

We all woke up at the usual time the following day, but instead of heading to the gym, we gathered in the kitchen. We shared a quick breakfast and split off to finish our basic morning routines before gathering back in the library, where Kaldur had set up the recording Batman had given us. Before long we had all arrived, including Wally, who zipped into the room just before Kaldur started.

“Sorry I’m late,” He said, dropping into a chair, which spun around twice before it stopped, the speedster facing the screen. “Did I miss anything?”

“No, we were just about to start,” Kaldur answered, nodding to his friend before starting the footage.

The first stage of the mission started to play on the projected screen, fast-forwarding as we escorted the armored transport from the city into the more rural areas. After a minute it stopped, and our first encounter started.

Silently we all watched as we put our plan into action, from when the robotic monkeys first attacked us until they “escaped” with the two fake crates. Kaldur paused the footage and turned back to us, leaning backward on a desk and crossing his arms. For a moment no one said anything before Kyle broke the silence.

“Batman was right, it was overly dramatic.”

“We definitely went overboard,” Robin agreed, nodding his head. “It could have been worse, but all of the theatrics probably wasn’t necessary.”

“Maybe, but we had no way of knowing who or what was going to try for the crates,” I pointed out with a shrug. “If it had been a person or even a more sentient android, they would have noticed if we just shrugged and let them have it. I mean, the monkeys had to have been recording everything, right?”

Kaldur reached over to the desk and grabbed a folder, one I hadn’t even noticed before. He paged through it for a moment before stopping to read a page. After a minute he nodded and closed the folder.

“They were, but according to Batman, Professor Ivo had no way of viewing that footage on the train with him,” He said before putting the folder back down. “Batman sent over his notes this morning.”

I frowned and pulled out my phone, cursing internally when I realized he had sent them to me as well, I just hadn’t noticed because of the low priority attached to the message.

“So if Ivo was less of an idiot, he would have been watching us, right?” Wally asked. “So then it wasn’t over the top.”

“There was a middle ground I think we should have gone with,” Tora said, her accent notable in her nervousness.

“I agree,” Kaldur said with a nod. “I believe in my eagerness to display our skill and to take the mission seriously I overplanned. I will do my best to prevent this for future missions.”

We talked a bit more about the first stage plan, and about what we could have done differently. After a few minutes Robin, who was apparently the best typist we had, typed out our thoughts in a few paragraphs on one of the library computers. Our final verdict was that we had overdone the theatrics but our actual performance was at least adequate. I pointed out that Robin's idea to tag one of the monkeys with a backup tracker should have been brought up during the planning phase so we could have prepared for it better. Robin winced but nodded in agreement. He knew his lack of communication was an issue, and he promised us that he was working on it.

Kaldur unpaused the footage, and after a moment it jumped to the footage of the train. We watched the video feed until I flying tackled one of the androids out of the car, which is where Kaldur paused it again.

“This one is obvious, we literally learned it a few days ago. We should have known better than to bring so many people in a tight space once,” I pointed out, most of the team nodding in agreement. “Our tanks should have gone in first, and gotten back out when they realized the situation was untenable.”

“What we should have done is stopped the train first,” Robin added. “Then it wouldn't have mattered nearly as much that we needed to push the androids out so we had more room to fight.”

“We had the element of surprise, but we didn't use it,” Wally pointed out after a moment of quiet, shaking his head. “We busted in fine, that was great. But then we all just kinda stood there... I mean we all listened to Ivo when he monologued.”

“Agreed, we should have immediately engaged and disabled all those present,” Kaldur said with a nod. “It may or may not have worked against the androids, but it is still what we should have done.”

Again we discussed the footage for a while before Robin wrote up our conclusions, finishing the few paragraphs easily. We continued on to the next part, the actual fight. This took the longest as we restarted the footage several times to focus on the fight with each individual android.

“I'll be the first to say it, Wally and I claim the most obvious screw-up,” I said, shaking my head with a frown. “I take credit for starting the conver-”

“No, we both messed up,” Wally said, cutting me off. “I should have known better, you should have known better, we both messed up.”

“I think that particular mistake has seen enough attention,” Kaldur pointed out, before continuing. “My orders to Robin were also an issue.”

“We should have just blown the connection between the cars. I’m pretty sure we could have done it without doing too much collateral damage,” Robin said. “We could have timed it to our breach as well.”

“The fights themselves went pretty well, all things considered,” M’gann pointed out. “We could have done a few things differently, but only in hindsight.”

“So, did anyone else pick up on the fact that the electrokinetic looked a bit like a smaller Mr. Twister?” Robin asked, looking around. “Without all the extra bells and whistles, and some extra armor?”

I squinted at the image on the screen, tilting my head from side to side.

“I guess I see it?” I commented after a moment. “Lends even more credence to that random attack having been a trap for Red Tornado, since these androids look a lot more like T.O. Morrow creations.”

“Yeah... I’m going to include that in the report,” Robin said, already typing. “Just to make sure they see it as well.”

We talked for another half hour about the fight, Robin taking notes and finishing our report while we analyzed the fight. When we were done we gathered back around the kitchen. It didn’t take long for the Zeta-Tube to spin up before flashing brightly, depositing Colonel Clayden into the cave.

*“He’s alone...”* M’gann commented mentally. *“I thought we were going to meet our stealth teacher?”*

*“He did say he was going to try getting in touch with who he had in mind,”* I commented with a shrug. *“Maybe they couldn’t, or maybe they weren’t interested.”*

The team met the older, retired soldier halfway across the main cave, the grizzled vet leaning on his cane. He waved as we got closer.

“I heard y’all got into some fun while I was away?” He asked with a smile. “Glad to see you coming out on top.”

"I believe it could have gone better," Kaldur responded from the front of the group.

"You won, no one died and you didn't blow up anything important," The Colonel responded, waving our combat leader off. "That's a win in any book that counts. Take the wins where you can, there will be times when you forget what winning feels like."

He spoke casually, but it was easy to see the haunted look just behind his eyes. M'gann shivered next to me, the veteran's emotions strong enough that she could feel them without even trying. He shook his head subtly and smiled.

"You'll be happy to know that I managed to find your stealth teacher," He said. "I had to call in an old favor, but it will be worth it. She is the world's premier stealth expert and has mastered every aspect of stealth, infiltration, camouflage, information gathering and espionage."

"Can't be better than Batman," Robin said from behind me, though he said it under his breath.

"Oh please, there's more to stealth and camouflage than hiding in shadows and scaring the shit out of crooks." A female voice said from behind us.

As one we all spun around to find a woman standing there, a hand on her hip, casually looking us up and down. She had shoulder-length black hair and brown eyes and looked completely average. If she hadn't been standing in a place no civilian should have access to, I would have assumed she was a passing random person. She had a decent digital camera hanging from her neck as well.

"New Titans, meet Ghost," The Colonel said from behind us. "She got here a little bit before me."

"Thanks, Marcus. Oh, and Robin, don't get me wrong, Batman has the whole stealth fighting ninja thing down to a science," She said with a shrug, coming off rather bubbly and energetic. "I mean, he has to since he still uses lopsided throwing stars as his primary weapon. But there is so much more to the art than that."

By the end of it, she sounded like she was offended on a professional level. Robin was looking at her like she had two heads and was speaking in tongues. The rest of us were wary, it was startling that she had snuck up on us like that while we were in our home.

"Colonel Clayden said you're looking for instructors to turn your group into a super-powered fighting squad" She responded with a shrug. "I have to admit, it's an interesting proposal. The idea has been floated around before, but it's never been done well before. But, the fact that you're all here with a common goal, and aren't under the influence of mind control or blackmail is a pretty good start."

Kaldur and I shared a look, before focusing back on the ordinary looking woman. After a moment she continued.

“I’ll give it a shot, but I’m not promising anything,” She said with a smile, peeking over us to look at the Colonel. “I won’t even count your favor paid if they are to inept for me to teach.”

“Alright, alright. Just don’t forget, these are clients, not conscripts,” He said with a smirk. “And picky ones at that. They almost kicked me to the curb.”

I opened my mouth to respond to his statement, but he waved me off.

“Don’t worry about it, water under the bridge,” He assured us, Kaldur and Robin both having started to speak as well.

“Really now, why is that?” Ghost asked, focusing on Kaldur.

“We had unrealistic expectations,” He explained after a moment. “We are happy to have Colonel Clayden as our instructor.”

“Your lucky to have come to your senses,” She said with a smile. “The Colonel’s training carries weight, even outside of the US. There are plenty of soldiers out there who would rather surrender and face judgment than face a team trained by him.”

“Alright alright, enough inflating my ego.” The veteran soldier said, waving off her compliments. “Weren’t you hoping to start your test sooner rather than later?”

“Right!” The woman said with a large smile, looking more like a soccer mom than a stealth expert. “If you want my training, your gonna have to prove you aren’t completely useless.”

“What’s the test?” Wally asked, already looking confident. “I’m sure we can handle it.”

“Oh, just a little game of hide and seek!” She responded with a smirk, walking forward.

The group split between me and Kaldur to let her walk through, the woman stopping and gesturing to activate our computer. I wondered for a moment how she even knew how to do that, before focusing on what she was showing us. A map of a city, labeled Star City, zoomed in until it was showing just a few blocks. Half was commercial space, with a few different types of stores, while the other half was a decent-sized park.

“You have received a tip that a world-class assassin has been spotted in this area. Your mission is to quietly canvas the area and locate the assassin,” She explained with a smile, turning back to look at us. “You have the remainder of the day to locate this incredibly gorgeous and intelligent assassin before she disappears into the wind.”

“Are powers allowed?” Kaldur asked, looking up at the map.

“No. Any use of powers will tip off the assassin and she will disappear.” She answered with a “what can you do?” shrug.

“Will you be hiding somewhere we would have to break rules to gain access?” I asked next.

“Ooo, good question. If I wanted to make this really difficult I could say yes, but I want you to have an actual chance, so no. I will stay in areas available to the public,” She responded with a smile. “And that’s your last question. Do you accept your mission?”

Kaldur looked down from the map, giving everyone look, before focusing back on Ghost.

“We accept.”

“Good! You can follow me through in ten minutes, the Zeta-Tube pops out just around the corner from the outer boundaries. Oh, and to keep things interesting, my own goal is to snap a selfie with each of you!” She said, turning and walking through the projected screen, which turned to static for a moment before turning to normal. “Good luck!”

She kept walking, not looking back as she tapped the controls for the Zeta-Tube, which quickly spun up as she stepped into the teleporting machine. Once inside she finally turned, and pulled at her hair, revealing that it was a wig and exposing smooth, black material underneath. Next, she pulled at her cheek, her entire face coming off, revealing a blank, expressionless, bone-white mask under that.

“You’re going to need it.” She said, her previous voice gone, just like her face, replaced with one that was flat, toneless, and modulated.

Before anyone could say anything, the Zeta-Tube flashed, and she was gone. For a long moment, everyone was silent staring at where she had stood before Wally finally spoke up.

“Holy shit,” He said, his eyes wide. “I... That was absolutely fucking terrifying.”

Colonel Clayden let out a long, deep belly laugh, leaning on his cane to hold himself up. After a moment or two, he recovered, wiping his eyes.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve seen her do a reveal like that.” He said, still chuckling a bit. “She developed her suit herself, in case you were wondering. And yes, you’re right, it is terrifying.”