

Artemis was a frequent guest over the next few days, all the way up until she officially joined the team. We didn't quite have an official joining ceremony yet, but we celebrated by taking her out for burritos and riding Bioship into space. The young archer sat in her chair for a full ten minutes without saying anything, the longest reaction so far. Even after recovering, she continued to take peaks at the view throughout the night. Not that everyone else wasn't doing the same thing, of course.

During our celebration, she announced her code name.

"Originally, I was just going to go by Artemis," She admitted. "There isn't much point in me trying to hide my identity, at least not while I'm working."

"Why not?" Tora asked.

"Because the League of Shadows and a few other villains already know me on sight," She explained. "I could mix up my costume, modulate my voice, use makeup, and even change my hair, but I would still be the teenage, female hero using a bow. Not exactly hard to pick from a line-up."

"So why the change of heart?" M'gann asked.

"I... well, it feels more like a choice, I guess," She tried to explain. "I want to leave what I was behind, so I can move on to better things. I deserve to leave that behind, and with Mom and me already changing so much, this seemed like the perfect opportunity."

"You have a reverse secret identity," Wally pointed out, Robin laughing beside when he realized what he meant. "Your hero identity is open, while your civilian identity is what's secret!"

Artemis had filled us in on what she and her mother were going through. Jade's attempt at recruitment had spooked the Justice League enough that they were moving them across the country and giving them entirely new identities. Paula's condition was the most challenging part to hide, but Artemis had already admitted, with a hopeful smile, that the League had something in the works to potentially solve that.

"I guess?" The archer responded. "As long as it keeps the Shadows off my back and away from Mom, I don't really care."

"So... what's your code name?" I asked, realizing that we had gotten distracted.

"Oh! It's Snapshot," She answered, doing her best to look confident. "I wanted something snappy but not overly aggressive. Plus, my dad hated when I would take quick, rapid shots. He would always say that an... that an assassin was about precision. If I was firing quickly, then I had already failed. So it's a slap to him as well."

"I like it," Tora said with a smile, the rest of us nodding in agreement.

"It's light but expressive, has to do with your talents," Robin added. "Assuming you can actually make snapshots..."

"I can, which pissed my dad off even more," She responded with a smirk.

"Well, Snapshot, welcome to the team," I said, getting a serious nod in return.

We spent the rest of the afternoon discussing the team's future and several other things, most of them causal. I was happy to see that Artemis was getting along well with everyone, especially M'gann, and Tora. M'gann tended to be a bit naive, especially with human culture. I was helping her where I could, but having a tough, street-smart friend like Artemis made me feel much better. Tora helped as well, but she was also new to her surroundings and lacked the solid confidence that Artemis usually had.

When we finally landed back at the base, Artemis left to help her Mom, as they were still busy from the move. Artemis would not be living in the cave, as she didn't want to leave her Mom alone.

When we weren't celebrating our new member, we were working our way through lessons from our instructors. Colonel Clayden and Ghost readily welcomed Artemis to our lessons, working her into their plans without a hitch. Artemis already had training with a lot of what Clayden was teaching, but as I had pointed out before, part of the training was not just learning, but learning together in a group. We were attempting to forge a solid team that could work together smoothly, and training together was a significant portion of that.

Artemis's first time meeting Ghost was a surprise as well, as Artemis had actually heard of her. The League of Shadows had attempted to recruit her several times, and when that failed, tried to have her killed so they could steal her tech. The fact that Ghost laughed and made an off-handed comment about the best assassins in the world being mildly entertaining went a long way in explaining why those attempts hadn't worked.

The general atmosphere at the cave was excited and eager, each of us looking forward to improving ourselves and working on the team. We all worked hard in our own wheelhouses, including Artemis, who had taken a few lessons from Green Arrow and was working on getting what she had learned into her general repertoire. Green Arrow was also funding her equipment, ensuring she had access to all the trick arrows she wanted, save some of the more lethal options he only used in extreme circumstances.

I also made an official request for access to martial arts training for Tora, Myself, and Kyle. Tora specifically wanted to be trained to tonfas, as they were a potent but non-lethal melee option should her powers not be sufficient. Between my earthbending knowledge and Steve Rogers' old instincts, my fighting skills were nothing to sneeze at, but like Kyle, I wanted to learn

a style completely rather than rely on the jumble of useful moves and techniques that had been jammed into my head.

I spent plenty of time working on my metal bending, and by the time Artemis had officially joined the team, I had finally reached the point where I could form cables out of meteorite metal. I replaced the cables in my costume with meteorite metal, which I could now manipulate quickly and precisely. Putting off my training in the cables was a good call, as the small amount of control I had developed before translated into a much more functional level.

My next hurdle was to move my metal bending away from meteorite metal. I could already feel metal better as a whole, at least when I concentrated, but I was still struggling to get more than a tremor or two from refined, Earth-mined metal. I already had some materials to practice on, but after nearly a week of constant training, it was time for a break. I had been working hard, and M'gann wanted me to take it easy for a few nights.

I had a hard time saying no to her.

Two days after Artemis officially joined the team, Batman stopped by the cave to offer a new assignment. We would be patrolling Central City, something I had been asking for for a while now. For three days we would patrol the city from ten at night to six in the morning, covering an evening shift. Central City wasn't exactly crime-ridden, at least not compared to places like Gotham or New York. That said, Batman did expect us to see plenty of small-time arrests as long as we did our jobs.

The day before our first patrol, we gathered in one of the cave's meeting rooms to talk about what exactly it would look like. Kyle, M'gann, and I had little to no experience with city patrols, while Tora and Artemis were amateurs. We would be relying heavily on Wally, Kaldur, and Robin's experience, although they freely admitted that working in such a large team to patrol was not something they had experience in.

We quickly determined that it was pointless to stay in one group, as any one of us was more than a match for any minor criminal. After some discussion, we decided to break off into groups of two. The groups, Robin and Tora, Kid Flash and Superboy, Artemis and Kaldur, and finally, M'gann and I would be paired off, but we wouldn't just be running around at random.

Tora had the brilliant idea of using Bioship as a way to deploy all around the city at a speed that generally only Wally or Kyle could match. Bioship would tune into the police frequency and we would respond as needed. Further, M'gann could interface with Bioship to lightly scan a much wider area for worrying emotions, such as consistent panic or extremely high levels of fear.

"It would speed up our deployment time considerably," Robin agreed after Tora managed to get through her idea, blushing by the end of it. "But I'm worried about the crimes that don't get reported until it's too late or not at all. If we are all sitting in Bioship, we will miss those."

“So let's split it fifty-fifty,” Wally suggested. “Superboy and I can get around the city pretty fast. And if you and Tora are on your motorcycle, you can patrol a large chunk of downtown. Meanwhile-”

“The remaining members can stay behind to respond to calls to the police or anyone M'gann's senses pick up.” Kaldur finished.

We discussed what kind of things we could expect before eventually suiting up. Artemis was wearing her new outfit, which covered her much better than her previous uniform. It had been an interesting discussion that Kaldur and I had eventually won that convinced her to finally change her look.

Her new suit still put flexibility and freedom of movement ahead of durability and protection, but it was made of the same material as Robin's uniform, with similar plates to cover vital areas. It followed similar design and color patterns as her original, with the spots that had originally shown skin covered by black, stabproof, and bullet-resistant material.

I was *still* working on getting everyone to wear helmets.

We all hopped on board Bioship, including Robin with his motorcycle, before leaving the cave behind. M'gann noted that between all eight of us and the motorcycle, Bioship was just about at maximum capacity for this configuration. When Kaldur asked about different configurations, M'gann explained that she could shift into a form that could lift more, but only as exterior cargo. Basically, she would sacrifice amenities for most passengers, as well as several other things to boost power to engines and antigrav.

We arrived at Central City not long after we left, dropping off the two patrol teams at their locations. When Robin and Tora stepped out of Bioship, M'gann guided her back up and began making low circles around the unpatrolled areas, and used the interplanetary ship to listen in on the police radio and keep in contact with the two patrolling pairs. It didn't take long for them to find trouble between Robin's honed instincts and Superboy's super senses.

It seemed like fate was determined to put us to the test immediately because we weren't even on the second tour around the city when a call came in. A fire in an apartment building had already spiraled out of control.

“An out-of-control fire with a could-have-been fire bender, a Martian, an Atlantean, and a ranger,” I said, rubbing my face. “No one say anything, I don't think the city could survive tempting Murphy after this.”

“M'gann, bring Bioship in closer. With her sensors and your psychic senses, you are overwatch,” Kaldur said, taking command smoothly, standing even as the ship started to move. “Bring up the same map we used when monitoring Red Arrow. Then link us up.”

As we closed in on the apartment building, smoke pouring out from the upper floors, the familiar wireframe mapping system came onto a screen in front of M'gann, who nodded to Kaldur. Despite being across the street from it, she was still clearly nervous about the fire. Bioship landed on the ground, and Kaldur, Artemis, and I quickly ran down the ship's ramp, which quickly closed up as they lifted off the ground again.

People were still pouring out of the building, most of them moving far enough away from it to be safe, but some were still way too close. A few even spotted us, pointing and whispering about the costumed heroes.

*"M'gann, where is the fire located?" Kaldur asked mentally.*

*"Heat sensors say the fire starts at the fourth floor and is spreading upwards,"* She responded. *"The lower floors are almost completely evacuated, Bioship is picking up six life signs above the fire line. They are cut off."*

*"Copy that. Alright, everyone to the top floor."* Kaldur ordered, pulling out his grappling launcher as we all stepped closer to the building.

Artemis was doing the same, but I simply stepped closer to the building. While my teammates fired off their hooks and activated them, I flicked out my arm, and my cables shot out from my gloves. A design stolen from the metal bending police from the cartoons and modified to fit my own style, a thick wire fired off about two stories up, the head connecting with the stonework of the building and melding into it with a twist of my arm.

I started reeling myself upwards, flying up the side of the building just as fast as my teammates. As I reached the point where my cable had stuck, I flicked my arm, the metal bolt pulling free with minor damage. My momentum carried me up for another few seconds, allowing me to flick out my left hand, latch on another cable, and reel myself in. Each time I switched from right to left, I spent just a second or two wholly disconnected from everything. It was fast, relatively easy, and probably the scariest thing I had ever done in either of my lives.

I was terrified of what it would be like when my range was greater than two floors.

We reached the roof in record time, and Kaldur immediately headed to the entrance to the building. He sliced the lock with a water blade and pried the door open, smoke immediately pouring out of the stairwell.

*"Masks on!"* He mentally ordered, as I was already putting mine on.

It was a black, foldable mask that covered the bottom half of our faces. I included it in our standard equipment because it not only obscured our faces and filtered out smoke and other particulates but also neutralized most airborne knockout gasses. Unfortunately, it had a

time limit. The more contaminated and particulate in the air, the quicker its filters would need replacing. In smoke this thick, we had ten minutes, maybe fifteen.

The three of us immediately headed into the smoky stairwell, M'gann guiding us. We cleared several floors and gathered all but two of the remaining people who had been trapped by the rising fire. At Kaldur's orders, Artemis guided everyone up to the roof, where Bioship picked them up. I was idly wondering why Bioship hadn't just dropped us off on the roof in the first place when Kaldur and I ran almost face-first into the climbing fire as we opened the door to the stairwell to the next floor down.

*"M'gann, the fires reached us. Are there any more people below us?"* Kaldur asked as we were both forced to take steps back, the thick black smoke and constant heat hitting us like a physical wall.

*"Yes! Two more on the floor below you!"* She responded. *"Both in the southernmost corner of the building!"*

For a moment, Kaldur looked as if he was going to step into the heat, even though I could tell he was already weakening. Hell, I could feel myself starting to struggle, and I wasn't nearly as affected by it as him.

*"Kaldur, you can't go down there! I won't be able to drag you and two civilians out!"* I argued, hand on his shoulder. *"Go to the roof! If you're out of the way, I can get creative!"*

He gave me a long look before nodding and gathering the water from his pack. He covered me with it before turning around and running back up the stairs to the roof. I could feel M'gann's worry bleeding through our connection. I shook my head and focused, still fighting through the heat and dragging my hand along the wall, the drywall and concrete crumbling and forming around me, solidifying into a gray stone and gravel armor around me. I knew that burning gypsum was irritating and toxic, but if we reached the point that I was burning that would be the least of my problems.

As I reached the southernmost corner of the hallway, I jumped, hammering the floor with a double-heel dive. My energy exploded outwards under my feet, the concrete structure under the floor liquifying and spreading, crushing metal rebar and flooring out of the way, letting me punch through to the floor below.

The entire hallway was on fire, and for a moment, I was lost. I could feel the heat around me, but thankfully the armor was buying me time. M'gann must have sensed my disorientation because she gave me a mental push.

*"To your left, Warren!"* She mentally shouted, dragging me back to reality. *"They are to your left!"*

I stumbled through the flames and found a door already charred with rising flames. I slammed into it, turning the remaining unburned wood into splinters. Inside was choked with smoke and was dangerously hot, but lacked any fire.

*“Walk straight ahead. They are in there!”*

I followed M’gann’s instructions, shoulder-checking through another door. The smoke was less dense here, most likely because of the open windows. There were two young girls, one nine or ten, the other a toddler. They were barely moving, leaning out the window, trying to get fresh air. The older was cognizant enough to turn and spot me, her eyes widening in fear. I dropped my armor, letting it collapse around me to the floor, knowing that the exterior was probably hot enough to burn them at this point.

“My name is Skarn. I’m a hero, here to get you out,” I said before realizing there was very little chance that she even understood me at this point.

I shook my head and walked across the room, picking them up. I knew we couldn’t get out the way I came in, it was too hot to walk through unprotected, and the smoke was even worse. We wouldn’t make it all the way up to the roof anyway.

*“M’gann, can you pick me up from the window in front of me?”*

*“I... I don’t think so. Bioship is fighting me!”* M’gann explained, sounding frantic. *“She doesn’t want to get closer to the fire!”*

The smoke was getting worse, and the glow of the fire was starting to engulf the room I had entered from. I cursed loudly before whipping out more cable, wrapping it around myself and the two young girls. It wasn’t gentle, but it was better than the alternative.

Keenly aware that every second I spent here was another second they were choking on smoke, I walked to the furthest corner of the room, charged the window, and leaped out of it, bending the concrete under the floor to boost myself as hard as I could.

And I was immediately glad I did, as the building under me was engulfed in flames, already licking around the open window. Had I tried to rappel down the side, I would have landed in the fire. Instead, I focused on the building opposite the apartment, punching out another cable and anchoring it as high as possible. I punched out with my other hand, catching the apartment building, a floor above where I had just come from. I then slowly lowered us to the street below, strung up between both buildings.

I landed on the ground softly, having just enough cable to reach. I quickly undid the impromptu cable straps to free the two young girls, passing them off to two waiting paramedics.