



Blue Beetle #4
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Blue Beetle

Issue #4 of 4: "The End of the Beginning"

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Egypt, 5th Dynasty (circa 2495 BC)

The evil tyrant Nubwia walked across the cold stone floor. He looked outside his castle and saw the enraged crowd coming for him. A servant entered the room and began speaking to him in their language.

"Master, I killed the man just like you told me. But, they are enraged. They say they will force you to step down from your throne." He panted working to get his words out.

"They watched their savior die and still come for me? They have been emboldened by his death?" He looked around at his men for an answer, "No matter, if I can crush the great Khamiji, I will crush them too. Should I lose my throne on this day I will spend eternity seeking the power I need to rule over the entire land."

Moments later the crowd broke down the palace doors. The servant who had killed Khamiji, was killed.

After a long struggle Nubwia escaped, powerless over his kingdom.

Today

I looked over the charred ruins of my home one more time before going

back to my hotel. It was already all over the local news that eccentric millionaire, Ted Kord had burned down his own house. They all assumed and speculated that it was caused by an experiment gone wrong, which I suppose is good news. It technically *was* an experiment gone wrong, just not one of mine.

I made it back to my suite at the hotel and planned to get some rest. I laid back on the bed and turned on the television when the phone rang. Assuming it was a detective from downtown with more questions about Jarvis's death I declined to answer it. I had told quite a few lies about what I saw there that night in order to keep my identity secret, so I wanted as little actual contact with the police as possible. The phone rang and rang and I continued to ignore it. Finally, it stopped. I walked across the room to get a drink of soda. As I picked up my can I heard a strange noise.

Shhwmp.

My can fizzed and soda flew everywhere. I looked at the wall next to me and saw the can stuck to the wall with an arrow in it. A green arrow to be more specific. I pulled the arrow from the wall. There was a note attached and it read: "Kord, answer your damn phone!"

Turning to the window I looked out across the street to another rooftop on the next building. The Green Arrow stood on the ledge waving at me with a big smile. In his other hand he held a phone. My own started ringing in my room. This time I picked it up.

"Hello?" I said picking it up.

"Suit up Ted, we need to talk." The voice came on the other line.

"But...how do...I mean I'm not...oh, just forget it, I'll be out in a minute." I said.

I suited up and climbed out my window and up the fire escape. Green Arrow soon joined me on the top of the building.

“What’s this all about?” I asked trying to act more irritated than star struck.

“You’re making a lot of people nervous, Ted.” He answered.

“How so?” I asked.

“Well. Let’s see, your house is burned down, your uncle is dead, the madmen are crazier than ever and you’ve only been in the tights for a week.”

“How do you know all this?” I asked.

“A little bat told me and since I owe that self-righteous maniac a small favor. I told him I’d check things out. Now I have, favor’s returned, and I got to go.” He answered.

“Wait, Batman sent you to check in on me?” I asked.

“No. Batman asked me to check things out. No one has sent me anywhere since I was a kid.” He replied.

“How did he figure out who I am?” I asked.

“Batman makes these things his business. It’s all part of his charm. Listen,” he said sighing “since I’m here already and you look like you could use it, what say we go get a beer?”

“Yeah, okay.”

Half an hour later, after a quick stop at a beverage drive through (you should have seen the look on the cashier’s face) we took our beers and perched on a nearby billboard.

I look around at my city as Green Arrow pops the top off his beer.

“You sure it’s a good idea to drink in uniform?” I asked.

“What, you on the clock or something. We’re vigilantes, we can have a beer.”

I paused for a moment considering it and then opened one myself.

“So, can I ask you something?” I said.

“Shoot.” Green Arrow answered.

“Well, who do you think you’re fooling with that little mask, Oliver?”

Ollie grinned and then started laughing. “Not you I see, Teddy.”

Ollie and I had been doing business for years off and on. He even owns stock in Kord Omniversal.

“What tipped it off?” He asked.

“The beard. The voice. The fact that I’ve known you for five years and your taste in awful imported beer.”

“Fair enough.” He replied.

“Wow. Oliver Queen is Green Arrow.” I said mostly to myself.

“Well, look at you Ted. The Blue Beetle. Too bad about Dan though. Hel-luva guy. He ever tell you about the time He and I fought Solomon Grundy together?”

“No, I never heard about that one.” I said laughing.

“Ahhh. Good times. I’ll have to tell you sometime, but right now, how is it going Ted?” He asked turning serious for a moment.

“It’s going... I just... do you ever get overwhelmed with it all. I mean I’m supposed to be a superhero here, but really I’m just some guy.” I said.

“Look, at the end of the day even Superman is just some guy. Powers don’t make the hero. You said as much at Dan’s memorial.”

“Does Batman have powers?” I asked only slightly changing the subject.

“No, just a guy. Kind of a jerk, but just a guy.”

“Who is he?”

“Can’t tell you.”

“Why not?”

“Cause he’d drink my blood.” Ollie deadpanned.

I stared at Ollie for a second and finally he smiled and we both laughed.

“Bwahahahaha”

“So, who was the guy who nearly took you out?”

“Which one? It’s happened more than once this week.”

“Start with the first one.”

“Chronos, the time traveling super villain.”

“Must be new. Yecch. I hate time travelers. Did he threaten to go back and seduce your mom?” He asked jokingly.

“He had a big part in Dan’s death. I’m not sure I understand what happened, but I have a pretty good idea.”

“Don’t try to figure it out, it’s all Greek to me too. Don’t tell Flash, he’ll question you for hours about it. What’s the deal with the Madmen?” He asked.

“They’re clones. Apparently of my Uncle Jarvis who was shot to death by Dan’s sister.” I answered and then went on, “They’re evolving. They were dependent on him and now they are not. At least that’s the long and short of it.”

“Hmm. Dan’s sister is a killer?”

"Yeah, I saw her shoot Jarvis. She seems to be controlling the Madmen now. I barely escaped but, I have this." I pulled out a vial. "It's an antidote that will reverse it. They will devolve when exposed to it."

"Sounds like you have a plan. Need help?" He asked.

"Yeah, couldn't hurt."

"I'll call the New Outsiders. I... listen, you ever think about joining a team?" He asked, but as he did so I was noticing the billboard we were sitting on for the first time.

"Yeah I think I will." I said.

Ollie turned his head and looked up. He flashed his classic Oliver Queen grin.

"It's always about a pretty girl isn't it?"

Above us thirty feet tall stood a billboard advertisement for the newest reality show.

"MTV Docs presents: Under the Cape: Powers, Inc"

"Her name is Looker" Ollie said, "Nice girl."

"Yeah." I said, "Looker."

"That Booster Gold sure seems like an ass though." He said.

Later

I opened the large sliding doors to the balcony of Dan's apartment. Sneaking in wasn't exactly something I had looked forward to, but it was better than the off chance that Tracy would be there packing his stuff. The doors were unlocked much to my chagrin. I slowly peeked around the corner hoping I was alone.

"Come in, Ted." The voice came and my heart jumped. Tracy was here. Apparently, expecting me.

"Why?" I asked. It was the only thing I could think to ask. "I mean, he was your brother. He was a hero. He wa—"

"Shut up!!" She screamed. "I want that scarab!"

"Is that what this is all about? That's why you killed Jarvis, sent the Madmen after Dan all those times? Power? It won't even work for anyone else." I said pulling it out and holding it up.

"You know nothing. I never sent anyone after my brother. Your Uncle was just business. I've only done what I had to. To protect myself and my mother. Now give me that scarab." She said tears welling up in her eyes.

I looked at her for a moment and thought about it.

"Why? Why do you need it, then?" I asked. The for the first time I noticed something in the way she was behaving. Fear.

"Please, just give it to me. He'll kill her." She said.

"Who?" I asked. I barely noticed her going for it ,but she produced the gun she had used on Jarvis.

"Just. Give it." She said crying. "Don't make me do it."

"Fine." I said and laid the scarab on the ground. Then I slowly backed away.

She picked it up, never taking her eyes off mine and also backed away slowly.

"I'm truly sorry about your Uncle. It wasn't my fault. Do. Not. Follow. Me." She said having regained some of her composure.

I watched her leave the apartment with the gun trained on me the whole time. Leaving the way I came in I hopped in the bug.

I looked up the address to Dan's mother's house on the bug's computer system and headed for the other side of town. Tracy said she never sent anyone after Dan. I assume whoever did is the one who wants the scarab. It must also be the same person who's controlling the Madmen now.

When I got there no one was around. The house was a mess as though there had been a struggle. I found a note next to a small recliner. It had another address on it in the business district. I took a look around to double check everything and made a quick phonecall.

I arrived fifteen minutes later in downtown.

I landed the bug on top of the roof. Looking around I could see my presence was expected. There were Madmen gathered around the roof waiting for me. It's a good thing I'm no dummy. I leapt from the bug and started fighting as hard as I could. The Madmen barely knew what hit them when green arrows started flying through the air from a nearby rooftop. Green Arrow shot a grappling arrow into the side of a nearby wall. Sliding in from across the rooftops he landed in a somersault and came up with two arrows knocked. They ripped through the flesh of two Madmen and they stopped. A second later they were screaming in agony. The arrows were laced with the antidote I made from the Vitamin X23 Jarvis developed to keep them stable. I knew it would hurt them and it got the job done.

They hit the ground shaking violently from the effects. I only made it strong enough to devolve them a few steps backwards. Once they were done shaking they simply fell asleep. The only problem was there were too many of them.

As Green Arrow fought on I had my hands full as well. When Ollie had landed on the roof, most of the Madmen were temporarily blinded giving me, temporarily, the upper hand. I pulled out the BB gun and stunned them further. With my other hand I pulled out a dart gun I had

brought along. It was loaded with darts full of antidote. I shot as many as I could with the serum. Four of them gathered around me and I grabbed the closest one and stuck him with a dart. As he started shaking I bowled him into two others and shot them with darts as fast as I could. The last one was accompanied by two more by the time I got to him. Noticing that Green Arrow was having a similar problem I spoke up .

“GA it’s about that time.” I yelled.

“You think?” He answered sarcastically.

I pulled out a cell phone and hit the send button. GA released an exploding arrow toward the ground. The loud boom distracted the Madmen and sent them huddled together. I threw the phone near their feet. They all looked down at it as though they were waiting for another explosion. Within seconds a green and yellow blur of lightening shot from the telephone out toward them knocking several of them on their butts. Airwave appeared from the light before them with Booster Gold in tow.

Booster staggered for a second readjusting from his ride through the airwaves.

Seconds later a flurry of small explosions filled the rooftop. Booster flew overhead with his blasters firing in every direction knocking down Madmen. Airwave was busy opening his can of beat-down on some more of them. Green Arrow was also pretty busy.

“Ted,” GA said “Go into the building find whoever we’re looking for here. We got this under control.”

I took off running for the stairwell as the battle raged on. Inside the building I located the central security room using an uplink to the bug and the internal monitor in my goggles. I sprinted through the hallways to the room. Just before I reached it I felt it. A punch to the gut that I was convinced could level a building. I looked up to see a large bearded man standing over me.

“What is the meaning of this?” He asked.

“Trick or treat.” I replied between gasps of air, still trying to catch my

breath.

“You must be the new Blue Beetle. You probably want the scarab, but it won’t work for you. You must be one of those sentimental types. I have been waiting a very long time for that stone, my friend. The soul that inhabits that stone took something from me many years ago, and NOBODY takes something away from the immortal Vandal Savage! Of course then I had another name, Nubwia. I knew when Garret first appeared that I recognized the symbol of Khamiji. I paid your pathetic uncle to send his clones after Garret. Testing him. Testing the strength of the bloodline.”

I had heard of this guy. Savage, was rumored to have been around since, well before the first Egyptian dynasties.

I had finally caught my breath and rose to my feet only to be grasped by a few Madmen. Savage punched me again in the gut.

“Bloodline?” I asked groaning in pain.

“Ah, Garret didn’t even know. The scarab will only work for those who share Khamiji’s bloodline. Your friend was a descendent of his. I arranged for his expedition to Egypt twenty years ago.” He explained quite proud of his plan.

“Why...why wait so long?” I asked him.

“Twenty years is nothing to an immortal. I wanted to know everything about its power. I know now all I need to know.” He looked around and ordered the Madmen “Bring him with us.”

I let them drag me along with them. I didn’t want to chance a fight with this guy and I knew I had back-up on the roof if I needed it. They took me down a long corridor to a corner office. This was apparently where Savage ran his own company from.

When we entered I saw Tracy tied up in the corner with her mother. Savage turned to me and said, “You will be among the first to fall. I spent years studying your predecessor and his scarab. This...” he pulled a blanket from over top of a machine “will allow me to harness the

mystical power that lies within the stone. All I need is the blood of a descendent." He looked over to where Tracy sat and pulled out a knife.

I quickly launched a side kick on one of the Madmen holding me down and threw a wild elbow toward the other. I dropped them both and ran toward Savage. He pointed the knife at me and I stopped abruptly. The Madmen back on their feet grabbed me up and he took a few swings at me. All of them connected. For like the fiftieth time in a week I was beat-up and bleeding.

Savage walked over to Tracy and dragged her toward the machine. I kept trying to get lose but the Madmen had tightened their grip.

What happened next all took place in under thirty seconds.

Savage took Tracy and held her arm over the machine. He then took his knife and cut a long slice in Tracy's arm. I stood there watching in horror and suddenly I remembered something. In Dan's note he said *"It will not work for you, but when the time is right you will know what to do."*

Tracy's blood ran down her arm.

For just a split second it felt like the whole world stopped.

"Tracy, say the word!!" I screamed.

"Khamiji??" She said baffled.

As soon as she did so the scarab started glowing and shaking. It floated toward Tracy and landed on her back. When it settled in one spot it grew around her. Savage took a step back. Tracy was knocked over by the force and when she stood up she had on a Blue Beetle costume. It looked strange. It was much different than Dan's or even mine. It had the look of armor. She held her arms out looking at them while the power surged through her body. She turned to look down at Savage who had also been knocked down from the force. She reached down, grabbed him by throat and picked him up with her new-found strength. Holding him up in the air she stared at him angrily while he choked.

"You made me kill. You hurt my mother. You hurt my brother. I'll kill

you!”

She slowly started to choke the life from him. His body went limp. The startled Madmen let go of me and ran away. I went over to Tracy’s mother and untied her quickly. As soon as she was free she went closer to Tracy.

“Please, Tracy! Let him go. Your brother didn’t die to make you a killer.”

“Mom?” Tracy said looking around confused.

“Yes, dear. It’s me. Now put him down. Please.” Tracy dropped Savage and began to cry. As soon as he hit the floor I hit him again to make sure he stayed down for a while. Tracy collapsed to the floor as she returned to her normal clothing and strength. The scarab fell to the floor. Tracy hugged on to her mother and cried.

About that time Green Arrow and Powers, Inc. ran into the room.

“Beetle? Everything okay in here.?” Green Arrow asked.

I looked at Tracy and her mother then over at Savage still laying on the floor choked out.

“Yeah I think it will be.” I replied.

Green Arrow arranged for someone from S.T.A.R labs to take Savage to a holding cell and to put the scarab away where it couldn’t be used for what Savage had in mind. Tracy turned herself in for the murder of Jarvis. She wanted nothing to do with the scarab or superheroes. Ollie knew a good lawyer who got her a plea bargain and with her testimony against Savage she was able to get her charges reduced to involuntary manslaughter.

With my house burned to the ground, I decide it was time for a change of scenery. I moved into Powers Towers the next week. One floor had a large empty hanger where I parked the bug. Josiah being the owner of the building and an old friend, I was able to convince him to let me build

a lab in the building, too. Steel helped with the layout and execution.

I walked into the cafeteria one morning soon after my arrival to the building. Looker was there.

“So, you’re the new guy?” She asked.

“I am. Hi, I’m Ted.” I said extending my hand. She looked at it and smiled.

“A pleasure I’m sure.” She said.

“Well, okay then.” I said pulling my hand back in.

“See ya around.” She said walking away.

“Hey, maybe we can go hang out or something?” I said. Then thought to myself about how lame it sounded.

“Maybe. If you play your cards right.” She said teasingly.

“I throw nothing but aces.” I said proud of myself for recovering from my lameness. She laughed and walked out of the room. I stood there watching her leave when I realized I had been stirring my coffee with my bare finger the whole time.

“Ouch!” I mumbled.

“Nice move.” I turned to see Booster standing behind me.

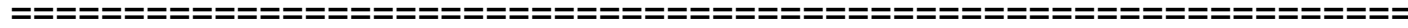
“How long have you been standing there?” I said .

“Long enough to see you get shot down. Listen, Teddy baby you gotta have more style if you’re gonna roll with the Inc. you dig?” He said. I nodded politely and headed out of the room. Booster followed me out and put his arm around me.

“Trust, me. This is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”

The End!

But look for the Blue Beetle's adventures to continue in the pages of *Powers, Inc.*!



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