

We watched while Kid Flash was drained of a considerable amount of blood using a blood donation kit. When the procedure was done, the Flash guided him to a chair by the far corner of the marble slab. His blood was taken and poured into a bucket before two cups of finely ground metal was mixed in and stirred with a simple wooden stick that still had its bark. When Queen Mera seemed satisfied with it, she handed the bucket to Kent, who looked inside it and nodded. He then took a paintbrush from a shelf and stepped down onto the marble slab.

The massive platform of unbroken stone was already covered in glyphs, lines, and more. Most notable were six chunks of almost perfectly see-through crystal clusters, each the size of my head, with multiple fist-sized growths. Each of those was surrounded by a circle, which was then connected to the nearest other crystal by a line, forming a large hexagon. A larger circle was painted onto the marble that encompassed all of this, with a six-pointed star set inside that. There were glyphs and symbols that I don't recognize and runes that I vaguely did, though I had no idea what they did or said.

Kent confidently added even more lines to the already complicated ritual as we watched. Most of them were focused around the center, where he made an empty circle about a meter wide, connecting with dozens of links, before adding three more rings, about the same size, to the outside of the ritual, connecting them similarly. In all honesty, I couldn't make head or tails out of what he was doing, but when he finished with the final exterior loop, he seemed satisfied. When he painted the last line, a sheen of some sort spread throughout the painted parts of the ritual as if every inch of the lines had suddenly shifted in reflectiveness just a bit.

"The ritual circle is done. No more magic or expressions of energy, please," He called out, getting everyone's attention. "That includes you, earth boy."

Tulip and Garth, who Kaldur had finally introduced as his good friends from school, just nodded as if that was obvious, while the rest of us just looked at each other and shrugged. Kent seemed to be satisfied with our response because he turned back and started talking to Kid Flash and his mentor, both of them listening intently to the mage, who was quickly joined by Zatara and Queen Mera. It came off as some sort of pre-event discussion, with Wally asking a few questions and Kent answering them confidently. I couldn't quite make out what they were saying, which made me think there was some sort of sound suppression effect going on, but I did pick up bits and pieces.

Mainly they just mentioned some of the risks, what Kid Flash was going to be doing, which was basically just standing in one spot and doing his best to stay calm. When Kent was done, Queen Mera started guiding the young speedster to the center of the ritual, both of them carefully avoiding the painted lines, which now gleamed as they crossed them. When the young speedster nervously stood in the center, Queen Mera took one look at him, nodded, and exited the ritual space. While that was happening, Kent Nelson made his way to us, leaning on his cane when he stopped in front of us.

"This ritual is going to be a doozy," He explained, looking at each of us. "I won't tell you to leave, both because it's a hell of a learning experience and because it involves your friend. That said, this is going to involve some powerful elements of reality, which means a few outbursts are to be expected. Since we will be standing still, the big one to watch out for will be time. We may speed up for small bursts, or we may slow down for a while. If it's the first, no harm no foul, we zip through the ritual and get done before dinner. If it's the latter, we might get stuck for a few hours, maybe even a day or two. It won't be permanent, and it won't be more than a week because the Tower will intervene eventually. If we get stuck for more than a few minutes, just get up and leave the ritual room. The door will open for you then."

He paused to make sure we were following him so far before tapping the ground with his cane for emphasis.

"Do Not interrupt the ritual for any reason. The amount of energy we are dealing with will be absurd, and breaking the ritual will cause that to cascade through Kid Flash and everyone involved. It won't be pretty, and it will be lethal. Is that understood?" He explained, looking at each of us, only looking away after we nodded in agreement. "Good. Stay in this area, it is protected from the effects of rituals, and it should stop any time shenanigans from affecting you."

And with that, he turned around and headed towards the circle, leaving his cane floating in front of us, glowing a light blue. I could see Aquaman and Flash on the far side of the room, standing on the stone lip that led down onto the marble platform. Kent Nelson stopped before one of the three circles around the ritual, Queen Mera and Zatara joining him just outside their spots. A few quick nods were exchanged before all three stepped into the circle at the same moment. Said circles glowed for a split second as if acknowledging their presence. All three of them pulled out a large scroll, unrolling them slowly.

Queen Mera started off, reading from the scroll at a slowly changing tempo, starting off at a snail's pace before slowly picking up. After about two minutes of her chanting in a language I didn't recognize, Kent started to chant as well, starting slow and building up steam. It took me a few seconds to realize he was just repeating what Queen Mera had said. When the retired hero was done, Zatara started working his way through the same words. The moment he finished, the painted ritual lines pulsed with energy, starting to glow, which pulsed inwards and encircled Kid Flash.

For a long few seconds, the room was silent before Queen Mera began reading again, this time with much more emotion. Her voice seemed to echo in the ritual room, filling every corner despite there being absolutely no echo before. Slowly the red-headed mage began to glow, waves of energy coming off of her and sinking the ritual matrix around her, the lines glowing with energy, all of it seeming to lead to the nearest crystal.

Again, like before, the other two magic users replicated what Queen Mera had done, energy pouring off of them and into their corresponding crystals. When they were done, all three were

constantly glowing, the lines painted around them pulsing in time with the runes and glyphs around Wally.

Again they paused before all three of them began to chant at once. More energy poured off them, sinking into the ritual and slowly channeling into Wally. The young speedster began to glow now, though the energy radiating off of him was red and gold, just like what we had seen in his magical scans. The teenager was looking around with wide eyes, watching the magic work around him, clearly nervous, clearly stuck between desperately wanting a cure to his issues and his distrust of magic. Slowly, however, his expression changed, as the chanting continued and the glowing coming off of him grew stronger. At first, he looked confused, glancing around as if trying to spot something hiding from him. After a few moments, he went still, eventually taking a deep breath and closing his eyes, slowly raising his arms, holding them out as more and more energy swirled and poured into him.

The chanting of the three powerful magic users had reached a fevered pitch, each of them reading from their scroll, shouting now as the air stirred in the sealed room. Suddenly their mouths blurred, the first sign of temporal anomalies. A split second later, for half a heartbeat, they all seemed to freeze, the sounds of their chanting stalling for just a quick moment before immediately picking up.

They bounced back and forth between this, instants of time spinning faster before single pauses that seemed to balance out the short moments of accelerated time. The pattern continued for seven or eight minutes until the chanting seemed to reach a crescendo. The crystals were glowing, bright enough that they were hard to look at, and energy had continued to push inward, feeding into Wally. The three magic users were clearly getting tired, all three sweating and breathing heavily as they seemed to be reaching the end of the ritual. Suddenly everything seemed to rapidly advance, everyone inside the ritual, as well as Aquaman and Flash, turning into a blur for several seconds, almost a half minute. This was the longest burst of anomalous time yet and ended with a massive clap of thunder and blinding light that had everyone around me looking away and covering their eyes.

Silence ruled over the ritual room as we all looked back to the ritual, only to find everything frozen in time. A massive red and yellow bolt of lightning had slammed into Kid Flash, coming from nowhere but starting by the roof of the chamber, entering his chest, and sparking out all over the room. Rather than looking like he was in pain, or even mildly discomforted, Wally, who was floating three feet off the ground with his arms out and face turned up, looked calm, even peaceful.

For a while, we were silent, looking at the ritual being performed and wondering when it would speed up and continue. After the first minute, we were nervously looking at each other. At the ten-minute mark, we realized that time was still passing inside the ritual room, just incredibly slowly. Eventually, after the fifteen-minute mark I stood up slowly

"Alright, Kent Nelson warned us this might happen. Let's head out and wait outside," I said, nodding my head to the door. "I don't want to find out if he told us to leave for a reason or if he just didn't want us to get bored."

Everyone nodded in agreement, taking a few last looks at everyone stuck in the ritual before we slowly moved out of the room. We stopped not far from the ritual room doorway, which closed behind us, but did not lock.

"That was... mildly terrifying," Robin admitted, everyone nodding in agreement. "Now I know why Batman hates getting involved with magic."

"I have never seen a ritual like that before, but Garth and I have seen a few lesser rituals," Tulip volunteered. "Messing with such elemental forces can have... weird effects when interacting with them during a ritual."

"I trust Kent Nelson and Queen Mera. All will be well." Kaldur said confidently as I leaned back against the balcony railing. "I am glad she was willing to help."

"Let's wait another thirty minutes," I said, pulling out my phone to check the time. "After that, you should probably start notifying people that your king and queen might be late for dinner."

Kaldur looked at me in surprise before sagging as he realized I had a point. Tula and Garth both laughed, though, the former shaking her head.

"We have a protocol in place for when Queen Mera is busy with spellwork or a ritual. They often cannot be interrupted or take longer than first expected," She explained. "She was aware that this was possible, and the appropriate parties are aware there might be delays."

Kaldur visibly straightened as she explained that he wouldn't have to explain why his king and queen were stuck in time on the surface world. After a moment, he winced and shook his head.

"We should still notify the League if it does not pass soon. Two members, a foreign dignitary, and a potential member, are stuck inside, they should be made aware."

Before I or anyone else could agree, a subtle, barely noticeable quake passed through the tower. Everyone looked around for the source, but there was nothing. It happened a second-time a few seconds later.

"What was-"

M'ganns question was cut off by a third, much more energetic quake. I pushed off from the railing and started walking back to the ritual room, assuming something must have gone wrong.

I was just about to push inside when I heard the familiar sound of the door's lock clunking into place.

"It just locked itself," I said before looking back at Kaldur. "Any-"

"The ritual is continuing in expected parameters," A voice said from behind us, prompting all of us to whirl around.

Floating in the middle of the hallway was a slightly scaled-down projection of Kent Nelson, semi-translucent and glowing a faint yellowish gold.

"The Tower of Fate is under attack by Klarion the Witch Boy, a lord of Chaos," The projection stated blandly. "Without Kent Nelson to monitor the defenses, they will eventually fall. Given the nature of the ritual he is currently performing, the Chaos Lord must not gain access to the ritual room, or the ritual will fail."

"Fuck... okay, Klarion is a heavy hitter. We need backup. Robin, call it in." I said, shaking my head.

The young hero nodded and tapped on his wrist computer while turning away from the group as he tried to get in contact with anyone who could help. I turned to Kaldur, who simply nodded and turned back to the projection.

"How much time do we have?" Our combat leader asked the projection.

"Klarion will take down the tower's defenses in three minutes and fifteen-" The projection started to say, only for the tower to shake again. "Five seconds."

"We need an alternate exit," Kaldur said. "Something out of sight of where Klarion is attacking from."

"I can lead you to an alternate exit."

Kaldur nodded and was about to say something when Tulip and Garth shared a look before stepping forward.

"Kaldur, we want to help," Garth said. "Queen Mera and King Orim are in danger if this lord of Chaos interrupts that ritual. We can't sit by and let you fight by yourself."

"Fine, but you will follow me and my orders. I know your abilities better than the rest, so you will be with me," Kaldur said quickly, waiting for his friends to nod in agreement before turning to the rest of us. "Klarion is a high-powered threat, one that has stumped multiple members of the League at once. Our goal is not to defeat him but to hold him off long enough for reinforcements to arrive. Robin, what is their ETA?"

"Wonder Woman and Green Lantern Stewart are on their way, five minutes," Robin responded. "A few others will show up after that."

"Then that's our target, five minutes," Kaldur said, standing tall before looking at the projection. "Three groups, Skarn, M'gann, and Snapshot in group one, Robin, Superboy, and Ice in group two, and group three will be Me, Tula, and Garth. The loose plan is to rotate group attacks to keep him from focusing on anyone for too long. Any questions?"

When no one spoke up, Kaludr nodded and turned to the projection.

"Lead us to the alternate exit," He ordered, the projected construct nodding, before gesturing to a nearby door, which opened on its own. "New Titans, move out!"