It’s a dark and humid night, as two hunters prowl the street. Random rain showers come and go, as you stalk the streets. Kyle heard that there had been more archer activity, but this time closer to downtown.

The streets bring a plethora of smells to the Badger. Sweat, grime, fear, lust... all of these assault his senses. He concentrates, filtering them out. Focusing on smells that are new, or don't belong. Then he picks up on something... burning...oil...ozone. Machinery. Fresh. Different. You have a trail, and repress the urge to howl. Badger follows it for a block, and suddenly the trail ends, and is replaced by a perfumed smell, that makes his eyes water. The trail ends right outside Premium Bank of Darian.

Suddenly the front of the bank explodes outward, throwing Badger back across the street. Kyle hears this and sprints to the area. Emerging from the smoke you both hear the mechanical "Vvvvrrrrrrr* thunk* "Vvvvrrrrr* "Thunk* of a robot.

Smoke and exploded particles cover the area. Kyle doesn’t see anyone aside from Badger, who deftly hops to a standing position after being thrown to the ground. There are very few parked vehicles as it is late at night. Kyle is only able to make out a large silhouette. It seems about the size of a van.

Badger quietly says to himself, "Senses of the Bat" and gives a far off look facing the smoke as he begins to give off a high pitched chirping sound. He is able to determine that the mechanical thing is basically a large box about 15' square. It seems to have appendages coming from the sides and the bottom, but because of all of the particulate matter in the air, it is hard to get a more detailed picture.

Kyle calls out "Stop what you're doing! The Challengers are here to protect this city!"

The response is a cease in movement from the thing. The smoke clears a bit and you are both able to make out the mechanical oddity. The main body is simply a cube. It is painted green. On the side facing you both is also painted a large purple question mark. Coming from what you guess are the sides are a pair of clawed vices on mechanical arms, each clutching a large sack which have money sticking out of them. From the bottom spout a pair of squat legs. They appear to be accordioned and end in a large “cup”. It finally reacts by extruding what appear to be pipes or gun barrels from the dot of the question mark on each side.

Reacting with superhuman reflexes, The Badger yells out "Damn it. I hate the freaks from Gotham. Why couldn't it have been a normal super villain? Kyle, hit 'em low!", and the leaps deftly through the air landing on the robot's top. Badger extends his
claws and calls out, “Shock of the Eel!”. He then tenses as a blue glow begins to surround him.

Despite Badger’s call to hit the robot low, Kyle decides that his bolo arrow would have a hard time wrapping around this thing’s wide stance, as well as the possibility that this mechanical monstrosity would simply snap the bolo. Instead he takes careful aim, and attempts to fire down the barrel of the pipe facing him. The master archer of Darian sights down the length of his arrow, and lets loose. With an almost cartoon-lish “thump”, this arrow hits home.

And none too soon! From each of the barrels, aside from the front, a gout of purple flame is expelled in a long stream. Luckily not far enough to reach any buildings. Just after this, the robot shudders, as the front buckles outward, and then expels the entire flame throwing mechanism from it’s front. The “attack” is sudden enough that Kyle is unable to dodge quick enough and is clipped in the shoulder, but not seriously.

Even with this damage, the robot seems unfazed. But with the newly made hole, Kyle is able to see the inner mechanics. Amongst the machinery there lies a steamer trunk that seems out of place. It is snuggly fit inside of all the inner workings.

Badger steadies himself, cocks his arm back with his claws exposed, and slashes straight down into the Robot casing rending the top of the machine. With the crackle of blue energy surrounding him, he is able to hit wire and circuitry; his electrical current shoots down into the robot’s innards. At the same time, Badger is thrown from the robot getting a jolt of his own. He lands on the wet pavement, causing sizzles and sparks.

The robot goes into a tizzy, many of its controller circuits fried. It spins and trashes, spewing flame randomly. Kyle lets loose with another arrow, this time aiming lower. It connects squarely, and is followed by a huge explosion, which basically blasts the legs out from under the robot.

It seems to go dead; arms limp at its side. Bits of flaming money leisurely tumble to the ground. Suddenly there is a sound like gear sliding into place, quickly ticking and a spring being strung. The top of the robot opens, and the chest you saw earlier is ejected into the air. It tumbles to the ground and lands squarely on its bottom. The trunk itself then pops open, and out pops a spring, with a paper attached to it.

Badger is able to shake off his dizziness, and hops up, much less deftly than before. Both he and Kyle approach this thing cautiously. Printed in bold type on the paper is the following:

*Remember the line?*
*“what is your sign?”*
*Look at it shine.*
*Soon, it is mine!*
It rests in a place
Where they leave relics to sit
Oh, you want the sign?
I'll tell you in this next bit.

It's not the first month
Nor is it the last.
It's in the month where the sheep comes
And the lion has passed.

It comes not at the front,
But comes at the back
The rest of this rhyme
Gives the info you lack

It's large and heavy
Pretty as can be!
Number 79 on the table
Look it up, you'll see.

Badger begins speaking at a quick pace, obviously thinking out loud. "He's talking about either the month of March or April. The old quote, 'March comes in like a lion, out like a lamb'. Assuming he means the Lamb has come, it would be April. The back of April might be the Zodiac sign for the end of April -- Taurus the Bull. Or it might be a reference to, 'April showers bring May Flowers'. Gold is the 79th Element on the Periodic Table of Elements. So .... April Showers could translate to 'Waterfall'. The solution might be the 'Golden Waterfall' restaurant in the Halcyon District."

"Or the other possibility of March ... the back end of March has St. Patrick's Day. With a reference to St. Patrick's Day and Gold, it probably means a Leprechaun Pot of Gold."

Badger then says, "Wait, wait, wait... It's not the Golden Waterfall or a Leprechaun's Pot of Gold. It's a Golden Fleece!!! The month he's talking about is March, not April. The Zodiac sign for the end of March is Aires the Ram. Gold is number 79 on the Periodic Table of Elements. It's got to be a Golden Fleece! It's where relics sit, therefore it's probably in a Museum here in Darian. I bet it's either at the Elizabeth Calhoun Center for Humanities, or the Darian Museum of Science and Natural History!"

Kyle looks puzzled. But it all seems like it could make sense. He can't recall where gold is on the periodic table, but if this object IS in a museum and is an element, gold seems a likely choice.

"How do you know so much astrology B.S.? Prognostication of the Wooly-worm, Badger?"
He ponders for a minute.

"Damn. If we only had a wi-fi setup we could check the websites! We've got to get geared up better."

He attempts to call the Trident but is answered by static. At one point he thinks he hears Scion calling for assistance, but is cut off. Both the cellular and radio functions seem out. His face turns sullen, then quickly lights up.

“I just remembered! The Nature and Science museum just got an exhibit that featured a rare fleece from a mythic Ram said to have once been on the isle of Themyscira! It's priceless!”

Badger exclaims.

"In fact, I bet this whole Bank robbery was a diversion for Riddler to steal the Fleece! C'mon! Grab on, I'll run us there."

Without hesitating, Badger picks up Kyle, and runs at top speed to the museum. As you speed towards the building, you pass several fire trucks that are heading in the direction of the main shipping docks. Followed closely behind them are the tell tale Psion Inc “cleanup” trucks. Deciding that Psion Inc would just try to stymie any attempts at aiding them, as well as the fact that you are on the trail of a robbery, you stay your course. During the trip, Badger quietly says to himself, “Agility of the cat, shell of the turtle, strength of the bear, speed of the puma, and leap of the cricket frog”. Kyle does his best to ignore Badger's rambling.

Once at the museum they notice the front door is wide open. Several museum guards lay unconscious by the door.

Kyle rushes over to the guards. They seem unharmed and are breathing. Their radios give off static as well. Kyle tries again to raise the Challengers. More static, and then a voice. It sounds like Marshall Law.

“…one fuggin’ out there….cell tower…………..plant……………destroyed…………Psion inc………….poison………”

Then continued static.

"Badger, our transmissions seem to be blocked. Are ALL transmissions being blocked? If it's our personal transmissions, are the Challengers all being targeted? We need to be braced for them to be ready for all our tricks, I guess. Since we can't radio each other let's try and stick together. Now, I know you've got some super senses. Any ideas as to what's in there waiting for us?"
Badger says: “Scent of the Hound” And his nose crinkles and begins to cough. “Smells like pepper spray!”

Badger says to Kyle, "Guess we go in cold. I'll lead the way. They won't hear me while I'm using the Stealth of the Panther." Badger stands there for a moment, then begins to look disappointed in himself. Badger then says as if offering another alternative, "Well, if that doesn't work, the Agility of the Cat should help me sneak around without being seen or heard."

Kyle nods in agreement. "I'll cover you. Now let's find that Fleece!"

Badger stays a good bit ahead, moving very quietly. He keeps waving Kyle back, Kyle seems to be making too much noise. Badger crouches as he walks, keeping himself low. He looks ready to spring. Kyle can see his claws glint in the dim light, but looses sight of him every now and again, as he blends into the night. A silent hunter whose prey is unaware of the danger it is in.

Kyle moves ever so slowly, his bow ready. As he passes an entryway, his arrow points, staying perfectly level, despite his movements. Moisture from the rainy night condenses; causing a drop to slide down his arm and continuing from his hand, to arrow, to arrow point and finally dropping soundlessly to the floor.

Kyle sees Badger stiffen ahead of him. They both look down, and see a wire; taut an inch above the floor...Badger's foot just barely grazing the top. He freezes, not sure if removing his foot might be the wrong move.

Around the corner, to the area the Fleece was being displayed in, the lights come on. There is a clapping...one person, clapping slowly.

“VERY good gentlemen. I was SO hoping my trap would catch you. Not many animals to call on with trap detecting powers eh? Do be so kind as to entertain my friends.”

From the ceiling drop half a dozen men in all black sweaters, ski masks and pants. Each is wielding a question mark shaped club.

You are both sandwiched between three men each and they approach menacingly. Badger leaps into action with superhuman speed. "Damn it! Kyle, they know us too well! Take cover!" Badger quickly and deftly removes his foot from the trip wire without pressing it any further, then immediately leaps into the air and tackles one of the masked assailants. The man gets the wind knocked out of him.

Behind him Badger hears the twang of a bow another twang and a whirling sound, quickly followed by two thuds. It sounds as though Kyle took a shot, hit his target, took a second shot and hit again before the first man hit the ground. Kyle calls
out "Do you REALLY want to keep coming at me?" Another twang, and a clatter as something hit the ground.

The remaining two men on Badger’s side lunge at him, clubs raised. He is able to deftly duck under the first blow, but isn’t quite quick enough to totally escape the second man’s swing, which clips him in the arm. Badger feels pins and needles race down his arm and there is a quick scent of ozone as his arm goes limp.

Kyle is only left with one unarmed man, who simply tries to tackle him. His shots were so swift he was able to prepare for the attack. As his opponent lunges, Kyle catches him, and they lock arms, attempting to subdue each other.

Badger attempts to see around the corner to the Fleece, but can’t, but does see someone walk around the corner. He wears a green suit and a purple bowler, and carries a cane with a question mark on its top. He is dressed like the Riddler, but his build isn’t right. He is tall, and gangly, and his face is youthful, and covered in freckles. Slung over his shoulders is a backpack.

Kyle and one of the black masked men struggle against one another, seemingly evenly matched. His opponent’s eye’s blaze with fury. With a grunt, Kyle’s muscles bulge, causing his costume to creak as blood surges to his muscles. He forces the man away, long enough to ram his knee into his foe’s gut, causing him to keel over.

Meanwhile, Badger stands, his left arm hanging limply. Balancing on his right leg, he strikes out with his right fist to the man nearby, knocking him back into the wall. Simultaneously, Badger’s left foot catches the man on his other side, as it springs out landing squarely in the man’s kneecap. A loud crack fills the air, as the man goes down clutching his destroyed knee.

During all of this the Riddler has removed his jacket and tie. Beneath it he was apparently wearing a t-shirt with a picture of Power Girl on it.

“So predictable. It’s almost boring. I would much rather be fighting Plastic Man, or The Creeper, or even Jester. At least they are harder to figure out.”

The room fills with the sound of moaning henchmen, and Riddler assumes a rather sad looking fighting stance.

Badger turns his head towards Kyle (obscuring his face from the villain) and very, very quietly says to Kyle, "Stench of the Skunk". Kyle is able to roll away before a noxious fume rolls off of Badger. The stench is so strong it is almost visible. The Riddler’s eyes tear up, but he seems otherwise unaffected.

He smirks and says “I had wondered if you may try to broaden your powers, seeing as they seem rather reminiscent of Animal Man. I had the forethought to have my Mistress whip me up some protection to various toxins and the like.”
Badger then leaps at him, ready to attack. But as he travels through the air, he can already see the Riddler prepare himself perfectly for the attack. Badger is batted from the air, and sent sprawling.

Kyle had by this time reached into his bag for a knock out gas arrow, but after hearing the Riddler proclaim to be resistant to toxins he hesitates. But now he sees an opening. Riddler’s deflection of Badger has left him facing away from Kyle, and he seems ill prepared to react again quickly enough for Kyle to attack!

Kyle’s fingers release the knock out gas arrow he was reaching for and move swiftly to another arrow. His first two fingers immediately grasp both sides of the nock of the arrow, and his arm swings smoothly in an arc that lands the nock perfectly onto his bowstring, which creaks as he draws it back. His eye looks down the arrow until the blunt end of the arrow blocks the Riddler’s head out. Just as he lets loose, the Riddler turns spoiling Kyle’s perfect target. Rather than landing squarely, the arrow grazes the Riddler’s head, knocking off his hat.

The Riddler’s eyes glaze for a second. Then brighten, as his face almost literally lights up. “Oh My God! What a day I am having!….Um, why do I smell like a skunk?”

Badger quickly gets to his feet, slightly embarrassed. Badger watches the “Riddler” intently from behind, his muscles tensed as if ready to pounce at the merest provocation.

"Crap, Badger, this guys mind controlled! Check on the fleece in case he’s a distraction!!!" Kyle says while keeping an arrow pointed on the young man. Badger peaks around the corner and can clearly see the fleece in its display. Meanwhile, the “Riddler” begins babbling.

“WOW! You’re Alley Cat! Wait, you go by Kyle Jones now don’t you? Sorry about your wife, I sent flowers…did you get them? Mind control huh? That doesn’t sound right. Pheromones maybe, but that wouldn’t explain how I broke out so apparently suddenly. Ivy has never been much into mind control. Skunk smell….skunk smell. The original Badger had a musk if I remember right. I suppose the New Badger could do it based on the powers he has displayed thus far. Wait…is he here too? Did you guys rescue me, or was I doing something bad under some nefarious influence? And where is ‘here’? I am going to guess Darian since it’s you guys.”

As he babbles, Kyle pin the purple bowler to the wall with an arrow. It sparks and smokes and then goes silent. The young man simply nods his head, as though this makes perfect sense.

Kyle starts with, “Ok, I’ll bite. You seem to know more about what's going on than we do. While Badger and I make sure these losers that are your henchmen are
tied up, maybe you’d like to fill us in? Who gave you the headwear? And why would they break into a bank just to give us a clue?"

The young man replies with, "Um...err...I dunno whose henchmen these are. I haven’t ever had any. By headwear, I am guessing you are referring to the Riddler-esque bowler. I have no recollection of such a thing, but based on the fact it seemed electronic, and find it important, I bet it was a Mad Hatter hat. Last I remember was a lady who I am guessing was Poison Ivy coming to my front door and blowing me a kiss. And villains often do weird things for their drawn out schemes. Riddler, Cluemaster, Joker, the President. It’s what they do!"

He takes a few breaths, as if staving off hyperventilating.

After assuring that the museum is safe, the duo take the young man, whom by this time has said that his name is “Counter” to the police. He seems almost excited about the prospect that he was used in a super villains plan.

The story continues in...

*Adventure Twenty-One – Part Two*

*Dream Girl and Raven Stick*