

Over the next few days, it quickly became apparent that a solution to tracking Mauser wasn't just going to fall into our laps. The best we could do was keep busy, but also stay ready. The League had promised to keep us up to date on any of his appearances, but ultimately, it fell to just waiting and trying to catch him in the act. It was a horrible feeling, knowing you were waiting for people to get hurt, maybe even die so that you could track down a single criminal psychopath.

We went about our patrols, worked with our tutors, and twice we responded to emergency situations, one in Colorado where an avalanche had trapped three cars under mud and stone, and another in Ohio, keeping a crop field fire from spreading to more fields. It felt like busy work to some of us, but the basket of freshly baked cookies was a nice thank you from the farm we saved.

It wasn't until the end of the week that something finally clicked. Nightwing, after coming back from a day of training, sank down into one of the living room couches, only to sit back up a second or two later, his eyes wide.

"We broke his first pistol!" He shouted as he all but jumped up from the couch.

Kaldur, Garth, and I shared a look, wondering what the young hero was talking about as he ran out of the living room, heading straight for the central open area of the cave. I stood up and followed after him, as did Kaldur and Garth, the latter putting down a sandwich he had just made. M'gann peered across our connection to see what was causing me to question Nightwing's sanity.

"Who's pistol?" I asked as we entered the central cavern

"Mauser's!" He called back, prompting us to pick up the pace.

When we caught up to the recently rebranded hero, the holo-projected computer was already accessing League resources, scanning through information as Nightwing tapped on a projected Keyboard.

"He said they were uncommon when M'gann broke it, right?" Nightwing said.

"He said, 'Those are rare in that condition, a part of history,'" I corrected, repeating the villain verbatim. When Nightwing looked at me, I shrugged. "Enhanced memory, remember?"

"Right, well, he wasn't kidding," He explained, an image of the damaged pistol appearing. "It was an early model, dating from before the first World War. It was in good condition and even had its original wooden grip."

"Damn... he wasn't kidding, it was a piece of history," I said with a frown. "But why is that important?"

"Because it was clearly important to him, right?" He asked, looking back at me. "And he was armed again when you saw him, right? Did you get a good look?"

"Yeah, any better of a look, and the barrel would have left an imprint on my forehead," I said with a scoff. "But... zero one seven, three four zero."

As I rattled off numbers, Nightwing looked at me for a second with wide eyes before cackling to himself in excitement, returning to the projected computer and quickly tapping away at it.

"What is that number?" Garth asked from beside me. "It was too short for a phone number..."

"It was the serial number on the side of Mauser's new pistol," I said, shaking my head. "Kinda hard to forget something like that even without an enhanced memory."

"I was just gonna see if any auction houses or whatever had any old C96s go missing, but I can actually track that number much better," Nighting explained with a smirk. "Even places with less strict gun records would list the serial number so its authenticity could be verified... there!"

A map popped up on the screen, showing North America, before focusing in on Wisconsin. The map zoomed in on a seemingly random spot, streets and roads appearing before we focused on a single road. A small dot appeared there, blinking slowly over somebody's house."

"The collector who owns the pistol lives here," Nightwing explained, stepping back for a moment. "Nothing out of the ordinary has been reported, no report of a crime or anything."

"So where does that leave us?" I asked. "Do we have any data on the owner?"

"Alec Barnap. Two kids, one with his first wife, and one with his second. Works in a local business as a manager.... He inherited a nice chunk of change from his father.... Nothing out of the ordinary. Most of this is scrapped from a newspaper article from two years ago when he donated a bunch of money to a school fundraiser."

"Okay... Get everyone together," I said, giving Garth a look, who nodded and jogged back to the living area. "This could be nothing, but my gut says it is a chance to at least learn more about Mauser. It's possible he just stole the gun, and Mr. Barnap hasn't noticed yet..."

"Or Mauser could *be* Mr. Barnap," Nightwing pointed out, shrugging as I sent him a wide-eyed look. "Oh yeah, because the immortal, magic-using psychopath having a secret family in Wisconsin is the craziest thing we've seen."

"It... might be close," I said, shaking my head before focusing. "Either way, tell Batman we are following up on a lead. We will check in with him in a few hours."

"What is the plan?" Kaldur asked as the rest of our team began filtering in from the rest of the base.

"We need to talk to this guy," I said, rubbing my chin. "Let's break into teams, one team on standby while the other heads out to Wisconsin."

"It would make sense for Beta team to lead for this. Bioship allows for faster travel," Kaldur pointed out, and I nodded. "We will stay on standby."

"Alright. We need either Garth or Tula to come with us, though," I said with a frown. "I want someone familiar with magic with us."

"Tula is more familiar with arcane details," Kaldur admitted, though it pained him since it would mean she was coming with us.

"Thanks," I said, patting his shoulder empathetically. "It means you'll be down a member since Tora will be sitting this out."

As he nodded, we both turned to the rest of the group, Nightwing returning from his call with his mentor. When everyone was gathered up, I stepped forward.

"We have a lead on Mauser," I announced, waiting for everyone to calm down before continuing. "It might turn out to be nothing, but any additional information we can find on him is worth the effort. Beta team is heading out to Wisconsin, while Alpha team will stay here on standby. Tora, you're sitting this one out, unfortunately, and Tula, you are coming with us. I want someone with magic knowledge on hand."

Both of the female heroes nodded, the former looking frustrated while the second looked confident. I went over a basic plan, which was essentially me knocking on the front door with Superboy as backup while the rest of the team waited in Bioship, while it was cloaked.

We quickly piled into Bioship, heading directly up. Within the next ten minutes, we were descending slowly on Wisconsin, cloaked and quiet, trying to make as little disturbance as possible. We landed on a street, two blocks from the target, and dropped out of the bottom of Bioship, the exit closing up after us.

Slowly, we made our way down the street, the sun just starting to set as the afternoon slowly transitioned into the early night. It was a bit late to be knocking on doors, but this was

considerably more important than being polite. When we reached our destination, Superboy scanned the house with his X-Ray vision.

"Four people, all around the dinner table," He said, scanning the neighborhood next. "There are three large safes in the basement that I can't see through, along with a lot of guns in two different cabinets. Nothing else suspicious that I can see. I don't like the safes."

I nodded, and together, we stepped up the front walk, stopping on the front porch. I rapped on the solid wooden door, waiting patiently for someone to answer it. After a moment, a kid, maybe fourteen, opened the door a crack, spotted us, and froze. His eyes went wide, and after a moment, he shut the door quickly. I could hear the sound of feet running through the house. I looked at Superboy with a raised eyebrow, and he shook his head.

A minute later and the door opened again, this time with an older man standing in the doorway.

"Well, I'll be damned, he was right," He said, looking confused and surprised, though he was hiding something else behind it. "It's a bit early for Halloween, but we don't get much superhero folk around here. I can't say I recognize the get-up either. Can I help you?"

"Mr. Barnap?" I asked, waiting for him to nod before pulling out my ID, which had been assigned to me by the League when the group became more official. "We recently came across information about a dangerous criminal using a firearm with a serial number that was registered to you. A Mauser C96."

His eyes went wide, and for a moment, I thought he was going to flip out on us. Instead, he cursed under his breath. It looked like he was going to start denying or demanding a lawyer, but I raised my hand.

"Before you say anything, be aware. I don't care about any rules, regulations, or anything like that that you might have... momentarily forgotten about. The man who has that firearm is dangerous and goes by the name Mauser," I explained, the man cursing again. "He is sadistic, psychotic, and we have reason to believe he is plotting a major... terrorist attack of sorts. I don't care if you have a tank in your garage as long as you can give me anything new about him."

The man looked at me for a long moment before letting out a long sigh. He stood to the side with a reluctant nod, holding the door open for us.

"Come on in," He said, gesturing inside.

We stepped inside, and the man led us down into his basement, where his gun collection was stored. It was an impressive collection, and included quite a few dozen older weapons stored in cabinets. There was a workbench along the far wall, with tools related to firearm maintenance hung along a large panel of pegboard. He quickly opened one of the safes and

leaned down, pushing aside three boxes before pulling out a small, cell phone-sized box that was maybe two inches thick.

"So I spend some time on gun collector websites, and I recently posted that I was looking to sell some stuff," He explained. "My friend recommended that I invest in gold, as like an emergency fund. So I post online for anyone looking for a trade and get an almost instant response about someone being interested in my C96."

He opened the box, revealing five gold coins and a gold ingot. He put them down on the table that sat in the middle of the room.

"I agreed that I was willing to sell, but figured we would do it through the normal channels... he showed up at the house the next day," He explained. "Just knocked on the door. Was even wearing a mask... I'm sorry, I know I should have said something but..."

He took a deep breath, shaking his head as he collected himself. When he let the long breath go, he finally started again.

"I... ended up trading it for this gold. I didn't ask for paperwork or anything. I just handed him the gun," He admitted, shaking his head. "You gotta believe me, I would never do that. I mean, I was handing him a gun that was under my name! But the second I opened the door... everything he said just seemed like a good idea."

"Please put the gold on the table, sir," I said before focusing on M'gann. *"Send Tula in. I think there is some magic influence going on here."*

Five minutes later, the man was sitting on his living room couch while Tula scanned him with her magic. She was frowning and shaking her head.

"I'm definitely seeing some magical residue, but it's long faded," She said, before turning to an older woman, the man's wife, who was sitting beside her husband, holding his hand. "Have you noticed any odd behavior from Mr. Barnap lately, any strange reactions to certain phrases, colors, or even gestures?"

"No, I can't say I have," She responded, giving her husband a worried look. "Should I keep an eye out for anything?"

"Judging by how he described it, I don't think you have anything to worry about," The Atlantean mage said. "The magic is almost completely faded and doesn't seem to have any long-term effects. It feels like a dazing spell I know of, something to make people a bit less cognizant and more agreeable. Your husband was basically high on magic."

"That... actually makes a lot of sense," Mr. Barnap said. "It's just about what it felt like."

"You should consider yourself very lucky," I said, standing not far from the three. "I can only imagine your gun hobby endeared you to him because Mauser has done a lot of nasty things for very little reason."

After another few minutes, Tula had scanned the gold, confirming that it was real and did not contain any magic. We were beginning to think that we wouldn't learn anything useful when a voice, the kid who had answered the door, spoke up from the living room entrance.

"Umm... the Dooleys, across the street... They have a security camera on their front porch, ever since those kids smashed their mailbox...." He said. "It might have caught something?"

After an introduction and a second explanation of what we were looking for, we managed to secure two clips of Mauser. The quality was exactly what you would expect, but it showed him dressed in civilian clothes but still wearing his mask, walking up to the Barnap house, being welcomed inside, and leaving. He appeared out of thin air in the first clip, doing the same in reverse in the second. We watched both clips three times before Snapshot finally spotted something in the poor-quality video.

"There! Bioship, go back three seconds and replay it in a loop," she asked, the pixelated low-quality video going backward and replaying. "Look! His gait shifted. He just dropped something... maybe threw it to the side?"

"I... guess? Maybe? Kinda hard to tell..." Fire said, but Snapshot and I were already dropping out of Bioship again, running to the sidewalk.

After searching for a few minutes, Snapshot stood up and let out a happy shout. She clicked off her flashlight and held it up in her gloved hand.

"Found it!" She said, holding out a crumpled empty packet of cigarettes.

"How do you know?" I asked, looking closely at what I had assumed was trash.

"The brand isn't from the US. It doesn't have the right Surgeon General warning," She explained, showing it to me. "It's also in Spanish, but they might sell Spanish cigarettes here, I'm not an expert."

I flicked a pair of grabbers out of metal, using the metal on my arm, taking the partially crushed package. I studied it before nodding back to Bioship.

"Let's get back to the cave. With any luck, one of the numbers on this will be a serial number we can track."