



Action Comics #16
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Published: 2007

Categorie(s): Fiction, Fan Fiction

Tag(s): Comics DC2 Superman Guardian Caesar "Martian Manhunter"
"Silver Banshee" "Lois Lane" Lightray Steel Batman "Wonder Woman"
"Lex Luthor"

Action Comics

Issue #16: "History Lessons: A Double-Sized Issue Event!!"

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Letter to the Readers: It should be said that Charlie Wilkins is a fighter. He fights for his ideas. He fights for his opinion. He fights for his stories. Even when put against all odds he pulls through. At the end, it really didn't seem like this would come out in time or at all. But it has come out. Because he fought for it. I had the pleasure of writing this issue with Charlie, and I hope there are more to come. Our combined efforts amounted to an obscene number of Word pages. It's a long read, and is divided into three parts. Read them separately if it helps you get through it. However, while this issue seems to be going everywhere at once and is long, I can promise it will not disappoint and that it is an issue of substantial worth and creativity on the DC2. We worked hard, and I think it shows. Great cover by Mischief and Ramon too.

Presenting, a dynamic DC2 double feature, starring Superman and all your favourite regulars! Prepare for action! Action! Action! As we enter... ACTION COMICS!

Chapter 1

Smallville, Kansas:

A doorbell sounded through the walls of the Kent farm. Martha, who had just finished the dishes, snapped her gloves off in wonderment. Her eyes reared towards the clock.

"Hmm, who could that be?" she murmured to herself, approaching the door. She twisted the handle and in surprise found a stranger at the door. He was a tall, handsome man and she could see the experience in his irises. But upon as gazing at his eyes, Martha found them unusually... inhuman. Quickly disregarding this thought, she addressed the stranger. "Hello is there something I could do for you?" she asked warmly.

"Why, yes. There is." An accomplished smile formed on his lips. "Would you mind if I stepped inside for a moment?" Martha became slightly discerned now, wondering what this man was offering or what he desired.

"Excuse me, I don't mean to be rude, but who are you?"

"J'o... John Jones. I am a friend of your son's, Clark Kent." Martha sighed in relief and then moved aside. John Jones walked in, the heels of his shoes tapping the floor rhythmically. Like any stranger to a cozy home, he inspected the walls and viewed pictures along it of various family members and occasions of joy.

"You'll have to excuse me, I just finished the dish-" John interrupted her calmly, but continued to stare at the pictures admiring them while he spoke.

"Mrs. Kent, it should be said, that while I value your hospitality, I haven't much time. In actuality, I'm not John Jones, and I know that your

son bares another name aside from Clark Kent." Martha, astounded by both Jones' forwardness and his knowledge became extremely cautious. "Kal-El. Superman. The latter by which I know him. I'm a superhero of the Justice League as is your son. My real name is J'onnn J'onzz. I am the Martian Manhunter. We met weeks ago, when Braniac attempted to murder your son. But I wore his form then."

She remembered the day well. "Oh, well then... " Ma Kent searched desperately for some type of response to his string of words, but could find very little. "Is everything... alright?"

"I'm afraid not. Clark... or rather, Superman, has gone missing."

"Well... " Martha pondered for a moment as the memory snapped back to her, "He was just going downtown."

"When was this, Mrs. Kent?" the Martian Manhunter, still disguised, asked intently.

"About ten minutes ago, John. I'm afraid you've just missed him." Mrs. Kent sat down and pulled a seat out for her visitor. Sitting, John scanned the near vicinities for his connection with Clark but could not contact the hero.

"I am not able to telepathically reach him. Something terrible has either happened or he is blocking me." J'onnn regretted having allowed the other Leaguers that privacy with their telepathic connection.

"Look John, I do not know a lot about super heroism though I've observed my son do it for years. I don't know how you heroes cope with the tragic things you see or how you have the endurance to handle as much as you do. But Clark has never been one to truly buckle under pressure. He may become weary at times, and he might seem to fade, but he will always return strong. Clark has always been a resilient young man, and if he's disappeared from your ranks I'm sure there is a reason. Maybe he needs a moment alone, maybe he has grown tired. But don't worry about that boy; he's got his father's stubbornness and heart." Mrs. Kent reassured the Martian.

"I do not mean to be rude, Mrs. Kent, but Superman is one of the most powerful beings on this Earth. He is a valued member of our team and without him and I'm not sure how we will fare. We all set out a number of agreements when we established the Justice League, and for him to intentionally disappear suddenly contradicts them." Mrs. Kent admired the Martian's persistency and objective. "Can we really trust him to return?"

"It's so easy to doubt him, John. It's so easy to doubt the man who bares the world on his shoulders. I think we've all made the mistake of doing it, but Clark is not only a valuable man for his powers but also for whom he is." Mrs. Kent ran her hands along the guised Martian's. "Trust him. He would never betray you. Now, I know you are in a rush for time, but I may tell you a story?"

Contemplating at first, the Martian soon nodded. The elderly lady loved this story and every time she shared it with another her heart became more whole or at least she liked to think so. "If this story does not convince you of Clark as a dependable soul than it shall make you a more hopeful person I suppose. It begins with Clark before he was Superman. He wanted to see the world so one day, he kissed me and his father goodbye and left and so..."

The year was 1996. The world was a busy and bumbling place as it had been throughout history. In any crevice or cranny in the world could be found life and the effects of it. So it was in a small nation, just another crevice in the world, that a man whose destiny was larger than life found himself. An unsure and unaware Clark Kent, the timid son of a farmer had strayed away from his homely Kansas town in search of something greater. But more so in search of something that had always been right under his nose, and had therefore been too obvious to see: himself.

There were many places on and beyond the foreign planet called Earth that the Son of Krypton could have travelled. The sky in fact wasn't the limit. If he had greater knowledge of his curious abilities he could have found himself somewhere outside of this galaxy.

But Clark did not have that knowledge of himself he would have liked to have and he had decided it would have been easier and simpler to venture into charted territory.

Clark had been travelling the globe for more than sixth months now, remarking the beauty and the ugliness of planet Earth, but nothing he had seen so far in his travels would prepare him for the following experience. Nothing would prepare this Kryptonian for the eye opening footsteps he would trace in the dirt of West Africa. So it was here in Sierra Leone in the midst of Civil War that Clark Kent, timid son of a farmer, had carried himself.

Just south of Kabala, was a small modest village nestled in a valley surrounded by mountains and plateaus that towered like walls as to defend this peaceful tribe from the terrors outside. A following of rebels, the RUF or Revolutionary United Front had challenged the Sierra Leone government seemingly without reason which had ignited a gruesome and blood-marked civil war.

The rest of the world wasn't ambivalent nor were they fully aware of what was truly happening behind these borders. Clark Kent knew only the little bits he had heard on the news back in America, so he felt a prick of shock at the fear of the village while they watched the stranger approach. From the distance the tribe could not tell exactly who this figure was. He was simple. Not an RUF, as he was not in company and only carried a humble load.

Little did they know that the white man pacing his steps towards them meant no harm. The village's people, disturbed, rushed to the direction of the arriving stranger.

"Halt, who are you?" a tattered but dynamic voice arose from the crowd as an old man parted his neighbours. An ancient artifact himself, dark wrinkled skin had wrapped itself around this flimsy skeleton. The faded eyes that bore cataracts seemed out of place, acting averse to the vibrant but stained clothing he wore. Even in this weakened state, one leg near crippled with a crutch under his left shoulder, there was an aura that

deemed him powerful and strong.

"My name is Clark Kent. An American, I am not RUF, I am not government. I mean you no harm whatsoever." The crowd was quite puzzled by his response, dissecting every word in their minds but being unable to comprehend why this unusual stranger had journeyed to their village of all places.

"Very well, then you won't mind letting us borrow your load? If what you say is true, and you mean no harm, surely you won't mind us checking you?" Clark removed the straps from his shoulders, tossing his sack to the ground before them.

"By all means."

"Excuse our precaution, Mista Kent, we have done much to remain hidden the past five years, and it has done us well. Our brothers and sisters are dying beyond these mountains, however if we are lucky, *they* will never find us." The old man, identified now by Abu Beah, dined with Clark hours later below an aged tree of giant proportions. It was a modest meal, but with resources low, one could never complain about rations like these.

The Kansan's eyes were fixated on the red earth rested underneath him, and the cloudless blue sky above, a wonderfully beautiful contrast. The mountains surrounding were the natural guardians of this small civilization, gifted by gods Abu believed.

"But if they do, what will your people do when the time comes?" these words struck the ancient man like bricks to the back of the neck. His eyes watered before he regained the strength that had garnered him the respect of his neighbours.

"If we are lucky Mista Kent." Deciding to shift subjects, curiosity got the best of the ancient human as he inquired, "So what brings you to Sierra Leone? Such a war-torn and shattered country surely is not attracting an American tourist."

Clark searched his inner self momentarily. Within these thoughts he found barely anything, and maybe that's why he was here. He needed to find something within himself. He needed to identify the Kryptonian who had been impersonating a human. He needed an identity, a real one as well as a façade.

"I was raised in a place called Kansas, a state of the USA. It's a lovely place, with lovely people. But I felt out of place there, and had always been told I was meant for more. At first, I couldn't imagine what could be more than farming with my parents, the two most wonderful people in the world. But my Pa, a great man, told me I was destined for greater things, told me of my 'true' existence. I was living a life, that I don't think I was meant to live, and it turned everything upside down. Somehow I found myself on an airline heading for Melbourne and I haven't been home since. In my travels I've seen both great and terrible acts since then on my journey."

As Clark went into greater detail of his travels, Abu marvelled with his lips curled and eyelids squinted at the distance, the extraordinary person beside him had covered. Most of this man's adventure had been on foot alone, through Buddhist temples in Eastern Asia and destroyed cities in the Middle East.

At the conclusion of their talk under the massive tree bathed in leaves, the elder extended his hand as an act of kindness to the American and granted him an offer.

"Your stories, as well as your person, have intrigued me. Stay here. For tonight, sleep among us and tomorrow you can plot your next move. However, be warned. My people are weary and all might not be as articulate or willing to communicate as I am."

With these words of wisdom, Clark nodded and then followed the crippled man back to his yurt where he retired for the night.

Morning rose, as did the sun gracefully over the mountains of eastern Sierra Leone. Clark Kent, as to not interfere or overwhelm the townspeople remained in his tent for the majority of the morning. Without control

after waking, Clark's super-hearing poured in sounds from every direction, the birds chirping, those that continued to sleep, talking (some in dialects that were hard to understand) amongst the people, and occasional snippets of his one true friend here, Abu, addressing his fellow villagers in a paternal manner.

But the cacophony was mostly soothing and enlightening until one noise seeped in that discerned him. Gunfire. From the sounds of it, it wasn't within the valley but near enough for caution. It'd be best to inform Abu, but how? He would have to wait until it became closer, and for a better time than the morning. Alert him now, and everybody might go ballistic, panic would ensue. No, Clark would wait for a better time. Finally the rush of sounds became controllable, and Clark was beginning to get a handle on this foreign ability.

As the Last Son of Krypton withdrew from the borrowed tent, stares of suspicion and curiosity were gifted to him from all around. Time resumed, and the villagers went about their life, but not without keeping Clark within their peripheral vision. A hand grazed Clark's shoulder, but he had heard it coming. The thumping and persistent digging of a sturdy wooden cane into the ground behind him had already notified him of Abu's presence.

"Today, Mista Kent, you will assist in the fields. Is that okay with you?" Clark smiled at the chance to interact with these people and the thought of labor didn't distract him, especially because he'd be able to do it with ease. In relation to his strength, Clark wasn't sure of the limitations really, but he had been farming all of his life and knew that manual work like this would be basic. "And may I introduce to you a very dear friend of mine, Rukan." A tall, built lady emerged from an adjacent tent, glaring directly into Clark's eyes. She had the aura of a warrior, of one who had been in various struggles, and it showed physically, as she was naturally painted with scars digging into her torso as well as her face.

Rukan possessed a trait the rest of the community lacked: a coldness lurking in her. This village lived in fear, but they had not lived through hardship like Clark could tell she had just by the looking in Rukan's eyes.

As they trekked into the fields, Clark pretending to be partly fatigued tried to strike up conversation several times, with "Were you born here?" and "So do you have any family?" and various other futile attempts. The resilient woman before him was as silent as the grave. Finally, by the time the two had reached the outskirts of the valley, in fields paved with red soil and sand dressed crops Rukan spoke.

"I am not a fool. You are not here for vacation purposes. The only reason some white American man would be coming here would be for something of value to you. You want the diamonds don't you? Your greed fuels you? Or maybe, your study in journalism you have spoken with Abu about is why you're here. You wish to exploit our fear, our pain." Clark had been expecting an encounter of this sort, so he was initially not offended just surprised by Rukan's sudden ability to speak.

"I assure you, I'm not here for anything like that-

"I was not born here," she continued, "I walked miles and miles to this valley, seeking refuge among this village. I had a family Mista Kent. I **had** one. My husband was executed before my eyes while I pretended to be dead only a few footsteps away. They took my son. I haven't seen him since," the calm African had suddenly dropped into a hysterical fit of rage. "God knows, they turned him into some soldier. Some ruthless hateful killer!" The dry soil beneath the soles of her tattered shoes had grown wet from the excessive flow of tears. "I wake every morning, with guilt. If the pain was **not** enough for me already, they also granted me the guilt! Now, no white, wealthy American comes strolling into Sierra Leone in search of himself! No sane man voyages into a battleground to seek guidance! I was barely educated, but I am not mad!"

Silence prevailed. For a minute, there was only murmured sobs. Clark was in awe, unable to comprehend the grief that the person opposite him had just poured out of her heavy soul.

"I AM NO FOOL, CLAHK KENT!"

"I... well... " stammered mumbles were all he could push out with his tongue.

"If there is any word that you came to this valley, RUF are sure to follow. You cannot bring pain to these people for your doings. Leave!" as her dress dragged in the wind, her left arm rose with a poignant finger aimed towards an opening within the canyon. "It is going to rain when noon comes. There is no use for farming today. Go. Leave what these people have left to themselves."

Equipped with his pack, Clark followed suite. Shamefully, but with understanding, the Last Son of Krypton trudged through the opening going again beyond the valley and leaving the village behind.

As noon came, so did summer rain pouring upon Clark Kent and the makeshift camp he had set up.

Gunfire. Within the noise of the soft tapping of raindrops against the Earth came the discerning racket of gunfire, much closer this time. The direction was uncertain though, Clark could not trace it towards any point of the compass.

Rising from the mud his whole body accelerated as he sped atop the mountains. A wake of mud splashed upwards trailing after him as he quickly charted the peaks until having reached the highest one.

"Kill him!" the flashes of light danced in pattern with the blasts of sound. Bullets skimmed the air breaking raindrops. As the first speeding piece of lead bounced off his shoulder, Clark became reacquainted with his immunity to bullets. This was no challenge. To him, this was child's play.

He saw the astonishment in the soldiers' eyes as he sliced through their gun barrels like soft marshmallow. These men, who had been taken from their homes, brainwashed and turned into ruthless warriors for the first time had come to a realization of what real fear was. A grenade went up in the air, and they all scattered. Rather than flee, Clark seized the grenade with his bare hand. As the explosive went off, he felt a minor concussion inside of his palm but no real pain.

"Run!" the RUFs slipped down the slopes through the taxing and muddy rocks. A single boy, not older than fifteen, tripped and plunged into the

sharp gravel. Paying no attention to their fallen comrade, one of the soldiers chucked a second grenade in Clark's direction in an attempt to shake the titan off. It fell just short of the child.

"No! Please almighty Allah! No! Spare me!" the injured teenager screamed helplessly. From the top peak, Clark raced down the mountainside, and wrapped his arms around the boy as the detonation went off. The terrain exploded, making a momentary rain consisting of dirt and boulders. As falling debris shattered against the Kryptonian's back he watched despairingly as the soldiers continued their escape down the hill.

This boy was now useless to them. They had taken an innocent soul and turned him into a monster only to abandon him. Rising from the gravel with the unconscious child in his arms, Clark sped off towards Abu's village.

Scanning the African environment that had culminated around him, the Kryptonian concentrated his eyes. Like lenses of a poor prescription the image of rich landscape went out of focus. Blur coated his vision grasping on but occasionally being overpowered until Clark had finally gained control. Miles and miles on end, but no violence within any of them. Then something clicked behind him, but something was absent. There had been no footsteps or audible warning.

It had been difficult to manage all of these powers at once; they were in a rapid state of rotation that farmer had found hard to manipulate.

"So, why are you here?" an RUF commander smirked triumphantly behind the alien. "I repeat: Why. Are. You. Here? Diamonds? Relief? What is a white man's purpose here?"

Clark spun like a tornado around in a flurry of speed. The trigger the commander had his finger on, pressed down as the Kryptonian crunched the firearm within his fingers. There was an explosive backfire engulfing the RUF's face. As the gun-toting warrior sunk to the mud, the other RUFs stared at the opposing titan in fear.

"They are coming! Word from the village just outside the canyon. **He** has brought them to this place." Rukan spoke angrily, confiding in the elder. "You took him in, and now they have followed him here. He cannot repair his own mistakes. We are doomed because of some outsider!"

"Hush Rukan, I'm thinking. We must move our people as far as we can." Abu's words were definite but truly empty as even he knew there was nowhere they could flee to.

"Abu! I'm back!" a familiar voice echoed into the tent from the rain outside. "I need to speak with you!" Rukan shot the elder a disgusted look, as Abu fixated his eyes on the tent's opening. Clark appeared only moments later baring the child soldier slung over his shoulder.

"Who is the boy?" Rukan interrogated, "Is he RUF?"

"Yes. But he is harmless-"

"You brought us a child from the enemy? What're you thinking?" Rukan exploded. Clark parted the boy's hair to reveal his battered face and smiled at it before turning back to her.

"He is as yours was," Rukan arched an eyebrow sceptically as she inspected the child. "No, you misunderstood me. He is not your son." Clark reiterated. "But he represents your son. An innocent boy probably dragged away from his town. Brainwashed, turned into a juvenile monster. Nobody deserves that fate" Abu perched himself humbly in a chair as he watched the outsider with pride. "I think I can help fix this."

In regret, Rukan turned from Clark beginning to pace. After a few quiet minutes, only accompanied by the orchestra of rain pattering on the roof, Rukan spoke. Her voice was calm and controlled a state that was rarely seen from her. "Why should we trust you?"

"Why shouldn't you?"

"Because this is not what you think it is. These men are dangerous killers. They will not hesitate to spill your blood across the dirt just because you

are not a native. You pretend like you can stop a squadron of armed men whose only instinct is to murder. Why should *I* trust you?"

"Because I told you to. Miss, if you can forget everything you know about what's possible and impossible for just a moment and look earnestly into my eyes," Clark ran his hand gently along her arm as her eyes gradually shifted towards his, "You will see I mean no harm. Trust isn't about your predetermined assumptions, Miss. It's a leap of faith."

There was a moment of intimacy between all three. A certain intensity emitted from each of their hearts that filled the room. Each held a key to the survival of this village. Though she despised the thought of admitting she had been mistaken, Rukan glanced at the elder, who grinned his rotting teeth back at her. Willingly, the scarred woman turned back to the outsider with a glint of hope in her eyes. A trying smile captured her lips briefly.

"How?"

Clark stared at the child soldier lying on the bed affectionately. Redemption; to redeem one's wrongs. This was his chance, a new shot at an old target. A fresh start to prove himself, but to who? Looking into the excuse of a mirror that these people valued as a treasure, he saw himself. Not just the image of his body, but his actual person.

"I'm not from around here," Clark stated simply. The elder and the survivor were unsure of what to make of these words. Here was relative. Here could have been Smallville, Kansas. Here could have meant the remains of a planet a billions of miles away in space. Here was relative.

A gust blew through the door, as the outsider became a blur and disappeared within seconds. Two jeeps rumbled through the valley with their gunmen firing into the air recklessly. The speeding bullet of a blur visually materialized as he lunged forth at the first car. His feet jammed into the hood, tearing through the metal coat with ease. The car swerved out of control as the passengers panicked firing bullets. The ones that came remotely close to the Kryptonian were useless to the natural energy shield that coated Clark's body.

Glass scattered throughout the air as Clark's arm shattered through the windshield. Grasping the driver's neck, Clark could not believe his own strength. The RUF soldier's face became purple immediately. As soon as he let go the man became weary and fainted. With the engine damaged beyond repair and an unconscious pilot, the jeep became a whirlwind twisting in around in a flurry of bullets. Clark abandoned the vehicle, heaving the other three men with him.

Clark watched his amateurish mistake go up in flames, literally, as the wild automobile flung into a nearby yurt. "No!" in a pool of guilt his attention returned to the three RUFs. He quickly grabbed one of their wrists, twisting it into an ugly mess without a thought. An ear-battering shriek rang through the valley. "Stay here, do you understand?" The damaged soldier nodded in a fit of tears, his two partners gaping at the outsider.

The RUF regiments flooded into the village striking terror into the hearts of all. The soldiers piled out of their jeeps, finding sick pleasure in treating their weapons as toys. In a desperate last ditch effort, crowds compressed the streets forgetting selflessness. The violence had killed morals and replaced them with animalistic instinct.

"You expect me to wait for him to keep a promise that cannot be kept?" Rukan loaded one of the few guns the poor village had to offer.

"What about what you said?" Abu questioned, "What about the leap of faith?"

"Leap of faith? Ha. With all respect Mista Beah, what if he doesn't land?" Rukan grimaced cocking the barrel of the rifle readily. Regret swept her as she noticed the loss of hope in her elder's face. "I'm sorry. I just... all of these people, they still have fresh lives. They can still live. I lost my life a long time ago," she mourned, giving her elder a trying smile. "If this is it... then... goodbye, Abu."

"Goodbye my friend."

Click-click.

Clark skidded into the village in a blitz. Gore. Too much of it. A woman yelped for help as she was sluggishly dragged along the ground by a lustful soldier. Immediately, Clark flashed in front of the RUF in direct defiance.

"Let her go."

"And if I don't?" dropping her to the ground like luggage, he grinned with a sparkling gold tooth.

"Then this" Clark clutched the man's shirt and lifted him up without stress. "Happens!" the human rebel was hurled across the dirt road crashing into a nearby hut. Clark helped up the frightened victim and ushered her away into the fleeing crowd.

The rumbling of an engine grew louder behind him. Clark turned just in time and subconsciously signaled his brain's self-protection mechanism. Lasers of heat spouted from Clark's eyes, almost involuntarily, detonating the jeep into a ball of fire. The guerillas floundered out of the car, charging in every point of the compass.

"This... " he said, "is going to be harder than I thought... "

The rain had dried. All that remained was chaos caked in mud. The clarity of the conflict had been lost and now it had become a giant free-for-all. Rukan pummeled a commanding officer to the clay with the butt of her rifle. She wheeled her gun back into a shooting position aiming it down on the beaten combatant. But before she could pull the trigger, her victim fell into a demented fit of laughter. At first, she smiled in a sadistic tone, but then realized something was eerily wrong.

"Okay, why in hell are you laughing?" she asked kneeling down beside him.

"The scars on your face. I remember you," a visage of loathing marked her face as she examined the RUF soldier. Seeing past the bruises, she recognized him. A chain of painful memories triggered in her mind and she whipped the back of his head with her rifle.

"I'll murder you." She scowled at him raising her gun again.

"I figured as much. But if you kill me now, how will you ever see your son again?"

A bloody wreck of a soldier catapulted through the wall of a hut. Three of his comrades who had been looting the house curved towards him. They loomed over him suspiciously.

"What the hell happened?"

"We... " the shaken soldier coughed and scrambled through his words "M-must go. D'ey have a god on their side."

"What the hell are you-" the wall behind them split open, being trampled by Clark as he strode in. His eyes glowed bright red and his face bore a frown composed of pure disgust.

"What kind of man are you!?" one shrieked. Clark only beamed deviously.

"I am no man."

KRAKOOM!

Abu sat still, blankly staring inside of his hut. A war of diamonds and greed was taking place just beyond these walls, a small war but a disturbingly violent one nonetheless; a miniscule war that was part of a more violent collective battle; a one-sided war, in which his people, his family most likely would not win. However, he accepted it, for that was all an old piece of furniture like him could do. The door crashed open, plopping on the floor. A combatant marched in with a burning look in

his eyes. Abu could do nothing, so he waved cheerfully.

One by one in the midst of the battle, RUFs were sending helpless men to their knees before sticking a bullet in the back of their head. Abu's fate had seemingly chosen the same path for him, because he had been thrown into the line. He was a useless old man to them, and his wisdom and charity could not aid in their violent rebellion.

"Send the next!" Abu was grabbed the rags around his collar and hurled into the mud. "May you find refuge in God, old man."

BANG.

The barrel of the gun was wedged up suddenly, and the gunshot within it tore it apart. Clark slowly demonstrated his strength, curling the rifle into a small knot of metal. In resistance, the arms-wielding man flung a rapid left hook at his opponent. The Last Son of Krypton crunched it into a useless deformity. No longer would it be used for harming others.

"Aaaah! You monst'a!" despite their fallen comrade, the surrounding RUFs remained resilient firing at the bullet-proof outsider. Clapping his hands together, waves of compressed concussion toppled the soldiers upside down.

"Get down!" Clark yelled, giving a fair warning to all in the vicinity. He switched around staring directly at one of the jeeps. As both RUFs and citizens of the village crouched, Clark's eyes generated beams of scorching heat. The compacted energy fired from his pupils blazing through the engine of the truck. His warning became meaningful as the jeep erupted into a rain of debris.

A captured soldier pounded to the ground with his hands tied behind his back. Clark looked up and his eyes met with Rukan's. She was in her primal warrior form, packing the rage of a thousand men in her eyes.

"Who is he?"

"An old *friend*, and a disgusting piece of a man. And he should be dead, but that'd be too easy. I'll secure" Rukan displayed her rifle in clear view for the outsider "this section of the town. The remains of their squad

have fled," she grimaced staring to the mountains. "Track them down."

The Last Son of Krypton nodded and sped off at with inhuman acceleration.

"What is he?!" one of the maintained soldiers scowled.

"He is the beginning," the warrior stated hazily "and the end."

As a cloud of dust shaped in his trail, Clark ran beside one of the escaping jeeps. He showed a small smile at the panicking passengers. However, that smile faded into an abyss of rage as he seized the side of the automobile. It came to a screeching halt.

"I'm going to spare your lives. After all the death you've caused to the innocent people who live in fear of your blood-marked hands, I shouldn't. But, it is not my place to judge, only to help. Return to your fellow rebels, tell them this valley is under my protection." The passengers nodded, their minds tampered by fear.

Clark let go, and they drove away in a rush to the peaks. Before they had left the Kryptonian's view of a carpet in the jeep was rose and from underneath a captured boy screamed for help. One of the soldiers knocked the boy back down, pressing the carpet back over him.

"I don't think so!" Clark raced up the slopes after the hurrying truck. In a rush to act, Clark pressed his lips together and blew a stream of air. The air culminated around the jeep's tires becoming frigid. Ice embodied the truck's wheels and the car lost control skidding through the peaks. "Oh..."

Madness ensued within the car as the icy tires steered it towards a cliff. The steep slope came at the passengers like a swift wave, catching them off guard.

WHOOM!

A giant deep dig below them, spanning at least half a mile down. They freefell and each, in their mind, saw their end. At a loss of breath, the usually violent warriors could only pray in this crisis.

The Kryptonian watched in horror as the bandits plummeted through the air towards certain demise. There was no logic thought, only instinct. Only pure trust. Clark's forefoot rocketed him off the edge.

A Leap of Faith.

The air folded out evenly beneath the Last Son of Krypton. The cold wind dug into his pores. A certain lightness pursued his heavy body, giving him an undeniable sense of freedom. He felt nothing and everything all at once. It was that feeling. Flight.

Clark caught the truck's underside in a blur of speed. Soaring gracefully back to the peak, he placed the fallen vehicle back on the Earth.

"The child comes with me." Awe. "Leave!" They tossed the boy from the truck and drove in a hurry. Awe.

By sunset, the few RUFs left had been forced out of the valley and most never would dream of returning. Clark grimaced over the shattered village. The once beautifully decorated town he had strolled into appeared as a ruined war zone.

Abu's mirror slept in the wreckage, frowning in disgust at the failed hero.

"I... did this," he confessed as the elder crept up behind him.

"Nonsense, we were not as well hidden as we had imagined, Mista Kent."

But the outsider was at a loss of words; he could lift skyscrapers with ease, but was unable to find the right words to condone the damage he

had done on the village.

"They would 'ave found us you know? You cannot blame yourself for what you could not prevent."

"But my pres-"

"They would have come whether you led them here or not. While you shun yourself, my village's people look upon you as a savior."

"I can help rebuild. In a day's time I can restore what it once wa-"

"Mista Kent. You've great power. Your father was correct when he said you were destined for great things. Not only are your physical feats remarkable, but your bravery is too. However, you cannot do everything for us. Surely, all of our people would have perished before the blood smeared guns of the RUF were it not for you," Abu knelt down examining the broken mirror with a tone of delight in his voice "but we must learn to help ourselves. You cannot fool me. You are no human." Abu gazed into a dusty mirror, while an old man retuned the face on the other side. "You're destined to do great things for this world and accomplish feats no single man could ever do. But you must also guide the rest of the world to help them. Do not act **for** them, act to **inspire** them. Because the people of this world have potential. All my life I've seen different people, evil and good men. But all human beings have the capability to love and protect each other. You just need to show them the way," Abu dusted the mirror off, gifting Clark a smile in his reflection.

"Thank you for your wisdom, Abu. You are a great man. A great... leader" the Kryptonian declared. "I know your people have that potential. I'll be gone first thing in the morning," Clark patted the ancient man on the shoulder with a comforting grin before trudging off into the fields.

The red sun sank into the hills of gold as Rukan approached an unsuspecting Clark. His super-hearing had been masked by his deep thought and so her feet slowly crunched on the dry grass without him noticing. She observed for a moment, watching the unearthly warrior at peace.

"When you said you could save us, I thought you were just being daft." The warrior of a woman strolled up behind Clark. "To be honest, I thought nothing really of your trust."

"Then, why did you leave your town's fate in my hands?" he responded. He did not change his view, and stayed still as he had been before.

"I didn't. You gave our town's fate to your own hands. Besides, it's not my town anyway. I come from the West, far enough from here."

"What do you mean by enough?" Clark inquired finally making eye contact.

"Far enough that it's easier to forget."

"Well," Clark was puzzled by her philosophy. "Why would you want to forget?"

"Why would you want to remember?"

"Because I have nothing to remember. Just a few things that I took with me."

"Ah, where are you originally from?" Rukan asked, unsure of where super-powered titans came from.

"Afraid you can't see it in daylight. If I stayed another night I could show you, but I really should get going," Clark grinned. Rukan returned the favor, still confused about how they would be able to see his place of origin at nighttime.

"I'm sorry about your son," Clark placed his hand on her shoulder as she bowed her head. "Good luck finding him."

"Thank you, but I do not need luck," the Kryptonian replied to this with a friendly smile, although the comment had disoriented him. "I trust him. It is risky and probably dangerous, but I dare to hope. It is a leap of faith, right?"

"... " an exchange of truths. "Right."

Another crevice in the world filled.

Justice Hall:

Today

"J'onn what took you so long?" Wonder Woman inquired coming across the Martian snacking on some Oreos in the Justice Hall. "We'd been waiting. What's the news of Superman? Did his mother tell you anything?"

"Superman will be back."

"How can you say that? Did you speak with him?"

"It's Ch'ak'tnoyu." The Amazonian was puzzled, what had the Martian Manhunter just said? "It means in my language 'the hope instilled within'. A leap of faith, Diana. I believe that's what this Earth calls it." Diana could not help but smile at the Martian becoming accustomed to Earthly things.

"Okay, J'onn," she agreed. He would be back. He would return.

Chapter 2

Ireland:

Hundreds of years ago:

Fires licked against the walls of the houses, shadows danced and the wind howled, and two men sat around a fire, sipping from their cups.

"I'm going to die, Bearchan."

"What?"

"I *heard* her. I heard the *sídhe*... She called my name in the night... And I knew then my time was up."

"But... "

"I'm going to die."

"But the *sídhe*... You... We can still save you."

"What? Going against the will of the Lord? If you hear the *sídhe* call your name, you're as good as dead... "

"You've seen the McDougal girl? Her hair? The way she dresses?"

"You don't mean... "

"I do." He leant in close to his friend and began to whisper. "She's one of them, Adair. She's the one who's been calling your name. We never see her except when she's with her father... If we kill her, you'll be safe."

"But Garrett... He'll kill us both... "

"Not if we're careful... " Bearchan pulled his knife from his belt. "Not if we slit her throat so she can howl no longer... "

Metropolis:

Today:

Dust. He could smell the dust. Thousands upon thousands of old books, sonnets, plays, comedy and drama, science fiction and horror, all here. He picked up one book, flipped through the pages and then put it down. "You well, Eddie?" He continued to peruse the bookshelves, searching and sifting.

The bookshop owner smiled, not that you could tell from beneath that great big white beard he wore. His cheeks were rosy, his eyes green, and he had a large nose, which on rested a pair of circular glasses. "Jim! How are you?" He waddled from behind the counter and patted the large man on the back. "You've not aged one bit! In fact, you look younger!"

Jim Harper, *The Guardian*, smiled. He was wearing black trousers and a white shirt; his tie was stuffed in his pocket. "Thanks, Eddie. I... "

"Don't even try and compliment me, Jim. You know the years haven't been kind."

"Lies and slander, my friend! You're not dead. I think that is a strong reminder of how fair and just God is. I remember when I always had to pull you out of trouble, you know that? How you always got involved with a bad crowd and I had to kick their heads in, and save you."

"Ha! Good times."

"Anyway, how's the wife?"

"Ha! The usual, Jim. How about you, any beautiful young lady at home?"

"I have my eye on someone Eddie, but don't think I'd tell you about it!" The two laughed, and then there came a jingle of bells as the door to the shop opened slowly.

"Got a shipment of antique books here for Edward Birch... ?" The man raised his clipboard and motioned to his van outside.

Jim nodded. "You sign, I'll go get them."

Ireland:

Hundreds of years ago:

"Castle Broen is wasted on these people... " Adair and Bearchan crept through the hallowed halls of the castle, the shadows welcoming them into their embrace.

"Garrett McDougal is a good man, Bearchan... "

"Maybe. But his kin aren't... " Bearchan smiled slightly as he found what he was looking for. "Here. Siobhan's chamber."

"What about Garrett? And his son, Bevan?"

"I've been here for dinner before, Adair, they sleep in different wings... " Bearchan slowly pushed open the door, and his smile turned to a grin as he saw Siobhan McDougal sleeping in her bed. "Yes... "

Metropolis:

Today:

"What's this?" Eddie glanced at the list of books he was expecting, and then at the books that arrived. "This isn't right, Jim... Looks like I've been given... Oh, wait... " He removed a layer of old books, a gust of dust engulfing him as he placed them on the counter beside him and then saw the tomes he was expecting, "here they are. I've been given some extras... Antiques by the looks of them... "

"Best call your friend and see if he meant to." Jim smiled and placed another box on the inside of the shop, and then began to look at the new items. "They smell old... "

"It's my old friend from Ireland, Jim. He sent me a load of stuff that had

been in his storage for a couple of decades. Didn't want the damp to get to them... " Eddie smiled and picked up an old book. "This looks interesting." He carefully flicked through the pages. "Have a look at this. Do you recognize this language?"

"Latin? Oh, wait... " Harper paused and began to mutter to himself, remembering words and languages that he had learnt through the many long years of his life, "It looks like a Goidelic language, Eddie. Old Irish."

"Yes, I realised that, but it's like nothing I've ever read. A mix of dialects that... Hmm. I need... Wait, I think I understand now... "

"Well... What's it say?"

Eddie checked the front of the book, and smiled, opening the pages again and running an aged finger along red ink. "It's a story."

Ireland:

Hundreds of years ago:

"She's... She's not *anything*, Bearchan. Come on, let's get out of here... "

Bearchan looked back at Adair, and fumbled with his belt, "You go, I'm—" Siobhan jerked up in her bed as she awoke, but the large man to her side jammed his hand down against her lips, stifling her cries. "—I'm busy."

"You can't... What are you doing?!"

Bearchan clambered on top of the young woman, her pale cheeks burning red as she realised what was happening. "What does it look like!" He began to pull the bed sheets off the bed.

"You can't do this! Get off of her!"

Bearchan grabbed a knife from his boot, and pointed it at his friend. "When I'm done with her, we'll talk."

"I... " Adair looked at the frantic eyes of the young woman beneath his

friend, and stumbled against the wall, barely holding himself up. He couldn't do anything. He... "Ack!" He felt blood dribble from his back, as a man tore a dagger out of the wound. "I... "

"GET OFF OF MY DAUGHTER!" Garrett kicked Adair away from him and began to storm towards the man attempting to accost his young daughter. Bearchan leapt away from the bed and threw his dagger at the chest of the greying Patriarch, and it found its mark, the man dropping his own weapon and stumbling to the floor, groping at the sword buried into his front. "Guh. Gah... "

Bearchan pulled up his trousers, and stalked toward the felled man who once considered him a friend. "You aren't going to stop me from doing anything now, are you, Garrett?" He pulled the weapon out of the elder McDougal, and pushed him to the ground, and then looked over at the dribbling body of his compatriot, Adair. "Seems that she was a bad omen, doesn't she Adair?" He turned back to the girl, and pointed his weapon at her. "And you... "

Siobhan stuttered with fear as she saw the bloody dagger glint in the moonlight.

And then she screamed his name.

Metropolis:

Today:

"And then... ?" Jim Harper smiled and sipped his coffee.

"The legend says here that Bearchan died, that the *sídh*e protected their own and dragged him to the Otherworld with him ... But... "

"But what?"

Eddie closed the book, more dust blowing out from between the old pages. "It's a legend. So who knows what really happened?"

"Can I keep this?" Jim pointed at the book they had been looking at, and grinned. "I know a friend who might be interested in reading about some

old legends."

"Sure. Free of charge."

Jim looked at his watch and finished drinking. "I'm on the clock in an hour. I'll see you same time next week." He exited the shop, only to be passed by a shady looking man, who entered behind him. He dismissed it, and then went about his way.

"Eddie," the man whispered. "We need your help again."

Birch sighed. "Again?"

"And we'll reimburse you well enough."

Eddie's eyes lit up. "You know where the back room is, have at it."

Downtown Metropolis:

"Well this is irritating." Caesar looked out as a small creature pranced around on parked cars and over lampposts. "It seems..." He looked over at the group of young police officers behind him, and grinned. "... Are you paying any attention?"

"What is that thing?"

"It seems to be a Psychopomp."

"Psycho what?"

Caesar sighed. Imbeciles. "Homework then! Tonight: Read a book. A dictionary. Go on Lexipedia and do a search for the occult! A Psychopomp is a being that, if it feels you deserve it, will drag you down into hell. But definitions are different from one occult source to the next. To simplify without sounding like an idiot... Think... *Charon*? Anyone?"

One young officer looked up at Caesar, who nodded for her to speak. "The Styx guy?"

"Yes! Thank you! Double points for you. Charon. Boat man who escorted

souls from one side of the Acheron to the other!" He paused, and began to wave his wand around. "As Captain Sawyer won't let me enchant your bullets until I prove myself worthy of her much lauded trust... " His wand began to shimmer as a ruin appeared from nowhere and hovered in midair, and then shot out toward the Psychopomp and entrapped it. "Luckily you have me around. The walls between dimensions are weak here because of the demon that emerged a while ago. The dimensional barrier is like a bloody wound, liable to infection if not treated properly... " Caesar looked at the hotel he had parted ways with his sister in, and sighed. "... But with a demon of that power? Hmm. We'll have to keep a look out for the time being."

"What now?" Another officer chuckled and hoisted his rifle to his back.

"Now? Now we return to Central. My shift is done and your dear friend Jim Harper will be joining you shortly."

A quiet chorus of 'yesses' and 'scores' spread among the officers. Caesar rolled his eyes and wrapped his black and red cloak tightly around his body, shivering as something crept over his spine. He shrugged it off, and continued. "Thanks for making me feel so glad to have accepted this meager assignment."

Metropolis Central:

"Maggie?" Jim Harper smiled cheerfully as he knocked on the door to his superior's office, and entered. Maggie Sawyer was sitting quietly in her large leather chair, reading reports. "Are you ok?" He wasn't wearing his gold and blue costume, nor the special riot uniform made for him by the techs two floors down. He simply wore black trousers and a white shirt, his shield in a black zip case on his back. "Maggie?"

She turned slowly, and nodded glumly. "I'm fine."

"What are you reading?"

"Nothing." She placed the papers down on her desk. Harper could see the name D. Turpin peak out from between brown pages. "What can I do you for?"

"Heh, I got you something. I don't know if you'll like it, but... I thought what the heck, you might." He handed her a small wrapped present, and she smirked.

"You do know that this is against regulations?"

"You do know that I don't care?" He motioned for her to continue. "How's our friend doing out on the streets?"

"Half the force loves him, half hate him. He needs to tone down the cockiness. Maybe." She smiled cynically. "Totally."

"He's a good guy."

"He's a cocky son of a gun, that's what he is." Maggie opened the wrapping and looked at the book in her hands. "What's this?"

"It's old. A book of Irish legends and—"

Maggie opened the book and suddenly she could no longer hear Jim Harper speaking. Instead, a new voice enters her mind.

"You're alone, aren't you? Full of guilt because you lost your family to the beast. Because you froze and couldn't do a thing." It scratched at her mind, and she had never felt this numb before. She could barely think, let alone react to the voice. She grit her teeth, and closed her eyes tightly, willing the voice to go away. **"Everything's so hard now, and you don't know what to do, but I can help you... "**

"H-Help me?"

"I can help you, Maggie. I can help you be free... "

Jim Harper didn't know what was going on. Maggie was muttering to herself, and he distinctly heard a call for help. "Maggie? Can you hear me? Maggie!"

"They are nothing, Maggie. I am something. Something that can help you heal the wounds that still burn in your soul... "

The book dropped from her hands and fell to the floor. Outside, Caesar entered the office floor from the elevator and immediately staggered back, only to be caught by one of the officers from his shift. "Sir?"

"Someone comes... Someone who knows the truth... "

"Oh, no... " He stumbled up, and sprinted for Maggie's office, he saw the imposing frame of Jim in the doorway, and began to shout at his friend. "Harper, what's happening?"

"Let us begin your baptism of fire."

"It's Maggie, something—"

The room exploded in light as Maggie, still slumped over in her chair, was engulfed in an otherworldly cacophony of magicks. The two men hid their eyes, then looked up—"NO MORE!" and were thrown back against the wall, the plaster shuddering at their momentum. **"NO LONGER MAGGIE SAWYER... NOW... FOREVER... SILVER BANSHEE!"**

Caesar gulped. "Oh, crap. Don't... "

The Silver Banshee, somehow inhabiting Maggie Sawyer's body, began to scream. She screamed and screamed, and every police officer in the building suddenly began to black out from the pain. Caesar struggled to stand, but even he, with his mystical charms and trinkets in his pockets and around his neck, crumpled down, blood slowly trickling from his ears.

**Interlude:
The Daily Planet
Today:**

She looked at him in amazement. "I can't believe you just told me that, Perry. Are you serious?"

"I'm afraid so, Lois." Perry shook his head. "But necessary."

"And dangerous!" She looked down at the layout of the next edition. "But is it worth it?"

"The insights on the dirty dealings that his company takes part in... ? Completely. But we can't reveal the source, you understand that. So we want to ask you to have the by-line."

"You want to pass this off as mine?" She pointed at the article. "I mean, it's good... "

"You taught him all you know."

"True. Let me have at it, and then... " Her eyes wandered out of the window. "Then sure."

"I wouldn't normally ask you this, you know that Lois. But I need someone I trust and—" Her jaw dropped. "What? What's wrong?" He turned and looked out the window. "Great Shades of Elvis." Perry White's jaw dropped too. His office faced the large building that the Major Crimes Unit inhabited, and he saw the right side of the building explode outwardly, and a floating ethereal figure leap out from inside, then vanishing into the streets below. "LANE! GET TROUPE! THAT'S A STORY, I'D BET MY LEFT VENTRICLE ON IT! "

End Interlude.

Hall of Justice:

He rolled over in his bunk. Sollis had been given residence inside the Hall of Justice itself, until the Justice League could discern the veracity of his warnings. They had searched for Boom Tubes, for anything that could contain a doomsday device from Apokolips, and they had raced to a small town where a meteor had struck, but when they had arrived... They found only traces of alien rock. Sollis sighed. It was hear. It was deadly. And it was intelligent.

The Earth would die.

And the Doomsday creature would travel to the next world closest to this one. And then one by one, the lights of this universe would be snuffed out.

"Lightray."

He jerked up out of his bunk, and his costume formed over his body in a flash of bright light. He spun around, but could see no one.

"Who is speaking?" His eyes, eyes that had viewed such wonders on the edge of creation, in the centre of the Source, darted about the room. He always found his senses were dulled when he travelled to Earth, as his body adapted to it's new mass and new size, but still, the senses of a God were still that, the senses of a God. His hand shot out, and grabbed a tiny creature, the size of a fly, but comprised of tiny mechanics.

"This is Steel! I'm sorry, I can't just walk into the Hall of Justice unannounced, but the Guardian and Caesar, the entire MCU in fact, have just been taken out in an explosion at their HQ. We're needed!"

Lightray nodded, released the small bug, and then shot out of the room. Worrying could wait. Right now... The situation demanded action.

Metropolis Central:

"—We're needed!" Steel moved his gauntlet, with an inbuilt communication device attached, away from his mouth, and then looked to his left, as a rumble of sound and light filled the area.

Lightray had arrived, skidding to a stop. "I am here, what can I do?"

"We need to clear the rubble so paramedics can get into the—" Steel blinked and Lightray was already moving, hefting massive loads of rock and debris to the sides of the roads, until there was room enough for an ambulance to make it's way through. "—That could work too."

Lightray looked up at the smouldering side of the building. "Who is

inside?"

Steel paused, filtering through reports in his main database. "The entire Major Crimes Unit. Caesar was logging out. The Guardian had just logged in. Maggie Sawyer hasn't left her office for 32 hours."

"Then we best get her out, friend." Lightray began to hover off the ground. "Are you coming?"

You couldn't tell if Steel smiled beneath his helmet, but not far away, a man sits behind a desk, his eyes glazed over, controlling that suit of armour that calls itself Steel. John Henry Irons grinned, and powered up the servos in the boots. His back itched, electronic impulses that were not his own racing down his spinal cord. Just because he'd been at this for over a year, didn't make it any less painful.

The building was a mess. Smoke drifted out of the large hole in the wall, whilst police officers lay on the floor, their ear drums damaged, some bleeding. The Guardian lay comatose, as did Caesar, in the room where the hole resided. Maggie Sawyer's office. "Jim!" Steel began to shake the Guardian, and he groaned in pain as his eyes fluttered to life. "Are you ok?"

"MAGGIE!" Harper jerked up, and began to unzip his shield frantically. "Something's happened to Maggie."

Steel looked around, and replied. "What? Where is she?"

Caesar was the one to answer that question, "She's gone."

"What do you mean 'gone', Caesar?" inquired Lightray.

Caesar nodded solemnly, "her consciousness has been replaced by an ancient spirit, one that is mentioned in many Irish legends."

Harper shook his head as he pulled out his glistening gold shield, "What do you even mean?!"

"A *sídhe*," continued Caesar, "a Banshee. A bringer of death, and now it's running free in Metropolis!"

"It's not a *sidhe*, or whatever the hell that is! It's Maggie!" Harper turned, and headed into the office floor. "And I'm bringing her back in."

"Harper... " Caesar chased after his friend, and placed his hand on his shoulder, only to have it shrugged off. "... "

Jim stopped in his tracks, surprising Caesar, and then he span around. "Ok, magician, I've humored you for a good month and I've seen what you can do. I'm not a fan of magic or the supernatural but I conceded that there might be a need for someone like you on the force, because no matter my views, there is a force out there we don't understand that you do. I've defended you, I've supported you, and now I'm collecting on all that and asking you straight: How do I help Maggie?"

"I don't know, Jim, I've not thought about it yet I don't... "

"THEN YOU'RE OF NO USE TO ME!" spat Harper, "START THINKING ABOUT IT OR I WON'T... " He hesitated, and trailed off.

"You'll what, Harper? You'll kick my ass?" Caesar rolled his eyes.

"No" replied the hero. "Or I won't be able to handle it. I can't handle any-more of my friends dying." He pressed a button on the elevator and it pinged to life. He entered it, looked across the room at Lightray, Steel and Caesar, and then pressed a button. Time to get serious.

Metropolis:

So many names. So many voices. So many SOULS. She can hear them all gnashing and gnawing for release, but she has to breathe, has to...

"What am I doing?" Maggie Sawyer slumped over in an alley, her clawed hands scraping at the concrete ground. Her entire body felt... Wrong. She gagged, and a voice emerged from her lips that was not her own.

"We must punish the one who did this to us. The one who trapped us. Who hurt us."

"I... I don't understand."

"HE HURT US! HE VIOLATED US!" Maggie spat the words. Her mouth ached, her skin burnt, and she began to float up in the air. **"AND WE CAN SMELL HIS SIN."**

Meanwhile:

He pulled on the jumpsuit. It was bulkier than his old uniform, but ever since that had been ruined he'd had to wear this. He felt relieved that Ted Kord had answered his calls and was working on a new uniform for him, but this would have to do for now. He felt like a soldier once more, his belt able to contain grenades, ammunition, but also handcuffs, a radio, trackers and sensors, all needed for his new role in the force. He walked over to the armoury and began to fill his pouches with things. "How could you put me through this? Or is this a new facet for my character? My pain? My loss?"

"Harper?" Caesar stepped inside the armoury, and sighed. "I've been thinking, and I think I know what you have to do." He paused and looked around. "Who were you talking to?"

"I don't know anymore. Give it to me straight, Caesar, what's going to have to happen?"

The magician began to pull something out of his sleeve. "We're going to have to burn it out of her."

"What are you thinking?"

"Possessions can some time hold... Fragments of spirits inside of them. And if someone with enough grief, or of similar enough soul, reads it? Touches it? Those two spirits can mesh together. Basically, Jim... We're going to exorcise that demon bitch out of her."

Jim smiled grimly. "I best start believing in magic then, eh?"

Metropolis:

He placed the books on the shelves. One day, he would have to alphabetise them, but for the time being he knew where everything went. But when his son inherited this place... It would be hard for him to run a mess like this!

"BEAAAAAARCHAN!"

"Hullo?" Eddie turned around, and saw nobody. "Huh."

"WE NEVER FORGET!"

The front of the shop blew off, the windows shattered and pages flew everywhere. Eddie was confronted by a horrendous sight, a black and white demon, with a skull for a face and a long licking tongue slathering around its mouth. "Oh. My. Lord."

Meanwhile:

He thought it through. What had happened? He saw Maggie. Gave her the book. Banshees were written about in red ink. Red ink. His eyes widened. Why didn't he think of this before?! He moved his hand down the thin pages, and licked his finger, then touched the print again. It smudged. He put his finger on the tip of his tongue and tasted it. Blood. Old blood. Ancient. *Sídhe*. So Eddie... Eddie had to have something to do with this? Maybe. It was barely a lead. But it was a lead none the less. Lightray was present, Steel was coordinating the rescue effort up above. Harper spoke the words to Caesar, and the magician nodded, and they vanished in a whirl of his wand.

Metropolis:

Her screams made him feel like his brain was liquefying. His fragile frame quivered and shook as the screams became louder and louder and he fell to his knees, pain overcoming him. **"YOU WILL SUFFER ETERNALLY FOR YOUR SINS!"**

"W-W-We've never met in my e-entire life!"

"LIES!"

"Maggie."

Silver Banshee span around, and saw Jim Harper, the Guardian, standing on the street. Caesar and Lightray stood behind him, the magician whispering beneath his breath. **"NOT MAGGIE!"**

Harper pointed a gloved finger at her. "Oh, shut up. Of course you're Maggie."

"WE'LL KILL YOU!"

Caesar grinned. "Nice use of plural, freak show."

"Do not disrespect her, Caesar, she is still Maggie beneath that frankly *ugly* exterior..."

"YOUR ENCHANTMENTS WON'T WORK, LITTLE MAGICIAN. AND YOU... ANGEL OF LIGHT... ARE NOTHING TO US. YOU CANNOT STOP OUR CRUSADE."

Lightray pouted. "No need to be rude."

Caesar smiled. "Shame."

The Guardian approached her slowly. "Why are you here?"

"HE VIOLATED US! KILLED US!"

The Guardian shook his head. "You're too old to have been killed by him, sweetheart."

"BEARCHAN KILLED US!"

"THEN YOU'RE GETTING REVENGE ON THE WRONG GUY!" Spat Harper. "This is Edward Phillip Birch. I've known him all my life and he's nothing but trouble, but not the kind of trouble YOU accuse him of being!"

"H-Harp... " Eddie struggled to put a hand out in front of him, reaching for help.

"YOU DON'T KNOW THE TRUTH."

"Then tell me! Stop hurting people!"

"TELL HIM, BEARCHAN!"

Caesar rolled his eyes, and whispered to Lightray, "this is getting ridiculous."

"It is the Guardian's play," surmised the New God, "let him handle it."

"H-Harp... "

The Guardian's eyes narrowed. "Eddie?"

"M-My family emigrated here... They anglicised our name... Bearchan to Birch... "

"SEE!" screamed the Silver Banshee. **"SEE THE TRUTH FROM BEHIND HIS LIES?"**

"Oh, so you've just shown us a coincidence. He. Did not. Kill You. You're an age old spirit somehow bound onto the body of a police officer: someone I care for deeply."

The unholy voice stammered, and then another came from Maggie's voice. "J-Jim?"

Harper jerked forward, only for the light in the Banshee's eyes to fade once more. **"COME NO CLOSER!"** She began to scream, and Harper threw up his shield, deflecting the supernatural Sonics inside the shop, to the left of Eddie. The walls could have been paper, for all the good it did them.

Harper looked up over his shield, a crack shooting through the near indestructible surface. He grimaced, and then his eyes widened. "Eddie?"

"W-What?" The elderly bookseller turned, and looked over his shoulder, to see a hidden room exposed, containing strange weaponry and devices. "Oh, G-God I can explain... "

Harper ignored the Banshee and walked past Eddie, and picked up one of the many weapons. Silver Banshee floated in the air, her tongue licking about her mouth. "This is... Intergang weaponry. Earth/Apokolips hybrids. What is this, Eddie?"

"I... I... "

"You did it again, didn't you?" Grimaced Harper. "But you're not a kid anymore! You've got no excuse! DAMMIT EDDIE, I DEFENDED YOU AND NOW YOU DO THIS!"

"HE IS A LIAR!"

Harper threw up his hand. "Shut up!" He grabbed Eddie and picked him up. "There were three groups on the streets of Metropolis during the Apokolips invasion before Luthor got a cease fire called. The police, slaughtered by Doomsday. The Parademons, killing indiscriminately. And Intergang, taking advantage of the chaos, pillaging banks and jewelries. Anything they could get their hands on. And this... This shows that you're nothing better than what THAT THING describes you as!" He dropped him, and walked out the shop. "Fine, Banshee. End it. Kill him."

"H-Harp!" Eddie dragged himself toward his old friend, clawing at his black boots. "You can't leave me... "

"PREPARE TO DIE, BEARCHAN!"

"N-No!"

Maggie stuttered. "I... "

"DO IT!"

Harper signalled for Caesar not to move. In the magician's hand was a small trinket, burning red around the strange emblem that was carved into it. Lightray's eyes glowed bright white, and he was aching to do something.

"I CAN'T!"

"HE DID THIS TO US!"

"Y-You did this!" Maggie twitched, her body fluctuating from human to demon. "I'm not... Killing... A defenseless... Man!"

"I CAN—"

"This is my body!"

Harper nodded slowly to his partners, and Caesar whispered a word, and suddenly the necklace was around Maggie's neck.

"AND I'M IN CONTROL!" Her body expunged the demonic influence as the rune on the necklace burnt into her flesh. She twitched and jerked, and then fell to the ground, into the arms of James Harper.

"Maggie, are you ok?" He gently placed her to the ground, and Caesar removed his cape and wrapped it around her exposed body. The gold and blue clad hero moved her hair away from her cheek and grimaced. Her scar was gone. But had it been replaced by something much deeper?

"J-Jim... " She moved a quivering hand to his helmeted face. "Y-You were going to l-let me kill him... ?"

Harper shook his head. "No."

"W-Why?"

"Because I had faith in you." He gently kissed her forehead, and then turned to Caesar. "Get us to the hospital."

Epilogue One:

Light emanated from her belt, the long golden lasso hanging loosely down her calf. She didn't like coming here. Bad memories from the year gone by. She had to fight her friend down in this cavern, and even a warrior born felt regret from such events. He was working in silence, sparks of blue light showering the smooth section of the cave that was reinforced with steel. The workshop. The chassis of something incomplete sat in the corner, half covered in a tarp, whilst the man himself... Was hunched over something, his long cape draped across the floor. Thick goggles covered his mask, and he held a strange soldering iron type device in one hand, and some strange otherworldly instrument in the other.

"Bruce."

He didn't react.

"*Bruce!*"

He shuddered in his seat. That voice of hers. A voice that could lead a nation. A voice that could command an army. "I'm busy."

"I don't care." She placed a hand on his shoulder. "What are you doing?"

Bruce spoke through gritted teeth. "Clark is missing. Arthur isn't answering summons. Something is wrong and we're at half strength!"

She nodded slowly. "I know. I spoke with J'onn though, he says Clark's adopted mom was sure he'd be back.

Bruce interrupted bluntly. "But we can't find him! He's a beacon, Diana! His body is full of solar energy and Adam Strange would've found him by now!"

"Bruce! She's his mother. For Hera's sake, let it be. He'll come back, maybe he just needs time... Have some—"

"I don't believe in it." his words stopped her dead in her tracks, his grim interruption enveloping the cave for minutes. "Not now. There's no reason to."

Diana smiled grimly, and then changed the subject. "What are you working on?"

Bruce removed his goggles and moved his chair back. "We've tried the entire universe, Diana. We can't take any chances anymore. And if he is gone, there's only one thing we can try now."

"And that is?"

Bruce hesitated before he replied. What he was about to say was something that had cost them a lot. Darkseid had attempted to conquer it, people had been known to become lost in it, and only one person truly knew how to travel in it... "The multiverse." He picked up the small spherical device he had been working on, a chunk in the centre missing. "I've built this using the schematics provided by Ted Kord."

"Ted Kord?" Gaspd Wonder Woman, "Blue Beetle? How can he have his hands on equipment such as that?"

"Chronos." Diana nodded in understanding. Chronos had battled Blue Beetle on many occasions, the fights always ending with the villain's defeat and incarceration, but also his eventual escape. Bruce continued, "Ted recently recovered the schematics to Chronos' time suit, and I've taken what I know and a bit of something else... To make this."

"What is it?"

"A probe. It's going to travel through the multiverse and seek out the one man who can help us. The man who left Ray Palmer and Niles Caulder schematics that allowed me to complete this device. The man who travels from reality to reality, and who has complete records of the past,

present and the future." Bruce began to program the small machine, and then took the final part of the device, a shield with the words 'Justice League' emblazed upon it, and clicked it into place.

"You don't mean... "

Bruce activated the device and it shimmered and shook, spinning in front of the two heroes. "I do." The device whined and howled, until, suddenly, it popped out of existence.

"So... What now, Bruce?"

Bruce sat back down, and hunched over, resting his head in his arms. A cold reply settled, sending chills down the Amazonian warrior's spine.

"We wait."

Epilogue Two:

"Argh," He wailed, crashing into a heap of trashcans in an alleyway. His weakening was usually gradual, and he was still getting used to this new state, and occasionally lost control of his body. He clutched his sides, warily panting.

"Are you okay?" a voice asked from the dumpster beside him. He glanced over and saw a homeless man reaching his hand out to him.

"No... no, I'm not." He smiled honestly and took the man's hand, helpfully being lifted back up to his feet. "Thank you, I needed that." The homeless man simply replied with a friendly smile before turning back to his newspaper. The other lingered in the alleyway for a few minutes, regaining his strength while Metropolis citizens walked by giving him the same suspicious look.

"Where do you think he is?" inquired the homeless man, browsing the back pages of the Daily Planet.

"Who?" asked the other, oblivious to the city's wonderment. The homeless man only pointed to the 'S' insignia printed next to an article in the paper. "Oh, him. Maybe... he needed a vacation?"

The bum chuckled, nodding his head. "Imagine that." He continued to read, and then looked up again. "You'd think the people of Metropolis would be taking care of themselves better though while he was gone."

"Why's that?"

"Because the people of this city have the potential. I've been here for fifty years, and I observe people of all class and society everyday. They just need someone to show them the way. And Superman has done that. You'd think after all his heroism people would take a hint, right?" The other could not help but laugh under his breath. "What you don't believe in them?"

"No... it's just:" The other man took a pair of glasses from his pocket, and placed them over his eyes. "I agree."

Epilogue 3:

Metropolis:

Today:

"What is this?" Lex Luthor paced the room, clutching a copy of the Daily Planet. "That infernal woman! That infernal Lois Lane!" He threw the paper at Glory. "This is an outrage!"

"What are you going to do, sir?"

The front page read in bold: *'The Truth Behind Lex Luthor; An expose on LexCorp'*. The page was torn and ripped, Luthor angry at what he had read. "Sue, obviously. And... other things."

"Sir?"

"I need to deal with Lois Lane once and for all. I'm sick of that conniving witch sticking her nose into my business." Luthor paused, and looked at the telephone. "Get me our man at the Daily Planet. I have chores for him to begin."

To be continued...

Chapter 3

ACTION COMICS PRESENTS:

Escape To Krypton!

Part Three: "*The Strange Case of Mizzer Lucian Crowley*"

Written by Roy Flinchum from a concept by Charlie Wilkins

Edited by Charlie Wilkins

Lucian Crowley stood with his back to the tree. The cool night air made his skin tingle, or maybe it was the anticipation of what he was about to do. Lucian cleared his mind; ready to reach out. This one would bring even *more* media attention, and he could be sure to expect an engraved invitation from the Justice League, after all, that guy Atom got in after helping, and what was his power? Being small. Lucian was sure to get invited after he solved this case, he thought.

Belle raked the remains of her dinner into the cat's bowl. The large tabby came over and tentatively investigated the offering with a twitch of his nose. Deeming it worthy, he began to eat with gusto as Belle patted him on the head.

"There ya go, Rocky, eat up."

Belle placed the empty dish in the sink and began to run the water. The phone rang. She picked up the cordless handset off the counter and punched the talk button with a soapy finger.

"Hello?"

"Ms. Jackson, this is Cat Grant, we talked briefly yesterday. I would like to schedule a more in-depth interview with you tomorrow, if that would be O.K. with you?"

"I don't know Ms. Grant", Belle continued to wash her few dirty dishes. "Some of the residents and I are planning a community watch program and that—."

Cat interrupted. "That's great Ms. Jackson, that's just the sort of thing the viewers should hear." Belle opened the cabinet to put up the dish, and suddenly her mind went fuzzy. There on the top shelf back in the corner, *He* could just see it, Belle Jackson's, Microwave Mom's microwave emitting device. *He* forced her to pick it up. *He* could feel the weight of it in her hand, like a heavy flashlight, the cold metal against her warm skin.

"Ms. Jackson", Cat continued. "If you and your watch group go on the show, maybe whoever is doing the killings will see it and back off, this could be a great service to your community."

"Oh, I'll definitely do the interview Ms. Grant, how about first thing tomorrow morning, here at my apartment?" *He* forced her to say.

"Uh ok," stammered Cat, surprised, "Great, I'll be there around 9:30 with the camera crew so we can get everything set up."

"Great, see you then Ms. Grant." Belle heard herself say. She dropped the phone into the sink, placed the microwave emitting device under her chin and pushed the button. Belle Jackson's brain evaporated in an instant as the radiation charred the ceiling above.

Cat Grant clicked her cell phone shut.

"Well, that was easier than I first thought it was going to be." She

swiveled around in her office chair to face her producer. "We'll meet Ms. Jackson in the morning and tape our interview and use that as part of the live segment."

"Captain Sawyer and the Guardian are *not* going to like that." Dan said.

"Dan, this is news, **real news**. I finally have a chance to make a name for myself and do something besides the '12 Ways to Reach the O by Yourself' pieces I'm usually handed. I'm not going to let them ruin this chance for me. Besides, *I can take care of myself*." Cat reached into her purse and withdrew a small silver gun, only slightly larger than a cassette tape.

"And what are you going to do with that?" Dan asked. "These people are metas, you might as well have a water pistol."

"It's small, but effective." Cat responded. She touched a colored button on the side and a high pitched whine filled the room, "A little present from a contact at star labs. It fires a ceramic plug that discharges a 20 kilojoule charge upon impact. It's enough to make Superman stop and shake his head for a few minutes."

Dan stood and slung his camera bag over his shoulder, "Superman, really?"

"Who do you think tested it?" Cat powered down the gun and put it back in her purse. She held open the door and followed Dan out. "See ya' in the morning. Don't be late."

Maggie threw down the folders on her desk. Her morning coffee had done nothing to improve her mood. She was not looking forward to another installment of Krypton Square. Police work was hard enough but combined with the meta element and Ms. Grants insistence on being everywhere they were, the investigation into the multiple deaths that occurred on the Square was not going well.

Maggie's cell rang. She flipped it open.

"Sawyer here."

"Captain Sawyer, you better get down here right now."

Grant, Sawyer thought. Damn I should've looked at the caller I.D.

"Look, Grant, I don't have time for this ... "

Cat interrupted. "I'm in Krypton Square, Belle Jackson's apartment; you better get in touch with Guardian and get down here."

"Is this another interview? Because I really don't ... "

Grant interrupted again. "She's dead, get down here now."

"Oh my God, Belle." Jim Harper almost whispered as he stood at the window of Belle's apartment. Maggie heard him and turned. She opened the window and Jim stepped through.

"I'm sorry, Jim. I know you knew her."

From where he stood in the living room Jim could see Belle's body sprawled out in the kitchen floor. Blood pooled around her. Jim walked into the kitchen avoiding MetroCSI who skittered around the small apartment taking pictures, picking up things with tweezers and putting them into plastic bags. Maggie followed close behind.

"We had more than a passing acquaintance years ago, yes." Jim kneeled at Belle's body. The top of her head was nearly gone. Jim instinctively looked up and saw bits of hair and flesh stuck to a charred area of the ceiling.

"Find the weapon?" Jim asked.

"No, whatever she used was pretty powerful though, no marks or smears in the blood so she was dead instantly." Maggie said.

Jim lay down on the floor with his ear to the ground. "Who called it in?"

"You're not going to believe it. Cat Grant, she was also the last one to speak to her, called her last night to set up an interview." She cocked an eyebrow as she watched Harper lay on the floor, "What are you doing?"

Guardian turned his head over to the other side. "Where's Ms. Grant now?"

"I told her that if she didn't leave I would shut her down. She's on the street, her and the camera guy getting public reaction, I believe she called it. Harper what are you doing?"

Jim reached under a small cupboard. "Looking for this", he pulled out the device that had dropped out of her hand at the moment of her death, and held it up to Maggie. "This is what killed her, her microwave rod."

"I am the new world order! All Meta-humans will bow to me or suffer the fate of those before!" Someone shouted from the street below.

Guardian and Maggie ran to the window. A man in a purple unitard and yellow cape bounded from the gathered onlookers toward Cat Grant and her cameraman. He landed, twirled around and fired an energy blast into the crowd.

Guardian was through the window, leaping into the crowd as Maggie sprinted out the front door and down the stairs. Guardian landed in the middle of the dispersing crowd in front of the mother and small child that had been caught off guard when the power blast was fired and the crowd parted. Guardian held his shield against the torrent of energy as it splashed and spit across its golden surface.

"You! Hands in the air— **Now!**" Maggie shouted from the entranceway of the building, her gun drawn and leveled with rock steady accuracy at the perps chest.

"Yes, officer! Take me in, I am responsible for the ghastly murders plaguing Krypton Square!" The mans hand's lifted high above his head erupted with energy that arced toward Maggie. With the skill and grace of an acrobat she leapt to the side dodging the deadly energy. She landed

with a roll and came up ready to take the shot, before she could pull the trigger. Guardian grabbed the mans shoulder and spun him around, meeting him with an uppercut from Guardians shield.

Such was the force of the blow, the man flew up into the air and onto the roof of the apartment building.

"Dammit it, He was out! Guardian had knocked him out with one blow." He hadn't counted on that. Crawley watched through binoculars from the rooftop across the street. He had to be the one to take him down.

Guardian jumped onto the window ledge of the building, grabbing the ledge above he ran up the side and somersaulted, grabbing the roof ledge flipping over onto the roof, where the unconscious perp lay. Guardian approached carefully making sure the man was out, his shield before him at the ready.

Jim heard Maggie swing the door to the roof open; he could smell the bluing on the gun and knew it was drawn and ready.

"He's out Captain." Jim knelt at the limp form.

Maggie deftly withdrew some cuffs from her waistband and snapped them on the purple clad man, several rows of buttons ran across the bar that held the cuffs. Maggie touched several of these in order and the cuffs beeped and began to glow.

"Power dampener cuffs, new gift from STAR labs." She stated, answering Jim's question before he asked.

The man began to stir.

"I can't let them take him." Crawley thought. "This ruins everything!" Suddenly Crawley had an idea. "No maybe not! Not only can I save the day, I can bring in a cop killer, but I'm gonna need a little help." Crawley's mind reached out. Oh yes. There, that's gonna be sweet.

"You! What's your name?? Maggie shouted at the purple dressed man.

"I ... II... ", he stammered.

"Jim, you know this guy?" Maggie asked.

Jim Harper stared blankly into space.

Maggie turned from the groggy man and faced Guardian. "Guardian! Are you alright?" Maggie shook him by the shoulder.

"Huh, yeah, I'm fine, Captain, just a little lost in thought. I'm sorry what were you saying?" Guardian shook his head as if clearing his mind.

"Do you know who this guy is?" Captain Sawyer and Guardian turned back toward the man who was now standing his hands still in the cuffs in front of him were now glowing brighter.

"The cuffs! They're overloading!" Maggie shouted.

Guardian tensed ready to spring.

"Stop! Don't move." A voice from behind them called.

Guardian and Maggie slowly turned. Cat Grant walked toward them a small gun in her hand, the weapon emitting a high pitched whine.

"Nobody move", she said. "We're all gonna stand right here and die."

To be continued...

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Food for the mind