

I don't own DC... ooooh boy, would it be amusing if one person had controlled that world all along... nor am I Japanese. Ergo, Ranma ain't mine either.

This has been edited by Hiryo and myself with Grammarly.

Sorry it's a few days later than I said it would be. I got into **Fate** on Monday all day Monday and worked on this yesterday, which resulted in me rewriting the last scene and sending it off to Hiryo to look at. I think the ending of the chapter is far better now, but it did take a bit to get right on top of going through all the other changes I wanted to make after Hiryo edited it. And most of today went to fate. I'm halfway through it now, if you don't count Grammarlying that work. Which will be ugh, I can just tell. Regardless, that will be up here by Saturday at the latest. I'd like to have Saturday to go over Journey03 and post it over on fanfic for the Ranma fic of the month there, but we will see how that goes.

I will also be posting the February Ranma poll tomorrow, so be on the lookout for that.

Now, without further ado, ENJOY!

Chapter 6: A Butterfly's Wings Become Lightning in the Hand

Kara zoomed up into the air over Star City towards the incoming drop pods as quickly as she could. Noting absently that the drop pods looked like teardrops with added bits, Kara crashed into the first one she could reach. The blonde girl brought it to a dead stop instantly. She then pulled it sideways towards another one, grabbing it by the nose-like portion at the top of the drop pod and bringing it to a halt in turn.

"Hello? If these things have external microphones, please know that you are landing on a neutral planet," Kara began, somewhat stuttering her way through her words. She honestly wasn't certain how to address these people, and very much did not think that this was some kind of hasty rescue operation for whoever had come down first, regardless of what Green Arrow had said earlier. Not given the dozen more drop pods that were falling towards Star City right now.

On another note, Kara didn't think that the Earth, despite its heroes being well known in the local area, had any kind of space-based representation or something similar. Thus, she wasn't really certain what she should say to these aliens, even if it had been a mistake.

As her fingers dug into the metal of her second prize, Kara continued on her way, lashing out with a kick to a third, smacking it straight back upwards into the air like it was a kickball. With her hands already full, she couldn't afford to be as gentle as she continued to diffuse the situation with her quasi-diplomacy. "Sorry! Really, we don't want any trouble here, if someone could just open up communications, or, um, download some kind of translation program or something so we can at least talk?"

Even as she spoke, the two drop pods she had stopped answered Kara by popping open several hatches on their exterior, out of which came guns. Bending forward at the waist, Kara was only able to destroy two of them with her eye beams before the others opened fire, solid-state slugs slamming into her along with plasma-based energy bolts. *That's an eclectic mix*, she reflected.

Something she knew from her time growing up on Krypton, despite her people's general isolationist policy, was that most other races preferred one type of weapon or the other, not both. Indeed, that tendency spread throughout the military of the various races. If a race favored laser technology, they didn't go into solid-state projectiles of any kind, be it slugs, rockets or missiles. If a race favored missiles, they built up defenses and doctrines around that preferred weapon type. Only after running into enemies with widely varied doctrines would a space-faring race shift to a more nuanced stance, and even then, their own weapons would only change unless the current weapon type proved entirely useless.

Which means these people are old hands at war and violence, Kara realized with a start as bullets and plasma bolts washed over her, hardly bothering her at all. *And that means this is hardly likely to end peaceably. Oh, thank you, Rao. Stumbling over my words like that was getting so embarrassing, even if I doubt anyone was actually listening. And that's getting annoying, too! Time to do something about that.*

The 'that' in question was the solid sleep state slugs slamming into her chest. They weren't hurting her at all, but they were causing her breasts to wobble despite her sports bra. *No wonder Diana goes around wearing a chest plate, ugh! I am sooo going to get a pair for me and Cassie.*

With that thought, Kara flung her two captive drop pods out towards the ocean. Having expended their onboard fuel trying to escape her clutches, they quickly crashed into the water, creating huge plumes of water as they crashed.

Even as a worry about what that could mean for the troopers within flashed across her mind, Kara found herself under fire by several other drop pods as they continued to fall towards the city. In response, Kara attacked them in turn, ignoring the enemy fire to close with them one or two at a time, smacking them aside from driving down into the city proper. One of them followed the other two out to sea, crashing into it somewhat nearer the beach area than she would've preferred, while the other one she was able to send out past the suburbs to crash into some empty grassland beyond.

The third and fourth were smashed straight upwards, and the fifth, she accidentally hit so hard it disappeared over the horizon, deeper inland. *Darn it, Kara, don't hit them in that direction, you boob. That's just asking for the troopers inside to make trouble elsewhere.*

Three others, instead of trying to zoom past her as a few already had despite her best efforts, opened their hatches. Not just their gun hatches, but their landing ones.

From within, more fire came, this time in the hands of individual aliens. And again, Kara was struck by the fact that not only were the guns an eclectic mix, so too were the species represented here. She saw at least five or six different alien species there and then found herself tackled from behind by a seventh.

The weight of her attack threw Kara's flight off, and she twisted her head to look back over her shoulder as something heavy slammed into the back of her head. Doing so, Kara saw that she had been hit by someone with wings. *A Thanagarian?* "What the heck?"

Kara had seen pictures of Thanagarians before, and she vaguely remembered that Clark had told her something about them. With a patch over one eye, what looked like red paint around his mouth. *Was that supposed to be blood?* He also had a vicious sneer on his face, one which Kara decided she wanted to wipe off at the earliest opportunity.

Not waiting for an answer, Kara brought an elbow around her back with punishing force. The Thanagarian quickly let go of his grip around her waist, with one hand, gaining distance and avoiding the blow as he brought around his mace for another blow. As Kara understood, that was a hereditary weapon among the Thanagarians. *Something like that, anyway.*

Regardless of its significance, Kara smacked it almost negligently out of the air. Stronger and more durable than the Thanagarian could be to humans, that didn't mean they were a match for her. He then lashed out with a kick, trying to rake her chest, but this only served to shred her shirt a little, her skin proof against his talons. *Darn it, I hope that doesn't start a trend. I am NOT going to keep fighting if my breasts are suddenly on display or worse!*

Three other aliens boosted out of the same drop pod the Thanagarian had come from on jet packs. The jet packs looked more uniform than the trio's actual species. Two of them were humanoid, but had thinner faces and far thinner arms than was normal for humans, and six arms instead of one. The other had the normal two arms but was a thin, speedy-looking lizard that reminded Kara of a skittering lizard she'd seen on the road earlier that very day.

In their arms, they carried guns, which they opened fire with on Kara even as they closed, while in their other hands they held strange chain swords, axes, and, oddly, a large cleaver-like weapon. The six-armed aliens brought a good deal of fire to the game, even with two hands occupied by close-range weapons.

Kara grabbed the lizard creature's blade as it flashed toward her face, her hand stopping the chain motion, causing the engine to quickly short out as a kick caught a six-armed alien in the face, sending him flying backwards and out across the ocean despite the best efforts of his jet engine to slow his progress. The other one kept on coming, her guns up and firing into Kara's chest.

This started up that very annoying bouncing feeling, while a fourth, far more human, alien came out. This one, whose green skin was the only difference between him and a regular

human, kept his distance and fired at Kara with precise shots from what looked like some kind of sniper rifle as he zoomed around where Kara was engaged with his fellows.

Twisting around, Kara dragged the lizard alien into the sniper's line of fire, causing him to stiffen and gasp, his eyes going wide quickly as several bullets slammed into his back. His skull exploded a second later, but Kara had already released her grip on his weapon.

Ducking around the floating corpse, its jet pack now blasting up and away with its previous owner, she grabbed at the Thanagarian's arm as he tried to punch at her face. His other hand came up, slamming into her chin, but even though she knew that Thanagarians were far stronger than normal humans, that punch didn't hurt even as much as one from Ranma. Stronger than normal humans they might be, but they weren't up to Cassie's level, let alone Kara's.

A punch from Kara caved in the man's chest a little, and she grabbed her by the hair as he doubled over, twisting and hurling him at the more distant sniper. The sniper tried to dodge, but Kara caught him a second later with her eye beams. The beam of light sliced through his weapon and nicked his jetpack over his shoulder, which caused it to explode.

Before Kara could realize that she had probably just killed at least two people directly, several dozen starfighters zoomed out of the clouds above the city, which were currently roiling for some reason. They looked like someone had stuck a crescent-shaped blade of some kind onto a thick handle, the handle being the thrusters, while the crescent shape, which pointed forward from the engines, housed the weapons, at least three to a wing.

Most of these starfighters opened fire on Kara, while a squadron, more organized than the rest, flew deeper inland for some reason. Another six continued their dive towards the city below, firing at the buildings there indiscriminately.

Despite their efforts to take her attention off their fellows, the starfighters' weapons were all plasma-based, and Kara zoomed through their fire without any issue. She slammed into another drop pod, hurling it out to the ocean. Two more followed before the starfighters, seemingly finally realizing that their guns weren't doing anything, began to fire rockets at her instead.

Those were more irritating, as the explosions hit hard enough to throw her off course. Kara hadn't yet trained enough in flight-based combat to know how to power through that kind of thing. Grumbling as one such made her miss a drop pod, Kara twisted around, zooming up and into the formation of enemy starfighters. They scattered, but she still crashed into and through several of them as her eye beams caught three more, slicing through wings and engines alike.

Flying through the explosion of one of those starfighters, Kara looked down at herself when something splats off of her stomach. Her face went a little green as she realized that what

had hit her was some alien's seven-fingered hand. It bounced off and away from Kara, and she shivered a little as the realization that she had been killing people burst through her adrenaline and need to concentrate at last.

For a moment, her rational mind tried to wonder why the hell anyone would go in for putting living people in starfighters as a way of trying to fight against that sudden realization. Kryptonian starfighters were drones, and that was the norm as far as she knew. *Mind you, I don't really know much, but still, that makes much more sense than piloting such flimsy things if you have the technology.*

Then the memory of the sniper who had exploded as his jetpack went up over his back, the Thanagarian whose chest she had literally caved in to the point where his innards had probably just sort of burst, and the others she had sent out into the ocean, not knowing whether or not they could swim all of it, hit her at once. Shivering as her arms went up around her chest, Kara found herself losing altitude for a second, her eyes seeing nothing.

She tried to push through it, tried to push through the sudden, shocking realization that she had ended the lives of at least seven, maybe many more lives than that, since the battle had begun. She tried to remember her past conversations with Ranma, with Cassie and the Amazons before that.

This was followed a moment later by screams, gunfire, and the crashing of several drop pods into the city below, which roused her from her momentary introspection. *Just, just don't think about it right now. Remember, this, this is a war. Killing alien soldiers, or pirates like these, yeah, they've gotta be pirates, or something similar, you have to treat them differently than you would supervillains or anyone else. They're not breaking the law; this isn't about justice or anything else. This is bigger than even good versus evil. This is about helping the people of Star City survive!*

With that thought, Kara shook her head, righting herself in midair just before her back would've slammed into one of the city's larger skyscrapers. Then she was off, smashing into another starfighter and through it, grabbing pieces of it and hurling them towards several drop pods, smashing them off course. Her attacks didn't hit with enough force to smash them entirely so that they would land outside of the city, but they certainly weren't going to land together.

A larger drop pod, this one shaped like a falling brick, with bits stuck on in the way of weapons and thrusters rather than a teardrop with an attitude like the drop pods, found itself slammed from below by Kara. Her fingers digging into the metal, she whirled and hurled it out over the ocean, before another one found itself caved in entirely by a kick that caused the whole thing to cave in around her, like a beer can hit by a bullet.

Even as her tears came to her eyes and she forced herself to work through her arms and legs suddenly beginning to shake, Kara shouted, "Come on, you sons of space mold! If it's a war you want, I'm gonna give you one!"

OOOOOOO

Arriving at the scene where the larger chunk of whatever had hit Star City, Cassie took a brief second to assess the area from her perch on a seven-story apartment building, trying to figure out what to do. With Kara taking care of the first few drop pods, there weren't any aliens around, so there was no direct threat to deal with. On the other hand, the chunk of whatever it had been had plowed into the upper reaches of an office building, sending debris and bits and pieces everywhere.

Given the time of day, it being a bit past four, hitting an office building after most of the people had probably started to go home was better than hitting an apartment or school building of some kind. There weren't any dead on the street or in the windows that she could see, although the debris had scattered far and wide. It had hit several cars and things on the ground below, and there were a lot of screaming and howls of pain coming from down there.

Far more experienced than 'Nyctimene,' Green Arrow simply raced on, another arrow rope darting towards the smashed side of the building ahead of them. "Don't just stand there, girl! Analyze as you move, every second you waste looking is a second you waste that could be used doing."

Even as he spoke, Green Arrow was in the air, zooming across the intervening distance and up towards the damaged side of the building. Entering quickly, he tossed several fire-retardant pallets into one area where a fire had begun, either electrical or from an embedded portion of the spaceship. Whichever it was, Green Arrow didn't care; there was a lot more here he needed to concentrate on right now.

"Anyone needs help, give me a shout!" he bellowed as he began to pull an unconscious woman out from underneath where she had been seemingly hit by a flung desk of some kind. Green Arrow took a brief moment to wonder how it happened, as the desk itself almost looked entirely untouched. But the physics of one incredibly fast-moving object crashing into a building like this always created weird little mysteries like that.

The woman groaned and began to come to, as shouts from further within the building reached Green Arrow, and he hastily helped her get to her feet, pushing her towards Cassie as she finally followed him into the building. "Get her down to one of the rooftops and then get back up here as quickly as you can, Nyctimene. Your superstrength is going to be invaluable in here."

Nodding humbly, Cassie gently took the woman into her arms and jumped out of the opening, ignoring the woman's sudden shriek of surprise. Within seconds, she had landed on a

nearby building, and after depositing the older woman on her rear, she doubled back, climbing up the rope arrow that still stuck in the roof of the damaged area of the building, grateful that Green Arrow had left it there as he raced inside. While Cassie could leap a prodigious distance, she couldn't fly and jumping up more than ten stories was beyond her.

Heading deeper into the building after Green Arrow, as the battle in the sky began to become more heated for Kara, Cassie spent around ten minutes doing Search and Rescue. Cassie's prediction only proved to be half-accurate, as there were still many people in the offices when the bit of debris crashed into it. Several stories of the building had been badly damaged by the impact, and she and Green Arrow found seven people who needed help reaching the staircase and four others who needed to be evacuated quickly to get some medical aid.

With the use of elevators not being a good idea in a building so badly damaged, though, getting the wounded out of the building was the best she and the Green Arrow could do at the moment. Even after they found two dead bodies, their corpses crushed by falling masonry, they needed to leave them where they were to concentrate on the living.

The Green Arrow handled it far better than Cassie did. For one thing, this wasn't his first rodeo. While S&R like this wasn't exactly his idea of a fun time, all heroes needed to do it occasionally. He was nowhere near as much of an expert as some of the European heroes were, as they were routinely called in to help with natural disasters in Africa and other places that didn't have first responders nearly as good as those in the US. But like them, he was also linked to the Justice League and had been provided with a lot of high-tech and extremely small medical equipment. This came in the form of small memory foam capsules to make splints, spray-on pain relievers and spray-type Band-Aids, small injections of far stronger pain relievers, knockout gas and even a few tubes of medical nanites created by the Martian Manhunter.

I might not be much of a team player most of the time, but I have to admit, the Justice League provides us with a lot of good stuff for moments like this. And the communication network too. For which I am profoundly grateful at the moment, even more than the medical gear, Oliver Queen, full-time playboy and part-time hero, reflected.

The Green Arrow wasn't one of the prime members of the Justice League, but he was still connected to it, like most American, Canadian and European heroes. As he and Cassie had raced to the scene of the larger impact, he had already called this in. If the Justice League had somehow been unaware of what was going on before, they became so at that point. Which hopefully meant that more heroes would start arriving shortly.

Shaking his head, the Green Arrow decided they were done on that floor and raced back to the stairwell, heading upwards even as the last of the survivors from this floor began making their own way down. There, he found his way barred by several bits of concrete and girders that had collapsed into the stairwell from the side. Peering through it, he could see movement on the other side and looked over his shoulder as Cassie joined him. "Do you think you can move some of this enough first to get through?"

"Hmmm... not without maybe bringing down more of it," Cassie said, shaking her head. "We're better served heading back out and climbing up to the next floor on the outside of the building."

Agreeing with a grunt, the Green Arrow gestured her to do so, following her out and then climbing up the exterior of the building using the handholds that she had, either thoughtfully or accidentally, left dug out of the side of the building. As he went, he tried very hard not to look up at the view directly above him. Cassie hadn't been dressed in anything approaching a hero suit when this all began, and indeed was still wearing the tight boy shorts, loose shirt and sports bra she preferred to wear at home.

Remember, Blondie Number One's barely more than a teenager, and she's Wonder Woman's cousin or whatever. Wonder Woman will literally break you in half if you look at her inappropriately, Green Arrow thought, before the distant sound of gunfire caused him to look up and away from the distracting scene above him. There, he could see Kara, aka Shielder, had intercepted a goodly number of the drop pods, but still others were already slamming down elsewhere throughout the urban area around them. His city was being invaded by aliens, and Green Arrow couldn't stop them.

Shaking his head at that, he quickly turned his attention back to the matter at hand, as Cassie shouted out from above, "Get in here, Green Arrow, I need another pair of hands!"

This floor hadn't been nearly as damaged as the one below, but still, some bits of debris and the ceiling had fallen. Some had apparently trapped a man under rubble, leaving two others free to try and help him out while they themselves were trapped there, unable to get through the rubble to the stairwell.

Cassie was already there, lifting up a large segment of what looked like bits of metal and concrete work together, holding it at waist height easily while the two men tried to scramble and pull aside still more bits of debris to get their coworker free.

Green Arrow quickly inserted himself into this process. Pulling the wounded out as soon as possible, he then ran a scanner over him, reporting that the man had two broken ribs and some internal bleeding. "I can give him a shot to deal with the pain and some of the worst, but that's more than my medical gear can deal with. He'll need to be taken to the hospital as soon as possible."

The two men nodded, staring sideways at Cassie, somewhat awed at the amount of strength the young slip of a girl had been able to lift. "Er, right, we'll need help to get him down to the next floor, but we can take it from there."

As Green Arrow went to work creating a loop of rope, to lower them all down to the next floor, Cassie turned away, staring out the broken window they'd entered through, a scowl on her face. "Green Arrow, if you've got this covered, I'm going to head down to the street."

Green Arrow was about to question her on why, when the sound of gunfire reached them, louder and closer than the sounds of battle in the sky above. That reminded him of his earlier view of the fight above the city, and he snarled. *God damn it!* "Go! I'll be behind you in a second."

Cassie nodded and leapt out of the building, rolling as she fell. It'd been more than a decade, but she still remembered some of the lessons that Ranma had given her on the Anything Goes Aerial Style back when they were kids. While falling forty stories from this height would've normally hurt a bit, his lessons helped Cassie slow her descent and aim appropriately.

When she hit, Cassie still had a lot of force behind her, but most of that force went into the light, purple-skinned alien who seemed to be directing several others to fire at first responders, police officers and EMTs alike. He and a dozen of his fellows had come out from a drop pod that had slammed into the road outside the building Cassie and Green Arrow had been searching through a moment ago. There had been several other drop pods along with the one that had landed when they had launched from their still distant mothership, but Kara had been doing a bang-up job of at least making certain that none of them arrived together.

The alien she smashed into feet first lost his head, his skull shattered into bits of pulp and brain matter as she landed, crushing it between her feet and the road. Then she was moving forward, slamming into another alien with some kind of large gun, smashing the gun into pieces with one blow and the man's chest with a second.

Several of the aliens turned in her direction, one of them lashing out with some kind of whip, but Cassie caught it on her forearm, letting it wrap around her forearm and pulling the man in even as more gunfire struck, hissing a bit at the pain from some of the plasma-based weaponry. She was an Amazon, and therefore far, far more durable than a normal human, but she wasn't up to Kara's level when it came to just ignoring heat-based weaponry. The handheld variety certainly wasn't going to be putting her down anytime soon, but they did sting a bit.

Stupidly, the man with the whip didn't let it go as she pulled him in, and he found himself flung up and over her shoulder into one of the other men. Then several others, who had turned away and stood up to fire at her, found themselves hit from behind in the sides by police fire. Small the normal handguns of the police might be, but they were still guns, and these aliens, while perhaps stronger and more durable than normal humans, weren't bulletproof. Or at least, their bodies weren't. Cassie noticed that their chest armor, which many of them wore, did indeed deflect the bullets that struck them well enough.

Several of them went down, and Cassie charged at the last, only to pause as an arrow took him straight in the eye from above. Turning, she watched as the Green Arrow landed from where he had been rappelling down from a rope from on high. The trio of men he'd been helping were nowhere in sight, but presumably had been helped to the next level down and then left there to make their own way through the building. With an invasion going on, the place for someone like Green Arrow was at the front lines.

He seemed to be fiddling with his mask for a second, even as he nodded to one of the local policemen who nodded back. Both men then stared upwards, and Green Arrow shouted, "One more incoming!"

Cassie scowled, staring upwards as well. While Kara had used her flight powers occasionally when they sparred, the only flight-capable enemies on the Isle of Women were the harpies, and they were, if not always friendly, not inherently warlike or dangerous like the minotaurs. Scanning the sky for threats wasn't something that she was used to.

Now, Cassie watched as more drop pods descended toward their current position. One of them skidded sideways in the air as it was struck by something, and Cassie whooped, "Nice one, K, er, Shielder!" barely remembering in time to use Kara's new superhero name rather than her real one.

The other drop pod, however, continued on its way, crashing into and through a small two-story restaurant before skidding along the road, leaving a groove in the asphalt. Even before it came to a halt, its hatches were opening all around its surface, and aliens poured out, only to be met with fire from the policemen.

Many of them had grabbed up heavier guns from their cars. They looked like shotguns and machine guns as far as Kara was aware. She wasn't a gun expert.

Gunfire met gunfire, putting down several of the aliens before they could get to the cover. Their heavier return fire, though, shredded what little cover one of the policemen had, and he would've gone down if not for Green Arrow grabbing him with a lasso and pulling him out of that cover and behind one of the stopped cars nearby.

By that point, Cassie was already halfway down the open street towards the new enemies. Given the fire coming from behind and above, Cassie, only one of them turned his gun on the blonde girl charging towards them. His solid-state slugs slammed into her chest and stomach. This didn't hurt, but it did set her breasts bouncing a bit, which annoyed her, but Cassie was already annoyed so much, that it was simply more like a cherry on top of her anger than anything else.

A second later, Cassie slammed into the shooter bodily, carrying them both back into the drop pod, bowling over two of his fellows. Cassie finished all three off before one of the others turned, trying to hose her down with an energy weapon. A kick sent the fire up and into the air of the drop pod, and she flipped, her other leg coming up to slam into his chin with enough force to practically explode chin and neck alike.

Two of the attackers from this drop pod evinced a bit more intelligence than their fellows. Both of them had chains wrapped around their forearms, acting as almost vambraces. The pair, which looked almost like bikers given their clothing, had rushed in to cover the instant they could, using the rest of their fellows as a distraction.

Now, they were laying down a heavy wall of gunfire on the nearby police, even as one of them shouted into some kind of radio. Two policemen went down, dead, while a third screamed as his hand was seared off his body by two blaster bolts hitting in quick succession.

Cassie was near enough to overhear what was being shouted, even over the sounds of violence, and even better, she could understand it. Cassie had been given the Gift of Tongues by the priestess of Mnemosyne prior to coming to man's world, and could understand any spoken language used in her presence, and could also communicate in such.

"//--- Heavy reinforcements! I repeat, heavier reinforcements force the Sun-cursed Heavy Clan to get involved. The locals are putting up resistance, and they seem to have heroes here; we need heavier guns to combat them." The man seemed to wait, then continued on, still keeping his head down as he spoke into his headset. "There's no sign of the slave princess here, she must have ejected DGGGh!!!/"

The man's words ended in a gurgle as an arrow took him in the throat, a specially hardened arrow punching through his leather-like skin. The chain-garbed alien fell to his knees behind the cover he and his fellow had found, both hands reaching up to grasp at his throat, where blood gushed around the arrow.

His fellow barely even glanced in his direction before his eyes widened as he saw Cassie leaping out from the ruins of their drop pod over the head of his dying comrade. Once more, his attempt to bring his gun around to bear on Cassie cost him, and a machine gun round took him in the side of the head, the burst of five or more bullets causing his head to almost come apart at the seams.

For a moment, there was no more enemy fire in the street, and the EMTs, all of whom had been huddling in place behind a pair of ambulances, quickly began to shout for any injured to holler, even as they moved to the ones who were visible now. This was in the form of a few injured police officers and a family who stumbled out of a nearby building, several of them looking like they had been cut by flying shrapnel.

In the distance, Cassie could hear sirens, indicating that more help was on the way. Although that was just the closest noise that reached her ears. There were screams in the distance, the sound of further gunfire, and shrieks, shouts and cries. With all the buildings around them, Cassie wasn't certain where it all was coming from beyond the sirens coming straight down the street.

In the sky above, still more drop pods were coming down. Among them, there were a few dropships, or maybe troop transports, that were larger and far blockier than the others. One of those was making for their position along with one of the smaller drop pods and Kara was nowhere in sight. The only hint of her friend Cassie could see with all the tall buildings in the way was a blast of red light reflected off the still intact windows of a skyscraper looming over a block to her right.

Cassie was about to shout a warning on that score, but she wasn't the only one who was now scanning the sky. "We've got incoming! EMTs, get those wounded under cover! Police, I'll want you up high in those windows, only two with me and Nyctimene on the street," the Green Arrow shouted. He had been rushing towards where Cassie was, but now veered off. Leaping up and over an overturned car, he landed on his other side even as he prepared several arrows.

Without any orders coming her way, Cassie charged toward one of the drop pods coming down in the center of an intersection. Despite her charge, though, the Green Arrow's namesake was the first thing that the next wave of invaders felt. Several explosive arrows struck, one after another, blowing one of the thrusters off a drop pod. Now overpowered on one side, the drop pod skittered sideways, crashing into a building that had, hopefully, been evacuated by this point by anyone within.

However, the larger troop transport landed beside the drop pod Cassie was charging towards, and even as more invaders boiled out of the drop pod, fire blasted out from several guns set into the transport's sides in every direction. These were mostly solid-state guns, rather than energy-based, with far heavier calibers, a size somewhere between that of a tank and a large anti-air gun, but firing at the same rate as a machine gun.

One of those bolts caught Cassie in the chest, sending her backward with a cry of pain. *That was like being hit by one of Diana's fists!* Cassie thought with a wince, even as she was sent flying back to crashing to a building next to which several of the policemen had taken cover among some rubble.

She groaned, moving to her knees, then rolled as still more fire came her way through the hole her flight had made in the wall and the way of the rest of the police. Two of the policemen had been taking shelter behind an overturned car, but now screamed as the car came apart under the weight of fire coming at them. Before either man could try to rush out to other cover, plasma beams were blasting through and into their bodies, killing them quickly.

Three other policemen, all having arrived in a SWAT car earlier, died as Cassie tried to get her breath back, but the police were returning fire, as was the Green Arrow. Several of the automated guns on the side of the boxlike troop transport had been smashed, and the first few aliens out had likewise been slain before they could get into cover. In particular, the policemen who had followed Green Arrow's suggestion, pulling back and heading up into buildings to fire down from on high, were proving incredibly effective.

Now, Cassie heard one of those men shout, "Pull back! Everyone, pull back. There's something behind the infantry in that box transport. Something big!"

She wasn't certain how the man thought he was going to be heard over the sound of the firefight going on, but to her surprise, he was. Several of the nearby policemen quickly began to pull back, performing a maneuver Cassie had seen in movies, though she had no idea what it was called. Several men would lay down fire, covering their fellows as they retreated, then

would be covered in turn by the group that had pulled back as it reached a new defensive position. In this case, this meant burnt-out cars, the fronts of a few restaurants that had already been hit numerous times, and the SWAT truck.

One of the policemen was still hit despite their best efforts, going down with a cry of agony as his neck and a large chunk of his back disappeared under blaster fire, but by that point, Cassie was on her feet. After the hit earlier, she was in no rush to simply charge forward just yet, but she was able to grab pieces of rubble and hurl them at the aliens with deadly accuracy. Bits of rubble the size of a shot put slamming into this or that alien, smashing chests or faces alike.

Her attack was rewarded a second later as four bolts of plasma, each the width of her two forearms pressed together, flashed over the heads of the other aliens towards the attackers.

None of them hit anything vital, but those strikes perforated a building, scorching straight through from one side to another. The tank or whatever it was then fired again, doing the same to another building, bringing it down on top of where several policemen had been hiding a moment before. They retreated quickly, racing in every direction away from the collapsing building, but one, along with several other civilians who had yet to evacuate for some bizarre reason, were hit moments later as hundreds of tons of wreckage crashed down on top of several more houses and large segments of the road.

Wanting absolutely no part of getting hit with that kind of thing, Cassie remained in cover, watching as a moment later, the aliens started to push away from the troop transport, still under fire from the police even as they came. One clump fell screaming as an explosive arrow from Green Arrow hit one of them, followed by another following, exploding in midair to throw shrapnel in every direction, showing that the Green Arrow was still operating somewhere around them.

Moving forward quickly, Cassie found herself next to a policeman, a grizzled middle-aged man with a shredded uniform, showing what looked like a series of tattoos on one of his arms. He had a machine gun in his hands and was methodically firing over the edge of the cover they were currently using, not bothering to watch where his bullets hit.

As he did, he blinked for a second, then shook his head, ducking back under cover. "What the hell? That thing looks like an alien version of a fucking Ontos!"

The war machine that trundled out of the transport was low-slung to the ground, having room inside for maybe two people at best. There were also two gunners visible at the back of the machine working the guns, of which there were four of them, each of them like a cannon from a human tank. The guns were moving on a turret.

While she couldn't get the reference, the strange, almost impressed look on the policeman's face was kind of funny. Then the thing fired, and nothing was funny at all as it

punched straight through the walls above them. Grabbing the man, Cassie rolled them away, grunting as several bits of falling masonry and other building material hit her back as she rolled.

Then she was tossing the policeman one side, and racing in the other. That was, straight towards the thing throwing out so much firepower. *Damn it all, I wish I had my armor or my sword right now! Or better, a spear.*

Seemingly unaware of the danger she could be in, the odd-looking tank fired again at a more distant line of police cars coming their way, slugging several, as well as the buildings to either side. At that point, one of its operators must've noticed her, as the two men, both small, wiry-looking aliens, turned the turret of the tank-like thing in Cassie's direction.

Some kind of tracer round hit her, but then she was right in front of the low-slung contraption. Her leg lashed out in a kick that caught one of the men operating it, hurling him backwards while her fist caught the other man, snapping his neck and crushing half of his skull.

Then she was sliding in behind it among some of the infantry, fists and legs lashing out. While the aliens with chains wrapped around their forearms had enough physical strength to actually make her feel their punches, that meant little to an Amazon. While she became a bit bruised in the next few moments, each of her strikes pulped ribs or broken bones.

She then launched several of them away, out into the open, where the policemen all around hammered into them, while Cassie stood in the entryway into the troop transport, not letting any of the aliens that had been behind the 'Ontos' look-alike get around her out of the transport. A few of their guns were heavy enough to hurt a bit more than the hits from the chain-wearers, but that was all.

A moment later, Green Arrow was standing on the strange tank behind her, arrows flying all around her. Electricity blazed from several when they hit, and smoke of some kind blasted out from a few that the Green Arrow aimed at the wall and floor of the troop transport. The smoke quickly knocked out anyone who came within reach of it, meaning it wasn't smoke but something else Cassie had never seen before. This was followed by more regular arrows as the smoke (or whatever) blew away.

A second later, even as Cassie continued to push deeper into the transport, the older man grumbled a little and pulled out what at first looked like some kind of small stick to Cassie, who saw it as a punch from another chain-wearer, which made her stumble back a step. The little stick quickly expanded, though, proving to be a collapsible staff of some kind.

Whatever material it was made of, Cassie had no idea, but it allowed the Green Arrow to lash out with a blow that caught the chain-wearing alien in the eye with enough force to cause him to scream in pain and pull back. The next blow came up and over in an arc, catching the man on the chin and sending him stumbling but doing little damage.

“Dammit! I am a street-level hero! What the **fuck** am I doing fighting a god damn **alien invasion**?!” Green Arrow cursed, as one of the aliens Cassie had smashed to the ground proved he wasn’t dead just yet by grabbing his leg. He found his back slamming into the ground, then lifted and hurled sideways. Despite the pain, he was able to right himself midair, getting his feet under him before he slammed into the far back of the dropship.

Cassie grabbed the alien who had tossed the Green Arrow aside, getting the man into a chokehold and snapping his neck with brutal efficiency before charging forward with a roar. “For Themyscira!”

A second later, bullets began to rain into the area, hammering still more of the aliens all around Cassie. Soon, the last one fell, its chest smashed by a knee from Cassie, and its neck snapped a second later. As it fell, Cassie smirked, leaning down to help Green Arrow to his feet. He had again been knocked on his rear soon after fighting to his feet. “I vote from now on that you fight from range. You’re okay with that staff, but you definitely have a point about not being made to fight these aliens up close and personal.”

Returning to the troop transport’s hatch with a grumbling Green Arrow, Cassie stared at the four cannon-armed alien creation, then over to one of the policemen who had moved up to secure the hatch. “I also think that this thing could be a really good anti-air gun. What do you all think?”

One of the policemen smirked, and, grabbing his partner, moved over to the tank, hopping up and into the control seat as Green Arrow watched. “I think you’ve got a point, little lady, and Strategically Transferring Equipment to Alternate Locations is a time-honored tradition of any military.”

The man sounded as if he had somehow emphasized each of those words, which caused Cassie to mouth them to herself for a moment. A second later, she began to giggle, a hand coming up to hide her grin as she turned away, embarrassed at the childish sound. Especially under circumstances like this.

Snorting and setting aside his bruised ego for the moment, the Green Arrow shook his head, then reached into one of his pouches, grateful that it hadn’t been damaged in the fracas so far. “Here,” he said, holding a small device out towards Cassie.

While the two policemen started to figure out the controls of the alien tank pretty quickly, Cassie took it, looking at the strange object made of some kind of jelly fiber or something, which looked as if it was made to go over an ear and make an impression. “It’s a communication device. I’m linked in with the local police net, and you need to be too. We’ve got help coming in from the League, but it’ll take a few minutes for most of it to arrive.”

“That would’ve been nice to have when we were back with Shielder,” Cassie said, stumbling again over using Kara’s assumed name, fighting back the urge to grin at the thought

of her friend and the fact that another friend might well be somewhere in the city. *Almost undoubtedly already fighting it out with these aliens, if he hasn't completely changed from what I remember.*

And he definitely didn't, not from the way Kara spoke of him anyway. The circumstances could be... well, way better. On a scale of one to ten in terms of circumstances, this is like minus one hundred in terms of what you want when you're meeting an old friend. Still, it will be nice to see him again. "She's up in the sky and could really use something like that."

"I know, but I didn't really think of it at the time," the Green Arrow admitted. "I'm not used to thinking on a scale like this, and I haven't really grasped how big an attack this was."

"It actually isn't an attack, or wasn't meant as one," Cassie said as she fiddled with the thing in her hand, not realizing that a lot of the police who had come forward to grab up enemy weapons and take up a defensive position around the heavy troop transport were now looking at her in confusion. "At least I don't think so. What few orders I overheard up to this point mentioned some kind of Slave Princess that they were here to retrieve."

"... That first ship down. It wasn't an escape pod or a scout, it was a prisoner trying to escape an enemy ship... Setting aside the fact that you can actually talk to these aliens, I suppose that why they were in the star system or how they ended up here doesn't matter at this point. I just hope that whoever this Slave Princess is willing to help us out from here on," the Green Arrow said, as the Ontos look-alikes behind them began to open fire up into the sky.

Cassie nodded in agreement, finally placing the thing correctly over her ear. It pressed into her ear like her headphones did, only softer and far closer, with a more liquid kind of feel. She didn't really like it much, and when that sensation shifted as the thing began to extend down the side of her face, she liked it even less. A moment later, the tendril was right beside her mouth, pressing into her cheek tightly, and she scowled before realizing that this must be the equivalent of the thing's microphone.

For a moment, she looked over at Green Arrow for instruction, and the older man smirked suddenly, grabbing up a gun for himself. The fight so far had made him use all of his arrows. *Isn't that a horrifying thought, he reflected now. Since I doubt this nightmare's going to end anytime soon.*

With that, she gestured for her to speak up. "I've told the police you're working with me as an understudy for the League. Give them your callsign and then let's get a move on."

OOOOOOO

Despite the fact that Kara was doing sterling work, making sure that none of the drop pots could land in clumps, that didn't mean they weren't getting through occasionally, and

around the same time that she began to have trouble in the air, one of them slammed down right near where Ranma and his former opponent had broken up things off for the moment.

As the edges opened up, guns blazed, solid-state slugs along with energy bolts, which Ranma was already out of the way of before the first bullet left its barrel. While Ranma could tank the kind of pistols that normal gangsters and so forth carried, and could even heal or redirect rifle and machine gun bullets, if he saw them coming, something he had proven a few times before this, he surely wasn't going to do anything about a wall of lead coming his way except move before it reached him.

As for the plasma, Ranma ducked behind a public restroom that quickly collapsed under the weight of the fire hitting it, and he held out his hand into the stream of plasma, blinking when it hit with surprising force. The heat, on the other hand, didn't even leave a mark and barely felt hotter than a bath. *Who knew I'd ever be thankful for that Phoenix Pill and Cologne wanting to have fun with me and Shampoo that one time. Freaking Cologne, I honestly never knew what to make of her. One moment she's the best trainer I've had outside Diana-nee and Master O. The next, she's playin' with Shampoo and me like a lady who won't take no for an answer, and the next, she's cackling and acting like she loves watching us squirm. The old bat.*

Shaking that thought off, Ranma leaped into the air. Two of the alien invaders followed his movement, and dozens of bolts of plasma crashed into him, causing Ranma to grunt a bit. With the heat doing nothing to him, the energy bolts still imparted enough force to remind Ranma of the time he'd experimented and come up with the Mini Moko technique, shrinking the size of his ki attacks to the size of his girl form's fists.

Most of the attacker's attention remained on his former opponent, even as Ranma was in the air. Unlike Ranma, neither bullets nor energy bolts seemed to be doing anything to her, and for the second time since meeting her, Ranma wondered if that was just going to be a thing with him, where he would meet women who were inherently tougher and stronger than he was. *Well, if it is, forget strength then, I've got skill!*

From his hands, ki claws flared as he landed amongst some of the shooters. Before they could react, Ranma's ki claws were slicing through armor and flesh alike, laying out several of them. One of them was then struck by the same technique he'd used to shatter the orange-skinned girl's chains. This turned that man's chain vambrace into a large shrapnel bomb. This obviously took the man's hand along with much of his chest, turning them into more meat and bone paste than living flesh, while several other aliens around him simply died, perforated.

Trying hard to keep his gorge down, Ranma twisted around an axe one of the chain wearers brought down towards him. Letting the blow pass by, Ranma then grabbed the man's arm and flung him sideways. The man almost fought Ranma's grip, showing a decent amount of strength, and when one of them was able to catch Ranma in the shoulder with a punch, his weapon having been destroyed by one of his ki claws, it hit with a surprising amount of strength.

These guys are just about as strong as Pantyhose Taro, but thankfully, nowhere near as durable. Heh, and their reaction is shit.

When that monster showed up in search of Happosai, Ranma had been training with the Amazons for a good while and had been pretty much equal to Taro at the time in terms of strength, despite how much taller and more powerful-looking Taro was. Now, he was even stronger, and he whirled around, grabbing the man's fist as it came towards his face, wrenching his arm sideways, breaking it, then kicking up into the man's chest, hurling him backward into the last two raiders.

They went down, but before Ranma could finish them, his former opponent streaked across towards him, her fists crashing into their chests with enough power to shatter a building, let alone their rib cages. With a sound like a giant pot of popcorn erupting all at once, the momentum of those strikes picked up the men, who Ranma could tell were already dead and hurled them through the air.

Standing up, she grimaced, wagging her hands in either direction, and seeing how much gore was on them from her own portion of the fight, Ranma nodded in commiseration. "Yeah, it's always annoying to get blood on your hands. Mind you, I gotta hope the smells better for you than it was when I had to kill those freaking cannibals... ugh. Bad memories." He shook his head, then reached into his ki space and tossed the girl a water bottle. "Never mind."

The cannibals had all been crazy, driven mad by their diet and some herbs they ate on Yamatai, yet even so, Ranma wasn't so used to killing that he'd been able to do so without nightmares. These guys, though, Ranma had no compunction about killing. Much like the Joker, they were right where they wanted to be, and Ranma wasn't going to weep about paying them back in the same coin.

The alien girl caught the water bottle and quickly figured out how to open it, looking at Ranma quizzically, very obviously wondering where it had come from before she began to drink from it rather than wipe her hands off. *Probably for the best*, Ranma reflected. *This ain't gonna be the last time today those hands o' hers are gonna get dirrrrr...*

Ranma's ability to think went out the window for a moment as he stared at the orange-haired girl, who had thrown her head back, her lips latched onto the top of the water bottle. A low hum came from the alien girl as she drank the water, as if it were the finest drink she had ever known.

What this probably meant for her life before this escaped Ranma as he watched, poleaxed. Some of the water had escaped from the corner of the orange-skinned girl's mouth and now trailed down her chin to her neck and then further down into her neckline. Coupled with the noises she was making and the fact she was wearing his shirt, which was not made for a girl of her height or bust size, well, Ranma had always been a sucker for innocently sexy moments like this. *Gah, and I can clearly see she isn't wearing a bra, either!*

Thankfully for Ranma's higher brain functions, the moment was ruined by a sonic boom from on high as Kara and her own private aerial war continued above Star City. That noise seemed to act like a doorway, and soon the noise of the rest of the city at war came from all around them.

Shaking his head, Ranma set his suddenly amorous thoughts aside, not knowing that Koriand'r had felt the sudden spike of interest and had enjoyed it. Feeling such thoughts, mixed with respect and good humor, was a far cry from the more possessive, demanding and darkly lustful thoughts of her previous captors.

"Er, I don't suppose you figured out how to speak English or any other human language since we started fighting, have you?" Ranma asked, staring all around them, trying to figure out where the nearest sounds of violence were coming from. He could figure out the sounds of the alien weapons, but there were so many echoes, shouts, screams and sirens that it was proving difficult.

Pulling the water bottle away from her lips reluctantly, the girl looked over at Ranma, cocking her head to one side. "//Hmmm? I don't know what you just said, but thanks for the water. It was most pleasant.//"

With everything going on around them, Ranma really shouldn't have had the attention span to waste on thinking that the whole head cocking thing like that was cute, let alone sexy. Yet somehow, with the moment before still bouncing around in his mind, he did.

Looking away quickly before his gaze could go anywhere it shouldn't, Ranma sighed before turning his attention up to the sky above. "Never mind."

He watched as Kara slammed into several drop pods almost directly above them, moving between them like a ping pong ball, each hit sending a drop pod arcing away from his line of sight over the buildings as she rapidly moved on. He then watched as starfighters, whose design was, in Ranma's opinion, kind of cool, appeared. More importantly, there were suddenly more drop pods, some of them moving towards Ranma and his companion. So many that Ranma wondered if the aliens they'd just dealt with had somehow been able to report that their quarry was here.

Regardless, Ranma waved his hand until the slave girl was looking at him. He then held up his finger to his lips, hoping that this was a galaxy-wide expression that could carry over.

Despite the moment of levity from earlier, Koriand'r was furious, scared, and more than a little worried. Despite the sight of someone being able to fly and bat aside drop pods, and the fact that her former opponent had turned around and helped her against her enemies, if this was the mighty Warworld itself coming down on them, and not simply a hunting party of Chain Brethren, then no amount of local help was going to be enough. She would be captured again, handed over to become a prize for Mongul with all that entailed.

And Koriand'r was not going to be a prisoner again. She was not going to be kept in a cage, locked away again, subjected to Mongul's unwanted attention!

She nodded at what the human was saying, then blinked in surprise when, as if taking her nod of understanding as permission, he seemingly faded out of her perception. It was a very weird feeling. She could sense his emotions and knew he was still standing there, but her mind didn't want to dwell on him or where he should be. Still, he was in the area, which meant he was simply using this trick somehow to ambush the next wave, and she was all for that.

Koriand'r raced towards the rubble of the strange central building in this parklike area, ducking into the rubble there for a moment, grabbing up a pair of blasters on the way. *If I didn't have these inhibitor cuffs on, I wouldn't need these, such primitive devices! But I do, and some long-range fire is always nice.*

The three drop pods slammed into the park area, finishing the job of destroying much of the tree line and several small walkways through it, with one of them coming down almost on top of the water fountain in the center, destroying it utterly. The water nearly hit Ranma, who had just ducked behind a tree. The water hit the tree and the area around Ranma, but not Ranma himself. *WOO! For once, water didn't hit me. I'll mark it out on the fucking calendar.*

He watched as the former slave girl fired on the incoming aliens as they came out of their drop pods, then charged forwards just as a scream of pain came from the girl, causing him to nearly stumble as his head swiveled in that direction. *What the hell, these guys can't carry guns big enough or strong enough to hurt her!*

Twitching his eyes forward once more, Ranma watched as one of the men with chains wrapped around his forearms used a new kind of weapon. The others were armed with machine guns and so forth, their proportions and fittings odd, but still easily understandable. The plasma weapons looked like something from some Star Wars aficionado's pipedreams. This one was simply a small device in the user's hand. The aperture was tiny compared to the barrels of the other guns, a little pyramid of glowing crystal at its tip. Frankly, much as the rest of their weapons and gear reminded Ranma of a few other science-fiction galaxies, that thing looked almost like a Star Trek phaser, perhaps of the Klingon variety.

Whatever it fired was invisible to Ranma's eyes, but did have to be pointed in the former slave girl's direction. She dodged several blasts, allowing hits from the other weapons to practically wash over her, such was the amount of firepower, but those strange, small weapons, she seemed to fear.

Above them, another drop pod crashed down nearby, not near enough to matter at the moment but enough to make Ranma make a note of it. Just as the alien girl yowled in agony again, the invisible beam of whatever had caught her again.

Koriand'r screamed in pain as the pain inhibitors hit her, causing arcing flares of raw pain to go through her nervous system. This was the way the Chain Brethren broke their slaves. They chained them, bound them, and injected them with a specific type of nanites. They then used weapons like this to communicate with the nanites in the prisoner's body, causing them to create pain throughout the prisoner's body.

While this type of torture caused no wounds, it did cause pain, so much pain that when you took the pain away, those moments where you did not feel pain were like feeling pleasure. In this manner, the Chain Brethren broke their slaves. It had been how the Chain Brethren had been trying to break Koriand'r for years.

Pushing through the pain, Koriand'r rolled under cover a second later, gasping in agony, then blinked as the sounds of shocked shouting and screams hit her. Ducking her head up over the rubble, she saw that her ally had snuck his way into the enemy's loose formation, and was now laying it thick about him, his strength and speed above those of most of his enemies, and his skill far, far greater.

Seeing many of them turn their guns on him, the human ducked in between several of them, using them as cover. The Chain Brethren and the rest of Warworld's warriors opened fire instantly, cutting down many of their own companions, causing a feeling of shock from Koriand'r's companion even as he bounced away through the group, causing still more friendly fire.

Their attention was so fixated on Koriand'r's former enemy that she was able to push herself to her feet, leap up over the rubble, and charge before anyone noticed she was on the move. Even as several of them turned back towards her, the Tamaranean princess slammed into a few from behind, literally lifting them up and using two of them as flails against several of their pet fellows. Many of them went down and stayed down as Koriand'r made a point of smashing her foot down on any other skulls that she could discover.

As the last of those attackers went down, Ranma nodded to her, even throwing a wink into it, before his eyes trailed down, then away as he forcefully twisted his neck. Koriand'r blinked, smiling faintly at the feeling of appreciation and approval from him now, even more than she had before, and she preened just a bit. Koriand'r **liked** that kind of feeling. Like many of her folk, Koriand'r was very open with her body, and knowing that others respected the effort it took to look as good as she did was nice. That was far better to deal with than the bestial lust she had been dealing with from most of her captors for several years now; ever since she had developed curves, in fact.

Ranma gestured, and the alien girl stopped preening just a little bit, something Ranma had indeed noticed, pointing towards where he could still hear gunfire nearby. In an urban jungle like this, it was hard to tell, but Ranma was pretty certain that the gunfire was getting closer.

Turning in that direction, Koriand'r hesitated until the sound of gunfire reached her. At that, she nodded, and the two of them raced in that direction. *Any harm I can do to those of Warworld, I will do. I will not be captured again!*

It wasn't the police that the aliens in that fourth drop pod were fighting. Rather, it was a group of heavily armed gangsters. The warehouse they had been in had apparently been smashed into from on high by the falling drop pod. By the time the pair were close enough to look through a window to the scene inside, more than a dozen dead bodies sprawled across the warehouse floor.

Glancing from side to side, Ranma wondered if this had been some kind of chop shop, given the amount of car parts and everything around, but regardless, the aliens had not had it all their own way. Several of their number were down, and two more were badly wounded.

Thinking quickly, Ranma led his acquaintance up over the rubble of where the edge of the drop pod had smashed down one of the walls. Skidding underneath the hull of the drop pod through the whole, Ranma then flipped upwards, lashing out at one alien who was hovering over the middle of the warehouse in a jet pack. He wasn't able to land and cling to the guy like a limpet in preparation to take said jet pack, although he very much made a note of it, even as his foot smashed into the man's back right below where the jet pack lay.

The wash from the energy within hit Ranma's leg, and despite his ability to tank the blow, Ranma found himself flipped upside down in the air, but Ranma turned this move into an attack on two other aliens below, his hands grabbing onto their heads. Smashing them together, he used them as a mount, lashing it with a kick to one side that took another alien in the side of the head, shattering it too.

From where she had crawled underneath the drop pod, Koriand'r watched all this, but could not emulate her new companion. *How is he so at home in the air when he cannot fly?*

Setting that observation to one side, she finished her roll, her leg smashing out in a kick that took the leg out from under one Chain Brother, breaking both of his legs even as she thrust up into another man with a punch that hurled him through the air to crash into the opposite wall.

As he leapt away from one of the aliens, Ranma was hit by fire from another alien who'd taken cover nearby, turning his attention away from his own enemies. One of those enemies quickly flanked him and fired, taking the alien in the side, perforating his arm and sides with bullets, and then the last alien was down from a headshot from another gangster.

"Hey, all! I ain't about to shout about how you are all under arrest or anything under these circumstances, but if you could get the word out to any other group that's heavily armed enough to make a difference, now's the time, yeah?" Ranma said, landing and grimacing just a

little bit. That guy's heavy-caliber weapon had hit hard, almost like one of Kara's punches when he couldn't redirect it in time. Those hurt, and Ranma had felt them a time or two on this trip.

"We've already put the word out on the street, ya damn chink," one of the gangsters grumbled, shaking his head. "Star City doesn't exactly have a big crime syndicate or anythin' running it, not with Green Arrow making it his home, but there's still some of us around. And we're for sure as hell not gonna let some aliens start an invasion here."

Ranma nodded, realizing that they were actual mobsters rather than gangsters. That probably meant they would be more determined than street toughs would be to defend their turf, and probably better armed and organized to boot. "Well, that's good enough for me. Hell, maybe if you all do a good enough job, the cops'll hand out pardons or whatever."

That garnered some interested looks from a few of the gangsters, but Ranma was already turning away. He looked over at his companion, then gestured her back the way they came, following her a moment later, before any of the locals could ask questions.

They had barely gone a block before another, far larger drop pod slammed into a building two streets to their right. Screams and shouts of fear, alarm and pain went off, and Ranma winced before charging in that direction, his companion following after.

By the time they arrived, the large troop transport, which had simply smashed down two houses in a small residential district, had opened its sides, showing it was a different type than the one Kara had run into elsewhere in the city. This allowed dozens of infantrymen to race out in every direction, while behind them came some strange four-barreled thing.

It blasted down the road, its shots slamming into and through several houses. The plasma bolts seared straight through, and what they didn't destroy, they set on fire. Along with whoever might've been hiding within, trying desperately to stay out of whatever was going on.

Snarling, Ranma and the alien girl slammed into the pirates just as they began to spread out. Many of them were able to bring their guns around to bear on Ranma or the alien girl, and she yelled again in agony as the same phaser thing hit her, but Ranma had seen that before. His return ki shots took two of the people wielding those things in the head, and before most of the aliens could get under cover, the alien girl herself crashed into several others, bringing them to earth, hammering blow after blow into them.

However, the mobile gun, much like the rest of the pirates, didn't have any care or concern for their companions. It twisted around and began to blast at the orange-skinned girl at practical point-blank range.

Starfire was able to roll away from one blast, but another caught her in the side, sending her skidding sideways along the road hard enough to leave a groove behind her, and for her to feel real agony for the first time in this fight from something other than the pain receptors.

Ducking under a series of plasma bursts from one alien, Ranma punched the ground, shouting out "Bakusai Tenketsu!"

This sent gravel stabbing through several of the aliens, the chunks of debris moving so fast that it acted like shotgun pellets, tearing several of them to pieces. Ranma then leapt up into the air as the thing fired again, coming down in the midst of another group of aliens, limbs flashing, smashing aliens aside like so many wooden dummies, not a one of them able to get their guns aimed at him in time to help.

The next second, Ranma was through, slamming his hand against the side of the four-cannon monstrosity. "Bakusai Tenketsu Revised!"

For the second time in as many minutes, Ranma used that technique to create a blast of shrapnel, though this time it was even deadlier. The entire side of the tank exploded inward, turning its crew and the two shooters into so many shredded bits of flesh and bone.

Even as the attack hit, Ranma squawked in pain as several bullets crashed into his side, sending him skittering sideways. He rolled on the ground as he hit, then kicked off, sending himself sideways from where he had begun his roll, setting the bulk of the tank between him and whoever had been firing at him.

By the time he then jumped over it towards the attackers, however, Koriand'r had dealt with the rest. He nodded her way, then both of them looked up as the battle in the sky took their attention again. This time, because two more troop transports were coming down towards them, blotting out the evening sun for a second.

Ranma was just about to grab up a large chunk of debris and hurl it up at the things to see if he could at least smash them together or do some damage to their bottoms when what looked like a Hiryuu Shouten Ha to him crashed into them from the side. It carried one of the troop transports into the side of the other and then hurled both of them out of sight over the skyline, before Ranma saw who had actually done the deed.

A large, red, armored figure lowered itself towards them, hovering over a thin, tightly controlled tornado of air, looking at the pair of them closely. "Greetings, Ranma Saotome of Japan. I am Red Tornado of the Justice League. Your name has been added to the Watchtower's database as someone who needs to be watched by Batman. Yet your help against these aliens is appreciated. Your companion is entirely unknown."

Staring at the metallic figure 'sitting' so docily on a tiny, condensed Tornado, Ranma could only stare for a second before he realized he didn't see any hint of flesh or anything else underneath that armor. "Are you a robot!?"

"Android, actually. There is more to my story than that, but this is not the time for it. I take it that we can accept that you are willing to fight these invaders?"

"I am, although I don't think they're actually here to invade. I think they're here to put my friend back under chains."

The Red Tornado, who was actually a cross between an android and a sentient tornado grafted together, kept his gaze on the orange-skinned alien woman. Her appearance and skin color were not in his database nor his memory prior to merging with the android he currently inhabited. Given the look of confusion, she also didn't understand English.

He said hello in several different alien languages, but the alien girl still looked completely blank. "Interesting. Her language does not seem to be in our database. Still, your hypothesis seems to be correct, given what my scanners can pick up from those powered inhibiting chains of hers."

"I don't suppose you can get her out of those, can you? I can probably break them, but I can't do it in a way that won't seriously hurt her," Ranma asked. *Unless I wanna try my ki claws? I didn't see my ki blasts impacting her chains much, but that's a far cry from a ki blade like my claws, right? On the other hand, I don't have that good control. I don't want to slice her by accident.*

"I cannot. My control over tornadoes isn't that precise. I wouldn't be able to stop a cutting force wind from cutting deeply into her arms, and that would be bad."

For her part, Koriand'r was staring at the robot in front of her in some confusion. Robots were known but very much not a thing among her folk, except for dealing with the most dangerous of tasks, like dealing with disposing of poisonous chemicals. There were also none on Warworld, or at least none that were humanoid in shape. Further, while she could tell this was an android of some kind, she was also sensing some strange emotions from it. They weren't anything like a normal sentient would feel beyond a stern determination to do it's best, and were also somewhat disconnected in a way she hadn't ever felt before. It was... Weird. Very weird.

"I would suggest the two of you shift your attention south by southeast, deeper into the city. Your fighting seems to have brought you to the outskirts, and the vast majority of the civilian population have begun to make their way out from the inner city on foot or by car traffic." The Red Tornado stared at several portions of the rubble before shaking his head. He detected no life signs beneath them, and he hoped that simply meant few homeowners in this street were actually home. Yet his logical center knew better.

Ranma winced a little. They'd gotten lucky so far in that Ranma hadn't seen all that many dead bodies up to this point, but Ranma knew that they had left behind a lot of injured by that first park they been fighting in and against several times after, although thankfully most of the people had by then already taken shelter. *I'm not exactly going to shed a tear for any of the gangsters that went down, but the rest?*

Here, Ranma and his alien companion had arrived in time for his key senses to tell them that at least three or four people had died in the time it took Ranma and his alien ally to deal with the attackers. "Right. I don't suppose there's more of you along the way?"

"There is only one Red Tornado, thankfully. However, other heroes are indeed arriving dribs and drabs. Indeed, the Flash have been on guard around the outskirts of the city, helping people evacuate and dealing with any aliens arriving in the suburbs for several minutes now." If a robot could grimace, Red Tornado would have at that point, but he didn't, instead making a circular chopping motion with one hand. "Unfortunately, most of the Justice League's heavy hitters are away enforcing peace in a nearby sector of space between two belligerents. Our European allies are also dealing with a hostage situation in Brussels, and there is something magical going on in the Amazon, which has drawn in Doctor Fate."

"I don't like either of those statements. Someone calling themselves Doctor Fate is just asking for trouble, and the idea of anything magical going on anywhere is enough to make my hair stand on end. And this is me saying it. Given everything I've run into, you'd think I'd be used to magic, but nooo," Ranma added in an undertone.

Red Tornado heard him, but despite that statement making Red Tornado have many questions, he agreed with the sentiment regardless. "Indeed, and as a creature who has been created out of magic, I have to say that even I agree with you. It is far more trouble than it is worth."

He then turned his attention upwards as several starfighters came in on a strafing run, only for Red Tornado to blast them all aside with a cone of air solid enough to act like a wall that the starfighter simply ran into. "Let's get a move on. There is still an invasion going on."

"Actually, is there a segment of the city that you know has no civilians in it at the moment?" Ranma asked, even as he also turned his attention upwards, with the alien girl following suit a second later. "Only, if they really are after my friend here, we can maybe drag them to where we want them to go."

The Red Tornado calculated for a brief second, then nodded. "Follow me. We'll leave them in that direction, although given the nature of the drop pods, it's doubtful that they will be able to be so precise. Still, under our present circumstances, we will take what we can get."

OOOOOOO

The Red Tornado was indeed correct on both counts. Other heroes were indeed arriving, and the first to do so was the Flash. The red-garbed hero that Kara and Ranma had already met once was not called the Fastest Man Alive for no reason. He'd been up in Canada at a science symposium, but luckily, that symposium had ended for the day, and there'd been no social issues stopping him from simply zooming away as fast as he could go once the Watchtower got in touch with him.

The first thing he saw was Kara in the air. As he raced into the suburbs of Star City, Kara was smashing several starfighters out of the sky, using her eye beams, fists, and breath attack to drop pods and starfighters alike.

Well... fuck, Wally West reflected, I didn't think we'd be facing an alien invasion so soon after we had that brief talk about morality, the rules of heroing, and how it would change in moments like this. Damn it all. Next time Green Lantern Corps requests our strongest heroes on one of their peacekeeping missions, I'm gonna insist at least one heavy hitter stays home! Superman's cousin seems to be doing the best we could ask for, but he could be doing a far better job of it, and J'onn could be doing just as good a job.

Zooming around the city and finding several small open areas and parklands, the Flash first dealt with a group of aliens from a drop ship that Kara had redirected deeper inland. Once that was done and a few signs were set up to keep people calm, he began evacuating significant segments of the population, pushing into the inner city in an ever-shrinking spiral. At times, he was stymied by damage already done to the city, as several of those drop pods that Kara hadn't been able to smash out towards the ocean had come down even in those suburban areas.

On top of the physical damage done to the city, the Flash ran roughshod over a group of aliens more than once. Like the other heroes and Ranma before him, the Flash quickly recognized that this was a very strange invasion, given how many different alien species were involved. He also discovered that a few drive-by punches weren't enough to do the job on the chain-wearing individuals. They were a lot tougher than the human or alien norm, yet the Flash could still deal with them with enough punches to soft areas. Mainly the throat.

For the fastest man alive, that was but the work of a moment. Better from his perspective, he was able to take most of the groups he faced out so quickly that none of the groups were able to prepare anything in the way of defenses against him.

Still, Wally's main priority was evacuating the civilians.

In emergencies like this, the plan was simple. Children and grievously wounded who could still be saved first. Children were sent to a specific area, accompanied by teachers, professors, and so forth, removed from schools, along with any parents they were in contact with at the time of removal. Grievously wounded were taken to the nearest hospital, from which they were found, unless the Watchtower's communications computer, which was what would be called, in gaming parlance, an Artificial Stupid, informed the Flash or whoever else was doing the evacuating that the hospital in question was already badly overworked.

Thankfully, Star City, while not a big-time name in technology or any other industry, was known for its hospitals and two local med schools. All of which was serving the city well now.

After the grievously wounded, children and their minders, came other civilians, with particular emphasis given to those who couldn't make their own way out of the combat zone.

Any civilian who was legitimately already fighting back against the invasion was left where they were, up to and including obvious criminal types.

Some of the heroes had a bit of an issue with that kind of concept, but pragmatism won out on that score.

Soon, Ranma, Kara, the Green Arrow and the rest all became aware of a red blur zooming through the city. Whole families and then whole streets were rapidly evacuated from the city, removing those who could not defend themselves.

At the same time, other heroes began to arrive. The first of whom caused a bit of an issue for Kara.

Twisting around at the sound of something hitting something else extremely hard, Kara's eye beams carved a path through the side of one of the large troop transports, ripping it open like a plasma torch on a tin can as she looked towards where the noise had come from. There, coming over the rapidly falling body of one of the jetpack-equipped aliens, a Thanagarian ducked to one side, shouting, "Gah, friendly fire, friendly fire!"

That line brought Kara up short, and her eye beams cut out right before they might've hit the Thanagarian as she blinked. "Friendly fire isn't," she quoted one of the history documentaries that she and Ranma had watched before her eyes narrowed and she glared at the man, breathing in and readying a tornado. "You're speaking the local language; you have three seconds to explain!"

"Wha, what, what's to explain!?" the Thanagarian shouted, ducking under fire from one side as two other jet-equipped raiders showed up. He hissed as he saw them, shaking his head and muttering, "Chain Brethren! This is Warworld then?" before turning his attention back to the strange blonde girl who seemingly was fighting almost like Superman, only far more viciously. *Didn't Superman say something about a cousin who had crash-landed on Earth a while ago?* "I'm part of the Justice League, girl, which is more than I can say for you!"

"Yes, but I've already dealt with four Thanagarians," she grumbled, turning to the side and using her breath attack to create a tornado that slammed into several starfighters, pushing and crashing them together. "So, you'll need to forgive me for thinking you might be one of the attackers."

At that, Hawkman winced, then twitched around, ducking under a series of plasma blasts, hurling his mace forward to crash into the face of the individual firing at him. That was the last of the group who used jetpacks to escape the flaming wreckage of the troop transport, the alien girl had already dealt with, and he twisted around, bringing up the gun in his other hand as he began to fire at another drop pod. While his folk preferred hand-to-hand combat to a degree that would make any sword enthusiast among humanity balk, even Thanagarians

understood that in a case like this, long-range firepower was a good thing, and he had come equipped accordingly.

"I wish I could say that my people being found in pirate gangs was a new thing, but it really isn't," Hawkman said, half apologizing, half explaining as he flew alongside Kara for a second, firing downward now at a group of aliens who were taking up positions on a series of roofs near the center of Star City. "We're an inherently warlike people, and if someone can't quite fit in with the society back home, well, there are various ways of leaving it, so to speak."

Kara shrugged her shoulders at that, then, after smashing a drop pod so hard with the punch that it disappeared over the horizon out to sea, she asked, "You muttered something about Chain Brethren earlier? Is that the name of this pirate band or whatever?"

"No, it isn't that. These aren't technically pirates, or if you would call them that, it's on a scale that no real pirate fleet could come close to." Hawkman grunted as he ducked under a series of blasts from one side of the starfighter. Twisting around in that direction, he returned fire, stitching the starfighter as it flew past to the point where its engine exploded a second later.

"That group, the Chain Brethren, is one... clan, or guild, I guess you could call them, that call a planet named Warworld their home," Hawkman explained, grunting between each word and shifting around as fast as possible, and it is basically the size of a large moon. No one knows where it comes from, but it's stuffed to the gills with extremely high-tech weapons and devices, which many of the local species in this quadrant, like my own, can't match."

Kara blinked at that, thinking for a second that she hadn't really seen anything that she would call particularly high tech among the aliens. However, she then became aware that a shadow had begun to cover the entire area around them. Indeed, now that she could take a second to turn her attention away from smashing drop pods and troop transports, she realized the shadow wasn't just directly above them. Rather, it was above the entire city, encasing it and miles in every direction in shadow, despite there being at least another two hours or so before the sun should start setting.

As Kara began to turn her attention upward, other heroes arrived within Star City and outside of it, making their presence known. Plastic Man arrived via a flash of teleportation into a small, abandoned bookstore. Or so the sign outside would say.

In reality, this place, like several dozen others scattered across America, was owned by the Justice League and used solely for teleportation. They didn't have a place like this in every city, but they were working on it.

Batman was somewhat opposed to the very idea, as it could be used against them if anyone figured out a way to suborn the technology or exploit the teleportation signals. That

was why there wasn't one in Gotham. But not everyone could fly as fast as Superman or the Red Tornado.

A case in point was the hero who had come through this specific teleportation. Plastic Man was a long-standing member of the Justice League, one of the oldest in point of fact. He was also well respected, despite his powers not exactly putting him among the upper echelon. Still, his powers were incredibly useful, and he quickly went to work in the streets above. Several aliens found to their detriment that plastic could punch through their skin and bone quite easily if thrust with enough force, concentrated into a small enough area. Whereas several civilians found thin sheets of plastic suddenly shifting beneath the rubble that was trapping them, then expanding to push it upwards.

However, unlike the Flash, Plastic Man didn't go looking for trouble after the first few aliens he dealt with. The aliens had plasma weapons, and fire-based weaponry like that was one of the banes of his existence. As he pushed on, the teleportation tunnel activated again. Two other heroes arrived, Firestorm and Metamorpho.

While Metamorpho, a new and somewhat reluctant member of the League, rushed to link up with the EMTs and police, Firestorm blasted up into the air, eager to use his pyrokinesis to good effect against the aliens before they could get to the ground. Metamorpho couldn't fly, but his elemental transmutation and all the additional powers that gave his body would be useful on the ground.

More important was the fourth hero to come through the teleporter. Although she honestly didn't look the part of a hero at first glance. Rather, she wore an outfit that would not be out of place in a casino. Specifically, she wore the leotard and spangly jacket of a 'traditional' birdy, or a woman who was part of a magic show. She even came complete with a tall hat atop jet-black hair, which she was currently wearing in a severe bun.

This young woman stumbled to her knees as she came through. "UGH. Fucking Christ on a crutch, that is the last time I use technology to teleport myself," Zatanna, newest magic-using member of the Justice League, grumbled. She pushed herself to her feet, little sparks of light pink and dark purple flickering around her hands as she pulled up the mask and magical necklace that would keep her identity a secret. "Now, where's the exact center of the city? Gonna need to do something before that planetoid decides it wants to play directly."

Out to sea, Aquaman also arrived, and he arrived in force.

Aquaman was not just a hero with the Justice League. He was also the leader of Atlantis. This was a kingdom based on the ocean floor, somewhere between the Hawaiian Islands and America's coast, with a few cities scattered across the seven oceans. It was the most isolationist nation on Earth, and there had been a time when the UN had been exceedingly leery of its existence, to say nothing about how China and Russia had reacted to the knowledge that there

was a whole nation under the waves. However, as Atlantis became known on the world stage, so too did Aquaman, its hereditary king.

Admittedly, he was more of a figurehead than anything else, with no real ability to enact laws or change Atlantis's society overmuch. Despite that lack of real legislative power, he had helped hammer out a mutual defense treaty between Atlantis, America, the United Kingdom, France, and several island nations since being basically forced at gunpoint to act like the King he should be.

So, as Aquaman himself burst out of the water on a stream of ocean water going at a speed that was rarely found in nature, to land on the docks in front of a group of aliens that had just tried to board a cargo ship, several Atlantean vessels rose up out of the ocean well out from the shore. Missiles and lasers began to fire from longer range, further helping Kara and the others attempting to smash down troop transports and so forth in the sky above the city.

"This is Aquaman acting as on-site commander of the Atlantean relief force," Aquaman growled as his foot caught one alien and his trident took another through the throat. The man he kicked remained on his feet and tried to go for a cut with a sword that, oddly, looked like a cavalry saber with whirling bits, but Aquaman blocked it with his trident then dodged a follow-on headbutt as he swept the man's feet out from under him. A stab later, and the man, his forearms wrapped in chains, strangely, joined his fellows in death. "Give me a sit rep, and let's get some organization here!"

The Flash and Aquaman were almost equal in terms of seniority within the Justice League, but Aquaman had brought far more resources to bear here, as actual Atlantean troops came up out of the water, their heads protected by large water-filled bubbles from the air that they could not breathe after generations of genetic alterations, he also brought an organization with him that the beleaguered EMTs police and firefighters dearly appreciated.

Normally, someone like Batman would be in charge on-site, or Superman or Wonder Woman to serve as a rallying point. However, Wonder Woman and Superman were both out of the star system at present, and Batman was stuck in Gotham and wouldn't be able to arrive even using the nearest teleportation system for another few hours. Still, Aquaman could do in a pinch.

Even without the heavy hitters, Aquaman and the other heroes began to turn the tide quickly throughout the city. Slowly but surely, more and more were taken out of the danger zone, and more troops began to arrive on the shoreline. Not just from Atlantis, but also from nearby military bases. While none had been very close to Star City, as with the Justice League, America's military had begun developing contingencies for dealing with alien invasions.

The first sign of this was groups of missiles suddenly slamming into alien starfighters, troop transports and drop pods from beyond the horizon, followed by still other jets flashing into the fight. Some of them went toe to toe with the alien starfighters, engaging them in a

snarling mass of dogfights, while others continued to smite from a distance. Still more arrived on the scene and began to lay down suppressive fire on aliens already in the city, with many of the aliens exploding under the fire from the giant guns of A10 Warthogs, although they did just as much damage to the surrounding city as to the alien invaders.

And in the distance, still more help was coming in as quickly as could be managed. The US had been attacked, and now Warworld would need to deal with everything that could be scrambled into conflict.

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High above the battlefield that had once been a human city, the warlord Mongul smirked slightly as he watched the locals fight it out with his own quick reaction force. More of Warworld's might was being deployed, but slowly, as such things always were. "Fascinating. These locals do indeed have several heroes to them and have a military structure that seems competent."

With a chuckle, he ordered more of the Chain Brethren and the other societies of Warworld to put forth their best efforts. The Flayers, the Screaming Avians, the Heavies, the Raptors and more. Every one of them, devoted to a different type of combat or weapon, raced to engage the enemy, his encouragement unnecessary. One thing that all of those societies, bar the Technocrats, the guild that kept Warworld running, had in common was that they lived to fight.

Even the Technocrats enjoyed a good scrap, if only at a distance.

What had been dozens of drop pods, a scattered handful of troop transports, and wings of starfighters became droves. Dozens, then hundreds of starfighters launched from Warworld as it slowly began to descend, along with hundreds of drop pods and dozens of troop transports.

The planet itself began to fire from dozens, then hundreds of ports. Most of that fire was small-scale, the equivalent of Warworld's anti-air, yet the sheer scale of the fire quickly smashed many of the first atmospheric fighter planes to reach Star City out of the sky, then began to work on those more distant targets. At the same time, they hammered into the city, collapsing buildings or outright smashing them to rubble.

He watched as the first individual to rise to protect the city began working overtime, zooming faster and faster, with eye beams of some strength and tornado-force winds in every direction. Several of the other so-called heroes were fighting just as well, and more of the human military forces were arriving from out on the ocean. Then missiles began to arrive, larger and heavier than anything seen before.

Two of them slammed into Warworld, shielding despite everything their defenses could do, and Mongul blinked in some surprise. He turned to a Technocrat, gesturing to his screen. "These humans are primitive, barely capable of flying out of their own gravity well. How did two of their missiles get through our antimissile defenses?"

"Our ECM suites are badly degraded while in atmosphere, Lord Mongul," that worthy responded promptly, bowing his head in supplication even as he answered the question promptly. Weakness and idiocy were hanging offenses on Warworld, but so was a lack of respect. "Further, they are so primitive that our automated defenses are having trouble locking onto them. An algorithm has already begun to be designed to solve that issue, but until then, we Technocrats are being forced to manually aim our guns at any incoming missile. However, those were only two of twenty that were launched from some kind of submersible. And they have in no way enough power to get through our shielding."

Satisfied, Mongul nodded, then turned aside, watching the fight avidly, his fists beginning to itch with a desire to get involved himself. Alas, leaving the bridge of Warworld was always a fraught decision, even for moments like this. Admittedly, he could earn glory for himself by leaving and taking direct part in the battle, but while the Chain Brethren and Technocrats were bound by oath and their own respect for him, some of the other, more morally flexible societies, when it came to their given word within Warworld, might take an opportunity to cause trouble or overthrow his rule entirely. The warlord of Warworld could never be too comfortable in his seat.

However, as more of the Chain Brethren and the other raider guilds arrived on the ground, reports began to come in of still more of these human heroes. Not just the blonde-haired woman in the air, either. One such report was passed directly to Mongul and surprised him enough to look away from a flying warrior with pyrokinesis. "What do you mean the princess has been freed of her chains?"

The Chain Brother on the other side of the communication snarled in reply, seemingly taken the fact that he had to report this as a personal insult. "I meant what I said, Dread Lord. Her chains have been shattered somehow. I would not have thought this planet had anything capable of doing that."

"Intriguing. It was probably one of the heroes, the blonde woman in the sky, for example. But does that in turn mean that the princess has freed herself completely?" The blonde woman flying around the city was interesting to be sure, and he had already ordered the Technocrats to begin a genetic scan, something that would take quite a while at range. Once the princess was secured, Mongul might head out to grab her as well. *She will be a fine prize.* Yet from what Mongul could see, she wasn't quite strong enough, and worse, wasn't durable enough to call for his personal attention. Koriand'r, the princess, would if she were fully freed.

"It does not seem so, my Lord. She still has her power-inhibiting bracers on," the Chain Brother reported, before a scream in the distance cut off the conversation.

At the same time, shields of varicolored energy, far different than any kind of shield that Mongul had ever seen before, popped into existence. They were small, these shields, seemingly sent out to intercept specific attacks from on high, but they ate whatever hit them before disappearing a second later.

At the same time, the blonde slip of a girl who had been smashing apart the initial waves of drop pods and troop transports burst up out of the strange melee around the area. She began to hammer her fists, eye beams and more into the shield.

Shaking his head at that, Mongul decided he'd had enough waiting around. He turned to the Technocrat he had been speaking to a moment ago, pointing at him. "You are in charge of the bridge until I return. I think it is time that I make my own presence felt here."

OOOOOOO

Kara watched as missiles and rockets slammed into the, the giant thing's shielding. While Hawkman had told her that it was called Warworld, not only had Kara never heard of it before, but her Kryptonian aesthetics harshly rejected its mere existence.

Warworld was built on a scale that her own people would never have bothered with, especially for mobile units. Admittedly, they had gone into huge moon bases and orbitals, but even so, building something that large to be mobile was just weird. Made worse by the fact that it was indeed round like a planet, particularly in-atmosphere.

*That thing should be disturbing, well, **everything**! A gravitic anomaly like that entering Earth's atmosphere should have massive repercussions on the ground. To say nothing of how it's disrupting the weather and air patterns,* Kara reflected as she smashed into and through a starfighter, her eye beams lancing out to the side to carve a path along the upper and right side of a troop transport, opening it up like an eggshell. *And isn't that kind of technology interesting! I wonder if I can find some and examine it, if we can beat these people back if I'll be able to---*

Her thoughts broke off as the planetoid, just a bit smaller than the moon, launched another wave of fighters and troop transports. This one was at least three times as large as the sporadic assault that preceded it, and Kara grimaced. *Never mind,* she thought, shaking her head. *It is quite obvious that they've got far too many troops and so forth to make that a viable idea.*

As if to emphasize her thoughts, Warworld itself opened up again. Beams the size of Kara's torso flashed down into Star City, carving through it in rivulets here and there, regardless of whatever they struck. Buildings, roads, open areas, it didn't matter to those beams of power.

Yet in comparison to the size of Warworld, it was clear to Kara that they were tertiary weapons at best, something for which she was immensely thankful, even as she dove to block

one such beam from hitting the hospital with her own body. The hit threw her backward, but dissipated quickly, doing no real damage.

Nearby, the Red Tornado somehow gathered up several dozen starfighters and two troop transports, using them as a protective barrier against several smaller beams of energy. These looked almost like pulses of energy compared to a solid beam like the one Kara had just blocked.

Alas, stopping those specific assaults was but a drop in the bucket in comparison to the sheer amount of firepower that suddenly was smacking down into Star City, and Kara grimaced, knowing that the evacuation that the Flash and other heroes had begun wasn't enough to save more than maybe a third of the city's population up to this point.

However, suddenly, small shields appeared scattered across the city. Where they came from, Kara had no idea, and they didn't look like any kind of shield that she had ever seen in educational videos back on Krypton or up to this point during the battle. Several of the attackers had personal shields, but they were normally scintillating white or dark blue, much like the one around the attacking planetoid. The shields scattered across the city were rainbow-colored for some reason. "What in the heck? I'm not exactly ungrateful, but did this city have some kind of defense system?"

"Incorrect," the Red Tornado said from nearby. Hawkman had dived down into the cityscape below them, dueling it out with several jetpack-wielding attackers, all of whom had a short-range weapon to go with their pistols. "That would probably be the work of Zatanna. When next we spot one of the other heroes around here, you need to pull back and get yourself a communicator."

Nodding Kara twisted around, using her breath attack to freeze to jetpack wielding aliens into icicles midair, before twisting around and launching a punch into the side of a troop transport, caving it in like she had just smacked a beer bottle can with a BB gun, only this BB gun had enough impetus to send the can in question flying. It was quickly hit by several of the Atlantean anti-air guns out in the sea, while still more missiles came in from beyond the horizon. "Who's Zatanna?"

"A somewhat probationary member of the Justice League, but well regarded for all that. She is a magic user, and although her experience is limited, her powers are quite extreme," the Red Tornado answered.

Kara might well have questioned what kind of magic this Zatanna person used at any other point, but right now, it didn't really matter. "Do you think she can go on the offensive, too? Only, this is not looking good."

A bolt of what looked like some kind of star stuff flashed up from the planet, crashing into Warworld shields and... doing absolutely nothing. The shields remained, a perfect bubble of white and dark blue energy around the planetoid.

The next moment, more firepower began to rain down, Warworld now doing the equivalent of a full broadside with its tertiary and anti-air guns. It did so in a pattern, firing some weapons, then others, then again, keeping the pressure on the planet and its defenders.

Despite that, still more shields appeared in the sky above Star City. Each shield absorbed the attack it popped into existence to defend against, and then disappeared. Even some of the heavier weapons were blocked in this manner, something Kara honestly had problems with. *Where does the energy go?*

More US Air Force fighters arrived at that point. Warthogs dove into the city, firing their massive guns at any target they could see. Several of them were shot down in turn, and Kara was horrified again as she saw one pilot eject in time to survive. "Darn it all, I've just gotten used to the idea that humans actually pilot their starfighters, now they use weird cloth things to protect themselves when they are inevitably shot down!? How primitive can you be?"

Before the Red Tornado could reply, Kara zoomed forward, grabbing at the back of the parachute and tugging the person dangling from it out of the way of one of the starfighters who had just begun to take a potshot at him. "Sorry, but I don't think those parachutes of yours are going to be any good in this environment!" she shouted.

Kara ducked down into the cityscape for a moment, depositing the airman on a roof, before zooming back up and into the fight, while in the distance, still more missiles arrived, once more the larger variety of which too had already gotten through Warworld's active defenses to slam into its shields. Seeing that, Red Tornado used his powers again to launch several captured starfighters and drop pods into the path of the incoming missiles, absorbing some of the anti-air fire.

The missiles, four of them this time, got through because of that little trick. But their payloads didn't do anything. Kara was getting the impression that anything below a nuke wasn't going to be enough here and that would have a whole slew of problems.

Deciding suddenly that all she was doing was trying to basically be a mobile dam in the face of a raging river, Kara shifted her attention upwards towards the planetoid. *Let's see if I can get through its shielding*, she thought grimly, her eye beams flashing up into the shield ahead of her. A millisecond later, she slammed her fists into it, one after another, hitting the same impact zone as her previous eye beams had, but nothing seemed to happen for a few moments.

She felt the shields then begin to weaken just slightly, but a second later, a blast of energy caught her in the side with enough force to cause Kara to yelp in pain as she was flung sideways through the air. Before she could right herself, the same kind of energy found her again, and Kara yelled a second time as she was sent tumbling.

That hurt! Kara growled, but she had dealt with pain before. Diana and her mother certainly hadn't taken it easy on Kara, after all. Now she wrenched one arm up and into the way

of the next beam coming towards her. It was small and thin, that beam, almost like her own eye beams, and tracing it back to its source, she saw a being standing on the outer surface of Warworld, facing her.

He was huge. At least twelve, maybe as many as fourteen feet tall? It was hard to tell through the energy shield's distortion and distance. What she could tell was that he was completely bald, if his species indeed had hair at all. His brows were thick, jutting forward over his deep-set eyes, almost like the brow of a Neanderthal, which Kara had seen in some biology textbooks. His eyes were the source of the beams hitting Kara, as she thought. His skin was yellow, and his hands just slightly oversize even for his own height. He wore a purple and white outfit, with purple predominating and white used as highlights, the same kind of skintight outfit that so many heroes and villains seemed to enjoy using.

Even as Kara took all that in, those large hands began to glow with energy, orange and dark black, roiling with chaotic energy unlike the dark red beams of power launched from the warrior's eyes. He raised those fists, and a blast of energy easily the size of Kara's torso flashed out, growing as it came until the diameter of the attack was wider than she was tall.

Before Kara could get away, the blast of energy crossed the intervening distance, bypassing Warworld's shielding as if it wasn't even there to crash into Kara. She howled in pain as she was flung backwards, and then two of Warworld's larger guns, secondaries or maybe even primary guns, locked onto her, adding their own impetus. Those blasts didn't hurt nearly as much as the more condensed, powerful energy of the warlord, but Kara still found herself being sent flying backwards away from Star City out and deeper inland with a cry of pain.

However, the warrior's attention on Kara had at least saved the Red Tornado, Firestorm and Hawkman from being his initial target. They dove down into the cityscape, using buildings to break up the warrior's line of sight, knowing they had no chance against him.

Watching them go, Mongul smirked just a little bit. "Good. Very good. Run and hide, little rodents. That will make squishing you all the more satisfying."

OOOOOOO

At the same time that Kara was smashed out of the sky and the other flight-capable heroes retreated down into Star City's skyline, Ranma and his orange-colored friend were fighting through a series of abandoned buildings against the alien invaders. They hadn't previously been abandoned. The signs of habitation were all over the place as the pair smashed through the sides of an apartment complex on one side and a large grocery store on the other side of the street. But it was evident that someone, probably the Flash, had evacuated everyone in this area of the city.

That was more than good enough for Ranma to go wild and stop holding back with his ki attacks, purloined guns, and makeshift weaponry, mainly in the form of debris. He still wasn't

able to stop a lot of the larger solid-state slugs from hurting him, but his ki healing was more than up to the task, and mainly, his speed and reflexes were more than enough to keep him from getting hit in the first place.

As for the orange-skinned alien woman, the only danger to her among these other aliens, who Ranma had heard over the hero network were called Chain Brethren, were those small, strange, pain-giving devices. Unfortunately, there seemed to be a lot of those, and more than once, the alien girl had been sent to her knees screaming in agony.

People using that kind of weapon, though, quickly became Ranma's targets, and he put them down with extreme prejudice.

Smashing an alien, one of those weird ones that had strange mechanical arms and legs through a wall, Ranma grinned over at his new friend.

She nodded in his direction, lifting her foot off the back of another alien whose spine she had just crushed. She then gestured around them, a wordless 'where do we go from here' question on her face.

Ranma glanced up, and, noting that for once they didn't seem in danger of any new drop pod or troop transport crashing down on top of them, gestured upwards to a nearby rooftop. This one was another abandoned building, an office block of some kind, and he clung to the side of the building as high up as he could jump, which was quite a ways, twenty stories to be precise. The girl followed after, but she was only able to get up to the thirteenth story, although from the pout on her face, she felt she should've done better.

From there, they both looked around the area for a moment before noting which direction the nearest sound of fighting was coming from.

Ranma hadn't realized it, but his and his alien companion's movements through the city had caused basically a zigzag pattern to appear. Now, it brought them in the same direction as the main portion of the orange-skinned girl's purloined shuttle had come down.

Green Arrow and several of the surviving policemen they'd fought with since the beginning had remained in this general area, drawing some of the attackers down on them simply because they were a source of anti-air fire. Cassie's original idea had proven quite correct. The four-cannon armed tank had astonishingly good anti-aircraft fire, but instead of scaring the aliens off, it seemed to work like a lodestone.

One of those guns turned in their direction, as Ranma and the orange-skinned girl came over the rooftops, but Ranma didn't even care. Seeing a girl who could only be Cassie, from his memories and the description of her from the car, of how she had grown up in the intervening years. "Cassie!" he bellowed to be heard over the sound of the fighting going on above the city.

Cassie turned from where she had just stabbed a hastily sharpened wall-hanger sword from a destroyed comic book shop into the neck of one of the attackers, staring for a moment in confusion at the black-haired, pigtailed youth that had just shouted her real name as he landed nearby. Then recognition bloomed, aided by Kara's warning that Ranma was in the area. "Ranma!"

The next second, they were hugging, with Cassie lifting Ranma off the ground. Ranma quickly returned the favor even as many of the local policemen looked on in confusion. The pair talked over one another, their enthusiasm spurred on by memories of their past, always kept at the forefront of their minds by Hera's magic. "Damn, but it's good ta see ya/Ha, it seems Kara was right, you are here. And you've kept up your training, too."

One of the watching SWAT team members looked over at a nearby Green Arrow, who was getting his shoulder seen to by a medic. "I thought showing romantic feelings or what have you was kind of frowned on for heroes. You all have secret identities and whatnot. Wouldn't, you know, having a loved one like that be dangerous?"

"That's how it normally works. But I'm getting the impression that these two and their friend up there in the air probably don't care." Oliver nodded his thanks to the EMT before heading towards where Cassie and the newcomer were now practically babbling to one another.

He tried, very valiantly, not to let his eyes stray to the nearby figure of the hot alien girl. *God damn, those tits would be amazing on a grown woman, but that face... she looks so young. Almost innocent, too. Kind of a disturbing juxtaposition, made worse by the cuffs on her wrists.*

For her part, Koriand'r was grinning, almost hopping in place as the feelings of old friendship and affection rolled off this pair. The friendship felt like it was older, like childhood friends meeting again after a long time separated and finding they were still friends, with a livening of delight from both of them. From that came a bit more affection, at first directed towards a third person for some reason, as well as some attraction, building as they hugged one another.

Sensing those feelings was extremely welcome after the past hour of combat, and frankly, her life on Warworld leading up to this point. It was almost enough to give her what her people called an emotional high, but not quite.

Pulling back with a faint flush from her hug with Ranma, Cassie turned in the alien girl's direction, holding out her hand. "//Hello, can you understand me?/"

Koriand'r blinked, then grinned even wider and, grabbing Cassie's hand with one of hers, pulled her into a quick hug. This nestled Cassie's head right where Green Arrow had been reflecting his own head would probably be suffocated, if he attempted to do the same, causing her to squawk as Koriand'r spoke. "//You can speak my language! Oh, that's amazing! Tell your friend that I'm very thankful that we're no longer fighting and that I've enjoyed fighting

alongside him instead. Please, feeling his emotions has been really interesting, oh, and I don't mind if he stares, I like it in fact. Oh, um, my name's Koriand'r."

Pulling back and reflecting internally that the girl had more than just height to be jealous of, the young Amazon relayed this to Ranma and the watching Green Arrow. *And good grief, I am not used to thinking other girls are attractive, but this one pulls off the cute-and-sexy cards too darn easily. And... is that one of Ranma's shirts? It looks like his style, and it sure isn't Koriand'r's size.*

Hearing the alien girl's name, Ranma snorted, shaking his head and winking at Koriand'r. "It's nice ta have a name for ya now, but I'm going to call you Kori, okay? Your real name is too dang long."

"Kori?" Koriand'r cocked her head as Cassie translated, then felt the emotions of the two of them, before smiling widely. Both were warm, welcoming and worried for her, which was **so** nice to feel after so long surrounded by Chain Brethren and her other captors. *"//I like it!//"*

"That's nice and all, but could you start asking some more pertinent questions?" Green Arrow demanded. "We have way more important things right now than names and making friends."

With the 'alien Ontos' firing, the group had a respite, and, with Cassie translating, Koriand'r explained about Warworld. Kori explained about her being sold to Warworld's leader, and her escape after so many years, but didn't mention the fact it had been her sister who had sold her into slavery in return for Mongul's help in claiming her throne. That didn't seem pertinent right now.

Kori was going over what she knew about what Warworld and its inhabitants could do when she was interrupted by the sound of something heavy slamming down into a shield that emerged from nowhere directly above them. Zatanna's magic was still working overtime to defend the city, and all three teens, along with everyone else in the vicinity, looked up at it worriedly.

The sight sobered Kori, and she slowly shook her head, cutting off what she had been saying, and concentrating more on the here and now. *"//With everything else set aside, I think the only way to do that would be to board it and do as much internal damage as we possibly could, but that would be incredibly difficult. Even if I were able to get these things off me, I wouldn't have the strength to do it.//"*

So saying, Kori held up her forearm bracers. *"//Nor do I think that blonde warrioress who's been flying above the city could do it. If we were able to get through the shield, we would face tens of thousands of warriors within Warworld. Admittedly, most of them are not all that dangerous to people like you, me, and Ranma, if you're as strong as he is anyway, but still, that's a lot of people we have to deal with. And then there's—//"*

Koriand'r was again interrupted, this time more abruptly by Green Arrow. He'd stopped listening a second ago, his hand up to one side of his mask as he listened to his earbud. "Time to move people! Flash just called in, Red Tornado has been smashed out of the sky, and a big bruiser just landed. he smashed down an entire skyscraper on top of a hospital, killing who knows how many people!"

As fast as he was, the Flash only had two arms and had to be very careful when transporting people. While the Atlanteans were doing their best to shore up the defenses and take the fight to any of the aliens on the ground or even in the sky, Aquaman hadn't thought to bring along any kind of medical help or whatsoever, and that had perforce turned to several of the hospitals in the city to fight against the aliens.

While normally the Green Arrow's abrasive attitude would've gotten Ranma's back up something fierce, right now, hearing that, he winced and just nodded, looking over to Kori, who Cassie hastily translated for. *Damn, that, that sucks, no, it, it's horrible! I... should I... no. Not right now. It'd, calling on my magical form, it'd cause too many problems and questions, right?*

As Ranma suddenly was reminded of the fact he had more than his own physical abilities to use in this disaster, Kori's face firmed, and she nodded to both of them. Swiftly, the three of them and the Green Arrow raced off, leaving behind the policemen and the purloined alien tanks.

Six streets later and several blocks deeper into the city, Ranma flinched as his warning senses went off. He instantly rolled to the side towards the center of the street as a building exploded to one side of them with such force that it looked as if the entire thing had been subjected to a Bakusai Tenketsu.

*{Through the rubble was tossed the body of Plastic Man, or at least who Green Arrow supposed was Plastic Man. The hero's upper chest and head had been melted into goo, but despite that, Green Arrow knew he'd be up as soon as he cooled down enough. It would probably take him longer to get his brain working right than anything else.

The next second, Firestorm crashed down nearby, and looking at him, Green Arrow knew there would be no coming back for the fiery hero as there would be for Plastic Man. His chest was mostly gone, leaving a bloody hole straight through his torso as if someone had punched clear through him.}

Cassie and Kori were slower to dodge, and both of them were pelted by a lot of the rubble coming their way, with both women being swept off their feet with cries of pain. Normally, rubble like that shouldn't be able to hurt them, but going as fast as it was now was another matter entirely, even for Kori, who Ranma had by this point guessed was pretty much on par with Wonder Woman, from what his memories could tell.

Shakily getting to his feet, Ranma stared as the killer of the two heroes came through the burning wreckage of the building he'd just shattered.

Mongul stood on the rubble for a moment, then smirked as Kori slowly pushed herself to her feet. “//There you are, princess Koriand’r. Your running away has proven an amusing way to pass the time, but it is time for you to return to where you belong.//”

Ranma didn’t understand what the alien guy was saying, but then again, he didn’t need to. The tone and the look he was giving the slowly recovering Kori (and wasn’t it nice to finally have a name for her) were enough. Ranma charged forward, growling even as he disappeared into his Umi Sen Ken, wishing to close with this alien guy before he could unleash any weird powers.

However, for all his speed, Ranma wasn’t the first to make contact with Mongul. That honor lay at Green Arrow’s feet, as bullets began to slam into Mongo. They did nothing, not even getting the large warlord’s attention. A second later, a red streak appeared, slamming a blow into Mongul’s side, which staggered him a little bit, but didn’t actually do any harm.

To the Flash, it felt as if he had just run fist-first into someone like Wonder Woman or Superman during practice. His fist literally bounced off the yellow-skinned warrior, and he was forced to use the momentum of that to shift backwards, lashing out with a series of punches and kicks, zooming all around Mongul, trying to hit him from every angle.

“Hah! Speed is nothing without strength, fool!” With a roar, Mongul slammed his hands together, causing a shockwave of force directly next to where the Flash was about to attack again. This caused the Flash to scream in pain as his eardrums ruptured, and his footing slipped. He looked up in time to see a large foot coming down in his direction, and Wally zoomed backwards and away before it could land.

With Mongul off-balance from his attempted stomp, Ranma hit him hard, coming out of the silent thief technique and slamming a blow into the back of the man’s other knee. With a grunt of surprise, Mongul found himself teetering for a moment before he got his other foot on the ground, stopping him from falling forward. He whirled quickly, bringing a fist down towards where Ranma had to be from that attack, only for Ranma to dance around it, lashing up and into the giant’s face with a kick.

That kick caused Mongul to blink, but his attempt to grab Ranma missed as Ranma somehow used the momentum of that attack to flip himself up and into the air.

For several seconds, as Cassie and Kori got their feet under them, Ranma fought in midair over Mongul, using his mastery of the aerial style to flummox the giant bruiser. The thing was fast, but his chest and shoulders telegraphed where his blows were going to go; he didn’t seem to have any kind of grappling technique, or at least hadn’t yet used it, and wasn’t using his

legs at all now, thanks to Ranma being up in the air above his head. His beams went wide, and his eye beams too telegraphed when he was about to use them.

This guy doesn't strike me as very flexible, he thought, twitching around a punch, using the air from that miss to twirl himself around the large, yellow-skinned alien. He then began attacking from a different angle, this time getting a blow right behind one of the alien's ears, or rather, several hundred blows. This caused Mongul to roar, but more in frustration and irritation than pain, if Ranma was any judge.

As often as Ranma hit the guy, he wasn't doing any damage. Even hits in places that should have rattled his brain box with the Amaguriken, the yellow-skinned alien, Mongul, barely staggered, and Ranma's blows under his armpit or other areas that should have caused him pain or debilitated him did nothing. If that was his name, a curse or title, Ranma had no idea, but that was what Kori had called him. The guy's skin was just too thick, too strong and powerful.

"Away with you pest!" Mongul shouted, a roundhouse coming around fit to liquefy any of these pathetic humans. This particular opponent was annoying him greatly by staying in the air and moving so quickly. *He's also reading my moves like I am an open computer screen, and that is most unpleasant to contemplate. His style is also far too mobile for me to use my suit's cannon, and watching him dodge my energy blasts is frustrating! I now sympathize with the Technocrat's complaints about building a better fly swatter.*

But one good blow, Mongul knew, would put him down. No warrior would train himself to the degree this won had to dodge if he could instead stand and fight like a proper warrior.

"Let's dance, ugly!" With a cry, Cassie charged forward, her purloined sword flashing through the air ahead of her like a spear.

Idly raising his forearm, Mongul grunted in surprise as that makeshift spear tip hit with surprising force. Despite the force behind it, which was so hard the sword shattered, the metal of the former wall hanger, the pride and joy of some sword or fantasy world enthusiast, could not penetrate his skin, nor even his armor. The impetus, though, hitting at the same time as another hit to one of his legs from the pest, was enough to knock Mongul off-balance.

Grabbing Mongul's outstretched arm, Ranma flipped upward, his feet coming up and around into a series of mule kicks directly to Mongul's face, one of whom caught him in the eye.

"//Ow,/" Mongul droned. It wasn't much, but it was actual pain, as it felt like someone from the Chain Brethren had suddenly decided to smack his eye several hundred times in a row with his finger. *"//If you think that a hundred blows like that will fell me, you are a fool!/"*

So growling, Mongul lashed out with a kick towards the blonde sword hurler who had just gotten within punching range.

Cassie ducked under the kick, her hands coming up into not so much a double punch but a push at that leg. She'd had time to observe Mongul and Ranma fighting and knew that she probably wouldn't be able to actually hurt Mongul if Ranma's bizarre attacks weren't doing anything, but taking one of his legs out from under him? That Cassie could do.

Mongul stumbled as his leg was carried past his line of balance, and then Kori slammed into his side and back. Now punches that actually hurt a good bit slammed into his side, back and the back of his head before he could twist around, smashing her away with a blow that Kori, unlike the pigtailed pest, couldn't dodge.

With a cry of pain, Kori found herself stumbling into a building alongside where they were fighting with enough force to bring down a wall.

Then Ranma's blows crashed into Mongul's face again and again, trying to blind him.

However, between one punch and the next, Mongul's eye beams flashed out, and Ranma, his sixth sense blaring, pulled his fist back. What that beam would do to Ranma, given his immunity to heat, Ranma didn't know and wasn't about to risk. But this opened him up to a blow that caught him in the center of the chest where he was flying above Mongul's head.

Despite Ranma's effort to move with the blow, the strike hurled him up into the air with a howl of pain. "ARGHHH!!"

Ranma had never been hit that hard before, not by Taro, Herb, Lime, or anyone else. Even Kara hadn't hit him that hard. Kara was always certain to pull her punch right before contact, something she had learned to do along with a lot more when training with the Amazons. Even so, she had him occasionally with only partially pulled strength. Ranma wasn't fragile by any means, yet this alien was just far, far stronger than he was and he wasn't holding back.

The hit didn't just crack ribs, they basically disintegrated, and Ranma almost blacked out at the apex of his journey, the pain more than nearly anything he'd dealt with before, but he forced himself to stay awake, pouring his control into his ki healing, not even noticing the impact as he came down to crash into the roof of a small pharmacy several blocks over, where he bounced. By the time he finally came to rest in the wreckage of a clothing store of some kind, Ranma's ribs had begun to knit themselves together.

Rolling forward, he grimaced, spitting to one side a mouthful of blood, before his eyes widened as an errant eye beam blast seared through the intervening buildings from where Cassie and Kori were still engaged with Mongul. "FUCK!" he yelled, ducking to one side.

I'm going to need to hit this fucker with overpowered ki claws or point-blank strikes to the eyes to do anything. Or the balls. I might target the balls, He thought grimly as he pushed to

his feet, taking stock of his ki reserves. Healing that much damage had taken a noticeable bite out of those reserves, but he still had plenty to go on with.

Racing forwards as soon as his body could move without feeling like it was going to cause him to scream in agony, Ranma perched himself in the shadow of a downed skyscraper. From there, he watched as the Flash darted in again, only to be batted aside by an errant elbow from the yellow-skinned alien. The Flash was still bleeding from his ears from the earlier sonic attack and now held his ribs in agony. Ranma honestly thought he had just gotten really lucky, but with no room to build up speed among the rubble and ruin around the three main combatants, the Flash was pretty much getting stymied.

The fact that could also have been said for Ranma was something the martial artist didn't want to contemplate right now. *Come on, Ranma, you've taken on stronger, way more durable opponents before. Let's go!*

With that bit of internal hyping over with, Ranma charged forwards, lashing out ahead of him with ki blasts.

Several of them struck, staggering Mongul, not doing much damage other than causing a bruise on his cheek and another on his hand, but the impact was enough to break Mongul's concentration on Kori and Cassie. Which in turn allowed them to take advantage. Blows quickly slammed into Mongul's chest, legs, elbows and knees, with Cassie going for what she knew were weak points on a human being while Kori just hit whatever she could as hard as she could.

Much like Ranma had hoped earlier with his own similar attacks, those weak points seemed to be the same, as Mongul actually grunted several times in pain from her blows, even if Cassie wasn't able to hit as hard as Kori. This was proven a second later as Kori's fist smashed into Mongul's side, causing him to grunt despite not hitting a weak area of his body.

However, the one thing that both Kori and Cassie lacked in comparison to Ranma was his ability to sense and read his opponent's intentions. Even though she had been trained to an incredible degree by the Amazons, Kara hadn't built up the same sixth sense toward danger and sheer reaction time that Ranma had developed over his life. Those, in turn, gave Ranma an ability to dodge that neither of the girls could match, even if they were more durable than Ranma.

Cassie's durability was on display now as she moved with punch that got through her defenses. The same kind of hit would probably have taken Ranma out of the fight again, maybe just breaking his skull. For Cassie, it caused her to nearly bite her tongue as her teeth ground against one another, and rocked her head back, causing her to see stars, but that was all. She was able to redirect the next strike for the most part, but a third blow she couldn't move with was enough to make Cassie feel a rib go when Mongul's knee came up into her chest.

Even as Kori landed a punch to Mongul's jaw that had him in turn also reeling a bit, a return blow from his forearm caught the Tamaranean princess across the face, sending her crashing to the ground. Kor didn't break anything, but it still smacked her out of the sky.

Ranma reached him just as Mongul was reaching into a pocket, pulling out a device that Ranma had become familiar with up to this point. Even as he brought it out and pointed it at Kori, Ranma's fist smashed down into the device, his other hand coming up to launch a ki blast at point-blank range. "I don't think so!"

The device had none of Mongul's durability and shattered under Ranma's fist, leaving Mongul holding only bits and pieces of it in his hand, even as Ranma's ki blast crashed into his nose, causing him to roar in pain. At the same time, Cassie came back into the attack, blows hammering into Mongul's knees, side, back and front.

Ignoring the wreckage in his hand, Mongul backhanded Cassie in the side of the head, causing her again to nearly see double as she was sent sideways. Then, even as she tried to get her balance under her, a kick crashed into her despite Ranma's best efforts to keep Mongul's attention on him. Cassie barely got her arm up in time, and was flung backwards and through a building to one side of them and out the other side for troubles, crying out in pain.

A blow to the top of Kori's head as she tried to get to her feet sent her back down. Ignoring Ranma's ongoing attacks on his head and face for a moment, Mongul brought a foot down onto the princess's back, crushing the orange-skinned princess into the ground with enough force to create a crater.

Ironically, the fact that this also created a slope under his own feet for a second that in turn caused him to stumble a little bit saved Mongul from losing an eye.

Ranma's ki claws raked across Mongul's face, a thousand times in an eyeblink, with Ranma pushing the speed technique he learned from the Amazons well past the breaking point, pouring out his ki into the attack and speeding his technique alike to the point where there was a series of sonic booms. These caused several civilians still hiding in nearby buildings, dozens of policemen and others in a wide area around them to cover their heads in agony.

And this time, his attack got through.

Blood sprayed from where Ranma's attacks struck the equivalent of dozens of papercuts across Mongul's face, specifically his temple and forehead, while Ranma had been aiming for his eye. *Damn it!*

As blood spurted from numerous tiny cuts, enough to blind him in one eye momentarily, Mongul roared in anger and pain as he reached up, trying to grab Ranma. "///Curse you, what kind of attack is that!? Regardless, I will still break you easily enough, gnat!///"

Ranma dodged, lashing out and down into Mongul's arm this time with the same kind of attack. It was like powering up his ki claws with a ki blast, keeping the power contained and releasing it on contact.

This time, Mongul's armor, if that was what it was, took most of the blow's impact, shredding, but protecting the flesh and bone underneath for a brief second. A brief second that Mongul used to lash out with his eye beams again.

Again warned by his sixth sense, Ranma barely dodged in time, flipping back and away. Then Cassie was there, slamming into Mongul bodily as he tried to lift a leg and step forward, moving closer to Ranma. Punches and knee blows slammed into him, causing Mongul to stagger, but he reached down, grabbing Cassie's skull with one hand.

Lifting her off the ground, his hand began to tighten. “//I’m going to crush your skull, then use what remains of your body as decoration in my throne room, female!//”

Groaning in pain, Cassie grabbed at his wrist with one hand as her other fist came up in a punch to try and dislodge his grip even as Mongul batted aside another attack from Ranma, catching him in the leg this time with enough force to snap the leg, and flip Ranma midair like a top. It was apparent that Mongul was getting used to Ranma's ability to move in midair, much to Ranma's chagrin.

Despite the pain in his leg, Ranma used this, going with the midair whirl to launch another ki blast into the center of Mongul's chest, thinner and more condensed than his previous ones. This caused Mongul to shout in rage as something in his chest sparked and exploded.

Meanwhile, Kori pushed to her feet and charged forward blindly, grabbing onto Mongul's leg for a second, pounding in several blows into his knee and lower leg. She found herself lifted up and kicked away, slammed into a nearby building, but her attack allowed Cassie to force Mongul's hand to open just a little bit. Her legs came up, and the young Amazon mule-kicked Mongul in the chest, breaking his grip on her and hurling herself backward.

The next second, Ranma came down on top of the man with an axe kick to the back of the neck, his leg glowing with ki, which exploded on impact.

“Useless pests!” Mongul grunted as his head was forced forward, but energy still blasted out from one of his hands, catching Cassie before she could dodge. She barely came out of her roll before the energy blast caught her, causing her to scream in pain as she was hurled backwards and through yet another building. This one entirely collapsed on top of her, rather than simply letting her go through it, burying her, each hit her broken rib and now her burns causing her to howl in pain even as she tried to fight through the debris.

Whirling, Mongul kicked off the ground and pushed away from Ranma's next attack, a series of ki claws lashing down into the ground, wasting their energy. He then charged forwards as Ranma tried to twist around, but this time, having gotten used to Ranma's way of fighting, Mongul went with the movement. His fist caught Ranma again in the side of his chest, smashing ribs again despite Ranma moving with the strike and hurling him sideways through the air.

Once more, Ranma's ki healing began to work even as he struck the ground nearby, rolling up and over a pile of rubble that had previously been a building at some point. He pushed himself to his feet, only to blearily look up as a mangled car came towards him, hurled after him by Mongul. “//Survive being squashed, pest, and I might upgrade you to amusement.//”

Still dealing with all the blood rushing around his body from his internal healing, Ranma charged forward on shaky legs, barely ducking underneath the hurled car with a millimeter to spare. Raising his head and staring across the intervening area that had once been a packed series of streets, he found Kori back on her feet.

The two aliens were going at it hammer and tongs, with only Kori trying to dodge. Mongul simply tanked every blow she could land. Despite dodging as best she could and even moving with every strike that landed, Kori was getting much the worse of it. She might be closer to matching the yellow-skinned alien in terms of strength than either of the other combatants, but she only had her training when far younger to fall back on. Mongul had centuries of combat under his belt, and she didn't have such a unique style as Ranma did to take Mongul by surprise.

One blow was choreographed just a little too much, and Kori found her arm grasped just past her power inhibitor. She was then pulled into a punch that nearly took her head off, causing blood and a tooth to go flying a second later. She stumbled and was then backhanded across the face by Mongul again, who, a still woozy Ranma noted as he charged forward, seemed to enjoy using open slaps like that.

Mongul turned, tossing the now unconscious Kori over one shoulder, lashing out with a similar backhand towards Ranma. His eye beams flashed upward, heading towards where he assumed Ranma would try to dodge the blow.

However, Ranma threw Mongul off by instead ducking under the blow like he had the car a few seconds ago. Ki claws flashed out, shredding Mongul's armor over one of his legs, before a punch that had a lot of Ranma's ki behind it to add still more force crashed into his knee with enough power to probably have knocked Kara on her ass.

For Mongul, it simply caused him to howl in pain, and while the knee bent under the blow, it did not break. He went to one knee and lashed out again, only for Ranma to dodge forward within his strike range, ducking under an elbow blow, punches raining into the man's chest, each fist glowing with ki as Ranma desperately poured out his ki.

When Mongul made to lash out, Ranma again dodged, but this time, Mongul's elbow caught him on the side of the head, sending him skittering sideways, his eyes nearly rolling up in his head.

"//Got you, pest, //" Mongul chortled, wiping away at the blood that had been blocking one eye. The cuts around his face had already congealed, but were still oddly painful to the touch.

Ranma couldn't dodge the blow that came as Mongul charged forward. The man's punch took Ranma in the shoulder and upper arm. Despite Ranma jerking back at the last instance and deadening much of the force behind that strike, the blow shattered bone there to the point where several bone bits actually exploded out of Ranma's skin, and he howled in agony even as he was sent sideways through the air, his arm barely hanging on by a few bits of skin. "ARGGHHH!!!"

A hurled bit of rubble crashed into the back of Mongul's head before he could go after Ranma, and Cassie. Her arm hung uselessly at his side, a bone in her forearm having been broken in the battle earlier, but she still charged forwards. However, on her own, already battered, down one arm, and bruised with several burn marks on her from the battle so far, Cassie found herself overwhelmed instantly. A kick crashed into her chest, sending her staggering backward, before Mongul followed up with a blow to the back of her head that sent Cassie crashing into the ground with a groan of agony.

Mongul was about to finish up with a stomp like he had earlier used on Kori when eye beams slammed into him from the back. Such was the strength of this attack that it caused Mongul to arch his back in pain and whirled in that direction, even as the eye beams continued to hit him. "//Who dares!?! //"

Zooming forward fast enough to cause a sonic boom to rock through the entire city, Kara crashed into the man with both fists, slamming him up and into the air. "Get away from my friends, you yellow-skinned scum! No more Ms. nice gal!"

So fast did Kara strike him that Mongul was carried up into the air before he could secure Kori on his shoulder, and she flopped to the ground where she rolled, groaning a little. "//Friend Cassie, I do not feel so good right now. Despite the auspicious beginning, this has not been a nice day. //"

From where she was still kneeling on the ground from where she had taken a strike earlier, Cassie grunted, looking over at her new... Well, friend, going by the far taller woman's own words. Something she joked about now, spitting out the words between blood-stained lips, her words more of a croak thanks to the pain she was in. "Friend Kori, I do believe I agree."

With that, Cassie looked into the air above the city, trying hard to ignore her various broken bones as she tried to find where Kara had carried their opponent. *Fuck, I hope Kara can*

do better against that bruiser than we were doing. Maybe if I had my spear or sword, I could do better, but I don't know. Amazon weapons were enhanced with magic, and Diana had told Cassie once that this allowed them to hurt even enemies on Superman's level.

The groaning from nearby had both girls moving in that direction. By this point, any civilians in the area were either unconscious from the repeated sonic booms, dead under the rubble, or fled, up to and including firefighters, police and so forth. Cassie certainly hoped more for the fled part of that, but anyone groaning like that, well, probably meant Ranma at this point.

It was, and to Cassie's astonishment, he was already sitting up, one hand going up to the absolute wreckage that was his other shoulder. There was no blood on his head from the slap that had caught him in the side there, and as Cassie watched, his arm slowly began to heal, causing Cassie to stare. "What the, how are you doing that, Ranma? And... can I have some?" she asked plaintively. *Fuck Zeus up the ass with a redwood tree, but I am hurting right now. I, I think even Diana would be losing against that monster in terms of strength and durability.*

Ranma grunted at that, not answering for a moment as he stared up above them into the fight going on high above them. "I learned to heal myself through the use of my life energy, the physical energy of my body, and yeah, if you come over here, I can heal you a bit. Or at least I can give you some ki and direct it to your wounds. I studied under this doctor guy for a bit, and I can't exactly take away the pain as you heal, so it's going to feel like someone basically reached into ya to rearrange your bones."

"You think I care about the pain? Get me back into fighting shape," Cassie hissed, reaching over to take Ranma's hand as he slowly pushed himself to his feet.

Ignoring his own wounds for a moment, Ranma nodded, directing a large portion of his remaining ki into Cassie. This would normally have had him on his back, but judging from the battle still going on, Ranma knew that wasn't going to happen.

*Which ain't even mentioning Mongul himself. And damn it all, I wasn't doing nearly enough damage to that bastard. Oh, I almost caught him in the eye that one time, but he was basically smacking me around like a ragdoll! Is that what it would be like to fight Superman? Kara said at one point she was weaker than her cousin, and I know she still holds back and **still** breaks bones occasionally when we spar, but still...* Shaking those thoughts off, Ranma concentrated on his ki inside Cassie's body.

At first, she gasped, flushing slightly. The feeling was like someone giving you a massage that spread out from the point of contact into the rest of your body, moving almost underneath the skin with a heat and warmth that took Cassie's breath away. Then the pain hit, and the young Amazon gasped for an entirely different reason. Ranma had understated how painful it could be, and she literally felt her broken ribs and the broken arms in her arm shifting within

her, like, as Ranma had put it, unseen hands were moving them around, uncaring of the continued damage that they were doing, healing that as it went along as well.

It was insanely painful, and she did not like it one bit, but soon, the worst of her injuries were healed. All that was left was the low heat and the feeling of being touched inside like that.

Kori had watched all this with wide eyes, not understanding what either of the two humans was saying to one another, as whatever 'Magic,' Kori something that, again, Kori wasn't certain she understood, Cassie was using to be able to talk to her only worked when Cassie was addressing her. However, the emotion she was getting from Cassie was interesting, as was the sight of her side suddenly beginning to fill out again, her ribs shifting back into their normal position, along with the crushed skin filling out more.

The gash to her head and her severely broken forearm also shifted, healing as the Tamaranean princess watched. “//That is both intriguing and extremely disturbing.//”

“//Y, you should feel it from this end!//” Cassie retorted. A second later, Cassie stumbled away, fully healed but still dealing with the aftershocks of the pain from it.

Kori grabbed her by the shoulder, holding her steady for a second before she held out her other hand towards Ranma meaningfully. “//I don't suppose that I could get some of that as well... whatever it is. Taking on Mongul is going to require us all to be in fighting shape.//”

Cassie ruefully translated for their new acquaintance, even as she leaned lightly into the much taller girl's grip for a second before shaking herself. “Although I don't know, Ranma. Considering how you look at the moment, that might not be a good idea. It looks as if healing me took a lot out of you.”

“Yeah, you're right there, but I already kind of decided I was going to use a trump card here, so my ki reserves don't matter,” Ranma answered obliquely, staring up into the sky for a second as he spotted Kara for a second, before taking Kori's hand in his own. He absently noted that her hand was almost silky smooth, without any of the calluses that Ranma had felt on Kara's or Cassie's hands. Despite that lack, she was still extremely strong, and he could feel the power of that grip for a second.

Cassie frowned at Ranma's words, as Ranma was swaying where he sat as he began to heal Kori. It was very clear that the hammering he'd taken from Mongul up to this point had taken a toll. “Are you sure about that? And um, not to put too fine a point on it, but why wouldn't you use your trump card before this!? We were getting our skulls handed to us, Ranma!”

“Ugh, don't remind me. I, I'm stubborn, okay!? Sometimes too much for my own good,” Ranma grumbled. “This particular skill feels too much like cheating most of the time.”

Even as Cassie cocked her head in confusion at that, Ranma concentrated, pushing his ki out into Kori.

Kori jolted, her large chest swaying just a bit, and then more as Cassie stared, her attention entirely arrested. *Hera's blessing, she's not only taller than me, but she's very obviously bigger than me by a wide margin! Heck, I don't think even Diana has a better physique than this girl!*

The fact that Kori was a girl rather than a woman was pretty obvious, judging by her face, which still had a hint of baby fat, and the facial expressions she often wore. But even so, some measure of jealousy began to enter Cassie's mind for a moment before she shook it off.

Kori felt that sharp jab of jealousy for a second, but didn't concentrate on it, gritting her teeth at the pain going through her. She'd been badly battered by Mongul, up to the point that numerous ribs had been broken and at least a few of her vertebrae had been sprained badly. One of her hips had also been broken, along with a missing tooth and a few broken fingers.

Now, though, everything but the tooth began to heal. "I can't do anything about the tooth," Ranma grunted, shaking his head as he felt the drain. "The rest I can do. Or at least, I can accelerate your healing to the point where you'll be able to fight. You'll still be sore and bruised, though."

Ranma wouldn't be able to fight if he didn't have that ace in the hole he'd already mentioned to Cassie. *Thank goodness for that little trick I learned about changing back from my Shazam form.*

He fell back now, nearly stumbling, before spitting to one side, blood flying from his mouth. "That's it," he gasped, shaking his head. "I am all out of energy."

"Hah, figured." Cassie snorted, watching as Kori reached over to gently study Ranma. Another sonic boom erupted from above, as Warworld's shielding suddenly flared into existence, accompanied by a distant bellow of pain and fury. "It looks as if Kara's at least giving that guy run for his money. Dammit, I really wish I knew how to fly!"

Kori made confused noises, and as Ranma finally got his feet under him enough to step away from the two women, Cassie explained what he'd said. Kori nodded, then gestured down to her bracers. *"//I actually can fly, but I cannot with these inhibitors on me. If friend Cassie or friend Ranma could remove them, I could fly at least one of us up to continue the battle against Mongul.//"*

Cassie stared down at the things for a moment before looking over at Ranma. "You couldn't get them off with your ki claws?"

“My ki claws might be sharp enough, but my control of that technique isn’t so good that I could cut into those things without cutting her in turn. They might look bulky, but they’re skintight. I would’ve tried that right away if I were certain I could do it... and could communicate what I was doing,” Ranma answered, straightening up. “Can you break them?”

Cassie stared down at them for a few seconds, then frowned a little bit. “Maybe if I could get a finger underneath them, I might be able to tear them apart, but you’re right, if I tried to break them, I’d probably break bones, Kori. Sorry,” she added, translating what she had been saying to the girl.

“Do those things have a lock on them?” the Green Arrow asked from nearby. He’d been keeping his distance from the fight against that giant alien guy, fully understanding his own limitations. Now, though, well, if they had a lock on them, the Justice League provided him with a lot of lockpicking and lock-breaking equipment just in case.

When Cassie relayed this question to Kori, she shook her head. “//No. They are molded to me with living metal, meant to grow with the wearer and never taken off. I have also heard of some kind of defense against any attempt to cut into them, but I never saw it used.//”

Her listeners all grimaced at that, shivering at the amount of thought and prior planning that seemed to go into slavery in Warworld.

A sonic boom from above brought their attention back to the here and now as more fire rained down into the city. Those same multicolored shields appeared everywhere to block the incoming attacks, but to Ranma, those shields looked as if they were a lot closer to the top of many of the skyscrapers and so forth across the city than had been the case previously.

Kori’s next words to Cassie made it clear that Ranma wasn’t too off-base on that point. “//Is it just me, or are those shields of your local ally looking a little smaller and far too close now to these buildings of yours?//”

Shaking his head as Cassie agreed with that, Ranma cracked his neck, pushed woozily to his feet, groaning at the pain in his arm, which he hadn’t healed. Ranma sent a wry, almost sheepish look Cassie’s way. This was an amazing feat considering the blood that covered one side of his body and was splattered liberally over the rest of his face and chest, Cassie reflected.

“You’re gonna have a lot of questions about what I’m about ta do,” he said, through blood-stained teeth. “But save them for after, okay? I’ve been keeping this a secret from Kara since we began travelin’ together, too, as it ain’t exactly something I want to rely on. But when facing bruisers like that Mongul guy, I suppose... well, a bit of magic-type cheating can be excused...”

Cassie blinked, looking at him quizzically, but instead of answering, Ranma's smirk just widened as he uttered a single word, one hand coming up to slap into his chest as he intoned, **"SHAZAM!"**

OOOOOOO

Mongul growled as he smashed Kara aside again. This time, instead of teleporting down to a roof below, as Mongul could not actually fly, he teleported inside the shields of Warworld to land on its physical surface. For a moment, he grimaced just slightly and resisted the urge to reach over his shoulders to discover whether or not he had been burned on his back. It certainly felt as if he had a little bit, and he knew that his armor had been burnt off his body entirely in those few seconds he was in direct contact with the shield. "Curse that blonde, she is quite speedy and powerful to boot. Her flight gives her a marked advantage in an open battlefield like this, too. She's also quite durable."

Warworld's shields blazed as more missiles crashed into them from well beyond Mongul's line of sight, and he watched as missiles from Warworld raced out toward where those missiles had come from. He wondered idly when they hit the human's ocean-going vessels, but kept most of his attention on the blonde as she righted herself and her eye beams flashed into the shield directly above his face.

In actuality, the humans and their Atlantean allies would perform quite well against Warworld's missiles. Better, they were well beyond the horizon of the massive planetoid, making direct-fire weapons nearly useless. Missiles were not one of Warworld's more advanced systems, and even had they been, they were still missiles, that is, danger-shaped. The launcher of those missiles that crashed into Warworld's shielding was a group of three destroyers protecting a pair of cruisers and a carrier, whose flight deck was now empty, having hurled every capable fighter ahead of itself into the battle occurring over Star City.

More importantly, though, those destroyers were Arleigh Burke-class destroyers and were locked into the same overarching defensive web. These ships had both close and long-range defenses, both physical and electronic. Several of the missiles died before they came even close, going wild or slamming into the ocean. Those that came close were smashed out of the sky by what the Navy and many people called Angry R2s, the close-in anti-missile defense system known as the Phalanx CIWS.

Elsewhere, more jets and other planes were arriving continuously from bases throughout western America, along with numerous helicopters. Those helicopters flew in close over the beleaguered city, firing on anything that looked alien. They were dead if the alien starfighters got at them, but they were very good at knocking down the troop transports and killing the aliens on the ground at range. While it had taken a bit for it to truly react, the American military was starting to make itself felt on a slowly escalating scale, matching Warworld's output thus far.

Mongul didn't know any of that, and probably wouldn't have cared if he had. Without the heroes here on this odd little planet, crushing its military forces would have simply been a pleasant pastime for the denizens of Warworld, regardless of how many of their own guild members they lost. For Mongul, nothing short of a nuke would have even warranted his attention.

Instead, he kept his attention focused on the girl whom he actually acknowledged as an opponent. The other three had been battered and tossed aside, but this one? This one was strong enough to actually hurt him, and it was somewhat ironic to Mongul that he had actually lost a pair of teeth to her, much like he had cost his soon-to-be pleasure slave, Kori.

Even as their eye beams blasted into one another, that thought brought a faint smile to his face, and he reflected that he would need to go back down to retrieve Kori later on. *Given the injuries I gave her, she certainly isn't going to be going anywhere at any speed.* No, once this one is dealt with, this battle will turn from an amusing pastime into a massacre quite quickly. *Even the Skull Thieves will be pleased with the harvest of this world.*

Thunder rumbled in the distance as a bolt of lightning came out of the blue, smashing down into something in the city. For a brief moment, both Mongul and his opponent paused, staring. There wasn't a single dark cloud in the sky, so where had that come from?

Kara also wondered even more about that score as it seemed to have bypassed the strange shields that had been defending the city for the past half hour. Or at least, Kara thought it had been an hour. She wasn't certain, but the sun was certainly setting in the distance.

The next second, lightning blasted back upwards into Warworld's shield. But this was no ordinary lightning. If it had been, it barely would've registered against Warworld's shields, and it would have been gone in an instant. No, this was something else entirely, lightning tinged with gold, and it crashed into and through those shields, as if the energy of the shield couldn't deal with whatever kind of different energy was behind that lightning blast. The reverse was not the case, as the shields faltered, fading out, as if they had been overwhelmed.

It slammed into the surface of Warworld, near where Mongul stood across from Kara, slugging several hundred yards of ground, forcing Mongul to leap back, and with it came someone Kara could vaguely recognize. "What... Ranma? Is that, is that you?" she muttered, although no one could hear her thanks to the distance between herself and the two people standing on the surface of Warworld.

The face of the individual who had suddenly flashed through the enemy's shield looked familiar to her, as well as the ponytail. Yet even from where she was looking at this new version of Ranma from nearly a thousand yards away, there were noticeable differences. His shoulders were wider, broader than they had ever seemed to be previously. He also looked taller, although Kara couldn't tell why she thought that, as she didn't have anything to really compare him to right now.

Ranma was also wearing very different clothing from what he had been wearing when the two of them separated hours ago. In fact, he was wearing what Ranma said several times he wouldn't be caught dead in: almost skintight spandex. On his chest was a large yellow lightning bolt on a red background, the red dominating the rest of the short-sleeved shirt he was currently wearing. Bracers had appeared on his arms, each of them marked with Yin-Yang symbols, while his pants seemingly remained the same loose version he normally wore, except marked with lightning bolts on a black background going down the outer side of each leg. Oh, and he also had a white cape that went down to the small of his back.

Ranma grimaced a bit as he stood up from where he had slammed into the outer shell of Warworld, a portion of his mind wondering if he could really call that outer shell an actual planetary surface, considering it was mostly metal, guns, and plates of further metal underneath, while the majority of his mind was simply thankful that when he had practiced with his Shazam form in the past, he hadn't neglected to practice with some of the magic that came with it.

Lightning Shift, the technique he'd just used, was one such ability and was in many ways the most impressive of the skills he'd so far unlocked in this form in his limited time training with it. He knew there was a lot more to learn, but up to this point, Ranma had treated his Shazam form like an ultimate move in a fighting game: something you broke out only under set conditions and didn't rely on.

Using Lightning Shift, he could control where he came out of the transformation to a certain degree. So long as something was within sight, he could appear there, although he couldn't pass through anything solid. In contrast, the energy shield of Warworld hadn't even registered to the magical teleportation or whatever it was.

As he stood up, Ranma cursed himself for a fool, his Shazam-assisted mind dissolving a few of the mental hangups Ranma had developed over the years without realizing it. *Damn it all, I practiced with my Shazam form in the first place so I could use it when the moment called for it. This whole damn invasion called for it, not just fighting Mongul. How many lives could I have saved if I was using this form from the get-go. I let my desire to fight as a martial artist, to use only the abilities I trained to achieve and my general distrust of magic make me too damn slow to use this form. Not again. I can't let that happen again.*

Outside that shield, people took advantage of this. Jets from on high twisted around, breaking off gun-range duels with their counterparts to launch missiles towards the massive supercarrier or whatever it was that had suddenly invaded their planet. A-10 Warthogs and helicopters from farther down rose into the sky, not firing their guns, but locking onto the massive construct above Star City with their missiles, launching them in a fusillade. In the distance, the carrier group also opened fire again, missile upon missile flying out until all of the onboard magazines had been emptied.

Had those shields still been up, all that firepower would have been wasted to do nothing. As it was, though, a lot of those missiles got through before the shield could fully reform, smashing and exploding on impact across the surface of Warworld from one pole to another, knocking out dozens of the weapons that had been almost continually slamming down into Star City.

From her position at the exact center of the city, Zatanna breathed a sigh of relief as many of those guns fell silent, feeling horribly drained from the experience. She idly wondered which of the other magic users that the Justice League could call on had been involved with that massive lightning bolt, but frankly, was just too tired to care about it too much at the moment. The other guns, however, were still firing, and Zatanna grimaced again as she felt her reserves starting to drain away once more.

Her attention on that score was short-lived as the door to the building she was currently in banged open, and the Green Arrow and two young women, both of whom would've made a teenage Zatanna **very** green with envy, stumbled inside. "Zatanna, you think you can magic open a pair of handcuffs that are not supposed to ever open?"

"Probably not, but there are a lot of other ways to get around that kind of thing with magic," Zatanna said, gesturing them forward towards her. "Don't step on the pentagram, and don't disturb the mural beneath me," she ordered, "but let me see what I am working with here."

Elsewhere, another person had also taken advantage of the distorting shields. Kara quickly zoomed forward as fast as she could move, getting in underneath the shielding and lancing out with a blast of her eye lasers into the nearest guns.

As this all happened, Mongul roared in anger and turned to charge across the surface of his planet towards the first interloper. He, too, recognized in this newcomer the same youth he'd been battling on the ground below. "///I do not know where this power of yours came from, human, but I will pound you into the surface of Warworld, then enshrine you there, a living monument to my fury until the winds of hyperspace travel peel away the last of your atoms!///"

Ranma charged towards the other man, actually flying for several moments as Kara got closer. He ducked under a blow, his own fist slamming hard into Mongul's chest, sending the warlord stumbling back a few steps, grunting in pain. This opened Mongul up to a cross that slammed into his jaw, but then Mongul recovered, blocking the third blow and the fourth, although a kick got through to land on his leg as Ranma took to the air again. Just because he was now using his Shazam body didn't mean he shouldn't use his typical style.

Only this time, every blow he landed told, and Mongul howled as he fought back, a fierce grin on his face. Here was an enemy he could really whet his teeth on. Blasts matched burst out from his hands and eyes as each blow created a sonic boom, while Ranma's own attacks blasted back. He couldn't create energy attacks as quickly as Mongul in this form, but

with his normal punches and kicks at a level that hurt the towering tyrant, that was enough. *Although if I do live through this, I'm gonna need to train more on that score. Not just try to figure out a way to control my water-based curse or Lightning Shift.*

As Mongul was busy with Ranma, Kara slammed into Mongul from behind, a punch from her landing right where the kidney should be on a human, causing Mongul to howl in pain, and lash out backward as he twisted around, a karate chop-like blow nearly catching Kara as she ducked underneath his first blow. Two more blows crashed home as Kara stumbled back, before a knee came up into her chest, sending her skidding backward, opening her up to a mule kick from Mongul that crashed into her hastily raised forearms, sending her flying away with a cry of pain.

However, this in turn opened Mongul up to a kick from above that took him right in the forehead, crashing his head down into the surface of Warworld beneath with enough force to shatter his nose and cause Mongul to howl in pain of his own. "Take out the guns!" Ranma ordered, coming down with a double-handed blow that Mongul quickly blocked with his own hands.

Both Ranma and Mongul blasted out with their different types of energy at that point of contact, but neither could gain an upper hand, even though Mongul grimaced as the energy from Ranma caused him still more pain in his hands and arms. Instead, the reflected energies flashed all around them, cutting deeply into Warworld and nearly hitting Kara even as she dove backward.

Shaking her head at that, Kara nodded, shouting out over her shoulder even as she flew away, "Fine, but you owe me an explanation for this new form of yours, Ranma!"

"I did tell you I was keeping a secret even beyond my curse form," Ranma shouted back, before dodging to one side as Mongul released his eye beams again. They flashed over Ranma's shoulder, and he kicked out hard, blocking a kick from Mongul with his foot and then flicking up and into a bicycle kick as Mongul pushed himself off the ground, his chin meeting Ranma's foot.

Mongul found himself airborne for a moment and shook his head, dazed. That below had hurt, and Mongul hastily revised his estimate. This new fighter was **much** stronger than the blonde girl he'd been previously fighting. Indeed, this warrior seemed almost as strong as Mongul himself. Still, that only made Mongul happier. He charged in with a roar of laughter. "Defeating you will be a worthy conquest!"

Ranma met him, again taking to the air, dodging every blow he could and hammering Mongul hard. "I don't know what you just said, you big bastard, but let's see how good you do on an even playing field."

Kara zoomed around Warworld, moving faster and faster in the small space between the planetoid's shield and its surface, her eye beams blasting out or simply smashing bodily through

any defensive installation she could see. Even as she did, she wondered about Ranma's new form. Kara finished on one side of the massive planetoid and shifted her attention to the other, then began to hammer blows into where she suspected shield generators had to be. She wasn't exactly an engineering student or anything of that sort among her own people, but certain laws of shielding and the all-encompassing nature of planetoids like this would need to have forced those generators to be in specific places.

This took the better part of twenty minutes, by the end of which, Mongul had lost a third tooth, nearly had one of his eyes ruptured, and was falling on the back foot. He just wasn't hitting his enemy nearly enough! The times he had, he could tell that despite his newfound strength and speed, this human wasn't quite as durable as he was. Because of that, the human was now shielding his side and right leg.

In return, Mongul had been taking at least five or six shots for any one that landed.
Damn this human, he is able to anticipate my blows far too well!

Ranma ducked around an overhead blow, lashing out with a kick that took Mongul in the side of the knee, then whirled around a kick of Mongul's own, attacking that same knee as he went underneath the warlord's blow. Slamming a punch into the side of it with enough force to shatter the metal underneath them from the backwash, he growled, "FALL, you tall fuck!"

Mongul howled as his knee went sideways in a way that it really shouldn't have, but he had bent his knee an instant before contact, meaning his knee wasn't completely crippled. At the same time, he brought his open hand down on the top of one of Ranma's shoulders, slamming him into the ground and pinning him there for a moment. "///I will break you!//"

For several seconds, he wailed on Ranma, and Ranma felt his nose and jaw break before he was able to get a leg in between them and launch Mongul away.

Mongul slammed into the side of one of the larger guns of Warworld, a planet cracker, going into and through the deceptively stubby barrel and out the other side. There, he rolled, wincing and gritting his remaining teeth against the pain of his leg. He pushed himself to his feet with his one good leg, found he could still put some weight on the other one, enough to at least stand.

But dammit all, that makes me even more of a sedentary target than I was before, and against this warrior, that is not a good thing! By the skulls of my father and his father before him, what is with that style of his!? Being as strong as we are, why would someone ever develop a style that is so based around dodging rather than simply standing and dealing damage? It's almost cowardly!

Pushing himself to his feet, Ranma flew forwards, zooming through the same hole in the side of the gun that Mongul had made a second ago, crashing into Mongul at full speed. Mongul had gotten his fists up in time to catch Ranma's, and for a moment, they strained, strength to

strength, with Ranma groaning as his bones were ground against one another and his legs trembled. But despite that, Mongul's leg couldn't withstand Ranma's speed attack, and he found himself flying backwards.

A hasty teleportation to the side had Ranma crashing into and through several more installations on the surface of Warworld, while Mongul barely kept his feet under him, pivoting slowly to bring his eye beams to bear as Ranma twisted around and came back. This time, Ranma was caught right in the face by the beams, and he cried out in pain as he was sent flying backward, head over ass.

However, Mongul blinked and stared upwards as the shielding flickered again. Losing much of its color, it quickly shrank in on itself around Warworld. "No! That blonde girl! She must have--"

That was as far as Mongul's monologue got before Kara zoomed over the horizon of Warworld. She slammed into him from the side, her eye beams slashing up towards his face.

They struck, and he howled in pain as they seared into his skin a little bit, before Mongul grabbed the blonde, hurling her sideways even as he tried to flip himself upright in midair. His attempt worked, but when he landed again, his battered leg gave out from under him, and he found himself on his knees as the blonde righted herself in midair and began to float to one side of him, while Ranma pushed himself to his feet on the other.

His attention on the two of them meant that Mongul didn't realize someone else had arrived. Or rather, two someone else's.

*{Cassie dropped from Kori's hands, rolling as she hit, coming up and launching herself towards Mongul. As she did, Kori, her hands now released, gathered green energy into them and blasted out, roaring happily. "I am free, free from you, Mongul! And I will never be chained again!"

Ranma blinked, surprised. "The heck, you're speaking English now?!"

Even as Ranma was surprised by this Mongul roared in anger as he raised his forearm to block her energy blasts. They still rocked him, and on his wrecked leg, that was enough to nearly have him on his back, but through sheer stubbornness and willpower, Mongul remained on his feet, meeting Cassie as he charged in, spear first.}

This was one of the weapons that Diana kept at their apartment, a real Amazonian weapon, imbued with magic. Much like the lightning teleportation that Ranma had used to breach Warworld's shields earlier, that meant it had an edge that could hurt even someone like Mongul, Superman, or Kara. He howled in pain as that blade stabbed into and through his hand with enough force to nearly drive the pierced hand back into his own face.

With a bellow, Mongul wrenched his hand sideways, and Cassie released her weapon, but not fast enough to dodge a punch that caught her in the chest, tossing her backward even as Starfire's energy slammed into Mongul along with Kara's eye beams and Ranma charged in. Mongul was barely able to block one punch from Ranma before the others began to land, and he howled as the energy blasts from Kori and Kara began to truly hurt, searing his body here and there where it had already been injured, while Ranma's punches landed on his wrists, elbows and chest.

As his wounds mounted, Mongul suddenly realized that he was losing this fight. A hasty teleportation later, he removed himself from the quartet of attackers, landing several hundred yards away, leaning against the broken spire of one of the first guns that Kara had destroyed. Blearily looking around, he saw that the shields were flickering now, the emergency red shields never meant to be used in direct combat like this.

Moreover, all of the guns on Warworld's surface had been destroyed, although that didn't really matter much. There would still be more underneath that could be pushed to the surface over time, and all of the original surface weapons could be recycled by the Technocrats. However, that would take time, and even as Chain Brethren and others rushed out onto the planetoid's surface to do battle with these four, Mongul knew that, even if they kept fighting, he might personally lose.

And that was one thing the warlord of Warworld could not afford to do: Lose. Show weakness in front of the enemy. Such things would practically force his underlings to try and replace him, and Mongul wasn't willing to go along with that. He glared at all four of them, particularly Kori, the prize he had waited almost a decade to finally pluck. Watching her grow up to the magnificent beauty she was now, doing all of his powers to make sure she did grow up as she did, only to now be wrenched from his hands by this pooling little planet, was a wound to his pride that could only be paid in blood, and personally at that. “//We will retreat for now, Kori. But I will have my prize. One way or another, you will—//”

That was as far as his monologue got before Ranma was crossing the intervening distance, hurricane-force wind propelling him faster than a bullet out of a gun. Kara and Cassie were on his heels, and Kori was already blasting away from range. Hissing, Mongul activated his teleportation powers again, teleporting back into Warworld's bridge just before Kori's energy blasts and Kara's eye beams stabbed through where he had been standing a moment before.

There, Mongul grabbed the side of the throne, keeping himself upright with difficulty. Yet he had to do it, even as his ruined knee screamed at him with its agony. He could not show weakness. Never on Warworld. “Order a full retreat. The enemies have more heroes than we expected and are unlikely to allow us to replace our external weapon systems. Jump to hyperspace as soon as possible. We will return better prepared in the future.”

“Our engines have been damaged somewhat, my Lord. Ten minutes to full repair,” the Technocrat he had left in charge of the bridge said. “We have also finished analyzing the DNA

sequence of the blonde girl. She is a Kryptonian. Given the yellow nature of this solar system's sun, we can extrapolate from that how she has gained her powers."

"Signal a full transformation of our outer layers," Mongul ordered decisively, that piece of information going around his mind for a few moments. "The movements should get those four off of Warworld's surface, and if not, they'll be too busy dealing with that to do any further damage to our engines."

He watched for a few moments as the group of Chain Brethren, Scavengers, and Skull Thieves tried to take the fight to the quartet he had left behind. However, none of them had enough weapons or ability to tangle with those four, not even the one with the strangely powerful spear, who seemed to be the slowest and least physically powerful of the group.

As he watched, the various guild warriors were quickly overwhelmed, but their unintentional sacrifice had allowed the transformation sequence to begin. He watched as the one central warrior he'd been fighting lost his footing, while the other one who had wielded a sword found herself nearly falling into a new chasm as nearly a quarter mile of metal underneath them began to shift and twist like the tectonic plates on a planet in miniature.

She was rescued by the Kryptonian, who darted in after her, grabbing the human woman up into her arms, and then all three of them were flying up and off of the planetoid's surface. Mongul calculated for a few brief seconds, then ordered the shields to be taken down around them, and he watched as Kori and the pigtailed warrior suddenly shifted away, zooming towards where several of the other human fighters duelled with the crescent fighters of Warworld. Why they prioritized those human lives over continuing the assault on Warworld, he didn't know.

Still, it hardly matters. Even if the trio had stayed, they wouldn't've had much impact now that they'd already destroyed all of the emplacements on the surface. Digging deeper into Warworld would have taken even someone like that pigtailed warrior a good while, and they wouldn't have known where to go once they pushed through the outer layer.

Regardless, they were now away on the other side of the emergency shielding; emergency shielding that quickly began to be replaced by normal shielding as new shield nacelles pressed up and out of the surface of Warworld, like blisters or volcanoes rising from the ground. With those shields in place, Mongul was tempted to resume the action, but looking down at his ruined hand and his practically crippled leg decided against it.

He needed some time in one of the regeneration chambers, and he needed to get there now before an enterprising Sky Raider or Skull Thief learned of his injury and tried to remove him. And if such a thing started, it wouldn't end until the various coliseums of Warworld ran red with rivers of blood. *Moreover, while the Tamaranean princess is certainly a prize, I know someone who will think that a female Kryptonian is even more of one. Someone who can make Warworld and I even stronger than we are now.*

With that in mind, Mongul continued to order the retreat even as he exited the bridge, heading towards his own personal chambers, where a regeneration chamber awaited him. He was still giving orders when he lay down in the chamber, and soothing medical nanites went to work on his various wounds. *Yes indeed*, he thought. *I might've lost this battle, but I will come out of it on the other side stronger and in a more secure position than ever before if I play my cards right...*

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Distracted as they were from grabbing ejected pilots from all across the battle zone and divebombing down into the city, it took Ranma and his companions a few seconds to realize that Warworld was rising once more through the atmosphere. It didn't help matters that literal thousands of aliens had landed by this point, and while the American military had begun to arrive in ever-increasing numbers, the aliens had brought more power to a point so far. Thus why Ranma and the others were busy smashing any hard points the aliens tried to set up whenever they weren't saving ejected fighter pilots.

Dropping off the last pair of flyboys, Ranma paused, watching as the same starfighters that had butchered their way through squadrons of American jets turned. "Where the hell are they going?"

One of the pilots heard him and also stared upward. "Did, did you superpowered types do enough damage to the Death Star wannabe to make it retreat?"

"No way," Ranma grunted, scowling a bit. "At least, I don't think so. Enough to wipe out the wannabes' own onboard weapons, sure, but..."

*{Both men fell silent as Kori and her passenger came down to the same rooftop, the alien girl also staring upward, her face locked in an expression of hopeful shock. "It retreats?!" she shouted from where she was carrying Cassie piggyback. The blonde girl's legs were latched around her waist from behind, and each of their hands dragged fighter pilots. Cassie held out her two charges to either side, while Kori's dangled beneath her, giving both of those pilots a tremendous view if they craned their heads. "Warworld, it is leaving?!"

"Yeah, it looks like it," Ranma shouted back, looking around to get his bearings. "And you haven't told me about how you can speak English now."

"Kori, could it be pulling back to bombard us from orbit?" Kara asked, interrupting whatever answer Kori might have given as she flew over to them.

Meanwhile Cassie flushed, looking away from everyone, a furious hope that no one would continue to question Kori about that point again going through her. *Damn it, my first kiss, and it was with a girl, to boot! I know it was for a good cause, but why do I get the impression Kori was pulling my leg about that.*

It had happened after Zatanna had figured out a magical way of removing Kori's magic-inhibiting cuffs. Kori had suggested that she use a Tamaranean ability called Linguistic Assimilation, a technique that allowed her to absorb language-specific information from another person, thus teaching her how to speak their language in an instant. According to Kori, it was one of the reasons why her people were natural ambassadors.

Cassie had agreed easily. While she had been given the gift of Tongues magically before coming to the World Of Men, she still knew how to speak English thanks to learning it from Diana and Kara, and she was honestly interested if something strange would happen if Kori's racial ability interacted with the portion of Cassie's mind that the magic of the priestess of Mnemosyne.

Then Kori kissed her. No warning but a bright, strangely devious smile and suddenly Cassie's eyes had been filled by Kori's face, and the taller girl had kissed her. It was sudden, but it wasn't altogether short, and Cassie had been so stunned she just stood there until it was over. After which, Kori had pulled back, spoken a few

I, I mean, it wasn't unpleasant or anything, but, but we just met, and it, it was my first kiss, damn! They're supposed to be important for some reason, right?

Thankfully for Cassie, Kara continued, keeping everyone's attention on her and the far more important question of Warworld's current actions. "We might have been beating on that Mongul character, but you can't tell me that injuring the leader and forcing him to retreat would make a planetoid, with all it's forces and everything else, retreat!"

That caused Kori's expression to shift, and she cocked her head even as she landed on the rooftop, gently setting her two charges down as Cassie got off her back, her flush from a moment before having disappeared for now.

The low 'cute' one of the nearby pilots murmured at the sight of Kori's expression had Ranma nodding his head. *Thank goodness it isn't just me.*

"Actually, friend Kara, that is actually what might have happened. Mongul rules Warworld by dint of being the strongest, undefeated in the arena, in raid and in war. If we hurt him enough, his position is in danger. You must also remember that your friends did a very good job of pulling Warworld's teeth. I don't know what was going on at the end there with all of the shifting and changing on the surface, and while I did see shields appear again, perhaps it isn't able to do the same thing with its offensive weaponry?"

"Eh, I suppose that makes some sense," Cassie grumbled. "Although, I don't like how Mongul was able to escape us. He definitely seems the sort to want some vengeance, and I don't like the idea of letting him alive to come back again after showing so much of what we could do."

Mind you, he didn't fight Superman, Diana or any of the other heavy hitters of Earth, but still... Cassie thought, concern going through her at the thought of someone like that, with the resources of a planetoid at his disposal, could do if he bothered to plan ahead and had enough knowledge to do so.

Even as Cassie was wondering if they were only borrowing further trouble by Mongul's escape, everyone else breathed sighs of relief, and one of the fighter pilots, an officer, frowned. "That sounds like we won. But what about the troops on the ground?"

Kori's brows furrowed at that, and she shrugged, which did very interesting things to her chest under Ranma's shirt, something he tried hard not to notice. The other men around him didn't have any such scruples, and for a moment, Kori's lips twitched.

The attraction and desire of these humans were interesting to feel, but the others not as pleasant or uplifting as Ranma's growing interest or Cassie's shocked pleasure at the little kiss they'd shared earlier. *I wonder why Ranma's trying so hard to not look. Now that the fight's over, I want him to look, and I honestly don't care if the other men do.*

Shaking that thought off for now, Kori addressed the man's question. "You are making a mistake in assuming another race thinks the same as you humans would, friend pilot. In this case, Warworld is a planet of mixed pirates and vat-grown clones. There will always be more soldiers, and quickly to boot. The weapons and great too can be replaced. This..." she gestured around. "This was but a skirmish to them. Mongul made certain I watched some of Warworld's true conquests. This was nothing. The troops left are nothing."

That caused everyone who heard Cassie's translation to scowl, but Ranma shrugged it off. "Well, a skirmish for them still wrecked Star City something fierce and dumped who knows how many bloodthirsty aliens on the streets. Are you flyboys okay to wait up here? I think the four of us can still do a lot of good out there."

For a moment, Kori blinked as a sharp, jagged feeling of guilt thrust through Ranma's typical easy-going, friendly feelings. *Why is Friend Ranma feeling so guilty about doing good things? Does it have something to do with his powered-up form? Hmmm, I can see that, I guess.*

"Yeah, we're good to go," the officer said, gesturing to another airman who had just pulled out a flare. "Get on out of here, but um, who are you four? What are your hero names?"

"Er... I don't have one. I'm really undecided about the whole hero thing in general, but I suppose in this form, I guess you could just call me Shazam. It's not really imaginative or anything, but it gets the job done for now," Ranma said, scowling a little.

"Ugh, same here. I'm Shielder, but that's **not** going to be my hero name going forward. Although, I do like having an S in my name, it looks like a glyph from back home," Kara mused. "Beyond that, all I'm sure about is I'm not going to be 'girl' anything!"

“Huh, well, while I decided on my name pretty much as this attack was happening, I think I like Nyctimene. It hearkens back to my roots. The thing I am going to change is going into battles like this with regular clothes.” Cassie grumbled, looking down at her shredded outfit. Bits were clearly in danger of showing, and that wasn’t fun.

Kori simply beamed, waving at the men happily. “Hello! I am Koriand’r. Friend Ranma calls me Kori. I am looking forward to learning more about human culture and everything else. Er, although I will say I am probably going to be stuck here. I was sold into slavery by my sister before she took over our planet, so unless Earth is willing to go to war to replace her, and I really don’t want that, I’ll be staying on Earth.”

While the implications of what Kori said were a bit horrifying and a bit out there, the airmen couldn’t stop themselves from smiling back, with many finding the alien girl almost destructively cute, while the senior officer there wondered if his newborn daughter would be that endearing. *Best to buy a shotgun now, I think.* Shaking that thought off, the man spoke aloud. “Er, well, good luck on choosing hero names, you three. I think I speak for all of us that when you make your official debuts, you’ll have at least a city-full of fans.”

Wincing just a bit at that, Ranma gestured toward the edge of the roof. “Well, thanks for the words of encouragement, but if you’re sure you’re all right, we’ll get going.”

With that he flew off, and Kori, ever excitable, raced after him eagerly. “Wait for me! I wish to

Cassie sighed, staring after them, then looked over at Kara. “Please?”

Giggling, Kara knelt in front of her friend. “All aboard!”

“UGH! That’s it. By hook or by crook, I am going to learn how to fly. Even if I have to learn more about the lightning rapist in the sky to do it,” Cassie grumbled, climbing onto her shorter friend’s back, wrapping her arms around her. *I’m just going to think of this as a weird way to hug my friend for now. Although the kiss with Kori is not making that easy!* “Come on, get after him, I’ve got questions for ‘Shazam,’” she growled, making air quotes in front of Kara’s face.

“Ooh, me too,” Kara nearly growled. “Let’s go!”

The airmen watched them go, then several of them fell back on their asses, shaking their heads and staring up into a sky where there were now only the final roiling clouds to show what had happened. They began to talk amongst themselves, and a lieutenant came over to the captain, jerking his head in the direction of the quartet. “So, four new super-powered people and an invasion all at once. Been a hell of a day, boss. Not certain I like the idea of teens having that much power, y’know? Despite that one gal’s body, they all were certainly teens, right?”

"Yeah, and there are a few other super-powered teens out there, right? Heck, those four aren't even the only teen heroes. Kid Flash, Batman's little sidekick, and there are rumors of Aquaman having a protégé or something." The captain shook his head. "Now come on, it looks as if we're not going to be rescued anytime soon. Let's see if we can get the door to that stairwell open. If we can get down into the city proper, we can at least offer our hands to whatever needs doing."

"Right!"

Back with the teens, Ranma had smashed into and through a group of Chain Brethren while Kori had lit them up from on high, annihilating them and moving on before Kara caught up. Glancing sideways, Ranma winced a bit at the twin glares he was getting even as they sped down towards another group of aliens. "Er, so, quite the reunion, huh?" he asked, even as he punched a Chain Brethren so hard that his body kind of came apart midair.

Cassie snorted as she jumped off Kara's back, her spear slashing out and then down, slicing the throat of one four-armed alien and hamstringing another. "Yeah, you could say that again. Although, don't you have something else to tell Kara and me? Kara was just telling me that she didn't know about this new form of yours either."

"Despite traveling together for a bit now," Kara agreed, hissing in annoyance as a shorter-than-average human with a gun set into one of his hands came apart as she kicked him rather than was sent flying away. "Drat."

"There's a trick to kicking someone and sending them flying instead of breaking them," Ranma agreed sagely, even as he ducked under a round of energy bolts, hurling a gun from the ground towards the attacker. The attacker fell, and suddenly there were no aliens around.

This just meant that Kara and Cassie could both glare at Ranma more freely, and he grimaced. "Um, okay, so first. I um, I kind of was... wrong not to use this form earlier." Despite having led a very different life than he would have if he hadn't gotten so angry at his father when they were traveling between islands, apologizing for being wrong or making a mistake was still not something that came easily to Ranma. But right now, he had to.

"Short version? This body is magical. I ran into an ancient spirit who turned out to be my many, many, many times-removed ancestor. He was a wandering magician blessed by the gods at the time with various powers that he passed on to me." Ranma looked down at his clenched hands, ignoring for a moment the sight of Kori zooming down an alleyway after an alien who had run off during the battle. "I, I should have remembered... no. No, that's wrong. I let my ego and arrogance, my desire to rely solely on my own Art to get the better of me. And because of that, I didn't do as much here as I could have. I'll, I'll have to live with that."

While Kori just looked confused at the term magic, not having run into it before except with Zatanna, Kara and Cassie exchanged a glance, and Kara sighed. "Okay, so, I understand

that. But, well, mistakes are just a part of life. And I think I know you well enough, Ranma, to understand your devotion to your Art, and why it would drive you to forgo something you so as a magical power-up. But I will want more information than that, when this city is back on its feet, Ranma, but I suppose it will do for now.”

“I’ll want to hear that longer explanation too, and I’ll want to spar with you in both forms,” Cassie stated earnestly, although her brows furrowed when both Kara and Ranma held back snorts of laughter. Kori also looked bemused by the sudden bright amusement that had flashed through both of them. “And you better not hold back against me when we do.”

“You owe me some sparring in that form too, Ranma,” Kara agreed, her lips twitching as did Ranma’s when she used that phrase. “I think going forward, you need to consider it a weapon like any other, Ranma: you need to train with it to master it, just getting by isn’t enough. And I won’t let you ignore it ever again.”

Practically bouncing on her feet in a way that Ranma could barely stop himself from staring at, Kori thrust up a hand. Feeling the rush of arousal from Ranma, Kori grinned even wider and bounced a bit more even as she spoke. “This one also wants to join in on the fun! Um, I also rather think I have no other place to go, so I would like to stay you three if I can, beyond staying on Earth, I mean. I would also like to learn how to fight better. I was allowed to keep in shape, but no more when I was a prisoner on Warworld.”

Cassie translated, and Ranma, noting Kori’s eager expression, smirked just slightly at the idea of fighting her in this form before looking over the side of the building down to the cityscape below. “Well, that’s for later. Kori, did you see any more pockets of aliens out there?”

Kori nodded, pointing to the west of their position, and Ranma took charge again. “Then let’s get going. We’ll help wipe out the aliens, then get in touch with whoever’s in charge of the rebuilding process. We’ve got a lot of work to do,” *I’ve got a lot of work to do to make up for my stupidity*, “before the day’s through.”}

The two blondes nodded, and Ranma then allowed himself to smile for a second. “Now, I think it’s my turn to carry Cassie. Do you prefer princess, fireman or piggyback?”

End Chapter

So... I am still not really happy with the ending of this chapter, but it’s far better than the first version. I wish I could add another few thousand words, but with work on *Fate* calling me, that’s not going to happen. Regardless, I hope I hit the right mix of raw action, strategy, comedy and the smidge of romance.