anyone's parade, but how are we going to go get food in a spaceship?” Robin asked, his chair swiveling around to face the rest of us. “It's not exactly subtle.”

“Don't worry, Bioship has it taken care of.” M'gann said, before focusing with her hands on the glowing interfaces and lifting off the ground.

As we flowed forward and out of the hangar I could feel the ship turn invisible through M'gann, a slight tingling through the jury rigged connection. I patted the arm rest as M'gann turned the ship and pointed it at Happy Harbor.

“Should I rush?” M'gann mentally asked me.

“No, we ordered a lot of food so it might take a bit.”

“Holy crap, are we invisible?!” Robin asked suddenly, leaning to get a better look out the window. “I can't see the wings!”

“Yeah, Bioship can turn invisible.” M’gann said with a chuckle. “She can also shapeshift.”

As we got closer to the small town we got lower and lower. Eventually, before we actually reached it, the ship landed on an empty area near a road. As M’gann explained what she could do, the ship showed off by slowly shifting into a large red SUV, just like the one they had picked me up in not too long ago. When the transformation was done we were sitting in what looked like a normal SUV with me behind the wheel and M’gann sitting next to me, her hands still on the glowing orbs.

“That... that was incredible!” Kid Flash said. “I mean that level of shape shifting flexibility, it’s mind blowing!”

“Not to mention incredibly useful.” Kaldur said, eyeing the interior of the car, Robin nodding alongside him.

M’gann smiled and directed Bioship onto the road, fading its cloaking out as she did. It didn’t take long for us to make it to the restaurant, get our food and leave again. This time M’gann didn’t even wait, simply cloaking the ship as we pulled into a wooded drive and flying away, the ship changing back to its original look as we went.

“So... are we going back to the cave or?” Robin asked, slapping away Kid Flash’s hand when he tried to get into one of the large bags of food.

“No, Warren had a better idea.” M’gann said with a mischievous smile.

The ship started to speed up, pointing upwards and gaining altitude fast, not that anyone inside could feel it. Kaldur was the first to notice, but everyone else quickly caught on.

“No way....” Robin said, once again leaning to get a better view.

It took a few minutes, mostly because M’gann didn’t see the point of pushing Bioship any harder than she needed to, but eventually we left the atmosphere. Over time we could feel our weight lessen slowly to nothing before the artificial gravity kicked in. Once we were stable, our buckles retreated, allowing us all to stand. The window expanded, becoming a viewing bubble that went from floor to ceiling, which also adjusted for more room.

The group was silent for a while, looking out on Earth. We floated in space, stationed over Happy Harbor, taking in the beautiful sight. It was incredible and absolutely breathtaking, completely undiminished by the fact that I had quite a few lingering memories of going to space through one Steve or another. We could see a significant portion of the planet below us with clouds and weather forming on the horizon.

“I’m putting it to our first team vote.” I said, getting everyone's attention, though only M’gann turned to look. “All in favor of making this a weekly team event, say ‘Aye’”

I immediately got agreement from everyone, with M’gann still looking back at me with a smile, along with a tight mental hug, which I returned. She was the only one not completely dazed by the view.

After a while of staring at the view, M’gann got Bioship to push out a table in the center of the cockpit, all of the chairs moving to sit around it. We all sat down to eat, but the ship remained mostly silent as no one felt like talking, still enraptured by the view.

Eventually, by the time we finished eating, everyone could look away from the horizon long enough to hold an actual conversation. We had all eaten our fill and packed up the leftovers, of which there was not nearly as much as I had thought we would have. When we were all finally done, Robin turned to me with an expectant expression.

“Okay Warren. This was one heck of a team dinner, but now it's time for you to share with the class.”

Kid Flashed looked a bit lost at Robin's statement, while Kaldur just nodded in agreement.

“I too appreciate the setting, as well as the company.” Kaldur said with a small smile.”But I think it's time for you to explain why you were so emphatic about this happening.”

I nodded and took a slow breath, smiling when M’gann mentally reassured me. We had already talked about all of this the day before. She had shown an enthusiasm that I couldn't help but find encouraging.

“Well, in all honesty there was something specific I wanted to bring up to the team. But I wanted to start off and ask you three what you think this team is. What its purpose is and what purpose it serves.”

For a moment both Robin and Kaldur looked like they would immediately answer, before they both stopped themselves, clearly picking up on the subtle differences between my two questions.

“That's easy. It was created because the Justice League needed a covert team.” Kid Flash said, or rather Wally did. He had mumbled out an introduction between munching on a box of crab rangoons and a box of dumplings. “We earned this.”

“I think that is only part of the answer.”

“You are implying that why the team was created is different from the purpose the team fulfills?” Kaldure asked, looking pensive.

“Yes.”

“If the League needed it, then why didn't it exist already?” I said, gesturing to Robin. “Is Batman the kind of person to hesitate when it comes to filling a need? Something tells me if he thought the League really needed a covert team he would have made one, not waited until you four refused to back down like you did.”

Now all three of them looked introspective, though Wally also looked a bit annoyed. Before he could say anything I continued.

“I'm not saying that you didn't earn this or that you don't deserve a chance to prove that you can handle more freedom, or more responsibility. But if they needed a covert team, and that's all they were trying to do, then why group three experienced young heroes with three inexperienced ones?”

“What are you saying?” Wally asked after a few moments of silence. “Because it kind of sounds like you're saying they are doing all this to shut us up.”

“No, not at all. If I had to guess, I'd say the League did this for two reasons behind what they told us. One, to give us the opportunity to prove we are capable of being responsible when given more freedom and more independence. And two, to provide a place for us to get more experience without being in the spotlight. Both of those are a way to prepare us to eventually be a part of the League, though that is a long term goal.”

As I talked Kaldur nodded a few times, while Robin's face was completely blank. Wally seemed to switch between annoyed and confused.

“So whatever missions we get, they are just to get us experience?” Wally asked. “Are they even going to be actual real missions?”

“That depends.” I said, looking at Robin. “Would Batman lie to us?”

“No, he wouldn't straight out lie, not for something like this. Not to me.” Robin said while shaking his head. “He might hide the truth, obfuscate or lie by omission, but we asked if we would be going on real missions and he said yes. The missions will be real.”

“So the question is, what's the difference?” Kaldur asked me directly. “We would be getting real missions, proving ourselves and getting more experience. That sounds like everyone would be getting what they want.”

“Oh, yeah! Believe me guys I’m not implying that anyone is trying to cheat us or that this is an empty gesture or anything like that.” I assured them. “But I think that treating this team as the training wheels for the Justice League is a waste of potential.”

I leaned back slightly, Bioship morphing my chair as I did to support my new position better. I looked at each of the more experienced heroes, knowing that they were the ones I would have to convince.

“Waste of potential?” Wally asked in confusion. “How could joining the Justice League be a waste of potential? I mean... It’s the Justice League!”

“And? Does that mean there can’t be anything else? Anything better?” I asked hypothetically, pausing for a moment before continuing. “Look, all I am saying is that we don’t treat this team as training wheels, as a club house we go to occasionally when we aren’t too busy.”

“We do take this seriously.” Kaldur assured me. “This opportunity is something we have been asking for for a long time.”

“That’s good.” I said with a nod. “But treating it like a springboard for the next big thing is a waste of potential, especially when the team represents a concept very different from the Justice League.”

“How so?” Kaldur asked, his eyebrow raised.

“The members of the League are almost all solo acts first, team players second. But this team is already set up to become the opposite. I’m proposing we use this opportunity to create a different dynamic. A group that is a team first, second and third.”

Robin and Kaldur looked at each other before looking back at me. Wally missed the interaction and just shook his head.

“Each of you has a mentor, one you know almost as well as you know yourself. Aren’t you much more effective because of that? Imagine a team made up of people who trusted, understood and worked together as well as you work with your mentors. Imagine a team, made up of people who know each other that well, fighting together.

“That takes years of training.” Robin pointed out, crossing his arms. “That sort of connection, that sort of bond is not something you can do overnight.”

“And? They clearly intend for this team to be a long term thing.” I explained passionately. “So let’s double down. Let’s put in that time, forge that bond. Imagine what kind of team we

could be in a few years. Given some time to find our dynamic, we could work together to stop threats on the same level as the League. And that would only be the beginning.”

As I looked across the table, from Kaldur to Robin to Wally, I could see the slowly exposed hunger in their eyes. None of them were strangers to hard work, and to be offered a way to achieve their dream, a way to stand alongside their heroes, their mentors, to do good on their level...

“We have an opportunity here, an opportunity to set the foundation for a group that could one day stand tall alongside the Justice League, not behind it. Sure we are young, and we have a lot to learn. But that doesn’t mean we can’t forge something great, something powerful, something good.”

“A new team of heroes.” Kaldur said, almost to himself. “One based on teamwork and cooperation.”

“A team that knows how to work together, how to leverage each other's powers and cover for weaknesses.” Robin continued in the same quiet voice.

“Yes, exactly!” I said passionately. “Given time, hard work and proper training, that is what this team could be.”

For a moment the ship's interior was quiet. The three younger heroes, the ones I really had to convince, shared a long look. I could feel M’gann’s nervous anticipation as we waited, until finally they looked back at me. Robin leaned forward with his self assured grin, his elbows on the table, steepling his hands together.

“Tell us more.”