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Clark Kent stared at the monitor, fingers poised over the keys.

"What's the matter, Smallville? Writer's block?"

He glanced up at Lois, who plopped herself down on the arm of his chair, extending her neck to read off his screen.

"Recent acquisitions of Genesis Corporation, including the high-profile eugenics research firm, Progene, have occurred in a virtual media vacuum, leaving many to wonder where did Metropolis' new Fortune 500 addition come from..." She thought about it for a second, chewing the nub of a pencil. "Clark, not all big companies are like LexCorp. What is it that you think you're onto here?"

Momentarily distracted by a stray curl that all but caressed her cheek, Clark replied in an unfeigned fluster: "I, uh, I'm not sure, exactly." He scratched his head thoughtfully. "But a good reporter once told me to always follow my hunches."

"She also told you not to *create* a story, but to *follow* it." She helped herself to the bottled water on Clark's desk. "Why do you think there's something there?"

Clark shrugged. "Been doing some research on their CEO, a Mr. Izaya. There's practically nothing known about him, other than he surfaced a couple of years ago, his Genesis Corp fully-formed, and lives in virtual isolation. His company has targeted all the cutting-edge firms from the Opal to Gotham to Star City, snatching them up, and bringing the best and brightest right here to their corporate headquarters in Metropolis."

Lois considered that a moment. "I heard about their bid for WayneTech last month. Luckily, Bruce has more money than he knows what to do with!"

Clark raised an eyebrow. "*Bruce, is it?*"

"Jealous, Smallville?" Her mouth twitched in a smile. "He takes me to dinner every time he comes to town. How can a girl say no?"

He crossed his arms over his chest and sighed in exasperation. "Gee, Lois, does a guy have to fly or have a billion dollars to impress you?"

Lois Lane slid off the arm of his chair, her eyes twinkling. "It's a start!"

"That is Earth... ?"

"Yes, my lord. Not only the place where the Highfather's filthy spawn has fled to, but the home to the Last Sons of Krypton, as well!"

"You said sons. There are more than just this so-called, Superman?"

"Yes, lord! Our instruments detect a hitherto unknown Kryptonian, though his life signs are weak."

"Bring him to me."

Like a monarch surveying his demesne, Lex Luthor stood at his wall-sized office window and glared out at Metropolis.

The view was spectacular, taking in a wide panorama of the City of Tomorrow, from Hob's Bay to Centennial Park, with the gleaming MetroTram winding through it all like a glittering necklace of light. In the distance, one could see the roof-top globe of the *Daily Planet* building (though still below the level of Lex's eyeline)— and the somewhat new

addition to the Metropolis skyline, the otherwise nondescript Genesis Corp. Building. And despite the breathtaking view, this was the only thing Lex saw.

Genesis Corp. He had paid them little heed in recent years, but now they had begun to encroach upon what he considered his territories. Happer-son had just accepted the resignation of the top structural engineer at LexTech, lured away by an offer from the enigmatic Mr. Izaya and his upstart Genesis Corp!

The GenCorp Building stabbed into the sky, like an insulting gesture aimed at LexCorp Tower.

This was absolutely unacceptable. No one poached in the king's forest! And while the loss of the engineer rankled, it didn't really hurt. After all, Lex himself was the greatest asset of LexCorp. A reporter early on had made the mistake of calling Lex a "jack of all trades", which implied the rejoinder "and master of none." Nothing could be further from the truth. He was a master of them *all*. Lex Luthor was a futurist and a polymath, the latest in a line of extraordinary individuals that stretched from Aristotle to da Vinci and ended with him, Lex Luthor, the *homo universalis*, the Universal Man, a culmination of all human greatness.

His mind was working furiously now, calculating odds and probabilities. What exactly was GenCorp? Who was Mr. Izaya? And just what was their agenda, which they conducted with such an admirable secrecy?

Slowly, the pieces started to come together... .

Across town, the smartly dressed man with the thick white beard stared out his own office window, across the intervening space to the shining pinnacle of LexCorp Tower, as if aware of the scrutiny.

"What is it, Izaya?" Came a carefully respectful voice. "Is there something wrong?" The speaker was one in a group of people standing in the office, waiting upon the older man. He was fair-haired and bright, almost glowing in his perfectly tailored white suit.

"Perhaps, Lightray. I fear we have begun to attract some unwanted attention." The old man's hand fell lightly upon a folded newspaper sitting on the nearby desk. It was open to an article buried on the last page of the Business section. The headline read: *Newcomer Genesis Corporation Challenges LexCorp in the Metropolis Technologies Market*. The byline was Clark Kent.

"Our work cannot proceed under the glare of public scrutiny." Spoke a bald woman with milky cataracts over her eyes. She was dressed in soft robes and cradled to her breast what appeared to be a bleached human skull— if it were not for the horns sprouting from the top. "And we cannot risk exposure. Not when we are so close."

The powerful old man, Mr. Izaya, turned to look at them, worry etched into the lines of his face. "I need no oracle to tell me that, K'zandr. Our project is paramount. I feel at last our enemy's eye upon us. I do not think we have much time left. We can brook no interference now."

A tall, broad-shouldered man with shaggy red hair let out an explosive expression of frustration, slamming his fist down upon Mr. Izaya's desk, sending the newspaper fluttering to the ground.

"Bah! I weary of this interminable skulking! What matters if we reveal ourselves? What can the Earthlings do to distract us from our purpose?"

"Patience, Orion!" Mr. Izaya held up a steadying hand, his face placid and soothing. "If the humans were aware of our presence on their planet, or of what lurks out there in the cosmos, waiting, there would be worldwide panic and terror. Our work is almost done. I only hope we are in time... "

The man called Orion ground his teeth in barely restrained frustration, but deferred to the wisdom of Mr. Izaya.

"Highfather!"

A young man dashed into the room through the open double doors, at a speed the naked eye could not follow; the aeropads on his boots glowed hotly, and he seemed excited.

"Fastbak!" Remonstrated Lightray. "More respect, if you please."

"Sorry!" The speedster shrugged apologetically.

"What is it, Fastbak?" Mr. Izaya asked patiently. "Have you found my foster son yet?"

"No, Highfather, still no sign of him." Fastbak explained apologetically. "But then, he is expert at avoiding detection. I was just coming to tell you that someone is on the telephone device asking— demanding!— to speak to you."

"Who?" Mr. Izaya raised a bushy eyebrow.

"Lex Luthor." The answer came from the blind woman named K'zandr. She held the horned skull to her ear, her head cocked to listen. "Beware! He is not like the rest of these earthlings, Highfather. The oracle foresees nothing good in dealings with him."

Mr. Izaya nodded thoughtfully. Nevertheless, he went to the device on the desk and activated the speaker phone.

"Izaya." A bold, powerful voice crackled from the speaker. "My name is Lex Luthor. You know who I am?"

"All of Metropolis knows who you are, Mr. Luthor." The older man said calmly.

"Yes, well, I get the impression you're not exactly from around here." Lex replied, with enough innuendo in his voice to start a low growling from Orion.

"What do you want, Mr. Luthor?" Asked Mr. Izaya.

"What I want, Mr. Izaya, is to give you your first and last opportunity to save yourself." Came the reply in crisp, clipped tones. "I've studied the activities and acquisitions of GenCorp very carefully. I've noted how you've snapped up the best men in certain fields, bought up certain patents and logged your purchases of exotic materials and real estate. I've

even noted the GenCorp interests in certain remote locations on the planet. You're planning something. Something big. Something, I would hazard a guess, which you would very much like to keep secret. Whatever it is, and I have a pretty good idea, I *want* it."

The low growling from Orion was joined by a gasp from Lightray, and alarmed looks all around.

But Mr. Izaya maintained his calm.

"Why should I heed you at all, Mr. Luthor? We have done nothing wrong. Nothing illegal."

"Perhaps not illegal, but you *did* do something wrong." Luthor's voice was cold and hard. "You came to my town— *my world!*— and you didn't pay tribute to me. You didn't say 'Mother, may I?' and that hurts my feelings. I will suffer no rivals, Izaya. A couple of months ago, I saved the world from some super-powered *alien freaks*; crushing *you* will be child's play."

A muscle in Mr. Izaya's chin clenched. "And just how do we avoid your wrath, Mr. Luthor?"

"By signing over a controlling interest in GenCorp to me. By stepping down as CEO, Mr. Izaya, and appointing me in your place as Chairman of the Board of Directors. And I want to know, definitively, right now, what you are building in the Marianas Trench."

"The dog—!" Orion could not restrain his outburst. Mr. Izaya shot him a sharp glance, silencing him.

The sound of Lex chuckling came through the speaker.

"And if we don't accede to your demands... what? Exposure? Fabricated lawsuits?"

"Please." Luthor's voice dripped with scorn. "Who do you take me for? Max Lord? Josiah Powers? I'm goddamn Lex Luthor. *I. Will. De-stroy. You.*"

For a moment no one, not even Orion, breathed. The menace in the earthling's voice was unmistakable, and so was his certainty that he could carry out the threat. Mr. Izaya and his associates stared at each other in a mix of consternation and rage.

"You have 24 hours to consider my offer."

Then Luthor disengaged the line.

There. That made him feel a little better.

Lex rose from his desk, and glanced out the window towards The GenCorp Building. *That rattled them*, he thought with some satisfaction. *Oh, well. If you wanted to see the ants scurry, you had to kick a few anthills...*

Then something exploded in his office.

No, that wasn't exactly right. It wasn't really an explosion— there was the noise and the light, but no concussive blast...

Lex lowered his hastily thrown up arm, and was amazed to see what his mind instantly catalogued as a kind of interdimensional space/time portal. Out of it stepped a hunchbacked figure in a purple robe.

"Lex Luthor! Greetings from Apokolips. My name is Desaad. And you have something I want... "

"Highfather, you must let me deal with this impudent human!" Pled Orion, spittle flying from his mouth. "He will destroy everything we have worked so carefully to build. Please! I will leave only a smoking hole where—."

"No." Mr. Izaya said quietly, but with an authoritative air of finality. "That is not our way, my son. We have labored long to show you this.

The Source teaches us that—."

Orion let out a strangled cry of frustration, near to tears at his rage, and stormed out.

Izaya's sad eyes followed him. "I fear there is still too much of his true father in him. Lightray, would you be so kind as to see to him?"

The bright figure in the white business suit nodded and excused himself.

Izaya released a long sigh and sank into his desk chair. K'zandr and Fastbak stepped closer, looking to him expectantly.

The horned skull in K'zandr's arms whispered again into her ear.

"The oracle warns that we ignore this threat at our gravest peril." She announced. "And that Luthor will anticipate an attack and take steps. Yet if we do nothing, he will surely endanger our work."

"What *can* we do, Highfather?" Asked Fastbak.

Mr. Izaya pondered only a moment. "The people of this world have a saying: *When in Rome, do as the Romans do.*"

The two looked at him, confused.

"They have another saying, too." Mr. Izaya sighed, resigned to a course of action now that his hand had been forced. "*This is a job for Superman...*"

"City Desk, this is Lois Lane."

Lois held the phone to her ear with her shoulder and typed into her computer rapidly, only half listening. Across from her, Clark was going over some photos with Jimmy for a story the two were working on, but when Lois stopped clattering away on her keyboard, he looked up.

"You're kidding." Lois stared blankly at her monitor, concentrating on what the voice on the other end was saying. "Me? When? No, that'll be fine. Absolutely. Can I bring a photographer? Excellent! Tell Mr. Izaya that I am very much looking forward to this."

She hung up the phone and gave the staring Clark and Jimmy a smug look.

"Scooped again, Smallville. That was the PR office of Genesis Corporation. Guess who's just been invited over to interview the CEO, Mr. Izaya? That's right, this girl!" She jabbed a thumb at herself and smiled sweetly. "Grab your camera Jimmy, your coming with me!"

Clark groaned in disappointment. "I don't get it, Lois! I was the one who did that piece on GenCorp yesterday. Why did they call you?"

Lois snatched up her coat and cell phone. "Oh, I don't know Clark, maybe it's my well-earned reputation, or that Pulitzer Prize sitting all shiny right here." She waved it in his face.

Clark watched her walk off, with a final waggling of her fingers goodbye, then, after a surreptitious glance to see if anyone was watching, left his desk and slipped into a nearby janitor's closet, already beginning to unbutton his shirt.

A moment later, Superman flew, too fast to be observed, from an upper-storey window of the *Planet*.

The Man of Steel sailed over the city, glancing left and right as he flew. Something was up, he knew. As Clark Kent, he had honed his reporter's instinct enough to sense that something was going on. At the very least, he knew there was more to Genesis Corp than met the eye...

He had to fight against that same reporter's instinct to follow Lois and Jimmy, and listen in on her interview with Mr. Izaya. But Lois had scooped him fair and square—the story was hers.

But whenever there was something going on in Metropolis, he always started at the same place: Lex Luthor.

He steered himself towards LexCorp Tower, his keen hearing already picking up Luthor's conversation: "... I want you to see to the transport of our newest acquisition personally, Mr. Happerson. We mustn't keep our new friends waiting. Oh, and please bring Version 1.1 online immediately; I have a feeling we'll need its services sooner than later. And have my lunch reservations canceled. My apologies to the mayor... "

Superman pulled up outside Lex's window and knocked. Luthor swiveled in his chair, seemed unsurprised to see him floating there, then waved him away, turning back to his computer.

Superman knocked again.

"Can't you see I'm busy, alien." Lex whispered knowing that his nemesis would have no difficulty in hearing him. "Besides, isn't there a cat up a tree that needs rescuing... ?"

"We need to talk, Luthor." Came the Man of Steel's muffled voice from beyond the glass. "What do you know about Genesis Corporation?"

Lex slowly swiveled back to face the window, one eyebrow raised. "I know that they're an upstart company that all but appeared out of nowhere. I know that they have projects that they'd prefer to keep out of the public eye. I know that they're about to have a bad day." Lex's glance flickered to a point over Superman's shoulder. "And I know that they seem to have a secret weapon... " And with that, he dove out of his chair and rolled to the side.

Superman barely had time to register this before he was hit from behind. Hard.

He went crashing into Lex's window, a super-missile drilling a hole clear through the entire floor of the building, regaining his momentum only when he emerged from the other side in a shower of glass and concrete.

"What in the world was that?" He shook his head. There wasn't much on earth that could through him for such a loop. He flew back through the

building, much to the shock of the people whose offices had been wrecked, and returned just in time to see a red-suited man with a silver helmet, harnessed into some kind of rocket glider, hovering in the middle of Lex's office.

"And just who the hell are you?" Luthor demanded, climbing to his feet and straightening his tie.

"Human insect!" The intruder scowled menacingly. "My name is Orion, the Dog of War. And you've meddled in our affairs for the last time!"

With that, beams of power shot from the glider, towards Luthor.

Superman was a blue and red blur, streaking across the office to get between Luthor and the blasts. Bracing himself, the Man of Steel intercepted the blasts, allowing them to slam ineffectually against his chest.

"Why, Superman, I didn't know you cared?" Luthor remarked drolly behind him. But Superman could pay him no heed. He had stopped the blasts, but they hurt. These were not just laser beams...

"By the Source!" The man called Orion muttered. "No man can withstand the Astroforce...?"

"Allow me to introduce myself, then," The Man of Steel cocked his arm and flew at Orion. "*My name is Superman!*"

The punch sent Orion sailing up through the roof of the building and arcing high over Metropolis.

"Thank you for offering me this opportunity, Mr. Izaya." Lois made herself comfortable on the couch in the CEO's luxurious office, as Jimmy snapped candid photos of Mr. Izaya himself, who was sitting uneasily in the plush chair across from Lois. "A lot of people in Metropolis are very curious about you and your firm. But before we begin, can you tell me—why the sudden change of heart? Up until now, Genesis Corp has always conducted its affairs out of the public eye."

"The answer is quite simple, Ms. Lane," The distinguished gentleman told her. "Yet I fear you will find it difficult to believe. You see, neither I, nor my special 'board of directors', are from this planet." He explained plainly, as if announcing he was from Peoria or Hackensack. "In fact, we are not even from this *dimension*."

Lois blinked, but otherwise the expression on her face did not change.

Jimmy stopped shooting photos and lowered his camera, looking confused.

"We are refugees from a cosmic war that has raged for many thousands of your years, and have taken shelter on Earth until we can assemble the means by which we can once again ascend to our proper place in the heavens."

He paused, waiting politely for Lois to interject or ask a question. She merely glanced around, as if expecting to see colleagues jump up from behind a closed door and yell "Surprise!"

"You're kidding me, right?" She asked, eyebrow raised. "Is this some kind of strange practical joke... ? Is Luthor involved in this—"

"Ms. Lane, I assure you this is no joke." Mr. Izaya replied solemnly. "However, you are correct in assuming Lex Luthor is involved."

Lois let out a snort and began collecting her things to leave. "I'm sure he is! Look, Mr. Izaya, I don't appreciate you wasting my time like this, and when you are ready to talk seriously please give my office a call. In the meantime, I suggest you seek psychiatric help. C'mon, Jimmy; let's go."

Without a backward glance, Lois stomped towards the door, just as it opened and a tall, bright man in a white suit blocked her way with a beatific but firm smile.

Fuming, Lois whirled back upon Mr. Izaya, who had risen now and was clutching a long golden staff that throbbed with power.

"Holy—" Jimmy ejaculated, fumbling for his camera.

"You are not far off, James Olsen of Earth." Mr. Izaya proclaimed, in a voice that resonated with age and wisdom. "For we are the New Gods, and I am the Highfather. We are benevolent beings and mean no harm to Earth or her people. And I do not summon you lightly! Our work is almost done but it is threatened by the sinister intentions of Lex Luthor. And if we are exposed, if our Enemy finds us, the danger we could bring down on this planet is immense. Thus it is that I call upon you for aid."

Lois needed a moment to assimilate all this, finally shaking her head before she answered: "And you want me to tell your story...?"

"No." The Highfather stepped closer to her, and he seemed now to be somehow greater than the flesh and bone shell he inhabited. "I called upon you because we need something only you seem to be able to deliver. We need the help of Superman... "

Superman pursued Orion into the stratosphere, even as the New God regained control of his glider and banked back towards Earth.

Behind the silver helmet, the face of Orion was contorted in battlelust as he aimed another salvo from his glider at Superman. The Man of Steel easily dodged the bolts of Astroforce, and strafed his foe with heat vision as he flew past him. Orion absorbed the blast but did not cry out, gritting his teeth against the pain and swinging the glider around for another pass.

"I don't know who you are, but you can't just attack people without provocation— even Lex Luthor!" Superman yelled to him.

"I *have* provocation!" Snarled Orion, whizzing past Superman, though choosing this time not to attack. "He threatens me and mine! We have already been hounded into near extinction, and I won't let a puny human bug pound the last nail in our coffin!"

The New God descended upon Superman from above, barreling down on him with full speed.

Superman reached out and grabbed the Astroglider, arresting its motion and holding a stunned Orion in place.

"We *don't* have to fight. Maybe I can help."

"Luthor!"

Superman and Orion floated down to the level of Lex's shattered office window, catching the CEO of LexCorp changing into a fresh jacket.

"My, what strange bedfellows." Lex remarked sardonically. "A moment ago the two of you were pummeling each other. But then, there's no telling what you types call a good time."

Orion growled, but Superman restrained him with a raised hand.

"Enough, Luthor! I don't know what your game is, or why Orion wants to hurt you so bad, but I do know that you've made a powerful enemy, and I can't protect you all the—."

"Protect me?" Lex's voice rose over its usually moderate tone. The idea seemed to repulse him. "I don't need you to protect me from *anything*, alien. I am quite capable of defending myself and my interests. And that's exactly what I've been doing all along."

With that, Lex jabbed a button on his desk and a wall panel slid open, revealing the ghoulish visage of his genetic abomination, Bizarro!

"Allow me to introduce Bizarro, Version 1.1— a marked improvement over the original!"

Bizarro opened his eyes and his lips curled.

"Here we go... " Superman muttered under his breath, even as the monster rocketed towards him and Orion.

It became quickly apparent that Bizarro's true target wasn't Superman at all, but the being that had attacked Lex in the first place: Orion. The monster whizzed past Superman and barreled into the New God, catching him by surprise. The two went spinning end over end, out over the tops of buildings, grappling with each other.

Superman spun on Lex, who was watching the scene with some amusement.

"Call him off, Lex! Before innocent people are injured... "

"Innocent people like me?" Lex retorted smugly. "I was viciously attacked, Superman, and have every right to defend myself. It just so happens that my bodyguard is as superpowered as my attacker. No court in the land would convict me."

With a lingering glare, and fuming in frustration, Superman flew away, leaving Luthor, chuckling.

"The human called Luthor has delivered the Kryptonian, my lord, but there are... complications..."

"What is the matter with it, Desaad? It looks damaged."

"Indeed it is, my lord. This one has been under enforced sedation for months, and has recently undergone some sort of primitive neural tampering. Its genetic code has been subtly but irrevocably altered by the creature called Luthor."

"It is useless to me then. Dispose of it. And then have this Luthor killed. We shall have to have the other Kryptonian for our purposes."

"If that is your will, O Dread One! But let's not be hasty! This one's DNA will not hold the component of the Anti-Life Equation we are looking for, but we may make use of him, yet! And I may never again have a live Kryptonian subject to

experiment upon... I think I could make a pretty toy of him, my lord. A lap dog to unleash upon your enemies."

"... Very well, Desaad. Prepare a doomsday for this Superman..."

The fight in the sky quickly escalated out of control. Bizarro pounded on Orion, who unleashed blast after blast from his glider on his enemy. Bizarro was a fearsome fighter, but not a shrewd one; he absorbed the bolts of Astroforce and was flung repeatedly into the sides of skyscrapers, dislodging steel and concrete to fall onto the streets below.

The debris rained down upon the busy Metropolis street, threatening to crush the innocent bystanders. But, as always, Superman was there. His heat vision vaporized a wide swath of falling stone, and one particularly large piece he caught on his shoulders, setting it down gently next to the cab it had almost crushed.

"Thanks, Superman!" The cabbie leaned out the window and cheered.

Superman paused long enough to smile and wave at the crowd gathering to watch the fight in the sky, then he launched himself back into the air, streaking towards the combatants.

Bizarro had managed to engage Orion in close quarters again, and had the New God in a headlock. Orion twisted and kicked, but could not squirm free of his foe's deadly embrace. So he engaged the glider, ramming it into the digital "Soder Cola" billboard. Showers of sparks flew everywhere and Bizarro was thrown free in confusion.

"Enough!" Superman roared in a voice that shook mortar and plaster from nearby buildings. He interposed himself between the two enemies as they rocketed back towards each other. A blast of superbreath sent Orion pinwheeling backward, and Superman grabbed the front of Bizarro's uniform, a mockery of his own, whirled him around at super-speed, then launched him into the sky, dwindling quickly into the distance!

As the New God zoomed back into the fray, Superman warned: "Stand down, Orion! Let me take care of Bizarro."

Before Orion could respond, a new player appeared on the scene. A man in glowing white streaked through the air, leaving an ionized vapor trail behind him. Superman watched as the newcomer greeted Orion familiarly.

"Lightray!" Orion cried.

"Easy, Dog of War! Highfather bids you to return and leave this problem to Superman." The New God called Lightray looked over at the astonished Man of Steel and smiled. "Highfather Izaya sends his greetings."

"Izaya... ?" Superman did not miss the implications of the name, nor did he forget that Lois and Jimmy were now involved in all this... !. But he could not be distracted now. A quick scan with his super-vision showed that Bizarro was recovering from his toss into the upper atmosphere, and was heading back.

He turned back to the New Gods. "We'll finish this later." The he was gone in a blur of color.

Superman and Bizarro clashed above the cloud-line, the force of their collision creating a sonic boom that shattered windows five miles below them. The Man of Steel shrugged off the impact, then aimed himself again at Bizarro. The monster roared and swung wildly. Superman didn't even try to dodge the blow: he caught it in his hands. Bizarro snarled and tried to pull himself away, but Superman wouldn't release him, twisting the monster's arm until it was behind its back.

"Yield!" Called Superman to his foe, who thrashed wildly and ineffectually in Superman's grasp. "I don't know what you are, but you don't have to be enslaved to Luthor... Let me help you!"

Bizarro let out an inarticulate noise and heaved with a fearsome effort, succeeding in dislodging Superman! The Man of Steel careened away,

struggling to right himself as Bizarro came after him. Heat vision lashed Bizarro, causing him to whimper and flinch away in surprise. Superman pressed his advantage, winding up and aimed a punch at Bizarro that sent his foe sailing into orbit!

Superman took off after the brute, through the thinning atmosphere and into space.

Bizarro was having trouble orienting himself in zero gravity— in fact, a look of panic had come over his gruesome and normally expressionless face. He flailed about, gasping for breath— and began to disintegrate before Superman's eyes!

Putting on a burst of speed, Superman grabbed the distressed creature and wrapped him in his cape as he dove back into Earth's atmosphere...

But by then, Bizarro was out cold.

Dr. Kitty Faulkner, Director of S.T.A.R. Labs, Metropolis watched as Superman descended into her courtyard, bearing a figure wrapped in his cape.

His blue eyes flashed and he grinned lopsidedly at her.

"Dr. Faulkner! Got room for one more... ?"

Lois waited for him on the rooftop of the *Daily Planet*.

"So, do you think they're for real?" She asked, passing him a cup of steaming coffee as he took a seat next to her on the ledge.

Superman accepted the drink gratefully; it had been a long day. They sat silently together, the mood between them somber and contemplative.

"Are you asking me if I think they're Gods... ? I don't know Lois." Superman shook his head, remembering the feeling of awe he experienced when Orion and Lightray had introduced him to the Highfather only an hour before. "But they need help. They're on the run from something awful, something we definitely don't want to attract the attention of... "

Lois heard something she never had before in the Man of Steel's voice: fear.

"What *is* it... ?" She breathed.

But he only shook his head and sat silently.

After a while, Lois announced. "I'll kill the story. And in the morning, I'll pay a visit to Lex and see if I can't persuade him to call off the hounds. I think I still have some influence with him. And by that I mean I think I still have some dirt on him somewhere."

Superman chuckled softly at this. "Just be careful. I know Lex has a soft spot for you, but never forget how dangerous— or how devious— he can be."

"Don't worry, Big Blue, I can handle Lex Luthor." She slugged him playfully on the arm. "But if I get into trouble, I know you're just a whisper away."

He smiled at her and passed her the empty coffee cup, climbing to his feet. "Thanks for the coffee." He waved and floated gently into the air, disappearing behind the huge *Daily Planet* globe.

"Anytime." Lois sighed.

"Lois!" Called a voice from the stairwell door. "There you are! Lois, I've been looking for you all over. Are we still going to get dinner tonight?"

Sighing again, Lois Lane stood, casting one last glance at the empty sky.

"You bet, Clark! After all, I think it's your turn to pay, isn't it?"

"Gee, Lois, I don't know... I mean I paid last time, right? At the Indian

restaurant. I remember because all that curry gave me a stomach ache later on, and... "

Arm in arm, the two reporters went down the stairs.

The next day Lex Luthor stood once again at his office window, looking out upon the city. *His city... .*

Metropolis.

Lex Luthor was a polymath, the next step in human intellectual evolution. His mind was capable of the most complex calculations and brilliant leaps of intuitive genius. Usually, he was so sure, his confidence boundless...

But not today. For yesterday, he had made a deal with the devil.

And not in any kind of figurative sense. Yesterday, Lex Luthor had gazed upon pure evil. Pure distilled malevolence. But he had stood up to it. Bargained with it... Did what he had to do to save his city... There was more than *one* Man of Steel in Metropolis...

Lois Lane had come and gone only minutes ago. She had been shocked to find Lex in such an accommodating mood. He would, of course, cease his hostile takeover bid for Genesis Corporation. No strings attached.

After today, it wouldn't matter anyway.

After today, nothing would be the same.

The skies darkened at midday. He watched the roiling black clouds in the upper atmosphere, and ignored the phone that rang incessantly on his desk, the pounding on his door, the desperate calling of his name. He knew what they would be reporting: freakish electro-magnetic activity in earth orbit. Super-energized ions falling like sparks from a 4th of July sparkler...

Lex Luthor just stood at the window, and watched. He knew what was coming. And he knew nothing could stop it.

The **BOOM!** shook the very foundation of the building, and like a dark, cankerous flower blossoming in the sky, the scarred and pitted planet called Apokolips, vomiting fire and greasy smoke, appeared between the Earth and its moon.

Below him, he could barely make out the sounds of cars screeching to a halt, sirens droning and car alarms wailing, as people poured into the streets to gaze up in awe and terror at the sight above them...

How many of them would survive this terrible day, Lex wondered.

A crisis was upon them. And nothing would *ever* be the same again.

With a final sigh, Lex Luthor activated the blast shields for LexCorp Tower and went to work; he had a city to save.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH WHEN THE DC2 LAUNCHES THE CONTINUITY-WIDE MEGA-CROSSOVER EVENT, *CRISIS: THE APOKOLIPS IMPERATIVE!*

If you enjoyed this story, you can find more tales of your favorite DC heroes at DC2 Universe.

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From the same author on Feedbooks

The Adventures of Superman #0 (2005)

The Adventures of Superman: Lost Sons of Krypton, Prelude:
Strange Visitors!

A strange visitor from another planet comes to Metropolis--- and Superman is all that stands in his way! It's a battle royale in the skies and streets of the City of Tomorrow as a mistake from Jor-El's past comes back to haunt his son. And intrepid reporter Lois Lane is onto the story of her career, but can the Man of Steel save her when she goes too far?

The Adventures of Superman #1 (2005)

The Adventures of Superman: Lost Sons of Krypton, Pt. 1: A War of Brothers!

Zod, the Destroyer of Krypton, has come to Earth, and with his Tigris and Hound, the bastard son of Jor-El, at his side, can even Superman stand against him? Meanwhile, Lois plays a deadly game to get to the bottom of the sinister machinations of Lex Luthor!

The Adventures of Superman #2 (2005)

The Adventures of Superman: Kingdom of Zod.

Superman leads a desperate assault on the Antarctic Kingdom of Zod. But even with the aid of an unexpected ally, can the Man of Steel overthrow the might of the Destroyer and his Doomsday Bomb?

Wonder Woman #0 (2005)

Wonder Woman: A Game of Gods and Men, Prelude.

Meet the Amazing Amazon as she hosts a summit of world leaders at Themyscira House--- but danger stalks the hallowed halls as a familiar foe lurks, thirsty for the blood of her enemy Wonder Woman! Meanwhile, on Paradise Island, former USAAF Colonel Steve Trevor becomes embroiled in the deadly affairs of gods and men--- and learns that sometimes they are one and the same!

Detective Comics #0 (2005)

Detective Comics: Lustmord, Prelude.

A wicked new serial killer with a bloody history stalks the night-time streets of Gotham, and no one is safe! Reeling from personal crises, the Dark Knight must confront hidden dangers from his own past and new enemies laying in wait for him... From Crime Alley to Arkham Asylum, Batman is tested by a diabolical mastermind!

Detective Comics #1 (2005)

Detective Comics: Lustmord: Shadows and Fog.

The mystery of the Gotham Ripper deepens as his murderous rampage continues. Batman haunts the streets and shadows, determined to bring the lunatic to justice, but in Arkham Asylum, plots are laid for the Dark Knight's demise!

Detective Comics #2 (2005)

Detective Comics: Lustmord: An Uncommon Fondness for Blood.

With Vicki Vale in the clutches of the Gotham Ripper, Batman must contend with a foe who has studied him for years--- and discovered his secret identity! This is the gruesome conclusion to the Lustmord storyline!

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman #0 (2005)

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman: Under Ancient Stars.

In the days of the pharaohs, in the land of the pyramids, is born a hero for all time! Defying the will of men and gods, Prince Khufu and his beloved Chay-Ara embark upon a destiny filled with triumph and tragedy, sacrifice and murder. With the wizard Nabu and the champion of Shazam who will one day be known as Black Adam at their side, they must use the power of the otherworldly Thanagarian Nth Metal and the gifts of the hawk-god Horus to defeat the villainous immortal tyrant known as Vandal Savage! Born in the fires of war, undying passion and treacherous betrayal, this is a definitive retelling of the ancient origin of the hero who will be known as--- Hawkman!

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman #2 (2005)

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman: Wings of Destiny, Part 2.

The two part origin arc of the Golden Age Hawkman concludes as Carter Hall takes up the mantle of the immortal hero and races against time to save Shiera Saunders from the clutches of the

villainous Dr. Anton Hastor! But first he must survive the attack of the undead Sons of Anubis, and defeat the man who is destined to slay him!

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman #1 (2005)

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman: Wings of Destiny, Part 1.
"Wings of Destiny, Pt. 1" First in a two part origin arc! It is 1938, and the world hovers on the brink of war... Troubled by dreams of past lives, museum curator and archaeologist Carter Hall receives a mysterious package from a lost colleague that sends him across the globe to Egypt, where he will be reunited with an immortal love and encounter an enemy that stalks him through the ages! A hero discovers his destiny as the Golden Age Hawkman is born!

Wonder Woman #1 (2005)

Wonder Woman: The Swords of the Amazons!
As Wonder Woman hunts the Cheetah, Doom's Doorway opens and Themyscira is besieged by the horrors of the underworld! Diana must contend with a deadly and secret mastermind determined to destroy her and all she holds dear!

Teen Titans #0 (2005)

Teen Titans: Friends and Heroes.
Reeling from recent harrowing events in Gotham, Dick Grayson struggles with the decision to hang up his cape and mask forever as he goes off to college in New York City. Joined by Roy Harper and Wally West, the trio have a fateful meeting with the girls who will forever change their lives! Guest starring Wonder Woman!

Wonder Woman #2 (2005)

Wonder Woman: The Rage of Angels.
As the Minotaur leads the Sons of Uranus against the walls of Themyscira and Wonder Woman does battle with Typhon, the Father of Monsters, a more devastating threat comes to Olympus... Nothing will be the same after this issue!

Teen Titans #1 (2005)

Teen Titans: Serpent's Tooth, Part 1 (of 2).
As the team comes together, Wally West is seduced by a mysterious girl with a dangerous secret. The Titans must infiltrate the

church of a fanatical ancient cult to rescue one of their own, but a fierce enemy awaits them: Enter Brother Blood!

Teen Titans #2 (2005)

Teen Titans: Serpent's Tooth, Part 2 (of 2).

The Titans have fallen to Mother Mayhem and a dark messiah is on the brink of awakening! Only Dick Grayson and his new ally, the mysterious and dangerous girl known as Raven, stand in the way of the resurrection of the dreaded... Brother Blood!

New Outsiders #0 (2005)

New Outsiders: What Happens in Vegas...

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A MATURE READERS TITLE.

A gritty and realistic look at vice, corruption and superheroing in Sin City! Meet the New Outsiders---Green Arrow, Black Canary, Huntress, Batgirl, Zatanna, and a driven District Attorney named Adrian Chase, the Vigilante!--- an unorthodox team of heroes banded together to stand against a sinister conspiracy and depraved foes!

New Outsiders #1 (2005)

New Outsiders: House Rules: Luck be a Lady.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A MATURE READERS TITLE.

Things heat up in Vegas as the Vigilante and Huntress face off against each other, and Green Arrow and Black Canary enlist the aid of young college prodigy Barbara Gordon to break into L'Inferno and rescue an old friend from the clutches of the criminal organization, the House, and its cruel mistress, Roulette--- and only Zatanna stands in their way!

New Outsiders #2 (2005)

New Outsiders: House Rules: The Most Dangerous Game.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A MATURE READERS TITLE.

With Black Lightning's life at stake and Green Arrow and Black Canary in the clutches of the House, Batgirl looks for some unlikely allies as she plays a dangerous game with Roulette in the conclusion of the New Outsiders origin arc!

JSA: Legends of the Golden Age #0 (2005)

Justice Society of America: Legends of the Golden Age: The Society, Prelude.

In the dark days before WWII, A Secret Society of Super Villains unleash a masterplan to seize the world in its iron grip of tyranny! But, in the gathering shadows of war, there is a glimmer of hope! The emerging mystery men of America--- Hawkman! the Flash! Hourman! the Atom! Starman! Dr. Fate! the Sandman! and the Amazing Amazon, Wonder Woman!--- rise up in a Justice Society to oppose the evil oppressors! But can even they withstand--- the Spear of Destiny!?!

All-Star Comics #1 (2006)

All-Star Comics: Captain Marvel, Part 1 (of 2).

At last! The history of the World's Mightiest Mortal in the DC2 is finally revealed! The ancient wizard Shazam recalls the career of his champion, even as foes from the past regroup to threaten the world once more. But will there be a Captain Marvel to stand against them?

Action Comics #8 (2006)

Action Comics: For All Mankind...

Crisis: The Apokolips Imperative, Part 9!

Darkseid has assembled nearly all of the components to complete the Anti-Life Equation. Now, Wonder Woman leads a daring mission to the very gates of Darkseid's palace to rescue the Man of Steel and bring hope to the war-torn planet Earth! Don't dare miss this pivotal chapter, as one man shows just what it means to be a hero! You won't believe the shocking ending!

Action Comics #9 (2006)

Action Comics: Return to Smallville, Part 1 (of 4).

In the wake of the crisis, the greatest tragedy of his life brings Clark Kent home to Smallville. But can you go home again? A new era in the life of the Man of Steel begins here! New dangers await, an old romance is rekindled--- and you won't believe the shocking ending!

Action Comics #11 (2006)

Action Comics: Return to Smallville, Part 3 (of 4).

The mystery villain stands revealed and the truth about Connor finally comes out! Superman stands alone against friend and foe alike and the surprises keeps coming in this penultimate chapter of the new adventures of the Man of Steel!

Action Comics #10 (2006)

Action Comics: Return to Smallville, Part 2 (of 4).

Reeling from Lana Lang's recent revelation, Clark is forced to re-evaluate his future--- unaware that a secret enemy is lurking and waiting to destroy him! Meanwhile, Lois Lane shows up in Smallville on the trail of the biggest story of her career: the secret identity of Superman!

All-Star Comics #2 (2006)

All-Star Comics: Captain Marvel, Part 2 (of 2).

Billy Batson has no time to adjust to his new role as Captain Marvel as the Monster Society of Evil unleashes their attack upon Fawcett City! And not even the wizard Shazam is safe when the villains storm the Rock of Eternity and a new, deadly fiend is born!

Wonder Woman #8 (2006)

Wonder Woman: Hell Hath No Fury...

All-Star Comics #5 (2006)

All-Star Comics: Martian Manhunter.

Snatched across time and space by the machine of Dr. Erdel, J'onn J'onzz is the Last Son of Mars, a dead planet wasted by a telepathic plague created by his own brother. On Earth, he is the Martian Manhunter, a crusader for justice in the years after the JSA retired and before the advent of Superman. Now, hoping to at last find his place on his adopted homeworld, he is John Jones, Private Investigator--- but his quiet retirement is at an end when a beautiful dame walks into his office with legs to kill for and a fiery disposition...

Rogues Gallery #1 (2006)

Rogues Gallery: Catwoman: Hot Tin Roof.

A wave of cat burglaries sweeps through Gotham's elite society! But as the Crown Jewels of Bahdnesia come to the city, can the

beautiful socialite Selina Kyle resist the lure? Sparks fly when Batman comes face to face for the first time with the deadly feline fatale, Catwoman!

DC2 Special #1: An Arkham Christmas Carol (2006)

DC2 Special: An Arkham Christmas Carol.

Wonder Woman #4 (2006)

Wonder Woman: The Eye of the Storm.

The true enemy is at last revealed, and the gods of Olympus discover there is a traitor among them! Meanwhile, the war on Paradise Island comes to a turning point as mysterious new arrivals appear--- but are they friends or foes? And in the end, Diana must set out upon a new quest to save everything she holds dear...

Wonder Woman #5 (2006)

Wonder Woman: The Quest for the Syrinx.

Nemesis is awake, and destined to bring about the end of the cosmos! Only the Syrinx, the Pipes of Pan, can stave off the inevitable fate of the universe, and now Diana, Hippolytus and Steve Trevor set off on a quest to the isle of the witch to find the legendary artifact. But will Circle prove Wonder Woman's most implacable foe yet?

As the traitor to Olympus makes his next move, the gods brace themselves for the final assault of the Furies!

Wonder Woman #3 (2006)

Wonder Woman: Horns of Doom.

Both Olympus and Paradise Island are reeling from the cataclysmic events of last issue, and the true enemy is at last revealed! Be here when Wonder Woman and the Minotaur face off at last under the walls of Themyscira!

Wonder Woman #6 (2006)

Wonder Woman: The Isle of the Witch.

The Quest for the Syrinx continues! As Wonder Woman confronts her old enemy, the witch Circe, the plots and machinations of all the players start to become known: friends are not who they seem and the true plans of the Olympian traitor are revealed as the

Game of Gods and Mortals hurtles towards it's epic conclusion next issue!

Wonder Woman #7 (2006)

Wonder Woman: Down the Widening Gyre.

Wonder Woman must journey into the Underworld to retrieve the Mask of Hecate for Circe, as time is running out! Even the Gods of Olympus prepare to meet their end as Nemesis, She Whom None Can Escape finally rises to work her terrible will, and the final moves of the Game of Gods and Mortals are played out! The Olympian traitor is revealed--- and his masterplan at last is clear!--- in this penultimate chapter of the epic storyline that began in Issue 0!

Wonder Woman #9 (2006)

Wonder Woman: Armageddon Aria.

The war is over and Wonder Woman is faced with a host of new problems: what to do about the war-like Lost Amazons, who will rule Paradise Island--- and who wants her to get... married?!? And Godfrey's Glorious Crusades reaches fever pitch as a deadly new foe is unleashed upon Diana--- and leads directly into next month's crisis!

Wonder Woman #10 (2006)

Wonder Woman: Darkseid Is.

Crisis: The Apokolips Imperative, Part 13!

At long last, the Anti-Life Equation is within the grasp of the Lord of Apokolips! The world's greatest heroes come together for the first time--- to destroy each other! Don't miss the epic battle as Wonder Woman stands alone against a world turned against her!

JSA: Legends of the Golden Age #1 (2006)

JSA: Legends of the Golden Age: Attack of the Giant Nazi Robots!

It's mayhem at the 1939 Worlds Fair in New York, as Baron Blitzkrieg attacks the greatest gathering of scientific minds in the world, and the Secret Society of Super Villains continue their quest for the Three Holy Artifacts!

This is it! The birth of the JSA!

Teen Titans #10 (2006)

Teen Titans: Forever and Never, Amen!
Crisis: The Apokolips Imperative, Part 7!
The city of Metropolis teeters on the edge of an uneasy peace as the truce between Lex Luthor and Darkseid begins to break down. Who are the Forever People and what happens when they turn the city of refugees against the Titans? Bedlam ensues!

Justice League #0 (2006)
Justice League: Justice Falls.
Crisis: The Apokolips Imperative, concludes!
This is it! The final battle between Earth and Apokolips as the World's Greatest Heroes take the fight to Darkseid! Don't dare miss this issue--- one year in the making!--- and the senses-shattering conclusion to this epic storyline!

Justice League #1 (2006)
Justice League: A League of His Own, Part 1.
It's finally here! The World's Greatest Heroes have come together as one! But not everyone is happy about that... It's the grand opening of the Hall of Justice, and all of Metropolis has turned out to honor their saviors. But hatred and jealousy lurk in the heart of one man as he schemes to destroy the newly-formed League! And this time, the League has met its match!

Justice League #2 (2006)
Justice League: A League of His Own, Conclusion.
The most powerful members of the Justice League have fallen to Amazo. Now, only Batman stands against the villainous Professor Ivo and his killer android, with all the powers of the World's Greatest Heroes at his disposal...

World's Finest #1: Batman (2007)
Join us on Earth-X for the re-imagined Batman and his new adventures.

World's Finest #1: Superman (2007)
Join us on Earth-X for the re-imagined Superman and his new adventures.

World's Finest #1: Wonder Woman (2007)

Join us on Earth-X for the re-imagined Wonder Woman and her new adventures.

All-Star Comics Annual #1 (2007)

All-Star Comics Annual: Justice Society of America: The Time of Their Lives.

All-Star Comics #10 (2007)

All-Star Comics: Hawkman: Sins of the Father, Part 1 (of 4)

All-Star Comics #11 (2007)

All-Star Comics: Hawkman: Sins of the Father, Part 2 (of 4)

All-Star Comics #12 (2007)

All-Star Comics: Hawkman: Sins of the Father, Part 3 (of 4).

All-Star Comics #13 (2007)

All-Star Comics: Hawkman: Sins of the Father, Part 4 (of 4).

The Flash #23 (2008)

The Flash: Flash of Infinite Worlds!

When Barry Allen agreed to help his good friend Ray Palmer with an experiment, he never thought he'd find himself in another reality! The Cosmic Treadmill takes the Scarlet Speedster to a parallel Earth, and just may give him a glimpse at his own tragic destiny! Can even the Flash fight the future? Find out in this first ever DC2/DC3 crossover issue as we enter the Multiverse!

Adventure Comics #11 (2010)

Adventure Comics: Stranger New Visitor.

The long-awaited return of the DC2's original Superman book, by its original creative team! Springing from the pages of last month's "Action and Adventure" Annuals, the new era for the Man of Steel continues here, as Lois investigates the sinister Evil Factory, a strange figure in a familiar costume arrives and a threat from beyond the stars strikes in the heart of Metropolis... A huge storyline for the Man of Tomorrow begins here!



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