



Action Comics #24
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Action Comics

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Daily Planet, the Newsroom

Lois looked up from her computer terminal as Clark came in through the newsroom door.

"Well, if it isn't Mr. Kent. Where you been Smallville?"

"Moving, Lois; Mom's selling the farm so I'm moving back to the city."

"Good thing too, I'm getting all the scoops since you've been gone."

"Oh really? What are you working on now?" Clark leaned over at her computer screen.

Lois quickly swiveled the screen away from him. "I'm not giving you any freebies, Kent. What's your Mom going to do?"

"She's buying a building in town and opening a general store, it was something her and Pa always wanted to do."

"Kent! Lane!" Perry stood at the open door of his office. "Lane, our new Mayor is giving a speech at Centennial Square, cover it! Kent, another drugstore robbery at 1414 Newton street, you're on it."

Clark continued to Lois, "Any news on that explosion the other night?"

"MSCU scoured the site, nothing; the Toyman is in a coma in Metro

General.”

Perry yelled from the door, “If you two are done with your morning ablutions, GO DO WHAT I TOLD YOU!”

Lois and Clark scattered like school children caught staying too long at recess.

Metropolis City Hall

“I pledge as the city’s new mayor to truly make Metropolis a City of Tomorrow, with the latest in advanced technology, and to crack down on crime, by working closely with the Metro PD and Captain Maggie Sawyer’s special Meta-human task force, to make Metropolis the safest city on the planet. Where you and your children can live and work without fear.”

John Henry Irons stood at the podium and flashed a smile that said, I’m here and everything’s going to be all-right.

“Mr. Irons, Lois Lane, Daily Planet” Lois shouted from the crowd of reporters.

“Mr. Irons, how do you respond to your critics that say your former actions as Steel, will put the mayor’s office in danger?”

John looked at her with a slight smile. “Never pull any punches, do you Lois.” He thought.

“My former activities as Steel should in no way affect my duty to the mayor’s office. I, like most people in public office, bring with them their own personal baggage; some good, some bad.

“Mayor Irons! Scott Nelson, Daily Star, how do feel about winning the election by default?”

“I would have preferred to win the election on my own merits and not by default, but I will say that I think Metropolis has dodged that bullet and I would like to applaud the actions of one Mr. Action for stepping up and revealing the corruption in my opponents election campaign.”

Across town: Adkins drugstore

Clark was taking notes. Nothing unusual about the break-in, what the police would call a smash and grab. The store was broken up pretty bad and drugs were taken, Clark scanned for anything out of place. He dropped his glasses over his nose, and focused his vision to see wavelengths beyond the normal visible ones. The usual random scattered radio signals, cell phone frequencies and bio-electric trail from the owner. Over at the back door Clark saw a faint energy signature that was different from the rest and somehow familiar, he walked over toward it as he neared it he felt queasy. "Kryptonite" he muttered.

"Excuse me, Mr. Kent, are you ok?" asked Mr. Adkins.

Clark wasn't aware that he had spoken out loud, or that he had wandered away from Mr. Adkins. "Oh yeah, uh sorry, thought I saw something over here, but it was nothing." Clark shook Mr. Adkins hand.

"Do you think its part of the string of break-ins lately?" Mr. Adkins asked.

"It fits the MO, Mr. Adkins, but that's really the police's job to say. Maybe someone will read the story and come forth with some information."

Clark's cell phone rang. He flipped it open.

"Collier building, two minutes." The voice on the other end said.

Clark clipped it shut. "Thank you for the information Mr. Adkins."

Clark walked out, turned the corner into the alley and Superman shot into the sky, climbing eastward toward the Collier building.

Whoever had robbed the drugstore had kryptonite in their possession. On his way Clark tried scanning the immediate area for the energy signature but it was like trying to pick out a straw in a haystack, up close it was obvious, but further back, the signature blended in with all the other

stray energies. He would have to do a more thorough search later. He landed on top of the Collier building.

Batman stepped out from the shadows. "You're on time for once."

"You're out in the daylight." Superman shot back.

"I have something for you." Batman reached into a compartment on his belt and withdrew a small CD and handed it to Superman. Superman stared at it for a second.

"This is a video of Luthor in the Hall of Justice admitting to his involvement in the Starro crisis and threatening to bring down Starros to earth." Superman said.

"How did you do that?" Batman asked, and for the first time since they had known each other Superman detected a slight hint of wonderment in his friend's voice.

"It's just ones and zeroes etched into the surface, you just have to know how to put them together. The better question is how did you get it?"

Batman pointed at his cowl. "Cowl cam, you don't think these ears are just for show do you? Luthor may be crazy, but he's smart, don't underestimate him."

Superman turned and looked in the direction of the Lexcorp building, when he turned back around Batman, a master at misdirection, was gone.

He opened his hearing, and could hear the faint whine of the Batwings engines. "Don't screw this up Clark; nail that son of-a-bitch to the wall." He heard Bruce say to him.

Metropolis Lower East Side

"Hey Jimmy, how long you been up man?" Marshall Norman walked groggily into his kitchen area.

"Since about 6:00 am Marshall, hard to break habits ya know." Jimmy sat at the kitchen table sipping a cup of coffee. He managed to find enough left over coffee in a can in the back of a cupboard, and a filter in the coffee maker that looked like it had only been used once or twice.

"Yeah tell me about it man." Marshall opened the refrigerator, popped open a can of beer and slugged it down.

"Thanks, Marshall for letting me crash on your couch while they fix the gas leak in my apartment." That was the story Jimmy had told him. Actually Perry had suggested he lay low while Lex was being investigated.

"S'all-right man, you sure helped me with enough papers back in high-school. No problem. Liss'en I got to go to work so you just hang around help yourself to whatever's in the fridge and play some Lex-Box. Just got that new game based on that pockalips thing it's called Invasion Crisis."

"Thanks Marshall, I just might do that."

Marshall pulled back his uncombed hair and stuffed it under a ball cap. "Well, off to make latte's for the masses. Later." Marshall said as he walked out the door.

Jimmy sat down on the couch and prepared to do battle with the minions of Apokolips when there was a knock at the door.

"What's the matter Marshall, forget something?" Jimmy barely got the door open before it was kicked in and smashed into his face. He fell backward becoming entangled in the cords of the game controllers. Through hazy vision he saw Mercy, Luthor's body guard wrap the entangled cords around her hand and pull him up to her.

"Olsen, you hear me?" She slapped him hard across the face. "You hear me!" She asked again.

Jimmy could feel his lip already beginning to swell he answered groggily, "Yeb, I herth you."

"Get out, go away, I don't care how, plane, bus, car, walk, just leave Metropolis, now, right now! Luthor sent me to kill you, I can miss once, but

not twice, if I see you again I will kill you, if I don't, he will kill me."

"Why are you bletting me go?"

She let the cord drop and Jimmy fell to the floor. Mercy paused as she walked out the door, "Don't make me regret this Olsen."

Metropolis Police Dept. Maggie Sawyers Office:

"You're too late, Batman," Luthor spat back, his voice a little too high, now. "I've already transferred the contents of your databanks back to my own headquarters, and I can assure you I've left no trail. I've got it all. I've won."

"Don't bluff me, Lex. The computers in the Hall have a fail-safe firewall of Rannian design. There's no way to datadump or upload to an outside network. I'm guessing the briefcase in your hand holds a number of thumb drives with the information you covet so badly. Bad enough to waken the ancient Star Conqueror that slept beneath the Capitol, bad enough to endanger every man, woman and child on this planet by seeking to put its heroes out of commission... Everything is just a tool to you, Luthor, a means to an end. Well what's the endgame now, Lex? You can't possibly imagine I'm going to let you walk out of this room..."

This time, it was Luthor's turn to laugh. "Very clever, Batman. Yes. It was I who found and woke that alien monster, and found a way to communicate with it... I'm getting very good at negotiating with interstellar menaces, you see. I created the Cadmus Project and manipulated Checkmate to my own ends, just as the Secret Society serves me now. But you're wrong about one thing, Dark Knight: you are going to let me walk out of this room— and there's nothing you can do about it."

(Editors Note: JLA Annual #1)

Maggie stopped the recording.

“Where did you get this Kent?”

“Maggie, c’mon, you don’t really believe that I’m going to tell you my source now do you?”

“Worth a shot. This is going to put him away for a long time. Kent. I’m going to get this over to the DA’s office. You want to be in on the bust?”

“Maybe I should hang back get more of an outsider perspective on it, you know stay objective.” Clark straightened his glasses. “But I do expect an exclusive with you after the arrest.”

“Absolutely,” Maggie didn’t blame Kent for being scared. Lex was a very powerful man and according to this recording even more so than anyone realized. She didn’t expect him to go easy and it wasn’t going to be pretty.

Lexcorp Tower

Luthor knew of Captain Sawyer’s arrival a full ten minutes before she started beating on his office door. In those ten minutes he had made several arrangements, like transferring most of his liquid assets and top secret Lex-corp projects to financial institutions and high tech secret labs around the world. Lex knew that someday, this time would come. In fact, he found himself looking forward to it.

The officers threw the battering ram against Lex’s office door and it splintered inward. Captain Maggie Sawyer came through followed by a half a dozen of her fellow officers, weapons drawn and pointed at Lex.

Maggie leveled her gun at Lex’s chest. “Lex Luthor, you are under arrest for the attempted murder of nine billion people. Move away from the desk, lie down on your stomach and put your hands on your head.”

Lex slowly rose from his desk. Maggie noticed that Lex was wearing a form fitting purple shirt with a high rounded collar. Two black straps crisscrossed his chest with one small canister attached to each strap. One canister was attached to green pants down the side of each leg and another on the purple boots he wore.

“Sorry, Lex, I didn’t mean to catch you in your pajamas, but one way or another I’m taking you in.”

The green gloves that Lex wore on each hand began to glow, “You and what army?” Lex asked.

There was a TAP TAP TAP from behind him. Lex turned, outside his window floated Superman, arms folded in front of his chest.

“That army.” Maggie said.

No one expected Lex to leap toward the window, as he did, Maggie fired. The bullet would have hit Luthor squarely in the shoulder, but instead it bounced off and into the wall. A blast of energy erupted from Lex’s glove and the window melted as he flew through it.

So unexpected was Luthor’s reaction his hands were around the man of steel’s throat, before he could react. Energy shot out from the jets on Lex’s boots hurtling both men toward the street below.

“Surprised Superman”, Lex asked.

Superman tried to speak but with Lex’s hands gripped tight around his throat he could only make a barely audible whisper.

“What’s that? I can’t hear you, cause I’m choking the life out of you”!

The two men hit the pavement on the street below. The shockwave shattered second story windows. Cars were toppled and flung aside. People were thrown from the area like rag dolls. Luthor climbed from the pit, Superman’s cape clutched in his hand as he dragged the man of steel behind him from the smoldering pit.

Lex dropped Superman to the ground. A crowd including several news crews had already gathered. Superman moaned, he was groggy, disoriented. Lex, oblivious to the crowd, could only see his hatred for Superman. He picked him up and smashed him down into the ground again.

“How do you like my new power suit, Superman? It has all the capabilities of the old one, thanks to a micro circuitry weaved into the fabric.

Gives me a lot more mobility, don't you think?" Lex knelt over Superman's beaten and bruised body and began to smash his fist into his face again and again.

"Luthor!" Maggie yelled. Lex turned to see Maggie drawing a bead on him. "You're under arrest, get down on the ground! NOW!"

"My dear Ms. Sawyer, do you honestly think that you or anyone else is going to stop me?" Lex stood and started walking toward her.

"Luthor, one more step and I'll shoot."

Lex ignored her warning and continued to walk toward her.

"Not you, not this alien piece of filth, not anyone. I've tried to show you all", Luthor was now aware of the cameras for the first time and he turned to them. "Show all of you, how mankind could benefit from what I have to offer, but each time you spit in my face, instead you choose to side with this alien garbage and the humans he's managed to turn against their own kind!"

Maggie fired her gun. Lex glowed slightly as the bullet hit his force field and bounced off. Lex laughed.

"You see, what humans are capable of, when they've not been made complacent by so called HEROES! " He spat the word.

Maggie's officers behind her shouldered their weapons. She held up her hand and pointed at several of the bystanders. They understood, under no circumstance were they to fire, the risk of civilians casualties was too great.

She just had to buy Superman some time.

"Why Lex?"

Lex was close enough now and grabbed Maggie by the throat lifting her off the ground.

"Humanity must be free to grow on it's on, not stifled. I can no longer

continue to act covertly to save mankind. You, Captain Sawyer will be the first causality in my war to rid earth of the alien Superman and his influence on humanity.”

“LUTHOR... PUT... HER.... DOWN “

Luthor smiled at Maggie and she knew that she was going to die.

Superman was standing, his face black and blue from the beating Luthor had given him. The power gloves Luthor wore gave him the strength to actually inflict physical harm on the man of steel.

Beams of heat shot from Superman’s eyes blasting Luthor in the chest. His force field absorbed it. Instinctively he dropped Maggie and stood there laughing, while his shielding absorbed the energy.

The news crews and the crowd of began to fall back. One of Maggie’s officers picked her up dragging her back behind an upturned car. She gave the signal, if you get a shot, take it.

Luthor walked toward Superman oblivious to the beams of heat.

“It’s obvious to me now kryptonian, that I should have done this a long time ago, just you and me, the way it should have been, no hiding behind a corporate desk or a dummy company, just you and me one on one, because it’s so painfully obvious, that you don’t have what it takes to beat me. My force field is absorbing your pathetic heat vision, and channeling the energy to other systems, ironic isn’t it that I’m going to use your own energy to kill you. Is this all you’ve got?”

“No. It’s not.” Superman answered and poured it on. The heat beams intensified, glowing white hot.

The micro circuitry in Luthors suit began to heat up. He could feel his body getting warmer. There was a loud POP. His suit had literally blown a fuse. The resulting shock to his nervous system was like being zapped by a tazer and he fell to his knees.

Luthor looked up. Superman was standing over him.

“Don’t think you won this Kryptonian, far from it, I ... “

“Lex” said Superman, “shut up.”

Superman pulled back his fist, without Lex’s force field one hit at even a tenth of his power would shatter Lex’s skull. Lex looked up at him and whispered, barely audible,

“Do it alien, you don’t have what it takes?”

Superman’s fist flew towards Luthor stopping just before hitting him in the chest. He instead grabbed him by his shirt and lifted him off the ground shoving him toward Maggie and her waiting officers. Maggie grabbed his wrists and pulled his arms behind him, roughly, cuffing him.

“Like I told you before Luthor you’re under arrest.’

“Don’t think this is over Kryptonian! Not by a long shot!” Lex called back.

“For you, yes it is Lex. I told you I’d be here when your empire crumbled.”

(*action comics annual #2*)

Two officers stuffed Luthor into a squad car and drove off.

“Well that went well.” Maggie said to Superman. He tried to avoid letting her see his bruised face. He turned ready to spring into the air.

“Just be careful Maggie, I shorted out his force-field but there’s no telling what other tricks he has up his sleeve.” Superman shot up into the air, he was a blur and there was a faint crack of a sonic boom before Maggie could turn back around.

Clark teetered out from behind one of the upturned cars. His face was bruised and his glasses broken but still on his face.

“Guess I still got a little more action than I bargained for, huh Captain Sawyer.”

“Captain Sawyer! Captain Sawyer!” Lois pushed her way through the crowd. “Captain Sawyer! I just heard about the arrest, do you have an official statement, what went on? Is Superman still here?”

“Sorry Lois, I promised an exclusive.”

“An exclusive...to whom?” Lois asked.

Maggie jabbed her thumb over her shoulder where Clark stood dusting off his clothes and poking his fingers through his empty glasses frame, while he still had them on.

“Kent! I don’t believe it!” Lois walked over to him. “Looks like you got pretty banged up there Clark; can I give you a hand?”

“Sorry Lois, no freebies.”

Later

Clark sat down in his apartment. It felt good to be back here in the city. With Luthor finally behind bars maybe he could finally let himself relax a little more. He let his senses radiate out from around him. No alarms, no cries for help, just the slow steady rhythm of the city. His phone rang.

“Hello.”

“Kent, Maggie Sawyer, thought you’d like to know before you heard it elsewhere, Luthor is gone.”

“Gone?”

“When the officers got to the station, there was nothing in the back but the handcuffs, still locked. Keep you eyes and ears open Kent.”

“Sure thing Maggie, thanks.”

So much for relaxing.

“Kal-el, this is Keelex, transmitting to you at a frequency only you can

hear. Your attention is needed at the fortress immediately."

"Great", Clark thought "What next?"

The Fortress

Superman flew into the cavern from the underground lake and gave himself a blast of heat vision to dry off. "I really need to put in another entrance." He thought.

Keelex floated over to him. "In here Kal-el, the monitor room."

Superman stepped into the room. It was filled with the kryptonian version of LCD screens imbedded into the walls. A large half egg shaped chair floated in the middle of the room. Superman floated over to it and sat in it. Around him crystals seemed to float in the air, Keelex touched several, and an image coalesced onto the screens. A large planetoid hurtled through space.

Superman touched the crystals fine tuning the image. "What am I looking at Keelex?"

"Deep space scanners discovered this planetoid a few hours ago. I wanted to make sure of its path before I alerted you to it. In approximately 26.2 hours this planetoid will enter earth's solar system and begin to wreak havoc on the systems gravitational fields. In 36.7 hours, the outer planets will pull it further into the solar system and the resulting inertia will throw them off orbit. Without the gravitational tug of the outer giants, the earth and all the inner planets will spin into the sun 12.15 hours later."

Superman stood. "Then we'll have to stop it before it makes the solar system, any idea where it came from?"

"Chemical composition and plotting its reverse path indicates that the planetoid is Xenon, the lost moon of Krypton."

To be continued

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