

*“Robin, go high, barrage him with whatever you can, focus on keeping him distracted and his eyes on us. Miss Martian, Skarn, flank and hit him from the back left while he is distracted. Kid Flash, Superboy, come in from the front and left, we are the distraction!”*

With a pause we absorbed the idea, before Aqualad gave us a mental shout to begin. With an angry roar, Superboy leapt forward, fist raised as he soared towards the mechanical humanoid, drawing as much attention to himself as possible. At the same time Aqualad charged as well, hands crackling with electricity loud enough to easily be heard over the whipping wind. Kid Flash blurred and went left, speeding along a walkway, picking up scraps of debris and hurling them at the red and black villain. A few of the chunks of stone and metal actually hit him before he could react.

“Brutes and poor imitations, the lot of you,” He said dismissively, waving his hands back and forth, blasting torrents of air and small twisters at my teammates.

Superboy was caught first and got blasted up and over the humanoid, smashing into the all over another wide open door, cracking the concrete and falling down to smash into the ground. Aqualad was next, a twister spinning him off his feet and into a concrete pillar to the left, his shoulder breaking off a sizable chunk. Luckily Kid Flash was able to dodge the attacks sent his way, though he had to sprint away and back out the door to do so.

Meanwhile, while the robotic construct was focusing on the other three, Miss Martian had swooped down and picked me up, flying low around the edge of the building, using her camouflage ability to mostly hide herself. She dropped me when I saw we were in his blindspot, or at least where one would be if he was human. I used the roll from the fall and the momentum to drop into my newly learned ability, the Earthen Wave, to come around one of the large concrete supports. Meanwhile above me I could feel M’gann, pulling off a long bar of metal from the railing, already partially pulled off by Mr Twisters attacks, and holding it ready with her telekinesis.

For a moment the robotic villain looked like he was turning towards me, but a birdarang whistled down from the rafters from the opposite direction, forcing him to turn and slap it away with a blast of air.

“You are getting annoying brats, what-” He started, only to cut himself off with a strangled shout as I jumped, slammed my foot into the ground and shot a pointed spear of rock up from behind him and through his metallic leg, completely destroying the mechanical knee.

“Where-!”

He shouted, trying to turn and face me before M’gann slammed her own spear through his shoulder, sending out a shower of sparks as she damaged one of his air blasters.

“AARGGHH!” The now enraged robot shouted, throwing his arms out and pushing out a massive blast of air that swirled and spun around him. All of us were picked up and thrown, slamming into the sides of the building, the pillars and the ground. Luckily Robin managed to keep from falling from the rafters.

“You brats! Thugs and underhanded tricksters!” Mr Twister shouted at us, still battering us with increasingly brutal winds. “Fine! If you’re so desperate to be taken seriously I will oblige!”

He swung his hand around, blasting twisters and spinning whirling dervishes at us, showing a surprisingly high level of control as each of us, save Robin, was lifted and half carried half thrown out of the building. M’gann managed to recover with her flight but Wally, Kaldur, Kyle and I all slammed, tumbled and rolled along the ground before coming to a stop a full fifty feet from the building. I turned to look back just in time to watch Robin bust through one of the already broken windows at the top floor, Using a grappling hook to swing towards the ground, running to where we all laid.

“Guys, are you alright?” He called as we got closer, helping Kid Flash to his feet.

M’gann flew down to help me, her worry coming in clear through our connection. I reassured her, showing off the soreness mentally to show her there was nothing seriously wrong.

“I believe we are all fine,” Kaldur responded, Superboy helping him to his feet.

“We got him good!” Wally said excitedly, before turning to me. “But why didn’t you go for a kill shot? He is just a robot.”

“And so is Red Tornado.” I responded with a shrug. “He is way too life-like to risk killing a possibly sentient construct without knowing for sure. Now focus up, here he comes.”

The obviously damaged robot hovered a few feet off of the ground, its left leg hanging down uselessly, a chunk of my rock spear still lodged in its kneecap. Its damaged shoulder sparked occasionally but the metal rod had been pulled out, probably doing more damage than it had going in in the process.

“What’s the plan?” Robin asked, clearly directed at Kaldur.

“Skarn, can you...?”

“If I get a bit closer to him, absolutely.” I said, already picking up what he was suggesting. “How brutal should I be?”

“He needs to be taken down. Hopefully if he is sentient we can repair him.” Kaldur said with an element of unhappy acceptance in his voice before it shifted back to projected

confidence. *“Alright, new strategy, get Skarn as close as possible! Kid Flash, in fifteen seconds zip back and carry him as close as you can. Everyone else, spread out and keep him busy!”*

Mr Twister floated closer, before rising up into the air, still very much out of my range. Instead of talking he simply raised his arms. Air currents whipped faster and the sky started to turn dark. As the team quickly spread out, lighting started to crackle in the growing storm, slamming into the ground around us. M’gann started hurling chunks of rock she pulled from the ground, while Superboy leapt and attacked him directly, once again putting on a distracting show. Robin threw his birdirangs, the devices set to explode on a much shorter timer so they couldn’t be thrown back at anyone.

The lighting was getting more intense, crashing into the ground and sending chunks of earth flying. One slammed into superboy, sending him spinning away, hitting a tree and cracking it in half, the top falling over him.

*“Now!”* Aqualad called out.

Kid Flash zipped away, dodging a blast of lightning before he was next to me, his hands on my lower back and head.

*“Don’t tense!”* He said through our link, zipping away before I had a chance to respond.

Suddenly, at a blur that stung my eyes, we were behind the metal humanoid, who was turning to follow our movement. His hand was out, already preparing to blast us away when I used the stone beneath me to launch myself even closer in almost a short hop. I sank down into the ground when I landed, boosting myself up with a pillar of stone. Using the momentum and upward movement I reached out with my energy, struggling for a moment before finally latching on, my energy locking into the bowling ball sized chunk of rock still inside his leg.

Following my upward momentum I gripped the stone in my energy and thrust it upward, crafting it into a more angular spear like shaft of stone. It crunched up and through Mr Twister leg, then his torso, piercing through whatever important mechanical parts were inside before punching up through his shoulder. I kept pouring energy into it, dumping a significant amount of my remaining power into the rock, recalling a warning my mentor had given me.

With a resounding crack the chunk detonated, chunks of rock hammered into the robots head, shoulder, and pack, denting and cutting into the top levels of covering. The blue connecting wires were eviscerated on the left side, cutting off power to his arm gauntlet.

The hovering construct faltered, the lightning fading as sparks flew widely from the blue wire and the massive hole on its shoulder and its utterly destroyed leg. He continued to move though, trying to raise his arm...

Only for Superboy's leaping frame to slam into him and grab onto it, planting both his boots on his chest and shouting in exertion as he pulled the arm clean off of his shoulder. M'gann caught me with her TK as I fell, flying beside me as she lowered us to the ground, Superboy falling down past us. He landed on his feet with a crash, immediately spinning and hurling the sparking arm back up at the humanoid robot with another shout. The arm flew through the air and slammed into the black and red robot's chest, caving it in slightly.

Mr Twister faltered once more before slumping in the air, its engines and power failing. It fell from the sky, hurtling towards the ground and slamming into it, creating a shallow crater, where he lay unmoving.

*"...Did we get him?"* Wally asked as everyone stopped moving, waiting for the machine to do something

After a full thirty seconds we started making our way to the construct, who's damaged chest suddenly cracked open and a person came stumbling out. Well it looked like a person, save for the fact that its left leg and arm had been completely destroyed by my chunk of rock, revealing not meat and bones but more metal and wires, which sparked and leaked some sort of black oil.

"That was hardly sporting." He called out, rolling off the broken remnants of his suit and falling to the ground.

"You put innocent people in danger." Kaldur responded, taking a step forward. "A fair fight is more than you deserve."

"Fine, I suppose that's true enough." He admitted, still leaning back on the half crushed chest of his suit.

"Why did you want to meet a hero so much?" I asked, keeping an eye on the robotic suit, worried it might have some final surprises for us.

"A challenge of course," He explained. "I wanted to test my metal against others as powerful as me."

*"...Anyone else not buying that?"* I asked. *"He doesn't seem crazy enough for the whole 'worthy opponent' shtick'."*

*"His suit and powers look a lot like Red Tornado too."* Robin pointed out. *"And today is the first time in weeks that he isn't at Mount Justice."*

*"So we have a fully robotic villain, who looks a lot like the robotic hero we know, and attacks the place where that hero usually is while looking to "challenge" a hero."* Wally listed off

before sarcastically continuing. *"I don't know what you guys are talking about, I don't see anything weird here."*

*"We need to set up a perimeter and keep the civilians back."* Kaldur said, taking a step back and gesturing for the rest to follow. *"Robin, call the police. They are probably already on the way but notify them that we-"*

"Are you kids going to say anything, or just silently stare for a while?" The robotic man asked, sitting up slightly. He squinted for a moment before scowling, looking away. "Fine, this was pointless at this point anyway."

A soft beeping started to grow louder and louder, emanating from both the robotic man and his suit. We all shared a look before our eyes widened. I stepped up and slammed my foot down, shifted my hands up and to the left, pushing three solid walls of rock up around the large robotic frame before M'gann snagged me in her telekinesis and pulled me away, only managing to pull me a dozen feet before the wreck and its pilot detonated, a blast of explosive force and fire getting forced up by the thick slabs of stone I had just summoned.

When it was over the stone slabs were cracked but whole. I stood up from where M'gann had pulled me, not far from where Kyle lay, shielding Robin with his body. Kaldur and Wally were almost fifty feet away from us, Wally having grabbed Kaldur and ran when the Atlantean had attempted to do the same for him.

We all slowly got closer, eyes and ears peeled for any sort of secondary reprisal. I slowly moved my arms in a series of chopping and pushing motions, the stone slabs falling back down away from where the mechanical man had been. The explosion had carved out the insides of the enclosed space, seared it black with soot and dug a crater in the ground. All that remained of the metallic wreck was small chunks of charred metal and some sort of melted plastic.

"Oh, look!" Wall shouted, zipping away to catch the fluttering remains of the humanoid machine's ragged scarf, singed and burnt around the edges. "Souvenir!"

*"I have to admit, that scarf looked pretty cool. Should I get one for my costume?"* I asked half joking, directing my question to M'gann, who stepped closer and leaned on me.

*"No, you have a handsome smile."* She said with a teasing undercurrent, looking up at me with a smile of her own. *"Covering it up would be a shame."*

*"Uh... you guys realize we can still hear you right?"* Robin asked.

Both our eyes went wide and M'gann blushed deeply, putting her head on my chest like she was attempting to hide from the others. I could feel the sensation of us being disconnected from the group as she radiated embarrassment.

“...Right... Well, let's hope our pizza is still at the shop.” I said, with an awkward cough, getting a laugh from Robin and a smile from Kaldur.

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We held off on contacting the League as the problem was already solved and there wasn't much they would be able to do now anyway. The police secured the situation, shutting down the powerplant and the outside area until it could be cleared both by the bomb experts from a neighboring, larger town, as well as the Justice League. We were interviewed extensively, though politely, as the local police force was familiar with the former sidekicks, as well as how the general situation of superhero fights went, mostly because of the close proximity to Mount Justice.

Just about three hours after the fight ended we returned to the cave, tired, sore and carrying several boxes of room temperature pizza, which M'gann started reheating in the oven. Wally didn't really feel like waiting and had already eaten his first box. Once we were all sitting down at the dining room table I let out a long breath.

“That... went a lot better than it had any right too.” I said, getting a nod from Robin and Kaldur.

“He was a powerful opponent,” Kaldur agreed. “And I do believe there was something duplicitous going on with him as well.”

“He was obviously trying to match himself up with Red Tornado.” Robin added. “He clearly came here specifically to get his attention.”

“It kinda looks like that, yeah.”

“But why?” Kyle asked, accepting a floating plate of warm pizza, a few others getting passed to everyone else. “And why blow himself up like that?”

“He was probably not actually here, either remote controlling him or maybe even a spun off instance of an AI.” Robin suggested. “But the self-destruct was almost definitely to hide a secret. The only ones I can think of would be who he really was or something we might find by examining the body or the suit, but it could be anything.”

“Why was there even a suit then?” M'gann asked, wiping her mouth with a napkin. “If it was all just remote controlled, then why have a robotic person inside of another robot.”

“That kind of stuff happens,” Robin answered with a shrug. “Tech based supervillains build weird stuff a lot, missing simple solutions all the time. I mean half of them would be multi-billionaires if they just marketed their stuff instead of trying to be villains. We tried pointing it out but...”

“It’s probably narcissism.” I said, getting a nod and point of agreement from Robin as he took another bite of pizza. “It’s my tech, no one else can touch it, only I’m smart enough to use it properly, and my solutions are perfect, what’s the KISS rule?”

“KISS?” Wally asked, already eating the third slice of his second box.

“Keep It Simple Stupid.” Kyle said, getting a few looks, shrugging in response. “Lily says it all the time.”

The group talked for another hour or so, finishing our dinner. Wally was about to head out for the day when we heard the teleporter activate and announce that Batman had arrived. We all shared looks, suddenly nervous. I could feel it creeping up on me before I took a long deep breath in and out.

“We did good work today.” I said, catching their attention. “We worked together, Kaldur was an excellent leader and we took down the bad guy. No one was hurt outside of a few bumps and scrapes and civilian casualties were almost zero, where zero after we arrived. We have no need to be nervous.”

Everyone stood a bit straighter as I talked, and together as one we walked out of the kitchen to greet the hero, who was accessing the main holo projected computer. On screen were a few clips of our fighting as well as some news reports. The clips seemed to have come from security cameras, while the news reports were focused on our final place of battle and the crater where the mechanical man had destroyed himself. Finally Batman turned around and faced us, his emotionless face giving nothing away.

“I see you have been busy.” He said simply, staring at each of us with a stern and expressionless face before eventually nodding. “Good work. If the Justice League needed any more proof that your idea of a team focused hero group would be a good investment, we certainly have it now.”

Wally and Robin shared a high five, while I could feel the shift of M’gann’s emotions from nervousness to excitement to happiness as Batman talked. I couldn’t help but smile as well.

“Now, let’s talk about the Justice League’s decision...”