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Prologue:

The Daily Planet:

They had watched him storm across the bullpen, papers in hand, and enter Perry White's office. He'd slammed the door after himself, looked at Perry and then pulled the blinds down over the windows. Lois, Ron, Steve and everyone else went silent, and tried to hear what was happening. What could they say? They were reporters. Secrets and mysteries were like crack cocaine to them. The silence was broken by the sound of a mug hitting the floor, and the shouting that followed.

"GET OUT OF MY OFFICE!" Lois looked at Steve. Perry.

"I'M LEAVING, OLD-TIMER!" Old-timer? Ron flinched at the words. "YOU WON'T SEE ME AGAIN!"

"YEAH, YEAH, YEAH... THEY ALL COME CRAWLING BACK IN THE END!" Lois rolled her eyes. Typical Perry bravado. "ALL YOU WERE EVER GOOD FOR WAS A COFFEE RUN! GET OUT! GET OUT OF MY BUILDING AND NEVER COME BACK!"

"I'M GONE!"

Jimmy Olsen stormed back out of the office and looked at the reporters who stood assembled outside. He scowled and slammed the door behind him so hard that the pane of glass with Perry White's name emblazoned atop it shattered into dozens of pieces and fell to the floor. He pulled on his coat, and made for the elevator, whilst everyone else looked on. No one broke the silence. Not until...

"Hey Jim."

The former photographer turned, and a smile formed on his lips. "Hey Ms Lane."

Lois grinned, and then shook her head. She looked at him with her piercing blue eyes, and then began to speak. "Why'd you come back?"

Jimmy sighed. "Ms Lane, I don't want to get into an argument with you, alright? So if you're looking for a fight, please, look some other place... "

Lois groaned, putting her arm in front of Jimmy as the elevator door pinged open, preventing Jimmy from getting inside. "No, I'm serious! You knew this was going to happen; yet you came anyway. Nothing you could have done would have made Perry happy. You knew that. It's like ... like you want to die or something. Painfully. With coffee mugs inserted in various orifices."

"I BEST NOT BE LOOKING AT MY *SOON TO BE FORMER* BEST REPORTER CONSORTING WITH THE ENEMY, LANE!"

The duo turned as Perry brushed the glass out of the way of his door with his foot, and pointed his finger at Jimmy, anger in his eyes.

Lois looked back at Jimmy and smiled again. "I'll see you later Jim, we'll play catch up, alright?"

"Sure thing, Ms Lane", Jimmy said.

Lois sighed. "Come on, how long have I known you Jim? It's Lois by now."

The ex-photojournalist and current PR man of Lex Luthor smiled and winked, "Sure thing, Ms Lane."

Lois nodded as he stepped into the elevator, and then as the doors closed she walked over to Perry. "You shouldn't be so... " She searched for the words but then shrugged. "You know what?" It's none of my business. But he's a good kid, and I don't think you should treat him like that, no

matter what he's done."

"I... " Perry walked back into his office and sat down in his chair. He looked over to a polystyrene cup on his desk, picked it up and took a sip. He shuddered and shook his head. "Cold. I need coffee."

"Mr... Mr White?" Lois and Perry turned to the door, where a blond man stood, a battered old attaché case in his hand, a scruffy beard covering his face. He looked like he'd not eaten for a year or so, emaciated as much as a human being could be without being dead.

Perry gathered himself quickly; trying his hardest not to fall into another caffeine withdrawal fuelled rage, and then looked up, smiling. "That is whom you are talking to, yes. You are?"

"Ray Lang. I'm here for the obituaries position."

"Ah yes, please, come inside. Lois, we can continue this conversation later."

"Sure, Chief."

Perry nodded as she left. "Yeah. Sure."

End Prologue

BRAKABOOOOOOOOOM!

The wind picked up, like a storm had suddenly materialized in the middle of the Hall of Justice. The air turned static, and the alarms blared. Wonder Woman flew into the briefing room, and stood ready, sword in hand. Two words left her lips, two words that actually scared her. "Boom tube!" She remembered CC Batson, A war, a dark blight in the universe, Apokolips. The entire building quaked, Hobs Bay shuddered, Metropolis groaned ... but the city was occupied at the moment with other matters... !

Light bathed the room, yet she didn't flinch, The Omega Effect? She didn't flinch. A warrior born she was, and a warrior born she'd stay.

"Justice League... I come with grave news!"

The light sparkled and shined, and then it became a man. The New God known as Sollis crumpled to the floor, his body smoking and charred. Diana's eyes opened wide as she moved over to him, to help him. She spoke the name that the others knew him by, "LIGHTRAY!"

"Princess Diana!" Diana helped him up, and he nodded. "It is good to see you again... "

Diana smirked at his words, obviously in discomfort, but still the gentleman God. "It's good to see you too... But what's wrong? Why are you here?"

"I come with grave news... " Lightray is about to continue when another alarm blares by the monitor wall. "By the Source, what is THAT?"

"Goddess... "

Meanwhile:

"I SCREAM FOR VENGEANCE! I SCREAM FOR RELEASE! FOR I AM FREE ONCE MORE TO REBUILD MY KINGDOM UPON THE MIDDLE WORLD!"

"What in all that is holy is that?" Maggie Sawyer peaked over the top of the toppled car they hid behind, her weapon raised and ready.

The Guardian shook his head and wrapped his fist in a bandage, hiding the melted flesh and crushed bone in his hand, "A demon."

"A demon" Maggie questioned. You know I don't believe in that horse crap. It's got to be some kind of ... mutation. One of the STAR Labs rejects. Come on Jim, you touched it, and that's what you're giving me, Demon?"

"Look, I punched it and my hand is now a mess. Its flesh is like acid, solid acid that dissolves human matter. The concrete below him isn't melting so I'm assuming it's only organic material that gets messed up." He picked up his golden shield and took another look. "Get your men back. Going up against that thing is like having a death wish."

"Then why are you standing up like you're going after that thing?" Maggie asked sternly.

"Because, Captain Sawyer, I am a work of fiction. And it doesn't matter what happens to me, I'm sure I'll be revived somewhere else... "

"Excuse me?"

Jim Harper paused and turned back to the Captain, "Because I have a death wish." The Guardian smiled that Bruce Wayne smile of his and leapt over the toppled car, leaving Maggie alone once more.

"Christ... Where's Superman when you need him?!" Captain Sawyer clicked on the bullhorn, "EVERYONE, LET'S GET A PERIMETER SET UP! I WANT ALL THESE BLOCKS EVACUATED! AND I WANT TO KNOW HOW A DEMON JUST MATERIALISED IN DOWNTOWN METROPOLIS!"

"What's your name?" The Guardian dodged between the flurry of punches the creature bombarded his way, but to the chagrin of the creature, the gold and blue clad hero was too fast to catch. "I think it's only fair we exchange names. Chances are, one of us might kill the other, and I like to play things fair like that."

"I AM THE ONE WHOM WAS UNNAMED! BORN BEFORE THE RISE OF THE LIGHT! BEFORE THE HORDES OF ANGELS WERE RELEASED UPON THIS EARTH TO CLEANSE THE DARKNESS!"

"So... Can I call you One? Or do you prefer Mr Was Unnamed?"

"YOU BLASPHEME MY NAME!"

"Yeah ... Your point being?" Guardian said, as he rolled past another bevy of blows.

Hall of Justice:

"I've... " Diana looked over to the monitor womb as yet another alarm blared. "My God... With Superman missing the devils have come out to play! Green Lantern isn't answering his summons, neither is Batman or The Flash... Aquaman has been refusing to accept our transmissions for some time now and J'onn is on Mars!" Wonder Woman shook her head. "Blockbuster is on the loose in Gateway!"

Sollis nodded solemnly, "You take this... Blockbuster character... I'll deal with this new aberration. Then we must organize your League, I have come with a message from New Genesis and Apokolips... There exists a threat to both our worlds and now yours!"

"I am sorry, Sollis." Diana began to wrap her Lasso of Truth around her shoulder and elbow ready for action, and then lifted off, "God speed!"

The New God smiled. "Yes. That's the point", he said patting his Mother Box. "Onward and upward, dear friend", he jumped up and launched himself through the wall, heading towards downtown Metropolis at the speed of light.

Centennial Hotel:

"A waste of bones!" Green smoke dispersed from around a large bed in the middle of the room; candles burned halfway down stood in a pile of melted wax and flickered and whispered ancient secrets to those that would listen, but right now... No one was. He was busy, this one. Busy trying to conjure something he needed...

This was not the room of any normal man. It shifted into the realms of another universe, and then shifted back. In the corner of your eye you thought you saw something... But when you turn to look, to examine, nothing, shadows. The entire chamber smelled of lingering otherworldly incense, a strange scent unlike anything you've ever smelled before, it

would linger there for weeks to come, making you question just how much you knew... The odours filled the nostrils of the young man that stood at the foot of the bed looking down at the young female that lay there in a comatose state. "It didn't work. It was supposed to work!" He placed his hands on her right hand resting his head on the side of the mattress. "I'm so sorry, sister... "

His eyes welled up with tears as he kneeled down by her bed and held her hands in his. "I'm sorry." He sobbed and looked up, shaking his head. "I tried... But it seems there is no escaping the deal I have made. There is no escape from that Faustian bargain... " He shook his head. "You were always right, Y'know... I do get overdramatic when I'm down... "

TOOM!

A car suddenly exploded through the wall of the hotel room, brick, dust and plaster spraying every which way. The man pulled his wand from the inside of his cape and pointed it directly at the bumper of the vehicle, mere inches away from him. He shook his head, thought an incantation, and then spoke clearly, soundly, calmly: "AWAY!"

The vehicle stopped as if grabbed in midair by an unseen hand, suddenly enveloped in a bubble of red arcane energy it flew back out of the room, back to the street below. The man known as Caesar stepped towards the hole in the wall. He shook his head as he watched a gold and blue clad warrior dance around a huge behemoth of death and destruction. Before the car crashed down onto the street Caesar grabbed it with a flick of his wand and hurled it toward the creature.

"Oh crap. That's probably my fault... " Caesar grimaces. "I summoned an Old One." He gripped his wand and shook his head again. "I'm so going to go to jail for this... "

Downtown Metropolis:

"Allez Oop.", The Guardian rolled across the street as the car that flew

out of the hotel room changed direction and rammed straight into the back of the creature, who roared in anger as he shrugged it off. Jim Harper smiled and brought his shield up in its face when it was distracted, then threw himself back, out of reach of the creatures' massive arms. "Who would have thought that the car would turn out to be a boomerang?"

"Ugly creature"! The demon flew back as a ray of light collided with its chest, sending it hurtling towards the hotel behind it. A voice came from nowhere, and The Guardian readied himself. "Surrender!"

The beam of energy bounced back and formed into the shape of a man landing beside The Guardian. The Guardian arched an eyebrow from behind his mask. "Who are you?" He glanced at the newcomer and nodded a welcome. "Not that I'm ungrateful, but I think the audience would appreciate a heads up on the duo that are about to team up... "

"Duo? Make that a trio." The two men on the ground suddenly looked up as a man dressed in a black suit with a free flowing crimson red cape levitated to the ground. "The name's Caesar and I thought that you two could use the help."

"Caesar", Lightray pouted for a moment, thinking. "I once knew a Caesar... "

"That's an interesting name, son." The Guardian raised his shield as the demon finally found its footing.

The magician smiled as he saluted to the Guardian with his long wand. "My parents were interesting people. Who's the rock star in the white?"

"I am Lightray, New God of Light. Are we 'teaming up' as the armoured man stated?"

The Unnamed began to pick up speed as he approached the trio; rage in its eyes, drool and spit falling from its deformed lips. Black fangs glistening in the sunlight. "KILL YOU ALL! FEAST ON THE MARROW IN YOUR BONES!"

The Guardian nodded, "Seems like Mr. Unnamed certainly thinks so."

Lightray blasted the creature again, but it merely stalled the demon, which brushed off the glistening energy and continued to run. "Umm... Do we have a strategy?"

The Guardian smiled again. "Hit hard, hit fast." He looked at both the men's shocked faces. "What?" He shrugged. "Ready? *Hut-hut-hut!*" The trio sprinted toward the creature and commenced their attack; The Guardian distracted the creature as Lightray unleashed a concentrated blast of power into its face. Caesar's eyes glowed red as he began whispering to himself, waving his wand around in front of him.

Lightray bounced off the hide of the creature and onto the pavement, concentrating his trajectory right back at the demon. He looked at The Guardian, who was still ducking and diving. "What is this creature?"

"Don't know, chum, but whatever it is, I'm going to beat it down just the same as anything else!" The Guardian slammed his shield with all his strength into the creature's head. He turned and looked at the man in the cape and jacket, still muttering to himself and moving his wand, "You gonna lend a hand?" He asked.

"Going to send this creature... Back to the circle of hell that it crawled up from... ." Caesar grunted as he continued, then side stepped to his left to avoid a lamppost the demon threw in his direction. "(I'm going to die or go to prison, God...)"

The demon swatted the other two heroes aside and dove straight for the magician, screaming and roaring, its clawed fist raised ready... "LITTLE SORCERER! DIE!"

"Not now... " came a voice from above. "... Not ever." A hammer swung down and collided with the creature's skull, a loud crack ruptured down the street as the creature screamed in anguish and crumpled to the concrete below. As fast as it arrived, the hammer shot back up into the sky, and was clutched by a man clad in silver and steel. He nodded at the three men on the ground below, before landing beside them. "Hey guys."

"Steel", The Guardian beamed. "Didn't realise you were back!"

"I am. And I'm here to stay!" He looked down as the creature began to stir and then stumbled back, surprised. "Damn! That was my most powerful blow... And he's getting up!"

"That'll be my cue." Caesar raised his wand up to the sky and yelled at the three men, gritting his teeth as a maelstrom of scarlet energy began to form at the end of the street, "Give me some room, guys! You don't want to take a vacation to this guy's home... " Suddenly a dimensional rift was visible behind the nameless creature, and Caesar pointed his glowing wand at it as the others watched on. The demonic being was enveloped in energy. "*Away.*"

Clawing and grasping at the concrete, the Unnamed howled in anger, trying to escape the tendrils of magical force that grappled with its legs, but to no avail. "NOOOOOO! TAAAAAKEN BEFOOOOOORE MYYYYY TIMMM—" He was dragged into the vortex and it sealed with a pop.

Steel turned to the others, and then shrugged. "That wasn't so hard."

The Guardian tipped his helmet at the man, shaking his head as he then went on to examine the burns across his body. "You only just got here."

"GUYS!" A man ran to the four men, taking numerous photos, causing the New God Lightray to flinch as the flashes blurred his vision. The Guardian put his hand up and motioned for the photographer to put the camera down.

Next came the reporters.

"Who are you?"

"Are you a team?"

"Are you friends of Superman?"

"What do you think of Booster Gold?"

"Are you a new Justice League?"

"A new superhero team?"

The Guardian's shook his head. "No, we're just four men who came together in a crisis, nothing more, and nothing less."

Steel nodded, "Four men here to help."

"I hope to be helping this city... Nay... This WORLD... As much as I can... " Lightray trailed off, and then blushed. "But I currently have an appointment with the Justice League!" Lightray saluted the others and shot up into the air, straight towards Happy Harbour.

Steel nudged The Guardian, "Weird guy."

"Yeah, I'm sure that's what they'll say."

"I... " Caesar looked around, slightly embarrassed at the press attention. "I have to get back to my sister."

Guardian called out to Caesar, "What... HEY! CAESAR! STOP!"

Caesar paused in mid levitation and looked down at Guardian with a smirk on his face, "I... I've got some personal stuff to care off, umm... Sir... But... Ah... If you want I can meet you somewhere and we can chat more. Maybe."

Guardian replied as he attached his metallic gold shield to the back of his metallic gold body armour, "I'm posted at One Metropolis Police Plaza."

"No offence Mr. Golden Guardian, but I don't feel comfortable going to police headquarters. How about I meet you at the Daily Planet, I've always wanted to visit that place." He threw down a small business card from his sleeve and then vanished in a burst of blue light, leaving The Guardian and Steel alone.

"When?" The Guardian looked down at the card and then jumped, as a mouth formed on the flimsy piece of paper. "Holy... "

It whispered to him, and to him alone, a guttural, quiet voice that shook him: "*Two hours...* " And then it returned to normal, a name, 'Caesar' and

an occupation 'Occultist'.

He looked back up to Steel, and pocketed the card in a pouch along his belt. "Well... That was an interesting diversion. You going to stick around for the media, Steel?"

Steel glanced toward the crowds, and then hesitated. "No, I... "

"THAT'S NOT STEEL!" John Henry Irons stumbled through the police cordon and pointed accusingly at the man in the Steel armour. "It's an impostor!"

The Guardian put up his hand, stopping Irons getting any closer; he turned to Steel, "Is this true?"

Steel nodded. "I'm Steel."

John clenched his fist. "No he's... "

The Guardian interrupted. "Look chum, this guy helped save the city today, so I don't care if he's an impostor or not, he's alright in my book... But if he turns out to be not what he seems?" He looked back at Steel. "I'll peel him out of that armour like a tin of sardines. You get me, Steel?"

"I understand, Guardian... And I'm sorry Mr Irons but when the time comes... " Steel leaped up into the air and waved goodbye to the masses below. "You have my vote!"

John Henry Irons leaned into the Guardian and whispered something into his ear, something no one else could hear. The Guardian nodded at the words placing his hand on Irons shoulder, "Right."

"John Henry!" The mayoral candidate turned to a woman as she burst through the cordon. "Can I have word?"

"You can have as many words as you want, Ms Lane... " He beamed as he approached her and then whispered in her ear, "But not here, alright? In an hour. At the Steelworks."

"Ok. I look... I look forward to it." She smiled and headed back behind

the police line. Ron Troupe watched as she bit her bottom lip and blushed.

"Ms Lane, are you alright?"

She turned and smiled. "Sure."

Epilogue One:

Hall of Justice:

"Sorry about that, Sollis... Every month or so I feel the need to return to my home... to search... But no. There is never any trace... " J'onn J'onzz smiled glumly, and placed his hand on Lightray's shoulder. "I saw the recordings of the battle with that creature... Any idea what it was?"

"No, Manhunter, none what so ever, but at least the threat is over."

Wonder Woman nodded. "Yes. Now, you have news?"

Lightray glanced around to the shadows, to the door, and then spoke. "Where is the rest of the League? Superman? Batman? Anyone else?"

"Indisposed. Batman is on the tail of the Joker, Green Lantern, The Flash and Aquaman aren't returning communications... "

"Are they alright?"

"There is only so much the Justice League can ask of its members. We allow Batman to deal with his problems, unless he requests assistance of course... It is a stipulation to each member's membership... " J'onn sighed. "And one that does not always have the desired effect on each member. Batman is very... Difficult when it comes to Gotham. We do not even bother asking now. He would only refuse."

"What news have you brought us?" Wonder Woman sat down slowly, listening to Lightray's every word. "You said it was important."

"Apokolips is in a state of civil war, friends... "

Wonder Woman looked up from her seat. "Isn't... Is that not a good thing? If a civil war is in place it prevents a stable power taking control and coming to Earth... "

Lightray continued. "Desaad controls the area around Darkseid's ruined palace, whilst other factions wage war in Armagetto... We only know this because of the spies we have working on the planet... "

"What does this have to do with us?" Replied J'onn.

"Because, Manhunter, Desaad released a beast from the bowels of Darkseid's dungeon in the hope it would cleanse the planet of all those who did not see things the way the God of Sadism did... But instead it demolished anything put in its path... "

"Merciful Minerva... " Wonder Woman clenched her fist and slammed it on the table. "Where is this weapon now?"

"That is the thing, friends... Desaad launched it into hyperspace, through the dimensional portals that connect our two worlds... Desaad sent the doomsday weapon to Earth!"

Epilogue Two:

The Centennial Hotel:

Well that didn't go as bad as I thought it would, thought the young magician.

He examined the hotel room and frowned. If he hadn't cast the illusion he did before he left, anyone examining the room would have discovered his magical nature. Above his sister a thin layer of plaster had formed atop the supernatural shield that prevented her from coming to harm, yet everywhere else there was destruction. He shouldn't have bought her here. She was safer with the monks. He waved his wand and the room

began to dance and sing as brick and plaster reformed and shuffled along the ground, until they had returned to what and where they were supposed to be. No longer was there a hole in the wall. No longer was there any sign of damage. No longer was Metropolis safe for her. He took a sip of his drink and walked towards the bed that contained his young sister. He motioned to a chair and it heaved itself towards her bedside. When it arrived he slumped down in it, and placed his left hand on hers. "Don't worry lil' one, I'll find a way to sort this out, to help you."

Caesar finished off his drink and placed it on the night table, summoned his mystical cane and then began a new incantation. The room whistled, a pink smoke formed, and three men appeared. "It's time."

"Have you forgotten your past, young one?" The lead monk shook his head as the other two attended his sister. He motioned to the nightstand, and the empty glass that stood there. "You are half the magician you have trained to be if you intoxicate yourself."

"I know, alright? Allow me this one bit of self-flagellation, out of... God, out of respect to my dad, or my mom, ok?" He shook his head. "I failed her, I failed my sister and now she's paying the price... "

"You could always return home, young one... Return to your training?"

"I won't find a cure for my sister's ailment in Nanda Parbat, will I?" Caesar smiled. "I'll return when I find a charm, or a spell. Or *something* that'll return her to me."

"You project a mask of arrogance, child, but we can all see through it. Don't forget that." The lead monk turned and suddenly found Caesar's hand on his shoulder.

"Please... Look after her."

"No man with violence in his heart or on his mind can enter Nanda Parbat Caesar. Remember that." He nodded. "We shall attend to her every unawaking need."

"Thank you. Thank you... " Caesar wiped a tear away from his eye as the pink smoke began to twirl and scream, and then they were gone. The

bed was empty. And Caesar had nothing left here. He closed the door to the room behind him, and sighed.

Caesar stood at the hotels front desk lost in thought, oblivious to the young lady in front of him. "Checking out, Mr. Caesar?" he looked up and saw the beautiful clerk at the front of the desk. "Mr Caesar?" His hand was on his key card, and he hadn't moved it away. She was looking from his hand to his face. "Are you alright?"

Caesar just smiled at the blonde desk clerk who brushed some of her hair behind her right ear. Caesar noticed a small star tattoo on her neck. "Umm, I don't think so." He took the key card back from the desk. "Ha, I mean I think I'll be sticking around Metropolis for a bit longer, especially since I've never had the pleasure of your company..." Caesar bowed in front of her, placing his cane in front of his desk. He looked up and glanced at her nametag. "... Nicole."

She blushed at the compliment. "Thank you..."

"But I tell you what I will do m'dear. I'll pay up my tab, to make sure I don't get kicked out when I least expect it, eh?" She nodded and typed something into the till, then printed out his bill. Caesar quickly scanned it to make sure everything was in order and with a twirl of his pen, he signed 'J. Caesar' at the bottom of it and passed it back. "So what time do you get off your shift?"

Nicole blushed again. "I'm not normally... I don't..." She takes a deep breath. "I get off in about two hours."

"When you get out I'm taking you out to dinner." He pauses and then realises what he said, "If you want that is. A beautiful woman like you shouldn't feel obligated to do anything you don't want to..."

Nicole felt weak at the knees. "But I don't have anything to wear."

"I'm sure you look beautiful in anything you throw on, but..." Caesar picked up the phone by the desk and dialled, waiting for a moment before speaking. "Donna! Yes, this is Caesar... Oh I'm great thank you... Oh, no, I'm sorry I can't pass the boutique, but..." He paused. "Yes, but... I'm sending you a beautiful young woman who goes by the name

of Nicole in a few hours, and I want you to take care of her and charge it to my personal account... Yes, I'll pop down in the next few days. Of course we can play catch up! My sister... Umm... " He paused, and breathed in deeply. "She's ill... I'll tell you about it later."

Caesar put the phone down and winked at Nicole, "Go here. And call when you're done. I'll find you in a flash." He put down his business card. Name: 'Caesar'. Occupation: 'Entrepreneur'. He scribbled down his cell number took Nicole's hand, kissing it gently. "Au Revoir Mademoiselle."

He walked out of the lobby of the hotel and watched as his car appeared. The attendant climbed out, and Caesar threw him a roll of money. He looked at the regal looking man with astonishment, and then passed him his keys. "She's a beaut, sir."

"I know man, I know." He examined the car. A brand spanking new Lamborghini Murciélago. Simply the best for Caesar. The best. The beautiful. The fast. That was the life he led. He looked back to the attendant. "This baby will go 0-100 miles per hour in about 3.4 seconds. Maybe next time I throw you the keys you can open her up a bit, take her out on the town... "

"Really sir?"

"Maybe... But I personally can't wait to open her up on the highway."

Caesar placed his right white gloved hand over the rear of the car and ran it over the roof. "Catch you later, kid." Caesar leapt into the Lamborghini and sped off, leaving the attendant bedazzled and confused.

He parked the car on top of a parking garage that gave him a good view of the Daily Planet roof. The golden sphere atop it glistened in the afternoon sun, and he smiled. He saw a man standing there dressed in a blue shirt and black trousers, a shield on his back. That must be him, The Guardian. Caesar mystically teleported to the roof of the Daily Planet and then jumped in surprise. A woman was with the Guardian.

"You look different out of body armour, Guardian."

The tall blonde man with broad shoulders and a barrel chest smiled and nodded. "You're not the only one, Caesar. I see you've lost the tuxedo and cape look... "

Caesar was wearing loose fitted blue jeans, a black collared shirt, and a pair of sunglasses that covered his eyes fully. His shoulder length hair was tied in a pony tail that hung behind his back. He laughed at the superhero's words, " To be honest, it's not very original, and not very practical, but I do enjoy being the centre of attention... "

He stood at the edge of the building, from the top of the ledge he saw a magnificent sight. The air was a lot cleaner here than in Gotham City (but that was nothing new), and maybe even cleaner than Star City or Coast City. The food too, was a bit more upscale in Superman's backyard than in Las Vegas, that was for sure, but Vegas did have the best gigs... "It's Jim by the way. Jim Harper."

"Aren't you supposed to protect your identity in case someone strikes at you through your family?"

"Family?" the Guardian smiled. "Any relatives I had have been dead for decades. How about you", Jim looked for the words, and then nodded when he found them. "Your sister, Is she well?"

"Hmm." He didn't answer, but turned to the woman behind Jim Harper. "How long are you going to just stand there and stare at me? Like I said, I don't mind being the centre of attention... But I wouldn't mind an explanation either."

"This is my commanding officer."

"Commanding Officer, a beautiful name, a pleasure", he bowed at her, his long hair falling to the side of his head. He examined her as she stood there. She was a tall, slender, blonde haired woman. She wore cream-coloured slacks with a matching jacket and black collared shirt and had a Captain's badge hanging around her neck on a chain.

Caesar thought that she had to be a magician herself with proficiency in hypnosis, for her blue eyes had captured his complete attention.

Sawyer extended her right hand to Caesar, "I'm Captain Maggie Sawyer. I run the Major Crime Unit here in Metropolis with Harper... "

Captain Sawyer was interrupted by Caesar who gently took Sawyer's right hand and turned it in his right black gloved hand so that the back of her hand was facing up. Caesar bowed and leaned closer to Sawyer's right hand and said to Sawyer, "A pleasure to meet you Ms. I do hope that it is Ms. Maggie Sawyer." Caesar winked to her as he kissed her backhand. Jim grimaced and turned to face the city.

Captain Sawyer blushed as she pulled her right hand out of Caesar's tender grasp and said, "I prefer Captain Sawyer. Now what do we call you? You got a full name?" Caesar confidently reached his right hand toward Sawyer's left ear and magically pulled out a business card from it, and then handed her the card.

"Caesar is the name I go by, says so on the card." He pointed to the blood red letters. Name: 'Caesar' Occupation 'The best at what you want me to do to you'. She blinked and then the words formed the word 'Occultist'. He took out his wand and tapped the card, and his phone number formed in golden letters below his name. "You can call me anytime you want." He winked as Captain Sawyer took the business card, and put it in her pocket. "So what do you have to ask me, because I'm a very busy magician and all."

The Guardian turned back and smiled. "You seem to know your way about the magical business... "

Captain Sawyer groaned as Jim Harper approached them.

Caesar smiled slyly. "Are you not a believer? I could show you a few things that'll open your eyes... "

Maggie nudged Harper. "Carry on Harper."

"We want you to be the magical consultant to the Major Crimes Unit. You'd have a steady pay check and you'd be doing the city a favour."

Caesar paused for a moment. "Would you pay my expenses? Hotel bills, etc?"

Maggie answered this question. "We'd have to talk about that.

"Oh, minor details, my friends. You have yourself a new recruit." He smirked. "But I'm not going to wear a uniform. I cannot work blue polyester." He nodded to Jim who sighed. "You have my number... Now I have to go! I have a prior engagement!" He leapt of the edge of the building and as The Guardian and Maggie Sawyer watched on in amazement, he vanished in a puff of blue light!

Epilogue Three:

The Steel Works:

"There's a new Steel in town then." Lois Lane looked up at John Henry, as he pulled on his tie. "Thoughts, your honour?"

Irons laughed and Lois smiled. "I'm not Mayor yet, Lois." He shook his head and glanced over to her. "Not by a long shot. Luthor's topping all the polls, mostly, I assume, because everyone's deluded themselves into believing he's the messiah or something like that... " He laughed. "He's the *man*. So you know what that means for a guy like me... "

"Ha. You've got to 'stick it' to him?"

He turned and pointed a finger at her, chuckling. "EXACTLY." He rearranged the black tie whilst looking in the mirror. "I mean... We both know what Luthor's about. The murder, the bribes, everything. But he's hidden his trail so very well that no one can call him on it. Besides, if he was called on it, he'd blame a clone or some crap along those lines. And his enmity of Superman, that really gets me. Lex is insane."

"But you avoided the question there, John. What are your thoughts on the new Steel, any connection to you?" She flipped back a few pages in her notepad. "You've stated that *'I can no longer wear the Steel armour because during the Apokolips Invasion it fried my nervous system, creating a real risk to my health if I ever step into those big metal boots again'*... So I'm

assuming you haven't been lying, have you John?"

"No I have not, Lois. Yes, the armour fried my nervous system but... " He looked around for a moment and then leaned towards her. "Can we go off the record for a moment? I mean... I trust you implicitly, but you're also one of the lead reporters of a globe spanning publication... So... Can we?"

"Depends" Lois, stated.

"What if I invoke the whole 'our best friend is Superman and he'd want this kept a secret' clause, or the 'our long running friendship and trust' stipulation?"

"I'd still be wary." She tapped her pen on the pad, twice, three times, five, ten. "Ok. Sure." She closed her notebook.

"Ok then." John sighed and removed his tie and then placed it on the desk. He put his hands to the top button of his shirt and then paused. "Don't be afraid."

"Afraid? A mayoral candidate is giving me one of the worst strip teases I've ever experienced. I'm not afraid, I'm intrigued."

"Ha, always trying to defuse a situation with comedy. I like that." He continued to unbutton his shirt. "Now when I said fried, what I really meant was... " He pulled off his white dress shirt and then stood with his vest covering his chest. "It's pretty self explanatory." He removed his vest and turned, showing Lois his back. "Replace 'fried' with 'fused' and you've got a walking biological remote control."

John Henry Iron's back was a mix of metal and flesh, the control unit of the Steel armour somehow embedded into his flesh, connecting with his spine. Lois Lane gasped, unable to see where the metal ended and the man's back began.

"How is that... How are you still alive?"

"I don't know Lois."

"Can I touch it?"

"Sure." She approached him and ran her fingers over the warm metal. "I can't feel anything there. It's... From what I was told... "

Lois looked up and interrupted. "Told?"

"I went to Superman as soon as I was able to walk, as soon as New Genesis launched. It seems that this stuff is the only thing that's keeping me on my two legs, without it I'd be crippled." He hesitated and then continued with a sigh. "My spine is all tangled with the metal. Every now and then I get an ache and... Well. Superman took me to the Justice League (I think they were operating out of a cave at the time) Green Lantern and Batman examined me and they said they couldn't do anything without jeopardising my life. They called in Will Magnus but he had no idea what was going on. So I'm kind of stuck like this... "

"What does that mean then, about you and the new Steel?"

He smiled at her, and motioned his head to a sealed door to their left. He uttered a password: "*White Rabbit*." The doors swung open, and a figure stepped out, clad in silver armour.

Yet, as Lois looked closer, she began to realise there was no man inside the suit. It all made sense! "*A walking remote control*. You... You *control* it!"

"Better than ever", He put his hand out to the suit of armour, and it took it, shaking John's hand gently. "And this is as close to the action I'll ever get from now on, best of both worlds."

"It's... Amazing."

"What is that I hear in your voice, Lois? Wonderment? Are you impressed?"

Lois blushed again. "Well you've seem to have the most impressive equipment, John... "

"Ha." He smiled and looked at her, their eyes connecting for a moment. "Lois... "

Suddenly realising she was gazing into his dark eyes; she looked at her lingering hand and immediately withdrew it from his back, slightly embarrassed that it had been there for so long. "Sorry... "

"No it's... It's ok." He paused. "Lois." He put his hand beneath her chin, and drew her head up. "I really want to kiss you right now."

"Don't let me stop you, John... " She moved in close, kissing him softly, and he held her tightly next to his body.

From outside the Steelworks he stared through the window. He frowned, and then slid down the wall, shaking his head. "Damn."

Epilogue Four:

Adapt. Evolve. Survive.

"An' I said to her... 'You gotta be kiddin' me... I mean... It wasn't even the *dog*, it was the *goat*... Tha's gotta... Gotta count for somethin'... '" The man finished off the can of beer and threw it into the lake, making a quiet splash as it hit the surface and sank slowly beneath into the darkness. The moon was full, the sky clear, and the two men sat on top of their cars around Myer's Lake. Dan Dreyfus leaned against his windscreen, looking over to his moustached compadre Lenny Hennessey, who at that moment looked at him, beer can at his lips, surprise at his eyes.

"You did not man... You did not... "

Dan Dreyfus nodded hard, laughing heavily. "I sure as hell did. I mean, you get drunk one night... Night like this... I mean... Jus' because... Y'know... "

"Tot— Wait, look... " Lenny pointed up to the sky as a bright light filled

the clearing. The bright glow made it feel like it was daylight, even though the sun was hours away from rising. "Holy Toledo."

BRAKABOOOOOOOOOM!

"GET DOWN!" The men dove off their cars and scrambled behind them as a massive rock shot out from the sky, trailing smoke and fire, splashing down in the lake. They watched in amazement as waves flooded outwards and a torrent of water slammed against their cars. After the water drained away, the two men, soaked to their skin, popped their heads up, and surveyed the damage. "What in God's name?"

Lenny ran his hand through his greasy hair, and then looked around. "Suddenly I'm sober."

"You ain't the only one." Dan stood, and reached for the shotgun in the back of his pick up. "Let's take a look. Grab the tow cables. Hold my beer." Lenny nodded and picked up the cable at the back of the pick up, and then waded into the warm lake water. He wrapped the strangely shaped meteorite in tow cables, and tied an adequate knot. "You ready?"

"Goddamn, this ain't good, I swear... " The man rushed back to the shore and looked over to Dan, who began to draw the cable back in. The duo watched as the rock dragged towards them. "Shouldn't we call the police? The FBI? The CIA?"

"Screw that, this is our find, easy. We might get superpowers out of it, or a ring like that GL dude!"

"Cool. WAIT— LOOK!" The cables seemed to dissolve into the meteorite, vanishing for a moment before they suddenly snapped off as the hunk of rock began to quake and shake, fragments falling off. The two men ducked behind their cars again, until the shaking stopped. They looked back, and saw what was left. A massive mass of black stone in the shape of a perfect sphere. "What in... What is that?"

"A UFO?"

"Don't look like a flying saucer to me... "

Adapt. Evolve. Survive. The words he lived by. Living being a bit of a conundrum in this man's case, If you could call him that, a man that is. Is he alive? He was. Blood pumped through his heart, a heart composed of the strongest muscles you'd ever see, super dense muscle, impervious to harm. Blood that healed any wound, that on exiting the body hardened to prevent damage to the body itself, ensuring that any injury healed instantaneously.

His life systems began to awaken, his black eyes opened, as he uncurled from the position he was in when he entered the void. His body cracked as it began to compensate for this new gravity field. The black cocoon, a secretion of his skin on contact with the extreme cold of space, broke away, until he stood revealed, his grey skin quivering slightly as muscles developed and grew.

If anyone were to attack him now, he'd be defenceless, but give it a moment... and there. His body had adapted. Evolved. He would survive. Earth. IT must be. He had been here before, before he was whisked away. But now he has returned, with one name on his lips— Kal-El!

"Y-You alright... ?" Lenny stuttered, scared, terrified. The creature turned slowly towards him. He recognised the tongue. Through the language acquisition device built directly into his brain he learned the language instantaneously, and he listened. And he understood. "Y'fell from the sky... Are you... You a superhero?" The creature stepped forward, each step a thunderous explosion on the sandy mud around the edge of the lake. He analysed the man's body. A blow to the neck. A crack of his sternum. He would fall. Like the rest of them. "Like Superman?" Lenny continued.

Doomsday screamed. The world quaked as his fists slammed down on the men around him; his attack sudden, unexpected. The men died without a sound escaping their lips. With a loud grunt, the villain leapt into the air, and headed North...

End Epilogue.

To be continued!

ACTION COMICS PRESENTS:

Escape To Krypton!

Part Two: "*Mom and the Phantom Zoners...* "

Written by Roy Flinchum from a concept by Charlie Wilkins

Edited by Brian Burchette

Lamar Short had never fit in anywhere his entire life. Anywhere except here. Here in Krypton Square he was just another metahuman. In fact here his powers were as much laughed at and scoffed as they were looked at in confusion elsewhere. What kind of power was making water from your hands? What good was that, except for maybe having super-sweaty palms for a job interview, and who the hell would want to drink that? The housing incentive plan offered to move to Krypton Square was just the break he was looking for to relocate and start a new life.

Lamar looked around the bar. He wondered about what kinds of things all the people in here could do, some were obvious: wings, feathers, tails, horns, he thought he even saw two heads. His fourth glass of beer slipped from his hand and crashed onto the bar.

"Dammit man, that's the fourth glass you've broken", the bartender berated Lamar as he swiped the pieces of glass off the bar, and wiped up the beer. "Maybe you should head on home. Are you too drunk to drive? You want I should call you a cab? Got it right here". The bartender held up his right hand. The skin on his palm was perforated and Lamar could hear the distinct sound of a dial tone coming from it.

"No thanks", Lamar held up his own hands, water dripping from them, "I'm not really that drunk, I never quite get to finish one. Besides I'm

walking."

Lamar left the bar and cut down the back alley. His sponge covered apartment wasn't far and the night air helped to dry him out some.

Lamar's mind began to get foggy, he stumbled. *What was going on, he wondered, I didn't have that much to drink.*

Suddenly Lamar was no longer in control of his own body! He could only watch as he fell to his knees, and stuffed his hand into his mouth. The water from his hand ran down his throat into his lungs filling them up. Lamar choked and gagged, his chest trying to expel the water; his hand stuffed into his mouth blocked the way and poured more water until it spouted from around his mouth like a geyser. Lamar collapsed face down into the alleyway and drowned.

Cat Grant took one more look in the mirror, hair perfect, lipstick perfect, teeth, crap, lettuce. She pulled her lip up over her teeth in a smile that would have made the joker proud. Dan her producer and field cameraman was not paying attention, he watched the seconds tick by on his watch. Maggie and The Guardian stood beside him out of "the shot", waiting for their cue.

"And we're on in 5, 4", Maggie deftly flicked the lettuce from her teeth with her long red pinky nail, threw the mirror to the guardian and picked up the microphone. "3,2,1" Dan finished.

Jim wondered if maybe Maggie didn't have a speed meta-gene.

"Welcome back for our second installment of Metropolis Real Lives. With me again are Agent Jim Harper and SCU Captain Maggie Sawyer. Dan motioned for them to step around to the Maggie. "Agent Harper", Cat continued, "You said that you have patrolled Krypton Square, what have you found here?"

Behind them in the street several people walked past the camera looking up for a second before shuffling on. "Ms, Grant I have found people from all over the world who have come to Metropolis in hopes of finding a

place where they can fit in, a place where people like myself and Superman who possess powers and abilities not known to normal men and women, can interact without fear of prejudice and persecution."

Cat began to stroll down the sidewalk. "Captain Sawyer, are there any special programs to deal with altercations in this area, since most of its citizens are meta-normals."

"We have special units in place to handle met-normal activity anywhere in the city Ms. Grant." Maggie noticed the camera man panning around the block. *Guess I'm not as photogenic as Harper*, she thought.

Cat stopped and turned toward the camera. "We thought we would get out of our little studio and show you some of Krypton Square itself. And who better to do that than the woman who the residents of Krypton Square have elected their 'mayor' of sorts. Miss Belle Jackson. The camera panned over to a small park.

Belle Jackson, a tall African-American woman, was in her early fifties. She was pretty, though time had begun to show a little in her tall frame. She was a brilliant amateur scientist and a former member of the group known as Power Company. In the late seventies she had developed a hand held microwave emitting device, and was dubbed Microwave Mom, but her greatest power was in her ability to lead and inspire.

Cat and her entourage walked up as Ms. Jackson attended to a young boy. The young boy sobbed as Belle patted with a tissue at a small scrape on his knee. "There, there, Logan, It'll be OK, see look." Belle pulled back the tissue and the scrapes were already gone." The boy smiled at her. "Thanks Ms. Jackson, it's all better now." He said, as he ran off to play.

Cat shot a look at Dan to make sure that he had got that on camera. He gave a "thumbs up", indicating he had. The show was on a 3 minute delay just in case.

Cat introduced herself. "Ms. Jackson, my name is Cat Grant, this is Captain Sawyer and Jim Harper. My producer had contacted you about an interview."

"Of course Ms, Grant, I'm sorry I don't have an office or anything to meet in."

"Oh no this is perfect Ms. Jackson, after all this show is about getting to know Krypton Square and its residents; where better to do that than out here with the children."

Cat indicated the children playing behind them. She knew Dan was zooming in for a shot. *Man this was playing so well.* , she thought.

Guardian stepped up to Belle and offered his hand. She took it and shook it enthusiastically. "Guardian, you old hound dog, how are?"

"Good, Belle, It's been a while." He said, his grin stretching into a wide smile. Belle nodded toward Maggie, "Captain Sawyer."

"Ms. Jackson." Maggie returned.

Cats expression changed, it was time to get serious. "Ms. Jackson, as perfunctory Mayor do you feel that the city government is ignoring Krypton square, especially with the recent rash of violence in this area?"

Belle Jackson was not pleased with the question and felt she had been ambushed. Before she could answer, a scream from across the street pierced the air.

Before the scream died down, Guardian had bounded across the street with Captain Sawyer close behind, SCU issued weapon drawn and powering up. Following close behind was Cat and her cameraman. The scream came from an alleyway beside a bar called "The Phantom Zone" Harper arrived first. A woman ran out of the alleyway, Harper grabbed her by her shoulders.

"Ma'am, what is it? What's wrong?" His voice was soft but commanding.

"Back there," she pointed, "another one." Harper released her and slowly inched his way into the dark alley.

Behind him Maggie stopped Cat and Dan. "You can't stop me from

filming." Cat was yelling.

"I'm not worried about you *filming*, I'm worried about you *dying*, now stay back 'till we've secured the area." Maggie turned to follow Guardian in.

"Harper", she whispered, "What have we got."

"All clear Maggie," Harper paused, and then continued, "I'm afraid he dead."

Maggie Sawyer lowered her weapon and stood with Harper over the body of Lamar Short. Dan flicked on the light on the camera; the little spot bathed the pale body in light as Cat stood solemnly by.

"Remember viewers you saw it here live, the discovery of another body in Krypton Square. *Will the police investigate? Who is responsible?* Follow along as we join in the investigation on 'Metropolis **Real Lives**". Dan swung the camera off his shoulder, "... and we're clear."

Several hours later Maggie walked into the Metropolis Medical Examiners office. "What have you got for me Hooper?" Maggie asked.

Hooper turned from his computer terminals, hours of staring at them had made the thick glasses he wore necessary. He had a thick mop of white unruly hair. "Well, Maggie it seems that Mr. Short here was drowned in the alley."

"You mean drowned and dragged to the alley."

"No, there was nothing to indicate that he was in the water though his lungs were full of water. Look at this. We ran his DNA in the new Lexcorp Meta-Gene sequencer. His power was making water."

"So he drowned himself?" Maggie cell phone buzzed.

"It would appear so." Hooper turned back to the computer screens.

Maggie looked at the phone, damn, it was Grant. "Yes, Ms. Grant", she spoke into the phone. "I realize that Ms. Grant. I am at the Medical Examiners office now. Yes I will be fully prepared to brief you on the findings during tomorrows show." She clipped the phone shut and walked out the door. "Thanks Hooper", she called back.

The Guardian jumped to the other building easily clearing the six feet between them. No one at the Phantom Zone had been any help. Lamar had been a regular; a sweep of his apartment had turned up nothing unusual, nothing unusual now knowing what his power was. This one had been like the others; whoever had killed them had gone to great pains to duplicate their powers. None of them as far as they could tell were related. Jim stood and looked out over Krypton Square, he strained his senses looking and listening for anything out of the ordinary.

The trees in the park hid his presence. They had noticed, finally. It was almost too good. The woman had broadcast the picture on the TV. That was better than he could have hoped for. But it still wasn't big enough. If his plan was going to work he would have to draw even more attention. This'll do it. It should really bring fear and panic, and just when all hope is lost, he'll step in and save the day.

To be continued!

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Food for the mind