

We spent two days recovering from our latest mission and the patrols beforehand. We all felt that even a singular full day off was overkill, especially considering that our given career paths would require us to keep very flexible hours and be prepared to work through tiredness and fatigue. Despite that, Batman insisted that we take two days off to recover. Rather than complain and try to undermine his orders, we decided to pick our battles. The first day was boring, but relaxing, which was frankly just what we needed. We spent the day hanging out around the cave, relaxing and unwinding from our mission.

In the early afternoon of the second day, Batman stopped by to debrief us on our investigation and patrols. He congratulated us on a job well done and explained that the League was more than proud of our progress and our results. He then explained that Muaser had escaped from custody early that morning during a routine transfer between holding cells.

Apparently, during the transfer, the melodramatic arms dealer started laughing maniacally. When the police officers asked what was going on, the man's muscles began to swell, growing large and strong enough to snap his handcuffs and throw his escorts through two separate walls and escape through a second-story window.

"Further analysis of security footage found this," Batman said, accessing a video through the base's projected computer.

The video showed Mauser, held by two officers, laughing like a madman. One of the officers shook him a bit, and Mauser reacted by saying something. He then did something with his tongue before biting down harshly. His muscles began to swell and bulge, though not to an inhuman degree. He snapped the handcuffs on his arm with some visible effort before picking up and throwing the first officer through a nearby wall. The footage cut out after that.

"A fake tooth?" Robin asked. "They didn't check him for that?"

"We think that the same officer that was bribed to keep the original investigation off course also altered his file," Batman explained. "As far as the current officers knew, he was just some guy selling guns who got lucky a few times and managed to avoid arrest, rather than someone who had gotten away with everything he had. There is an investigation going to see if any more criminals are being undersold with a similar method.

"What the heck did he have in the fake tooth?" Wally asked

"There is no way to be sure, but I believe it was a small dose of Venom," Batman responded. "Enough to nearly double his strength for just over three minutes,"

"Venom? How did he get that?" Kyle asked. "We shut down the production facilities, didn't we?"

"More than likely, he purchased this before the Santa Prisca mission," Batman responded. "That said, Venom is relatively stable, any unused product will still be good for another six or seven months."

"Dammit. Any leads on finding him again?"

"Yes, a security camera spotted him driving a stolen vehicle out of Central City limits," The cape crusader responded. "In all likelihood, he has gone to ground."

"And what about the genius guy?" Tora asked. "Any trouble with him?"

"None. He continues to sob in the corner of his cell, shouting to anyone that walks by that it is, in fact, 'not fair,'" Batman explained, getting chuckles from everyone. "I want everyone to understand that Mauser's escape does not change the fact that the New Titans did an excellent job, both with the patrol schedule and the subsequent investigation. You can expect similar investigations to be added to the mission profiles we look at giving you for training and experience."

We discussed the mission some more, the experienced hero going through our raid of the warehouse, and our patrol method. After he was done, he and Robin left for some one-on-one mentor and protege time while the rest of us headed to the kitchen. M'gann and I made some quick lunches for everyone, including a large stack of extra sandwiches for Wally.

"This sucks," Wally said after finishing his second sandwich. "That creepy guy escaped because no one thought to check his teeth?"

"Really?" I asked, looking at him with a raised eyebrow. "Did you think to check his teeth?"

He opened his mouth to retort, only to wilt slightly and shake his head. We continued to eat, chatting about the mission. About fifteen minutes later, we had all moved into the central area of the cave, each of us doing some light practice with our downtime. Artemis had set up some targets and was working on her rapid-fire accuracy, while Tora was working on her melting and freezing. She still hadn't cracked the secret to her ability, but she still claimed there was one and that she was close. I was working quietly on my refined metal bending in the main cave area, and M'gann was working on her fine Telekinesis control, floating two dozen small objects around in the air. After about thirty minutes of this, the Zeta-Tube kicked on.

"Recognized. The Flash. 03. Kent Nelson. A-04"

All of us turned to the new arrivals, the new name catching our attention. Wally zipped from where he was munching on a bag of chips, stopping a few feet away from the Zeta tube, prepared to greet his mentor.

"Flash, what's up?" He asked, looking at the other two men.

The Flash was dressed in his usual uniform, the scarlet speedster stepping forward to hug his protege. The other man was dressed more casually, his only stand out being a brass-handled cane. Of course, considering his old age, that wasn't really that strange. I did recognize his name from my constant research on this world's heavy hitters. At one point, he was part of the Justice Society of America, during which he wore the Helmet of Fate, letting the Lord of Order residing inside to possess and work through him.

"We have some good news," He said, his smile getting bigger as he put his hand on Wally's shoulder. "We have made some surprising progress about the source of our speed."

"Wait, what?" Wally responded, his eyes going wide. "Are you serious? How?"

"Well, a little while ago, your Base Leader Skarn and Miss Martian called Batman, wondering if Amazo's, that's the android the League fought with the ability to copy powers, the one we used to set a trap for Ivo, if the android's ability could be used to analyze our speed, and potentially come up with a solution to your problem."

The kid speedster looked over at us, then the rest of the team, as we gathered around him, sensing something important was happening. After a moment, he looked back at his mentor.

"Why didn't you say anything?" He asked. "I mean-"

"KF, this was about as long of a shot as you could get," He explained, his solemn tone cut with his smile. "I know it's not exactly a nice thing to hear, but we didn't want to get your hopes up. Especially since the analysis of the android didn't actually lead anywhere. What it did do was call attention to an entire avenue of investigation that we had missed. We never considered what magic could-"

"Really? Magic?" Wally said, trying to sound flippant, but we could all hear the vulnerability he was covering. "Do you really think-"

"Wally. It worked!" Flash said, cutting him off with a slip-up of his name. "Kent here ran some... What was it you called them?"

"Just call em magical scans," The older man said with a smirk. "No reason to be specific if your audience doesn't give a tick."

"Right, fair enough. Kent Nelson, he knows magic like Batman knows being paranoid. He ran some scans and... Kent?"

"Your mentor has an open-ended aetheric binding to an elemental plane, one tied to the basic concept of speed, momentum, and even time," Kent explained, stepping forward, his cane

tapping the stone floor. "Normally, that would be reason enough to call in the calvary. Last time I saw anything even remotely like this was in Louisiana, and the results weren't nearly this pretty."

"W-what?" Kid Flash asked, unable to really process what was being said to him.

"But, considering your mentor isn't locked in an endless time bubble, or moving too fast for us to perceive, infinity stuck between seconds, or unable to move because his momentum was conceptually stripped of him, I have to assume that whatever ruling consciousness resides in this conceptual dimension has approved of this connection. It would have to for him to be using his abilities like he does, with no repercussions."

"Repercussions like a massively increased appetite?" Wally asked, only for Kent to laugh.

"I'm afraid not, kiddo. The forces we are dealing with are a bit past an annoying but manageable inconvenience," He assured him, shaking his head. "We are talking fire and brimstone, the kind of tortuous punishments you read about in Greek mythology. The only way your appetite might be on purpose is if it was the prelude to something else. Maybe a constant hunger, but any food you put in your mouth was fast-forwarded through time until it was rotten."

Wally let out an audible gulp, looking down at the mostly empty bag of chips he was still carrying. Before he could spiral any further, Kent reached forward and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Bottom line, kiddo, all that just means that the primary consciousness of the plane you two tied into isn't actively fighting the connection because you both would have lost. Most likely in a biblical fashion." The older man explained, though Kid Flash clearly wasn't following. "Geez, Kiddo. Alright, think of this plane as a power plant, providing you with the energy for you and the Flash to do your thing. We know the power plant isn't the problem because energy is coming through, and nothing is on fire. Which means..."

"The problem is on my end." Kid Flash said, his voice warbling just the barest amount. "Does... does that mean I'm the problem?"

"...I won't lie to you, kid. There's a chance that's true," The practiced magic user admitted. "One of the first things you learn practicing magic is that all the practice In the world can't make a lead brick float. If you don't got it, you don't got it. That said, the fact that you are using this energy so well despite your issue makes me think you have a pretty good affinity for this energy source. If that's the case, the problem being on this side of the link is the best news I think you've heard in a long time."

"Why...." Wally started to ask before trailing off, his eyes going wide and a smile forming on his face. "If the problem is on my side, then we can fix it on our own!"

"Bingo kid, that's exactly what it means," Kent confirmed with a smile, patting Wally's shoulder. "I need to get you to the Tower of Fate so I can do some more mumbo jumbo scans before I can know for sure, but I'm confident we can at least identify the problem. With a little luck, we can use that to figure out a solution."

"Why? Can't you just wave your wand and say a few twisted Latin words?" Wally asked, his excitement at having a possible solution to his long-standing issue making it hard to tell if he was being deliberately flippant or just being an idiot. "I'll even run to the nearest butcher and pick up some chicken bones."

I was about to open my mouth to reprimand Wally when Kent Nelson started to laugh, leaning on his cane as he guffawed. Wally just looked at him with a raised eyebrow until the older man recovered.

"Oh lord, it always gets me when the ones with sparkly fancy powers are the skeptics. It's like a pilot not believing in gravity," He said, wiping his eyes. "For your information, I'm not attempting something like this without a fully sanctified, aetherially neutral ritual room capable of negating large energy spikes. If I was interested in killing myself, I would use something less likely to rip a hole in reality."

Wally opened his mouth to reply or retort, but the Flash cut him off.

"Kid Flash, Kent Nelson has been a hero since before you were born," The Flash said, sounding disappointed. "He may not care that you don't believe in magic, but you will respect his dedication to his craft and the work he has done making this world a safer place."

Wally was silent for a long moment. For a split second, I thought he was going to open his mouth and double down on his stupid. Instead, I was pleasantly surprised by his response.

"I... I'm sorry, you're right. Even with my issues with magic, I recognize your name enough that I should have been more respectful."

"Don't worry about it, kid. When you get to my age, you stop worrying about how people see you. Magic has a lot of negative connotations. You're not the first skeptic I've had to work with."

"Honestly, it's not even that I don't believe in magic at this point," The young speedster admitted, looking down at his hands. "I had a little bit of an awakening recently, and it caused me to question a lot of my beliefs. I may not like calling it magic, but I recognize that people manipulate energy and that sometimes they do stuff that doesn't make sense. It's just that... if I can't understand it, how am I supposed to trust it? It's all hand waving, chanting lights and, how am I supposed to rely on it when I can't open a book and read about its basic principles?"

"Now, what gave you the idea you couldn't do that?" Kent Nelson responded. "I've got bookshelves full of books on magical theories and the like in the Tower of Fate's library. Some of them are even in English. You're welcome to read any of them that aren't cursed."

"I...I think I would actually like that," Wally said, surprised at himself. "But first...."

"Right, let's move this shindig over to my place. We can run the scans and see if there isn't anything we can do to set you straight," The magician said with a smile and a nod.

"Great... Do you think the team could come?"

"Of course, as long as they don't wander off. The Tower of Fate is usually friendly when I'm home, but it tends to get feisty when people start snooping around."

The next fifteen minutes were spent cleaning up a bit and getting ready to join the two speedsters and the experienced magic user. Artemis asked if we were getting dressed up, referring to our uniforms, and I looked at her with a blank face.

"Did you not hear him describe his tower as 'feisty?'" I asked. "Yes, for the love of God, put on your uniform. "

About ten minutes later, we were gathered around the Zeta-Tube. I could see Wally was bouncing on his heels, clearly fighting his nervous energy and impatience. When we had all gathered, Kent Nelson looked around before focusing on me.

"This everyone?" He asked, getting a nod in return. "Alrighty then, let's go!"

We shared a few confused looks when Kent tapped his cane twice on the floor. A web of blue lines spread out from the brass tip of his cane on the second tap, shooting out into a perfect circle around us. It was an intricate magic circle, complete with stars, runes, and geometric lines. It flashed once, nearly blinding us before silence hit us like a wet blanket, immediately replaced by the sounds of a vibrant and active city.

We had been teleported.

"Welcome to Salem, Massachusetts," The older man said before walking towards an empty field. "C'mon, the tower is this way."