

Once the Chaos Lord retreated to parts unknown, both of his companions attempted to retreat as well. Felix Faust summoned a portal of his own, disappearing with a flash of light that temporarily blinded Superboy, Ice, and Robin. Blackbriar Thorn, on the other hand, tried to retreat by summoning a gnarled chariot of thick vines around himself to carry him away but only made it a few dozen yards before Garth and Aqualad cut it out from under him, and Tula smacked him around with her own magic while he was busy trying not to fall.

Once the dangerous magic user was apprehended and special pair of magic-dampening handcuffs, courtesy of Kent Nelson, was slapped on his wrists, we spent a few minutes securing the area and making sure that the Chaos Lord wasn't about to pop back up and attack us while we were unaware. While that was going on, Aquaman was coordinating with the rest of the League and local law enforcement. Kid Flash was happy to zip around the field, checking every corner multiple times, running at speeds he could never have achieved before today. Orange-gold lightning continued to spark around him as he ran, though the energy was noticeably dwindling, almost as if the energy was settling into his body.

Once the situation had stabilized, we all returned to the interior of the Tower of Fate, Green Lantern and Wonder Woman happily taking care of Blackbriar Thorn, escorting the prison transport as he was taken away. Everyone else, of course, was very interested to learn what had happened after we left the ritual chamber.

"When the ritual started to... pick up," Wally explained, looking down at his hand, lightning still sparking between his fingers, even as he sat down on a comfy couch in one of the many rooms in the Tower. "I started to... feel something trying to communicate with me. It wasn't with words, but emotions and ideas, even the occasional concept. At first, I tried to push it away... but then it 'explained' it wasn't going to hurt me... I believed it. I could feel it wanting to help me and that it wasn't going to hurt me... so I let it."

"That kinda thing isn't uncommon for beings of other planes, especially ones as foreign as what you and the Flash tap into," Kent Nelson explained before stopping to clarify. "The inability to speak a language that is, I've never heard of one being so gentle before."

"Well, it...It was. Gentle, I mean. Once I accepted its help, it showed me what it was doing, what had gone wrong," Wally continued. "I don't think I have the right words to describe it, but it felt like it had chosen me, but the connection had been... shifted by something. And in order to fix it, the connection needed to be widened and-"

"Widened?" Queen Mera asked, leaning forward in surprise. "That is *not* what our ritual had been intended to do."

"Yeah... I got the sense that you guys caught the problem but ended up running with it in the wrong direction," He explained, rubbing the back of his head. "Your ritual would have stabilized me and gotten rid of my problems, but it would have cost me any hope of getting

faster and what little flexibility I had. So once the ritual made contact with it... it kind of just took over."

All of the magic users looked at the teenager with wide eyes, both Zatarra and Kent with their jaws hanging loose. It took a full fifteen seconds for Zatarra to finally shake free of his shock and speak.

"I'm sorry, are you implying that the consciousness of an elemental plane of speed, time, and several other fundamental forces, saw that a few magic users were meddling with its domain and... it decided to help?"

"Pretty much?" Wally answered sheepishly.

The fancily dressed magician leaned back heavily in his chair, reaching for the handkerchief in his breast pocket before using it to wipe his forehead. His hand was shaking just enough to be noticeable.

"That... is horrifying," Kent admitted, looking a bit pale. "The fact that it took over our ritual like that without us even noticing? What did it change?"

"Well, once that bolt of speed energy-"

"Speed energy?" Flash asked. "What is that?"

"It's all this lighting stuff and what hit both of us during our experiments. It's what gives us our powers and lets you, well, both of us now, do all the physics-defying stuff like not bursting into flames from friction," Wally answered, waiting until his mentor nodded and motioned for him to continue. "Well, after the bolt hit me and everything slowed down, it got easier for me to understand what was going on. They needed to widen our connection so that it could be rebuilt properly, that's what the speed energy bolt was doing. After that, it just... fixed it all up, made sure our connection would be stable and complete."

"...the idea that such a powerful entity would lend its aid in such a way is still mind-boggling," Queen Mera said, looking at her two apprentices. "Make note, this is one of the many reasons why messing with such beings is fraught with danger. They are completely unpredictable and often so foreign that discerning their intent is near impossible. We assumed we would be safe because we were not messing directly with its domain. When in truth, it had us at its complete mercy. Had it been less... magnanimous, we would all be very, very dead. Or potentially worse."

Both Garth and Tula nodded rapidly, clearly taking their queen and teacher's words seriously. Both of them showed the signs of the recent fight, with Tula's left cheek covered with a bandage and Garth's costume torn up on his left shoulder. Still, they had both clearly avoided major injuries, as had everyone. Artemis was sporting a bandage around her arm, Queen Mera

having treated her with some basic magic, as the archer had refused to leave before getting an explanation. I was looking forward to seeing everyone's footage of their fights, as I had been way too busy not dying to even check if they were doing okay.

"But it worked out, right?" The Flash asked. "We are very lucky, it could have been a lot worse... but it worked, right Wally?"

"Yeah... It worked. My connection to the Speed Force was completely fixed," He responded with a large smile before answering everyone's question before they could ask. "That's what it felt like they were calling it. It was hard to understand without words, but... Yeah, we draw our powers from the Speed Force."

The Flash reached over and ruffled up Wally's hair before patting his shoulder, giving his protege a big smile.

"That's fantastic to hear, Wally," He said. "I guess that means I can start passing on some of the more advanced things that I've learned over the years."

"Yeah! Well, eventually, at least. It's going to take some time to build back up to how fast you are right now," Wally explained. "I'm still feeling the effects of being saturated with speed energy, but it will taper off in a few hours. I'll still be faster than before when it fades, but closer to what you were when you first started. I'll get it back eventually, though, it will just come naturally over time as I work at it."

We talked a bit more about what Kid Flash experienced and about what being connected to the Speed Force felt like. Eventually, we started talking about the fight we had just finished, and I turned to Kent and asked him about what Klarion had been looking for.

"I've been keeping an eye on the Helmet of Fate for a while, ever since I took it off for the last time," Kent explained, shaking his head. "When I did, Nabu started getting ornery about me taking time off. Inza, my spitfire of a wife, started getting worried that one day I would put it on and Nabu would never let me take it off. I realized that I couldn't say she was wrong, so I never put it on again."

"That's a thing?" I asked with a look of disgust. "A helmet you couldn't take off?"

"Oh, it's worse than that. When it's on, Nabu takes over," Kent explained with a shiver of discomfort that had nothing to do with temperature. "Your soul gets shoved to the side so the great and powerful Nabu can take control. Most of the time, it's just boring, but... he sees the world as black and white, chaos and order. He will stop the big threats and fight to keep the Earth safe, but... I have nightmares from the looks on people's faces when he would smash the bad guy flat, only to vanish while people screamed for help around him."

"Fuck..." I muttered. "That's horrifying, talk about a one-sided deal."

"He has only gotten worse over time," Kent explained. "I can use a minor ritual to talk to him without putting on the helmet, and he gets more and more bitter every time. But what's worse than all that... is that the world clearly needs him, and I shouldn't be keeping him locked up."

"Klarion didn't use to be that strong," Robin said, Kent nodding in confirmation. "His magic was faster, more powerful than what the League records say. That second gear he pulled out? That came out of nowhere."

"The world has always been full of chaos, but it's only gotten more extreme," Kent explained, shaking his head. "We are lucky the only Lord of Chaos on Earth likes being... childish. He has just as much fun playing schoolyard pranks as he does committing horrible acts of violence."

"It sounded like someone had a leash on him," I said. "He said someone named Vandal had convinced him to hold back but that he didn't care anymore."

"Dammit..." Kent said under his breath. "I had hoped to never force someone to wear the helmet..."

"Would he keep his word?" I asked. "If you promised to, say, find four or five people to pass the helmet around, would he stick to his word and not just fly away with the first person to put it on?"

"I... don't know if he would agree to that," Kent said, looking at me curiously. "That... I will ask him, once I've recovered from today. Finding a group of people to share the burden would... it would make me feel a lot better about passing the mantle on."

"Well, if he doesn't like that, what about people who are brain-dead?" Kyle suggested, everyone shifting to look at the usually quiet Kryptonian. "I don't know much about souls, but... if a person's mind is gone, does it matter if they are always wearing it?"

"People who suffer the level of personality death you are referring to rarely have souls still connected to them. Miracles do occur, but not often," Zatara answered. "And from what I understand, the Helmet requires the wearer to have a soul, which is why I assume you do not just make an ethical homunculus."

"Ethical homunculus?" Wally asked, his eyes wide. "What the hell is that?"

"A Homunculus is a fake human, made using real parts," Kent explained bluntly. "It's not exactly a nice process, and most people frown on it, but it's not necessarily dark if done correctly. An ethical one just means using voluntarily donated parts, possibly paid for. It's not exactly polite conversation and wouldn't work anyway, as Zatara said."

Eventually, the conversation petered out, and it was time for the team to head home to the cave. Wally and the Flash ran off, the streak of yellow and red trailing laughter as Wally enjoyed his new speed. Kaldur said goodbye to his mentor, queen, and friends before we headed off to the nearest Zeta-Tube. Kent was kind enough to call for two cabs since he was the reason we were several miles away without a ride.

Once we stepped into the cave through the Zeta-Tube, Artemis immediately turned around and went through again, as the cut in her arm needed to get looked at. After I apologized again for accidentally hitting her, M'gann shifted to her human look to go with her. I probably should have gone as well, as I could feel the bruised forming on my back and side, but considering that they would be gone by tomorrow morning, maybe early afternoon, I didn't see the point.

While they were gone, the rest of us, Kaldur, Tora, Robin, and myself, sat down in the kitchen, snacking lightly as we killed the last few hours before it was time to go to bed.

"So... Tula and Garth?" Robin asked, looking at Kaldur. "Never heard you mention them before."

Kaldur frowned, which was a significant expression for the usually stoic Atlantean. Both Robin and I noticed and sat up straight, neither of us expecting such a response.

"We were very good friends while I was studying at the academy," Kaldur explained. "But I was always more interested in the martial application of magic, something I shared with Garth to a degree. When Aquaman offered to take me on as his protege, I leaped at the chance... I hadn't realized I had left them behind until it had been far too long. I should have reached out..."

"But it felt like too much time had gone past, right?" Tora suggested, Kaldur nodding in agreement. "You should reach out anyway. Trust me, even if they react poorly, closure helps too. I left so many friends behind in Norway, and we were so busy with moving and getting settled, only to be moved again? It was months before I realized I hadn't talked to any of them. Eventually, one of them reached out to me, and I regret not reaching out sooner."

Kaldur nodded, still frowning as he considered Tora's words. After a while, M'gann and Artemis returned, the latter with a more professionally bandaged wrap on her arm. She explained that they just glued it shut and that she would be skipping heavy work out for a few days while it healed. The fact that it would only take a few days reiterated the need for us to find someone capable of healing magic for the team or at least on base as staff. I made a note to seriously research the topic as soon as possible. I doubt I would stumble on a miracle cure-all just sitting in the Justice League records, but chances are there was a bit of super science tucked away somewhere we could use to at least minimize downtime.

After a few hours of unwinding and talking, everyone split up, and the rest of the team headed off to bed. M'gann gave me a tight hug and a quick kiss goodnight before I headed down to the grotto. The last few weeks or so had been incredibly busy, so much so that I had been putting off visiting Toph for a few days now. I was confident in my growing metalbending skills, and I was very much looking forward to learning even more impressive things.

I quickly climbed onto my raised meditation pad, taking a deep breath as I did my best to let the stress of the day bleed away. Soon, I could feel myself slipping into the familiar feeling of my training trance.

"Welcome back, Mopey!" My instructor said, prompting me to open my eyes to find myself in the usual training pit. "Get off your lazy butt and show me what you've learned!"