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Superman soared through the solar system chasing a sentient shadow-sphere, a rogue collection of gasses and a consciousness, capable of colliding with the Earth's atmosphere and wreaking havoc. It was like playing a game of hide-and-seek, but the fact that he couldn't hear it in the vacuum of space— and that it could make itself two-dimensional and flatten itself up against the starscape and vanish amongst the darkness of space— made it into a game of hide-and-hide-and-keep-hiding, and Kal-El wasn't having fun with it anymore. He stopped his movement, and turned around slowly, his eyes wide and searching through all possible wavelengths of vision. He sifted through the radiation and the space dust and then— *Aha*. He unclasped his cape from his shoulders and burst forward through the orbit of Mars, swinging it over a region of space within pico-seconds— and then the cape bloomed and bulged, something within struggling to get out. *Gotcha*.

<Trapped! Darkness and trapped! No no no! Not want! Not want to go home!>

Superman nodded slowly. *Sorry, kiddo. Your parents miss you, and you being this far from home is dangerous, not only for yourself, but for the people that call these planets home.*

<Not fair! Parents fly! Fly and journey! Child sit and wait! Not fair!>

You'll have your time, son.

Superman turned to where he had just come from, and caught his breath. The view from this deep into the solar system, was beautiful, with Earth a pale blue dot against the jet expanse of space. He would have stayed there for hours if he could, but he knew he couldn't. Instead, he filed the mental image away into his photographic memory, and turned towards the distant Andromedan gas giant that was shadow-sphere's homeworld. But he was brought up suddenly.

Before him, floating in space against the backdrop of the Red Planet were dozens of familiar figures, of various shapes and sizes, all clad in bright heroic costumes. They were old friends, so he was not alarmed— but he was very surprised to see them here, a thousand years before any of them would be born.

Holding the shadow sphere under one arm, Superman raised the other, allowing starlight to glint off a ring he wore, calling to them telepathically: **Long live the Legion.**

As one they answered him, raising their fists and brandishing identical rings: **Long live the Legion!** Saturn Girl undoubtedly making it possible for all of them to hear each other.

It had been years since he had last seen them, and they had grown from idealistic teen-agers out to save a universe into sharp-eyed, battle-hardened heroes. Some he looked for and couldn't find, while there were many more he didn't recognize at all, though they shared the same nobility of spirit he had seen in Rokk Krinn, Imra Ardeen and Garth Ranzz all those years ago. Seeing them brought back memories of camaraderie and adventure, and it all made him feel like a kid again.

My friends, it's so good to see you— is everything alright...? Superman did not miss the solemn expression shared by one and all.

There's no need for alarm, Superboy, the thoughts came from the matronly beautiful Saturn Girl, who, despite her words seemed to be holding back tears. **Pardon me, Kal— Superman. It's been a long time.**

Beside her, Lightning Lad pulled her close to him comfortingly.

But what are you doing here in the 21st century...? Superman asked, his anxiety growing. **Is there a problem? Is it the Time Trapper?**

We're not actually in the 21st century, Kal-El, replied a green-skinned man in purple. Brainiac 5 floated to the fore, hands hooked into his belt. **We're at the Time Institute in our era, using Dr. Circadia's Chronoprojector. I told them this wasn't a good idea, but since when has that ever stopped the Legion.** Even mentally projected across time, the Coluan sounded droll.

What's not a good idea? I don't understand. What are you not telling me?

You know that's not how this works, Kal, Nura Nall, platinum-haired and still lovely, told him gently, a serene smile on her face. *"We risk*

much just by appearing to you.*

Superman nodded, perplexed and frustrated. They didn't want to give him knowledge that would change history, and thus endanger the time-stream. He simply had to make do with what he had.

Then I'm just glad I get to see my old friends once again, he replied, returning Dream Girl's smile.

It's been too long, buddy. Jo Nah, Ultra Boy crossed his arms over a broad chest and looked as if he was recalling fond memories. "I miss our little contests of strength.*

I used to let you win, Superman shot back good-naturedly.

You wish. But... thanks, little brother.

Superman swallowed hard, looking from face to face. Dawnstar nodded tightly, then looked away, her eyes bright. Karate Kid gave him a little bow...

Forgive us, Kal, Saturn Girl dashed a tear off her cheek. *We didn't come to trouble you, despite what this looks like. But— at this moment in history!— we could not stay away.*

Superman nodded. He had so many questions, but out of respect for the bond they shared, he would not put that on them. He would simply let them say what they could say, and he would face the days ahead as best as he was able.

The Legionnaires faced him, and as one, they raised their hands above their heads, their flight rings glinting in salute.

The Legion of Super-Heroes would not exist were it not for the heroism and selfless example of you, Superman, It was Lightning Lad's voice he heard now. *Which is why we have appeared at this pivotal moment, on the eve of your greatest struggles, to honor you and what you mean to us— and the universe. The Legion of Super-Heroes will always be proud you stood in our ranks. We salute you Superman!* And with that, every voice was raised in a glad, fierce cheer, a cacophony in soundless space.

Touched by the sentiment, Superman raised his own flight ring, never an unnecessary adornment but a badge of belonging, and returned their salute. Their eyes never wavering from his, they slowly faded from existence, leaving Superman alone again in space.

Except for the shadowspere, wriggling in his cape and still tucked under his arm.

C'mon little guy, time to get you home, Holding onto it tightly, Superman angled away from Mars and flew out past Jupiter, gaining speed as he shot across the Solar System. It was a long trip, but then he had a lot to think about...

A NEW ERA BEGINS IN THE LIFE OF *THE MAN OF STEEL*, IN...

Action Comics

Annual #3: "Action and Adventure, Part One!"

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Cover by Nathan Kilburn

Edited by David Charlton

*"BVVVT! —It's another bright and sunny morning in Metropolis today, and the forecast is for clear skies throughout the day and beyond, so hopefully we'll be able to catch a glimpse of the Big Apricot's favourite son **Superman** before the day is—"*

Edward Lytener pushed the snooze button on his radio-alarm. He rubbed his eyes with balled-up fists and then managed to swing his legs round to the ground. A groan followed this effort, and he then pulled himself up.

"Another bright and sunny morning, huh?" He mumbled, finishing wiping his eyes of the sleep that had accumulated there during his unconscious hours. "... Isn't it always?"

The *Daily Planet* reporter pulled off his shirt and shuffled into his shower. Work soon. He knew that. Another day at the *Daily Planet*, another day of chasing leads and watching Lois Lane from across the— he turned on the shower, cold first, and then released a loud shriek as the icy blades of water struck his skin. Within seconds the temperature balanced out, and he ran his hands through his hair. When he was done in the bathroom, he dressed, and left his apartment, running into his landlady in the hallway. As ever, he flashed the smile he knew made most women weak in the knees and waved, and she blushed and vanished from sight.

Edward liked this. Not a bad way to start your day, even if you are lust- ing after one of your co-workers at— "Morning, Joe," he said, as he hit the sidewalk, striding toward the pretzel stand that was a mere metre or so away from his apartment block.

"Mr. Lytener!" Said the vendor, grinning, "The usual?"

"As ever," nodded Edward. "How's the morning treating you so far?"

"Early yet, my friend," was Joe's response, as he wrapped up a warm pretzel and passed it to the reporter. "You need to take better care of yourself. A pretzel a day, whilst good for my pocket, not so good for your waistline, yes?"

"You keep selling them as they are, I'll keep buying them, Joe," laughed Edward, patting his flat stomach and then turning a corner. "But thanks anyway," he groaned, as he contemplated the warm bread product and his stomach. "I'm no Superman... " he said, "aww, heck, what's the loss?" He munched into the soft pretzel and smiled, handed over a dollar to the newspaper vendor he just passed and picked up the early morning editions of the latest papers. Within moments of that he was on the bus, and on his way to work.

Today is going to be a good day, he thought, flipping open the first newspaper. *I can feel it in my bones.*

When at last Superman returned to Earth, exhausted, he flew straight to his Fortress of Solitude and hit the solar sauna. Dropping his cape, boots and everything else for Kelex to scoop up and launder, he padded naked into the crystalline hollow and activated the lamps that turned the chamber into a red-hot firestorm. He basked in the warmth of the life-giving yellow-sun radiation, allowing it to flood his cells, recharging him and soothing his aching body. Cleansing flames scoured his skin, washing away the cosmic dust and microscopic grime of an intergalactic jaunt. When he emerged, pink as a newborn, he felt refreshed and smiled at Kelex as the Fortress' custodian passed him a fluffy blue robe emblazoned with the 'S' symbol that was the crest of his Kryptonian father's house.

"Welcome home, Master El" Kelex intoned, floating behind Superman as he strode down the corridor towards his diary room; he wanted to record today's thoughts and concerns while they were still fresh in his mind. "There have been no Level Alpha alerts since you left. There was one Beta Alert, which was resolved by the Martian Manhunter, and thirty-seven Gamma Alerts, 19 of which were resolved by various members of the Justice League and other of your colleagues."

He groaned inwardly at his cybernetic valet's report. Eighteen Gamma Alerts unanswered: could have been anything from Luthor's latest gambit to a terrorist attack in Pokolistan. As he did so often, he remembered his Pa's words: *Even with all your powers you can't save everybody. You can't be everywhere at all times, son. You're Superman, not God...*

"Extent of damage of most severe Gamma Alert,"

"One hundred, nineteen killed in the African village of Mbala in a raid by separatists from Gorilla City. Rebels were later rounded up by the Flash and remanded into custody of King Solivar."

One hundred and nineteen souls. Everyone of them somebody's Ma, Lois, or Jimmy... He couldn't bear to hear the stats of the Delta Alerts.

You can't be everywhere at all times, son...

Maybe that didn't have to be the case.

He abruptly changed directions, heading instead for his workshop. "Kelex, using my vocal imprint call the *Planet* offices and tell them I will be out sick today. I'll be in my workshop working on the Reflecto Project."

"You alright, Mr. Lytener?" asked Jimmy Olsen, as the reporter bumped into the photojournalist. "You look like you're in a world of your own!"

"I'm good, James," said Edward, patting the young man on the back, "I'm thinking today is going to be good, can't you feel it? Like everything is finally coming together and great things are on the verge of happening."

"Sounds wonderful to me," laughed Jimmy. "Sound some of those good vibes my way!"

"Will do, Jimmy, Will do." Edward winked, sharing in the laughter. "Go hit the town and look for some real action and adventure; today's the day you get a picture on the front page!"

"Maybe I'll get a good one of my pal Superman! Catch you later, Mr. Lytener!"

Edward finally nestled into his chair, behind his desk, and turned on his computer. He leaned back and saw that Lois Lane was already there, already typing maniacally on her keyboard whilst on the phone to whoever her piece was about. He contemplated going over. Where was Clark Kent? Whenever he went to make a move the lunking farmboy would intercept, make awkward chit-chat, and by then Lois had a lead or something, whatever it took for her to get out of the office and into the world.

"Superman's in space? Why? Come on, Professor, you're S.T.A.R. Lab's top consultant and Superman's best science buddy, you have to know why. You give me this story, and I'll guarantee it runs on Page One—Mayor Irons has discussed cutting subsidized funding this year, so you could use all the publicity you can get." Lois jotted something down, nodding. She saw that Edward was looking over her way and winked, throwing him a lop-sided grin.

Edward considered this for a moment. He loved her smile. So why shouldn't he do something about it? Why shouldn't he take a shot? *What the Hell, you only live once...*

"Lytener!" called Perry White, and Edward swung towards his Editor's office. "Got something I want you to cover."

"Oh?" asked the reporter, "what's that then, Mr. White?"

"Kent is off sick today, so I need someone to cover the story he was working on— S.T.A.R. Labs is experimenting with a Kryptonite energy-wave generator to power whole cities. They have high hopes for this one— if Lex Luthor or one of those Society thugs don't run in and try to steal it. High security, high pressure, high time you got a story like this to take you up a notch. What do you say, Edward?"

"It sounds like my day has been made, thanks Mr. White," said Lytener, and Perry handed him a folder with his press-pass and some story notes already prepared.

Perry grunted, and continued to chew on the unlit cigar that was lodged in his mouth. "Come on, call me Perry. You've got an hour to get there, Edward. Go get it."

"Will do, Perry." Lytener picked up his coat and pulled it on, checking for his notebook. Breast pocket. "Fantastic." He then walked pass Lois Lane, and stopped in his tracks. He clicked his fingers a few times, building up his confidence, and then turned to face her. "Hey, Lois, what you doing tonight?"

"Tonight? Sleeping, why?"

Edward swallowed hard. *Want company?* "Want to grab a bite? After work?"

"Work at the *Planet* never finishes, Edward, we just take it home," said Lois in a tone that made Lytener's knees melt. "But sure, meet you here at seven, that alright?"

Boy is it. "Sure thing." Edward nodded, turned, and headed to the elevator. He stood calmly until the doors pinged close with him inside, and then leaped up, punching the air as he did so. Ron Troupe looked at him with a raised eyebrow, and then shook his head.

Edward grinned. "... What?"

CLANG! GLANG, CLANG! CLANG!

Hefting a hammer made of super-dense dwarf-star ore, Superman beat the inertron plates into the desired shapes. He softened the metal with his heat vision as he banged away at it with the hammer, Kelex turning the pieces so he could flatten both sides equally.

When at last he dropped the hammer no one else on Earth could even lift, he surveyed his work with satisfaction.

"What do you think, Kelex? It looks like my Reflecto is turning out pretty well."

On the work-table before them was the metallic shell of a man, in the exact shape of Superman himself. Synthetic flesh waited close-by to be applied to craft the features and add warmth and humanity, and the gleaming skull-housing was almost finished downloading the sophisticated Kryptonian A.I. program that would make the android autonomous; its optical lenses glowed as the data transferred from the Fortress supercomputer, imprinting it with Superman's own memories and personality.

"Hyper-sensitive Kryptonian receptor cells store a solar charge, giving it the powers of flight and super-strength. Invulnerability from 31st century Coluan force fields. Heat vision from solar-ray emitters in the optical lenses... Nearly all your powers and abilities. An almost perfect replica of Superman."

Superman picked up the skull, examining it thoughtfully. *What a piece of work is a Superman...*

"Almost perfect," he nodded. "Too much use of the heat vision will drain the solar charge, leaving it weak and flightless. That's something I'll have to work on for the others."

"Others, Master El?"

The download complete, Superman disconnected the skull then attached the trailing cords and couplings to the android's body, snapping it onto the neck. "My Pa once told me I couldn't be everywhere at once, but that's not good enough, Kelex. Sometimes I have my hands full, and that's always when awful things happen. I could use some help."

He stood back and with hands on his hips watched as the android sat up, still just a bare, metallic skeleton, but thanks to its Responsometer moving in perfect human simulation. A proud smile stretching his face, he said, "Kelex, meet Reflecto-1, my first Superman Robot!"

S.T.A.R. Labs was amazing. Edward always loved to visit this place. It was a labyrinthine complex, always with so much going on, always teeming with invention and excitement. It reminded Lytner of the last time he was at a newspaper when an election was going on—the men and women running around checking facts, getting figures, interviews, whatever it took to get an amazing story out about an important event.

"Mr. Lytner?" asked a security guard. "You're here for the K-Generator demonstration, correct?"

Edward pulled himself away from watching oxygen become the colour blue in a large containment pod, and nodded. "Yes, I am."

"Follow me," said the burly man, as he motioned for Edward to head toward a large pair of reinforced doors. They moved through them slowly and Edward almost felt the air shimmer as he stepped through a threshold and into a larger-than-life demonstration area.

The scientist inside beamed as Edward arrived. "You're from the *Daily Planet*, yes yes?"

"I am, Doctor— Abernathy, is it?"

"Yes, yes, come this way please... " The scientist ran a hand through his scraggly blonde hair, and then pointed a quivering finger at the large device in the centre of the room. "This machine, as I'm sure you have been briefed, is intended to harness the potential for Kryptonite to be used as a viable energy source— previous attempts to make it a sustainable fuel source have been shot down by the government, mostly— as we now realise— because it was Lex Luthor's attempts, and he was trying to infuse the atmosphere with Kryptonite to make it toxic to Superman," he caught himself, and then looked around, "but the thing is, I don't hate Superman, I think he's brilliant, so I don't want to ruin the atmosphere for him. That's why this device has been constructed to beam the energy into a containment sphere, to be distributed to wherever it needs to go, not, you know, injected into the atmosphere, yes yes?"

"Yes," nodded Lytener, making a note, "So, how does it work?"

Dr. Abernathy burst out laughing, but then clamped his hands over his mouth. "... I can't tell you that. But I can show you."

"That's why I'm here," said Lytener. He stepped back and watched as Abernathy went to work powering up the machine. Edward leaned forward and saw through reinforced glass portholes that massive chunks of green Kryptonite were hooked up to all sorts of large wires, threading down into the pit of the machine. He made a note of that, and then turned to Abernathy. "And this is all perfectly safe?"

"Safe?" repeated Abernathy. "I turned the machine on yesterday for two minutes, Mr. Lytener! This building is still running off the excess energy the machine created!"

"That's incredible," said Lytener, "The power output must be off the charts."

The beam began to ramp up its energy output. Edward could see the Kryptonite begin to throb as something was sapped from inside it, and he jotted another note down about it. "Where'd you get all the Kryptonite from then?"

"Does it matter?" asked Abernathy. "It's here, isn't it? It's here and it's going to change the world!"

"Yeah, I'm curious. Whilst it's not a *controlled* substance, the US government does like to keep tabs of its use... so you had to either get it from them, or from the black market. Or maybe a secret contributor? I'm just asking the questions my readers will want answered."

Russell nodded, and wiped his brow. "We asked the government. They gave us the Kryptonite from a Metropolis Police Department meltdown detail. They normally dispose of it by way of explosion, but instead they gave it to me. Wonderful. Me. Us, I meant us, S.T.A.R."

"I'm talking to a mad scientist," mumbled Lytener, as he continued to watch the throbbing green Kryptonite. "Huh?" He gazed deeper, and pushed his face up against the glass. "Hey, doc?"

"Yes?"

"What's that black thing? In the Green K, is that... I don't know... damage?"

"Black?" asked Abernathy. The machine continued to hum and throb. He leapt down from the stand he was monitoring the experiment from, and pushed his face in the opposite porthole. "What... what is that?"

"You tell me..." said Lytener. "... I have no idea what's going on right now. Sounds like you don't, either."

"I need to shut down the machine, run a full—" Abernathy was about to disengage the machine when suddenly the room quaked. "—oh, no, no, no!"

"What?" Edward climbed up to the command platform.

"This didn't happen yesterday! It... it worked! It was going to—" Abernathy turned to Lytener, a grim expression on his face. "I'm sorry."

"What for?"

The room exploded in a flash of emerald light.

Sitting back in his anti-grav chair, Superman settled into the cushions and relaxed. Kelex was running the robot through diagnostic trials, and with the synthetic skin applied and the personality imprinting, it had been a little unnerving— if fascinating!— to watch. So he had come at last to his diary room, allowing himself to reflect upon the events of the long day. Fitting the cybernetic cap to his head, he recalled his chase of the shadowsphere through the Solar System, watching as the automated laser engraved his thoughts into Kryptonian words on the giant metal sheets before him.

He did his best not to read too much into the Legion's visit, but that was impossible. They, of course, had the whole spread of history before them, had looked back on his struggles against Darkseid and Black Zero, Starro and Nekron... and yet they chose this particular moment in time to appear... *On the eve of your greatest struggles*, Garth had declared. Something big was coming. And the Legion's visit felt more like a farewell... Was he going to die?

He was not afraid to die. He knew it would come someday, as he threw himself in the path of danger nearly every day of his life. Now more than ever it was important that he prepare for that eventuality. He supposed that was why he had felt such an urgency to complete the Reflecto Project... Even if he died, his work needed to carry on.

"Master El?" Kelex's voice intruded on his thoughts. He removed the diary transmitter cap.

"Yes, Kelex?"

"Delta Alert incoming from Metropolis, S.T.A.R. Labs. There's been an accident..."

Edward Lytener attempted to jerk forward in his bed, but found that he was strapped down. It was then that he screamed. His skin felt like it

was on fire, he couldn't breathe, he couldn't think, what had happened and why did everything hurt? He tried to bring up his hands, but found that they were strapped down, too. He struggled to escape, but could barely work up the energy to move, and finally, resigning himself to his unknown fate, collapsed inwardly. He slowly moved his hands up as far as they would go, and saw that his arms were wrapped in bandages. "W-w-what?"

"Mr. Lytener, please calm down," said a detached voice. He looked up and around and realised that he was in a white room, alone, and his bed and the machines that trailed wires into his veins were the only thing inside. There was a glass wall in front of him, and behind that men and women walked around in bulky containment suits. "Don't pull out your IV."

"What— what— what's going on? What's happened to me? Why am I here?"

The doctor typed a code into a panel and a door hissed open. He then walked through, and approached the confused journalist. "Yesterday, the K-Generator you were reporting on exploded, Mr Lytener. The containment void was destroyed, you were the only survivor of the incident. You've suffered massive internal trauma. Your skin was badly burned and... and, well, sir... "

Edward grimaced, and thrashed about in his bed. "What? Spit it out!"

"You've absorbed a large amount of radiation. Your body is dying, your internal organs failing. We don't know how long you'll last, but... we don't think it'll be that long, sir."

"I... I... " *It was going to be my day, he thought, I was going to hook up with Lois Lane. I was going to break a great story and share with everyone something that would change the world.* "I... "

"Is there anyone you want us to contact?" asked the doctor.

"Uh— I... I don't... " He abruptly leaned back into his pillow as a wave of pain washed over him. He didn't recognise the scream, but then, as the doctor watched, he realised that it was his own. He'd never really

screamed before. He'd never really felt this much pain. He blinked hard, and then he was alone in the room. He must have blacked out— for how long? How long was this going to last? "Oh... oh... God... "

He felt someone's hand in his own. He turned, and saw the face of Lois Lane beaming down at him from where she sat, wearing her own containment suit. "Hey, Edward. You're not looking so good."

"I... I... I wish I could say the same about you," he managed.

She nodded, and squeezed his fingers. "Always the charmer."

"Guess I won't... get that dinner... after all."

Lois swallowed hard. "Maybe some other time... "

"What's... going to happen to me?" he asked slowly.

"The doctors... have never seen a human being absorb so much Kryptonite radiation and survive. Before today, ambient Kryptonite radiation only effected Superman, but they've made a startling discovery," she shook her head. She tried to wipe away the tear that was forming at her eye, but couldn't reach due to her bulky suit. "Your internal organs are melting. You'll suffer seizures and eventually die. Until then you'll suffer attacks, they think. You've had five in the past 24 hours, don't you remember?"

"N-No," he managed. He was glad he couldn't remember. Awaking from the last... and the pain that still seeped into his muscles... "... Thank God."

Clark Kent sat at his desk, and stared at the wall. He stared past the wall. He stared so hard that he could see inside Metropolis Memorial Hospital quarantine wing, where Edward Lytener was suffering, Lois Lane at his bedside.

It was supposed to be him.

He had been the one assigned the story, but had shirked his responsibilities to the *Planet*. He couldn't risk being so close to Green Kryptonite—and had his encounter with the Legion caused him re-think his plans? Surely his Reflecto Project was more important— but now Edward Lytener was dying, his body infused with Kryptonite radiation. Somebody else was suffering in his place, and there was little Clark could do about it now. Perry White walked by, and their eyes met. Perry managed a reassuring smile, and Clark nodded back but turned away quickly. Was this the die Superman was supposed to have died? Had history been changed?

"Perry, I'm going to get some air," he said abruptly, climbing out of his chair and making a bee-line for the stairwell. "I'm still not feeling well..."

"Where's the Luthor piece you were working on? About his supposed resurfacing?"

"In your inbox, sir, has been for an hour..."

Perry shook his head. "Then why have you been sitting there? Get out!"

"Thanks, Chief."

"And don't call me—"

He stepped through into the stairwell and scanned for anyone nearby. Comfortable that he was alone, he closed the door and began to move at super speed up toward the rooftop. By the time he burst through the door that lead to the rooftop he was no longer Clark Kent, he was Superman, and he soared above the city, and headed to S.T.A.R. Labs.

His vision pierced the walls, and he looked at the ruins of the K-Generator. They had yet to collect the Kryptonite samples that had flung themselves through the machine. Huge spikes of the mineral were embedded into the wall, and he could see the piece that had severed the spine of Russell Abernathy. Killed by his own creation. What a waste.

He had been excited when he'd first heard about the experiment. If something so dangerous to himself could be put to some good use, then

why not? The remains of his homeworld were toxic to him but what if their potential could be harnessed for good? Why shouldn't he support that? He stared at the chunks, searching for some evidence. He couldn't go inside that lab, that would be signing his own death warrant, but if he looked hard enough...

... He nodded, and flew up to the top of the building, landing on the rooftop balcony leading to the private workspace of S.T.A.R. Lab's top consultant. He had what he needed, but he needed help reconstructing the experiment, from someone he trusted. Inside, a white-haired man in a white lab coat over a brightly-patterned Hawaiian-print shirt was busy directing a team of interns in an experiment when he noticed his visitor.

"Superman," he threw open the glass balcony doors. "You're here about Dr. Abernathy's accident...?"

"I need your help, Professor Hamilton. If we can reconstruct the accident maybe we can figure out what went wrong and save the life of Edward Lytner." He tapped his head. "I remember every crack and every dent and every chunk of machinery and Kryptonite that was in that room. I can see how everything fits together. I can reverse the explosion here, and examine the generator prior to the blast."

Professor Emil Hamilton did not hesitate. "My workshop is at your disposal, Superman."

"Thank you, Professor."

Hamilton hustled his assistants out of the lab as Superman got to work. All the raw material was at hand in Professor Hamilton's well-appointed lab. The Kryptonite wasn't necessary, depleted uranium would work just fine as a substitute. Superman twisted the metal into precise pieces, shaping them so they were the exact weight, size and shape of the generator components, and with the professor's help, he soon had a perfect, working replica of the generator. He looked over the parts, scanning every single piece he'd built with an analytical eye, and then found something that confused him.

"What's this?" He looked through the metal, and saw that there was a void where there shouldn't be. Every single piece in Abernathy's lab had

been accounted for by his own eyes— but there was a perfect sphere-shaped void inside one of the uranium rods.

Professor Hamilton bent closer and looked over the top of his glasses at the Generator, but without the benefit of x-ray vision, he was lost. "What have you found, son?"

Superman studied it carefully, sure that he had molded an exact duplicate of the Kryptonite rod. "I'm not sure... But I think Dr. Abernathy's experiment may have been sabotaged..."

"Edward?" Lois asked softly, the man shifting in his bed as his skin crackled and cracked. "Edward, can you hear me?"

"Y... y... yes... " he slurred, his now green eyes blinking once, twice, as he tried to clear his vision of the horrors that were seeping in there. "W-what is it?"

"Professor Hamilton just called from S.T.A.R. Labs... he wants to know if there was something unusual in the Kryptonite present in the machine? Something that shouldn't have been there...?"

"Black," Edward managed, lurching forward. He gagged, his stomach feeling as if something needed to get out, "black... in... K-Kryptonite... ?" and then he fell backwards, fading back into the unconscious world that brought him respite.

"Black Kryptonite?" asked Superman, his arms folded across his chest. Lois had joined them across town in the penthouse lab, watching as Professor Hamilton typed wildly at a bank of computers. "Or black *in* the Kryptonite? Something was in the machine, Lois, something that caused the explosion. But it was no accident."

"Who would want to sabotage Dr. Abernathy's experiment? And for what reason?" Lois leaned back against a worktable, her hands on its edges. She stared into the middle distance, lost in thought.

"You've experienced Black Kryptonite before, haven't you, Superman?" Asked Hamilton, glancing over his shoulder at them. "I can create a simulation on the computer demonstrating how the Generator would have reacted, but I'll need the specs on the Black K."

Superman's brow furrowed. "An experience I'd rather not remember, professor. It's nasty stuff, but it wouldn't cause anything like this level of destruction— even *if* that's what Edward meant. Perhaps the Kryptonite itself was booby-trapped? Something that would be triggered by an initial activation of the Generator, and then fully erupt on a secondary activation? Whatever it was that had fit into that void is missing now, so someone is definitely covering their tracks... "

Edward managed to open his eyes. "L-Lois?"

A nurse looked down at the journalist, and tapped him gently on his shoulder. "She's talking to Superman, Mr. Lytener. She'll be back soon."

Superman. If it wasn't for Superman I wouldn't be in this bed. If it wasn't for Superman there wouldn't be any Kryptonite in existence, the Generator wouldn't have been made, I'd be alive, I wouldn't be in so much damn pain. If it wasn't for Superman I'd have Lois and I would live and I'd have a life and why is everything so... why is everything so green?

"I shuh-shuh-shouldn't have *been* there," he said to the nurse, "it wasn't my cuh-cuh-case! It wasn't my stuh-story." Tears began to stream down his face. "It wasn't my story."

The monitoring equipment began to blare. The nurse checked his vitals as Lytener began to experience a grand mal seizure. He thrashed about on the bed, unable to control his movements. "Mr. Lytener!" cried the nurse.

"Wasssnnt miiiiineeee!" he screamed, and the machines got louder and louder, blood seeped from the corners of his emerald eyes— his skin

began to harden and crack— the restraints burst around his wrists— his mouth twisted and contorted as his gums began to push out his radiation-decayed teeth— his fingernails fell from their moorings— and his skin, finally after hardening, began to thicken. It began to grow. His skin went from the black and red scar tissue it had become to solid emerald scales, and the nurse screamed as Lytener grabbed her by the arm.

"What are you— no, Mr. Lytener! No, don't—!" Her containment suit fizzled and melted as his touch burned away at the material. She screamed and she screamed as his coarse hand touched her skin, and a green infection shot through her flesh and bones. "No! Oh, God, no!"

Lytener did nothing but hold on and stare at her, even as his perceptions shifted and the pain increased. He watched her as her veins popped green and her blood boiled emerald. "Itttt... wasnnn'tttt... myyyyyy... . storrrryyyy!"

To Be Concluded In Two Weeks In Adventure Comics Annual #1

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