The Fire Shadow of Young Justice

by This_is_not_a_Fanfiction

Summary

Naruto, after an unexpected encounter with Madara Uchiha, is sent - via space/time jutsu - to another dimension: the DC Universe. Learning to accept his new life in a new world, Naruto becomes 'Fire Shadow,' the youngest member of the Justice League and Head Supervisor of the newly formed Young Justice Team.
"Hey, flea bag."

"What, brat?"

"Any idea where the heck we are?" Naruto asked as he stared down an unfamiliar city, which was lit up as though the sun were shining down upon them rather than the full moon that actually was. The people down below so indulged into their own lives, they hardly noticed what was going on around them, most of whom were talking on small boxes, or pressing something onto them. There were also strange contraptions saucing up and down a black smooth surface where people crossed in a bundle ever so often. And the buildings, they rose higher than anything in Konoha, or anything he had seen in all the Elemental Nations for that matter.

"No, I don't know where we are for the millionth time! All I know is that it's a different dimension than where we're from!" Answered the Kyuubi in more than a more than annoyed tone. He just about had it with the Kit, constantly asking him questions rather than finding out answers on his own!

"No need to bite my head off!" Naruto retorted. "First things first, I need to learn the language if we stand a chance getting home." He said to his inner demon. The difference in language was among one of the first things Naruto had noticed when he woke up in the middle of an unknown alley way. To him, it sounded like gibberish, but there was clearly some sort of structure.

"Why go home? Every human here is weak, we could easily control this dimension!" Said the Kyuubi no Youko in a rather excited voice, sounding awfully unsettling as it was demonic in nature.

"When are you ever going to get it in your head that I will never set out on world domination?" Naruto retorted, completely annoyed that the Fox's 'idea' was once again brought up.

"Just rain on my parade why don't you. You're never any fun."

"Whatever, Kyu." Naruto said, rolling his eyes, "So, any idea how to learn the language fast?"

"Keh, you useless vessel. Let me handle this, just look someone in the eye."

"Uhhh, okay."

Complying to the Kyuubi's suggestion, Naruto looked a person in the eyes with slight annoyance, until pain slashed at his mind.

"AAAHHHHHRRRGG!" He screamed as his hands grasped hold oh his head in pain, staggering back a bit. "Damnit, Kyuubi! What the hell was that?!!"

"Oh shut it, Kit. You now know their pathetic language."

"That was worse than one of Sakura's punches!"

"When did you get so weak?"

"Forget it, Fox." Naruto said getting slightly irritated, "Now, I need money, new clothes since ANBU gear seems to stand out, and a place to crash."
"Does this mean we can break something?"

"… Possibly."

"Then get going already!"

"…"

Without another word, Naruto jumped from building to building, trying to find someplace that had something of value which he could… borrow. But a line of drying laundry caught his eye first, and was able to find clothes that fit him which were more suitable to wear than his normal clothes. Unfortunately, he couldn't find anything that was orange, and had to settle for a dark blue shirt and some khaki pants (thankfully the pants had enough pockets to hold his scrolls and kunai away from sight). Once dressed in the proper clothing, it didn't take long for him to find a jewelry shop where he could 'borrow' the valuables. The security was so abysmal, he was doing them a favor by taking the merchandise before someone else would come along and take it simply to take. At least he needed it to survive in this strange new world. Out of politeness, he left a note explaining why he had taken it, and thoroughly explained some ways to have better security for future reference.

After which, he was able to pawn off in various stores - all of which a very safe distance from the jewelry store - the questions of how and where he was able to get such valuable items were easily brushed off with his impeccable lying abilities. By the time most of the stores closed, Naruto had more money than he could think of using. Seeing the night finally take hold of the bustling city, Naruto found his way to a run down apartment building; the locked doors and barred windows easily infiltrated in silence.

"We didn't break anything."

"No, but now we have money to eat and a place to stay until we can figure out a way back home." Naruto said to the rather annoyingly disappointed Kyuubi inside him, "But, before I crash…"

Quickly, Naruto did familiar hand symbols before saying in a whisper, "Kage Bushin no Jutsu!" Out of a sudden puff of smoke stood two dozen shadow clones, ready and eager to take orders. "I need to know everything about this world, fan out and find out everything you can, then disperse by sunrise."

"Right, Boss!" The clones said in unison before disappearing in another puff of smoke. Satisfied, Naruto bounded his way toward a slightly cleaner part of the abandoned apartment room, bringing out a scroll which he unsealed to produce a futon. It was always better to be prepared for unexpected events such as this; though he never once in his life thought it possible to somehow wind up in another dimension.

"Damn that Madara…" He thought bitterly.

"Shut up and get some sleep, Kit. You're undoubtedly going to need it."

Waking up, Naruto found that all of his clones had dispersed, and thanks to them, now had a basic understanding of the dimension he was indefinitely trapped in. Apparently, this world was not as weak as he and the Kyuubi first believed. There was a group relatively powerful people who called themselves, the Justice League, that basically became an international police power that spent it's time protecting the weak and striving for peace and justice. But, they weren't the only 'Super' people on the planet. The world also brought out 'Super' villains who, much to the Kyuubi's delight, were bent on either destruction or world domination.
"Join them, Kit!"

"For the last time, NO!"

"You're no fun..."

"Deal with it, furball."

The biggest surprise of all to the seventeen year old blonde was that, in this universe, there were beings from outer-space. Aliens, as they called them. It seemed that there were only two resident aliens on Earth, known as Superman and Martian Man-Hunter, both of whom a part of this Justice League and both had unearthly powers. There were also a number of other Earthlings Justice League members with exceptional powers, some through artificial means such as this Flash character, and others born warriors such as the Amazon, Wonder Woman, and the Atlantian King, Aquaman. To say this world was strange to Naruto, was the understatement of the century.

Though, each of their abilities were limited, none even came close to the amount of experience and skill he had. He had been through hell and back, seen more than his fair share of death and destruction. Nothing that had happened to this planet came particularly close to what he had lived through.

"What do you think our first move should be?"

"It's clear that these… Leaguers, are the most powerful beings on this pitiful planet, and also probably the only ones who could help us get back. Going to them seems to be the best bet, though I still don't know why you want to leave… you could take this place with your eyes closed! Let loose once in a while!"

"Alright, the League it is." Naruto said, completely ignoring the little tidbit on world domination as he was growing tired of the constant nagging. "Now… to find them."

Apparently it was a lot harder trying to find the League than he first imagined. It wasn't hard finding their battles, as they were usually fairly large and much destruction came from it, but getting an audience with the infamous members proved to be difficult.

"Kit, these Leaguers are hardly any help. You've been trying to get to them for over a month!"

"Yeah, I'm starting to think we're better off alone."

"Finally. He realizes the obvious."

"Your such a jerk, you know that?"

"Deal with it."

With an annoyed grunt, Naruto began paving his own way in this new world. Sporting his ANBU gear and fox mask, he began to do his own 'hero' work; saving people from burning buildings, stopping heists, hindering plans for world domination, the works. At first, it was to do something since he had reached the peak of his boredom level, but once he saw the faces of the more than grateful civilians he saved, he realized how much he had missed it. Though here, there were none who knew of the demon inside him, nor any who felt any disgust or hate toward him (excluding those who he threw into prison cells), only respect and appreciation. Whenever asked for his name, Naruto gave them Fire Shadow, the English translation to Hokage. It wasn't exactly the way he had hoped to gain the title, but it worked nonetheless.
Surprisingly or not, doing this was pretty much the only way to get the good attention from the League. After a few months of his own vigilante style heroism, he was greeted by the Man of Steel himself, AKA: Superman.

To say he was surprised would have been an understatement. After all, he had been trying to get a minute with the man for well over a month not so long ago, as well as the rest of the League to no avail, and now, here he was on his own accord.

"Fire Shadow, I presume?" he said floating in front of him as Naruto himself had Chakra glued himself to the side of a skyscraper.

"Yes?" he asked in a bored tone. Inside he was feeling rather conflicted. On the one side, he was meeting Superman! This guy could pack a serious punch! And on the other, it was Superman, who had seemingly been doing everything possible to avoid the young blonde shinobi. Definitely enough to irk him into wanting to punch the man.

"I, and the rest of the League, have recognized your skill and morals and would be honored to have you join our ranks as an official member of the Justice League."

For the moment, Naruto was rather glad he had a mask (which was lined with lead paint, thus making the man of steel unable to see his actual face) since his eyes widened considerably and his jaw went a bit slack.

It was hard to believe. Really. They were offering him a spot on the Justice League!

"To join, or not to join..."

"Shut up and join, Kit. You can bring those arrogant temes down a peg or two."

"I humbly accept." 'Fire Shadow' finally said to Superman, who smiled in return.

"Then, if you could be at the Hall of Justice tomorrow by twelve p.m, we can officially indite you into the League."

"I shall be there." he said simply before watching the Man of Steel fly off, probably going to save a cat from a tree.

Cat...

"Damn, now I have those stupid memories of all those times I had to catch that damned cat Tora..."

"Don't remind me, Kit. I wanted to skin that bloody animal." Said the Kyuubi, his voice full of hatred for that little pest.

"Well, now I'm apart of the League. They better not treat me like some kid." Naruto said with a small 'humph.'

"Kit, I don't even think they know how old you really are. You're probably one, if not the, most powerful being in this pitiful place, thanks to yours truly, so I doubt they would think you're a seventeen year old, brat. Plus, your voice is muffled by the mask, so you don't even really sound seventeen."

"Who're you calling a brat, furball!? And, yeah you're probably right. I'll let them know when I'm absolutely positive they won't treat me like everyone did back home; like I was weak."
"Face it, Kit. You were weak."

"Shut up, furball." Naruto said, though knowing full well how true that statement was. Even with the Kyuubi's chakra, he was weak. He couldn't even bring Sasuke back... he nearly died defeating Pein. Hell, every major mission he nearly died! Not in one major battle was he left the standing victor... no. He was the victor always lying in a damned hospital bed for days if not weeks. "Well, nothing to do until tomorrow." he thought returning to his home.

The ceremony of his becoming an official member of the Justice League was met with a lot of media; much to Naruto's annoyance. They asked every possible question, until he firmly said that he would answer nothing about who he was, where he came from, and just what the extent of his abilities were.

To most, he seemed rather rude.

To others, he was a mystery that was just waiting to be solved. Namely to people like Lois Lane.

The other Leaguers seemed interested in the new blood, and were eager to see him in action for their very own eyes rather than just hearing about what he could do. Batman, along with a few others, Zatara among them, were weary and suspicious of this man. They knew virtually nothing about him, not even his actual name, nor what he looked like underneath his mask as he refused to take it off. All they knew was that he was a powerful 5'11" blonde whose abilities caused them to question whether or not he was actually human. J'onn J'onzz had tried to peer into his thoughts in order to find out more about him, but was forcefully kicked out thanks to his extra host. Of course, this only made them all the more cautious of their newest member.

When asked if he would take his mask off, he simply said that once Batman took his off, he would as well.

As if that were ever to happen.

And everyone knew it.

The Kyuubi was actually surprised (and a bit impressed) at how well he kept his identity a secret. Not once had he acted like the happy-go-lucky gaki he was used to. Instead, he seemed to actually be more mature. He hadn't even pranked anyone since he arrived... but, then it hit him. The only reason his Vessel had suddenly become more serious is because people here actually acknowledged him, unlike those fools in Konohagakure.

If they could only see him now...

Regardless, he was pleased with the change in demeanor of his Vessel. The 'I'm going to be the Hokage one day, believe it!' brat that he once used to be was long gone, and for the better.

Two years had passed and it became evident to the young Konoha shinobi that the chances of going home, were dwindling down into single digit percentiles. Whatever time/space jutsu Madara had managed to inflict upon him, was something beyond his abilities, and since there were no Chakra wielding people in this world, learning the skills needed to imitate his technique was impossible. That, and he didn't particularly want to go raving around he was from another dimension, especially after he learned that there were, theoretically, billions of dimensions...so finding his would be harder than finding a needle in a ten foot high haystack. Besides, by now, he would have been deemed killed in action and the Village would have moved on by now (the more close-minded civilians probably celebrating his death regardless of his saving them against Pein). Still, it wasn't so bad. He had become one of the strongest members of the Justice League thanks to his mastery in Tai-, Nin-,
and Fuuinjutsu - of which he still refused to let anyone understand how it worked.

The one who was more persistent in his trying to figure Naruto out was none other than the Dark Knight himself. Batman had been able to figure everyone else out, but Fire Shadow had remained an enigma. Despite his attempts of finding more about the guy, Batman remained in the dark for just about everything pertaining to him. He didn't even have a clue as to what the man liked to eat! For all his detective skills, he couldn't even figure that out, let alone just how his powers worked. He knew they manifested themselves just after he completes a series of hand signs - all of which he documented - but as to where his powers originate from or the energy used to manifest them, remained a complete mystery he was more than determined to figure out. As it was, the Caped Crusader had little trust for the newest member of the League, despite his proving loyal during the various battles he had accompanied him on.

Everyone was entitled to their own little secrets after all. So what if he had a few more than the average?

After a year of being a member of the League, Naruto had confessed his true age, baffling the League. They had allowed a minor to join their ranks. A kid at seventeen had become a member of the Justice League and had been recognized as one of it's strongest members.

While the Justice League members were conflicted in their feelings about the sudden confession, their sidekicks were overjoyed to hear that such a young hero had managed to become the youngest member of the Justice League (save for Captain Marvel who was at the time only nine - not that anyone other than Batman knew).

Thankfully, they treated him only slightly different, sometimes reverting back to rather protective mentors during battles. Though after a while they all finally realized that he was stronger than most of them and could easily hold his own against an enemy, so they backed off.

The Kyuubi had, on several occasions, made an appearance. Though, luckily, it was only to his enemies rather than any of the League. He did not want to have to deal with explaining that he had a demon sealed inside him. He knew from hands on experience that people are fearful and act out on impulse when they are met with something unknown and possibly threatening. Here, he was given a chance to escape the scorn and hatred, so there was no reason to bring it up.

Though he trusted the League with his life, and returned that trust on the battlefield, Naruto, wisely or not, did not trust any of them with his identity or past.

This, of course, hurt and angered some of the League.

But they couldn't say much as they all had their own personal lives they kept hidden from the public and their peers.

Though this didn't mean he hadn't befriended some of them. He had taken to The Flash, Green Arrow, Aquaman, and to some extent, Superman. There were times when he reverted back to his happy-go-lucky self, particularly when ramen became a part of a conversation. He also had that uncanny ability to see the good in everyone, and was able to sympathize with a great deal of them; he did after all live in a war torn, power hungry, world before all this.

Some were surprised at how wise the young man could be when it came to the harsh truths of life. They couldn't understand how this young man could know so much of pain and loss; and unless he changed his mind, they never would.

Even so, none confronted him about it, save for Batman who tried on several occasions to get some
sort of information out of him while asking misleading questions. He thanked his ANBU training whenever Batman came to him, if he hadn't had it, then he would have most certainly told the man everything he needed to know to figure out just what he was, and possibly where he was from.

As such, he was always weary of the Caped Crusader.

So when he messaged him to speak privately, Naruto naturally kept alert.

Batman had asked the Fire Shadow to come meet him at the Hall of Justice only a few minutes earlier, stating it was of importance and he should be quick to arrive.

Which wasn't all to difficult given he was only a few miles away from the Hall, and that he had placed the seal which activated his father's Hirashin technique. It took less than two minutes to arrive in a red flash.

Walking inside, Naruto made his way to the meeting chamber, where the zeta tube was located, and looked to find the black caped man on the computer monitor.

"Fire Shadow," Batman greeted curtly.

"Batman," Naruto said in a rather bored voice, "What was it you needed to speak to me about?"

"I'm sure you've heard of the new team being put together?" he asked rhetorically. Of course Naruto had heard of the new 'shadow' team of the Justice League; Young Justice. After the abrupt fall out of Green Arrow's apprentice, Speedy, the other sidekicks of the main Leaguers had banded together and demanded to be their own team after their 'mission' at Cadmus Labs, as well as the discovery of Superman's clone.

"Of course," he said simply.

"I am offering you the position of being their Head Supervisor." Batman said, getting straight to the point.

Had Naruto not been wearing a mask, his obvious shock would have been clearly written on his face. Batman... The Batman was offering him the opportunity to be the mentor to the younger generation of heroes... his own apprentice among them. It was so outrageous it was practically laughable.

"You- You're serious." he stated more than asked. All Naruto got was a long stare, as if waiting for an answer. He thought about it for a few long moments. Head Supervisor...? That was essentially the same as a Jounin-sensei was to a new squad of Genin, as Kakashi was to Sakura, Sasuke, and he when he was younger. Maybe this was something he could do to make a real difference? No doubt these young heroes were going through some sort of turmoil. They did after all just denounce their apprenticeship/partnership with their mentors, though he was sure they were keeping close contact with them. After everything they had gone through together, thinking they would cut them completely out of their lives was preposterous. Regardless, he could make a difference.

"Alright," he began, "so long as everyone remembers that this is going to be my team, meaning I don't want anyone to interfere with how I deal with their training, ect, I accept."

Batman, ever the stoic man, showed no emotion to his condition, and simply said, "Hn, You should know that you will not be the only one to help train them." he said, "Though you may be capable, there are members that require more personalized training exercises."

"That's fine. Two teachers are better than one after all." Naruto said, "But, my voice is should be the
highest authority."

"...Very well." Batman said with slight hesitation.

Nodding, Naruto followed suit as Batman walked over to the Zeta tube, the mechanic voice stating their name and League membership number before sending them to their destination: Mount Justice.

"This is going to be interesting." Naruto thought just as Batman and he emerged from the blinding Zeta-tube light.
"What do you mean, Head Supervisor?" Kid Flash demanded from Red Tornado, frustration and annoyance evident in the young speedsters' voice.

"As I said," replied said Leaguer, "The Justice League has appointed a Head Supervisor who will overlook the majority of your training as well as the administering of missions. While Black Canary and myself shall remain in our roles as Trainer and Supervisor, he shall have the utmost authority when it comes to the dealings of this team."

"So it's just a glorified babysitter." Superboy said, scowling that the Justice League had done so.

"This isn't so different from what you've been doing right, Red Tornado?" Megan asked.

"Indeed. He will also accompany the Team on missions to mark your progress." replied said Leaguer.

"You keep saying 'he,' but who is it?" Robin asked a bit annoyed that they wouldn't be working independently from the League as he had hoped they would be.

"You shall meet him-"

"Recognized. Batman 02. Fire Shadow 17." came a synthesized voice that echoed throughout the hall, interrupting Red Tornado.

"Now." he finished.

Before the two figures had fully come through the Zeta Tube, Kid Flash's became wide-eyed. "No. Way."

"We got the Fire Shadow?" Robin exclaimed, equally surprised.

"This is most...surprising." said the young Atlantian as he secured his gaze at the oncoming fox masked figure, not particularly caring for the Dark Knight that walked beside him.

"I'm sorry, but who is Fire Shadow?" Megan asked, a bit confused as to why this person was so interesting to her teammates. Robin, being the ever informed teen that he was, chose to answer her with clear enthusiasm.

"Fire Shadow: currently the youngest member of the Justice League. Joined two years ago when he was seventeen, and is easily one of the strongest members of the League. Nobody really knows anything about him... not even Batman." he added a bit after, a small smirk finding it's way onto the boys face, "No one really knows where he came from, or if he's even human despite his appearance. His abilities range from cloning physical bodies of himself, to the manipulation of the elements, though even now the full extent of his powers are unclear." Robin stated. To the young teenager, said Leaguer was his idol. Being so young, without training under any Leaguer, or any Superhero, and being able to become a member of the Justice League, how could a thirteen year-old hero not idolize the guy?

"He doesn't look so tough." Superboy said, not believing that this masked man could possibly be as strong as Robin made him out to be. He was Superman's clone. A living weapon. He was as strong
as they came, and nothing could be stronger than he was, least of all this guy.

"Really? I thought the mask would help some with that." Naruto said a bit amused at the boys comment. Had it been in another time, he would have reacted differently. In his Genin days, he would have yelled in protest, ending with 'believe it!' and someone (*cough*Sasuke*cough*) calling him a dobe.

The group of young heroes had the decency to look a bit sheepish when they were caught talking about him, save for Superboy who looked as though he couldn't care less. Taking a few more steps, Naruto and Batman were standing in front of the teens with a fair gap between them.

"Team, this is Fire Shadow, your Head Supervisor." Batman said in his usual toneless voice, "I'm sure you know of his role."

"Yes." Red Tornado answered for them, "I explained it shortly before you arrived."

"Hn. Introductions are in order then." he continued, only to be stopped by Robin taking up the initiative.

"I'm Robin," he said pointing to himself with his thumb, "This is Aqualad, Kid Flash, Superboy, and Miss M." he continued pointing to the said heroes in order of introduction. Naruto, in fact, already knew three of the heroes since he was more or less acquainted with their mentors. He hadn't, however, gotten the chance to know Superboy or Miss M, mainly because one: Superman had absolutely no idea what to do with his clone, let alone introduce him to the other Leaguers, and two: Martian Manhunter hardly wanted to associate with him after the whole mind-reading fiasco, so when his so called 'niece' arrived to earth, he wasn't exactly invited to the little welcoming party.

"I'm surprised that freak of a bat is actually letting you teach his protégé." The Kyuubi said offhandedly as he watched the little introduction from his cell.

'You and me both, Kuruma. But, no way in hell am I going to do something that'll arouse his suspicion of me. I don't need him on my case again.'

"Guess not, it took us months to get that persistence bat to back off." Kuruma spat out. It was annoying that the stupid Bat couldn't just let something go. The moment Naruto had aroused the Justice Leagues attention, the Dark Knight had been trying nearly everything to get information on him. All except for the one thing that might have gotten him answers: asking. But after the third time the said Leaguer had trailed them, Naruto decided he would make sure the Dark Knight couldn't find anything of importance about him (mainly for the fun of it rather than just spite).

'Well, if anything he's using his little sidekick to gain some sort of intel on me.'

"I wouldn't be surprised if he was.' Kuruma paused before continuing, 'Actually, I'm pretty sure he is, Kit."

'Yeah, he's definitely using his little sidekick for that. Even if the boy doesn't know it.'

"Nice to meet you all." Naruto said a bit after the introductions.

"I have prior business to attend to. Fire Shadow, they are now in your care." Batman said. Though his voice didn't give way to much emotion, Naruto, being the trained Shinobi that he was, caught onto the slight discontent when he said 'your care.'

"Until next time, Batman." Fire Shadow said as the Dark Knight was engulfed in the zeta-tube's
light. Turning back to his new charges, Naruto couldn't help but smile. He had never had a team he was in charge of before. Sure there was Konohamaru Corps, but that was more of a hobby and unofficial sort of position. "Well," he started, "no point in wasting time when we could be doing something productive, so let's start with getting to know a little more about each other, ne?"

Each of the Team looked a bit surprised at his sudden change in demeanor. When he was talking to Batman, it seemed as though Fire Shadow couldn't care less about the newly formed team, but as soon as the said Leaguer was gone, the tension was as well, and with it, replaced with a sudden light feeling; it almost relaxing.

"But, before that, let's get a change of scenery, all this metal is suffocating," he said with a small shrug before walking to Red Tornado, "Could you point us, or lead us to the training center?" he asked politely.

"Oh, I could lead us, Fire Shadow." Miss M said a bit excitedly before Red Tornado could answer.

"Ah, even better." he said, a smile forming behind his mask, "Lead the way Miss M."

Without saying much else, Naruto followed an excited young Martian who floated towards the training center's entrance. Once there, Red Tornado advised Naruto to chose the layout of the training room through the use of the large consul to the left of the entrance. In that moment, Naruto had yet again been thankful for his mask as he was wholeheartedly surprised. He knew of training halls which literally took on the form of whatever the user wanted to be in, whether it be a sandy desert or in the middle of a city, but he hadn't known that Mount Justice was equipped with such a training facility. Thanking the Leaguer, Naruto walked over to the consul and was able to quickly configure the training center in the form he wished: training ground 7.

With a small smile, Naruto opened the doors and revealed to the rest of his team what he had grown up in. He was partially amazed at how easy it was for the computer to create the layout, but was nonetheless happy. Walking toward open area, Naruto turned to face his team, who all wore the same expressions of confusion.

'Why are we out here?' was the collective thought of each of the young heroes. Truth be told, they hadn't known what to expect with Fire Shadow as their new Head Supervisor. Robin, Aqualad, and Kid Flash had all heard stories of the young Leaguer, each time their mentor had reiterated a mission and Fire Shadow's part left them in a state of awe and wonder. Whereas Superboy and Miss M were in the dark as to what he was truly capable of.

"Much better." Naruto said with an amused tone, though there was a hint of pain in it. If there was one thing that had bothered him about this world, it would be the air quality. Rather than the crisp clean air he was used to, the air was murky and, for lack of a better word, disgusting. He understood that the machines they used had polluted the air, but he suspected he would never truly get used to it. 'Man, I miss Konoha...' Naruto thought a bit sadly as he looked at his surrounding area.

"Kit, why do you even want to go back? For all we know, that world no longer exists. Madara made sure to get rid of you before he enacted his plans, don't you remember what he said?"

'How can I forget?' Naruto thought with bitter anger seeping through his very pores before he reined it back in, hoping not to alarm his new charges. However, one small thirteen year-old hero caught onto the anger, however short and subtle it had been.

What was that about?’ Robin wondered to himself before his thoughts were interrupted by Fire Shadow's muffled voice.
“Well, now that we’re here. Let’s get to know each other better.” Naruto said as he plopped himself cross-leggedly onto the grass, motioning the rest to do the same. “Let’s introduce ourselves, be it your real name or your codename, along with your likes and dislikes, and your abilities.”

“Could you go first, Fire Shadow?” Miss M asked tentatively.

“Sure.” He said before rising, “My codename is Fire Shadow, but you can call me Shadow for short. I like ramen and a number of other things. I dislike arrogant people, those who turn back on their teammates, and the three minutes it takes to heat ramen. As for my abilities, you’ll see them eventually.” He concluded before retaking his seat on the grass.

“Well, some things we learned, other than his obvious like for ramen, is that he dislikes arrogance and traitors.’ Robin thought to himself as he looked at his Supervisor with a curious stare.

“Your up.” Naruto said pointing to Robin.

“Names Robin. I like training and acrobatics and dislike being treated like a kid. I'm trained in several forms of martial arts and am an expert hacker.” He said with a small smirk playing on the edges of his lips.

Making sure to submit that to memory, Naruto then pointed to Kaldur.

“My name is Kaldur'ahm, feel free to call me Kaldur, that is what my friends call me. I like to fight for justice and protect people precious to me as well as innocents who are unable to protect themselves. I dislike those who aim to harm others. My main ability is to use my waterbearers to manipulate water to form different weapons.”

‘Protect his precious people.’ Naruto mused to himself. He had a distinct feeling that Haku would have enjoyed his company, and that he would work well with the young Atlantian.

Letting his head tilt slightly, Naruto then motioned for Kid Flash to introduce himself.

Getting the message, the teenager stood up and began, "I'm Wally West, aka Kid Flash, I like cute girls and being fast. I dislike doing anything slow and my power is being faster than everybody else."

Naruto nearly laughed when Kid Flash sent a smile and glance toward the young Martian when he openly stated he liked cute girls. With a small pause, he then pointed to Superboy.

"Superboy." the clone stated, "I like to fight. I dislike wasting my time and I hate monkeys. I have the same powers as Superman."

‘Wasn't really expecting the hate for monkeys,’ Naruto thought with a small smile before getting serious again, ‘However, from what I've learned about his abilities, I beg to differ, but we'll see.’ he thought to himself. Reason being is because he had heard that Superboy's Kryptonian abilities were either underdeveloped and hadn't fully come through, or were nearly non-existent. He hoped for the former seeing as how the young clone seemed to idolize his, for lack of a better word, father.

Making a mental note to keep a record of Superboy's progress on his Kryptonian abilities, Naruto finally pointed to Miss M.

"My name is M'gann M'orzz, but you can call me Megan or Miss M. I like baking, and I dislike people who discriminate against others." However much she tried to hide it, Naruto could hear a twinge of hardness in her voice when she said her dislike. It was a familiar tone and he could immediately tell that she was speaking from experience. Wondering why a Green Martian would feel so adamant about discrimination, Naruto made another mental note to find out more about it, but
turned his attention back to listening when she continued, "I have the ability to shapeshift, telepathy, and telekinesis."

"Alright that's all of us." the masked Leaguer stated before standing, "Now, why don't we start with a little exercise?" he said with an amused tone before pulling out four silver bells, "The exercise is simple, each of you have to get one of these bells from me."

The five heroes looked at the masked man before them with different expressions, though Megan was the first to find her voice, "But, Shadow," she began, "There are five of us and only four bells."

"Exactly." he said, "The one person who fails to get one of these bells will not become a part of the team."

"What!?" Robin exclaimed in outrage, and getting shocked faces from the rest as they too were caught of guard by their Head Supervisor's words.

"You can't do that!" Kid Flash screamed in protest.

"Head Supervisor. I can do anything I want with this team." Naruto said with a deadly tone, "Whether you or the League like it or not." He couldn't help but feel laughter growing in the back of his throat. The young heroes reacted just as he and his team had all those years ago, but that didn't necessarily mean there was no hope. "You have exactly two hours," he said before he pulled out a small timer from his pocket, "Starting now." he said taking one last look at them before he brought his hands into a familiar seal and disappeared in a puff of smoke.

"Piece of cake." Kid Flash muttered just as he put on his goggles and took off at full speed into the tree infested area.

"Shows how strong he is, he just ran away." Superboy said as he too took off on his own.

"Wait!" Kaldur protested as he turned to his remaining teammates, "I do not believe-"

When a small child-like crackle of laughter reached his ears, Kaldur realized that only Miss M and he remained. Looking to her, he said, "Perhaps we could work together?"

"Hello, Megan!" Miss M said in a happy voice, her palm hitting her forehead, "We stand a better chance together!" Both nodding to each other, they set of together.

Hidden in the shadows of the branches above them, Naruto thought, 'Ah so they have what it takes to pass, but the rest need to pick up on it too. Well, let's go see the solo acts first, shall we?'

"Yes, let's, Kit." Kuruma said with an evil looking grin plastered on his face.
The Bell Test

Training Simulator, Mount Justice

One hour, fifty five minutes and counting. Naruto laughed to himself a little as he silently walked through the simulated training room that took the form of Konoha's Forest. Just a little less than two hours to teach these teen heroes what teamwork actually means. Inwardly, he was grinning like an idiot. Ever since Kakashi had used this test on his genin team and he, Naruto had been dying to use it on his own, and now he finally was. Though this team wasn't exactly like a Genin team, it was pretty close. Besides, though he didn't have full control over their training as Black Canary was still going to teach them some valuable techniques, he did have the end say in what the team did.

As he walked, Naruto heard the soft pitter-patter of running legs hitting the forest floor edging closer and closer to him.

Someone had spotted him.

It didn't take much to know that the person who approached him was none other than Kid Flash. He didn't exactly scream 'subtlety,' after all.

In one swift movement, Naruto sidestepped to his left and dodged the scarcely controlled fist that threatened to slam into the back of his head. Looking onto Kid Flash, he realized the young teen didn't have full control of his speed as he just scarcely missed slammed into one of the many trees. That was one thing Naruto committed to memory about the young speedster. There would be many instances in his time as a hero where the need to stop abruptly, even going at top speed, is required. Even if it's not an immediate halt, the ability to change direction on a moments notice was a countermeasure to that. Also something the boy seemed to lack.

"Alright, no more messing around." Kid Flash stated with a grin, "One of those bells are mine!" after exclaiming that, Wally started at him again, this time actually getting a bit creative and circling Naruto, hoping to catch him off guard by his inability to see where the speedster actually was on account of his after images. But, Naruto had plenty of experience at keeping a trained eye on his target, regardless of their speed. After all his time with Gai, Lee, and the Flash, he was able to keep notice of where Kid Flash was.

It didn't take long for the young hero to attack his back, hoping to grasp hold of one of the silver bells tied tightly on his belt. While Naruto's speed wasn't nearly as fast as the Flash's, it certainly outmatched Wally's. Though if he trained the speedster the way Gai had trained Lee, Naruto was sure that the boy would one day outrun the Flash.

Twisting his body, Naruto dodged the speedsters grasp and exclaimed in a mocking tone, "¡Olé!" making the young hero scowl in annoyance.

"Quit moving around!" Wally exclaimed before again taking off at him head on. With a small sigh, Naruto mentally noted that he also needed to teach the young hero a diversity of attacks. All he was doing was using his speed to try to outmatch his opponent. Which, on most cases, would work. However, he would occasionally meet some villain who would be able to match his speed, or counteract it with one of their own abilities. Someone like Count Vertigo would be able to stop the speedster before he got within five feet from him.

With a mischievous grin plastered on his face, Naruto brought his hands to form a few seals as the speedster made his way toward him ad called out, "Sexy no Jutsu!"

The Bell Test
Wally was, to say the least, taken completely by surprise. As the ploom of smoke dissipated, so did his Head Supervisor, leaving a very, very attractive blonde girl in his place! Not to mention she was NAKED!

Unable to stop himself and the full on nose bleed that ensued from seeing such a sight, Naruto shifted back to his normal self, moved to grab the young speedster's outreached hand and was able to twist it in order to throw the boy aside in one quick movement. Kid Flash, who was still recovering from the amazing sight, was easily thrown to the ground and knocked unconscious.

'I knew he would fall for that!' Naruto thought laughing out loud at the unconscious nose-bleeding speedster.

"Of course he would!" Kuruma said stifling a roar of laughter. That was one jutsu that he let the Kit get away with simply because of the hilarious effects it had on males.

'Still, he has a lot of potential.'

"Indeed." Kuruma said collecting himself, "Though he is still to arrogant. Not as much as Sasuke or Neji were at one point, but still too overconfident in his abilities." Kuruma said observantly.

'True, but knocking him down a few pegs would do wonders for him. I'm sure Black Canary already has something set up for him and the rest of the team knowing her.'

"Out of all the Leaguers, I have to say she's one of the better ones. She's just as good as those two 'Fires of Youth' idiots when it comes to hand-to-hand combat. Not as fast, but damn good."

'Should I let you out so you could ask her out on a date, Kuruma?' Naruto said mockingly to the fox as he continued his assault on the teen.

"Shut up, kit." Kuruma said with a rather angry growl, "I can appreciate skill, but there is no way I would ever lower myself to these measly humans."

'Whatever you say, Fox.'

Cutting off the 'fun' conversation with the Kyuubi, Naruto finished the young speedster off with on final fist to his abdomen, sending Wally to hit one of the many trees surrounding them.

"Not bad, Wally." Naruto said to the boy who was currently fighting the battle to stay conscious, "You have a lot of potential, but have yet to use it. You lack the motivation to continue to grow because of your arrogance." Once Naruto knew the boy was out for the count, he said with a smile, "Which Canary and I are going to have a lot of fun helping you with."

Leaving the boy where he passed out, Naruto stood his ground for a short while, trying to feel where he felt a small ripple in the earth originate from. Only one thing could do that, and that was Superboy. Whether from venting his frustration on the poor unassuming earth or leaping an incredible distance in hopes of finding him, Naruto was unsure. Either way, the boy had given away his position, something that could very well cost his own life, and/or the lives of his comrades in a real life-and-death situation.

'Least I didn't have to waste time trying to find him or Robin.' Without bothering to hear the Kyuubi's snark comment, Naruto took off in the general direction of the ripple, and eventually found himself in a small circle of fallen trees. The area practically screamed, "Superboy was here!"

"No more hiding!" yelled a rather aggravated young voice. Turning casually, Naruto met the gaze of
the young clone who, like Wally, sped straight for him without thinking first.

One thing Naruto noticed was his lack of speed. This was supposed to be Superman's clone... so where was the super speed? Wanting to gauge the clones strength, Naruto let the fist make contact with his raised forearm.

It hurt like hell.

Not as much as Superman's punches, that much was for certain, but this kid seriously packed a punch. Easily on par with one of Sakura's chakra enhanced punches.

Letting Kuruma's chakra handle healing the nearly broken bone and ripped muscles, Naruto kicked the clone in the abdomen, sending Superboy back a few yards. Naruto needed to see everything the boy could do, only then could he hope to know what he had to train him in to make him stronger. Besides the obvious need of Teamwork, of course.

With an angry grunt, Superboy rushed forward again, and, not wanting to beat around the bush, Naruto started a strictly hand-to-hand battle with the young clone. He was faster than most, but his execution of attacks were sloppy. Whatever those genomorphs had taught him, they had failed to give him a proper foundation for his attacks. As such his movements were on par with lower level villains. Not a good thing when the League mainly dealt with the likes of the League of Shadows.

After a short while, Superboy let out a rather agitated growl and then screamed, "Stop holding back!"

Naruto was rather surprised the boy noticed, but at the same time, grinned mischievously. The boy wanted a real fight, he would get one.

"Oooh let me out, Kit!" Kuruma said excitedly. Though he knew that the clone was no where near as powerful as Superman, he still had Kryptonian blood running through his veins, so he was obviously tougher than most and could survive his attacks.

'Not a chance, Kuruma. I just want to teach him a little lesson, not send him to the medbay! I'll just see how he handles me when I enhance my strength and speed with Chakra.' With an annoyed Kuruma growling in the back of his head, Naruto focused his chakra into his legs and arms.

"You're Superman's clone?" Fire Shadow asked in a slightly mocking tone, "Hmph, let's see just how strong you are."

Angered, Superboy began his assault again. Only this time, he had nearly no control over his attacks, thus making them far easier to dodge and manipulate their movements.

'Way too easily angered... I'll probably have to deal with that someway or another.' Naruto thought with a small internal sigh. 'He also seems to show lack of other Kryptonian abilities. No attempt at flight, arctic breath, or even heat vision. I'll have to do some digging and see if that's normal for his apparent age.'

Finding that he had noted enough about the clone and his abilities, Naruto stepped back a bit and brought his hands to a similar hand seal until a ploom of smoke revealed four exact copies of himself. Then, Naruto and his clones took off toward Superboy - who had shaken off his surprise and gotten into a defensive position - and screamed,

"Fire Shadow Rendan!" Quicker than Superboy could keep up with, Shadow and his clones began to punch and kick his body with fluid motions. Though Superboy was doing a rather good job at blocking most of the punches, the last kick to the head caught him completely by surprise and sent
him flying backwards onto the forest floor, the edges of his vision beginning to cloud. Looking to his side, Superboy saw his new Head Supervisor peer down at him.

"You are strong, Superboy, that much I can admit." Shadow said, "But, you are too quick to anger, and that is your greatest weakness. Rather than harnessing that rage, you let it control you. As of right now, you aren't even close to Superman's shadow." with that sentence, Naruto could see both hurt and anger cross the clones face, "However, with proper training, I have little doubt you will one day surpass your father." Even though Shadow had a mask on, covering his entire face, Superboy couldn't help but feel as though the Leaguer had a smile on his face. Before he could do or say anything, Superboy succumbed to unconsciousness.

'Two down and three to go.' Naruto thought with a small smile.

"One last solo act, Kit."Kuruma said, "And it just so happens to be the Baby Bat."

'That it is. Kid's smart though. Kind of like Shikamaru, but with way more motivation.'

"He's small though."

'So he's harder to catch.'

"Not when he's outnumbered by a thousand, Kit."

'Heh, not a bad idea, Fox.'Naruto thought with a wide mischievous grin. 'Now, off to find the Baby Bat.' He finished before trying to find the specific power signature the thirteen year old hero let out.

It didn't take long to find the right signature, and without missing a beat, Naruto went off toward the young hero's location.

"It should not take this long to hack into the training simulator!" Robin said in a frustrated voice as he fumbled with the small computer programmed into the armored glove on his left arm.

"Sometimes, technology won't be there to help you. In escape or fighting. So what will you do when you're in those situations?" asked out a muffled voice Robin knew well enough to recognize.

"Find an alternative way of escape or fighting style, duh." Robin replied cheekily taking out a number of his own personalized birdarangs in preparation.

"Even when you're over run?" replied Shadow before calling out, "Kage Bunshin no Jutsu!" making two hundred physical copies of himself. He wanted to see if the young hero would realize that when you're outnumbered, your best bet of not being killed or captured, is having people fighting beside you.

Immediately, Robin sent out a dozen of his birdarangs, and while his clones dodged the projectiles with mastery, the explosion triggered after a few seconds easily dispersed a small number of them. While fighting, he inwardly cursed his luck. How on earth was he supposed to grab hold of the bell when he didn't know which Fire Shadow was the real one?! He had tried to keep an eye on the original, but when a dozen clones literally jumped him, his sight of the original was lost for good.

While Robin fought off the miniature army of Fire Shadow's, the original Naruto sunk into the earth, finding his way directly beneath the young teenager. He hated, absolutely loathed the time Kakashi had used this Jutsu on him, and knew from experience how difficult it was to escape without insane strength or help.
Above the surface, his clones were giving the young hero the fight of his life. Robin couldn’t help but feel if his new Head Supervisor was slightly sadistic. Nearly one hundred and fifty clones were attacking him with speed that was simply inhuman! Not to mention their strength! While nothing was clearly broken, he wouldn’t be surprised if he was going to be a new mix of purple, black, and blue the next morning. Still, he would show his new supervisor that he wasn’t to be messed with. Sure he was small, but he had more experience than any of the other guys on his team; he's been fighting crime since he was nine years old!

In order to fend off the mass amount of clones that surrounded him, Robin moved around as much as he could, trying his best not to waste a single movement. He had tried to use the trees to escape into a more advantageous position only to find that there were clones literally sticking to the side of the tree trunks defying the law of physics(!) and had thrust him back into the barrage of the masked Leaguer. Quickly becoming exhausted, Robin used practically everything he could that was stored in his utility belt, causing the number of blondes to finally dwindle into the thirties, something Naruto thought to be rather impressive. But, time was ticking away and he still needed to deal with the last two who actually understood the point of this test, and he was sure it would take plenty more time to deal with the two than it had for the solo acts.

"Always be aware of the number of your enemies." Naruto said surprising the young hero before he called out, "Doton Shinjuu Zanshu no Jutsu!" Robin was at a loss for words. First he's fighting Shadow's clones - which he still couldn't figure out how he made them - and then the original (he assumed) literally drags him down into the solid ground with only his head above the surface!

While Robin struggled to free himself, he couldn't help but feel as though the masked blonde was smirking at his situation.

"Your smarter than most Robin. Way smarter than any of the others, I'm sure." Shadow said, "But, that arrogance of yours is going to get you killed one day." he stated seriously, causing the boy to wince at his tone. It sounded eerily like Batman's when he reprimanded him over a rookie mistake. "Still, not bad. All your lacking is one vital thing, once you figure out what that is, you'll definitely become a force to be reckoned with." he said before sending a quick blow the the back of the boy's neck, knocking him out efficiently.

"I'm a bit disappointed in the baby bat."

'You know... so am I. I feel like I'm missing something important...' Just as Naruto left the area after dispelling the small remainder of his clones, he foolishly stepped on a trip wire, causing a net to come over his head. With no time to dodge, Naruto made a few hand seals with break neck speed before calling out,

"Kawarimi no Jutsu!" and watched as the substituted piece of log was shocked silly with what was 500,000 volts of electricity.

'...Can't say the kid isn't prepared...’ Naruto thought as he looked at the flaming log with a small bead of sweat running down the side of his cheek.

"Still didn't help him much." Kuruma growled out, annoyed that his vessel failed to see something so simple as a trip wire.

'True... Oh well, he's out for the count and I've got a little pair of hero's waiting for me.'

"Get going, Kit. I want to see just how you handle these last two."
'Alright, I'm going, I'm going.'

Training Simulator, Observation Room

"How are they doing?" Black Canary -who had just arrived- asked the red clad Leaguer

"Fairly well considering their opponent. However, only Kaldur and Megan realized the true purpose of this test." Red Tornado stated as he continued to watch the various monitors that showed each of the individuals location in the Training Simulator.

"Hm, I didn't think any of them would realize they needed to work together." Canary said aloud wondering how the two young heroes would work together to attempt to take down Fire Shadow.

Over the two years Shadow had been a member of the League, he had proved time and time again that he didn't need a team and could easily handle himself. However, whenever it was offered, or demanded by Batman since he wanted to keep an eye on him, Shadow would work with his teammates strengths with mastery, and cover their weaknesses for them. He was the perfect back-up and possibly the best teammate to have in any situation. While Canary and he weren't exactly the best of friends, she could say that they would trust each other with their lives. For whatever reason, he refused to speak of his life prior to heroism, though Canary did have a few theories as to why that was so.

Every conversation they had together left the senior Leaguer knowing that something terrible had happened to the young blonde. Despite the muffle in his voice due to the mask, she could hear the slightly broken tone that was only heard in a man, or woman, that had seen death in the worst of ways. She was certain if she had been able to see his eyes, she would have looked into ones that were haunted by the past.

Red Tornado shared the same speculations of their young member. While he could not empathize with such emotions, for he had little understanding of them, he could try to sympathize with them. Though he was certain, with the way the young blonde carried himself, that he wanted no pity.

"Nor did I." Red Tornado said as he watched Fire Shadow walk through the trees in search for the two remaining heroes.

"Well, they only have a little bit longer until the alarm goes off. I wonder if Megan and Kaldur will succeed?"

"Perhaps they shall."

"Ten says that they won't." Canary said, betting on Naruto's skill and experience over the young heroes would prevail.

"...I do not understand." Red Tornado admitted, causing Canary to smile slightly.

"Never mind, Red. Let's just enjoy the show."

Training Simulator

"Which way do you think he went?" Megan asked as she stood next to Kaldur. Everyway they went it seemed they merely hit more trees. They hadn't even gotten a glimpse of their friends, though they did feel a slight rumble earlier.
"Is there anyway you can try to locate him through your telepathy?" Kaldur asked instead of answering her question.

"Hello, Megan!" she said with a smile and a soft palm to her temple, "I can try to connect to his mind and find him that way!"

For a moment, Kaldur looked thoughtful, "Is there anyway you can make it so we can keep telepathic contact? When we confront him, it would make communicating much easier."

"Sure! Back on Mars this is how we talk to each other." Megan spoke to Kaldur telepathically. However, since he wasn't expecting it so suddenly, he grasped his head in slight pain.

"That is good, Megan, but give others a warning before you do so. Here on Earth that would be considered a major invasion of privacy."

"Oh! I'm sorry!" she apologized vehemently, "I'll be sure to tell you from now on."

Nodding, Kaldur continued, "That would be most appreciated. Now, let us find Fire Shadow."

"Right." she agreed nodding before she brought her hands to the side of her head and tried to telepathically come to contact with Fire Shadow. She let out a smile when she found him, though she felt as though something were blocking her powers. She couldn't see his thoughts, only a small flicker of emotion every now and then. It was... odd.

"I have him. He's approximately two hundred yards east from our current location, and it seems he's waiting for us." she said letting her arms fall back down to her sides and turned to Kaldur.

"I do not know whether or not he will be prepared for the both of us. For the moment, we have the element of surprise." he said while beginning to make his way east.

"Right. He'll only be expecting one of us." Megan said in agreement.

"From what Robin has said of Fire Shadow's abilities, I do not know if he would recognize your touch of his mind. I will meet him head on while you camouflage yourself and get behind him. When you see the opportunity arise, take the bells."

"Understood. We're almost there, should I link us up?"

"Yes." Kaldur said, preparing himself for the foreign feeling to return.

"Link established." Megan stated telepathically.

"Good. I will keep his attention. Do not hesitate."

"Got it." she thought to him before quickly shifting to camouflage mode and swiftly but silently phasing through the trees of the forest to position herself behind Fire Shadow. She noticed that he seemed to be meditating. He was seated on the grass with his legs crossed, though she couldn't be certain as he could very well easily be watching everything as his mask hid whether or not his eyes were open.

Just as she finished positioning herself, Kaldur walked into the open activating his waterbearers and causing Shadow to rise.

"Just you, Kaldur?" he asked in what seemed to be a knowing tone.

"I am more than capable on my own." he replied.
"Well, then let's see what you've got compared to the others." With that said, Shadow positioned himself in a battle stance.

As they were located far from the only source of water in the training simulator, Kaldur had to shift his waterbearers into the hammers he was used to fighting with and move swiftly to attack the blonde. Naruto knew that Megan was positioned behind him, simply waiting for the right moment to grab a hold of the bells while he held off Kaldur. Taking a pair of kunai in hand, Naruto met Kaldur's weapons with a force that knocked him back a few feet.

When Kaldur moved toward him again, twisting his body for more momentum and power behind his attack, Naruto swiftly moved away and brought his leg to hit the young Atlantian's head only for it to be halted by said hero's forearm. With a slight smirk, Shadow jumped back a bit and made a few hand seals until he called out, "Katon Goukakyuu no Jutsu!" making the Atlantian's face pale drastically before causing him to dive to the side in order to dodge the giant fireball.

Kneeling on the floor, Kaldur looked back to the masked Leaguer.

He wasn't messing around.

Steeling his nerves, Kaldur launched forward again. "Megan, try to telekinetically grasp hold of the bells, I will keep his attention even if he realizes you doing so."

"On it, Kaldur." Megan said as her eyes glowed green. Naruto heard the jingling of the silver bells that were tied to his belt and looked down to them, realizing that they were attempting to escape by some phantom force. Who happened to be named, Megan.

'Right. She has telekinesis.' he thought to himself as he took the bells in his hands, hoping to force Megan out in the open.

"He's taken them in his hands, I'll try something. Be prepared to hit him." she said to Kaldur who simply nodded. Naruto knew he had no hope to counter her telekinesis when she took hold of his entire body and raised him into the air and slammed him into a nearby tree, rather forcefully, before bringing him toward Kaldur who prepared to hit him with his hammer as though he were nothing more than a baseball.

Bringing his arm out, Naruto in the last minute was able to grasp a hold of the hammer and maneuver himself away from the blow. Rolling onto the floor, Naruto skillfully threw a small number of shuriken toward the scarcely visible Megan. The young martian lost concentration due to the projectiles and swiftly moved to the side in order to dodge the small weapons, bringing her out in the open just as Naruto had hoped.

With a small smirk, brought his hands to a few seals and called out, "Kage Bunshin no Jutsu!" creating another hundred clones before making them all charge the slightly shocked pair of heroes and, in unison, screamed, "Fire Shadow Bunshin 'Bodii Gachan!'" The two teens stood no chance at escaping of fighting off the blondes and ended up crushed beneath them, suffering a number of punches and kicks at the same time.

When Fire Shadow dispelled his clones and looked at the nearly unconscious pair, he was about to comment on their execution until a rather loud alarm filled their ears causing both Megan and Kaldur to realize that they had failed.

"Well, looks like times up!" Naruto said in a rather happy tone before walking up to the fallen heroes and offered them his hands, which were taken appreciatively. Once they all stood, he continued, "Let's go grab the rest of your friends and I'll let you all know what happens now since you all
"You mean none of us could get the stinking bells!?" Wally exclaimed with a small wet towel on his nose that was helping rid his face of the blood.

"Yes. We all have failed." Kaldur said in a solemn tone.

"At least none of you were dragged into the ground!" Robin bit out. He was still frustrated that he one, couldn't get the bell, and two, he couldn't get himself out of the earth even after he regained consciousness; it had been Shadow who helped him out.

Superboy and Megan both decided not to say anything, though for different reasons. Superboy was beyond annoyed that he was beaten by such a weak looking guy. Though, inwardly he was wondering if the blonde had meant what he said before he lost consciousness. Could he really surpass Superman? Even when it seemed he had neither heat vision or the ability to fly? Megan, on the other hand, felt that she was a few words away from being sent back to Mars. She had a chance to be a part of a team here on Earth, the planet she had dreamed about visiting forever! She had a chance to make friends... to be equal with the people here, and she failed.

Noticing the tension, Naruto decided to speak up, "Yes you all failed. Anyone have an theory as to why you did?" he asked the heroes.

"Because you're stronger than us?" Megan said a bit softly.

"Individually, yes, I am stronger than you. But that's not why you failed. Anyone else?" when no one raised their voices, he continued, "The reason none of you were able to even touch the bells was because you didn't work together." he said causing a few eyes to widen, "Megan and Kaldur were the only ones to come at me together, and I had to keep my wits about me during my time with them, while when I fought against you three," he said pointing to Superboy, Wally, and Robin, "I didn't really have to put that much effort."

"The Justice League faces against villains who are hell bent on world domination, or mass destruction, going off on your own doesn't help, it'll only get you killed. No hero, not even the Man of Steel himself can do everything alone. That's why we work together." 

"Give us another chance, this time we won't fail!" Wally screamed out.

"Just one more time." Robin asked.

Getting nods from the rest of the small band of heroes, Naruto inwardly smirked. It was strange how they reacted so similar to how he and his team had when they had failed the test.

"Alright." he said receiving wide smiles in return, "However, I did state at the beginning of the test that only four of you would be on the team. I'm giving you five minutes to choose who won't be on the team."

"What!?"

"That's not fair!"

"Life is unfair. Get used to it, kid." Naruto said sternly.

"No. I will not make such a decision." Kaldur said with a firm voice.
"Neither will I." Wally said, sounding uncharacteristically serious.

"We never wanted to work with the League anyways." Superboy stated with his arms crossed as he stood side by side with his teammates. He wasn't about to abandon them. They were the sole reason he wasn't still with Cadmus, the reason he wasn't the weapon he was meant to be. They were his new family, and home.

"I won't either. I won't do that to my friends." Megan said with as much courage as she could muster. Times like this, Shadow was rather intimidating.

Naruto looked at the five young heroes with a small smile, though he made sure his voice didn't give way to it. "I see." he said in a calm, almost cold voice that made the heroes slightly fearful for some reason. "Then I can only do one thing." he said pausing dramatically, as Kakashi had simply for fun, and even let out a slight killer intent just for effect.

"I have to pass you." he said, a smile sounding clear in his voice and recalled the killer intent as he watched Wally face plants into the grass and the other heroes look taken back.

"What?" Megan asked confused.

"I am afraid I do not understand." Kaldur admitted.

"If you all decided to kick one of you out, then you would have failed for you wouldn't have what it takes to be a functional team. But you didn't, you stuck together and refused to betray one another. So congratulations, you are all now officially the Young Justice team." Naruto finished with a wide grin plastered on his face, though he knew that no one would be able to see it.

When the news finally sunk in the five heroes, they mirrored his unseen grin and Wally jumped up in the air in a victorious pose.

"Now, I don't know about you, but I could go for a few bowls of ramen!" Naruto stated happily at the excited teens.

"Ohh! I'll bake cookies and make us lunch!" Megan said happily as she began to float, looking as though she was barely controlling the urge to speed off into the kitchen.

"Sounds great, Megan." Naruto said heading toward the exit, "Come on, I'm sure you're all just as hungry."

"You bet!" Wally said racing out of the Training Simulator, a happy martian girl trailing after him.

While they were walking toward the kitchen, Naruto couldn't help but smile. He had a few doubts about training and supervising this team, but it seemed as though they were baseless. While each hero had their faults, they had the potential to surpass their mentors and become a great team. They'll all do great things one day. 'he thought contently. The future was definitely going to be interesting.
"Again!" Fire Shadow demanded of Team Young Justice, who were currently fighting the urge to collapse on the floor. They had been training all morning since the crack of dawn, nearly six hours since they had began. None of the teens really knew what to expect when they passed Fire Shadow's test, but if the test was any indication, it would be tough.

_Tough_ was an understatement.

It was torture.

From the moment they walked into the training simulator, which had taken the form of a large gym equipped with various obstacles, Shadow had started them off by stretching for a good forty minutes. At first they were confused why they had taken double the normal time of stretching, only to realize he had a reason for doing so.

He was pushing their muscles to their limits.

First, a thirty minute run. Which would have been particularly easy, had they not been forced to sprint the entire time or face the wrath of Shadows rubber balls of fury; whenever they lost a bit of speed, Naruto would bombard them with small rubber balls in order to push them to maintain their speed. Kid Flash thought he was going to breeze right through the run. He _was_ the fastest kid alive after all. A thirty minute sprint wouldn't be too taxing. Maybe cause him to eat an entire buffet later, but hardly difficult. That is, he _thought_ it would be. Fire Shadow knew that this sort of exercise would be nothing for the young speedster, and prepared beforehand. He had the young teen dressed in a weighted body suit, making him weigh roughly 300 pounds. After the run, the boy was sweating as much, if not more so that his other teammates.

Of course, Naruto couldn't leave the young Kryptonian clone without something that would cause the training to sink in. Thanks to a little digging around, Naruto was able to come into possession of a shard of Kryptonite, Kryptonians mortal weakness. Rather than simply placing it on him and hope for the best, Naruto asked the Kyuubi for help on duplicating it's effects into a seal in order to, in a sense, 'level out the playing field.' He had placed it in Superboy's training shirt, a shirt that was given to each of the members as they were also slightly weighted. When the young Kryptonian asked what it was, Naruto had answered honestly, omitting exactly how he had created the seal, of course.

He couldn't exactly let out all of his secrets after all. Though Shadow had to give it to Robin and his rather... cunning ways of asking questions which to an ordinary person would have fooled them to say exactly what he wanted to hear unknowingly.

Naruto knew that once Batman looked through the training sessions videos, he would come to the right conclusion that he had an 'unknown amount of Kryptonite in his possession,' and, more than probably not, up his surveillance on him. It wouldn't be that hard for a "master detective" to deduce that much. That, or believe that Superboy wasn't full Kryptonian (which could be the actual case now that Naruto thought about it). Either way, Shadow didn't particularly care, he simply wanted to teach and train the young heroes so that they wouldn't one day loose their lives on the job as some have, regardless of the methods he would have to use. _Without_ crossing the line, of course. He would rather rot in hell than see himself turn into Danzo.
A while after they completed the sprint, Shadow had them go through two obstacle courses multiple times with each run through slightly different than the last. The first base-course was a rather simple one compared to the others: a timed course that consisted of monkey-bars, a high wall to climb, a mud pit they had to crawl themselves through without getting hurt, or caught by the lowly hung net of barbed wire, and finally a simple run through a treadmill going the opposing direction.

The second, was more difficult. Unlike the first, the obstacles were more intricate. While it still had the same course, dozens of traps were laid flawlessly throughout it. From trip wires, to weighted sensors that triggered a blaze of shuriken to elemental jutsus. All of which were illusions of course, and would simply splat paint on the person should they be caught in it and feel something equal of hammer slamming into them.

He wasn't out to kill his team after all.

Of course, after finishing the second obstacle course, each young hero simply knew without a shadow of a doubt that their new Head Supervisor was a sadist.

While they had breaks between the blocks of exercises, where Shadow provided them with water, energy boosters, and offered each of them a very low-level stamina pill to each of them so they could continue, the young heroes still felt as though they were just about ready to collapse.

"Come on Team, one more quick run and we can all call it a day." Naruto said, hoping it would motivate the team to finish the last exercise, which was a quick combination of jumping jacks, pushups, pullups, and situps. He had watered down his original training regime for the team, knowing they wouldn't be able to handle the stress of his so early off in their training. While his team was sweating what seemed to be every last drop of water their bodies carried, Naruto was sweating only a fair amount that seemed down his mask. There were a few surprised faces when Naruto told the Team at the beginning of the morning that he would be joining them in their Training. Simply because he was training them didn't mean he couldn't use the opportunity to train himself. After all, there was always someone better and always ways to better yourself. Though throughout it, he cursed himself for dawning the full face mask. The thing was not made for good ventilation.

Of course, Kurama had scolded him for acting so weak. Even though they were mutual allies and some sort of friend to each other, they still bickered as though he were still a thirteen year-old kid. Though now it held little to no malice and ill intent, the bickering was more for the sake of keeping normalcy in the universe that was not their own.

When Shadow received weak groans as a reply, Naruto and the Team finally finished their training and the young heroes couldn't hold back the need to fall on the floor panting heavily.

Robin was currently wondering how Fire Shadow, who seemed particularly laid back when not fighting, could possibly be more of a slave driver than Batman! He thought that Bruce's training regimes were taxing, but Shadow's made his training session simply blew everything Bruce had thrown at him out of the water.

Superboy, while panting and sweating slightly, was ransacking his knowledge of Superman and trying to figure out just how he was sweating! Everything he knows about the man clearly state that he's practically invincible and nowhere does it state that he sweats. Could Shadow have been wrong when he said he could surpass Superman? He couldn't fly, he didn't have heat vision or arctic breath, and he sweat...

The other young heroes were far too exhausted to even wonder such thoughts about their new Head Supervisor, but one thought did run through their minds, and that was that even though this training was harsher than the arctic winds in the heart of Winter, this was helping them become stronger, and
"Good job, Team." Naruto said with a happy tone, "Honestly, I half expected you all to bail out halfway through, but you surprised and impressed me by not giving up." While the group of teens were exhausted, they managed to grow small grins on their faces at the praise. They felt as though they had passed another test from their new Head Supervisor, and it felt nice.

"Cool down and head to the showers, I'll be out on League business till tomorrow night, so you probably won't see me. Either way, this training regime you all faced today will be the standard from now on, and whatever Black Canary will want from you every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday with some light weight training on the other days. When I come back, I don't want to hear anything about misbehaving or disrespect, otherwise you'll see just how much I can push your body past it's limits." Naruto said in a calm chilling voice that practically screamed doom to all those who didn't obey him.

Wisely, the teens all nodded in agreement and watched as their Head Supervisor left the room, letting the young heroes calm their muscles and breathing before they left themselves.

Observation Deck

"That was a bit much, don't you think?" the melodic voice of Black Canary rang through the metal walls of the halls, ringing into Shadow's ears.

"Not really. You and I have done training worse than that." Naruto replied with a smirk evident in his tone.

"They're just kids, Shadow. Ease them into it." she added in a soft yet stern voice.

Naruto, though his face was completely covered, let him face grow cold and his aura darken. "They haven't been kids since they donned the masks, Canary. They want to be apart of the League, then they need to see exactly just what they're getting themselves into. You saw them in there, Black. That Team has everything it takes to be members of the League except experience. The determination is testament to that, all they need to really work on is their teamwork. I'm not going to let themselves believe that they're ready for something they're not. I will not allow them to die simply because I was too easy on them."

Canary, at that point, realized she had said the wrong thing. The past couple years she had gotten to know Shadow was that he took their work seriously. At times, she thought, equal to Batman's seriousness, if not more so. While it was clear in his movements that he had faced more than a few life-and-death situations, she didn't know just how many, and who he had lost during those times.

With an apologetic expression, she said, "Alright, I understand. I won't question it from now on."

Nodding, Shadow made his way toward the Zeta-tubes. "Thank you, Canary." he said with a calm tone before the computer recognized him and he was engulfed into the light and brought directly to the Watchtower.

'Ugh...Time to get to work...'

"Stop whining and get to it." Kurama growled slightly.

With a small sigh, Shadow walked forward and went to see what Green Arrow wanted from him.
"You again! I'm starting to get insulted that Green Arrow's not messing up my operations personally!" Screamed a thug at a newly solo act known as Speedy.

Said young man merely glared, fresh resentments shining through at the mention of his past mentor. As the thug began shooting at him, Speedy expertly dodged and managed to fire a exploding arrow at the firearm destroying it, and in the process, ruining the thugs suit. Which apparently, was expensive for a man his size.

Before Speedy was overwhelmed, a blur of red and gold knocked a couple of the lackeys down, and biderangs thrown by a small laughing teenage boy knocked out a couple more before a rather serious looking Aqualad took down the remaining thugs with his waterbearers.

The "Head" of the operation had since removed the remnants of his shirt and began to lift parts of the concrete floor and threw it at the kids who decided to play hero.

"The cave is perfect. It has everything the Team will need." Kaldur aka Aqualad said to Speedy after cutting through a thrown concrete boulder with his waterbearer.

"For covert missions. You know, spy stuff!" Robin said with a bit of enthusiasm at the hope of his long-time friend at joining their newly formed Team. Ever since the fiasco at the Hall of Justice, Speedy had become estranged and wanted nearly nothing to do with any of the League, including League member protégés like Kaldur, KF, and he.

"And wait until you see Superboy and Miss Martian. But I saw her first!" Wally said, adding his two cents into the conversation before all of them dodged the coming boulder the thug threw at them. Speedy, ever quick with his bow, shot three exploding arrows that stuck onto the thugs chest before exploding in concession to their attachment on his body.

The explosions only seemed to annoy the thug rather than actually bring him down. Rather cockily, he said, "He-he. Tell Arrow he shouldn't send boys to do a mans job!" While Speedy readied another arrow, "Go ahead." he finished while spreading his arms out, leaving him wide open. With narrowed eyes, Speedy sent the arrow flying, knowing the thug was expecting another explosion, he was slightly satisfied with his look of shock as the arrow exploded into foam, spreading over the thugs entire body until it fully covered him, ending the fight.

"High-density polyurethane foam! Nice!" Kid Flash observed while impressed at his friends choice of arrow.

"So Speedy, you in?" Robin asked with a hopeful tone.

"Pass." Speedy said with finality, "I'm done letting Arrow and the League telling me what to do. I don't need a babysitter or a clubhouse handout with the other kids. Your "Junior Justice League" is a joke. Something to keep you busy, and in your place. I don't want any part of it." he finished with much venom lacing his voice.

While the young hero was engulfed in the shadows, leaving the three remaining heroes behind, a fox masked man walked over to the young archer causing him to stop in his path.

"Is there something you want, Fire Shadow?" Speedy asked the masked Leaguer with slight anger in his voice.
"Sure, a lot of things." Shadow replied with a small shrug, "I could go for a nice bowl of miso ramen right now."

With a small exasperated sigh, Speedy clarified, "I meant something from me, Shadow."

"What? I can't just stop by and visit a friend?" Shadow said with mock hurt in his voice.

"I am not your friend, Shadow." Speedy hissed out with narrowed eyes, his grip on his bow tightening.

"Alright," he conceded, "I'll stop bullshitting then." Naruto said with a sigh before getting serious. "Technically, I'm on an "official" League assignment to extend a hand and offer you a place on the Young Justice Team." he finished with a dull tone to his voice.

"Something tells me you don't want me on the Team." Speedy said with a cold voice.

"Of course I don't want you on the Team." Shadow said nonchalantly, causing the young archer to tense with anger, "For several reasons in fact. Firstly, you don't want to be on the Team. Secondly, you want to be a solo act without the League on your back. And thirdly, you don't need much direction. You already know what you want and have a plan on how to prove that to everyone else. While there is a major need for a long distance fighter on the Team, I'm not going to deal with someone who doesn't want to be a part of it. All that'll do is cause problems later on."

After his explanation, Speedy's shoulders relaxed. 'Finally' he thought, 'Someone who gets it.' "Then, thanks for the offer, but no thanks." he said with a small nod of respect to the Leaguer. Speedy had met the guy when Green Arrow and he accompanied him on an assignment to prevent a large drug shipment and take down the leader of the cartel behind the shipments.

Back then, he looked onto the young Leaguer with awe. It was obvious he was powerful, and he worked perfectly in sync with Green Arrow and he that he felt as though they had been working together for years.

He was the perfect teammate.

"No problem, Speedy." Shadow replied with a small shrug, "Though, if you ever change your mind, you are always welcome, and if you ever need anything from me, don't hesitate to ask."

With a small nod of his head, Roy Harper watched as Fire Shadow disappeared in a swirl of leaves and smoke.

'I'll be sure to remember that, Shadow.' Speedy thought before he too returned to the shadows and left in the night.

Mount Justice
July 18 11:16 EDT

"Recognized. Robin, B-01. Kid Flash, B-03"

As the light from the Zeta Tube disappeared and brought forth the two young heroes, Robin wasted no time in running toward his friends that remained standing by a large monitor. "Did you ask him?"

"What did he say?" followed Kid Flash's question as he jogged over to his teammates.
Taking notice of his friends arrival, Kaldur answered, "He is arriving now." 'He' being none other than Red Tornado.

"Well what are we waiting for?" Kid Flash continued before speeding his way toward their "front door."

When the Team made it's way outside, they were met with a small tornado and Red riding it before he landed on the grass in front of them.

"Greetings." the Leaguer said politely, "Is there a reason you intercepted me outside the cave?" he queried the Team.

Robin, taking initiative, said, "We were hoping you had a mission for us.." Red Tornado looked at the other members of the Team and saw that they all were hoping that he'd say yes.

Answering honestly, he said, "You know that is is Fire Shadows duty to assign team missions as he is Head Supervisor."

Getting a small groan from Robin, the teenager said with frustration lacing his voice, "It's been a week!" Which it had since their little Cadmus debacle. And that technically speaking, had been a self assigned mission for..."poetic justice."

Knowing that nothing short of a mission would appease the young heroes, Red Tornado began to take his leave before saying, "You will be tested soon enough. Until that time, perhaps you should use this time to take pleasure in each others company."

Now, fully frustrated and reminded of what Speedy had told them the night before, Kaldur said stiffly, "This Team is not a social club."

Turning, the Leaguer said, "No, but I understand from Fire Shadow that team interaction is a good teamwork exercise. Perhaps you should take this day off from your training and learn more about each other." With that, Red makes his way to the opened door and is recognized by the computer before leaving the young heroes outside completely.

"Does he really expect us to believe that?" Kid Flash said annoyed at their lack of missions.

"Oh, let me find out." Megan offered, reaching out to the Leaguer telepathically before continueing in a dejected voice, "I am sorry, I forgot he is a machine. Inorganic... I cannot read his mind.

"It was a good try, though." Kid Flash said comfortably with a hand placed on her green shoulder.

With his arms crossed over his chest and an annoyed expression smothering his face, Kaldur said, "And now we tour the club house." with frustration lacing his tone.

Trying to defuse the obvious tense feeling in the air about them, Megan said, "Well, me and Superboy live here, maybe we could be your tour guides?"

Taking slightly pensive expressions, the rest of the Team turned to look at the young Kryptonian who merely shrugged his shoulders and firmly stated, "Don't look at me." While he didn't have anything better to do, he wasn't about to play tour guide to the rest of his Team. They could take a look around the Cave the same way he had: exploration.

"Don't have to." Wally said with a wide mischievous grin toward Miss M, "Private tour guide sounds like fun." he finished with what he thought to be a suave tone of voice.
Slightly sputtering at the subtle insinuation Robin knew Megan would innocently miss, he exclaimed, "She never said anything about it being private!"

"Team building." Kaldur said in a calm commanding voice that brought the rest of his teammates attention to him, "We'll all go." the Atlantian finished with the same commanding voice that left nothing up for debate.

Quickly afterwards, Megan began to show them around the cave, from the Front door, to the bedrooms, and everything in between. While she knew she couldn't cover everything as the Cave was rather large, she managed to show the most important of areas until Superboy's voice broke through her musings.

Sniffing the air slightly, Superboy said in a slightly confused and curious voice, "I smell smoke."

With an ever so slightly horrified gasp, Miss M exclaimed in a panicked tone, "My cookies!"

Without another word Megan flew with haste to the kitchen and telekinetically opened the oven door to place the burnt tray of cookies on the counter. Just as soon as the tray hit the marble, the rest of her teammates had entered the kitchen and looked at the small flat circles of char with slight amusement.

"I'm sorry." Miss M apologized, "I wanted to make you all cookies."

"Do not worry about it, Megan" Kaldur said with a grateful smile, "It is the thought that matters."

"Yeah," Robin added with a smile gracing his teenage face, "Besides, the cookies you made us last time with Shadow were great, and it doesn't look like Wally minds!" he finished with a definite smirk looking at his speedster of a friend that had two charred cookies in hand while taking bites from them each.

Noticing that the attention of his friends were on him completely, Wally looked sheepish before admitting, "I...I have a serious metabolism?" Which was true. At the speed he moved his body, calories were of constant need due to the speed that the young man worked them off. While his eating habits were... unsightly, the need for nutrition was an absolute must.

As his teammates laughed, Superboy brought up a topic the everyone else had been curious about as well.

"Still wondering how Shadow managed to eat with his mask completely on."

"I know!" Wally exclaimed after finishing his third charred cookie, "I was looking forward to seeing what he really looked like too!"

The rest of the Team nodded as they too had hoped their Head Supervisor would take off his mask to eat. Of course, with everything else he was capable of, Shadow had managed to eat three large plates of the food Megan had made without so much as touching his mask. It was as if there were an invisible hole whenever he took a piece of food into his mouth that none of them could see. Even as they stared intently, none of them could quite recall just what they had seen.

It was absolutely frustrating.

"I wonder why he chooses not to show his face. I know from Uncle J'on that some members of the League let their secret identities be known to each other, but Shadow has always been... recluse."

"Keh," Superboy snorted, "sure didn't seem "recluse" when he talked non-stop at lunch." he said. Which was true. During the lunch their mysterious Head Supervisor hadn't stayed silent for long.
Bringing up stories about the Justice League that none of them had heard, telling jokes, and overall having a good time with them. What they didn't know was that Naruto had realized how lonely he had been the past two years during that lunch. Dealing with so many adults constantly had caused him to miss interaction with those closer to his age. Roy Harper, aka Speedy, was really the only teen hero that was closest to his age, and he wasn't exactly his friend, as the archer so liked to state.

"Yeah, from everything I head from Bats, I thought he was going to be... different." Robin said with a thoughtful expression. Everything the young teen had expected their Head Supervisor to be, was completely thrown out the window during their "Bell Test of Humiliation." While the young boy had in fact been on a mission or two with the youngest member of the League, he certainly didn't act anything like he did with them here. 'Maybe he just doesn't like Batman? Knowing Bruce he would have done something to annoy Shadow.' Robin pondered over the thought before Kaldur spoke, breaking his musings.

"I, too, expected something different of Shadow." he said, "My King explained that he was a complicated individual, but I did not expect him to be so..."

"Excentric?" Robin supplied just as Kid Flash said, "Sadistic?"

With an amused smile/smirk that matched Superboy's and Megan's, Kadur finished, "...friendly. Though those do describe him rather well." he admitted.

"Well, coming from Mars, I didn't know what to expect of him, but he is a great teacher." Megan added with a small smile as she watched Kid Flash finish the last of her forgotten attempt at cookies.

"Cadmus couldn't supply much about him, but he is strong." Superboy said. While he didn't want to admit it, it was evidently clear that Shadow outmatched him in strength by a long shot. But he knew that the training their Head Supervisor was making them do would help him greatly. Yet another reason why he begrudgingly respected the man.

"Sooo, who do you think would win in a fight? Superman or Shadow?" Kid Flash asked truly curious. *THE* Man of Steel against the Enigma of the Justice League. That would be the battle of the century!

"Who knows." the mini-ninja said with a small shrug, "Though I'm betting on Shadow. Everyone knows Superman's strengths and weaknesses... Shadow on the other hand...well, no one really knows everything about his powers other than himself. So no one can know what else he has up his sleeves. For all we know he could spout Kryptonite gas from his mouth." Robin said. While he respected Superman, Shadow was *THE* Fire Shadow! However young, he was completely unpredictable.

"Well, we toured most of the 'clubhouse'." Kid Flash said a bit annoyed, "What else is there to do?"

"Oh! I know what we can do!" Megan stated excitedly before floating off with a small yell of, "Come on!" to her teammates knowing they would follow.

When the rest of her team had caught up to her, they were in what they presumed to be the Hangar Bay that would exit to the bay outside. In the center of the large oval piece of metal, shining a nice red.

"It's my Martian Bioship." the Martian said happily, motioning toward the piece of metal.

"Cute. Not aerodynamic, but cute." Wally said with a slight shrug.

Laughing a bit, Megan said, "It's at rest silly. I'll wake it" with a mental command, the small oval
piece of metal morphed into a fairly large red ship. Turning to her gawking friends, she asked, "Well? Are you coming?" With her friends closely behind her, she walked into the ship and sent out another command that brought up the pilots seat, and four other seats for her Team. "Strap in for launch." she said taking the pilots seat.

"Woah!" Robin exclaimed when all of a sudden black straps crossed over his chest in a seatbelt like manner on their own.

"Cool!" was Kid Flashes reaction to the same thing. What can he say, technology was simply amazing like that, what else could be expected from martian technology?

"Red Tornado, please open the bay doors." Megan asked and soon enough the Team was off flying through the surrounding area aimlessly.

"Incredible." Robin breathed out. The Bats ship had nothing on Megans!

"She sure is..." Kid Flash said unknowingly. When both Megan and Robin looked at him questioningly, he quickly added a bit lamely, "I mean the ship! Like all ships...is a...she..."

Snickering, Robin said to Megan, "Fast with his feet, but not~ so much with his mouth."

"DUDE!" KF exclaimed with a pink twinge on his cheeks.

"Hey," Robin said to Megan, "Show us some Martian shape-shifting!"

Smiling amused, Miss M morphed her entire body into that of a female Robin and then turned to change into Kid Flash before reverting back into her normal green self.

"Nice." Robin commented with a few claps of applause. "But, you know you're not going to fool anyone with those." he said talking about how it was blatantly obvious she was a female version of themselves, rather than male.

Slightly downtrodden, she said, "Mimicking boys is a lot harder.."

With a wide grin, Kid Flash said, "Maybe you should ask Shadow! He can turn into a really pretty girl!" When his friends looked at him with smirks of their own, Kid turned a red that matched his hair before groaning to himself. When Robin had managed to get the video from their "Bell Test" with Shadow that they quickly and silently deemed the "Day of Humiliation," he had shown it to all of them under the partial guise that they could better themselves by looking at their mistakes. In reality, Robin just really wanted to see what the other members of his team had to go through, while expertly omitting his last moments with Shadow. So, the entire team saw how Kid Flash lost from a nosebleed when their Head Supervisor turned into a nude, while attractive, girl.

"You know, that is not a bad suggestion." Kaldur said after chuckling at his friend, "While I am unsure if it is the same as your shape-shifting, he may have good pointers for your benefit."

"You're right!" Megan said happily. "I'll ask him the next time we train with him."

"Oh! Can you do that ghosting through walls that Manhunter does?" KF asked excitedly.

"Density shifting?" the young Martian asked for clarification, "No...that is a very advanced technique." she admitted. As hard as she tried, that particular technique was still a bit too much for her.

Chuckling a bit, Robin said, "Flash can vibrate his molecules through a solid wall," snickering, the
teen finished, "when he tries it. Bloody nose!"

"DUDE!" Wally exclaims, even more embarrassed.

Before anyone could say anything else, Fire Shadow’s voice broke through the com.

"Team," he said in his usual muffled voice, "There has been a disturbance at the Harbor Power Plant. Investigate covertly and I trust you all will be able to deal with the problem, whatever it may be should the situation arise. I am sending you the coordinates now."

"Received. Adjusting course." Megan said in a serious tone before turning the ship toward Happy Harbor in New England.

"Finally! A mission." Robin said with excitement.

"What do you think caused the alert?" Miss M asked.

"Uhh, I think I know the cause." Superboy said while silently motioning outside the window. There, just outside the window was said Power Plant with explosions setting off in various areas.

Soon after that was said, she brought the ship down to land so that the Team could exit and move toward whatever was causing this.

"Wait!" Kaldur said to his teammates as soon as they exited, stopping a thirteen year-old in his attempt to see the problem alone, "We should deal with this as a team."

"Right, what Shadow said." Robin said quickly berating himself for almost running off alone, something Shadow had told him specifically not to do at that lunch.

"Hey Suppie, can you use your x-ray vision to see the disturbance?" Kid Flash asked putting on his own goggles in preparation.

Nodding, the young clone looked into the building and said, "It looks like a girl, masked face, and is carrying two sais."

"Alright, we surround and subdue. Stick together and we cannot allow civilians to get caught in cross fire so we must maintain ourselves in a certain area until they are evacuated."

"Right," Robin agreed, "Megan, go camouflage mode, keep out of sight and use your telekinesis to fight."

"Understood." she said bringing her hood over her head before turning invisible to the untrained eye.

"Then let us move out." Kaldur said before running with his Team to the Power Plant.

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Mount Justice

Observation Deck

Back at the Cave, two figures stood in front of multiple monitors that displayed live footage of the dealings at Happy Harbor and watched with a keen eye as their new charges dealt with the situation. Due to the explosions, all the security cameras inside the Plant were either destroyed or damaged, so they had to wait for their Team (as both Robin and Kid Flash had tiny cameras on their sunglasses/goggles) to enter before they saw what caused all this mayhem.
"Are you sure it is wise to leave them to deal with the situation alone?" Red Tornado queried the youngest Leaguer. While he had two years to learn about the newest member of the League, he realized that in the past few days he had learned more about the young man than in the past two years. And as much as he trusted his teammate, he could not help but question whether or not his judgement was sound in this situation.

The Team was brand-spanking-new, and the teen heroes had only spent one day of actual training with their Head Supervisor. While their work at Cadmus Labs was impressive, they still didn't know what caused the disturbance and whatever it was could very well be over their heads in terms of skill.

Not looking away from the many screens as he watched his students talk to each other making a plan as a Team should, Naruto answered, "I have complete faith in the Team. They are after all being trained by me, and all of my students are just awesome."

"Careful, gaki. You're starting to sound like your old idiotic self." Kurama said in amusement.

'Ooh shut up, furball. I meant it. All of my students are just amazingly awesome.'

"Keh, whatever, kit." the giant fox growled at his container sans the venom is once had before.

"If you are certain, then I am sure they will be fine." Red Tornado concluded.

"Of course they will be." Naruto replied, quickly dropping his mental conversation with Kurama at the sounds of Red's slightly automated voice.

"Then let us return to watch their progress."

With a small nod of his head, Naruto said, "Yes, let's."

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**Happy Harbor**

As soon as they all enter the factory, each in different spots to cover all exits and surround their target, they were slightly surprised by who they were up against. The woman was approximately 5'6", wore a white mask that was carved with a wicked looking grin, red markings on the cheeks and one straight down the forehead and black hair flowing down her back. She wore a dark green kimono with slight rips and tears through it along with black high-knee boots.

"My my, such little heroes. Out here... all alone." spoke the woman. While her face was completely hidden, the smirk in her voice was evident.

"Hey, we are sooo not little!" Kid Flash exclaimed, unable to keep it in.

"What do you want?" Kaldur asked with a commanding voice.

"Wouldn't you just love to know." she said twirling her sais in her hands.

"Enough of this!" Superboy practically screams before he runs in and tries to punch her stupid mask off her face.

Quickly, the girl jumps over the raging clone, kicking his back in the process and sending him into the wall painfully. Bringing out her shuriken, she throws them quickly at Aqualad before she hits the floor. Only to see them be sent back at her by an unknown force. Dodging the projectiles with quick reflexes, she also cuts off both attacks from the speedster and bird-a-rangs sent by Robin in quick succession.
"Hmm, this is getting a bit too interesting." she said with a dry voice, her body in a tight defensive position.

"Who are you!?!" screamed Kaldur.

Not bothering to answer his question, the masked woman said, "Tell Shadow to meet me at our old spot tomorrow at 6pm. Or else I plaster all of his little secrets for everyone to see." With that message and threat said, she threw down a smoke pellet and vanished as though she were never there in the first place. Leaving five concerned and frustrated teenagers in the factory.

Mount Justice
Observation Deck

"Isn't she...?!" Kurama asked with annoyance laced in his growl.

'Yeah... she is.' Thought Naruto. With a heavy sigh, he turned away from his fellow Leaguer and left the cave without another word.

'This just got a lot more complicated.'
"Hey, Supie! Come on and try this with us!" yelled an excited Kid Flash. After their Happy Harbor "mission" he had flashed throughout the entire Cave and discovered that there was a game room in the making and he'd been waiting days till it was finally open for their use. The room was fitted with the biggest screen he had ever seen. Bigger than some of the screens in the Observation Deck. They had gotten all of the latest game consuls as well as the latest and most popular of games.

Apparently, it was Shadow who had asked for the room to be built, and personally put the money forth for everything that went into the room.

The cost must have been a small fortune. Wally had to wonder though, where had Shadow gotten the money to buy all of it? Heroes were... voluntary help for lack of a better word. They worked for free simply to help the citizens of the world in hopes of bringing them a safer and brighter future. The only logical explanation was that Shadow did have a secret identity and some sort of job that coughed up a lot of dough. Robin was the one who brought up that if he did have a secret identity, Batman was losing his touch since he still hadn't learned much about their Head Supervisor. Of course, none of them would ever say that to his face...

Superboy looked over to his fellow teammates with a neutral gaze. He hadn't been... programed, with the information needed to play the game consuls. Cadmus had given him the necessary information and knowledge to replace Superman if it ever became necessary, not have... fun.

"It is enjoyable, Superboy. I find myself surprised by the surface worlds' progress in technology." Aqualad said with a smile on his face.

"Come on SB, let's see those Kryptonian skills in Black Ops." Robin added with a smirk on his face as he leaned over the head of the couch to face the young clone.

"Fine." the young clone grounded out, taking a seat next to Aqualad and took hold of the controller while mimicking the way Wally held it.

After a while, Wally erupted into laughter, "Dude, you suck!" he said teasingly.

"Whatever. I'm done with this." Superboy said thoroughly frustrated and slightly angered. He was a Kryptonian, a weapon, who cared about video games?

"Aww, come on SB, he's only teasing." Robin told the irate clone.

"I thought you did great, Superboy." Megan said with a shy smile.

"Keh."

"Wonder if we could get Shadow to try." Wally thought out loud as he continued to play the game.

"No way!" Robin protested, "He'd probably make it into some sort of training exercise!"
"I do not believe he would..." Kaldur said, though he wasn't all too sure if he believed himself. As they trained more with the Leaguer, it was clear that he was completely unpredictable. After all, he managed to turn a regular slip-n-slide into a "plastic slide of doom." Wally was never going to look at his childhood pastime the same again.

"Where is Shadow anyway?" Wally asked his team members. After training earlier in the day, their Head Supervisor had disappeared completely.

"Dunno." Robin admitted, "Think it has to do with that chick we met at Happy Harbor?"

"It was only a few days ago." Wally said to the thirteen year-old.

"It is a possibility. When he returned to the cave the morning after their supposed meeting, he was... strange." Kaldur added.

"Strange? The guy was practically devoid of all emotion!" Wally exclaimed. He, and his teammates had been thoroughly concerned about their Head Supervisor when he returned for their training the day following his supposed meeting with the masked woman. No matter what they said, the Leaguer would tell them in a monotone voice that it "doesn't concern them," so they didn't need to know.

"Whatever happened managed to rattle Shadow badly. He's never had his emotions so in check before. Not even around Batman." The rest of the Team nodded at their youngest teammate in agreement. They had seen how their Supervisor acted around the Dark Knight. He was controlled, careful, and at times, cold. But nothing they had seen compared even closely to how Shadow was that day.

"It doesn't matter, he can take care of himself." Superboy said, albeit hesitantly. Despite not believing their Supervisor that it didn't concern them, he couldn't do anything about it.

Wally looked pensive for a moment, until he turned to Robin and asked, "Hey, Rob, did you by any chance check to see the data banks if that masked ninja chick was in them?"

Robin looked to his red-haired friend before smacking himself in the face with his palm. "Stupid! How could I forget to do that!" he berated himself before immediately running to the nearest computer to check. Honestly, that should have been the first thing to do after that day. Instead, he let his thoughts wonder over the Bats and the conversation they had back at Wayne Manor.

Bringing up a few screens, Robin began to type at incredible speeds, bypassing the few security blocks that denied him the full access he needed. Noting silently that the rest of his teammates surrounded him and smirking at Megans gasp in awe, he brought up the right files and grinned in satisfaction.

"Code-name, Cheshire." Robin said out loud as he stared at the picture of the woman they all had faced briefly at the Happy Harbor Power Plant. "Woah... she's associated with the League of Shadows." he said with wide eyes.

"What's Shadow doing meeting with a person like her?" Wally said in confusion, "You don't think he's..."

"No." Kaldur said with conviction, noting where Kid Flash was going with his unfinished statement "Fire Shadow would not work for the League of Shadows."

"Well, there has to be some sort of an explanation for why he met with her..."

"There is." A familiar muffled voice broke their musings, and the Team slowly turned to see the
masked face of their Head Supervisor. "And like I said before, you do not need to know what it was about." Unlike the first time he had told them, this time his voice was harsh and cold. "I had thought you would respect that...I can see I was wrong." Shadow finished with absolute disappointment that made the young heroes feel thoroughly ashamed.

"We're sorry, Shadow. We only wanted to know so we could help." Megan said in a soft tone that was on the verge of cracking. She hated to disappoint people. She never wanted to hurt him... to make him hate her or the Team.

"Be that as it may," Naruto grounded out, "that doesn't change the fact that none of you respected my privacy. I know you had to bypass more than a couple of security blocks to get that particular information." Robin could feel Shadow's glare directed at him. After all, he was the hacker of the group, and Shadow knew it.

"Why don't you just tell us what happened?" Superboy asked in an agitated tone, though he too was feeling a twinge of guilt.

"Because while I trust you all with my life, I do not believe any of you should be privy to my personal life." Shadow said to the Team, "Stop looking into it. None of you need to know how I know her, what happened, or my past." he finished with a finality that didn't let any of the Team question him further. "I wanted to inform you personally that you will be deployed on a covert mission in half an hour. Get ready and meet in the Observation Deck then." Without another word, Shadow left the young heroes to prepare.

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**Observation Deck**

"Shadow, they just want to help." Canary's voice broke Naruto out of his thoughts. Turning to the blonde, he sighed. He knew that the teens had good intentions, along with hoping to sate their curiosity, but that didn't change the fact that they not only hacked their data banks, but also invaded his privacy.

"'The road to Hell is paved with good intentions.'" he quoted with such certainty that one couldn't help but believe it to be the truth, "They should not involve themselves in something that does not concern them. Nor should you."

With her own sigh, she said, "I know you don't like talking about your past, Shadow. But I'm always here for you if you ever need to talk."

"I know, Canary." Naruto said in a soft tone, "And as always, it is appreciated."

"But you won't."

"...No." he said after a short pause, "You should not be burdened with my past."

"Shado-"

"**Recognized. Batman 02. Red Tornado 16.**" the automated tone of the Cave's computer interrupted Black Canary and both Leaguers turned to watch as Batman and Red Tornado walked out of the Zeta Tube light and into the cave.

"Has the Team been informed?" Batman inquired in his usual dark, commanding tone.

"Yes. They are getting ready now." Canary answered politely.
"Hn." Batman grunted before turning his full attention to Shadow, "We need to talk."

"Unless it's something that pertains to the Team, or the League, then no, we don't." Naruto said with a cold tone. He knew what Batman wanted to talk about. Thanks to Cheshire, Batman knew they had some sort of relationship with her on a personal level since she knew his "secrets" and thus, he had a connection to the League of Shadows. Or so he did in Batman Logic. After all, how could he have contact with a member of the League of Shadows without actually being in contact with their higher ups?

"Your relationship with Cheshire could put the Team at risk." Batman said with narrowed eyes. He was tired of not being able to get a straight answer out of the masked hero, and damn frustrated that all of his detective work was bringing up nothing useful about him.

"My "relationship," as you so put it, with her has nothing to do with the Team, nor the Justice League, nor will it put anything other than myself at risk. Do you see me nosing about in your business? Keep this up and I wouldn't be surprised if Wayne Industries stock goes down in the market."

"Is that a threat?" Batman hissed, glaring at the masked Leaguer.

"You're the detective. Figure it out."

"Alright, enough!" Canary demanded, putting herself between Shadow and Batman who had gravitated toward each other. "Bats, Shadow says it doesn't put them at risk, so leave it."

With a narrowed gaze directed at Shadow, he said, "This isn't over."

"It never is with you Bats." Naruto said resigned. Maybe he should just come clean with the damned bat just to get him off his case.

"Do that and he probably won't even believe you." Kurama's voice rang in his head.

'Che. You're probably right. He won't believe anything unless he finds out himself without my permission."

"Regardless," Red Tornado finally spoke, reminding those around him that he came with Batman, "We have another matter to discuss."

"Right, that Twister guy." Naruto said crossing his arms and taking a more relaxed stance. Just the day before, self proclaimed "Mister Twister" attacked a small city just a few miles away from the Cave where Shadow and Canary were out trailing a lead. It was an annoying battle, having to counter all of his bloody miniature tornadoes, even with his clones and Canary to help.

"Indeed. Had it not been for you and Black Canary, I would have been sabotaged or destroyed."

"That's what we do for each other, Red." Canary said, "What I want to know is why he was after you in the first place."

"The android inside the suit was Brom Stikk, a man with heavy background in robotic engineering and most probably the creator of Mister Twister." Batman said bringing up a few holographic screens with all the information they had on said man.

"He was after reprogramming you, Red. That's what he said when you used a clone to look like Red, right, Shadow?" Canary asked
"He did." nodded said Leaguer, "That was all he said though."

"It is unlikely he was out to reprogram you to turn you into an unknowing spy as he attempted to do so with another member of the League present." Batman said to his teammate, "It is more probable that he was out to turn you against the League entirely."

"And take all of his information on the League and the Team with him." Naruto finished the Dark Knights theory.

"Unfortunately, we will not know for certain until he makes another attempt as we are unable to locate Brom Stikk." Red Tornado supplied, his teammates nodding.

Before they could continue to theorize together, Kid Flash made his entrance, tripping on his feet in his own excitement and landing face down in front of the League members.

Biting back a laugh, Naruto asked, "You alright there, Kid?"

Grumblin, Kid Flash stood up immediately, brushing off the dust from his uniform he simply nodded, a slight twinge of pink marring his cheeks.

"Heh, should we be worried you can't run in a straight line without tripping, KF?" Robin asked mockingly, teasing his long time friend with a smirk plastered on his face.

"Shut it, Rob!" Kid Flash grumbled at the teen. It wasn't his fault the floor was slippery!

"We are here and ready to receive our assignment, Shadow." Kaldur said in a serious tone, though his eyes were clearly amused after watching his friends bicker.

"Good." Batman said in place of Shadow before turning to the monitors and switching the information on Bromm Stikk with that of their covert mission.

The team looked as the screens shifted to that of an island, and all of them saw where they would be sent out to.

Santa Prisca.
"Approaching drop-point A." Megan said in a serious tone to her team members who all sat in the Bioship mentally preparing themselves for what they were going to meet. This was their first real covert mission, and everyone was doing their best to show the entire Justice League that while they were young, they had what it took to be an actual hero; what it took to be a member of the League.

Kaldur readied himself for the drop; it was his duty to disable the sensors on the beach so that the Bioship could pass through completely unnoticed. Shifting to his camouflage mode, Megan telepathically opened a hole which Kaldur immediately dropped down in. It wasn't that far of a swim to the shore, and getting through the net barrier was a simple task thanks to his water-bearers. As soon as he reached the shore, Kaldur made his way to the device hidden slightly by the natural growth and placed another device onto it; one where the readings from the past hour would continue to loop continuously.

"All clear to move." Aqualad said to his teammates through their telepathic link. Rather than risking the use of easily hackable radio-contact with each other, the Team had decided that unless stated otherwise, Megan would maintain telepathic contact with every member and link them up on a singular thought mainframe.

"Understood. Moving to drop point B." Megan relayed to her teammate as Kaldur began to trek through the jungle-esque landscape.

Megan and the others moved swiftly to drop point B, and as soon as they were on top of it, Megan opened several exit portals at the floor of the ship, as well as a _ for them to latch onto.

"Check out the new stealth tech!" Kid Flash exclaimed, shifting his uniform from the original vibrant red and gold to dark shades of grey.

"You sure you don't want to try out the new uniform, Superboy?" Robin asked with a smirk. He didn't need the stealth tech, he was a ninja all on his own without it.

"No capes. No tights. No offense." Superboy replied, thoroughly against wearing anything other than his jeans and black shirt. He never thought it was appealing to see men in tights, but that was his personal opinion.

"It totally works for you..." Megan muttered to herself, only to realize Superboy could hear what she said. "I-In that you can totally work in those clothes!" she added afterward, extremely embarrassed and flustered. When Superboy merely raised an eyebrow her direction, Megan pulled her hood over her head and shifted herself into camouflage mode, all but disappearing from everyone's sight.

As the rest of the Team latched onto the _ and dropped, Superboy merely jumped down, knowing the drop wouldn't hurt him. Down bellow, Robin, Kid Flash, and Megan had to jump out of the way before getting crushed by Superboy. As soon as he had touched down, his landing had created a small crater as well as a slight seismic wave.

"New I didn't need the _" Superboy said smugly as he stood up from his kneel, brushing off the dust that had stuck to his shirt because of the landing.
"But causing a seismic event is not helping on the covert!" Robin exclaimed in a hushed voice.

"Ah...right." Superboy said a bit sheepishly, internally berating himself. Shadow had always drilled into him that while he was tougher than most people, he couldn't use that as an excuse to go through with foolish actions.

"We need to move." Kid Flash said.

"Team, shift to night vision." Kaldur ordered as he climbed the side of a mountain, cutting his travel time to reach the team by a considerable amount

"Understood. Shifting to night vision." Megan relayed. While both Robin and Kid Flash pressed a small button on their mask/goggles, Superboy merely blinked and noticed there was a group of armed men not too far from where they were.

"Got a party of armed bosos." Kid Flash thought to the rest of his team.

"Two parties." Superboy corrected. "But they'll meet each other before they find any of us."

Not a moment after did the entire group hear the beginnings of a shoot out.

"Looks like they already found each other." Kid Flash said looking at his teammates.

"We should observe from afar, see who the two groups are and why they don't seem to like each other." Robin suggested.

"Agreed." Kaldur's voice came in, "Observe and report back to me, I'm nearing the rendezvous point."

"Gotcha Aqualad." Wally replied, sharing a glance at his teammates before they all moved together to observe the group from a "safe" distance. Everything would have gone fine, and the group would have remained unnoticed by the inhabitants of the Island had Wally not slipped on the wet growth of the forest and skidded straight to the "no-mans-land" between the two parties.

As the two groups stared in frozen surprise and shock of the teen suddenly in the middle of their fight, Wally muttered to himself.

"So much for the stealth-y..."

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**The Watchtower**

"How do you believe our young heroes will do?" Red Tornado asked Fire Shadow, as they completed their zeta-tube jump to the Watchtower. Canary had opted to stay at the Cave, in case anything were to happen on their first mission out and required assistance via radio link. Naruto had originally planned to accompany them and watch their progress in the shadows, but he had chosen against it and decided to follow up on a few things that required his attention.

"I have faith in the Team." Shadow said with confidence lacing his tone. "I have no doubt they will perform satisfactorily, and perhaps even surprise us."

As they moved into the confines of the Watchtower, Naruto bid his companions a short farewell and made his way to the League Archives. While it wasn't his *direct* mission, Naruto wanted to figure out why four ice villains chose to attack simultaneously on July 4th. It was far too much to be a coincidence, and if anything, was an elaborate distraction for something...*deeper*. Though for what,
he hadn't a clue. All he knew was that Bats, and the other Leaguers weren't anywhere closer to finding an answer and, for some reason, chose to leave himself and many others out of the metaphorical loop.

He supposed it was mainly on account that Batman didn't fully trust Naruto, which was to be expected given their past, and current relationship. He had begun with the intention to annoy the Bats, proclaimed to be the best detective, with trying to find anything deeper about him other from the plainly obvious. After a while, and far too many privacy violations, Naruto had chosen to vehemently hide everything he could from the nosy man. He was far too paranoid and if anything, deserved to be taken down a peg or three.

As Naruto made his way into the Archives, he began to look up the four villains that had attacked as well as every single crime reported that day. The list of crimes reported were seemingly endless, and he was forced to narrow his search to crimes near important buildings, and locations, as well as any that seemed out of the ordinary.

In the end, he was still left with a disgustingly amount of reports and with a mental sigh, printed out every a summary of every single report. He could have chosen to send it electronically, but to be honest, that left much more to be easily tracked, and he had preferred to read reports on written paper rather than on a screen. It was easier on his eyes and much more comfortable as he had been forced to read and write every report on a scroll during his time in the Elemental Nations.

"Hey, Shadow!" A bright happy voice greeted him. "What are you up to in the dreary Archives?" the man that had greeted him was none other than the Flash himself, donned completely in his costume of red and gold spandex. When he had originally met the man, Naruto couldn't help but laugh madly on the inside, thinking that two very enthusiastic people would have an absolutefield day with him. After all, Lee and Gai both valued speed among all else, and for the man to be the fastest man on the planet, and wear spandex...well, it would be a horrific combination. Though he was certain their personalities wouldn't exactly...mesh, as easily.

Not many could match Gai's and Lee's personality waves after all.

"Hello, Flash." Naruto greeted politely.

"Sooo~ are you going to answer my question?"

"Ah, well I am looking further into the coordinated attack of our four resident ice villains on the fourth of July." Naruto answered, waiting for the papers to be sent to his flashdrive so that he could print it out on his personal printer as the Watchtower didn't have a simple printer; apparently they were far too advanced for such plebeian devices.

"Ohh, right. Bats still is digging on that. Get any leads?" Flash asked interested.

"Haven't had much time to look into it, honestly. Though I am sure I will find something eventually, same as I'm sure Batman will discover something on his own."

"True enough. The man can figure out practically anything... except of course anything dealing with you." he added with a smirk

"If he wasn't so overbearing, then perhaps he would know more than common facts about me. Like, say my actual name." Naruto admitted with a slight groan.

"Haha! Yeah, Bats can be a bit...pushy." Flash agreed, "Though, you don't tell anyone anything about you."
"Not true." Naruto said dryly. "There are several individuals whom I have hidden nothing from. Though, they are bound by their code of honor not to reveal anything that I have spoken of. I cannot be certain that members of the League will not reveal anything I tell them. I have told you many times before, Flash-"

"I trust you with my life, but not my past.' Yeah, we've all heard it, Shadow." Flash said a bit dejectedly. "I just wish you would just trust us with that information. Not all of us have ulterior motives..."

"I understand that, Flash. I will reveal who I am in time, but not in the near future. Perhaps if you finally manage to rid me of my mask I'll let you know my name." he added with a teasing smirk that was evident in his voice.

A wide grin threatening to split his face erupted from the red clad man, and in a swift movement, reached out in hopes of removing Shadow's mask once and for all.

Though, like every attempt before, he failed.

"Ah, better luck next time, Flash." Naruto said thoroughly amused.

"I'll get rid of that mask, just you wait and see!" Flash exclaimed, reminding Naruto way too much of how he was before.

"I'm sure you will one day. But not today."

"One day soon, Shadow." Flash said with a grin before he reached to his ear piece and said a few things to whoever was speaking to him, "Sorry, Shadow, gotta run. Be back in a Flash!" and in a swift movement, Flash had disappeared from his sight and all that remained in the Archive was Naruto and the computers humming lowly.

"Shadow." A voice interrupted him through a very secure line. Brining his hand up to the side of his mask, Naruto replied to the familiar voice.

"What is it?" Naruto demanded quietly.

"We need to talk."

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Santa Prisca

"Dangit Wally!" Robin exclaimed through their telepathic link as the Team save Kaldur fought off both Bane and his men, as well as the Cult of the Cobra. After Kid Flash had fallen in the center of the two parties fight, the shooting started almost immediately afterward, and the Team had to knock out both groups.

The fight itself was a lot easier for the group to handle than it would have been without Shadow as their main trainer. After all, being pinned against a hundred of his clones all at once was nothing compared to the fifteen-some people that were here; thought the group could have gone without the guns. Those were always annoying (not to mention fatally dangerous) to deal with.

Once the number of conscious enemies dwindled to zero, the Team rounded them up and proceeded to tie them all up to a small number of nearby trees. During the end of the fight, Kaldur had made his way to the rest of his teammates, helping knock out a few remaining enemies.

"I recognize these uniforms, they belong to the Cult of the Cobra." Robin announced to his friends.
"I am sure Fire Shadow would have informed us had he known a dangerous extremist was running Santa Prisca's venom operation."

"Agreed. And since there's clearly no love loss between the Cultist and those goons, I'm betting Cobra came in and tossed them out. *That's* why normal supply lines have been cut off." Robin added with a smirk, slightly smug about his deduction.

"We get it." Wally clipped in dryly, "Cobra wanted super cultist. Mystery solved. Radio the Cave and let's go home." He was more than ready to get out of this dreary island.

"The Cultists aren't on venom." Robin exclaimed. "Cobra's hording this stuff. We can't leave, not until we know why."

"Shadow would expect us to find out more. He always says to "look underneath, the underneath."" Megan added, all her friends knowing that statement to be true.

"Keh, no kidding." Superboy snorted. "We need to find a way to the factory without getting caught. The main entry ways are bound to be securely guarded." Before he waited to listen to his teammates responses, Superboy overheard light whispering coming from the group of goons they had tied

"Vistazo a discutir. ¡Siéntase libre y llevar a cabo mientras están distraídos!" one of the nameless goons said to the one who was obviously the leader.

"¡Callate! Por ahora me toca. Que me dará lo que necesito."

"We should spread out." Kaldur said breaking Superboy's focus on the goons. "Try to find a way into the factory without any of the Cultists, or Cobra, knowing. There we should find the answers we seek."

"Hahaha..." the leader of the goons laughed, "Such clever niños. But you only have half the story. Let me show you the rest, get you into the factory via my secret entrance."

"There is a secret entrance." Megan said, already probing his mind. "But, he's also hiding something." As she tried to delve deeper into the man, Bane, apparently, she was blocked off.

"Ah ah ah, chica. Bane is not that easy." the man said with a suppressed smirk on his face.

"Gah." the Martian winced, "He's mentally reciting fútbol scores en Español. This could take a while..."

"It's not complicated. The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

The Team all looked skeptical at the man, knowing he was hiding something, but they didn't have much of a choice other than to agree, having no sound way into the factory.

Bane led them to the edges of the forest, where the factory was in clear view. Dozens of Cobra Cultists swarmed around the grounds, all working diligently for their leader. Men were placing scores of boxes near a helicopter landing area.

"Look at all that product!" Robin exclaimed, lookin down at the factory through binocularars, enhanced to zoom in from far distances. "There *is* a buy going down, but if Cobra's not selling to the usual suspects..."

"We need to identify that buyer." Kaldur finished Robin's train of thought.
"Just what I was thinking." Wally added with a serious tone.

Unable to resist the opportunity, Robin said teasingly to his friend, "Yeah... you're the thinker."

"Dude, sarcasm? Dude, now is not the time, we need to focus on getting answers." he retorted, though the tell tale twinge of pink that dusted his cheeks clearly showed he was slightly embarrassed.

The Team turned to the sound of grunting, and saw that Bane had pushed aside a large boulder from an entrance to a cave on the side of the mountain.

"Answers," the man began, "are this way."

The group of teens followed the man down the tunnel way, lit dimply by a few lanterns that hung on the rock ceiling, up till a point where they reached a metal mechanical door. Bane pressed his thumb against what looked to be a fingerprint scan, and soon after, the door spread wide open, clearing the way to the interior of the Factory.

The group had exited out a door on the far end of the factory, no Cultists in sight.

"All clear!" Robin announced, exiting the small room and pressing himself against one of the many metal tubes that surrounded them. Feeling the urge to run off and find answers for himself, Robin stopped before he could move, remembering Shadow berate him with a volley of high speed rubber balls to his person. The shadow pain caused him to shiver slightly, and he waited for his friends to come out.

"Nice to see you didn't go all ninja on us." Wally said with a slight smirk, causing the boy wonder to visibly shudder.

"Yeah... I try." he admitted, and his friends all in a way sympathized with the thirteen year-old. Shadow really drilled in the lessons...

"We need to get intel on the shipment." Kaldur said to his teammates.

"I can go hack into their mainframe. It'll be a piece of cake." Robin said, already preparing to make his way to the room with access to the intel they needed.

"Kid, go with Robin, both of you can sneak by any guards you come across easily."

"Roger that!" Wally said, noticing that Robin had already disappeared. "Aw man!" he exclaimed unhappily before he pushed his goggles over his eyes and raced after the teen.

It was easy enough for Robin to hack into the mainframe, especially after knocking out the Cultist who was using the computer with his personalized bird-a-rang equipped with knock-out gas. Pushing the unconscious guard off the seat, Robin began to type away mercilessly at the keyboard, his eyes narrowed in concentration.

"What'chu got?" Wally asked once he reached the room Robin was sitting in, chewing on a high-calorie snack bar.

"Chemical formulas." the thirteen year-old replied, still typing away at the keyboard. "I'm guessing it involves Venom, but..."

"This one's Venom." Wally supplied, pointing at the molecular structure of the Venom that was displayed on the screen, "And that one's...woah...the Blockbuster formula from Cadmus! Mixed
correctly, Cobra's new juice is three times stronger than Venom...and permanent." he finished grimly. But how did Cobra get access to Project Blockbuster?"

"Our mystery buyer must also be Cobra's supplier! Using the Cult to create the Blockbuster-Venom super formula!" After this deduction, Robin immediately focused on the Teams telepathic link, Aqualad! Cobra's mystery buyer is also his supplier. He made a superformula by combining the Blockbuster formula and Venom. The new juice is at least three times stronger than Venom and permanent."

Through the mental link, Robin and Wally could feel the shock from their other teammates.

"I see. Then that is why they have not touched the current Venom stored in the Factory." Kaldur stated, "There is a massive shipment, and Superboy say's there is a helicopter coming. I suspect it is the buyer. Megan is camouflaged by the helicopter landing area."

"Team." Megan said through their link, "I am sending you a telepathic image of the buyer." Not a second after, the rest of the Team felt the image of none other than Sportsmaster's face in their minds.

"Sportsmaster?!" Kaldur exclaimed, "HE is the mystery buyer?!" Without a moments hesitation, Kaldur reached his earpiece and said, "Aqualad to the Cave, do you read?" After waiting a moment and hearing only static, he groaned. "Ugh! Can't reach the League... We need a plan. Now" he said out loud, frustrated they were relatively on their own with a bit more than he thought they could handle.

"I have a suggestion." Bane said with a telltale smirk on his face. Without any other word, Bane jumped down the walkway with a man-like roar, taking down a few Cultists before shots began to be fired, undoubtedly informing those outside of what was happening.

"What is he-!"

Before Kaldur's sentence could be finished, a beast of a man came crashing through the window to Superboy's and Kaldur's left, causing both heroes to jump down to dodge out of the way.

"Robin, Kid Flash, Megan! We need you now!"

Unknown Location

Naruto groaned internally as he reached the rendezvous point: a large, desolate, and deteriorating warehouse in the middle of nowhere. He had specifically told Cheshire they needed an actual headquarters, but no. The girl much rather meet in gross, dusty, rat infested locations such as the one they were in.

"My, my." A sultry voice pipped in, echoing in the confines of the large empty building, "Someones in a bad mood." Naruto turned up to where she was perched, and watched with a dull expression behind his mask as she jumped down from the steel beam.

"You know how I feel about meeting in places like...this." he said with disdain littering his tone.

"Yes, you have no sense of vision." she commented, sounding rather disappointed in that fact.

"Vision? Sorry if I don't like to talk in a dark, dusty, vermin infested shit of a building."

"Enough." Another voice pipped in, causing both trained assassins to turn to where it originated from. Out of the shadows came a man dressed similarly to Naruto, though rather than a fox mask, the
mans mask was an elegantly painted desert eagle, not to mention he was a few inches taller than the blonde.

"Hey, feathers." Naruto quipped with a smirk shining through his amused tone.

"Remove your mask, Uzumaki, and refrain from calling me feathers." The man said in a emotionless dry demanding tone that caused Jade to chuckle slightly.

"Maa, you really need to stop being so serious, feathers." Naruto said teasingly, removing the fox mask from his face, revealing his cerulean blue eyes and whiskered cheeks. His face was no longer that of a youth or child, but a young man well into his way to adulthood. His hair had grown slightly, and resembled that of the Yondaime Hokage more than his unmanageable spiky mess he once had. Over time, the bright sunshine dipped color of his hair had dulled slightly, turning into a more natural looking blonde, though still very vibrant against his tanned skin.

"Yours as well, Cheshire." the man demanded again.

"Very well." she breathed out, reaching with her right hand to take off the wickedly grinning mask revealing her half-Vietnamese, half-Caucasian features.

"Well, if we're removing our masks, go ahead and remove yours, feathers." Naruto continued, grinning widely at the remaining masked man.

Without much hesitation, the man took off his mask, revealing his true features.

"So nice to see you again, feathers."

"Quiet, Uzumaki. We have much to discuss."

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Santa Prisca

"Destroy them!" Cobra demanded once he caught sight of the little heroes that dared to interfere.

Without another word, Mammoth (the man-beast) charged with a beastly roar, meeting heads on with an equally enraged Superboy. Not long after, the Cultists began to fire at Kaldur, who changed one of his waterbearers into a shield and the other into a water-type gun that shot condensed water at the trigger-happy men.

Megan flew in, still camouflaged, and began to telekinetically throw small numbers of the Cultists from harming her friends. Unfortunately, being camouflaged was still a ways away from actually being invisible, and with keen eyes, Sportsmaster was able to see her clearly. The hockey-type like masked man threw a spear her way, and Megan scarcely dodged it from impaling her, only for her to be blown back by a well timed explosive.

Once Robin and Kaldur joined the fight, things easily became a bit more organized.

"We need to regroup!" Kaldur exclaimed.

"I have to go stop the Helicopter. We can't let them leave!" Robin said, already making his way to the helicopter landing area.

While the rest of the Team was fending off from the massive horde of Cobra Cultists and one mutated-enhanced man that could easily go toe-to-toe with Superman's strength, Robin fought against Cobra's right hand woman for the operation: Shimmer.
"Robin! Now!" Kaldur demanded, knowing that even with their strength as a team, they would be easily overrun soon enough. Scowling, Robin barely had the chance to disrupt the helicopters functions before he threw a smoke pellet and disappeared from Shimmer and Cobra's sight.

Once the Team was all back in one place, Kaldur said, "We need to retreat! Kid, clear a path."

Knowing what to do, Wally raced through the Cultists that blocked their path, knocking every single one of them down with his inhuman speed. Not waiting another moment, the entire Team began to race back to the "secret entrance" trying to evade the scores of bullets and one beast-man for a good while. Even though they had closed the foot thick steel door between them and the Factory, Mammoth easily pounded through it and the Cultists began to fire upon them again.

"Superboy!" Kaldur said, "The support beams!"

Not even motioning a nod, Superboy punched through two beans and Megan had to telekinetically fly him out before the ceiling came down upon them.

Once they were in the clear, Kaldur broke a couple of glowsticks, lighting the once pitchblack tunnel as the lanterns were cut off from the electricity line.

"Okay~" Wally breathed out, leaning against the wall of the tunnel, "All in favor of officially making Kaldur out Leader?"

While Kaldur looked shocked at the proposition, the rest of the Team, without missing a beat, said, "Aye."

Smirking at Aqualad's shocked expression that was dimly lit thanks to the red glow sticks, he said, "Come on, Kaldur. You know your the one to lead this team. You're the only one who can."

"Could'a told ya." Superboy added, his arms crossed.

"I- I will accept this burden, but only until you are ready to lead this Team, Robin." Kaldur said, looking directly in the masked eyes of their youngest teammate. "You were born to lead this Team. Perhaps not now, but one day soon."

Robin smiled genuinely. While he knew that he wasn't ready to lead the Team, he still wanted to. Hearing Kaldur's opinion definitely helped him accept it all.

"Our first priority," Kaldur announced, "is to stop that shipment from leaving the island."

"Already took care of that." Robin reminded them. "It won't hold them forever, but it'll give us time to destroy the shipment. I've copied and deleted the original data on the new Cobra-Venom."

"Then let us move." As they sped down the tunnel, Robin began to read vehemently through the intel he had gathered on his forearm computer.

"Sportsmaster's the supplier/buyer, but it still doesn't track. He doesn't have the juice to obtain the Blockbuster formula, or to get Cobra to do his dirty work!"

"And neither of them have the chops to combine blockbuster with venom. That took some major nerdidge."

"I believe the expression is, 'tip of the iceberg.'" Kaldur said, stopping short as they reached the exit of the tunnel, watching as Bane made his way in front of them.
"Halt, niños." he said, holding a detonation device. The Team looked around them and saw the entire entrance way was littered with explosives. "I'm feeling...explosive."

"You betrayed us! Why?" Kaldur exclaimed with narrowed eyes.

"I want my factory back." Bane admitted easily.

"Kid, you need a running start." Kaldur relayed quickly through their telepathic link. Without a word, Kid Flash readied himself, waiting for the right moment to grab the detonation device from Bane.

"So I forced you into a situation where you would either take down my enemies, or die trying. If the latter, the Justice League would certainly have come to avenge their sidekicks. And when the smoke cleared, Santa Prisca would be mind once more. Blowing the tunnel with you inside, would have the same effect." As Bane smirked, about the press the trigger, Kid Flash raced forward and caught hold of the detonator without him even knowing until he pressed down his thumb to feel nothing there.

"With what?" Kid Flash asked with a smirk leaning against a tree, the detonator wiggling in his hand. "This trigger thingy?"

With an angered roar, Bane leapt toward the red-haired teen, only to be thrown back telekinetically by Megan. Turning Bane around, Megan smiled slightly as Superboy readied his fist.

"Finally." the clone said, his fist readied for a right hook. "Drop him."

Without and hesitation, Megan dropped her hand and simultaneously dropped Bane, his world turning black as soon as Superboy's fist met with his face.

The Factory

"The helicopter is operational, exalted one." a Cultist said to Cobra with a bow.

As Sportsmaster was making his way to the helicopter, a row of Cultists standing to the sides of him, ready to make way with the new Cobra-Venom, Wally flashed through and knocked out a couple of Cultists, beginning the last confrontation on the Island.

Shots were fired, and Cobra commanded Sportsmaster to take the shipment and leave immediately. Without ushering a word, Sportmaster raced his way to the helicopter, ready to leave the island and back to his bosses.

Choosing to make a dynamic entry, Superboy leapt through the air and landed a few meters away from Cobra and Mammoth, the latter roaring before racing toward him, roaring in trepidation before he was pummeled with a sudden burst of water thanks to none other than Kaldur. Soon, the battle turned to the teen heroes favor, the number of unconscious Cultists rising, and Robin chose it a perfect moment to taunt the leader, Cobra.

"I know you hate getting your hands dirty." he said, smirking.

"True." Cobra admitted, taking off his hooded coat, revealing his muscular body. "But sometimes, even a God must swoop to conquer."

Scowling a bit, Robin initiated the attack, but was easily taken over by Cobra's larger body and strength. The man literally caught hold of Robin's leg and kicked him feet away from his person,
undoubtedly bruising the boys abdomen, if not crack a few of his ribs.

Off to the other side of the battlefield, Megan was being held at the throat by Sportmaster as he shot explosive rounds at Superboy who could do nothing more than protect himself against the bullets.

"Sorry, kiddies." Sportmaster said, throwing Megan at Superboy, "I got to fly."

Megan and Superboy watched silently as Sportmaster began to fly off in the helicopter, both of them turning to each other before sharing a small grin. Megan took out the small detonator device Bane had planned to use on them, and pressed down on the small green button, watching as the helicopter immediately went up in flames. Though not without noticing Sportmaster had managed to 'floothe-coop' before the helicopter was completely destroyed.

The rest of the fight didn't last much longer, especially after the remnants of the helicopter dove straight down into the factory, effectively exploding the entire building into flames. Cobra had fled shortly after being confronted by the entire Team, disappearing into the shadows of the forest.

All they knew now was that the mission was over, and they had to explain everything to Shadow.

"Great..." was the main thought on all the teens minds as they looked at the destruction they caused in their fight.

---

Mount Justice
Observation Deck 09:58 EDT

"Recognized. Fire Shadow, 17."

"Ah, there you are, Shadow." Black Canary's voice rang melodically to Naruto's ears as he exited the zeta-tube. "I was wondering where you had gone off to. The Team is on there way back from a successful mission it seems."

With a small smirk, Naruto said, "I never had any doubt they wouldn't be successful. They've trained far to harshly and come much too close to have failed a simply covert mission such as the one given to them...unless something occurred during the mission that forced them to adapt?"

Smiling wryly, Canary said, "Always were the observant one. I don't know the full details, but that will be given soon enough."

Nodding, Naruto made his way to the center of the Observation deck, directly in front of the open screens.

"The Team has returned." Came Red Tornado's mechanical voice rang in the room.

"Good, no-"

"Recognized. Batman 02."

"Fantastic..." Naruto grumbled lowly, eliciting a soft stifled chuckle from Canary. "How nice of you to be here, Batman." Naruto said in a polite tone.

"I received word the Team was successful, I am here for there report." Batman replied briskly.

"You could have simply read it when it was inputted into the computers with all the other reports, Batman. In case you've forgotten already, I am in charge of this Team. Not Canary, not Red, and
Scowling at the masked youth in front of him, Batman didn't have a chance to usher a retort as the entire Team walked into the room. The Leaguers looked onto the group of teen heroes and at once, Kaldur began to recite the happenings of the Mission, Robin helping fill in the smaller details that were necessary in a detailed report, along with a few side comments from the others.

All in all, Naruto was more than impressed with the Team. He thought they performed above what was expected of them. After all, once they discovered who was behind the ongoings of the Santa Prisca factories, their mission parameters were met to a full; they didn't need to continue on with their investigation and stop Sportsmaster from gaining the newly enhanced Cobra Venom that was mixed with the Blockbuster serum from Cadmus Labs.

A very good thing to stop.

When they finished, Naruto crossed his arms and sent out pleased waves to the Team. "You did well, all things considering. At times, mission parameters are thrown out the metaphorical window and we must adjust."

Batman, not particularly enjoying standing on the sidelines saying nothing, chose to put his two cents in. "There are still much to improve on." he said, causing the Team to visibly deflate. "It comes with experience, and given time, you all will cease to make foolish rookie mistakes."

"Batman has a point." Shadow said shocking many of the Team and Canary. "So, take tomorrow's training off so that you all can review everything you did well and could have improved on during the mission."

Kid Flash and Robin could scarcely contain their snickers at his order. They all knew it was just a jab at Batman, but they didn't mind it too much. Some days, watching the two banter back and forth is the best entertainment one could find. Of course things had yet to get physical; not even training spars. Either way, there were always small bets placed on who would win the argument, and much deliberation on who would win a physical battle between the two.

"End point: Well done, review what you can do better and what you did well on tomorrow, and go get some well deserved sleep." Naruto continued, motioning for the Team to disperse.

As the Team left, Naruto could feel the deep intense stare that Batman was giving him.

"The damned Bat just doesn't know when to give up, does he?"

"Unfortunately... I just hope we don't get caught."

"That...would be bad, kit." Kurama admitted. "Be more cautious, kit. I feel like this is only the beginning of something bigger than all of us."

"I hate it when I think you're right." Damned it all, he knew deep inside that it really was only the beginning.
In an office overlooking the Metropolis Bridge, Bruce Wayne stared observantly down at the chaos that ensued. The bridge seemed to begin to collapse, the steel wires that held it up snapped and caused a bus full of school children to teeter dangerously over the edge, threatening to fall down to the river below with even the slightest shift in the wind.

Without another moment's hesitation, he walked to his desk where he lifted the head of a copper bust and pressed a red button, opening a locked drawer to the left of his desk. Inside lay his Batman uniform, ready for him to quickly put on and do what he could to save the people below. A sudden familiar sonic boom caused him to turn his head and watch as Superman came flying in and the most opportune moment, holding up the underside of the bridge that was threatening to collapse while simultaneously using his heat vision to secure the steel beams once more.

He was ready to turn away, knowing full well that Clark would be able to handle the situation below when he noticed another blur come onto the scene.

It was none other than Clark's clone, Superboy. The teenage clone immediately began to help the cars that teetered over the edge, carrying them back onto more solid ground. As he watched the boy struggle with carrying the full weight of the school bus, he witnessed Superman take his burden, lowering the bus onto the safety of the bridge with Superboy walking toward him.

Whilst he could not hear what the two were saying to each other, watching Superman fly away hastily, Bruce didn't need much of an imagination to know he had run away from the boy.

This wasn't something that he could let fester any longer, Clark needed to talk to the boy. Reaching for his cellphone, he called Clark directly.

"Already got the alert, Bruce." Came Clark's voice through the end of his cell.

"I know, Clark." he said as he stared at the Kryptonian fly away. "But we need to talk."

Back at the Cave, the Young Justice team sans Superboy were challenging each other to a holographic game of foosball, Wally smirking victoriously as he won one over their Field Leader, Aqualad whilst snacking on a healthy dose of potassium in the form of a ripe banana. They had the day off of training with Shadow, and heard that it would be Canary who would be taking it up with them, though Shadow would stay and watch.

"Recognized. Superboy. B-04."

Came the automated voice as Superboy stalked through the Zeta-tube. He didn't understand why Superman was avoiding him. He hadn't done anything to the man that was technically his "father," only existed. Yet that seemed enough for the man to say he couldn't teach him anything because "Shadow has it under control." All he ever wanted, even whilst inside the tube in Cadmus, was to meet Superman...to get to know him. Yet he was avoiding him as much as one possibly could while being under the same banner of Heroes.
"Hey, Superboy." Megan's voice called out to him as he walked straight through their game. "How was Metropolis?" As much as he knew she was only being polite, he didn't want to talk about it.

Thankfully, or unfortunately depending on the person, Canary interrupted them as she said, "Ready for training everyone?" as Martian Manhunter and Shadow walked along side her.

"Black Canary, Shadow." Megan said surprised, before looking completely elated at the sight of her uncle and exclaimed, "Uncle J'on!" before running to hug the green skinned Martian.

"Megan," The Manhunter replied as she let go of him. "I was in the neighborhood, so I thought I'd come see how you were adjusting."

Superboy stared at the interaction between Megan and her Uncle, feeling an angry bout of envy take over him. Was something like what Megan had with her Uncle so much to ask for with Superman?

Naruto looked over to his clone charge, feeling envy and jealousy radiate off him in waves. With a mental sigh, the blonde figured it had to do with the interaction with Superman earlier in the morning. He heard nothing of their conversation, only that they had spoken to each other briefly before the Man of Steel flew off to help Green Arrow and the other Leaguers stop the android that was terrorizing a city.

"You'll need to bring that kid aside alone soon and talk to him. Or else he'll keep that anger in and hurt himself, and possibly others around him. " Kurama's voice quipped in his mind as he too observed the clone.

'Yeah, looks like I will. I have to make him see that he's not alone...I've no doubt that he's feeling out of place here, being only a clone rather than a born-person like those around him.'

"You have a lot of experience in feeling alone, kit. Try to relate to the kit, his broodiness is only something I can take for so long."

"A few bumps." Megan admitted, bringing both Shadow and Superboy back to reality. "But, I'm learning."

"That is all I can ask." J'on replied with a pleased smile on his face.

Shadow watched as Superboy made his way to leave before Canary's voice broke in.

"Stick around." she said to him with an commanding tone. "Class is in session." Naruto couldn't help but chuckle a bit. She sounded too much like Iruka for that split moment for him to be able to hold it in. She sent him a stern glare, knowing that he held a smirk on his unknown face, before she walked them over to the training ring at the center of the Observation center.

"I consider it an honor to be your teacher." she said started. "I'll throw a lot at you. Everything I learned from my mentors, from fellow Leaguers," As she took off her jacket, she moaned in pain that originated from her left arm, the wound noticeably wrapped in fresh bandages. "and from my own wounds." she finished rubbing the bandages lightly.

"What happened?" Megan asked wide-eyed.

"The job." Canary said firmly, not caring to say anything more on the subject. "Now, combat is about controlling conflict, putting the battle on your terms. You should always be acting never reacting." she lectured, staring at the interested teens. "I'll need a sparring partner."

"Oh, right here!" Kid immediately said raising his hand at the rather beautiful blonde Leaguer.
Walking up to the center of the ring and in front of Canary, Wally continued. "After this," he said throwing his banana peel into a trash bin. "Woosh. I'll show you my moves."

Naruto couldn't help but stifle a full blown set of laughter at the fifteen year old kid. Hitting on his teacher? Now that was something he had only known Kiba to be foolish enough to do. Canary seemed to be holding back a bit of laughter as well, since her face grew out into a large smirk, immediately sending a punch his way that was blocked by the red-head before dipping low and swiping his legs from under him, causing him to fall to the ground harshly on his back.

The rest of the team, and even Naruto, winced slightly at the sound of his back hitting the concrete floor.

"Ouch." Naruto whispered lightly.

"That had to hurt the little kit." Kurama said as he watched the extremely short spar.

"Ooh, hurts so good..." Wally mumbled as he laid there dazed for a moment before taking Canary's offered hand.

"Good block." she praised lightly. "But did anyone see what he did wrong?" she questioned the others.

"Ooh, ooh!" Robin said excitedly. "He hit on teacher and got served?" a smirk painted firmly on his face.

"DUDE!" Wally hissed at his friend, thoroughly humiliated.

Canary, on the other hand, continued to lecture and said firmly, "He allowed me to dictate the terms."

"Oh please." Superboy's chiding tone interrupted her before she could continued. "With my powers, the battle's always on my terms. I'm a living weapon, and this is a waste of my time."

Naruto inwardly groaned. He hadn't thought the clone still considered himself to be a living weapon. This definitely called for some one-on-one time with the kid. He needed to see that not only was he not a weapon, he was also not just a clone, but a living breathing, individual.

Canary seemed to take his frustration in stride, as she always seemed to be able to do and goaded him into fighting her. "Oh really?" she said skeptically. "Prove it."

Superboy raised his eyebrow before walking up to her and shortly after initiating the fight with a forward punch, to which Canary easily caught and with the momentum he pushed into his punch, threw him over her shoulder, causing him to fall directly on his back a few feet away.

Robin was the only one to be able to openly laugh at the sight, but covered his mouth when Aqualad sent both an elbow to his rib cage and a stern glare.

The Kyrptonian on the other hand only had his anger rise, and immediately stood.

"You're angry." Canary stated. "Good, but don't react. Channel that anger into-" Before she could finish, Superboy launched himself at her once again, but Canary simply jumped over him using his shoulders and then swiped her legs under his so that he would fall once more to the ground.

Naruto couldn't help but cringe slightly. He remembered with vivid detail his first spar with Canary, one where he fought without his chakra helping his strength or speed, just what he had managed to
attain through hard work and training like she had. They were matched for a short while, until she had caught onto his fighting style and quite literally slammed him into the ground. Multiple times. She was merciless when it came to hand-to-hand combat, enjoying the fact that she had several martial art styles under her belt and the ability to use them perfectly. It was one of the reasons he enjoyed to have Canary around him so much.

Looking to his side, Naruto could see that the Team were also looking at the clone with some level of sympathy, though Robin chose to point and laugh at his misfortune.

"That's it!" Superboy snarled. "I'm done here."

As he began to walk off, Canary grabbed his shoulder and said in a softer voice. "Training's mandatory."

Before Superboy could say anything else, a soft alarm rang shortly before Batman's face came up on one of the holographic monitors.

"Batman to the Cave." he said calling attention to everyone in the Observation room. "Five hours ago, a new menace attacked Green Arrow and Black Canary." just as he said that, a picture and soon a video of the attacker was shown. The attacker was obviously an android, and the Team watched with differing levels of shock as the android easily brushed the Leaguers aside whilst causing them damage. "The attacker was capable of studying and then duplicating the powers and abilities of his opponents. Arrow called in reinforcements, which nearly proved disastrous, as our foe gained more and more power with each new combatant."

"Woah..." Kid said both shocked and awed. "One guy with the powers of the entire League."

"In the end, it took nine Leaguers four hours to defeat and dismantle the android." Batman continued.

"An android?" Robin quipped in interested. "Who made it? T.O Marrow?"

"Good guess, Robin." Batman answered with a slightly softer voice, letting him know of his approval at the boy's deduction. "But Red Tornado doesn't think so."

"The technology bears the signature of... Professor Ivo." Manhunter added, still shocked at the signature that was on the android.

"Ivo?" Aqualad exclaimed softly. "But, Ivo's dead."

"So we all thought..." Canary said to the Atlantian. "Or hoped."

"To make certain this threat is permanently neutralized, we are sending two trucks carrying the androids parts to two separate Star Lab facilities in Boston and New York for immediate evaluation. Every precaution has been taken. We'll have four additional decoy trucks to create confusion in case Ivo, or anyone, attempts to recover the remains. You will split into undercover teams to safeguard the two real trucks."

"Sweet!" Wally called out, a fist in the air. "Road-trip."

Superboy, on the other hand, was not amused. "So now we take out your trash?" he said coldly.

Before Batman could make a harsh remark to the clone, Naruto stepped in and spoke to the Team. "This mission isn't something to take lightly." he said sternly. "This android is one of the greater threats the League has ever encountered. I have little to no doubt that someone will be after the
android, it is far too valuable to simply let rest in parts in two separate facilities. We are counting on you to make sure that this monstrosity isn't put back together by Ivo, or anyone else."

The Team looked at Shadow with surprised faces. If he thought this was more than a simple escort job, then it would undoubtedly be more than what it seemed.

"Coordinates received." Aqualad called out-loud. "On our way. We will not let you down." Despite Batman technically being in the room, as well as two other Leaguers, they all knew that the last sentence was directed at Shadow, who had undoubtedly become a integral part in their lives over the past few weeks.

Before Superboy left, Canary grabbed his shoulder and said, "Whenever you're ready." in her soft voice, "I'll be here."

"You're not alone Superboy." Naruto added in. "Trust me when I say that. We'll both be here for you."

Superboy didn't say anything, but he looked thoughtful as he left with the rest of his Team.

"Are you sure you're fine?" Naruto asked, sincere concern lacing his muffled voice after the Team and J'on had left through the garage and zeta tube respectively had left Canary and he alone in the Cave.

"I'll be fine, Shadow. If you hadn't pushed me out of the way, then maybe not. But, you did, and I'm fine." Canary said, feeling the need to reassure the masked hero.

Naruto brushed his gloved hand over the bandages that were wrapped around her arm. If he had just paid attention rather than rushing in, he would have noticed that the damned android studied and duplicated the powers of his fellow Leaguers and then she never would have gotten as hurt as much as she had. When he realized that Amazo was directing his own Rasengan at her, he had pushed her out of the way, letting her only get skimmed by his father's technique whilst he let the swirling ball of chakra take nearly his entire right shoulder.

She was human...she couldn't handle even a quarter of the attacks he knew she couldn't protect herself through her own chakra since it was nonexistent in her body. She was strong hand-to-hand and down right lethal with her sonic scream, but she didn't have the regenerative abilities he had that practically "regrew" his shoulder... she had a much higher risk at dying, and to see someone who stuck by him even with the attitude he had when he first joined the League, was something he couldn't bear to think about.

"I'm not so fragile, Shadow. I can take care of myself." She said, noticing the guilt that seemed to pour off him.

Pulling his hand back, Shadow sighed audibly. "I never said you were, Canary. But my attacks...that particular attack, is considered to be one of my strongest. If you were hit with it directly, you would be dead." His voice, though muffled, was clearly shaken by the thought.

"It comes with the job, Shadow. You of all people should know that. I'm not going to sit behind a desk for the rest of my life just because I might be killed one day."

With a soft chuckle, Naruto couldn't help but smile. This was the Canary that he had truly come to care for. The stubborn, unrealistically patient, and caring woman.

"Still, I hope that's the last we see of that Android. I don't know why we just dismantled it. It would
be a hell of a lot safer if we just destroyed the damned thing."

Even he wouldn't deny that the android was beyond difficult to defeat. It took him all of two seconds to realize that the machine had been able to copy his Rasengan, making the fight all the more difficult. How the droid had been able to copy that ability, one that required natural chakra, was completely unknown to him, and he would be damned if someone were to exploit his abilities that easily.

"I agree, but that technology must be studied. It'll help us if somehow Ivo, or whoever else helped create the android, make another, then we'll know how to stop it rather than what we had to go through to bring this one down."

Yeah, Naruto really hated when he knew she was right. "I know..." he admitted. "But, I swear if that thing is put back together again, you owe me ramen."

Canary smirked at his change of attitude. "Oh, and why would I owe you anything if that happens?"

"Tch..." he scoffed. "Can't even get free ramen anymore..." his voice was lower, barely above a whisper, but Canary heard and smiled.

"I'm sure they'll be fine, Shadow. You need to rest though, I saw how your technique took half your shoulder. I don't care if you healed it back up, it had to take a lot out of you."

Knowing when a battle was lost, Naruto sighed and nodded. "Fine, I'll head back home and take a few hours. Wake me up if anything happens though."

Nodding, Canary said, "Don't worry, Shadow. Everything will be fine."

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**METROPOLIS**

August 3, 21:18 EDT

In a small corner diner sat both Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne ordering dessert for themselves, while knowing they were going to talk more than just about the food.

"Something tells me this isn't about dessert." Clark admitted, looking at Bruce curiously.

Not wanting to beat around the bush, Bruce said rather bluntly, "The boy needs you."

Clark immediately looked affronted and said, "No! No, he needs you, he needs Shadow. I-I'm just a constant reminder of what he's not."

Bruce looked at his long time friend with a stern gaze. "Sorry, Clark." he said a bit softly. "But you're dead wrong." Getting a raised eyebrow from the man in front of him, he quickly continued. "Look, I know he troubles you, but he's here. You have to get over the how and the why. Trust me on this, this boy needs his father."

At the last word, Clark couldn't take it any longer and immediately stood up and said, "I am not his father."

Bruce couldn't help but be disappointed at his friend as he walked out of the dinner. He had hoped Clark would see that

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**GOTHAM ACADEMY**
"What did she tell me?" Naruto grumbled to himself. "Oh yeah, everything will be fine!"

"Shadow look out!" Wally screamed to the masked hero. Naruto was damned glad they had the brain to call him to help once they saw that the android, now dubbed Amazo, was put back together, and was even more thankful he had chosen to stay in his apartment in Gotham, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to help. He knew that the Team was strong, but he couldn't help but worry. The League had taken a few heavy injuries because of this android, he didn't want to think what it could do to the teenagers.

Jumping out of the way of Captain Atom's beam, Naruto kept leapt to punch the android, only for it to say, "Access Superman." grab him out of the air and throw him into Wally.

"Shit. This is not working..." Naruto hissed out in pain as he stood and helped Wally get back to his feet. At the moment, it was only him, Robin, Wally, and Superboy as both Megan and Aqualad were still on their way.

"Yawn." Came Professor Ivo's voice. "Normally Amazo would study and mimic your abilities, but you're such poor copies of the originals, there's no point."

Superboy growled lowly, but there was something else in his eyes that Naruto couldn't identify. "So everyone keeps telling me." he growled out. "It makes me angry!" With that said, Superboy launched himself at Ivo, causing the red-haired professor to jump out of the way in fear of being pulverized. "Want to see me channel that anger!?"

At the last screamed sentence, Naruto smiled widely at the Kryptonian.

"Great! Now he's gone ballistic again." Wally groaned at the sight.

"Maybe not." Robin said, coming to the same conclusion Naruto had.

"Amazo!" Professor Ivo screamed. "Protect your master! Priority Alpha!"

"Access Captain Atom." the android said as he sent a beam toward Superboy, sending him to the nearest wall.

"Anyone want to play keep away?" Robin said as he kicked a just barely standing Ivo.

"Ooh me, me!" Kid said excitedly as he ran toward the fallen professor.

"Access Superman." the android said as he brought down his foot against the wooden floor, sending a ripple toward the speeding Kid Flash. The sudden burst underneath him caused Wally to fall aside to the nearest wall.

Taking his chance, Robin threw two bird-a-rangs toward the android and watched happily as it called upon Martian Manhunter's powers and phased through them. Superboy thought he had enough time to reach the androids head as it was still phasing and essentially cause it to blow up once it retook solid form, but he timed it off and the android grabbed his fist, keeping tight hold of where he was.

"Access Fire Shadow." Superboy stared wide-eyed as the blue swirling ball of sheer power was brought toward him. He readied himself for pain, but it never came, instead, he found himself on the
other side of the room, watching with utter shock as Shadow took his own technique to his chest. The power of his technique literally ripped through his chest, and he and his teammates could see the androids hand sticking out of Shadow’s back.

Naruto didn't waste any time in putting a kunai straight through the androids head, and immediately activated the exploding tag that was wrapped around it. The explosion sent him flying through the air, and to the far end of the gym they fought in. Superboy sped as quickly as he could to Shadow, taking off his shirt and placing it over the hole in his chest, trying to do something, *anything* to help him.

"Call the League!" he hissed at his teammates.

Robin shook himself out of his shock and quickly contacted the League for immediate medical evac...even if he knew that no one could survive having their chest be ripped apart the way he had.

'Fuck that hurts...' Naruto thought to himself as darkness swirled in his vision.

"Kit! Stay awake damnit! I need your help with this, it's not a normal rasengan injury! I can't heal it like normal!"

'What do you mean?' Naruto thought softly, even his thoughts becoming no louder than a whisper.

"Damnit stay awake!"

"Shadow! Shadow stay with me!" Superboy screamed, panic evident in his voice. "You're going to be okay! Just stay with me! Stay awake!"

Naruto turned his head slightly to get a better look at the Kryptonian teenager, and he smiled lightly. "I'll be okay..." he said softly. "Promise of a lifetime...and Naruto Uzumaki never breaks a promise..." before he could even question what he just said, Naruto felt himself close his eyes and let the darkness engulf him.
Revelations and Infiltration

GOTHAM ACADEMY
August 3, 22:08 EDT

'This cannot be happening!' Superboy screamed in his head as he pressed his black shirt over the bloody hole in Shadow's chest. Why had Shadow switched places with him? He was Krytonian, it wouldn't have pierced through his body like it did with Shadow's! Right? No, it didn't matter. Shadow wouldn't have let him get hurt eve if he wouldn't have been so horribly wounded as Shadow was.

"Shadow! Shadow stay with me!" Superboy screamed, panic evident in his voice. "You're going to be okay! Just stay with me! Stay awake!" 'You can't die!'

Superboy vaguely heard as Robin called for medical evac as he continued to put as much pressure over Shadow's chest without causing more damage.

He could see it. As clear as day, Superboy could see Naruto's insides, his half-destroyed, half-collapsed lungs, his ribs, his spine...he could see it all. He had to survive. Fire Shadow had the ability to heal himself, and he hoped with every fiber of his being that Shadow would be alright somehow. That somehow he would just bounce back up and everything would be alright. He would go back to torturing them all through his training regimens, laugh with them while they ate lunch and tried to see his face behind his mask, and beat them in that Black Ops game... he had to be okay. He was the only constant in his life... the only person in the whole League, Young or otherwise, that made him feel normal. There was just something radiating off of the masked hero that made him feel like he wasn't a clone...but a normal teenage kid like Wally, or Robin... he knew what to say, he knew what he needed, and never pushed him to do anything more than his absolute best. He felt understood around Shadow...and he couldn't just stand by and watch, doing nothing, as he laid dying.

"I'll be okay..." Superboy heard his voice, no louder than a soft whisper rasp out. "Promise of a lifetime...and Naruto Uzumaki never breaks a promise..." Superboy didn't even notice that Shadow had said his real name, only that his breathing had stopped and eyes closed, soon followed by the lack of a beating heart.

"Sha-Shadow...! Shadow, come on! Wake up!" he screamed at the masked man.

"Superboy..." he heard Robin's voice speak softly at him, but all he was focused on was Shadow.

It was a moment after Robin had spoken that Black Canary, followed by Batman, and Martian Manhunter, came storming in, Canary holding a syringe filled with some sort of liquid in her hand.

"Shadow." She gasped out before stabbing the syringe into his heart and injecting the liquid into it. Superboy immediately recognized what Canary had just given him: adrenaline. It would be enough to keep his heart going a little while longer, just enough to get him to proper medical attention.

Without needing a order, J'onn used his telekinetic abilities and rushed Shadow to their transport, where Canary quickly followed. The Watchtower was the only place where Shadow had the best chance at surviving. Superboy watched, wanting nothing more than to race after them, but knew that he could do nothing to help him, he would only hinder them as they did all they could to save Shadows, or rather Naruto Uzumaki's, life.

Batman turned to the shell-shocked Team, and immediately spoke softly to them. "Shadow will be
given the best medical treatment we can offer. For now, let's return to the Cave, and we'll speak more there."

"Wi-will he be okay, Batman?" Megan asked, tears streaming down her face. She wouldn't be able to forget the sight she raced in on. Superboy pressing his shirt over Shadow...a pool of red thick blood around them.

Batman sighed slightly, "I honestly don't know." he admitted. "But Shadow has always been resilient. We can only hope for now." Despite their rivalry, against one another, Batman wasn't about to let his feelings and history with Shadow cloud his obvious worry for the young man. He was only nineteen, a kid by his standards... he deserved to pull through and live a long fulfilled life, especially after everything he had done for the League despite his suspicions.

"He has to be okay." Superboy said softly but with a firm tone. "He promised."

Nodding, Batman motioned the Team over and they all entered Megan's BIOShio and made their way back to the Cave where he would drop them off, and he would make his way to the Watchtower and see if Shadow survived.

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**WATCHTOWER**
**August 3, 22:15 EDT**

"Move!" Canary growled at Flash as she and J'onn raced to the Medic Wing of the tower, Shadow floating closely beside them. Shadow couldn't die. He had seen it with her own eyes as he regenerated healthy skin and tissue over hundreds of wounds he attained in the time she had known him. She watched as his shoulder mended itself back together! She knew this was a hole in his chest, but he had to pull through.

"Woah!" Flash exclaimed as he caught sight of Shadow. He could see the blood that dripped off his body, leaving a bloody trail into the Medic Wing. He didn't bother with racing over to see how he was, the blood was enough to indicate that it was bad, and he didn't want to distract J'onn as he worked to heal him, or face Canary's wrath as she had all but adopted the kid as her little brother of sorts.

'Hope you'll be okay, kid.' Flash thought softly, his face engulfed in worry and concern for their youngest teammate. He noticed that the other Leaguers that were in the tower looked to have the same thoughts, as they all had witnessed Canary and J'onn race their teammate to medical attention. The other Leaguers took the somehow peaceful time to worry for their teammate, rather than busy themselves with something else. They all sat in vigil, waiting for something to be said about Shadow and his condition, when an automated voice broke their revere.

"Recognized: Batman - 02."

Flash turned his head and saw as the Dark Knight sped walked through the zeta-tube and turned to go directly to the Medic Wing where Shadow and the others were.

"They got here not too long ago." said the speedster. "We haven't heard anything yet."

"Understood. I need to check on them."

"Let us know...please." He said, knowing that he spoke for the entire League that sat behind him.

Nodding, Batman made his way to the Medic Wing, hoping that their youngest teammate would live
"How is he?" Batman asked an exhausted looking Canary as soon as he entered the room.

"He's...He's stabilized. That red energy he was emitting back at the fight with Amazo resurfaced, and we weren't able to get near him, let alone touch him after that, but J'onn says he's stabilized and he put him in the healing tank just in case with his telekinesis. Bruce...he...he almost..." her voice trailed off. She knew she shouldn't let herself show such weakness. Shadow would be fine...he was healing, even though it was extremely slow, he was getting better.

"That's all that matters, Dinah. He'll be fine." he said placing a comforting hand on her shoulder, though inwardly he wanted to learn everything he could about this red energy that practically filled his entire being with dread.

"He...he's so young, Bruce. He's only nineteen and he took his technique that ripped his chest apart..."

Bruce nodded slowly, squeezing her shoulder lightly. He never doubted that Shadow was loyal to the League's members and would do everything in his power to protect them, but this really proved just how far he was willing to go for someone he considered to be a friend. As Batman, he had seen numerous accounts where that particular technique had been used, and he had seen on each account just how powerful and destructive it was. For a moment, he wondered why Shadow didn't allow Superboy to take the attack, with him being Clark's clone, he was bound to have been less injured than he had been, but then remembered that he knew much more about his own technique than what he could procure together about it. If Shadow believed that Superboy would have been mortally injured, then there was little doubt that he would have been injured.

'He's been through more than he lets on.' Bruce thought to himself as he watched the teen float in the tank, a breathing mask over his entire head as J'onn respected the teen's wish to remain unknown to the League. Bruce had figured that after two years, J'onn had figured out just why the masked teen adamantly refused to show his face to anyone, but didn't bother trying to get it out of him; he knew a lost battle when he saw one.

"He'll be fine, Dinah. For now, we tell the rest of the League and Team and wait." Bruce said to the blonde. Canary nodded shallowly and left the room, with J'onn staying behind to continue monitoring Shadow's condition.

When the two entered the main hall, the League that had been on the station stood up and waited with trepidation for news on their youngest member.

"Is he going to be alright?" Flash asked for everyone, wanting to know his fellow Leaguer was alright.

Canary cleared her throat and answered as strongly as she could. "He's stabilized." she said with slight hitches in her voice. "His own regenerative abilities is playing together with the healing tank we have him currently in, and though he's healing slowly, J'onn suspects he'll make a full recovery, though we don't know when he'll awaken."

The group let out a collective breath, happy to hear that they would not lose a valued member of the League who had come to be considered a pleasant presence around everyone, even though none
knew him as well as a collective few.

"Great!" Flash exclaimed. "I have to head home, but J'onn, could you let me know if anything changes? And especially when he wakes up. I need him conscience to take that mask from him and learn his name." he asked the Manhunter through the communicator, trying to lighten the mood a little by mentioning the deal that he and Shadow had with each other.

"Of course." J'onn answered. "I will send out a League wide notice the moment Shadow's condition changes."

"Thanks, J'onn." Flash said appreciatively. "I've gotta go, be back in a flash!" the League members present groaned lightly at the last comment, but watched and followed his lead as he left through the Zeta Tubes connected to the Watchtower for either their respected homes or to patrol the cities around the world the best they could.

Canary turned to Batman and said, "I'll head back to the cave and let the Team know personally."

Nodding, Batman replied, "That would be best. I have a few things to run here, let me know how they are, and tell Robin we will speak when I return."

"Sure thing, Bruce." Canary agreed before she too was engulfed by the Zeta tube.

Batman returned to the Medical Wing, J'onn already having his computer up without even reading his mind.

While J'onn understood Shadow's desire for anonymity, he also understood Batman's merciless need to simply know everything that could even be the slightest threat. Not understanding Shadow’s powers, or even his true identity, was something he would not stop to figure out and would go through any means at discovering the truth. With Shadow being unconscious, it gave Bruce the perfect opportunity to examine the red energy that was literally flowing off of him.

Quickly typing in the correct scans, Bruce was incredibly surprised at the initial results.

'This certainly explains a lot.'

MOUNT JUSTICE
August 4, 01:05 EDT

When Dinah Lance, AKA Black Canary, returned to the Cave, the entire Team was waiting with baited breath for whatever she had to say just outside of the Zeta Tube. The Team looked worse for wear, as physical exhaustion coupled with emotional trauma took it's toll over their bodies. Superboy had never looked so physically exhausted before, nor did she think he ever felt it being a Kryptonian and all, while the rest seemed as though they aged quite a few bot of years.

With a strained smile, Canary said, "He's stabilized and healing slowly." As soon as "stabilized" left her mouth, she watched as the entire Teams shoulders droop with relief and their held breaths exhaled from their lungs. Superboy, in particular, looked to be the most relieved, a smile washing over his normally blank face.

"We'll be keeping you updated on his condition, don't worry about that, and as soon as he is able, we'll bring him back to the Cave to finish treatment. I know he would have wanted to keep close to you all rather than the Watchtower." she said softly, remembering fondly at how much he vehemently stated that the Watchtower was a deathtrap waiting to happen.
"It's in space! One accidental fight or explosion and we're sucked into space! I can't survive without air!" he once screamed at her, his boyish characteristics shining brightly the entire time. She actually laughed when he started flailing his arms up and down at the sheer thought. He didn't care about all the safety mechanisms placed into the tower, he kept his time there to the bare minimum and sometimes could only be convinced to go through bribery. Rather than money or a favor, it was always with his beloved ramen.

"You should all head to well deserved rest." she said softly, feeling her own exhaustion taking it's toll on her body. "Robin, Batman said that when he returns home, that he wishes to speak to you, but other than that, goodnight." Robin nodded slightly, feeling too tired and relieved to say anything.

Quietly, he, Wally, and Kaldur used the Zeta Tube to return to their respective homes while Megan and Superboy retreated to their rooms. Everyone just wanted rest after what had happened today, and they could only wait until Shadow was back up and running in the Cave, which hopefully, would be sooner than later.

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**INFINITY ISLAND**
*August 7, 23:49 ECT*

Roy Harper, otherwise known as Red Arrow, sped through the island as quickly as deftly as he could while took out any guards silently with his arrows. He needed to get in and out as quickly and quietly as possible with Dr. Roquette before the League of Shadows hailed down upon them. He knew that going against the League of Shadows on his own was foolish, but seeing as he had very little time to get the good Dr. out of the Shadow's grasps, he didn't have time to contact anyone for backup if he needed it, and the only backup he would ever ask for was currently out of commission thanks to Professor Ivo's latest creation.

Pushing away all distracting thoughts aside, Roy bombed his way into the room where they held Dr. Serling Roquette, and saw her hopeful expression.

"Dr. Roquette." he acknowledged her with a small nod before readying his bow once more for their escape.

"Tell me you're the advance guy." she said, dreading the answer.

"The only guy." Red answered shortly.

"You couldn't bring back up? What! With our budget cuts?!" she patronized the solo-hero, annoyed with the entire situation she was in.

Not a second after, the bells were rung and the two knew that they would be swarmed with Shadow guards within minutes, if not seconds; the sound of thundering footsteps a dead give away.

Keeping calm, Roy fired an explosive arrow that destroyed the far wall, opening a way for him to get the Dr. out quickly.

"Now or never time Doc." he said to Roquette, waiting for her to grab hold of him so they could get off the island as quickly as possible.

"We can't leave this!" she exclaimed, staring down at a powerful looking machine. He knew what it was, but there was no time for him to take both her and her creation.

"Look!" he said harshly, "I take it, or I take you."
"Right.." Serling said taking off her glasses. "Take me."

Quickly, Roy fired off another arrow, this one with a wire attached at it's end so that he could use as a quick means of escape.

Holding onto her waist, Roy said, "Hang on!" a mere second before the guards came through the door and began firing upon them as they zip-lined down to the shore. Dodging the bombardment of bullets hailing down upon them, Roy and Roquette uncovered a blue speed boat.

"So what do you call this, the Arrow Boat?" Roquette asked patronizingly.

Annoyed, Roy answered, "I call it a rental. Now get down!" Pushing her back down toward the floor of the speedboat, Roy floored the accelerator and pressed a button on the boats navigation to ignite numerous explosives he rigged all around the shore the moment he arrived on the island. The large explosion led Roy to believe that they were safe from any who would try to chase them.

"I think we're in the clear." he said, motioning for Roquette to sit straight.

"Great." she said with dread. "Leaves only one problem."

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**MOUNT JUSTICE: BEACH**

**August 8, 09:58 EDT**

The Team, while still waiting patiently for their Head Supervisor to wake up from the near-fatal wound he received only five short days before, were pushed to spend a relaxing day on the secluded beach just outside of the cave. None of the team was in a very celebratory mood, but they knew that their supervisor and friend would be alright, and the next time, they would take Shadow with them to the beach.

"Hello, Megan!" Miss Martian exclaimed while pointing out to the crystal clear sea.

"First," Robin started with his head bowed slightly, "a moment of silence for our absent comrades." The entire Team became quiet, a pang in their hearts as they thought of both Wally and Shadow who couldn't be with them.

"They will be with us soon enough." Kaldur said with a nod of his head. "For now, all we can do is wait for news on Shadow's condition, and Wally can join us another day."

Superboy remained silent, taking a deep breath of calming air before saying, "Canary did say he's improved a lot. They're talking about moving him back to the cave in a few days."

"Soon, we will be a full Team again." Kaldur said with a slight smile.

"And the torture will begin again." Robin snickered, not willing to admit that he actually missed the intensity of training when Shadow was there. He had to admit that while strenuous on the body, his own physical strength and speed had improved ten-fold to what it had been before Shadow was in the picture.

"Well, come on, let's get into the water!" Megan said, hoping to bring them away from depressing subjects. With smiles, the Team began to enjoy their day at the beach, somehow feeling that something would change today.

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**MOUNT JUSTICE: OBSERVATION DECK**
The Team, after a nice relaxing day at the beach, Red Tornado called them into the observation deck where he, Batman, Green Arrow, and a blonde haired girl donning a Green Arrow-esque disguise stood waiting for them.

"You wanted to see us?" Kaldur asked for he and his teammates, all wondering who this girl was, though having an inkling feeling of what they were going to say.

"This is Artemis." Green Arrow said, "she's my new protégée and your newest teammate."

"It is a pleasure to meet you Artemis." Kaldur said politely, bringing out his hand for her to take. "I am Kaldur'ahm, please feel free to call me Kaldur."

"Names Robin." the Boy Wonder said with a small wave of his hand, already setting a mental reminder to look up everything he could about who this Artemis was. It had barely been over a month since Roy walked out on Green Arrow, and suddenly having a protégé that hadn't been on the news at all, was something worthy of being investigated. He didn't care if the League was ready to trust her with them, Robin wanted to know for sure on his own.

"I'm M'gann M'orzz, but you can call me Megan, it's my Earth name!" Miss Martian said happily, excited to have another girl on the Team. While it was nice having Wally, Robin, Superboy, and Kaldur on the Team, she never had any close relations to a female on Earth, and now this was her chance!

"Superboy." the Kryptonian answered shortly. He didn't really care for a new teammate, so long as she didn't hold them back or impede them in any way.

"Nice to meet you all." Artemis said politely.

"She will be joining you on all further training sessions and missions." Batman said to the Team. "Though she will not be living in the Cave. There is also news about Fire Shadow that we need to tell you." The last sentence brought the full undivided attention of the entire Team, wanting to know everything they could about their wounded Head Supervisor.

Before Batman could continue, the automated voice rang in the room as it was being illuminated by the Zeta Tube.


Bathed in the Zeta Tube light was both Canary and Shadow, the latter being supported by the former as he walked slowly into the filled room.

"Shadow!" Megan exclaimed before flying over to her masked friend with her arms spread open to capture him in a hug. Canary stopped her right before she could though with a frigid glare.

"Nice to see you too, Megan!" Shadow said joyfully in a less muffled voice than they were used to. In fact, it sounded more like a normal voice would. "But, I'm still pretty wounded so no touchy until I'm all healed up. Shouldn't be too long, fuzzbutt is doing his best to heal me, and I better be up and about before I rot in the hospital beds." he rambled.

"He's been feverish, and we now know he has a tendency to ramble during this state, so it'd be best to ignore half the words he says until he's completely healed and back to normal." Canary explained.

Robin's eyes widened a bit at that information. As a detective, he knew that everything Shadow had
said since he regained consciousness (which shouldn't have been too long ago considering that Canary had been giving them updates on even the slightest bit of change) was recorded by Batman and being reviewed intensely. Whatever he was saying would definitely paint a clearer picture on just who Fire Shadow was.

When Superboy's eyes drifted onto Shadow's form, he felt a weight lift from his shoulders and sighed in relief. He hadn't told anyone, not even his Teammates that Shadow had let his true name slip before he slipped into unconsciousness back at Gotham Academy. He figured that it wasn't meant to escape his mouth, and when he was ready, Shadow would reveal just who Naruto Uzumaki was to everyone.

"Artemis, this is Fire Shadow, your Head Supervisor." Green Arrow introduced. "He's been wounded recently and only barely regained consciousness. When's he's back up to full health, he'll be the one in charge of your training with the Team as well as assigning missions."

"Oh?" Shadow looked up to the green-clad girl. "Hmmm, new protégé, Arrow? A bit soon don't ya think? But it's been a month and Roy hasn't come back so I guess why not. Not like she's related to you or anything right? I mean you have...oh I probably shouldn't talk about that huh? Yeah, fuzzbutt would maul me right now if he could, rambling like some drunk... ugh...I'm tired.." Shadow muttered softly in the end. A part of his mind that was completely lucid was screaming at him for letting out so much information that should definitely remain unknown.

"Let's get you to the infirmary, Shadow." Canary said softly, leading Shadow toward their designation.

"Recognized: Kid Flash B-03." Came the automated voice just as Wally came through the Zeta Tube carrying a large assortment of beach related items.

"The Wall-man is here! Now let's get this party star-" he began, only to start running and tripping over himself, falling face first in front of everyone inside the Observation Room. Staring at Batman's unimpressed gaze, Wally finished off his sentence lamely. "-ed...?"

"Wall-man, huh?" Artemis said with a smirk as she and the rest of the rooms occupants stared at the red-haired boy as he got up with as much of his dignity as he could muster. "I love the uniform. What exactly are your powers?" the green-clad girl asked, the same smirk playing on her lips.

"Uhhh, who's this?" Wally asked with a raised eyebrow before he looked over to see Shadow in all his masked glory. "SHADOW!" he exclaimed with a bright smile, racing over to his Head Supervisors side.

"Yo!" Shadow said with a two-fingered salute to the speedster. "You got some pigeon doo-doo on your nose...you should get that wiped off." he said with a concerned voice.

"What?!" Wally exclaimed before wiping his nose feverishly. "Oh... wait, no that's just sunscreen." he said relieved once he realized it. "How long have you been up?"

"Ohh, an hour? Yeah an hour. I had to get out of that stuffy place. I don't care haw many times Baa-chan struck me on the head, I'm not staying inside a hospital bed as long as I can help it. Sooo I'm moved here! Better than that steel...titanium...that death trap we call a Watchtower!"

Wally looked at his supervisor with a confused gaze. "Uhh, okay?" he said none too sure about the situation and why Shadow was acting so weird.

"He's feverish." Canary chose to explain again. "He's rambling off about random things, so don't pay
too much mind to it. Once he's back to a hundred percent, he'll be taking back his duties."

"Oh, okay, but who the heck is she?" he asked once more.

"Artemis," she replied. "Your new teammate."

"Kid-Flash. Never heard of you." Wally answered with a raised eyebrow.

"Uhm, she's my new protégé." Green Arrow said quickly, placing a hand on her shoulder.

"Wh-what happened to your old one!?" Wally asked quickly. Roy hadn't gone solo that long ago!

"Recognized: Speedy B-06." The automated voice brought everyone's attention back to the Zeta Tube where they saw Roy walk through.

"Well for starters," Roy said harshly. "He doesn't go by "Speedy" any more. Call me Red Arrow."

Brushing himself past Artemis, Oliver Queen looked at his ex-protégé. "Roy... you look..."

"Replaceable." Roy finished firmly with narrowed eyes at Artemis.

"It's not like that." Oliver tried to defend himself. "You told me you were going solo."

"So why waste time finding a sub?" Roy hissed at his ex-mentor. "Can she even use that bow?" he asked with doubt lacing his voice.

"Yes. She can." Artemis said, getting directly in his face to defend herself.

"Who are you!?" Wally asked again, wanting to know just how this girl became Green Arrow's new protégé so quickly and without them knowing.

Green Arrow said "She's my niece." at the same time Artemis replied, "I'm his niece." The way it was said so quickly led everyone to think it was some sort of lie.

"Another niece?" Robin asked with a raised eyebrow, now knowing the League was hiding her true identity from them. That simply would not do for the Boy Wonder. He would hack through the Watchtower's databases again if that's what it took to discover just who "Artemis" was.

"But she is not your replacement." Kaldur said firmly, staring at his friend. "We have always wanted you on the Team, and we have no quota on archers."

"And if we did," Wally added. "You'd know who we'd pick."

"Whatever Bay-Watch." Artemis said annoyed. "I'm here to stay."

"Besides!" Shadow said loudly. "Red Arrow over here has been doing great on his own! And he already has an open invitation to stay, he chooses not to, but that's fine, Roy is fine on his own and knows we'll be there for whatever he needs should he ever need anything."

Roy looked at Shadow curiously, having already noticed his existence in the room the moment he arrived. Something was a bit off about the masked Leaguer, though. He was more chatty and had a different air about him that seemed completely off.

"You came to us for a reason." Kaldur said curiously.

"Yeah." Roy admitted. "A reason known as Dr. Serling Roquette."
Immediately, Robin's eyes widened, his right hand typing furiously at his build in computer on this arm. "Nano Robotics genius and claytronics at Royal University in Star City. Vanished two weeks ago." he informed while pulling up numerous holographic monitors of information on the Dr.

"Abducted two weeks ago." Roy corrected. "By the League of Shadows."

"Woah!" Robin said awed, walking toward his older friend. "You want us to rescue her from the League of Shadows?"

"Hard core!"

"I already rescued her." Roy said walking toward the monitors. "Only one problem." he said taking out a portable holographic monitor. "The Shadows had already coerced her into creating a weapon. Doc calls it "The Fog." Comprised of millions of microscopic robots - nanotech infiltrators capable of disintegrating anything in their path. Concrete, steel...flesh, bone. But it's true purpose isn't merely destruction - it's theft. The infiltrators eat and store raw data from any computer system and delivers the stolen intel to the Shadows. Providing them access to weapons, strategic defense, cutting edge science and tech."

"Perfect for extortion, manipulation, power broking...yeah, sounds like the Shadows." Artemis said with a glower in her eyes.

"Like you know anything about the League of Shadows." Wally said patronizingly, only to receive a knowing smirk as an answer. "WHO ARE YOU!?" he finally exclaimed, getting tired of her.

"Hey now, the Shadows do what they think is right, and we do what we think is right." Shadow said softly. "We all do things...whose to say whose right or wrong?"

Batman glared openly at what Shadow had just said, making sure that everything that was said in the room was being recorded. He knew that right now, Shadow was at a vulnerable state and rambling out things that when normally lucid, he would never say. He needed to take advantage of what he could for the time being.

Ignoring, but taking note of what Shadow said, Roy continued. "Roquette's working on a virus to render the Fog inert."

"But if the Shadow's know she can do that..."

"They'll target her." Red finished for the Boy Wonder. "Right now, she's off the grid. I stashed her at the local High School's computer lab."

"You left her alone!?” Oliver exclaimed in worry.  

"She's safe enough for now." Roy answered confidently.

"Then let's you and I keep her that way." the Green Arrow tried, hoping to bridge the relationship he had with Roy back together again.

"You and I?" Roy answered tersely. "Don't you want to take your new protégé?" He asked harshly. 

Oliver began to walk to him, but Batman stopped him with a firm look and a strong hand on his shoulder. With slightly slumped shoulders, he said, "You brought this to the Team. It's their mission, which means it's hers now too."

"Tch. Then my job is done." Roy said walking away from the holographic monitors and toward the
"Zeta Tube.

"Always a pleasure talking to ya Roy! Don't forget to write!" Shadow said happily waving at the red-haired boy.

"You too, Shadow. Find me when you're...you again." he said before the automated voice said,

"Recognized: Speedy."

"That's "Red Arrow B-06." Update." As soon as he finished the sentence, the zeta tube light engulfed him once more and disappeared from their sight.

"Okay, I need to get Shadow down to the infirmary. Good luck Team, I know you'll do fine." Canary said walking away with Shadow by her side.

"Do what I've trained you to do! Never leave a man behind no matter what, and look underneath the underneath!" Shadow said as he was being lead out of the Observation Deck.

The Team looked at Shadow once last time, promising to do just that before they all headed to Megan's BIOShip and head to the local High School, dead set on protecting Dr. Serling Roquette from the League of Shadows.

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**MOUNT JUSTICE: INFIRMARY**

**August 8, 19:21 EDT**

"Come on, Shadow, up on the bed." Canary said softly as she helped her fellow Leaguer, and friend onto the infirmary cot.

"Ugh...I feel awful Canary...why won't the fuzzball heal me already?" he asked out loud, his voice almost whining.

"I don't know who this "fuzzball" is Shadow, but you're getting better, just slower than usual." she said softly. "I didn't know you were such a wimp with pain." she said hoping to lighten up the mood a bit.

"I'm no stranger to pain, Dinah..." he said sounding completely lucid. "It's been my companion since I can remember. It was the only thing that was constant in my life. Heck this isn't even the first time my chest has been ripped through! Can you believe that...I did everything for him, loved him like a brother and what do I get? His hand in my chest... Kami, I'm so tired Canary..." he muttered softly.

Dinah looked at Shadow with wide eyes, finally getting a clearer picture on Shadow's past. From what she's heard over the years, she figured it wasn't a happy as many could say theirs were...but this, this just proved that he's lived a hard life, filled with pain. Who ever this "brother" was, had hurt him more than she could ever imagine, so much so that his voice sounded like he was going to cry any second.

"It's alright Shadow..." Canary said softly. "That's not how it is anymore. You have friends, a family with the League, and you'll always have me."

"I'm glad... I don't think I would be as sane as I am now if it weren't for you..."

"Go to sleep, Shadow. You need rest if you want to get better."

"Naruto."
"What?"

"My name's Naruto...Naruto Uzumaki." His voice drifted off until steady breathing was all she could hear. It took her a moment before she realized just what he had said. He had finally told her his name, something that she had been vying after since she had met him when he was seventeen.

Dropping her head down, Dinah placed a soft kiss over his mask. "Sleep well, Naruto..."

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**HAPPY HARBOR**

**August 8, 21:53 EDT**

The entire Team plus their newest member arrived at the local high school a few short hours ago, protecting Dr. Serling Roquette as she completed her virus that would stop the "Fog" from being a danger to the world. While Superboy and Megan patrolled the perimeter, Wally, Kaldur, Robin, and Artemis took to protecting the Dr. Within the Computer Lab she was working in.

"Megan." Came Kaldur's voice through his and Megan's telepathic link. "Link us up. I do not want the Shadows intercepting our communication."

With a mental nod, she linked everyone up. "Everyone online?" she asked.

"Ugh..this...is weird..." Artemis commented through the link.

"And distracting." came Dr. Roquette's patronizing voice. "Coding a distributed algorithm virus on a kiddy computer with less RAM than a wristwatch is hard enough! Now I have to hear teen think in my skull!?"

"Lady, do you always complain when someone tries to help you?" Wally asked while eating his protein bar.

"Megan cut the link with Dr. Roquette, she needs to concentrate on the virus." Kaldur said, getting an appreciative look from the Doctor once she no longer heard what they were saying.


"Hey, hey! I do not need attitude from the newbie who drove Red Arrow off the Team."

Finally having enough, Artemis stood up and pointed accusingly at Wally. "That is so not on me!"

"She has a point, Kid." Robin thought. "Even Shadow said he has an open invitation. He just doesn't want to be on the Team for his own reason." While he definitely wanted his friend to be on the Team with him and the rest, he wasn't about to blame this new girl because of his actions, that would be completely illogical. And unless she proved to do something that threatened him or his friends, and until he found her information off the League data base, he was going to give her the benefit of the doubt.

"Enough." Kaldur thought while rubbing his temples.

"How about I just help Miss Martian and Superboy patrol the perimeter." Artemis said walking out of the room.

"Good idea." Kaldur thought to the green-clad girl as he watched her leave the room. "The virus won't be of much use if we don't know where the weapon is. Can you track it?" he asked Dr. Roquette as she was working on the virus.
"My utility fog, is not a weapon. It's science, brilliant science, and of course I can track it, but I'd have to go online. Might as well rent a billboard that says "Assassinate Me" in neon."

Noticing her worry, Kaldur placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. "We will protect you." he said confidently.

Believing him, Dr. Roquette clicked enter on the keyboard and said, "Tracking the Fog now." The tracking system on the computer showed that the Fog was located on a plane in Philadelphia, and she also knew that the Shadows knew her exact location.

"They'll know where we are now," she said with worry in her voice.

"We understand." Kaldur said. "Miss Martian, Dr. Roquette has located the Fog, reconfigure the BIOShip so that Robin and Superboy can pursue."

With another mental nod, Megan put her hand in the air and motioned for her BIOShip to touch down while simultaneously changing the piloting system for Robin and Superboy to use.

"Ready." she said as she and Artemis watched both Robin and Superboy speed away on the ship, headed to stop the Fog.

While waiting standing in the front of the school with Artemis, Megan said, "You embarrassed Superboy." patronizingly. She was referring to the fact that she had complimented him through their telepathic link, in a way that Miss Martian didn't appreciate.

"I didn't hear him say that." Artemis replied smugly, continuing to keep a look out.

"Must you challenge everyone?" Megan asked with her hands placed squarely on her hips.

Thoroughly annoyed, Artemis answered with a frown. "Where I come from, that's how you survive." Because of their little argument, both girls missed a lone deft figure that snuck past them, twin sais held tightly in her hands and a Cheshire mask over her face.

Once the figure was inside the building, she silently caught Kid Flash's attention, and once he was lead to the proper place in the pool room, knocked him out with a firm kick. Knowing he was completely unconscious, the figure kicked him into the pool face down, and immediately ran to the computer lab where all she had to deal with was Aqualad.

Opening the door slightly, the figure threw a lone shuriken toward the doctor, only for it to be blocked by Aqualad who had heard the sound just before it had struck the Doctor.

"Doctor get down!" he urged the woman, only to have to force her down himself when she hesitated. In doing so, he had taken three additional shuriken to the forearm, and then immediately had to defend himself against the figure with his water bearers as she attacked him with her sais.

"Cheshire." he said as he realized who the figure was. It was the same woman they had fought the previous month, the one who had ties to the League of Shadows as well as their Fire Shadow.

"Mmm, that had to have hurt." she commented lightly.

"Atlantean skin is quite dense." he replied tersely while defending and attacking the Shadow.

"And my shuriken are quite poisonous."

"Megan, Kid, Artemis! We are under attack in the Computer Lab!" Kaldur said through the
"On our way!" Artemis said, readying her bow as she ran to the Computer Lab. Megan was right behind her until she stopped short, feeling Kid Flash's life draining away. She flew immediately to the Pool and used her telekinesis to take the water directly out of his lungs.

In the Computer Lab, Aqualad had to move on the defensive, his movements becoming slightly more slugish. Cheshire was taking advantage of the situation and brought Kaldur to the ground before she threw one of her sais toward the Dr. hoping to impale her head. Aqualad barely stopped the sai from reaching it's target, and was able to redirect it to impale the wall be her head.

"Almost." Cheshir commented, taking out a kunai to replace the sai she threw. "Poison slowing you down?"

"Jellyfish toxins. I'm largely immune," he said with a narrowed gaze at the woman. With one headbutt though, Kaldur was on the ground unconscious.

"Largely." she commented before raising her sai, readying it to throw and complete her mission. One arrow to her wrist though, and pain erupted through her hand and caused her to drop the said. Turning around, Cheshire noticed Artemis standing by the door, her bow readied with another arrow trained at her.

"Don't. Move." she said.

"Hmmm." she began, noticing that Kaldur regained consciousness and stood up, his waterbearers in hand. "This gig's getting interesting."bringing out her expandable tanto, she readied herself for another fight, and once Artemis fired her arrows, she effectively cut them down while in the air. When Kid Flash and Megan entered the room though, she knew when a tactful retreat was necessary. "Maybe a little too interesting." Grabbing hold of a smoke pellet, Cheshire cut down another arrow and made her hasty retreat when smoke filled the room.

"She's getting away!" Dr. Roquette screamed. "You're letting her get away!"

"This is all your fault!" Wally accused Artemis. "You were on perimeter! How'd that Shadow get in!?"

"That's not really fair..." Megan said to Wally. "I was outside too..."

"O-outside being distracted by her!" he said still vehemently blaming Artemis. "Besides, I can't be mad at you...you gave me mouth to mouth."

"We heard that!" everyone said through the telepathic link.

"Dangit!"

"I didn't do half as well on my first battle." Megan admitted to the green-clad girl. "And I know you can't have been Green Arrow's side-kick for very long." she said hoping to console her.

"Focus everyone." Kaldur said in a commanding voice. "The Shadows will be back."

"Robin to Aqualad!" came Robin's voice through the communicator. "We're over Philadelphia. We've located the Shadow's next target: Star Labs...we're too late. It's destroyed. Totally destroyed. The Fog decimated it... This is bad. Star Labs has cutting edge science and now it's secrets are in the hands of the enemy. What's our next move?"
"We scan for that Fog," Aqualad said, looking to the Dr. "Find it. We're moving the Doctor."

The Team moved the Doctor to the ports, where she would complete the virus for the fog. They had a plan though, and they hoped it would work long enough for the Doctor to complete the virus, because then, they could move her to absolute safety rather than random places which had internet access and a viable computer. They couldn't take her anywhere near League locations, what with the Shadows being able to track their exact location, else wise they would be protecting the Doctor within the Cave.

Inside a large building off the port was Dr. Roquette working diligently on the Virus while Kid Flash and Artemis stood guard. Though even through the telepathic link, Kaldur could hear them glaring.

"Stop it you two." he ordered the two hot-heads.

"What!?" the exclaimed in unison.

"I can hear you glaring." Shaking his head lightly, Kaldur said out loud, "Miss Martian, stay in camouflage mode and make a wide perimeter sweep." Only seconds after he said that, he was lifted into the tree and thrown into the side of a white van, making a sizable dent to the metal door. Unconscious, with a strong elbow to the back of the head, Cheshire came out of the Shadows and stood among two other Shadow Agents, Black Spider and Hook, and said,

"The Martian could return any second, and I'm not keen on evening the odds. We end Roquette. Now."

Black Spider flung the doors open and immediately began attacking, Kid Flash taking him up as his opponent, keen on putting all of his hard training to good use. Over the training with both Shadow and Black Canary, his speed and precision had increased, and he was sure that he could beat this spider-wannabee without too much trouble.

While Kid was taking care of the Spider, Artemis was forced to go toe-to-toe with Hook, a tall burly man who had an insanely large hook rather than a right hand.

"Don't stop working!" Artemis ordered the Doctor who immediately took back to working on the computer.

Above, unnoticed, was Cheshire with a crossbow readied at the Doctor's head. But just as she released the arrow, a desk telekinetically placed itself between the arrow and the Doctor's flesh.

"Martian's here!" Cheshire exclaimed, throwing the crossbow to the side. "It's now or never!"

Just as Cheshire was about to claim the Doctors life, as she was ordered to, Roquette morphed into none other than Miss Martian, who wore a smug expression on her face.

"We've been duped!" Cheshire exclaimed to Hook who was next to her.

"You'll never find Dr. Roquette!" Megan stated rising up from the floor and shifting back to her Miss Martian form.

"Never is such a long time." Cheshire commented lightly. "Pursuing target! Keep them busy!"

"Pursuing their leader, take the rest down!" Artemis exclaimed, running after Cheshire.

"You are so~ not the boss of me!" Wally screamed at her retreating back.
"Just do it!" she screamed back at him, still chasing after their leader.

Wally didn't have time to argue, as he was immediately thrown back into a heated fist fight with Black Spider, who was turning out to be a difficult opponent.

Outside, Cheshire changed her mask to track heat and saw the nice little trail that the shoeless Atlantean left for her to follow. "Oh, I do not like to be played." she said as she followed the residing footsteps. As she ran, she turned to cut down an arrow sent by Artemis.

"I was hoping it would be you." she said, a smirk sounding evident in her voice before she jumped onto the roof of the nearby buildings and made her way to the place where the real Dr. was at.

While running, she narrowly dodged an arrow, only to fall down from the gas it emitted shortly after.

Coughing, Cheshire fell to the ground, her sais falling beside her. As soon as Artemis got close enough, Cheshire swiped her legs to the side, effectively throwing Artemis to the ground beside her.

"Mask has built in filters. Better luck next time, kid." she said patronizingly before she sent an elbow to the back of Artemis' neck, causing her to fall unconscious. She would honestly have to thank Naruto for pressing the need of having her mask built with a filter if she could, else wise she would have been taken down far too easily for her liking.

Hearing the drop on the roof, Kaldur brought out his water-bearers and prepared for a fight. "We have company!" he said to the Doctor.

"Uploading now!" she said with a determined smile. "And by the way, you said you'd protect me!"

Ignoring her comment, Kaldur stared at a single smoke pellet that rolled into the room, only for him to turn around and take three thick darts to the chest.

"Let's test the limit of your jellyfish immunity, shall we?" she said coyly, bringing out her sais against him. Kaldur shook his head a few times before running after her, attacking with precision and strength she wasn't expecting after taking a healthy dosage of poison.

"My, it seems you do have quite the immunity, don't you?" she commented with a smirk, though inwardly she was annoyed that he wasn't as easily knocked out as she had hoped.

"Always be prepared, and have an immune-booster on hand." he said as he blocked her sais.

"And always look underneath the underneath." she said with a haughty tone.

"How do you know Fire Shadow." he demanded as he fought against her.

"Oh, you know, from here and there. Nothing little boys like you need to know about." she said throwing a few shuriken toward Roquette, only for them to be blocked by Aqualad.

"It's uploaded!" Roquette screamed with a smile.

Jumping back, Cheshire said, "And with that eliminating the reason for your elimination. But not for the entertainment value." Kaldur readied himself once more, putting himself in front of Roquette. "Lucky for you, my orders are clear. You live to program another day. After all, Doctor, the Shadows might have use of you yet." With another smoke pellet, Cheshire made a hasty retreat, heading to the nearest Shadows base.

As she ran to the near forest shadows, an explosive arrow hit her squarely in the face and her mask
was blown off.

"Don't move a muscle!" Artemis hissed at the black-haired woman, an arrow trained at her as she stood up.

"Wow." Cheshire said turning around. "I am completely at your mercy."

"You..." Artemis breathed out with wide eyes.

"I suppose now you'll bring me to Justice. Let your new friends interrogate me. I wonder if your position is secure enough to survive them learning everything I know."

Defeated, Artemis put down her bow and stared as she left through the shadows. She barely got on the Team... if they learned everything Cheshire knew about her, she would be sent back and this time, her father wouldn't let her go.

As soon as she disappeared, Kaldur walked out of the internet café, Roquette right behind him.

"Artemis, where is the assassin?" he asked her quickly.

"She...she got away..." she answered, her eyes focused on the concrete ground.

"Woah, from you?" Wally said as soon as he sped toward them. "Big surprise." his voice was coated in sarcasm, but Artemis didn't say anything where in most cases, she would. "Notice? We got ours." he said motioning to where Megan held Black Spider and Hook suspended in air with ropes tied tightly around them. Looking to the ground, Wally noticed Cheshire's mask. "Woah! Souvenir!"

"Her mask? Did you see her face?" Kaldur asked.

"It was dark." Artemis said, avoiding the question through misdirection.

"It is fine." Kaldur said to her. "Robin and Superboy neutralized the fog, and Dr. Roquette is safe, thanks to no small part to you. Welcome to the Team."

For the first time since she arrived at the Cave, Artemis gave a genuine smile and walked toward her new Teammates, shaking their hands.

"I've always wanted a sister. Here on Earth I mean! I have twelve back on Mars, but trust me, it's not the same."

"I...wouldn't know." Artemis admitted. "But, thanks."

When Wally refused to say anything, Kaldur elbowed him in the ribs.

"Ow... yeah, okay, welcome." he said unhappily shaking her hand.

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**MOUNT JUSTICE**  
**August 9, 00:47 EDT**

When the Team got back to the Cave, everyone went on their separate ways, taking the Zeta tube to their homes, or moving to go to their rooms within the cave. Before he went to his room, Superboy walked to the infirmary, set on visiting Shadow before he went to sleep.

Walking in, he noticed that Shadow was actually awake, and greeted him with a wave.
"Superboy! Good to see you. Come to bail me out?" he asked, a smile evident in his voice.

"Uh, no. I think Canary would have my hide if I did that." he said with a soft smile on his lips. "I just came to see how you are."

"Ohh, I'm fine, fine and dandy. Just feeling really jumbled, but Canary and J'onn said that it would pass by tomorrow hopefully, what with fuzzball healing me and all." Shadow, no Naruto replied.

"So uh, Naruto? Right?"

"Yup! Naruto Uzumaki-Namikaze at your service!" he said cheekily. "No more denying my name since pretty soon everyone will know. Old Batsy is probably recording everything right now! Such a creepy little bat, probably sitting at home in his dark little lair watching these videos like it's some trash television show."

"Are you sure you're alright, Naruto?" Superboy asked.

"Maa, I'm fine. I'm feeling more... normal as we continue to talk." Naruto admitted. "You know what you need Superboy?" Naruto said suddenly.

"What?"

"A name. I'm not going to call you Superboy all the time. Robin has a name, Kid and Miss Martian have names, you need one too." I put a finger to the painted mouth on his mask before snapping his fingers. "How about Conner? We can work out a last name later on, but for now, you just need a good first name, and I think that works." he said.

Superboy blushed lightly, feeling a joy he had never experience before. A name. He wasn't just the Superboy anymore, now he was Conner. With a bright smile, Conner said, "Yeah, I like that."

"Perfect! Now, you should probably head off to bed. If I'm well enough to get out of this stuffy bed, I'll be observing your training again!" Naruto said, shooing Conner out of the infirmary with his hand.

With the same bright smile, Conner said, "See you in the morning Shadow."

UNKNOWN LOCATION
August 9, 03:19 EDT

"So he's awake now, is he?" said a figure, his face masked with an elegantly painted bird mask.

"Yes, but he's also feverish, and apparently spouting out a few of his own secrets." Cheshire said as she walked out of the shadows.

"Nothing that includes what we are doing, I presume?" The figure said, knowing that in no matter what state Naruto was in, he would not let their secrets be known.

"Not that I know of, and we would have heard by now if he did." she replied.

"Good. For we must remain in the shadows if we hope to extinguish the light."
"You stupid idiot of a kit!" Kurama screamed at the blonde who was underneath his giant red paw and groaning in pain.

"I didn't mean-" he tried, only to be swatted by his paw once more.

"You didn't mean to?! It doesn't freaking matter now! You stupid idiot! Not only did you spew away your identity, as well as a few major facts about your past, you kami damned lost consciousness! Do you have any idea how close we were to dying!? HUH!?"

"But...OWWWWW!" He screamed in pain when Kurama's paw smashed down on him again.

"STOP THAT!" he screamed at the giant fox demon. "I didn't mean to! I don't know what the hell happened for me to get all...loopy like that! It's never happened before! J'onn said it was because of the fever, but I've had fevers before, and I don't ramble like a drunk then! And, YES I KNOW! You've been screaming at me for the past hour because of it! Why couldn't you heal me like normal? I took a part of the rasengan earlier that day and regenerated well enough!"

"Because you were awake! You're chakra was helping you regenerate because of your Uzumaki blood! I was on my own when you let that robot RIP YOUR CHEST APART! It wasn't natural chakra! It was something synthetic and completely disrupted all my attempts at healing you normally! I had to force your chakra and mine to fuse together to heal you, and that took the better part of five days!"

Groaning in pain but standing, Naruto rubbed his face with his hands, trying to figure out a way to go with his new situation as well as taking in everything Kurama had told him. Somehow, that Android had been able to create synthetic chakra...if that knowledge got into the hands of the wrong people, then the world was in for a surprise...especially if it had the same raw destructive power as Amazo's rasengan.

"Okay, that explains that, but why the hell was I spouting out nearly everything about me when I woke up finally?" He asked curiously.

Pulling his paw back, Kurama's face grew into a thoughtful expression.

"My only theory is that you reacted badly to whatever chemicals were in that healing tank they put you in."He said logically. "Your body isn't structured to be treated the same ways theirs are, and I know you haven't taken the immunization crap they've put into their bodies into yours, so it's highly likely that the healing properties in the liquid affected you on a neural level."

"Crap." Naruto groaned rubbing his face. With a sigh, he gave a resigned expression. "Well, no more hiding who I am anymore I guess...I'm pretty sure everyone will know who I am by know, from one source or another." After two years, Naruto discovered that much isn't kept quiet for very long on the League, especially when it has to do with someone on the League. They weren't exactly gossips...but they were very observant and inquisitive about certain things.

"No, you can't. However, no one got a look at your face, though I'm sure they realize you're a fleshy human after they bandaged your chest."

"True, but the face is what bothers them the most. Maybe I can show part of it now, have the same annoying face-mask like Kakashi had just so I can still keep annoying them."
"Your constant desire to hide your face is completely childish, brat... but entertaining, so go ahead. But, Kami help you if you leave me to heal your ass alone again when I TELL YOU TO STAY AWAKE!" Kurama threatened with a raised paw.

Covering his head with both his hands, Naruto was quick to agree. "Yes! I swear I won't leave you to heal me on your own! Promise of a lifetime!"

"Good. Now wake up, someone's coming through the infirmary door."

"Alright, alright. Keep the connection open."

"Tch. I never close it, kit."

MOUNT JUSTICE: INFIRMARY
August 9, 08:21 EDT

With a slight groan, Naruto opened his eyes and looked around the room, finally laying sights on a familiar head of blonde hair that belonged to none other than Dinah Lance.

"Morning, Canary." he said with his same muffled voice

"Good morning, Naruto." She said with a smile. "You know, I had wished you told me your name before you were injured and...loopy." her face had a grin etched on it, and Naruto couldn't help but sigh.

"I would have told you eventually." He said honestly. "You would have been the first person I would have told, you know."

Dinah smiled brilliantly at that, finally knowing from Naruto himself how high of a regard he held her.

"Thank you for that, Naruto. So when am I going to finally see that face of yours?"

With a smirk of his own, the masked Leaguer replied, "I suppose theirs not much use of this thing now, since you know my name, but I'll still use it outside of League facilities. No way am I letting the enemy see my beautiful face." he said with mock seriousness. Raising his gloved hand, Naruto pulled down his hood first, revealing bright spiky blonde hair that was much brighter than her own. Staring intently, Dinah watched with baited breath as he reached for his fox-mask, pulling it down to reveal blue-eyes that shamed the summer sky, but stopped to stare at the cloth mask that remained to cover the bottom half of his face.

Even with the half-mask, Naruto had a strong facial structure, while still having a soft undertone to it. His hair fell down to his shoulders, spiked in an uncontrollable manner that Dinah suspected was naturally that way. Once she looked let herself look at his face as a whole, she laughed at the mask, shaking her head.

"Guess I can't convince you to let me see under the mask, can I?" she asked almost rhetorically.

Still, Naruto answered. "Nope!" with Kakashi's eye-smile that he had perfected to annoy the habitually late Hakate. "But I promise you'll be the first Leaguer to see my whole face, Dinah."

"I had better be with what you put me through these past several days."

Now laughing, Naruto picked himself up from the bed, groaning only slightly at the stinging pain in
his chest, and walked up to her. Placing a gloved hand on her cheek, Naruto leaned in and pressed their foreheads together. He sighed softly and said, "I'm sorry. I just couldn't let anyone get hurt..."

Slightly shocked by the intimate gesture, Canary forced herself to relax and lean into the touch. "I know. But you better not give me a scare like that again, Naruto."

Leaning back with a chuckle, Naruto placed a soft covered kiss on her forehead and said, "Promise of a lifetime."

Smiling, Canary said, "Good, now I think there are a couple of teens who have been waiting for your training."

With an eye smile, Naruto said, "Great! Let's go see them then, after being out-of-commission for so long, I need to see if they've been lax in their training."

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**MOUNT JUSTICE: OBSERVATION DECK**

**August 9, 08:37 EDT**

The entire Team waited out in the Observation Deck after hearing that Shadow would be more himself when he woke up, and most probably be observing their training once Canary came in. Every member, save for Artemis who didn't get a very good first impression of their Head Supervisor the day before, waited with baited breath to see their friend the way he was before the battle with Amazo.

Robin wondered idly if everything he had gathered up about Shadow was true. It didn't take long to hack into Bruce's files and see everything that he had compiled over the past few days about Shadow, or Naruto Uzumaki-Namikaze, as he introduced himself to Superboy the night before. So far, after all the searches both Batman and he did, there was no one in the League-charter countries under that name, and he doubted Shadow came from a country like Bialia. Still, even with as much as Naruto had given out while under some fever, there was still a lot of glaring holes in his backstory, and only time would tell if Naruto would ever tell them his whole story.

When they saw Canary walking into the room, side-by-side with a spiky, blonde haired man, Robin nearly gasped at the sight, his eyes becoming extremely wide under the domino mask he wore.

There, right in front of them, without his fox-mask, was none other than the Fire Shadow of the Justice League.

"Dude, who's the blonde guy with Canary?" Wally asked with a raised eyebrow while chewing on an energy bar.

The rest of the Team turned their attention to the two and Megan openly gasped at the sight, knowing immediately who it was, though it was Kaldur who chose to speak out loud and answer Kid Flash's question.

"I do believe that is Shadow..." he said as he stared wide-eyed at the incoming pair.

"What! No way!" Wally exclaimed finally really taking notice of the blonde. He wore the exact outfit Shadow wore, but he had never imagined he would actually get to see his face!

"Yo!" Naruto waved with an eye smile once Canary and he stood in front of the Team.

"Shadow?!!" Wally exclaimed wide-eyed, dropping his energy bar.
"In the flesh." Naruto said. "Though my real name is Naruto Uzumaki-Namikaze, so feel free to call me Naruto, I'm sure most of the League will now."

"It's good to see you back to normal, Naruto." Robin said with a smirk. "What's up with the half mask? Got fish lips or something, fishcake?" the teenager added with a smirk at the end.

Naruto face-palmed at the Boy Wonder's last word. It would be him who brought up one of the meanings of his name. With an annoyed grunt he replied, "It means 'Maelstrom'!" Of course this caused a collective snicker from the group that made Naruto wish he hadn't revealed his name. Trying to avoid the subject, Naruto continued. "Now! You've all seen half my face, know I'm up and back to my normal self, so let's stop wasting time and head over to the Training simulator, I want to find out if you've been lax in your training without me."

Without another word, Naruto began walking toward the Training Simulator and began imputing the correct simulation he wanted the Team to go through today. Once the door was opened, the Training Simulator took the form of the same obstacle course that he had the Team go through their first day of training.

"So obviously, this is a re-run of your first day. I want to see how your teamwork has improved and how well you are at adapting with a new teammate, whom I've heard has only accompanied you on one mission thus far." He said looking at the Team with a serious gaze before turning his attention to the newest member. "Artemis, I will tell you what I told this Team when it was first formed. You are no longer alone, nor with a partner you understand completely, here you are a Team. All for one, and one for all, we never leave one behind and do everything we can to help one another. You will learn to trust your teammates with your life, and theirs to yours. Work together, compliment each others abilities, and always look underneath the underneath."

Getting a serious nod from Artemis, Naruto was satisfied for the moment. "Good, now stretch out and run the course!"

When the Team had finished the course three times, Naruto smiled mischievously at the teens, noting that Artemis was by far the most worn out.

"Good job. I see you've actually improved over the month that I've been training you." Naruto said with an eye-smile. "Artemis, I'm particularly impressed with you. I half-expected you to forget to cover the others at one point or another, being so preoccupied with the projectiles sent your way, but you proved me wrong and kept up with the rest of the Team while they've had a substantial amount of training over you. So, good job."

Artemis, through her heavy breathing and sweat covered face, broke out into a small pleased smile. Throughout the entire course, she was mentally, and sometimes outwardly cursing Naruto for what she had put them through, calling him an insane sadist who was out to kill them. Robin had actually laughed at her when she said that out loud while dodging a huge fire-ball sent her way, telling her that she would get used to it soon enough since his training was every other day.

"Alright, now, cool off. I would have you guys go some more, but I think we'll hold off on that until Artemis has a handle on how things are run around here. I expect each and every one of you to fully accept her here, and work together just as splendidly as you did during training out on the field. After you guys are sweat free, I hope you'll take the time to actually get to know one another, but that's up to you."

"Also," Black Canary added from his side. "tomorrow we will be continuing our spars, though it will be you all against each other. It is just as pivotal to know your allies strengths and weaknesses as it is
to know your enemies. I can see that you already have an idea of what they may be, given your teamwork, but knowing them in a one-on-one spar will better yourselves."

"So, that's basically it. I have to head out, otherwise I'd join you for lunch as usual. It seems more than a few of the Leaguers up at the 'Space-Station of Impeding Death' want to see my face." Naruto said nodding to the Team in goodbye. "I'll be back later on today, maybe in time for dinner, Conner, Megan."

"Alright, Sha-I mean, Naruto!" Megan said happily.

"Wait, who's Conner?" Wally asked confused.

"I am." Superboy said with his arms crossed. "Naruto thought I should have an actually name, and he chose Conner."

Robin's eyebrows raised a bit. Naruto had given Superboy a name? And he'd accepted it? No, he not only accepted it, he was obviously proud of the name their Head Supervisor had chosen. He was slightly surprised that he hadn't noticed how close Shadow and S.B were, but this had definitely shown just how much Superboy, or Conner now, trusted and respected the older teen.

"Great! Now you have an Earth name too!" Megan said happily. "You know, Conner's always been my favorite name."

"Uh, cool?" Conner said to her with a raised eyebrow.

"It is a good name." Kaldur said while smiling to his friend. "What of a last name?"

Naruto shook his head lightly. " Haven't thought of one yet, but we'll get to that eventually."

"Why can't I just use your last name, Naruto?" Conner asked, trying to keep his hopeful look hidden. Naruto, on the other hand, was taken back by the innocent question. There was no good reason why he couldn't but he was completely surprised that the kid wanted to have his last name in the first place.

"You want to be Conner Uzumaki-Namikaze?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

With as nonchalant of a shrug as he could manage, Conner replied, "You gave me my name, why shouldn't I use your last one?"

Rubbing the back of his neck, Naruto gave a light shrug. "Well, there's no reason not to, I guess. Alright, you are now officially Conner Uzumaki-Namikaze." He said with an eye-smile.

Conner smiled happily, glad that Naruto hadn't said no to his request.

"Okay, now I really have to go, or Flash'll have my neck." Naruto said waving goodbye and heading toward the zeta-tube.

"Recognized: Fire Shadow-17"

"Keep out of trouble." Canary said before she too was engulfed in the zeta-tube light, leaving the Team to each their own.

"So, who's hungry?" Megan asked with a bright smile. "I'm making cookies!"

"Shadow!" Flash exclaimed while rushing toward their youngest member, coming to a complete stop when he noticed that Shadow's face mask was gone.

"Aww man!" he said rubbing his face with his hands. "You said you'd tell me you're name if I got your mask!" he complained.

Chuckling, Naruto said, "Not much of a secret anymore, Flash. It's Naruto Uzumaki-Namikaze. But, I still have this one. I suppose if you manage to take this one off, you'll see what's under it."

With a smirk, Flash quickly reached out and caught hold of the mask pulling it off. His smug expression lasted all of a tenth of a second when he saw what was underneath the mas.

"Another mask!?" he whined throwing the mask he had taken back at the, now identified, Naruto's face.

Laughing, Naruto took the mask and put it back over the mask he already had on. He knew that Flash wouldn't have tried to get the second mask off, but if he had, then they all would have seen his face.

"What?" he said with a lazy drawl. "Expected to see my face?"

"Yes!"

"Ah, oh well." he said beginning to walk away.

"One of these days, Sh-Naruto. I'll see you're whole face!"

"Maa, I'm sure you will." The blonde said with an eye-smile.

J'onn and Superman walked up to the trio, being the two that were currently near the zeta-tube other than Flash.

"It is good to see your face, Naruto." J'onn said with a slight smile. "I am glad you have trusted us to this extent."

"You're definitely not what I was expecting." Superman said honestly looking at the blonde-haired teen before him.

Naruto merely raised an eyebrow and stared at the Kryptonian. "What? Expecting some purple, four-eyed, tentacled man?" he asked sarcastically.

Superman looked sheepish for a moment, "Well, I didn't know if you were human or not...so I might have let my imagination run a little wild. Not to say you didn't seem human!" he rushed slightly, feeling embarrassed for thinking Shadow didn't resemble a human.

Looking at the stumbling Man of Steel, Naruto couldn't help but laugh. "Maa, don't worry about it." he said waving the mans embarrassment off with his hand. "Now, I think there were a few others who wanted to see me, right?"

"Yeah, they're all in the Mess Hall." Flash said pointing his thumb to the back of him.
"Great!" Naruto said enthusiastically. "My ramen stash should still be here."

Canary just shook her head with a small sigh. "I'm sure it is, but don't forget I do own you ramen."

"Wait, really? I was completely joking at the time..." Naruto admitted while rubbing the back of his neck before backtracking quickly. "Not that I don't want it! I'll never say no to the food of the gods!"

Laughing, Canary simply continued walking to the Mess Hall where some of the League waited.

The League had different reactions to seeing half his face, some were amused that even after taking off his mask there was another one underneath, and others were annoyed at still not knowing what he looked like. Naruto learned that they had made bets on whether or not he was even human, given all that he could do, and saw the friendly exchange of a few bills here and there when he introduced himself formally.

Overall, everyone was glad to see that he had finally chosen to take the first step into trusting them as a whole. Most of the League members knew one another on a more personal level outside of the League, so it was nice to see that they would be able to know who he was, rather than merely 'Fire Shadow.' Thankfully, they didn't really press for more information other than what he had given them, which mainly consisted of what they saw and his true name. Eventually it would come up that there was no one under that name, but he was being completely honest.

The members who were present took time to relax with each others company, though many of them left off for different assignments, or merely to return to their respective homes. After a few hours, it was just Canary, J'onn, and him left at the Tower, moving to the lounge rather than the Mess Hall.

They spoke of idle things, at least until Canary asked the question Naruto really didn't want to answer.

"Who was the man who ripped through your chest the first time, Naruto?" she asked softly. "The one you thought of as a brother..."

Immediately, Naruto stiffened at the question, remembering Sasuke only brought bad memories... ones he'd rather forget.

Taking a deep breath, he decided to answer honestly, knowing there wasn't any reason not to trust Canary, and figuring that J'onn already had a vague idea from the first time he had tried to read his mind. Silently throwing a shuriken at the lone camera in the room, destroying it with the seal that disrupted mechanical devices near it. "He was my teammate when I was younger." he said softly, staring out the huge window before them. Rather than leaving it at that, Naruto decided to tell them most of the story. "We both had fairly unfortunate childhoods. Though he was loved by everyone, and I was hated, we were both alone. Long story short, we became rivals, both trying to prove ourselves...but he wanted power to get revenge on a man who had killed his entire family. When we were about thirteen, a man promised him the power necessary and I tried to stop him from leaving with that man along with a couple of our friends. At the end of the chase, it was just him and me...we fought, but he fought me with the intent to kill. He said that my death was necessary, that he needed to kill me to prove he wasn't weak and obtain something he could only obtain from killing his closest friend...It was funny, really...that when he was trying to kill me he finally admitted that I was his friend...his brother. It was then that he used our teachers technique, called the chidori."

Quickly running through the correct hand-seals, Naruto showed the two the technique that had ripped through his chest back then before dispelling it. "I used my Rasengan against him, but he managed to strike me full on in the chest. Thing was, I didn't stay down." he said with a bitter smile underneath the mask. "I healed myself enough with the energy I create inside me and we continued..."
to fight, though I was more determined to beat him down and drag him back home. In the end, I took another *chidori* to the chest, and he left with the man who promised him power, leaving me to die. Thankfully my teacher found me and I was healed back up in a few days. But, most of that doesn't matter anymore."

"Why not, Naruto?" Canary asked completely shocked at what Naruto had just revealed.

"It just doesn't." He said not wanting to explain any further than he already had. "I'd better get home, I still feel pretty weak." he said standing up slowly, J'onn and Canary both doing the same.

"Alright, Naruto." Canary said with a comforting voice. "If you need anything, I'm here."

With a smile, Naruto nodded. "I know, Dinah. Don't know what I'd do without you."

"As am I, Naruto." J'onn said with a small nod.

"Thanks, J'onn." the teen said with an appreciative look. "I'll see you two tomorrow."

Both Canary and J'onn watched as the young man used the zeta-tube to whatever destination he had in mind.

After a few moments of silence, Canary spoke up.

"You knew this about him, didn't you." she stated more than asked.

Even so, J'onn nodded. "The first time I attempted to sort through his mind, I was abruptly expelled, but not before many of his memories were flashed through my mind." he explained. "It took much time for me to sort through them all, but it was through what I saw that has kept my silence about who he is."

With a nod, Canary turned to the Martian. "He's been through more than we could ever imagine, hasn't he?"

"He has. And he is strong because of it."

"If you notice anything off about him, J'onn...something that brings back those memories, please let me know. I don't want him to feel alone."

"Of course, Dinah."

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**UNDISCLOSED LOCATION**  
**August 10, 01:21 EDT**

"My, my, I have to admit, I like this look much more than that silly mask you always wear." Cheshire said, strutting over to where he stood in the deteriorating building. "Definitely like the half-mask, gives you an aura of mystery."

With a raised eye-brow, Naruto answered, "I just wanted to annoy people, but sure, let's go with that."

Jade laughed lightly before their other member joined them.

"I have to agree. Why you demanded I wear one like yours continues to baffle me." the man said, his deep voice muffled by the full face mask.
"And yet, you still wear it, feathers." Naruto said with a cheeky look in his eyes.

"Do not refer to me as 'feathers.'" he said sternly. "Regardless, we have much to speak of."

"Right, the 'Utility Fog' stole data from both Miami Beach University, as well as a Star Labs Facility, while failing to obtain the Wayne data thanks to the Team."

"The data stolen on it's own is quite valuable, but together, it has far more potential. I also know for a fact that the League of Shadows didn't keep that information just to themselves. They're sending it out to multiple locations."

"We already know the Light is compiled of a main body, did you manage to discover how many locations it was sent to?" 'Feathers' asked.

"Actually, I did." Cheshire said with a wide grin before getting serious again. "They sent it to seven main bodies, and I just happened to overhear that the Light considers the little heroes to be a viable threat. They have an inside operative, Naruto."

Naruto became stiff and stared at her intently, knowing that she was speaking truthful. "I see." he said with narrowed eyes. "Any hints as to who this mole is?"

Shaking her head, she said, "None at this moment."

"Finding that mole is now a main priority." Feathers said sternly

"I agree." Naruto said with a stiff nod. He would find out who threatened not only his Team, but the entire League no matter what it took.

"There is also the concern that Kent Nelson has been unseen since July 27th. It has been too long for him to have been simply on one of his 'walk abouts.'" 'Feathers' continued.

"I think we can all assume who has him." Cheshire said crossing her arms. "The Light probably sent someone, someone they can trust to succeed, to obtain the Helmet of Dr. Fate."

"Then we must recover both Nelson, and the Helmet before them. The Light cannot be allowed to obtain the Helmet."

"I'll see if I can send the Team on an official mission to try to find him. We still have other matters to attend to, and you, Feathers, still need to go to Poseidonis."

"Indeed. Send your Team, Naruto, as there is much more to be done."
Naruto typed furiously into the keyboard that was connected to the archives in the Watchtower, trying to find anything that would give him a lead on who the 'mole' on his Team could possibly be. The sheer thought of a traitor was enough to send him into a rage had he not been so trained to keep his emotions in check. From day one, he had stressed the importance of teamwork, and trust. This was just too much...if it were willingly.

There was that chance that the 'mole' was feeding the Light information without knowing, or through blackmail. Both possibilities were as likely as the former of doing so willingly, and Naruto found himself hoping that whoever this 'mole' was, was not a willing traitor.

Scowling underneath his half-mask, Naruto watched a few videos, trying to discern noticeable changes in personality, or the like that would be a possible sign for what he was looking for. It had been a few hours, and without finding anything, Naruto grudgingly turned off the holographic screen and turned around to leave, just in time to see his favorite Leaguer walk in: Batman.

Sighing internally, Naruto said, "Batman, what a surprise." sounding completely unsurprised by his being there just as he was about to leave.

"Naruto." Batman said walking in and having the Archive door slide shut behind him. "I think it's about time you and I talked...honestly."

With a bland gaze, Naruto replied, "I'm assuming you mean to speak of the fact that, one: my name doesn't come up with anything in all of the League Chartered Countries. Two: the fact that the energy I create inside me is something never before seen, and completely unknown to you and the rest of the world, except that it's similar to the destructive force of anti-matter when completely raw and uncontrolled. And three: why I didn't heal properly as I usually do after taking Amazo's 'rasengan' through my chest as I had earlier that day, correct?"

A slight scowl on his face, Batman nodded and said with a demanding tone, "Explain."

With a small huff of breath, Naruto said, thoroughly annoyed, "And just why do you think I'll answer? Getting tired of trying to figure it out yourself?" Ignoring Batman's deeper frown, he continued, "It must burn you, to have all of the evidence in front of you...nearly all the information you sought after for two years right there, and have more questions than answers than when you started." With a growl of his own, Naruto said, "I don't have to explain anything to you, Mr. Wayne. I'm sure you've at least thought there was a reason I've kept everything secret about me. Why I never instigated any sort of friendship or conversation for the first year I was on the League. The relationships I have now with the League are only because people like Canary are too stubborn to give up until I begin to truly care about them. Use that detective mind of yours and keep searching, because I sure as hell ain't gonna tell you jack."

Staring at him with dangerously narrowed eyes, and a deep scowl, Batman exclaimed, "Enough of this! You are a threat to this League. Ever since you first were indited into this Team, you've been nothing more than a stranger to the majority. Considering you have ties with not only Jade Nguyen, AKA Cheshire, a known Shadow, but past history with notable criminals, gives me more than enough reason to be suspicious about you. The fact that you've never so much as told us your name until now, is enough reason to put you in that cell and interrogate everything out of you. I will not
stand for this League to be pulled to the ground because of some kid managed to sneak his way into the League."

Naruto was more than incensed by the end of Batman's little tirade, and finally cracked. "Oh, I'm the threat to the League? At least I don't hide the fact that I have relations with Cheshire- the whole damn League knows! The moment I came on, I know they looked up who the hell I was in the world to be asked to join. They know that I worked as a solo vigilante across the globe, they know that I have spent time with Cheshire because she's the only one out there who is nearly equal to my hand-to-hand combat other than Canary. But do they know about you and little Miss Kitty Cat?" he asked with narrowed eyes, watching in satisfaction as Batman's own widened slightly, "No, of course they don't. No one knows that you've been...what was it? Have ties with the criminal thief. They don't know that the epitome of Justice, THE Batman, has allowed a dangerous and highly notorious criminal to walk free on more than one occasion. After all, why would Batman do such a thing?"

Pushing past Batman, Naruto looked over his shoulder and said, "Just because I feel like it, My name is Naruto Uzumaki-Namikaze. Keep digging, Batman. I'm sure one day you'll learn to look underneath the underneath."

"Think that was smart, Kit?" Kurama asked once they were a fair ways away from the Archives.

'It doesn't matter. He needs to figure it out on his own, or else he'll never see the truth, even if I tell him straight up like he asked."

"The Bat's going to go nuts once he figures everything out."

'The whole League will." Naruto admitted, 'I just hope they forgive me at the end of it all.'

MOUNT JUSTICE
August 19 19:39 EDT

Once he was at the Cave once more, Naruto typed with quick fingers on the holographic keyboard, pulling out as much information about Kent Nelson before the Team arrived. He had planned on giving this mission to the Team a week ago, but work with the League and his 'shadow' group had delayed him. He hoped that this didn't cause any horrible consequences, and prayed to Kami that the Team would find Nelson and the Helmet unharmed and untouched.

Kent Nelson was more than just an old man who was once a major member of the Justice Society. He was a close and dear friend, a man who had managed to become an important and precious person to Naruto unknowingly. He had been in a henge when he had met the Dr on one of his walk abouts, the man enjoying the sea side while holding onto his precious pocket watch with his wife's picture inside. They had shared a cab and he began to talk to him, noticing the haunted look in his eyes apparently.

It wasn't an easy friendship at first, as he didn't want to create any sort of attachments when he was adamantly trying to figure a way back home. But the man, so wise and kind managed to get him to tell him everything. Tell him his name, reveal his face, and where he was originally from. When Kent revealed he was Dr. Fate, Naruto thought he had discovered his way home, but was told, gently, that not even Dr. Fate knew of a way into his home dimension.

Even so, the man had become his ji-san, a grandfather figure in this world, and his first true friend. He truly hoped that the man was alright, wherever he was being held.
As soon as he had the various screens of information up, the Team walked into the Observation Deck and waited patiently for him to give them their mission just after a short training session they initiated on their own. For the most part, Naruto was utterly proud of how much they had improved, both as individuals, and as a Team, but the knowledge of a 'mole' was utterly trust-shattering. Given the situation, the most likely suspects were either Superboy or Artemis, having been a Cadmus Labs experiment and the daughter of both Huntress and Sportsmaster respectively. He didn't want to believe that Superboy was the 'traitor', and if he was, he hoped it wasn't under his volition. He also hoped that Artemis' reasons for joining were sincere: to get away from the crime and her father. For now, he had to sit idly by and wait how it played out, given that Cheshire was the only one close enough to the Light to figure out who the 'mole' was.

The knowledge of the mole, however, would continue to be only his own. Telling the Team that there was a traitor in their midst would destroy the teamwork dynamics they had accomplished over the past month and a half. Even divulging only Kaldur with this would be detrimental, and with the Team needed so much, he couldn't allow them to know. Nor could he allow anyone else know; not even Canary or Red Tornado.

He had to remain silent...

For now.

"What do you have for us, Fishcake?" Robin asked with a smirk. Naruto groaned outwardly, his hand already rubbing his forehead tiredly as he had to hear the teen snub his name, again. He knew that telling everyone his name would have someone call him that, simply because they would enjoy the rise it got out of him, but he really was annoyed that it was Robin of all people. He had to see the kid nearly everyday for more than a few hours, and once the teen noticed he was visibly annoyed with the nickname, the brat wouldn't stop calling him that. He doubted he ever would.

Taking in a deep breath, Naruto pointed to the monitors and said, ignoring the nickname for the time being, "This," he said motioning to an elderly man holding onto a gold handled cane, "is Kent Nelson, a friend. He's just passed his 106th birthday." His ear picked up the hushed whispered voice of Wally as the red-headed teen said,

"Guy doesn't look a day over 90."

Ignoring Kid, Naruto continued in a more serious tone, "He has been missing for twenty three days. For those of you who don't know, Kent was a charter member of the Justice Society, the precursor to your mentors of the Justice League."

"Of course!" Kaldur exclaimed staring at Kent Nelson's photo that shifted to his better known uniform, "Nelson was Earth's sorcerer Supreme. He was Dr. Fate!"

Again, Naruto heard Wally comment, and it seemed the boy didn't believe in magic. He could understand why, given he was so enamored in everything technological and even remotely science-y. It was the reason he even had his speed. Though after everything he had lived through, denying something so large as Magic in this world was blinding him to see with only one eye. Either way, there was nothing he could do to convince the boy otherwise. His beliefs were his own.

"Some of the Justice League believe he may be on one of his...walk abouts, but I believe different. As caretaker to the Helmet of Fate, the source of the Doctor's mystic might, and his given age, Nelson may have been kidnapped in order to use him as a means to take the Helmet."
"He is like the great sorcerer Priests and Priestesses of Mars!" Megan exclaimed, "I would be honored to help find him."

Naruto rolled his eyes when Wally raised his hand immediately and said, "Me too! Soooo honored, I can barely stand it. Magic, rocks." He could see that both Robin and Artemis didn't believe him in the slightest just as he didn't.

Before the blonde Leaguer could continue, Batman came up on screen and said, "Robin, Zeta back to the bat-cave, I require your presence." and his screen left soon after saying nothing more to the Team.

Robin sighed and said, "Well, I'm off, good luck finding Kent guys!" before running to the Zeta-tube and being engulfed with it's light, disappearing from the Team's sight.

"Well," Naruto said rubbing the back of his neck, "while they're out doing the dynamic duo thing, I want you guys to take this," he handed Kaldur a golden key with an inscription on it's side, "it is the key to enter the Tower of Fate."

"Where is the Tower located?" Kaldur asked curiously.

Naruto smirked, "I'll send you the coordinates, I find the location rather ironic in a way. But, to get inside, it is a test of faith."

SALEM  
August 19 20:22 EDT  

"We've reached Shadow's coordinates," Megan started, "but-"

"Nothing's there," Conner said staring at the empty space before them.

"Miss M, take us down." Kaldur said wanting a closer look.

Once they were out of the BioShip, Wally made a quick perimeter sweep and came back to report, "This isn't simple camouflage."

"So, what do you think?" Artemis prompted, "Adaptive micro-optive electronics combined with face-shifting?"

Wally had a rather impressed expression when he said, "Absolutely!...not! Clearly the mystic powers are at work here!" Artemis rolled and narrowed her eyes at Kid, changing his tune just to impress Megan, or have something in common with her was starting to grate on her nerves.

"A test of faith..." Kaldur murmured as he stared at the inscription of 'insert' on the side of the key. "Stand behind me." The Atlantean walked in front of his teammates and used the key as one normally would, though against an unseen door. Just as he turned it clockwise, a tall stone tower came to view, as though unveiled leaving the entire team awe-struck for a few moments before entering the Tower of Fate.

Once they were inside, the door closed behind them and disappeared all together.

"Uhhh," Superboy began, "where did the door go?"

Before anyone could reply, a holographic-esque image of Kent came to view in front of them.
"Greeting," it said, "You have entered with a key, but the Tower does not recognize you. Please state your purpose and intent."

Wally, wanting to impress Megan was about to talk before Kaldur placed a hand on his shoulder, squeezing it just tightly enough for him to hold his tongue.

Wally raised an eyebrow at his friend before Naruto's parting words came into his mind, "Also," he had said, "be sure to be honest when you get inside. The Tower...you could consider it alive in a way. It will protect itself against those who mean it harm, or those who do not reveal their reasons for being there. So, do try not to be flayed by it, that's probably the lamest way to go. " his aggravating eye smile on full blast as he told them.

"Fire Shadow sent us to see if Mr. Nelson and the Helmet were safe." Kaldur answers the image. The holographic-Nelson gives a combination of a smile and a smirk before disappearing, the floor beneath the team disappating beneath them so quickly, none could grab on the the edge in time before falling through to the bottom, landing in a snowy tundra.

"What the heck?" Artemis said as she lifted snow in her palm, realizing it was very real.

"Mystical powers!" Wally said with a half-laugh, "Cool."

Annoyed, Artemis snapped, "Enough! You're little, "impress Megan at all cost" game is starting to get on my last nerve. You're not a "true believer"! If you were, you wouldn't have said all those things back at the Cave before Megan said she would be honored to find Kent!"

Megan looked at Wally and said, "You truly don't believe?"

Feeling as though he couldn't deny it any longer, he said, "Fine, fine! I lied about believing in Magic. But magic is the real lie! A major load!"

"Wally." Kaldur said gently, his hand touching the snow, "this is real. I also studied for a year at the Conservatory of Sorcery in Atlantis. The mystic arts created the skin I use to power my water-bearers."

"Dude, you ever hear of bio-electricity?" Kid replied as though it were the most obvious thing, "Hey, in primitive cultures, fire was once considered magical too. Today, it's all just a bunch of tricks."

"Then how do you explain from coming from an interior of a mansion into a snowy tundra?" Artemis asked smugly. "Well?"

Wally wasn't giving in and said, "Ever hear of string theory? We're in a pocket dimension."

"You're pretty closed minded for a guy who can break the sound barrier in his sneakers." she said thoroughly annoyed.

"That's science" Wally exclaimed, "I recreated Flash's laboratory experiment and here I am. Everything can be explained with science."

All of them, deciding to let it go, turned around and Megan spotted the cane Kent Nelson carried in his picture.

"Is that Nelson's cane?" she asked.

"Oooh, maybe it's Nelson's magic wand." Wally drawled sarcastically before rushing to grab it just
as Artemis did.

"I got it." they said in unison, "Gah, I can't let go!"

Together, they were dragged upwards and disappeared in a golden light.

"Uh, we keep walking forward?" Conner said unsure of what to do.

"It would be best, I am sure there would be another exit close by, and perhaps we will find them once we are out of this area." Kaldur said walking forward, both Megan and Superboy following.

Just as Artemis and Wally reappeared on the flat area of a set of stairs in a room filled with them, all leading in different directions, Wally noticed a trio above them, one right away.

"Abra Kadabra." he said standing up.

"Well, would you look at that?" An elderly man said, soon engulfed with a golden light that matched the cane's, his entire body rising and floating toward the two teens. Just as he grasped the cane, the ropes that were wrapped around his wrists evaporated. "In here!" he said to the two teens, using his cane to create an elevator before them.

"No, no no!" a deathly pale, black haired kid began to whine. "I want that helmet! I want it! I want it! I WANT IT!" with his hand out before him, red energy began to ball up before being sent to the trio that stood inside the elevator, the door closing just as the twin streams of red energy slammed into them.

Inside the elevator, the elderly man finally said, "I'm Kent Nelson, by the way."

Wally rolled his eyes and said, "No duh." being immediately elbowed in the side by Artemis. "Ow!"

"I'm Artemis," she introduced, "Ms. Manners here, is Wally."

"Well Artemis," Kent began, "We're up against an opponent with tremendous mystic power."

"Abra Kadabra?" Wally asked with a raised eyebrow, "Tch, guy uses advance technology to simulate magic. Guys all show and no biz."

"Right you are!" Kent agreed, Wally immediately taking on a smug expression.

"He is!?" Artemis asked curiously.

"Abra is a charleton, but Klarion the Witchboy, the kid with the cat, is an actual Lord of Chaos. The ultimate enemy of a Lord of Order like Dr. Fate."

"Right~" Wally drawled sarcastically, "you're a Lord of Order."

"Oh no, not me." Kent admitted, "I'm just an old coat Fate used to put on. At least before my wife Inza convinced me there could be more to life. Ah," he said looking lovingly at a picture in a pocket watch, "she was a real pistol, my Inza. Any who, Klarion's after the Helmet. If he gets his sticky little mitts on it, he'll turn the whole world into his little playground of pandemonium. I'm sure that Shadow of yours would have said something about it's power."

"Wait, Shadow?" Wally asked, "You know Na-uh, Fire Shadow?"

"Ah, so he's finally revealed his name!" Kent said with a wide smile. "And yes, I know Naruto, we
met not long after he first began his hero work. A real fighter, that kid. Done many great things in his life."

"Woah, you know about his past!?"

"Indeed." Kent nodded lightly, "Great boy, and a greater friend." Before he could comment any further, the elevator door opened and revealed a short stairway to a large golden bell. The trio walked up toward it, but not before another trio came falling through a hole above them, revealing Superboy, Aqualad and Miss M.

"Friends of yours?" Kent asked Wally lightly before both having to duck from an attack by Abra Kadabra.

"Friends of yours?" Wally asked rushed as they dodged his attacks. The Team immediately went on the defensive, giving Wally and Kent enough time to get the Helmet.

Kent walked up to the bell and rang it with the head of his cane, causing the bell to be engulfed with the same golden light as his cane before walking through it as though it were an open doorway with Wally by his side. Both finding themselves on the roof of the Tower. Just as Kent went to reach the helmet, a spear of red energy struck him in the heart, the old man barely having enough energy to cast an extremely strong shield around them before Klarion who had followed them managed to attack again.

NOOOOOO!"Klarion screamed incensed.

"Not bad...for Dr. Fake...eh, kid?" Kent wheezed out, Wally having to support him as he fell to the floor. "The bubble... will give you just enough time t-to do...what you need...to do..."

"I have no idea what I need to do!" Wally exclaimed, looking at Nelson fearfully.

"Have faith...do what...you can't explain...believe...in what you can no longer...deny..."

And just like that, Kent Nelson was gone. No amount of Wally's attempt at CPR would work to revive him. Wally could hear Megan's pleas for Dr. Fate just before the telepathic communication was shut off from her pain.

He looked at the helmet that floated above him.

"A test of faith..." he said as he looked down sadly at the elderly man. Standing up, he grabbed the helmet just as Klarion used his powers to create giant red claws of pure energy to rip the shield.

"Hey dumb kid!" the witchboy said, "You put that thing on you may never get it off!"

Just as the shield was destroyed, and a huge flame came toward him, Wally put the helmet over his head, finding a world of darkness rather than pain.

Opening his eyes, he saw he was in a dark room, lit only by one light above him.

"Okay, okay, okay..." he said to himself in a panicky voice, "I'm not here, I'm dreaming!"

"Still don't believe?" said a familiar elderly voice. Turning around, Wally saw a living Kent Nelson.

"Honestly kid," Nelson continued, "how did you become so bull headed in fifteen short years?"

"But, bu-but you're...you're..." Wally stuttered taking a few steps away from the man.

"Yup." Kent said firmly, "but don't feel bad. Soon as this little brouhaha is over my spirit will
ascend, and I'll finally be reunited with my beloved Inza."

"O-oooh? Okay..." Kid said softly before he became panicked again, "Wait! Does that mean I'm-!?"

"Ahh, your alive." Kent reassured the teen, "But your soul no longer controls your body. See, we're inside the helmet." he explained, "You put it on, and my soul got sucked in. Probably because I spent so many years serving it's master."

"Master?"

"Nabu. The real Dr. Fate. One of them Lords of Order I told you about. He's the guy controlling your body now. Want to watch?"

As though they were watching through a window, the two saw as Nabu took Wally's body and used it as his own, even their own voices sounding as though they spoke in unison.

It was only when Klarion finally got a clean hit that Kent informed Kid that even though Nabu was in control of his body, it was still his body, and whatever damage was dealt to it, was dealt to his soul. Every attack, punch, kick, and throw, Wally would feel.

When he was told that should Nabu lose...Wally was less inclined to believe putting the Helmet on was a good idea.

Thankfully, Nabu was able to defeat Klarion by ridding him of his Familiar, his anchor to the physical plane, and just when he was waiting for Nabu to take off the Helmet, he appeared before the two and said he wouldn't.

"He can't do that!" Kid exclaimed, "Can he do that?" he asked Kent beside him.

"Can, but shouldn't." Kent said before addressing Nabu, "This is not the right candidate, the kid's soul belongs to the world of science, not sorcery."

"True." Nabu admitted, "But I do not appreciate being permanently hidden away. Useless and isolated...for decades at a time. Chaos must not be allowed to reign!"

"That won't happen again." Kent said firmly to the Lord of order, "The boy will see to it that you'll be put to good use."

"Yeah!" Wally agreed vehemently, "I swear."

"But in the meantime, I'll stick around. Keep you company."

"Wait!" Wally protested. "What happened to ascending? Reuniting with Inza?"

"So now you believe?" Nelson said with a small smirk, "Don't sweat it kid. I'll spend a few millenia here and then see my Inza. That's the great thing about eternity...it's eternal."

"The bargain is acceptable." Nabu stated finally.

"Some free advice before you leave kid." Kent said looking at Wally's bright green eyes, "Take care of that Supervisor of yours. He's strong, but even the greatest of knights have chips in their armor. Also, find your own little spit-fire, one that won't let you get away with nothing. Like that-"

Before Kent could finish his sentence, Nabu lifted the helmet over his head and he regained control of his body. He stared down at the soulless body of Kent Nelson sadly, clasping his hands tightly around the pocket watch he held so dearly before telepathically communicating with Megan about
what happened to him and that they should go home.

He needed some alone time after this.

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**MOUNT JUSTICE**  
_August 20 01:13_

"Good, you are all back!" Naruto said to the Team happy, though he was expecting to see a familiar elderly man walking alongside them with the aid of his cane. He felt his eyes narrow slightly at the absence of the man he had called ji-san for a year and a half.

"Report." he commanded the Team, said Team slightly flinching at the tone of voice of their Head Supervisor.

"We arrived at the Tower of Fate where we learned that Abra Kadabra and Klarion the Witchboy abducted Kent Nelson in hopes of gaining entry to the Tower and the means to retrieve the Helmet." Kaldur began, "Kid and Artemis were able to momentarily rescue him from his captors, but as Kid and he made their way to retrieve the Helmet, Kent Nelson was struck by an attack by Klarion...it was lethal and Mr. Nelson did not survive Wally's attempt to revive him...Abra Kadabra was detained and sent immediately to the police while Klarion made his escape."

Naruto stood stock still, his fists clenching at his sides before he nodded to the Team.

"I can see the Helmet is safe." he said in an emotionless tone, "You all should go rest up, and no training tomorrow." he turned from the team before he let his emotions get the better of him and allow his welling tears to fall.

He had lost another precious person...had he been able to sent the team before now, things could have ended differently...Kent could have been saved...he could have lived.

Naruto leaned heavily against the wall of the hallway he was walking down in before he punched through it, angry at the worlds cruelty.

"Naruto?" cam a familiar voice that brought his attention back to the real world. Turning, Naruto saw the concerned face of Superboy.

"Yes, Conner?" Naruto asked holding his anger and tears.

Conner could see the tears welling in his eyes of the man he had come to both respect and care for. The man who had taught him more than he could ever hope for. The man who treated him as an equal, yet cared for him as though he were his son.

The man who _believed_ in him.

Without saying anything, Conner swept Naruto in a hug, the blonde allowing himself to be lost in the arms of his ward, taking in the comfort he was offering, allowed himself to cry for the first time in a ridiculously long time. He allowed himself to shed tears for the man whom he revealed everything to. For the man who became his confidant, his ally, mentor, and above all, friend.

Superboy only held onto his Supervisor as he cried, glad he could be there for him in his time of weakness. He certainly didn't know what it was like to lose someone close...but he could imagine after nearly losing Naruto.

And it wasn't something he would ever wish on anyone.
It was only a few moments later that Naruto regathered himself and pulled away from Conner that the clone could see that he had lost more than just Kent Nelson before. He could see, as clear as day, that Naruto had lost many people he cared about.

Naruto wiped his eyes and squeezed Conner's shoulder in silent thanks before stalking off to the Zeta-tubes to take him home. He didn't want to stay in the Cave, but rather the comfort of him house.

Conner didn't say anything as he watched his Supervisor leave, only stared as he was engulfed in the bright blinding white light before he was gone and stalked off to his room for well deserved sleep, hoping Naruto would be alright.

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**UNDISCLOSED LOCATION**  
**August 20 02:54 EDT**

Just as Naruto returned back to his secured safe house, he received another ridiculously annoying notification in his ear that someone, most likely Cheshire, was trying to get in contact with him.

"What?" Naruto demanded, thoroughly emotionally drained with everything that had happened. He didn't have the patience to deal with whatever Cheshire had been trying to tell him for the past hour.

"Finally!" She groaned through the immensely secured communicator, "Why haven't you been answering?!!"

"Because I'm damned tired!" he exclaimed, pinching the bridge of his nose with two fingers.

"Doesn't matter! We need to move out now!"

"Why?" he asked alert from her slightly panicked voice.

"'Feathers' is down."

Shit.
"You look like shit, 'Feathers'." Naruto stated bluntly, looking down at the beaten up form of his comrade. His lightly tanned skin was marred with different shades of purples, blues, reds, and sickly yellows, indicating wounds in different stages of healing. His mask laid off to the side to reveal strong facial features struck with slight flesh wounds that were sure to leave a few faint scars.

It was strange, seeing such a strong man look so frail and broken, yet the spirit in his eyes so vibrant and burning, perhaps brighter, than even before. The young blonde had only seen such a look on a scarce few in his life, the major being the look of utter determination in on Rock Lee right after he had been told that perhaps, his ninja career was over before it could even truly begin. He laughed in memory of the bowl-cut, bushy eyebrowed boy he knew as a child, as he had with the boy himself before he had been transferred to this dimension. How he had, whilst wrapped in numerous bandages and casts, gone out in the Hospital courtyard and began training once more, unable to allow his 'Flames of Youth' to dim even in this time of darkness. He was sure that Gai couldn't have been more proud at his protégé at that moment, regardless of his concern for his healing.

"And you're still a brat." 'Feathers' said dryly, unsurprised at the lack of sympathy from his fellow teammate. The blonde had, at the very start, always let him know how it was. He was blunt, yet had a way with his words to make him believe, without a shadow of a doubt, that everything he promised would be fulfilled. That what they were doing was worth more than their lives, and greater than themselves. Of course he had no doubt that the kid cared for him. Other than being teammates and partners, they had formed a strong relationship, however much neither really admitted to it.

"Stop your whining bird-man, and let me heal some of this up." Naruto said moving toward the unmoving body lying on the medical cot, "I would have earlier but after last time...well, I'd much rather you be conscious."

As 'Feathers' watched Naruto's hand gain the soft green glow, he relaxed and allowed the strange energy to take hold in his body and heal the wounds he had amassed a few days earlier.

"Good," he said, "The last time was not worth it. You might have healed my flesh wounds and bruises, but my entire body felt as though it were on fire while simultaneously being stabbed with needles. I'd rather wait out the couple weeks for them to heal naturally."

"Awww," Jade's voice interrupted, "and here I thought you were strong enough to take a little pain." Even though he couldn't see her face, 'Feathers' was sure the woman had a grin or smirk equal to that on her Cheshire cat mask.

Glaring at the young woman, he said, "That was not a little pain." she chuckled lightly causing him to grow more irritated, "Take that mask off, Jade."

Sighing dramatically, the young woman grasped hold of the mask and revealed a small smirk.

Deciding to stray away from the current topic, Naruto spoke up. "So," he began, "what did you tell the wife about your absence yesterday?"

Looking to the blonde, the wounded man replied, "Half-truths."
With a raised eyebrow, Naruto's silent request for him to continue was answered.

"She, as you know, is knowledgeable of very little about what we are doing. I told her I would be back soon to let her know a slightly bit more about my injuries, but she hasn't demanded any more than that, thankfully."

"I'm surprised she hasn't already." Naruto admitted, "Hawkwoman was never very...patient, even with you."

Scoffing, Hawkman pushed the blonde's hands away from his arm as soon as the slight laceration was healed thoroughly. "No, but she respects my wishes enough to not...badger me for more information."

"Well~ I for one am glad this is all over and done with." Jade said, looking at the almost fully-healed wounds Hawkman had sustained, "You've gotten better, blondie. Been practicing?"

Crossing his arms after over his chest letting the healing chakra evaporate from his hands, he said, "Of course. After everything that's happened, to me personally, that was one of my priorities, even with my horrible control, I'm able to do flesh wounds. Any deeper, I wouldn't be able to do anything, and you're internal injuries will have to be healed on their own."

"Right." Hawkman butted in, standing to his full height, "Since we're all here, what is happening on the Shadow's side?"

Jade, taking on a more serious posture spoke firmly, "They've been in contact with Black Manta," she informed, "It could be nothing other than a progress report, but I somehow doubt it. Something serious is being planned, and I'm going to go ahead and guess it will have something to do with the fish people."

"Other than that, have you made anymore progress with finding the Lights true intentions?" Hawkman asked, putting on his League costume and mask.

Shaking her head, she said, "No. They still have me at bay with the important decisions. I'm not in with the Light. Only my father; who is also keeping me out of the loop." The word father was spoken bitterly, her voice frigid and void of any pleasant emotions.

Nodding, Hawkman continued, "Continue to try getting a better picture on what they are planning." he said, "You are the only reason we have been as successful as we have been thanks to your intel."

Jade smirked victoriously, "My, was that a compliment?"

With a stern glare, Hawkman said, "I was merely stating a fact."

Silently laughing at the pair, Naruto felt a rush of one of his clones memories return to him. Blinking furiously for a moment, Naruto cut in, "One of my clones discovered something. On Poseidonis, they've discovered something...but I cannot say what. They have placed an immense amount of security. No one but authorized personnel are allowed in, or out."

"Must be some find then..." Jade commented lightly, curious about what the Atlantians had found.

Naruto merely nodded, trying to think about what the discovery could possibly be, and why it was of such high importance.

"Interesting..." Jade drawled out, "I'll try to find out more about what it is, since it's obviously something they deem to be of great value if they're talking to Black Manta."
"Good, I'm sure you'll find out more than I can, but I'll still keep hanged clones around just to see what they can scrap up." Naruto said with a nod.

"Very well." the woman said before opting a serious glint in her eyes, "On another note, I've made a few more discoveries on our little mole..."

With a serious stare, Naruto silently demanded she continue, knowing that Hawkman was just as interested, if only slightly less so, as he was to learn what she had discovered.

"I can say that the mole isn't in your immediate Team, so that leaves very little other options."

His eyes widening some, Naruto knew exactly who she believed was the mole. A traitor who wasn't on the Team, but close enough to them and the League that they were able to provide vital information on what they were doing and who was going where, not to mention the motive to do so.

Red Arrow...Roy Harper.

"Are you positive?" he asked, his hands fisted at his sides.

Nodding seriously, Jade placed a hand on her partner's shoulder in comfort. She knew that there was a slightly bigger spot in his heart that he held the young Arrow. He had said once that the ex-side kick had reminded him of someone he once knew in his youth, someone he had deemed a precious person and would give his life to protect; a brother. To find that he was the one...that he was the mole, was undoubtedly hard for him.

Taking a deep breath, Naruto calmed himself. There was just one last question to ask: "Is he doing this willingly?"

Looking him directly in the eye, she answered him, "I don't know for sure. I just caught the end of their conversation before I had to bail out and return to my duties. Though I did catch that Cadmus was involved in some way. What exactly, I don't know, but a few theories seem plausible."

Letting out a small sigh, Naruto nodded at Jade and turned to Hawkman, "You should get back, I'm sure there's a crisis somewhere in the world that needs your help...there always seems to be something." the last bit was a whispered groan. Somewhere in the world there was always something that was wrong. Something that needed their help, or someone trying to take over part, or the whole world.

It was honestly rather irritating. Back in his world, there were always those who were greedy, those who killed for their own personal gain, but the only person who really tried to take over the world, was Madara, and that was for his own version of peace, rather than his own greed and hunger for power.

"Tch. I can say the same to you kid. Don't you have a Team to be training or something?"

"Canary is handling them today, as it's my "mental health day off". We need them every now and again, as I hope you know."

Jade rolled her eyes and sauntered closer to him, "Maybe we can spend the day together relaxing."

Her voice becoming huskier as she finished her sentence.

Looking at the raven haired woman next to him, he gave her a smirk and leaned in close to her face, so close their noses were almost touching.

"Hmm, as tempting as that sounds, let's not. I really need to get a few things squared out at the
Watchtower before I can get back home."

Putting on a rather genuine looking pout, Jade sighed lightly and peeled herself away from the blonde. "Well, can't say I didn't try." she said before turning to Hawkman, "You better get back to the Mrs, Feathers. I'll head back to the Shadows and see what more I can dig up, and just how far my influence goes."

Nodding to the ex-Shadow assassin, Hawkman turned to the exit of their true base, hidden under layers upon layers of rock, cement, and concrete, and powered by their own generator in order to stay off the grid. It was suited to their needs, outfitted with another personal supply of food, clothes, armor, and weapons, as well as various wings in which they can practice their style of fighting, and one dedicated specifically for medical purposes. A room that was continuously being used between the three of them, though more so for Cheshire and Hawkman than Shadow.

"I will call the next time something comes up." He said before riding the elevator up and out of their base, leaving both skilled ninjas alone.

"So," Jade began, turning her full attention to the blonde before her, "how are things going between you and that pretty little bird?" her voice teasing, with the slightest twinge of jealousy.

With a curious gaze, he stared at her, "What do you mean?"

"..."

"..."

"You cannot be serious."

More confused, he ushered her to continue, but instead of an answer, she merely shook her head and smiled wickedly.

"If you don't know, then there's no way I'll tell you." She laughed at his put out expression before wrapping her arms around his neck, pulling him close to her at the same time. "Besides, I much rather have this Naruto than one who knows what I mean."

As he was about to respond, Jade pulled down his half mask and pressed her lips to his, enticing a startled gasp that she took advantage of immediately.

Naruto was more than a bit surprised, even more so as Jade intensified the sudden kiss into something more. His body responding before his mind was able to compute what had happened, had moved his arm around her back while his other hand tugged at her hips, bringing them closer to him, his mouth moving just as passionately against hers as she did his.

When he finally regained clarity in his mind, Cheshire had pulled away from him, her face looking smug and accomplished. "See you around, blondie~." she said before she sauntered off and entered the elevator, leaving him to recount just exactly what had happened.

Once she was completely out of his sight, Naruto let out a groan and rubbed his face tiredly.

"Well, that was interesting."

'Fat chance.' the fox said smugly.
'Gah, why can't my life be simple?' He groaned to himself.

"Because you're Kami's itch with a b."

'F-you Kurama.'

GOTHAM CITY
August 27, 06:17 EST

Naruto burst into the abandoned warehouse, saving his last conscious ward from the mercy of Clayface's hand-mace. The villain was tough, his molten clay body able to sustain even the harshest of physical attacks, the only thing he knew would work on the beast, was something that conducted electricity.

Using a wind technique, Naruto pushed Clayface away from Kaldur, and further into the warehouse. The man-turned-monster roared in an unwavering rage before he charged Naruto. His hands though were already speeding through seals, and once the monster was close enough, he revealed his palm which had a raikiri charged and ready for impact. As soon as the lightning swept through the surface of the clay, the beast screamed, high and filled with agony that had forced Naruto to shut his ears off to the noise, as he had learned to during his shinobi days in Konoha.

He watched, emotionless, as Clayface's body dripped to the floor before he turned to his young friend and helped him off the ground, already having shadow clones do the same for the other unconscious members of the Team.

"You'll be alright." Naruto said to the Atlantian before he lost consciousness in his arms, nodding to his clones as they helped him take all of the Team to the bioship. Thankfully, the ship shifted the seats into small cots where the unconscious members could rest while they flew to the Cave. Once he was seated in the pilots chair, Naruto flew them straight home, glad that Megan had shown him just exactly how to manipulate the ship without telepathic abilities.

Kaldur was the first to awaken from his unconscious state, bolting up from his laid position, his eyes moving quickly to determine where he was. When his eyes met Naruto's, he looked down in shame, knowing he had failed the Mission as well as his friends and Mentor.

"We're about twenty minutes out from the Cave," Naruto said casually before his eyes became a bit sterner, "Care to explain just what happened down there?"

Kaldur looked up and met his Head Supervisor's eyes and tried, "I am sorry you had to intervene," he began, "I know the Team performed poorly-"

"Actually, the Team performed pretty well." Naruto interrupted, "However, you did not." His eyes became narrowed, trying to decipher exactly what was wrong with Kaldur, and why he hadn't been acting himself these past few days, so he pressed on, "You are their Leader, Kaldur. By vote, you are the one they turn to when all hell breaks loose. It's a big responsibility, of that there is no doubt, but you have been handling yourself well this far…what has changed?"

"No! You are-…" Kaldur sighed, his eyes finding the floor of the Bioship far more interesting than his Supervisor's sky-blue ones. "You are correct…"

"I am here to help Kaldur." Naruto said to the young teen who seemed to be facing a rather strong internal battle, "However, I cannot unless you tell me what is wrong."
Kaldur met the eyes of his friend once more, finding nothing but compassion and understanding within their depths. Gathering his courage, he spoke once more.

"As of late I am not even convinced I belong on the Surface World." He confessed, "For so many years it had filled my every thought, but now that I am here… my dreams are all Atlantis."

Naruto looked at the teen closely, trying to see underneath his words, listening intently on the way he had worded everything. Dreams...he, according to Aquaman, had dreamed of nothing but being what he was now, a Hero, among those above the surface of the sea. Yet now it seemed to be more than a mere case of homesickness, something deeper...something closer to his heart, so he decided to take a shot in the dark.

"Is it Atlantis?" He asked softly, "Or someone you left behind?"

As soon as he had said 'someone', Kaldur's eyes had widened, shock eminent in the soft pale green orbs, and he knew he had guessed correctly.

"Listen Kaldur," Naruto said a bit out of his depth, "You can easily split your time between here with the Team and Atlantis...but you can't continue to be so unfocused, you already know the consequences that can come from it..." He motioned toward the other still unconscious members of the Team and saw the teen wince.

Seeing that Kaldur was going to remain silent, Naruto continued, standing to place a comforting hand on his shoulder and squeeze it slightly, "I think you need a small vacation to Atlantis." He said, "I'll call Aquaman and let him know you'll be joining him down there as soon as everyone's up, clean, and fed. Afterwards, I expect an answer as to whether or not you will continue to stay with us Kaldur, and no matter the decision, I will support it."

Looking up to Naruto, Kaldur let out a soft sigh, "Thank you, Naruto."

With a crinkle in his eye, Naruto replied in kind, "It's what friends do, Kaldur."

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**MOUNT JUSTICE**
**August 27, 10:48 EDT**

When the Team returned to the Cave, Naruto let them know of the situation, he felt as though they deserved to know, and Kaldur wasn't opposed to it.

"It is just... I am sorry, it is something I must do." Kaldur said to his friends as everything was explained.

The Team's individual reactions were varying. Artemis hadn't known Kaldur for very long, but she couldn't deny that he was a great leader even if she hadn't been on the earlier mission since she was with her "Uncle." As such, she didn't have very strong feelings over him leaving, but was certainly apprehensive to think about what would happen to the Team dynamic if he did.

Megan looked at her friend sadly, but tried to hide it. "We understand, Kaldur." She said giving him a tight hug, not knowing what else to say.

"Yeah, don't worry about it Kal." Robin said, "Whatever you decide, we'll still be friends."

"Totally!" Wally was quick to agree, though he really didn't want Kaldur to leave. Robin, He, and himself had been the original trio of side-kicks, sans Speedy, or rather Red Arrow, who left at the start of this all. Not to mention they had been friends for years, and being on a Team together had
been better than great. "We're here for you." He finished with a wide grin.

Superboy was unsure of what to do, but decided to answer truthfully, "I hope you decide to stay, but it's not as if we'll never see you again."

Naruto smiled at his Team, happy they had formed such a strong bond in such a short amount of time. As he watched them continue to say their short goodbyes, he couldn't help but think back to his original genin team and where they were after two months of officially being a Team. If he remembered correctly, they had still been chasing that damn cat Tora for the Fire Daimyou's overweight wife who never managed to smother the beast to death.

After two months, they still lacked the very basics of what a Team was, and still had an abysmal amount of proper training. He couldn't blame Kakashi very much, since they were particularly difficult to deal with, but as a Teacher, he was meant to do more than damn teamwork exercises…he was meant to help them out through their problems, meant to be their rock when they had nothing to help hold them up, meant to be more than the habitually late annoying "teacher" he had been.

In the end, it neither mattered, nor did they care as their team had been all but destroyed, but he was proud to say that his Teacher would have been proud to see him as he was now, and proud of what his Team had become.

"You should get going," Naruto said, "Aquaman said he would meet you on the other side at 13:00 UTC-2."

Nodding to his Head Supervisor, Kaldur gave one last look to his friends and smiled, "I will see you all soon."

His other Team members smiled slightly and waved, "Try not to attract trouble while you're out there." Robin said waving.

With a small chuckle, the sound of the automated voice in the background, he said, "I shall try."

One flash of light, and he was gone.

And the other Team members let their masks fall slightly.

"I hope he decides to stay with us…" Megan whispered, hugging herself slightly.

"I think we all do, Megan." Robin said giving Megan's shoulder a squeeze.

"I certainly hope he will." Naruto quipped in, gaining their attention, "However, if he decides to return to Atlantis, for whatever reasons they may be, we will support him one hundred and ten percent."

"Of course." Conner said with a stern nod, annoyed that he would insinuate they had thought to do otherwise.

"Now, I believe you all deserve some rest after today," Naruto said to the remaining Team members, "Tomorrow, we'll be going over what happened with Clayface and how you can all learn from it."

"Sure thing, Fishcake." Robin grinned widely, lessening the tension in the air considerably.

Groaning loudly, Naruto rubbed his face tiredly, wishing dearly he had never told anyone his name, least of all the baby bat.
"Alright, alright, go on, eat, sleep, play…do whatever you'd like." He said turning, "I have some things that need to be done, but if you need anything from me, just call."

"Sure thing." Wally said, turning to his friends to see if they could do something to get their mind off the fact that Kaldur might leave them.

CAVE LOUNGE

Naruto groaned as he let himself fall on the soft couch they had set up in the official "Lounge" not wanting to zeta up to the Tower and try to scrounge up more information on what was down in Poseidonis. Perhaps it would be easier to merely question Kaldur about it when he got back?

"You seem tired." A soft melodic voice rang in his ears, making him turn his head toward the sound and squint open his eyes.

Finding Canary standing in the doorway wasn't much of a surprise, but it was certainly welcome.

"Hello, Dinah." Naruto said with a small smile. Since she had learned his name, he had taken to calling her by her own rather than merely Canary as he had done before. It felt...different, but in a welcoming sort of way. "What brings you here? I thought you had something planned with Oliver?" he asked curiously.

Dinah scoffed slightly before flopping down on the couch next to him, causing him to raise a brow.

"I'm going to go ahead and guess something went wrong?"

"Let's just say Oliver is an idiot and leave it at that." She said with a slightly murderous glint in her eyes.

"That was already established, but alright." He said, hoping to elicit a laugh from her, if only to get the conversation away from whatever Oliver had done wrong.

Smiling when she let out a small chuckle, he continued and asked, "Now, what can I do for you, Dinah?"

"Why do you think I want something from you?" she asked in return.

Raising a blond eyebrow, he said, "So...you don't then?"

"I never said that, just wondered why you assumed."

Wondering where this conversation was headed, he continued slightly confused, "So...I'm right?"

Rolling her eyes, she punched his arm lightly, "No, I'm asking why you automatically assume I wanted something from you."

Rubbing his arm in a faux attempt to seem in pain, he said, "Um, I don't know...most people don't particularly want to speak to me unless there's something wrong, or they need something." It was the truth, despite how much he hated recognizing it. It had been a long while since he had been able to talk to anyone openly. Talk to someone who knew everything about him already, and knew everything that had happened to him.

There was J'onn, of course, as he had seen many things about his life from the first attempt to read his mind, but he wasn't all that comfortable speaking to the Martian. He would much rather speak to
Megan than him, despite everything he had gone through with the man. It wasn't anything personal, but the Martian gave him, and Kurama, bad psychic waves.

"Hmm, well that's not a good." Canary said with a twinge of sadness laced in her voice, "How about I take you to the fair? Get away from all this madness for a day."

Naruto smiled, his eyes crinkling in delight. "You know it won't really be fair to the game employees when we blindside them with our amazing skills and leave with every prize." he commented wanting to laugh at the mere thought.

"Hmm, let's make it an exercise for the Team then, however get's the most, can skip out on the next spar with the two of us." Naruto's eyes lit up at the thought, knowing that each of the members would be fighting hard to win since they all hated, possibly with a passion, the spars they had with both Canary and he.

"I already said they could rest, but I don't think they'll want to miss out on this." Naruto said with a smile still evident on his face.

Smiling with him, Dinah turned to the door that lead to the Game Center, knowing that would be where they would find the Team.

"Let's go get them then."

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POSEIDONIS
August 27, 13:00 UTC-2

"Greetings Kaldur." Aquaman greeted his Protege as he swam out the Zeta Tube.

"King Orin." Kaldur greeted, saluting his King.

With a smile on his face, Aquaman motioned for him to swim along, moving toward the heart of the city, where they would split ways, leaving Aqualad to do what he wished.

"The Queen and I are hosting an intimate dinner tonight." Aquaman said to the teen, "Will you attend?"

Aqualad answered without hesitation, "Your Majesty...there is someone...special, that I had hoped to see tonight."

Aquaman smiled, chuckling slightly, "You may invite a friend."

Kaldur smiled happily at his Mentor, "Thank you, My King."

"Until Tonight."

With that, they parted ways, Aquaman returning to his duties, while Kaldur swam toward the Conservatory where students trained in their sorcery and magic, knowing this was the place to find his friends, and most of all, the one he left behind.

Upon swimming through the many students in the courtyard, practicing their sorcery, Kaldur came across an old friend of his, Topo, who seemed to be rushing to finish a mosaic of some sort, though Kaldur could see the King was depicted in it.

"Topo," Kaldur interrupted looking at his friend's work, "the workmanship is magnificent."
"Kaldur!" Topo turned, seeing his old friend, "wait, watch... listen" focusing his magic upon the mosaic, the art began to move, depicting the story of how Garth and he had assisted in helping Aquaman defeat the vile Ocean Master, and how he had accepted his King's offer in becoming his Protege.

Kaldur was lost in thought as he watched the story, listening to his friends narration of the events that happened so long ago. It was true, he and his best friend Garth had managed to distract the Ocean Master with their combined powers, allowing their King to triumph against the villain. In the end, both Garth and he had been offered the chance to become 'Aqualad', but Garth had chosen to remain in the Conservatory and continue his training, whilst he had taken his King's offer, his curiosity and dreams of the surface world making his decision easier.

"Kaldur?...I mean...Aqualad?" Topo's voice had brought him out of his reverie, forcing him to come back into reality rather than reliving past events.

"Oh...It is very good, Topo." Kaldur commented, placing a hand on the mosaic. "Do you know where I might find Tula...and Garth?"

"On the roof, at their studies." Topo said lightly, as though that were the only answer he could receive.

"Thank you, my friend." Kaldur said before swimming off toward the roof, where he would find his friends.

Upon arriving on the roof, Kaldur saw both Tula and Garth, along with the Queen herself who seemed to be in charge of both his friend's studies.

Saluting to his Queen, Kaldur said, "Apologies my Queen, I did not mean to interrupt." Which was true, though he was happy to hear his Queen's response.

"It is well, I have another class. Will I see you at dinner?"

"Yes, Your Majesty." he said with a smile.

"Then I shall see you then," with that, she swam from the roof and into the building, off to whichever class she had after teaching his friends, leaving the trio once again together after so long.

Once the Queen was gone, Tula hugged her friend, "You look well, Kaldur." she commented as she released him from her greeting.

"Yes," Garth said placing a hand on Kaldur's shoulder, "Surface life agrees with you."

Kaldur looked at his friends with a slightly curious gaze, "You speak as though we have not seen each other for years, yet it has only been-"

"Two months." his two friends answered in unison.

"That long..." Kaldur stated, wondering how it hadn't truly felt that long at all. Then again, there hadn't been much time for rest between everything the Team was assigned and everything both Naruto and Canary had put them through. He supposed that was where the time had gone, and left him feeling as though not much had passed as everything was fairly quickly paced.

Looking to his friends Kaldur said, "Then I must make up for lost time. Tula, will you accompany me to dinner tonight at the Palace?" When both Garth and Tula shared a quick look, Kaldur narrowed his eyes curiously before placing a hand on Garth's shoulder, "I wish I could invite you as
well."

"I made that choice long ago..." Garth commented looking to Tula, before she averted her eyes and spoke to Kaldur.

"We have another class," she said looking as though she wanted nothing more than to disappear, dragging Garth along. "But I will see you tonight."

Kaldur stared longingly at Tula as she swam away, but could see that there was something that both his friends failed to tell him, and perhaps did not want to. Training with the Fire Shadow of the Justice League had taught him more than merely tactical strategies, and strength training for being out on the Field. Naruto had taught all of the members of the Team to look underneath the underneath, and there was clearly something of importance that was not being said that involved them both.

He shook his head lightly, knowing that whatever it was, and if it was truly important, his friends would tell him when the time was right. After all, that was what friends did.

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HARBOR FAIR
August 27, 14:45 EST

"Alright, Kidies!" Naruto said to the Team, henged as an older version of Sai, sans the trademark creepy smile, "Here are the rules. You're each given $50 to spend on the various side games here, whoever wins the most prizes and still has the most amount of money, wins and doesn't have to spar with C and I tomorrow. The one with the least amount has to fight us both at the same time."

Looking to the Team, he could see the competitiveness win out, and they all looked with sheer determination, wanting to be the one to win the most amount of prizes so they could skip out on the next spar...those were absolutely brutal.

"Oh, also, you can't use your abilities to help you out, and you can only play at each station twice, win or lose." Canary said with a smile, knowing this would even the odds a little more since they all got training in the areas they were weakest at, though the little Bird and Shooter were sure to have a slight upper hand at most of the side-games at the fair.

"So, go on and win!" Naruto said with a wide grin that was only slightly creeping the Team out.

"Ohh! There's a coin toss thing on to the top of a bottle!" Megan said walking over to the stand, wanting to see if she could win without her telekinetic abilities.

Watching as everyone went their separate ways, Naruto smiled wondering just how many prizes each of the members would win before their money ran out. He had already scoped the area beforehand with a few clones and could see that all, save for a few, of the games were rigged for the player to lose unless they were 1: extremely lucky, or 2: had the knowledge to win at the rigged games.

He could see that Conner had followed Megan to the coin tossing booth, and couldn't help but smile. To everyone else save Conner and Wally, it was clear that Megan had a bit of a crush on the Kryptonian teen, and had since she first met them after the initial formation of the Young Justice Team. It was an interesting thing to look at, watch as both slightly socially awkward teens gravitate toward each other and quite possibly become something more.

Turning his head slightly, he also saw that Wally had left to the booth where reflexes were the skill needed. Being the speedster he was, flipping a switch that changed where either the blue or red balls
would go to seemed perfect for him. At least as the first game of the day.

Robin and Artemis were going toe to toe with a game at darts, both finding the game that required the most accuracy, and leveled strength to a good first game to play, though it seemed the Baby Bat was taunting Artemis into missing a few of the balloons that were made to withstand the dull ends of the darts.

"Should we have a competition ourselves?" Canary challenged, regaining the disguised Leaguer with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"Hmmm, is that a challenge I hear?"

"Maybe..."

With a wide grin, that looked completely natural on his henged form, Naruto said, "You're on. Same rules?"

"Same rules, but we go head to head on each game." she said with a smirk.

"Let's go then." Naruto said already walking over to one of the booths that allowed for multiple people to play.

POSEIDONIS
Palace Dining Room

"A gigantic echinoderm, frozen, yet still alive!" Prince Orn told those at the dinner enthusiastically, "Of course at this point our data is quite limited, but Dr. Volko believes this creature is very promising."

The dinner had been served and finished, everyone listening raptly at what the Prince was stating, though Kaldur turned to his friend Tula his voice a bit above that of a whisper.

"I am thinking about rejoining you at the Conservatory." he admitted with a smile, one that was not mirrored by his friend.

Before he could comment on her expression, the Queen interrupted, having heard what he had said, "You realize you left your studies some time ago." she said softly, "Your sorcery skills have not kept pace...you would no longer be in Tula's class, or Garth's."

Kaldur looked down slightly at the news that he would no longer be in the same classes as Tula, or Garth's, but perked up and said, "Then perhaps I will require a tutor?" looking to Tula hopefully, though once again, she did not return it and instead looked sheepish and ate a piece of whatever was left on her plate.

As desert was being prepared to be place on the table, both King Orin and the Queen stood, looking absolutely bright and absurdly happy.

"We have an announcement." Aquaman said, placing his hand over his wife's stomach.

"I am with child." the Queen said brightly, seemingly shocked herself that she and her husband spoke true.

"Oh that is wonderful!" Tula said ecstatic over the news and rushed to hug her friend and Queen in joy.
"Congratulations!" Kaldur said to his Mentor, shaking his hand, "An heir to the throne at last." he stopped to turn to the Prince, feeling thoughtless at his choice of words. "Forgive me Prince Orn, I did not mean..."

"No fear Kaldur, for no one could be more thrilled at this news than I!" Prince Orn said, happy for both his brother and sister-in-law.

"Thank you brother." King Orin said happily, "Thanks to you all!"

The celebration however was cut short when Superman's voice came through from Aquaman's communicator placed on his belt. "Superman to Aquaman, League emergency in Tokyo bay. Rendezvous at the Watchtower."

Placing a finger on the communicator, Aquaman replied, "Acknowledged." before turning to his wife, "It seems I must take my leave..." he said holding onto her hand tightly, before she forced it out of his grip, not daring to stare into his eyes, or back as he left. Aquaman knew that being a Leaguer and starting a family was going to be difficult...already not having much time down in Atlantis as it was due to his responsibilities on the surface. But such a sacrifice was to be made for the better of the world, and he just hoped that his wife would continue to support him as she had even with a child on the way.

"Swim with me." Aquaman said to his protege, turning away to the Zeta Tube room and leaving behind the others.

Once they were a fair ways away from the room, Aquaman turned to his protege and began, "Shadow has made me aware of your...dilemma." he said softly, causing Kaldur to flinch, "I know from personal experience that it can be difficult to live there and love here."

As they reached the entrance to the Zeta Tube, Aquaman inserted just where he wished to Zeta to and turned once last time to the young teen. "I am confident that you will make the right choice." he said placing a strong arm on his.

Kaldur forced his warring thoughts to halt and placed a strong expression on his face as he saluted his King. Once the flash of light was gone, and his King along with it, Kaldur allowed the mask to fall and he rubbed his face tiredly. He thought, he had already made his decision, to stay in the sea, in Atlantis alongside Tula, but he was suddenly unsure if that was going to disappoint his King and Mentor.

He decided to return to the Hall and ask Tula out for a quick swim around the Palace gardens, hoping that perhaps then, some more light could be shed on his situation and final choice. For he would not only be leaving his duties as Aqualad, but as Leader of the Young Justice Team. Returning to live here, with Tula again would leave him little time to return to the surface and visit his friends, much as it had with visiting both Garth and Tula. Yet they seemed to be getting along well with their studies...and he couldn't help but wonder who would become Leader in his place should he leave.

Robin was the one he believed should have been Leader, but he was far too young and inexperienced in such a task that forcing it upon him so young would be detrimental to his growth. Wally was to headstrong and eager, leaving his choices to be rushed and have a higher risk. Artemis to new to the Team...Megan to unknowing and naive at times...and then Superboy who was still to quick to anger.

He supposed that Shadow would take over...but that wouldn't be the same Team that they had planned to begin at the start of this all in the beginning of July.
Sighing, Kaldur felt as though he truly knew where his decision lay, and decided to swim back to the Palace, keen on letting Tula be the first to know of his decision.

**Palace Gardens**

Both Tula and Kaldur swam alongside each other, looking awkward and wondering at which point would be a good time to speak, though both found that their courage at the same time.

"There is something-" they both said in unison, laughing lightly at the coincidence.

"Kaldur, I-" Tula began, only to be stopped by Kaldur's hand.

"Please, Tula.." Kaldur began softly, taking her hand in his own, "I have made a decision. Though I miss both you and Garth dearly, my place at the moment is above the sea, and in the Surface World with the rest of my Team. I will try my best to return more frequently, so that two months that have passed without so much as word as to how we are doing does not happen once more. I am sorry, for my indecision before now seemed to cause you some duress."

Tula sighed lightly, internally relieved for she had believed he was about to confess his feelings to her, feelings she had known about before now, but had not thought he would ever act upon them as she had before now.

"Kaldur, there is something that I...we, should have told you the moment we saw you." Tula began, "Garth and I...we are...together." she said softly, taking her hand back from his own.

Kaldur for the most part looked shocked, though with a few blinks of his eyes, he reached an understanding. This had been what both Garth and she had been hesitant to tell him, in fear of hurting his feelings as Garth knew of his true intentions toward Tula months ago. It hurt, truly, but Naruto's words spoke true to him. Underneath the Underneath, the truth was always there, and he had known that something like this was extremely plausible. As they had said, it had been two months since they had seen each other, and within those two months, he himself was no longer the same person. It would be logical to think that within that time, both Tula and Garth had changed, and found each other.

Before he could say anything, the world around them seemed to explode. Behind them, the conservatory was all but demolished, stone turned to rubble now falling around them. He stared on in horror as that explosion was not the only one, as it seemed every major building in Atlantis was put to the torch, the entire city seeming to crumble underneath the explosions strength.

Without having to look at each other, both Tula and Kaldur rushed back to the Palace, protecting the Queen and the heart of the City the first things on their mind.

When they arrived, a fight was already quickly heating up, guards attacked the black clad men, the uniforms of those who work under Black Manta. Everyone fought against the invaders, Kaldur using his teachings from both Naruto and Canary at their fullest. Whilst Naruto nor Canary could train him properly in sorcery, everything that Naruto has spoken of control, and finding strength in protecting those he loved and cherished, had been put to the test.

"This attack was precision planned." Kaldur stated out loud whilst taking Black Manta's men out with his water-bearers. "The initial explosions lured patrols into ambush."

Swimming more agile than anyone remembered, Kaldur was able to bring down many of those who dared to threaten his home, Tula, the Guards, Prince Orn, and the Queen taking many of the others
"Tula!" a voice broke out in the midst of the fighting, taking Tula's focus off of the sorcery she had been casting and turning to the familiar voice of Garth. Once she saw her boyfriend, she screamed his name in fear, noticing the black clad man pointing his gun at his back. Rushing over, she managed to push him out of the way, only to be shot herself, rendering herself in pain, and unconscious.

"TULA!" both Garth and Kaldur screamed in fear, Garth holding his beloved's unconscious form in his arms and protection, Kaldur already at their side.

When the Queen cast her sorcery, they were once again reminded why it was she who held the Heir in her womb. She wasn't just a pretty face, she wasn't weak in the slightest, but the strongest Female sorceress in all of Atlantis, as was required of the Queen by her own standards. She called upon her magics and summoned an octopus form, larger than the very roof they stood and began to capture and throw those who dared to destroy her home with all her strength, rendering them unconscious and useless on the battlefield.

"Surface communications are down." Prince Orn explained feeling the pressure, "We cannot reach King Orin! Summon more troops to the palace!"

"The palace was not the only target." Garth said to the Prince, "I witnessed explosions in sectors one, two, three, and five."

"Nothing in sector four?" Kaldur said already suspicious, "Explosions all over the City except for where the Science Center is located. Where your gigantic sea star is secure."

Seeing the dots being lined together, Prince Orn said, "Then it is all a diversion, but with the King away I must protect the Queen...and the heir."

"I need no protection! Go!" The Queen stated firmly, wishing someone could see that she was the one doing all of the fighting at the moment.

"No, Mira." Prince Orn said softly, "If you suffered an injury my brother would never forgive."

"The Prince is right my Queen." Kaldur said firmly, "This battle is mine."

"And mine!" Garth's voice came through, though he was still cradling Tula's limp form in his arms.

Aqualad looked at the two, "Your place is with Tula." he said, though not unkindly. Without another word, Kaldur readied his water-bearers with both a sword and made, already swimming through the men, taking as many down as he could along the way and headed toward the Science Center, keen on stopping this theft before it occurred.

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**MOUNT JUSTICE**  
**August 27, 17:32 EST**

"Alright, now let's count and find out who is out lucky loser!" Naruto said with a wide smile on his now covered and un-henged face.

"I got fifteen." Robin said smugly, looking at the large prizes he had gotten throughout the day.

"Ha!" Wally said with a fist in the air, "I got sixteen."
"I won thirteen." Artemis piped in, already knowing she didn't win.

"I only got seven." Megan said softly, though happy with those she had won.

"Ten." Superboy said before he continued, "but I gave them to Megan, so technically she has seventeen."

Both Canary and Naruto shared a look, happy to see that Megan held a stuffed rabbit close to her chest, already knowing that it was only one of the prizes that Conner had given her.

"Hey! That's cheating!" Wally said, thinking smugly that he had already won. "That's cheating right?"

Naruto smirked at the speedster, "We never said you couldn't, so it's alright." at Kid Flash's glum face, he continued, "Which means Megan is our winner, and Superboy our lucky loser."

"Not cool, Fishcake." Robin muttered annoyed that he had come third, *third(!),* in the little competition they had.

"Well, it's getting late and I'm sure you all have a few things you want to get to so now, you're officially off. Hope you all had fun!" Naruto said with Kakashi's trademark eye-smile.

"Heh, next time, *I'm* going to win." Robin said to Wally.

"Psh! In your dreams, Rob!" the speedster replied good-heartedly.

"Well, I have to get home. See you tomorrow guys." Artemis said walking over to the Zeta Tube. After a while, everyone went on their separate ways, leaving both Naruto and Canary alone once more.

"Well, today was fun, and I won, so shouldn't I get a prize?" Canary said turning to the blond Leaguer.

Smirking, he said, "I guess, but that's only because you kept kicking me when I tried to aim."

"Never said anything about distractions." Canary smiled widely, "Artemis found that out the hard way as well."

"Ha! That she did." Naruto laughed, remembering how angry the archer was when Robin wasn't penalized in any way when he did everything he could to distract her in the booths they went head-to-head in.

"So, what do I get?" she asked again.

"Hmmm, don't know." Naruto answered lightly, "What would you like?"

Tilting her head to the side a bit, she put on a slightly thoughtful expression before brightening up, "You have to promise to take me out again, just the two of us."

Blinking in surprise, Naruto felt a slight blush rise from his neck and couldn't be happier he chose to imitate his habitually late teacher, as it hid his heated cheeks perfectly.

"Oh, um...sure." he mumbled out still a bit out of it that *that* was what she wanted, "Whenever we have free time again, we'll go out. I'll make sure it'll be even better than today." he promised finally regaining a bit of his senses.
"Good." Canary smiled happily before turning to the Zeta Tube, "See you tomorrow, Naruto."

"Till tomorrow, Dinah."

**POSEIDONIS**

**SECURED LABORATORY**

Aqualad had managed to enter the laboratory, only to react when Garth sneaked up behind him. Retracting his sorcery imbedded into his water bearers, he said to his longtime friend, "You should be with Tula."

"The Queen watches over Tula, and sent me after you." Garth replied.

Knowing he could not go against his Queen's orders, Kaldur nodded sternly before swimming inside, Garth following close behind. They both swam through the narrow hallways, Kaldur's training coming through full blast as he sent a silent wave through the water, acting as a soft, unnoticeable sonar and alerted him to two of Manta's grunts.

Before Garth even knew he was gone, Kaldur had managed to sneak up behind them and knock them out cold just as they took aim against his friend.

Seeing Garth's shocked expression, Kaldur said, "I too have had my studies." Whilst it wasn't strictly sorcery, his training did wonders out in high pressure situations as the one they were currently in. Everything Naruto and Canary had taught him had centered around retaining a leveled head even in the most dangerous of situations. Losing focus, or losing a calm mind could very well lead to one's fall. And this was something he had learned the hard way earlier that day with the Team in Gotham City.

"It would be wise to disguise ourselves as these two." Garth pitched in, "It will allow us access without suspicion.

"That is a good idea." Kaldur said, already releasing the man from the suit and placing it upon his own body.

Once they were properly dressed, both Kaldur and Garth swam into the room, the giant frozen echinoderm taking the majority of the space. Kaldur nodded to Black Manta, receiving a slight nod in return, though he could not feel the man's gaze linger on him, and more importantly, his waterbearers he had chosen to clasp onto the uniform's belt.

After a few moments, Black Manta swam up to the pair, "Impressive is enough...Aqualad."

Knowing their disguise had been seen through, Garth shot his weapon at the Black clad villain. Seeing that their Leader was being shot at by the two, the other grunts went to work against them as well, locking their weapons onto them, forcing both Atlantians to fight back with equal ferocity.

"Such a waste! You really have no ambition beyond serving Aquaman!? Aren't schools of other fools willing to die for their King. This fool for example!" Black Manta screamed before sending a blast from his mask toward Garth. Said Atlantian would have been hurt badly, if not fatally had Kaldur's reaction time not been so short, using his waterbearers as a whip and brought his friend away from the blast.

Once they were under the safe cover of a concrete beam, Kaldur turned to his friend and hissed sternly, "Garth! Get your head in the game."
Swimming away to fight against Black Manta and his grunts, Kaldur forced his body beyond its limits, forcing his muscles to continue moving despite their strain, all to glad that Garth had found his focus and began to truly fight alongside him, as they had once before against the vile Ocean Master.

However, despite their attempt to stop Manta from taking the frozen specimen, the main ship above the glass dome had melted through, dropping down a thick steel line that was to attach to the ropes latched around the ice, making their get-away all the easier.

Kaldur continued to fight head to head with Black Manta, while Garth had taken to fighting against the grunts. His body, however, was not up to the strain and he was considerably weakened, particularly against Black Manta who hadn't done much fighting up until then. During their mostly one-sided battle, Kaldur noticed that a grunt had managed to clasp the cable onto the echinoderm, already hefting the frozen beast above the stand made by the Science Center.

"Garth!" he called out to his friend, "The cable!"

Without being told, Garth formed a condensed ball of his sorcery and threw it toward the clasp that attached the ship's cable to the echinoderm, forcing the frozen ice to fall harshly back down to the stand, breaking apart some of the ice, and fully awakening the beast within its grips.

Manta, looking at the broken cable felt nothing but anger and rage, "If I can't have it," he screamed, "no one can!" Without a thought to anyone's well being, he shot a couple of his shoulder torpedo's at the beast, causing not only for the echinoderm to explode, but everything around them to feel the shockwave of heat and destruction.

Garth had managed, before the brunt of the explosion hit, to force a frozen shield to erupt and protect both Kaldur and himself. Unfortunately, when the smoke dissipated in the ocean water, all of Black Manta's men and the man himself had retreated onto his main ship, leaving nothing but destruction and memories to prove he was ever even there.

POSEIDONIS
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"Our City was heavily damaged, and many Atlantians were injured...and many lost, but it could have been far worse." King Orin said, holding onto his wife and unborn child tightly to his side. "I am grateful to you all."

Prince Orn brought forth a small container, within it a small piece of a sea star.

"This contains all that survived," he said, "It is already regenerating, the creature requires further research, but with the Dome compromised and the Science Center in ruins, we cannot safely secure or study it. Perhaps...the Surface World can do better."

"I am sure they will be eager to try." King Orin said to his brother. Turning to his protege, he continued, "Kaldur?"

Saluting his King, he replied, "Please, call me Aqualad, My King." fully letting his Mentor know his final decision on the matter.

Aquaman merely smiled slightly at his Protege, knowing that he would have made such a decision in the end.

Since they had other duties to attend, Aquaman, Queen Mira, and Prince Orn all bid the young Teen goodbye and wished him well once he returned to his Team, leaving the friends alone once more.
"Kaldur..." Tula began, "I...we...that is..."

Placing a hand on her shoulder, Kaldur released her from her stuttering, "I wish you both nothing but the best." he said, completely honest and in fact, happy for his two friends. Hugging both his friends one last time, Aqualad turned to the Zeta Tube, the light forming around him.

Before it could take him to his destination, Kaldur turned to Garth, "Have you ever wondered what would have happened had I stayed behind, and you had become Aqualad?"

"Never." Garth answered.

With a small smile on his face, Kaldur replied honestly, "No...neither have I."

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