

The American Samurai Troopers

Von Zpan_Sven

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Kapitel 1: Chapter One: Troopers in America

THE AMERICAN SAMURAI TROOPERS

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DISCLAIMER: I do not own YST/Ronin Warriors, only this story and the alterations I have made to the characters, histories, ect. No profit is being made from this; this is being written solely for the enjoyment of myself and others whom like to indulge in the scenario of 'what if?'

AUTHOR'S NOTES: One of my infamous 'What If?' fanfics, where I take some of my ideas, the plot of an anime and throw them in the blender set on puree just to see what happens.

Abandon hope all ye who enter here... For here be gender-bending, cross-dressing, and teenagers being teenagers! And 500+ year old Dark Warlords being perverted old men! And a pretty-boy gay teenaged Yulie too, later on! I've taken elements from the original version and the Americanized version to so there will be the original names for the Warlords and the Americanized names for the Troopers in the same story. General insanity shall abound as I unleash this twisted creation upon the world...

...and you people aren't even reading this are you?! Gee, thanks for thinking about my feelings, you barbarians... *sniffles and leaves to work on her other fics*

"Some believe it is the ability to speak that separates us from the animals..."

("Can you understand the words coming out of my mouth?")

'I think, there for I am...'

:Our minds are as one...:

SUMMARY: A 'What if' fic. What if the story of the Samurai Troopers took place in modern times, in the USA? What if three out of five Samurai Troopers were female? Pity Ryo, Rowen, and the Warlords, because dealing with three powerful females with PMS and often violent mood-swings won't be pretty...

CHAPTER SUMMARY: Introducing the Samurai Troopers and Dynasty in the Washington City of Hell's Cove. With the help of a brilliant young research assistant, five teens gifted with mystical armor must protect the preteen named Yulie and rescue the captured civilians of Hell's Cove...but it won't be easy with the Dynasty Soldiers lead by the four Dark Warlords prowling the deserted city...

RATING: R

WARNINGS: Violence, swearing, and sexual innuendo and situations of both the hetero and other popping up...and my depraved sense of humor XD

GENRE: Action & Adventure/Drama/Supernatural/Humor

ARCHIVE: FanFiction(dot)Net, FicWad(dot)Com, Zpan Sven's Works, others please ask

EDITED: 12.31.2008

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CHAPTER ONE: TROOPERS IN AMERICA

Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, mid-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

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Hells Cove was a small city, more of a big town compared to the cities of Seattle and Portland, but it was a rather nice place, with a scenic harbor and even boasting tours to Mt Helios, a dormant volcano several hundred miles from it. Several of the natural caverns just a hundred miles to its south brought spelunking fans from all over the world to explore what had to be some of the deepest and darkest caves of the region called Hells Pit while the high cliff-faces to the far north was a favorite of many rock climbers due to the steep, nearly vertical climb they offered. Most of the income came from tourism and shipping; however, there were very few pleasure vehicles on the water. The almost unnaturally strong rip currents called Diablo's Current, just outside the seemingly peaceful cove made yachting treacherous for even the most experienced sailors. Those rip currents were the main reason for the massive bridge that stretched out over the cove to allow traffic to come and go into the city and alleviate the congestion expansion brought.

It was late spring, closing in on summer, and for the city that meant time to prepare for the tourist season; for the students it meant Summer Break, a vacation away from the boring hell of classes. At Hell's Cove Private Academy, the students were leaving early, their end of semester finals completed. Among the milling students were four teens. The one standing near the rear of the quartet was tall and lean with a dark midnight blue hair and piercing blue-black eyes; he wore the school's 'male' uniform of khaki pants, white dress-shirt, and a dark blue sweater vest, which cling to his lean frame. Truthfully male or female students could wear pants or shorts, but many consider them to be part of the male uniform set.

Of the four, only one other wore the 'male' uniform, a tomboyish girl of Chinese decent, her long blue-black hair pulled back in a loose tail at the nape of her neck with a wave of bangs falling in over her almond-shaped eyes; the other two wore the female uniform of khaki skirt, white dress shirt, and dark blue sweater vest ensemble. The more femininely clad duo were as different as night and day, the taller of the pair was a blonde with a far more modern hairstyle, teased into a poofy halo around her head with a lock falling over one of her violet eyes, which were artfully lined with dark eyeliner and blue eye-shadow who had her shirtsleeves casually rolled up; her shorter counterpart's uniform was worn properly and looked neatly pressed despite the fact it was the end of the day and not the beginning, with her chestnut hair pulled back in a twist at the nape of her neck, two long bangs framing her makeup-free face.

The chestnut-haired teen rolled her sea-green eyes as she listened to her best friends bickering behind her. Beside her, the blonde shook her head at the duo's antics, mentally wondering when they'd just admit to having feelings for each other and get on with sucking face; really, the silence that would result would be so appreciated. Then again, the blonde knew that most the resistance towards the two of them even forming a relationship came from the male of the duo and not the female.

"Have I mentioned lately I hated you?" The grumbled complaint came from the Chinese-American tomboy, glaring heatedly at the only male of the group. "Seriously, Rowen, not all of us happen to be honors students – I have to work this summer so I can't spend every waking moment with a book in my face doing extra credit book reports and essays! Mama and Baba are going to have me working my fingers to the

bone since I don't have school to worry about now!"

"Kun, you're smart and you know it; if you'd just apply the effort—" the annoyed bluenette began, only to be interrupted by the sudden annoyance flashing of the oriental girl's doe-brown eyes as she suddenly spun around to face him, causing him to stumble backwards a pace in surprise at the abrupt movement.

"Apply the effort?! Big words coming from quite possibly the laziest genius known to man!" Kun retorted hotly before spinning on the heel of her dress shoe and marching to meet up with the other two girls. "Sage! Cyé! Can you believe him? It's the last day of school and he wants to badger me about doing extra credit projects!"

"Remember, when it comes to school work, he wants to get it done fast so he can sleep more, even if he's going to college when fall comes," the blonde agreed with a laugh as she tossed her hair back, the teasing of the only male among them coming second nature to the 'Ice Queen' of the private school. "Don't feel bad, Cyé and I are going to be working this summer too – Daddy says I've almost got enough saved up for my Mustang."

"And I need to get familiar with working at the aquarium if I'm to take over for Mum after college – best to work from the bottom up, to get a feel for what my future employees will be doing," the chestnut-haired teen agreed, her voice soft and holding a lingering English accent.

"How is your Mom anyway?" Sage asked, shifting the strap of her messenger bag; the four teens had been friends since childhood, living only a few streets apart in the same gated community – the families of Sage, Rowen, and Kun had particularly close ties due to the fact that the patriarchs of their respective families worked closely together in the United States Government in various fields; Sage wasn't exactly sure what her father or her grandfather did, but she was convinced either or both were in the CIA, while Kun's parental grandfather was a high ranking General in the Pentagon, and Rowen's father was a very well paid and a highly respected scientist who worked on many classified contracts.

The three had brought the young Faith Cyren Mouri into their group after her widowed mother settled in a small, cozy house close to Rowen's when her father had died tragically while overseas in the midst of his marine research. The youngest of the four, Cyé was a grade behind them but she spent her lunch and Biology 2 Honors class with her friends; like her father, a retired Navy SEAL, she had a passion for defending the sea and was often helping at the aquarium her father had established for the rescue and rehabilitation of injured marine life with any unable to return to the wild staying as attractions that educated the visitors about the inhabitants of the sea as well as the effect humans had on their environment.

"She's doing alright – I talked to her last night and she said she'd be home in a couple more weeks; the showing in Paris is taking longer then normal..." Cyé murmured softly, concern in her eyes at the possibility of her frail mother getting a cold while overseas.

The teens conversed on as they headed for the student parking lot, like so many of those around them unaware that danger was lurking and waiting for the opportunity to strike...

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Location: Arago's Castle, Dynasty, Youjakai

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, mid-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

In a place that was far away and so different from the known world, was an ancient Japanese-styled fortress, shrouded in darkness. In the very heart of the tall, middle tower of the fortress was a chamber, a throne room. The throne room was dark, but it was not empty. A malevolent force stirred to life near the vague outline of a dais at the far wall.

"Shuten Doji! Anubisu! Naaza! Rajura! Attend me, my Dark Warlords!"

An unearthly voice bellowed the summon, booming throughout the darkened stronghold, and torches burst into a sickly green flame, shining off the Samurai-like armor of the four men kneeling before the shadowy dais; each were powerful and each were so very different, as their unique armors indicated. One resembled a spider, enhanced by the eight kama of the Chi Lin Tou on his back while another resembled a snake; the other two appeared almost demonic, with elegantly curved horns protruding from their helms and armors.

"Arago-sama. We are here and we obey," the quartet intoned in unison, their deep metallic voices blending in their obedience to the voice that had summoned them.

"The time for our conquest of the Mortal Realm is here," the voice continued, a large spectral helm appearing over the dais – it resembled an ancient Samurai's helmet, with a red demonic face mask with the mouth opened in a silent snarl; a gleam of dark magenta appeared in the empty eye holes.

"We of your Warlords are prepared and anxious to please you, Arago-sama," replied one of the four, acting as an unofficial spokesman; he wore an open, sleeveless haori of black trimmed in yellow over his dark armor and the chain of a kusari-gama was wrapped around his waist.

"Go, lead the scouting parties, and prepare for the final stages of the invasion of the Mortal World!" The specter commanded of his subordinates; in the shadows, their teeth gleamed as all four wore identical predatory smirks in anticipation of what was to come.

"As you command it shall be done, Arago-sama!" The four voices replied as one in their unwavering obedience to the ghostly being before vanishing in blurs of displaced air.

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Location: Exemplar Community College, Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

The local college at the outskirts of Hell's Cove wasn't as large as many more contemporary schools in the Washington State area, but the teaching staff and courses offered made it a highly accredited facility. The campus was old but well taken care of, with the tallest of the buildings, the dormitory, being only four stories tall; there were signs of new additions being erected, the contractors taking great care to make certain the new buildings blended seamlessly with the originals, going so far as using the same pale bricks from the rock quarry a couple days drive from Hell's Cove in the construction. The old campus offered a decently sized library and toted a large history department, the three story building housing the history, literature, and art departments for the school.

The campus's lovingly tended green-spaces were quite popular with students and staff alike, some classes being held outdoors on the more pleasant days; behind the building housing the history department, a crowd of students stood, watching in silent awe their professor as he stood wielding a recreation of a Welsh long bow, an arrow notched back and the bowstring taunt.

With a sharp twang of the bowstring being released, the arrow sliced through the air and embedded itself into the distant target's bull's-eye.

"...and that is how a single arrow can change the course of an entire battle." The Professor concluded his lecture, turning to face his students, who clapped and cheered.

Professor Koji was popular with all the students despite the age gap – for many he was the grandfather many never had and would never talk down to his students, no matter how dumb the question they posed might seem; his easy going manner and devotion to his students and the subject he taught had many considering him to act as the Dean of History when the current Dean stepped down. He wasn't very tall, nor was he very short; in fact, the professor was average in height, but his broad shoulders had yet to stoop with age and his ready smile and kind eyes made several of the students forget his age, even with his steel-grey hair and mustache.

"Remember your final essays are due in two days – just because Final Exams are just around the corner is no time to slack off or panic," he advised as he dismissed his class.

As he watched them go, the old professor couldn't help but suddenly shiver before tilting his head back and studying the sky. No, there was no chill in the air, but there was something...something ominous in the air. Perhaps he should look into his research concerning the Legend of the Samurai Troopers a bit more today with his granddaughter; she'd be stopping by his office after class and it would ease his mind to have her in sight, just encase what he was feeling was more than an old man's paranoia...

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

The time had come; he could feel it in the air, the breeze that disrupted the small clearing carrying the message of the war waiting to engulf the mortal world once more and that the thousand year reprieve was at an end. The massive white Siberian tiger turned to peer over his muscular shoulder at the meditating Japanese-American teen; the slight breeze stirred his wild black hair and he opened bright tiger-blue eyes that apparently spoke of his Caucasian heritage. The young man would be turning eighteen at the end of the year, legally an adult but with his sheltered upbringing, he would still be considered a child by many.

The teen's eyes narrowed as he contemplated the silent tiger before him; the boy knew that the tiger wasn't natural, recalling him never changing even as he himself grew from uncoordinated toddler into young adult. His massive feline guardian had always been with him, watching over him as though he was the tiger's own cub. Gracefully he rose to his feet, immediately stretching his over six foot tall frame to work out the kinks that had developed from sitting so long; his joints popped and it felt wonderful to stretch out his muscles after a long meditation. The raven-haired teen smiled at his tiger companion.

"What is it, Whiteblaze? You look so sad..." he asked of the massive white tiger, who rose to his feet and padded over to the teen he had protected for so long, butting his broad head against the boy's hand. "It's time, isn't it? The Dynasty is here."

The tiger rumbled deep in his throat in affirmation to the boy's question, his eyes partially closed. The boy sighed and his head tilted back to study the wispy clouds that stood out starkly against the blue sky. "I hope that we're ready ..."

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Location: The Imperial Dragon, Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

The Imperial Dragon, the Shu's family restaurant, was still empty as Kun entered it; the tiny bell overhead rang cheerfully as it opened while she undid the tie she wore with her school's uniform – technically it was her brother's old uniform, but she didn't mind wearing their hand-me-downs since they tended to be more comfortable than what her mother would make her wear when she was younger.

The restaurant was housed in an older building, remodeled extensively with four levels, the basement and floor level devoted to the family's restaurant while the second floor and above were used as a residence for the Shu family, apartments divided up for the extended family to live in, from a one bedroom apartment for their

often out of town grandfather to apartments for her married brothers and their families, along with the smaller ones her single brothers lived in, one she shared with her parents, and an empty one she was certain would become hers as soon as she was eighteen. At the back of the restaurant was the stairwell that led to their apartments, which could be accessed from the alley in the back.

("Lei-Kun! Is that you?") A male voice from the kitchen in Cantonese called out to the young woman entering.

("Yes, Chang – who else would it be this time of day? Is Mama and Baba here yet?") Kun answered with a sigh as she shoved the tie into her schoolbag as her older brother exited the kitchen, drying his hands on a white and green towel.

("Well, it could be the General dropping in early,") her brother drawled. ("I suggest you wear the uniform Mama's laid out for you on your bed and do your hair nice – you know how she gets when the General visits...")

("Grandfather's coming?") The only girl child of the Shu clan immediately perked up at the thought of her grandfather visiting; generally he only was able to leave the Pentagon for special occasions or family emergencies and she wondered if this had something to do with that betrothal agreement she'd heard her parents talking about when she was in middle school.

("He should be here in an hour or so, depending on the traffic – he flew in at the Base and should be grabbing a driver to bring him here if he doesn't drive himself that is....")

("Thanks Chang!") Kun called out and darted for the back of the restaurant for the stairs. She didn't hear his reply as she pulled out her set of keys from the pocket of her uniform pants, opening the door to the stairwell and going upstairs towards her parents' apartment.

After a quick shower and change of clothes, she was re-entering the restaurant in under twenty minutes, straightening the thin pencil skirt of her waitress's uniform; normally she wore the pantsuit version, but since her grandfather was visiting, she'd have to put up with the skirt and having her hair pulled back in a loose braid of hair wound in a bun at the nape of her neck. The uniform was simple, a dark royal blue with orange piping and a fiery dragon coiled on the back above the restaurant's logo, a smaller version of which was just over her right breast.

She was tying her apron around her waist when the bell over the door jingled merrily, announcing the first customer. Kun forced a bright smile as she greeted the lone man with a bow and a cheerful, "Nihao! Welcome to the Imperial Dragon! One for your party, sir?"

The man studied her with his single pale blue eye, the other hidden behind a casual fall of long wavy white hair that cascaded around his broad shoulders; his suit was worn casually without a tie and open at the throat, but it was one of obvious quality. "One for now...I'd like that corner booth, where I can watch the door."

"Of course, sir; do you know how many more will be joining you and how long 'til they do?" Kun asked the tall man as she led him to the booth he'd gestured too.

"Three more joining me...when I'm not certain; we're new to the city and they're exploring...." He replied vaguely with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

She kept of the smile as she picked up a menu and led him to the corner booth with the perfect view of the door – and at the same time allowed him a view of the kitchen. "Would you like some water while you wait? Or perhaps a soda or a glass of wine?"

"Water for now," he said, sliding into the booth and accepting the menu. He opened it, summarily dismissing her from his presence.

Kun fought to keep her annoyance from showing and turned, walking over to the beverage station to prepare his water. Immediately she just knew that this was going to be a long dinner shift...

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

The city of Hell's cove was bustling as tourist season came closer and closer and among the crowded walkways was a man older then the city itself, dressed in a casual, but expensive, suit, the collar open and the base of his strong throat and the shirt and jacket appearing to be tailored for his broad shoulders. His hair was stark white, gleaming in the sunlight; a bit of his hair hid on eye from view, but in the faint breeze moving his hair, the black eye patch he wore beneath the veil of white hair could be seen. Unknown to the people milling about him, this man was far different from any of them; in fact, he was someone who sought to bring an end to the world as they knew it...

He was Rajura, the Warlord of Illusions, as adept a master of spying and deception as he was in hand-to-hand and weapons' combat.

The sheer amount of people jammed into the city was enough to bring the Warlord of Illusion's disdain to the forefront; too many people were bumping into him as they rushed about in their unimportant lives. He and his three comrades were scouting the city they planned to begin their invasion with for Arago-sama, able to blend in with the populace with the clothing Anubisu had procured for them on one of the cursory scouting missions the Warlord of Corruption had been sent on.

His stomach growled faintly and he looked down at his abdomen before sighing. Well...he hadn't eaten a large breakfast, too eager and anticipating the coming invasion to enjoy anything more. The Warlord of Illusions tilted his head back and studied the signs of the buildings he walked by when one caught his interest; a golden dragon curled up around the words 'Imperial Dragon' with smaller words beneath

'Traditional Chinese and Japanese Cuisine'. The scents coming from some of the other restaurants held no appeal for him, so laden with grease and fat, but what he could smell wafting from the door of this one...well, it'd be better than nothing, he imagined.

An Asian woman – a mere girl, really – in a sleek dark blue and orange trimmed outfit greeted him; his mind was wandering as he tried to find his comrades as he answered her questions with a minimal of effort and followed her to a corner booth. He slid into the circular booth and accepted the shiny tablet of paper she gave him. Inspecting it, he saw the logo of the restaurant and opened it to find on the inside of the shiny, smooth paper the list of foods available at the establishment as well as what he assumed to be their prices.

He didn't have any money, but he could use an illusion to make her think he did if he had to; Anubisu would have the money out of the four of them given his longer time scouting the modern mortal world. The Warlord in civilian guise ignored the serving girl, silently dismissing her from his presence as he studied the list of offered meals; her soft, retreating footfalls barely registered in his mind as he read over the list. Rajura knew English, written and spoken, as well as he did his native Japanese – all of the Warlords and the higher ranking individuals in the Youjakai did; to be multilingual was an advantage when one intended to conquer the Earth, which was full of many diverse language groups.

There were many foods and so many did sound appetizing... Rajura leaned back in the comfortable booth and continued to contemplate, even as the serving girl placed the tall glass of ice water within easy reach of his left hand. His eye slid over to study the young woman as she straightened; she was certainly attractive, the outfit she wore – a uniform of sorts – clinging very nicely to her graceful form and her hair was such a deep shade of black it gleamed a rich blue in the afternoon sunlight streaming through the windows. Perhaps she'd make an interesting bed-partner after the Invasion...

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

It was exhilarating to be out of the Youjakai, even if this was technically a 'business' trip. Even with his dark blue hair and facial scar, the Warlord of Corruption seemed to fit into the American populace, his well over six-foot frame garbed in a pair of blue jeans and faded black tee-shirt which proclaimed him 'Evil Incarnate' that were snug, but not uncomfortably so; he wore a black leather 'Biker' jacket, even though he no longer felt the cold, instead worn to conceal the tanto dagger he carried. The 'police', what the law enforcement for America was called in the modern era, seemed to get snippy when someone walked around with a weapon shown predominately. Anubisu's nostrils flared as he entered the outskirts of the city, noting the less offensive odors and sounds the further he moved away from the city.

His duty was to inspect the potential boundary of the city for the invasion; across the city, nearer the beach, he knew Naaza of Venom did the same. The Warlord's long strides ate up the distance as he walked around the new location that would likely fall outside the barrier when it came down. It was some sort of facility, with many people of various ages, the most common being from eighteen and up; they congregated in rooms and under trees, reading in books and writing in other, thinner books... The occasional outdoor lesson he came across showed him this was a school of sorts.

He stayed in the shadows, watching, lurking; the sound of sharp, swift footsteps caught his attention. Walking down the smooth pavement that carved paths between various buildings was a young woman, the sunlight catching the rich highlights of her auburn hair, pulled back in a loose bun at the back of her head. Anubisu stared, fascinated by the young woman, who appeared to be around the age of a few of the students he'd observed, her features certainly attractive...beautiful, really with the thickly lashed eyes, delicate nose, and lush mouth. She looked in his direction, as though sensing his gaze, and he was caught in wide, beautiful, innocent blue eyes that sparkled like rare gems.

The Warlord was caught by surprise the emotions that welled inside him, the pooling of heat in his lower belly and groin; never in over six hundred years of life had he felt so attracted to a woman, just from a chance meeting of eyes. He scanned her form, finding it more than pleasing from what he could see of the garb she wore; the thin pale rose-pink sweater that covered her white blouse seemed to bring out the rosy nature of her pale skin even as it showed her trim waist and shapely hips, encased in a pair of blue jeans that seemed to mold to her rear and thighs. His eyes returned to the woman's, finding she'd paused and was blushing before yanking her eyes away from his; immediately she turned, hurrying towards her destination, her head ducked in embarrassment.

Mia Koji's heart felt like it was about to beat out of her chest; she didn't get a good look at the tall, broad-shouldered man standing in the shadows of the large oak tree, but his eyes...oh his eyes! Even with the distance she knew they were green, filled with such...well she didn't know what, but it made her weak in the knees and blush in acute awareness. Her blush had faded by the time she reached the history building and she snuck a glance back to the oak tree only to feel disappointment to find that the man was gone...

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Location: Hell's Cove Aquarium and Marine Rescue Center, Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

The ocean contained in the cove was beautiful under the spring afternoon sun and hid such deadly rip currents under its supposedly tranquil surface. It was something the man couldn't help but appreciate as he watched the rolling waves; he was tall with broad, powerful shoulders, the wind teasing at his wild green hair, his muscular form garbed in the clothing presented to him by his fellow Warlord, a pair of the rather

snug 'blue jean' trousers and a long-sleeved black 'tee-shirt' with a stylized snake motif on it, curling around his midriff with the word 'Poison' in sharp, jagged sickly green letters over his pectorals, the dark fabric molding to and accenting his broad shoulders and powerful arms.

He was Naaza, Dark Warlord of Venom.

The Warlord turned, studying the 'aquarium' around him with serpentine black eyes; the bustle of activity, the children pulling parents to see this creature and that, the dedication to tending to these injured creatures of the sea, all was observed, stored away. He walked into the crowd, ignoring the wary glances shot his way, walking, watching...

Soon...soon the invasion would begin and each Warlord would be in their place to oversee the capture of the mortal world...

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Location: Hell's Cove Aquarium and Marine Rescue Center, Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

Many parts of the Hell's Cove Aquarium and Marine Rescue Center were under renovation, expanding the habitats for the eventual future inhabitants that would come to them as humans further intruded into their domain. The old tanks were drained and cleaned before being worked on, the cleaning being done by some of the many volunteers at the Center. Among them was the daughter of the Aquarium's owner, who was determined to work from the bottom up to learn the business; she'd been doing such since she was fourteen, helping out at first in the retail aspects like the gift shop and food-court.

Cye removed her ball-cap and wiped the sweat from her face with her bandanna; she'd been serious about learning from the bottom up and honestly, she didn't mind even if she was scrubbing the drained tank clean with a crew of other volunteers. The work was satisfying in knowing that soon this tank would house more marine life that needed their help. Smiling despite the ache of her muscles, she returned to her work even as a bit of unease formed between her shoulder blades.

When the time came for her break, she climbed out of the tank and headed for the food court; she needed more water, having drained the last from her water bottle. The chestnut-haired teen took the less direct route towards her destination, using the back access that was known only to the staff, not wanting to mingle with the visitors in her grimy blue jean shorts and tee-shirt; both were a bit loose on her petite frame and she'd tucked the bandanna back into her back pocket. The ID badge clipped to her jeans pocket kept her from being stopped, along with the logo of the Aquarium on her tee-shirt and cap, as many of the older staff was used to seeing her run around helping out behind the scenes.

Slipping out from one of the rear doors, she made a beeline to the food court. She grinned at the sight of some of the volunteers that was from the local public high school, waving her over.

"Hey, Cye! Over here!"

The teen darted towards the group gathered around the table, passing by a tall man; something sparked -- an awareness that made the sense of unease come back tenfold. Startled, she turned her head, looking at him over her shoulder. He was tall and handsome, if terrifying with his wild green hair and the purple eye shadow he apparently wore, accenting the cold, almost serpentine snake-like eyes he had, their color an almost fathomless black; was he some sort of Goth-punk? He looked a bit old for that, in his mid to late twenties...but his garb suggested otherwise...

Naaza stared at the boy that ran past him, frowning. There was something about this child, something that caused Venom to stir in the back of his mind. The boy looked over his shoulder at him, apparently as startled as the Warlord himself; black met sea-green and the boy's curly chestnut hair, pulled up into a tail through the opening in the back of his hat, fluttered in the breeze coming in from the ocean.

"Cye!"

The sound of what seemed to be the boy's name tore his attention away from the Warlord and back to the group of human children calling him over; they were dressed similarly to him, just as filthy too. He watched as the boy joined the group, accepting a bottle of water one of the females offered him.

...how odd, to have Venom react to the child's presence...

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Location: Hashiba Residence, Silver Oaks, Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

It should be a crime to willingly cloister oneself away in one's house on such a beautiful day doing homework, but there he was, sitting at the desk of his cluttered bedroom. The bluenette sighed as he leaned back in his swiveling chair; the laptop had been pushed to the side, the monitor glowing faintly even as it displayed the daily maintenance scan running, his school books laid open as he reviewed the assigned material.

Rowen sighed again, his chin resting on his folded arms; the books were taunting him today, wearing the faces of his girls – gentle Cye, playful Kun, and regal Sage. Honestly...he was in love with them all -- at least parts of them, of their varied personalities. If he could find a woman who had the aspects he loved of his girls...then he'd be the luckiest man in the world. His eyes closed as he tried to picture this perfect woman – how would she look? Tall like Sage, with Kun's long hair and Cye's sweetly curved form...? What would she be like? Regal with a hidden playful

nature and a gentle smile...?

He opened an eye, peering at the clock. ...time was so slow today and he'd not gotten started on any of his assignments...

The birds chirping in the tree outside his bedroom window caused his other eye to open and he looked at the tree, finding the bird's nest immediately. The birds took flight and he straightened in his chair, watching the fly away. Kun was right...he was cooped up and doing all this extra work when he didn't need to and not having any fun... alright, so Kun was working, same with his other girls, but it was better then being alone with homework of all things, the stuff he needed to impress the teachers when he went to college as his girls went back for their senior and junior years...

The blue-haired teen stood, shoving his chair back. Forget that! It was a great day – he'd go bother one of his girls and do this homework later; better to spend as much time with them as he could since college would eat up his time. After a quick change of clothes, Rowen was running out of the house to climb onto his midnight blue with silver trim 2006 Yamaha motorcycle. Pulling his helmet on, he started it up, peeling out of the driveway, his shirttails flying out behind him.

Now... Who to bother first...?

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

The sunlight felt good, reassuring and warm on her skin as she walked to work; the small boutique was a perfect place for her, what with her love of clothes, fashion, and style. If she hadn't wanted to follow her father and grandfather's footsteps, Sage would have gone into the field of fashion. The low heels of her ankle boots clicked against the pavement of the sidewalk and the reassuring weight of her purse bumping her hip combined with the gentle breeze...it should have been soothing, a lovely Spring afternoon...but..

Sage tilted her head back, looking up at the clouds gathering in the sky. She frowned, an uneasy feeling creeping up her spine; there was something...something foreboding in the air. Even with how beautiful the day was...something just felt wrong somehow...

Tires squealing to a halt beside her had the blonde look over in surprise to find a familiar dark blue and silver motorcycle pulling up beside her; Rowen pushed up the visor of his helmet and grinned impishly.

"Hey there. Need a ride?" The bluenette asked.

"I thought you would be doing that extra homework to impress the teachers at that college of yours," Sage said, flicking her hair back from her violet eyes.

"Yeah, well I was....but... Kun's right. What are you girls doing tonight anyway? We've not hung out at the coffeehouse in a while..." he asked, shifting his bike closer to the sidewalk to let traffic pass more smoothly around him.

"Honestly? Nothing really aside from go home, shower, and nap..." Sage said with a shrug, ignoring how Rowen's eyes blanked as he mentally pictured his girls showering.

With a faint blush on his cheeks, he cleared his throat. "Tell you what, you girls aren't too tired after work, I'll treat you to dinner at that new Japanese place...I hear they have good sushi and even steak..."

"Sushi?" She arched a delicate brow at his offer. "Well you just won Cy over right there – swear that girl can eat her weight in fish..."

"And I know how you like steak and Kun likes anything..." Rowen quipped, even as she snorted faintly.

"You mean how you like anything...I swear you're a bottomless pit..."

"Yeah, yeah...now...as I was saying – do you need a ride...?"

Sage shrugged. "Why not..."

Rowen pulled his helmet off, passing it over to the blonde as she stepped off the sidewalk. After adjusting the strap of her purse, she pulled the helmet on and lowered the visor. She slipped her arms around his waist, leaning up against the tall teen's back. A wicked glint appeared in her eyes as she purred, "Remember...ride fast and hard..."

Rowen made a strangled sound in his throat from the flood of naughty images those words produced; damn how his girls loved teasing him....! Smoke rose from the rear tire of his motorcycle as he peeled away from the side of the road, rejoining the flow of traffic.

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Location: Exemplar Community College, Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

The clouds over Hell's Cove built rapidly in a completely abnormal pattern though many didn't look up to see them, else they'd have noticed how the ominous black clouds seemed to momentarily take the shape of a man in a demonic-looking set of Samurai armor before vanishing as lightning split the sky.

Thunder boomed even as lighting split the sky in the outskirts of the city, and at the college campus, inside his research office, Professor Koji spared only a glance for the ominous signs occurring out the window he stood near. It took the old Scholar only a

second to study the signs before looking back at the heavy-duty laptop he'd stored his research containing the Dynasty of Arago and the Youjakai on; his granddaughter sat in the desk chair, her fingers flying faster over the keyboard than his ever could. She frowned at the flashing text on the screen before looking up at him in worry.

"...Grandfather...?"

"So...this entire time...I was right," there wasn't satisfaction in his voice, merely resignation, his eyes seeming to look inward, before looking down at her. "Mia, be a dear and input what I'm about to tell you..."

"Of course..." She murmured, turning back to the laptop, her slender fingers poised and waiting. "Ready when you are."

"Wildfire. Hardrock. Torrent. Halo. Strata."

Her right pinky tapped the Enter key as the last of the five names were inputted and the laptop beeped softly as the information was rapidly processed. The monitor glowed eerily right as thunder boomed and a flash of lightning struck down near the campus; the wind harshly blew in its fury and the windows of the research office slammed open, wildly banging as graded essays and papers flew off the Teaching Aide's desk.

"Grandfather!" Mia gasped, looking up at him, her eyes wide as her hair whipped around her, being pulled free of the loose bun she wore it in. "Is it...? This is...?"

"The Dynasty," Professor Koji confirmed grimly. "Arago's empire has returned and the thousand year reprieve for our world is over... Today is the day our world could very well end..."

The wind howled as it continued to whip around them, the laptop's screen flaring different hues of light...

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

Downtown Hell's Cove, the weather had yet to shift, the blue sky only concealed by a few fluffy white clouds and the pleasant spring breeze was much appreciated by the many commuters on foot. Outside one of the local sporting goods stores, a preteen boy was critically eyeing the selection of skateboards the store had on its sidewalk display under the amused eye of the clerk; his previous one had been unintentionally run over after a scuffle between himself and another boy who declared him too girly to play on the soccer team.

Tch! Just because he grew his hair out didn't make him girly...!

"Yulie, come on, we'll be late for dinner and the movie if you don't decide which one you want..." the boy's mother pleaded, looking down at her wrist watch before she looked towards her husband, who was smiling indulgently at their only son, her voice taking a beseeching tone with her husband. "Darling..."

"Oh, honey, it's alright. We have all the time we need today – let him pick out the best one..." he replied, wrapping an arm around her waist and pulling her closer to him; he smiled lovingly down at her, brushing a loose curl of hair back from her face as he reassured her. "Don't worry about schedules today...it's our day off!"

"Well..." Yulie murmured while picking up one that was blue with a stylized white flame. "I do like this one..."

"Good eye, kid," the clerk praised.

"Thanks. Uh, may I...?" The boy asked, his long ponytail of hair stirring in the breeze as he gestured to the sidewalk.

"Sure, kiddo, give it a go; see how your balance is."

"Thanks!"

The preteen turned, setting the skateboard down and stepping up on it; he pushed off, ignoring his mother's frantic calling of his name as he focused on the board, finding his balance and keeping it easily. Oh yeah, definitely this one...

The sounds of panic, of screams and honking car horns, broke him from his focus on the skateboard and when he swerved to avoid a woman running blindly in fear entering his path, he tumbled gracelessly from the skateboard, rolling to a halt on the now partially deserted street. Groaning in the pain of his now scraped knees and elbows, he pushed himself up off the pavement onto all fours.

"Owowowowow..." Yulie hissed to himself, the panicky screams still echoing around him. Gritting his teeth, he closed his eyes, fighting back reflexive tears of pain...when something with a big, warm, and wet sandpaper-like tongue suddenly licked him on the cheek with enough force to cause his skin to tingle. "What the--?!"

His head snapped around and he found himself staring in to feline hazel eyes peering at him from the face of the largest white tiger that had to be known to man. If that wasn't weird enough, it seemed to talk too, with a voice that was deep and rumbled like fire: "Now that had to hurt..."

Yulie reeled in surprise, falling on his rear, and caught sight of the teen that stood beside the tiger, a hand on it's powerful shoulder blade; he was tall, taller than Yulie's dad and appeared to be somewhere between seventeen and eighteen, with a wild mane of black hair that fell down past his shoulders and brilliant tiger-blue eyes that looked at him in amusement as he spoke in the tiger's supposed voice. "Bad spill there – you alright, kiddo?"

The older teen was so handsome it took Yulie's breath away. He blinked and cleared his throat, shakily rising to his feet. "Um, y-yeah, fine! Nothing I can't handle!"

The teen smiled at him, his white teeth gleaming against the tan of his skin as he offered his hand to Yulie. Mesmerized, he took the teen's larger hand, forgetting about the scrapes on his palms; a surprised hiss of pain escaped him as the hand closed around his and he was pulled to his feet. The teen looked startled and turned his hands over inspecting the scrapes.

"Oh...! Sorry, kiddo. You need to get these cleaned up..." the teen apologized as he inspected the injuries.

Yulie blushed, overwhelmed by the sheer presence of the taller, older boy who held onto his hands, automatically studying him; he had broad shoulders emphasized by the tee-shirt he wore, black with red, orange, and yellow flames rising from the hem with the word 'Pyro' in blocky, flame-like letters stretched over his chest, his faded blue jeans snug to his hips and thighs, the tattered cuffs falling onto a pair of white and red sneakers.

"You'll be fine, I don't think they'll scar," the teen commented, releasing his hands.

"Um...thanks..." Yulie said, shifted awkwardly, feeling so...short, puny really; this guy...he was so cool, he probably never had anyone harass him! He was tall and with big shoulders and muscles, and even had a tiger!

The murmuring of the crowd seemed to draw the younger teen from his daze. He blushed jerking his hands away. "You....that's your tiger, isn't it? Really yours?"

"Well as much as he lets himself be," the teen said with a chuckle, his head tilting slightly; the faint breeze caught the ends of his hair and his tiger blue eyes sparkled in good humor as they peered down into the wide hazel eyes of the younger teen.

"Yulie! Yulie!"

Hearing his parents calling his name, the younger teen looked over his shoulder at them; why were they so worried looking? This guy had everything under control...

"Ahh...your parents look worried. I'll see you around, kiddo..." The older teen said with a chuckle, reaching out to ruffle Yulie's long hair.

"My name's Yulie, not kiddo!" he retorted, blushing indignantly.

"I know." He smiled, his hand dropping. The older boy walked away, the tiger padding lazily at his side; Yulie turned, watching the stranger, his eyes wide. That guy...was so...awesome!

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Location: Exemplar Community College, Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

The end of the World...? Her grandfather knew so much, was so wise...but was it really the end of the world? She didn't want to believe it – it seemed like nothing was wrong, the news reporting the weather forecast even as she nibbled on her potato chips. Fearful for her safety, her Grandfather had asked her not to leave his office and so, to keep him happy, she remained, turning on the old television by the teaching desk and snacking on the junk food that he kept there for his all-night grading marathons during Finals Week. The sound of a helicopter flying so close to the university caused her to look out the window in surprise. How odd...that looked like a news helicopter, heading toward the shopping district...

"We interrupt the current broadcast with a special report," the female news caster's voice caught Mia's attention.

In dread she looked at the television screen again and found herself looking at a bird's eye view of the pedestrian shopping mall of the shopping district of Hell's Cove. A male reporter's voice took over the report, the sound of a helicopter whirling blades mingling with his words.

"We're here over the Pedestrian Mall, where a teenager and a white tiger have appeared, causing panic and chaos on this peaceful afternoon. He is apparently ignoring the police's demands..."

Mia didn't hear the rest of the words, the bowl dropping from her lap to clatter loudly on the hardwood floor as she stared at the man beside the white tiger; he was a year younger than she, with wild black hair and even with the distance of the camera, his eyes seemed to gleam a bright, inhuman blue. There was something...something familiar...

"I...I know him...somehow..."

The door swung open and her grandfather entered his office. "Mia, did you--"

"I saw him, Grandfather... The world's not in any more danger of ending if he is..."

"He is, Mia," her grandfather murmured, studying the teen on the television screen.
"He's a Samurai Trooper."

"...I'm going to go see for myself," she said, grabbing her messenger bag and darting for the office door.

He watched her go and prayed for her safety, for where there were Samurai Troopers, there were Youjakai soldiers...

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 25, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day One

His tiger companion was getting restless, his agitation making the police officers in their heavy riot gear encircling them and the crowd nervous; the beast lifted its massive head and roared. He followed the tiger's eyes and looked up to see the unnatural rapid formation of heavy storm clouds over head; sucking in a startled breath, his fingers gripped the tiger's fur. They were here...!

"Whiteblaze..."

Yulie stared at the teen and the tiger, could feel his father's hands covering his mother's on his shoulders, holding him in place. The sky was darkening and his eyes darted up in confusion before looking back at the teen, the restless tiger. Something...something was happening, the preteen knew, something that'd change his life forever. How he knew, he didn't know...

Mia's blue eyes darted to the rear-view mirror, studying the flow of traffic behind her before returning to the road before her; studying the skyline, she frowned. "Those clouds...they're only over the city..."

The engine of the SUV sudden began to stall, and she bit her lower lip as it rolled to a halt, surrounded by other stalled vehicles. Futilely she tried to start the engine, pressing on the gas pedal.

"Come on, come on...!" She sighed and her eyes darted up to check the stop light; her eyes widened at the sight of the darkened lights and she peered at the intersection to find that many cars has stalled out there as well, the sound of horns and yelling mingling. The buildings were dark despite the hour and she frowned as she stepped out of the SUV. "...the entire City...it's blacked out. ...I wonder, this..."

Mia bit her lower lip and a frown of determination settled on her brow. "I have to find him....that Samurai Trooper."

All around her she could hear the confusion, the chaos and saw an unattended bicycle with the Hell's Cove Police Department logo; beyond it was the policeman that it belonged to, trying to bring order to the chaos the Dynasty was causing. It was there and she needed it...he'd understand, she hoped... Mia darted over to the bicycle, placing her hand on the handlebar; she glanced over her shoulder at the policeman and met his startled eyes.

"I'm sorry, but I need to borrow this, it's an emergency!" She called out to the police officer as she swung a leg over the bicycle's seat.

"Hey! Wait a minute! Stop!"

She could hear him call out even as she swiftly pedaled away, but leaned forward, closer to the handlebars to pick up speed. All around her she could see the buildings lose power and her heart raced in a combination of fear and excitement.

A dark fog was rolling in as the city was plunged into unnatural darkness, the panicky screams of the populace being strangely muffled as the fog passed over. Overhead, as the power left the city, the news helicopter suddenly plunged into the side of one of the skyscrapers, much to the horror of the people below, their screams blending with the honking horns and yelling, confused voices. The roaring of a tiger seemed to carry over the noise, drowning out the sound of the running footsteps as the dark-haired teen ran up beside his white tiger.

"Listen! Everyone, you have to listen to me before it's too late!" He shouted to the confused, scattering crowd, even as thunder and lightning rumbled and crashed overhead ominously.

Lightning split the sky and struck down, hitting one of the taller skyscrapers; the windows shattered outwards, raining down onto the panicking populace below. In the crush of the fleeing crowd, Yulie felt his parents being ripped from him.

"Hey! Watch it!" Yulie snarled, his hair and clothing being pulled as he fought against the flow of the mob around him; his voice raised. "Mom! Dad!"

"Yulie!" His father's voice was barely audible over the screaming around him and the preteen struggled towards where he thought his father's voice came from.

"Dad?!"

"Yulie! Sweetie?!" His mother's voice now, a different direction. "Darling! Darling, I can't find Yulie!"

"Mom! Mom, I'm over here--!"

Yulie's cries seemed to vanish under the screaming of the crowd as they pushed and shoved; his head turned and he saw a blur of red hair. Everything seemed to freeze as he caught sight of the strangely calm redheaded man standing at the mouth of an alley; he was tall with broad, powerful shoulders the fabric of his dress shirt couldn't hide, his thumbs hooked in the front pockets of his blue jeans as his green eyes watched the panic and chaos in seeming amusement, his long, loose hair blowing around his shoulders in the breeze. The man's green eyes met Yulie's and he smirked as the preteen was washed away in the crowd despite his desperate struggling.

All was going according the Arago-sama's plan, Shuten Doji noted in satisfaction, the mass of seething, panicking mortals sending a thrill through the Dark Warlord of Cruelty. His lips curled into a victorious smirk as he watched the whelp that had to be a Samurai Trooper standing beside the white tiger whose broad head was swinging about, evaluating the surrounding chaos with an alertness no wild animal possessed. Shuten's eyes were drawn back to the crowd rushing past where he stood and for a moment his eyes met one of those in the crowd, wide hazel eyes filled with panic, but no fear, merely determination. Even as the crowd dragged the preteen with those eyes past, Shuten watched him, noticing the effeminately pretty facial features, the black hair pulled back in a ponytail. How interesting that a child shows no fear when

those around him are so easily overwhelmed by their most base instinct in the face of an unknown danger...

"You cowards! I'm the one you want! Come out and face me!" the dark-haired teen shouted to the thundering sky, the tiger beside him roaring in challenge.

He was unable to see that behind him, one of the previously dead large advertising flat-screen monitors suddenly gleamed malevolently and a form garbed in ancient Japanese-inspired armor wielding a kusari-gama appeared; the figure's eyes opened and gleamed as they glared down at the defiant teenager. The tiger's ears twitched and he suddenly turned towards the glowing screen, roaring out a warning the same second the screen exploded outward, the armored minion leaping down. Biting back a curse, the teen lunged forward and felt the blade of the kusari-gama slicing into the cotton of his tee-shirt, a long slice forming in the back of the fabric. He tumbled forward in a controlled fall and rolled up into a crouch; the gap of fabric revealed red metal as the teen stood, assuming a loose ready stance.

"...about time." He muttered, his hands lifted, curled into fists before him. Tiger-blue eyes studied the armored figure before him; heavily armored, but still fast, definitely not a human in there, he decided. His fingers twitched and reached up, gripping at the fabric covering his shoulders; he jerked and the cloth seemed to tear away, revealing the sleek crimson over white body-armor he wore. "Decided to stop your lurking, tinman? Good. I'm Ryo of the Wildfire; you and your master's going down, demon...."

Whiteblaze had circled the minion and the tiger growled, his powerful muscles ripping under the dual-toned fur as he crouched, eying it as it began to spin its kusari-gama, its eyes on the teen. It spoke, its voice inhuman, ringing and metallic. "Brave talk from some human brat whose world is about to end..."

The weighted end of the kusari-gama lashed out and Ryo leaned to the side; he'd been training for this his whole life, the action practically so ingrained he could probably do it in his sleep. Crouching, Wildfire darted at his inhuman opponent the same second Whiteblaze lunged; the teen leaped once he was close enough, his armored foot lashing out in a graceful crimson arc as it slammed into the helm of the Dynasty Soldier. It staggered back a step in surprise, right into Whiteblaze's path; the tiger roared its fury, powerful claws lashing out and raking over the inhuman creature's armor. With a grunt, the Dynasty Soldier lashed out with a vicious backhand to the head of the massive tiger, which on hind legs stood almost as tall as it did.

Even as the tiger reeled from the blow, Whiteblaze's massive, powerful body was twisting gracefully to land on his feet, the paws spreading for purchase as he lowered into a crouch beside his human companion. Ryo took a wary step back as the minion turned, eying the kusari-gama and calculating the range of the weapon.

"...that's it? The best you have after your brave little speech?" the Dynasty soldier mocked as he turned to face teen and tiger. "Let's try that again..."

The minion suddenly lunged forward in a blur of inhuman speed, lashing out with the Kama section of the weapon; Ryo's eyes widened and he automatically lifted his arms

to block the downward curve of the weapon, bracing one wrist with the heel of his other hand. The shaft of the weapon, just below where it joined with the curved blade slammed into his forearm and he felt the shock all the way up his shoulders. The shaft slid against his forearm guard in a screech of metal against metal, the curved blade hooking on his forearm guards. The teen gritted his teeth at the pain shooting up his arms from the power behind the blow – the weapon crackled with golden energy that pulsed outwards and suddenly the pavement behind him cracked and splintered in a semi-circle behind him.

Startled, he shifted his weight, curling into a crouch; the curved blade slide free, even as the teen twisted his body, going into a back-flip from his crouched position, out of what he assumed to be the range of that energy pulse; the minion's weapon still had downward momentum, sloughing off more of that destructive energy – it sliced through the pavement and slammed into the base of a nearby building, a crack running up the foundation. Ryo's eyes narrowed as he studied the sheer amount of damage a missed wing could dish out...

"Holy shit!" Ryo whistled out from between clenched teeth; he'd have to watch his step around this guy and all those like him...

Yulie had been running for several minutes now, searching for his parents, only to come up empty – it was like the entire city was deserted; he'd barely managed to escape the crush of that panicking crowd by throwing himself into an alleyway and when he'd gotten up...they were all gone... But he could hear something, unrecognizable from the echo bouncing between the empty streets and buildings at first, but now what he recognized as the roaring of a tiger...and so he followed it. Stepping out of the alleyway, he looked around at the apparently deserted street. At the sound of the tiger's snarling, the preteen turned his head, his ponytail of lush black hair flying out behind him.

"Oh my God..." the young teen gasped softly, taking in the sight of the older teen from before and his tiger, only now...that older teen wore some sort of crimson and white body-armor, sleek and deadly...powerful. Towering over the taller teen was a man in oriental-looking armor, wielding a chain and sickle weapon. What on Earth was going on?!

"Now do you realize how foolish you are challenging Arago-sama? You've yet to experience even a fraction of the Dynasty's power..." The tall, armored minion rumbled a split second before lunging for the teen in the body-armor, lashing out with his weapon in a graceful, deadly arc.

Ryo swore even as he twisted out of the way, skidding back on the pavement in a crouch; the weapon gleamed gold even as the minion caught himself and there was a discharge of pure power...heading straight for Yulie, who'd froze in shock when the weapon had been aimed his way. The pavement splintered, a fissure heading straight for the long-haired boy, who took a step backwards, muscles tensing in fear and desperation – he...he couldn't get out of the way in time...! He didn't want to die--!

Yulie's frantic thoughts were cut off as he was suddenly tackled out of harm's way;

there was a screeching of metal as a bicycle was torn apart. There was a heavy weight atop him and he lifted his head, a bit dazed from the sudden impact with the pavement to meet the worried blue eyes of an older girl in her late teens, auburn curls that had escaped from the loose bun at the back of her head framing her face. He blinked before inhaling sharply, a harsh wheezing gasp as the air as he regained his breath. The older girl pulled him up to his feet and he swayed, leaning against her; she was a few inches taller than he and looped a careful arm around the boy's waist.

"Are you alright?" Mia demanded of the young teen she'd knocked out of the way of certain death.

"Y-yeah, I thought I was...!" He blinked and his head snapped around towards the battle. "What about...?"

Mia's head turned, following the preteen's wide-eyed gaze to land on the hulking armored minion of the Dynasty, who stood with its back to them, the weighted end of his kusari-gama spinning so fast above its head the weapon whistled loudly. The armored teen stood in a ready stance, the tiger crouched at his side with lethal fangs bared. The chain lashed out suddenly and Ryo reacted, leaping high; the weighted end caused the chain to recoil and the teen yelped in surprise when he felt the chain wrapping around his ankle. With a flick of its wrist, the minion sent the defiant rebel flying, swinging him with enough force to fracture the pavement when the teen impacted facedown.

"...unnn..." Ryo groaned, armored hands sliding over the broken pavement as he began to push himself up on his hands and knees; a soft screeching of metal against concrete resulted, the high-pitched noise making the pounding of his skull hurt even worse. "...s-shit...gotta pull myself back together..."

"...he's getting pounded..." Yulie whimpered in concern even as the snarling white tiger stepped protectively over the fallen teen.

Ryo pulled at the chain around his ankle, loosening it even as he sat up, scolding his companion. "Whiteblaze, get outta here! He'll hurt you!"

Ignoring the human's advice, Whiteblaze lunged for the minion and was batted away; skidding over the pavement, he rolled and was back on his feet in a wary crouch. The large cat snarled even as he shook his head to clear out the cobwebs.

"Whiteblaze...!" The teen looked at the shaky tiger in worry before turning his enraged eyes to the Dynasty Soldier, taking a step forward; pain lanced through his sternum, out to his upper torso, and he rested a hand on his chest subconsciously even as he hissed out from between clenched teeth, "I'm going to kick your ass for that...!"

"Not if your dead, mortal!"

The minion lashed out with the Kama of his weapon; it spun in a graceful arc, moving so fast that Ryo could only bring his arms up to block. Reflexively his eyes closed as he

braced himself...and suddenly there was the sound of metal screeching against metal and a voice with a vaguely Brooklyn accent. "Hey. Gonna introduce us to your buddy here? Or did we come at a bad time?"

"Eh?!" Ryo's eyes snapped open and he started at the taller, slimmer teenager who stood an arm out before him, a gash on his midnight blue forearm guard gleaming before sealing; he wore armor like Ryo's own, only in place of the fiery crimson was the color of the night sky. His hair, a few shades darker, was in a stylishly messy style, with long bangs falling in his eyes. "...who the hell are you?!"

"Rowen of the Strata. And my buds and I were hopin' to get in on the action ourselves if ya don't mind..." the taller teen snorted and turned his head to grin at him, dark blue-black eyes gleaming in a sarcastic humor. "We got a beef with these walking tin-cans too..."

"...we?" Ryo asked in echo, frowning in confusion even as another figure landed in a crouch on the other side of the Dynasty soldier, this one in a rusty-orange over white, with shortly cropped messy blue-black hair; he rose to his feet, the tails of his yellow bandanna flickering in the breeze. The minion made a sound of confusion, its head snapping about to inspect duo of newcomers.

"Kun of the Hardrock," the newest one murmured the introduction, voice low, almost inaudible; armored hands curled into fists. "Justice cries out for your demise, demands retribution for what you've done to this city and its people...."

"...what?" the Dynasty Soldier shifted its weight when suddenly a rock the size of Ryo's fist impacted with the side of its helm; angered, it glanced around wildly for the source of the attack.

"Look up here, bucket-head!" a voice that was vaguely British in its accent called out, soft and Ryo was unable to tell gender as he looked up as well to see a pair in green and white and sea-blue and white standing on the ledge of one of the shorter buildings just above them. The taller of the pair dropped the rock he'd been holding, while the shorter leaned forward, bracing his weight on his raised knee as he peered down at them, his chestnut hair pulled back in a low tail that fluttered in the breeze. "I'm Cye of the Torrent; you're certainly an untrustworthy lout, aren't you?"

Torrent leapt forward, somersaulting gracefully as the silent green and white armored blond dropped down beside him; the pair landed opposite Hardrock, effectively circling the Dynasty Soldier. With a toss of the golden blond hair, the last one introduced himself in a soft-spoken, regal voice. "Sage of the Halo; doesn't take much wisdom to see that we need to work together if we want to defeat the tinman..."

Ryo's eyes darted between the newcomers; Hardrock, Strata, Halo, and Torrent...those were the other four armors of the set of five his Wildfire belonged to. That meant...they must have all come here, pulled by their armors...

"...all five of the Samurai Troopers, here in one spot!" Mia murmured in awe from

where she'd crouched, the preteen beside her at the mouth of an alleyway; she'd come just to retrieve the one, but all five of them...together! Hope welled in her breast, the world wouldn't end, she knew it wouldn't!

"...the what?" Yulie looked over at her in confusion from where he rested on his knees beside her. "...you know those guys?"

"...only from a legend, which states that when the Earth has been covered by the wicked shadow of Arago's Dynasty, the Samurai Troopers shall emerge, chosen by their armors to save it..." she murmured, looking at the preteen at her side, her blue eyes lighting up at the retelling of the ancient legend.

"All here? At least I won't have to waste my time hunting you down one by one..."

"That's big talk coming from a walking pile of tin!" Halo snorted regally with a toss of his head, even as he lowered in a crouch. "But can you back it up?"

Halo lunged forward, bringing his fists together for a powerful blow that was blocked by the kusari-gama's chain; the minion's foot slammed into the blond's ribs, sending him flying backwards into Torrent's arms. The blond pushed himself back to his feet, stepping forward, even as his violet eyes narrowed to study the large armored being.

Hardrock snarled in outrage as he lunged for the Dynasty Soldier's back. "You bastard! You're mine!"

It sidestepped and in the same split-second was swinging the Kama; the blade grazed Hardrock's side and he was sent sprawling at Halo's feet. Holding his side, the orange-clad Samurai Trooper rose to his feet. Torrent sprang past them, fast and graceful as he dodged the kama and the chain, going in low before lashing out with a vicious uppercut; spinning, his elbow slammed into the chest-plate of the minion, sending it staggered, giving the chestnut-haired teen time to slam his small fists across the creature's face-plate. He suddenly leapt back and out of the way as Strata seemed to drop from the sky, his legs swinging in a powerful set of kicks that sent the minion staggering backwards under each blow before the bluenette back-flipped out of its range to land in a crouch by Torrent.

"Ready to give up yet, tincan?" Strata asked mockingly as he straightened.

"Hardly..." it murmured, swinging the Kama end of the kusari-gama in a tight circle.

The minion stuck back, lashing out hard and fast with its weapon even as the four lunged at it; the resulting blows sent the four newcomers sprawling. They were on their feet in second, rubbing at their injuries when Ryo stepped forward, his breathing harsh.

"Let me handle this..." he said, panting for breath; damn his chest hurt where that damn Dynasty Soldier has smashed his chest.... Beside him, Whiteblaze stepped up, snarling at the minion.

"You got a plan, Wildfire?" Strata asked, a dark brow arched.

"I should hope so, you don't look to be in any condition going up against that thing alone," Halo agreed.

"Maybe we should let him try, see that he won't have any better luck..." Torrent mumbled, even as Hardrock shook his head.

"No. We can handle this, the four of us..." the orange-clad Trooper claimed, cracking his knuckles. "He'll just get in our way..."

"...oh no...they aren't united...if they want to beat them, they have to work together, all of them...their minds and hearts as one..." Mia murmured in concern, frowning as she rose to her feet; beside her the preteen scrambled to his feet as well, watching in confusion as the Scholar cupped her hands around her mouth to call out to the five Troopers. "Listen! The five of you have to work together – only all of you can defeat the Dynasty; when you're all together, you are at your strongest!"

"...all of us....together..." Ryo murmured as his breathing starting to steady as the ache elevated, bit by bit...

The other four straightened, exchanging glances before settling on Torrent, who was studying the Wildfire-bearer thoughtfully before nodding once, the kanji of trust gleaming on his pale brow. "...I Trust him."

"All I need to hear," Hardrock murmured. "Let's get to it then!"

The Dynasty Soldier's helm had turned a fraction of an inch when it heard the human woman's voice and at her words...knew her to be a threat to Arago-sama's plans. "Rude of you to interrupt our private conversation," it sneered, spinning the weighted end of the kusari-gama; turning, it lashed out with its weapon, "but since you seem so interested..."

The chain lashed out for the pair; Yulie grabbed Mia's arm as he turned, trying to drag her out of the way. Instead that only made them a better target as the chain wrapped around the both of them as Mia stumbled, pulling them together tightly, back to back. The assembled Troopers' shouts of anger and surprise mingled with Mia's fearful scream and Yulie's shouted demand to be released as they were suddenly hauled through the air. The minion dangled the pair before it at the Troopers; it towered over them with its immense size.

Ryo's eyes widened, recognizing the preteen from before, the kid that had been knocked off his skateboard in the panic caused when the civilians had seen Whiteblaze. Yulie's head tilted back in pain as the chain tightened around them, a faint whimper escaping his throat. "...c-can't...move..."

"You bastard!" Hardrock snarled, charging forward, the virtue of Justice flaring brightly despite the headband that covered his forehead.

The Dynasty Soldier turned, holding its hostages out; immediately Hardrock came to a skidding halt, right into its strike range. The blunted side of the Kama slammed hard into the Trooper's side, sending him flying; he slammed into a railing to separate the pedestrians from the road, the metal crumpling under the impact. It laughed at as Hardrock slid down the twisted metal and slumped forward with a groan of pain.

"Are you afraid of damaging my trophies? They are frail things, but I think I'll keep them...." It taunted, shifted as it wrapped another length of chain around the captive pair, lying tight over their throats; it pulled up on the chain, letting their feet dangle freely almost half a foot off the pavement.

"...ahhh....c-can't....b-breath..." Yulie wheezed, trying to shift against the restraints; behind him he heard her gasping, choking and he stilled, fearful that he was pulling the chains tighter around the throat of his savior.

"Stop, damn you!" Ryo snarled the demand; the minion seemed to arch a proverbial brow at him and lowered them back to the pavement. The chains loosened enough to fall from their throats and the captives slumped over, gasping desperately for breath. "You want a fight so bad? You got it. But we will win."

They stood flanking him, Halo and Strata to Ryo's right, Hardrock and Torrent to his left; the tiger rumbled as he padded up beside his human companion. The eyes of the teens and animal were determined and on the brows of the Troopers, their virtues gleamed. Ryo's hand lashed out, calling summoning for...

"Armor of Wildfire!" There...there it was, waiting, eager and ready...his armor; it had been slumbering, waiting for this, ready to roar and engulf any enemy in its blazing righteousness... "Dao Jin!"

Behind his eyes he could see it, waiting, ready... The power of his armor washed over him and even with its roar, its caress of fiery power, he could hear his armor-siblings calling for their own armors...

"Halo!"

"Strata!"

"Torrent!"

"Hardrock!"

Their voices were drowned out by the raging crackling and roar of the armor and he could hear...kettle drums, mingling with that roar. Everything seemed to slow down and he could see the energy of the armor unfurling like rolls of silk, exploding in a shower of energy-petals, changing, evolving his subarmor where they fell...

It happened all in a split-second and he was already in a ready stance, the weight of the armor of Wildfire, the paired katana on his back reassuring. Around him the other four stood, ready in their own armors... Ryo reached up, gripping the hilts of his

katana and in a single, fluidic move drew them; behind him he heard the armors of the others clanking softly, their weapons rattling.

This was it. This was their destiny!

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"These children are rather headstrong, aren't they?"

Shuten turned his head a mere fraction of a millimeter in acknowledgement of Anubisu's murmured comment. The four Dark Warlords had assembled once more in full armor, perched out of view and watching their childish adversaries as they battled one of their stronger minions. The Warlord of Cruelty made a noise of agreement of the older man's assessment; of them all, Anubisu and Rajura had the most keen observation skills, Corruption as a master hunter and Illusion as a master of studying his foe for weakness. "Aah. But they will fall before the Dynasty and suffer for their impudence."

"And from that suffering they will learn that challenging the might of Arago-sama and his Dynasty was quite foolish on their part..." Naaza murmured before chuckling nastily; his eyes were on that 'Torrent' boy. There was something....a flash of sea-green eyes, looking over a shoulder, a chestnut-brown tail of hair swinging in the breeze. That boy? What had those children called him....Cye? Could it be that boy? Was that why Venom stirred, recognizing the slumbering power of its opposite in the child as they crossed paths? "...I think I saw that boy in Torrent's armor before...at that place where they keep the fish..."

"The Aquarium? Perhaps; even before the armor awakened, it would have a strong hold over them, influencing their young minds..." Anubisu murmured thoughtfully.

"That influence will end when we break them," Rajura promised darkly, watching the children's battle with their minion closely; his eye went to Hardrock, screaming his outrage at the mishandling of the captives. What a voice that boy had...must not have fully hit puberty yet...also explained the lack of height. ...how galling, going up against children... "They're just a bunch of snot-nosed brats, boys barely out of the Dojo...it'll be too easy..."

Anubisu's smirk was hidden by his faceplate and the amusement in his posture was misinterpreted as agreement with the Warlord of Illusion's assessment; in actuality, he could smell something they couldn't, being down wind of them all... Three of them were not male at all. Halo, Hardrock, Torrent....all three of them were females, of breeding age. Though if Shuten or Naaza could smell their female musk as well – doubtful, as the feline and snake Warlords' sense of smell wasn't as good as Anubisu's own – the younger men wasn't saying. And if Shuten nor didn't want to disclose it, then neither would Anubisu; it would be their little in-joke over the oldest of the Warlords...

The wolfish Warlord's green eyes returned to the scholarly young woman who had butted into the battle with her comments; her...from that campus. Maybe...maybe he

could have her, once their minion defeated the children...and then they could gather the woman, the child, and the defeated ones, bring them into the Dynasty...

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"...well...so you really are the Samurai Troopers..." the minion murmured; Mia's eyes were wide at the sight of the five armored teenagers, they stood ready, and the power seemed to radiate from their armors...

...the legends were true! The realization sank into the young woman; she'd researched these legends with her grandfather, studying them, heard them all her life...and there they stood, these five legendary warriors in the flesh. It was awe-inspiring, really... Her eyes flickered between them, their faces now obscured by the face-plates of their helms. The most dominate feature to be seen of them now were those eyes, bright and fierce with determination and an unwillingness to back down...

To be honest, he was thrown for a loop; there had been those flares of light, unfurling like ribbons, then petals around them, forming into...into...those armors! Yulie's breathing quickened and his heart pounded in shock. Magic...real, actual magic! ...they were real-live heroes, like from the comic books, the movies...and they were standing right in front of him! "...they are...they're real..."

"...they are. The Samurai Troopers...." Mia agreed softly, awe in her voice.

Ryo took a step forward and the brief euphoria that had washed away his aches and pains seemed to vanish and the collective injuries he'd gotten from the beating he'd taken already began to twinge and throb warningly. He bit back a grunt of pain, sweat beading on his brow and sliding down his cheeks behind his face-plate. ...this...is so not good, Wildfire concluded grimly as the Dynasty Soldier laughed.

"Fool! That armor, it won't help you at all! Such a weak creature like you can never wield its power properly!"

Ryo had this pet peeve about being put down, called weak... His temper flared as he suddenly charged forward, seeming to blur as he lashed out with his blades; he hooked the curved blade of the Kama and shoved with all his strength to get the point away from the captive pair. The blades of their weapons clanged as the tall minion used its greater strength to block Wildfire's numerous blows with one hand. It seemed to grow bored as it suddenly yanked its captive into the way; as Ryo suddenly hesitated, like with Hardrock before, it slammed its Kama into the teen, sending him flying back to the feet of his fellow Samurai Troopers.

"Ryo...!" Torrent cried out, shifting her grip on her trident as she stepped forward. Beside her, Hardrock growled, gripping her naginata tightly.

"Bastard! You let them go, this is between us!"

"Hehehehe...I've yet to even begin..." the minion snorted.

"If you don't put us down right now, the second I'm free I am so kicking your ass," Yulie promised, glaring up at the tall Dynasty Soldier. He wasn't afraid, hadn't been really...right now all he could feel was anger... Anger at this creature and those it served, who had taken his parents and the other people in the city away for whatever evil plot they had hatched.

"What a spirited little brat you are! Perhaps I should introduce you to the cruelty of the Dynasty!" It snorted; the chains around them clinked and clanked as they were suddenly hauled up and tossed casually, as though the combined weight of the young woman and preteen boy was no more than a feather...then again, given how strong it had proven itself to be, their weight probably was nothing....

Torrent was darting forward even as the minion began shifting its weight, dropping her trident-like maga-yari. She sprang forward at the minion; it moved to swipe at her and the sea-blue-armored teen used it for a spring board to somersault, arms wrapping around the pair mid-air. Flipping gracefully, she landed in a crouch a split-second before pain lanced from her lower back, the Kama's blade gouging her armor. Her scream of agony echoed as she slumped against the captives.

"Cye!" Strata bellowed, bringing up his bow; he had an arrow drawn and notched in a blur of movement, letting it fly to strike the elbow joint of the walking suit of armor before them. Its hand immediately began to spasm before automatically releasing the Kama, which dropped with a clatter behind the wounded Torrent.

The captives' chains were loosened, dropping...and Mia grabbed Torrent's chest-plate and began to pull; Yulie wrapped his arms around the armored teen's waist, helping the young woman move the wounded Trooper out of harm's way. Cye gritted her teeth as she braced herself, standing despite the pain shooting up her back from where the kama's blade had raked over her lower back; she might not have Hardrock's near ungodly pain tolerance but she'd not be brought down so soon...!

The supporting arms and hands fell away as she turned, holding her arms out as she stood like a shield between the Dynasty soldier and its former captives; her maga-yari protruded from the ground where the center point had been driven into the concrete behind the minion. "To get to them...you must go through me."

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"He's either very brave or very foolish," Naaza commented of the Torrent Bearer, watching as their servant spun the kusari-gama, "Or quite possibly both."

Anubisu bit the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing at the younger Warlord's blunder concerning the Trooper's gender, instead nodding as Strata's arrows peppered the Dynasty soldier, "Some tend to be overly protective of bitches and pups, even if they aren't their own..."

"And these children certainly must feel the need to protect those two..." Rajura agreed, observing in interest as Hardrock snagged the weighted end of the kusari-gama out of midair and yanked the minion off its feet and into a nearby wall, which

buckled under the impact. "...perfect bait for our web should we need them..."

"They are persistent little brats, aren't they...?" Shuten snorted, half-amused and half-disgusted by the sight of the young armor-bearers getting back to their feet repeatedly again and again after being slammed around by the Warlords' most powerful servant; Torrent had retrieved the maga-yari while the other four kept it occupied and was in a defensive stance before the woman and preteen, who were backed into a distant corner of the battlefield.

The four that had arrived together were showing remarkable teamwork, seeming to have to remember to let Wildfire get his hits in. That unity....could pose a problem, though the fact that they seemed used to a group of four and not five, could probably be useful... Anubisu tilted his head thoughtfully, "Four out of the five get along so alarmingly well...perhaps we should go after that 'fifth wheel'...."

"Study the situation further; if it's a weakness, we shall exploit it fully," Shuten murmured; the battle was heated, with vicious blows being exchanged on both sides.

And without its captives, the assembled Samurai Troopers were taking out their frustrations and anger on the Dynasty minion; they fought with a sheer brutality that seemed more appropriate for the Warlords watching the battle than for the 'noble' Samurai Troopers. Anubisu's lips twitched in satisfaction; perhaps it wouldn't be too hard to turn these children to the proper path of serving Arago-sama and the Dynasty...

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Torrent stood at the ready, constantly deflecting any stray attack from the minion that came her way with her maga-yari, the outer bladed prongs of the trident-like weapon closed. The Dynasty Soldier had tried more than once to recapture its freed captives, and Cyé refused to budge; she'd taken more than one hit when she'd not been fast with her weapon to block and deflect the weighted end of the kusari-gama but she remained steadfast in her determination. Her sea-green eyes were narrowed behind the visor of her faceplate, even as she took careful, shallow breathes. One blow she'd barely been able to deflect had grazed her ribs and they ached when she took a deep breath...

Ryo's eyes scanned the battlefield – they'd demolished the sides of the buildings around them, torn up the pavement of the street and still that thing was still kicking! He could tell they were all well-trained; Halo and Hardrock especially, given their skill with their respective weapons and when Hardrock got close enough to engage for hand-to-hand...! Strata was hanging back, his arrows landing what would be decidedly fatal hits on a human being. The Dynasty's minion merely snarled in its frustration as it yanked the golden arrows free of its armored shell, seeming more annoyed than harmed. The Wildfire-bearer's tiger-blue eyes flickered over to where Torrent stood with the maga-yari at the ready in defense of the civilians; they had it boxed in, they just need a clear decisive shot on it at its weak spot...if they could just find its weak spot!

"...this is getting ridiculous!" Halo snapped to Wildfire, her grip shifting on her Nodachi. "We need to take this walking tincan down and do it now! That thing got a good hit on Cyé's ribs!"

"Right..." Ryo murmured in agreement, his grip shifting on the hilts of his paired katana. They could defeat this thing, he knew it...he just wished he knew how...

The minion seemed to sense weakness in Torrent's stance, seemed to know she was hurting and tired, that her ability to defend the civilian duo behind her was beginning to unwillingly waver. The tiger roared in warning even as the Dynasty Soldier moved in a blur of speed, charging for the weary Trooper of the Torrent. Cyé gasped in surprise, bringing her maga-yari up, blocking the downward swing of the Kama's curved blade. The force of the blow sent her to her knees, even as the weapon gleamed gold.

Whiteblaze lunged, tackling the human pair out of the way of the sudden burst of destructive energy that erupted. Armor creaked and rattled as Cyé strained to keep that deadly point away from her faceplate; she could feel the burn from the strain and silently cursed the fact she had no leverage to push back...! Seeming to taste victory, it lashed out with its massive armored foot, kicking straight into Torrent's ribs, where they had been attacked before. A strangled scream of pain escaped the young armor-bearer as she felt her ribs breaking and the minion over powered her enough to pin her to the pavement, a foot pressing down on her broken ribs.

"Cyé!" Strata called out, his heart in his throat.

The other three armor bearers shifted their weight in attack stances, preparing to charge, they just needed Cyé out of the way...!

"R-Rowen...!" The youngest of the quartet called out in a pained sob for the eldest and the archer charged immediately to save her.

"You bastard!" The bluenette shifted his grip on his bow, wielding it like a club as he rushed the minion.

The golden-hued metal lashed out, slamming into the chain of the kusari-gama even as it began to apply more pressure to its captive's injured ribs. The tiger roared, lunging once more and slamming into the Dynasty Soldier, his claws raking over the armored hull of the minion, knocking it off balance enough to free Cyé. She scrambled for safety, pain lancing up her side; from the corner of her eyes, she could see that the woman had taken hold of the preteen's wrist, leading him far from the danger zone as possible.

"Rowen, grab Cyé and haul ass!" Halo bellowed the command and immediately the archer twisted his body, letting his weapon scrape against the chain as his weight shifted.

Strata bent, slipping an arm around Torrent's waist; he mumbled an apology as he hauled hard and fast, dragging her out of the way. She whimpered in pain, slipping her arms around him, clutching him tightly as he dragged her past Halo and Hardrock, who

were in defensive stances behind Wildfire. Wildfire's eyes seemed to glow, burn with some sort of power and the heat of the day seemed to suddenly increase.

"Foolish children, there's nothing you can do to defeat me! Your world is lost to the might of the Dynasty and once I'm through with you, I'll take my time killing those pitiful mortals you protect!"

"No."

It a single syllable, but it held so much resolve, so much power it made the other four armor-bearers' hair raised up on the back of their necks as they froze. That heat was increased practically tenfold as Wildfire spun his swords, bringing the hilts together in a flare of pure heat energy. Startled by the sheer power, the intense heat that was emanating from the teenager before it, the Dynasty Soldier backed up; there were distorting heat waves visible now as Wildfire strode forward.

"...could this be...the strength of the Wildfire armor?" It murmured in fearful awe.

Ryo's armor rattled faintly as he bent his knees, crouching just barely and suddenly springing up into the air. White hot flame suddenly burst into being around him as he hefted the joined blades, crackling hungrily as he channeled the furious power.

"Flare up – NOW!" He roared, his voice taking a vaguely metallic tone as he hurled the gathered power; the world seemed to go white as the pavement shattered, large chunks rising as the sure-kill slammed into the minion. Its weapon flew from its hands as it was sent fling backwards.

"Forgive me...! Dark Warlords...!" The minion shrieked in its pain, it's armored form disintegrating in the face of the attack. "I...failed you...!"

Ryo gasped for breath, feeling so utterly drained as he staggered, the attack dying away. He blinked once, then twice in shock at the sight before them; the building that had been there, a large movie theater complex...had been sliced right down the middle, melted stone and steel sizzling in the late afternoon air. "....whoa..."

"Holy shit..." Hardrock breathed, staring at the devastating results of Wildfire's flare attack

"...that is the power of the Wildfire armor?" Strata murmured in the appreciative manner of men who like when things go boom.

"...apparently so," Halo sighed and shook her head, looking over at the thoughtful Wildfire.

"...what happens now though?" He asked, frowning at where the Dynasty Soldier had stood before looking over to see the woman and preteen peering out of their makeshift cover.

"At least," Cyé wheezed softly as she saw the pair of civilians, "...at least they're

alright..."

"Are you guys okay?" Yulie asked of the armored teenagers.

"I'll live..."

"Been better..."

"Take more than that to take me down!"

The assorted grumbles from the five made Mia smile faintly in relief, even as she looked worriedly to Torrent, who was leaning against Strata, cradling at what had to be broken ribs... The pair of civilians approached the five teens and tiger and Yulie darted forward, his long ponytail of hair fluttering behind him.

"You guys were amazing...!"

Unknown to them, the weapon that had been sent flying spun rapidly through the air, following an unnatural path until it was returned to the hand of its true master; the links clinked as a gauntlet-covered hand captured it from midair. They became aware however, when a dark, malevolent laugh -- soft at first, then echoing around them in the deserted city -- let them know that they were no longer alone. Startled, the five Samurai troopers spun, wearily lifting their weapons.

"Who are you?" Wildfire demanded of the source of the laughter, even as Mia reached out, snagging the preteen's hand and pulling him back towards her; Whiteblaze snarled, stepping before the pair of humans protectively.

In the distance, standing tall on the rooftop ledges of four separate buildings were four darkly armored figures; the kusari-gama dangled from the hands of the closest one. Exact detail was hard to determine with the distance and the darkness, but they could feel the eyes of the four armored demons boring into them intently. The four were large, powerful and deadly, that much the Samurai Troopers and the pair of civilians could determine quite easily...

"We have watched your battle very carefully, little Samurai children..." the closest figure informed them, his deep voice rich and cultured, almost without accent -- in the darkness they could see most clearly the blood-red of his faceplate, the yellow trim on his haori coat; against the darkened sky they could barely make out the two shades of blue that were predominate in his armor. "...you pitiful things, you barely won...you're so weak. You are no match for the forces of Arago-sama and the Dynasty..."

"Oh really? Well who the hell are you and why should we give a damn about what you think?" Wildfire shot back in annoyance, anger surging hot through his veins.

"We, little boy, are the four Dark Warlords in Arago-sama's service, his greatest Generals in this invasion of your World. I am their commanding officer -- Shuten Doji, the Dark Warlord of Cruelty."

"I am Anubisu," the second closest figure rumbled, his voice deep and dark as he introduced himself, his crimson cape snapped briskly around his dark armored form, the hilt of a Nodachi visible at his shoulder; his helm had two hornlike protrusions sweeping backwards, making him appear almost devil-like against the dark sky, "the Dark Warlord of Corruption."

"Naaza, the Dark Warlord of Venom..." The voice of the third was a deep, almost serpentine hissing; lightning flared, gleaming off his poisonous deep green and crimson armor. His black eyes bore into the wounded Torrent, studying the injured Trooper. There was something about him...something...

"Rajura," the final Warlord's deep voice held a metallic tone; he was the furthest away and they could only make out the gleaming of the multiple Kama on his back that gave him a spider-like appearance, "Dark Warlord of Illusions."

Unnatural lightning crashed around them, the four Dark Warlords studying their young foes, each of whom stood defiantly, weapons raised despite their injuries and exhaustion. The lightning struck down between the tallest skyscrapers in rapid succession; as they struck, concrete melted and shattered. Ryo felt his throat seeming to close, and he could hear, very faintly, almost inaudibly, the clattering of his comrades' armors as they shifted, forming a tight formation, a protective circle around the pair of civilians. Whiteblaze roared and the Wildfire-bearer could feel it, feel that oppressive threatening presence...

"Pitiful children..." The voice echoed around them, deep and tinged with spectral tones. "...I am Arago, the ruler of the Youjakai, Master of the Dynasty. Surrender, join us and thrive within my Empire..."

The four distant Warlords seemed to gleam malevolently before being engulfed in orbs of energy that shot straight up into the unnatural clouds.

"...what the hell is going on?" Yulie demanded.

"War. A war like none any of us could ever imagine..." Mia murmured as her eyes focused where the four orbs of energy had vanished into the clouds.

Kapitel 2: Chapter Two: The Scattered Heroes

THE AMERICAN SAMURAI TROOPERS

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DISCLAIMER: I do not own YST/Ronin Warriors, only this story and the alterations I have made to the characters, histories, ect. No profit is being made from this; this is being written solely for the enjoyment of myself and others whom like to indulge in the scenario of 'what if?'

AUTHOR' NOTES: One of my infamous 'What If?' fanfics, where I take some of my ideas, the plot of an anime and throw them in the blender set on puree just to see what happens.

Abandon hope all ye who enter here... For here be gender-bending, cross-dressing, and teenagers being teenagers! And 500+ year old Dark Warlords being perverted old men! And a pretty-boy gay teenaged Yulie too, later on! I've taken elements from the original version and the Americanized version to so there will be the original names for the warlords and the Americanized names for the Troopers in the same story. General insanity shall abound as I unleash this twisted creation upon the world...

"Some believe it is the ability to speak that separates us from the animals..."

'I think, there for I am...'

:Our minds are as one...:

SUMMARY: A 'What if' fic. What if the story of the Samurai Troopers took place in modern times, in the USA? What if three out of five Samurai Troopers were female? Pity Ryo, Rowen, and the Warlords, because dealing with three powerful females with PMS and often violent mood-swings won't be pretty...

CHAPTER SUMMARY: For Arago, the five teens together are a great threat and so he sends the leader of his Warlords, Shuten Doji to engage them in battle; in the battle, the sly Emperor of the Dynasty tries to reclaim the Troopers' armors when a mysterious force scatters the five back to where their armors were forged. It's up to Mia and Yulie to locate the missing in action Troopers.

RATING: R

WARNINGS: Violence, swearing, and sexual innuendo and situations...and my depraved sense of humor XD

GENRE: Action & Adventure/Drama/Supernatural/Humor

ARCHIVE: FanFiction(dot)Net, FicWad(dot)Com, Zpan Sven's Works, others please ask

EDITED: 04.24.2009

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CHAPTER TWO: THE SCATTERED HEROES

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

"I will reign over your world, now...and forever....!"

Cye's eyes snapped open, blank sea-green orbs darting around to take in the abandoned subway station they had holed up in. Beside her she could feel Kun's familiar strength and her eyes closed once more as she cuddled closer to her armor-sister. The haunting, terrifying image of that dark castle appearing in the sky above the city as the unnatural clouds parted. It seemed burned into her mind's eye, really... And they had heard his voice -- Arago, the Demon Emperor...

It was like a nightmare brought to life. She rested her head on Kun's shoulder, drawing strength from the Chinese-American girl. Rowen and Sage were gone, leaving them with the pair of civilians and that other teen, Ryo, Wildfire's bearer. It was a thought that was completely out of place and totally unlike her, but Cye couldn't help but think he was rather attractive...

...maybe that Dynasty Soldier had smacked her around too much...

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Location: Arago's Castle, Dynasty, Youjakai

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

The throne room was lit by the light of four blue-flame candles, one representing each of the Warlords, and the glow of the Mirror of Youja, which allowed them a glimpse into the Mortal World. The smoke from one of the destroyed aerial war-machines used by the Mortals was black, mingling with the supernatural clouds that covered the city. The Four Warlords stood in their subarmor before the Mirror and when the Mirror vanished away, the ghostly helmed visage of Arago appeared in its place. In perfect unison, their armored fists slammed over their hearts in a salute to their master.

"My Warlords, I trust all is going accordingly to plan?" The spectral helm asked, his voice echoing around them. "As expected the five Samurai Troopers have appeared to challenge us and as you have witnessed from their battle against your chosen servant, they prove to be inexperienced but brimming with potential. Should they continue to oppose us, they will be destroyed."

"Arago-sama," the crimson-haired Warlord murmured. "There is nothing to fear from these children, we can dispatch them easily..."

"I don't think so. These young warriors were chosen by their armors, therefore there must be some hidden strength to them we are not able to see," Anubisu advised the younger Warlord, "A greater power that they themselves are not even aware of."

"Anubisu, do these children frighten you?" Shuten mocked the older man's cautionary words. Really they have been preparing for this for well over three centuries; their plans would not fail because of five children!

"No. Merely being cautious, as any wise Hunter is," the wolf-like Warlord chided softly. How impatient the young were...

"And there is a thin line between caution and cowardice," Naaza reminded the scarred man, his black eyes focused on the spectral head of their Master. "What we should do is destroy them before they get any stronger to be a real threat..."

"Enough!" Arago's voice boomed and Naaza was immediately silent in the face of the reprimand. "Now, these five shall be dealt with. Which of you, my Warlords, shall deal with them?"

Shuten stepped forward and to the side, flanked by a pair of the four tall candelabras, gaining his Emperor's attention. He bowed respectfully as he spoke. "Arago-sama, allow me to honor you, to put these brats in their place..."

Rajura turned his head a fraction of an inch, eyeing the youngest of the four with his remaining blue eye. "Hmph..."

Shuten's back stiffened and he slid green eyes over to the white-haired man. "And why are you so amused, Rajura?"

The eldest of the Warlord's lips twitched, turning up into a faint smirk. "Merely how you ignore the words of a more experienced Warrior and how you underestimate the enemy. They may be young, but might prove to be more than a match for you..."

"They are children, nothing more!"

"Children with access to mystical armor, children prophesied about in legend," Rajura reminded him.

"An excellent point, Rajura, one I am glad you brought up – never must you underestimate the armor these children samurai wear," Arago informed them grimly.

Shuten nodded his head in understanding, his eyes hard. "Then I shall destroy this threat to you, Arago-sama. Leave this task to me."

"Do not fail me, Shuten," the demon Emperor warned and the Mirror reappeared, this time behind the four Warlords. They turned, wondering what their Master wished to show them now. "But there is something else. To be more accurate, someone else..."

The screen showed the city, then seemed to 'blink' before focusing in on the female civilian of the duo gathering canned food goods, passing them to the long-haired preteen. Anubisu's face was carefully composed, but his wolf-green eyes sharpened, tracing the delicate profile of the young woman who had caught his attention on that

campus. Her auburn hair was loose and cascading free, no longer in the bun like before; it flowed around her shoulders as she turned, a reassuring, gentle smile on her face as she spoke with the black-haired preteen. When Arago spoke, the Warlord had to force himself to focus on his Master's words.

"She knows too much, more than the average human of her time period should about us -- she knows about the Samurai Troopers, enough to rally them together against us," the demonic Emperor informed them. "The warrior children have already displayed a protectiveness of her. Use her as bait and find out how much she knows."

Anubisu's head turned as the candle nearest the youngest Warlord suddenly began to dim, darkness washing over Shuten's form. The candle extinguished and no longer could the feline Warlord be sensed. With that, the remaining three were dismissed as Arago-sama's presence withdrew.

"He's running off full of himself again," Rajura noted, a tinge of dismay in his voice as he shook his head, his waist-length loose braid of hair swaying behind him.

"Aaah," Naaza agreed with a sigh. "I do have to wonder if he's even got this planned out or if he's flying by the seat of his pants again?"

"If he's not careful, he'll be overwhelmed by their combined power. Together they are strong, if he'd take them one on one, he'd defeat them easily," Anubisu murmured. "But only if he kept his wits about him that is..."

"He can be impetuous, but he will not fall before these children," the green-haired Warlord decided; black eyes slid over to Anubisu, pale lips quirking into a smirk. "After all, between he, Kayura, and I, have we not given you all that grey hair with our creative antics, old man?"

Wolf-green eyes narrowed as he glared at the serpentine Warlord; the strands of grey at his temples gleamed in the dim light given off by the candles. "Oh yes... I can point out each strand you two and Kayura gave me and I'm certain Rajura's ulcer remembers you as well."

The eldest Warlord twitched as he lifted a subarmored hand, pressing reflexively to where that ulcer had been. "I still get phantom pains from that, thank you."

"I believe you," Anubisu snorted, shaking his head; from the corner of his eye he could see that the Mirror no longer showed the woman, now merely displaying random images around the abandoned city. "...I want some sake..."

"Aaah," Rajura sighed in his agreement as the elder pair of Warlords left the throne room.

Naaza followed but paused, turning back to look at the Mirror; his eyes sharpened when it showed the armored children -- Torrent to be precise stretched out on his side on a bench in some underground location, a hand to his wounded ribs. The predatory instincts in the Warlord screamed for him to hunt down his chosen prey while he was

weak, but he gritted his fangs, forced control over those instincts and deliberately turned on his heel. However, his fists were tightly clenched as he left the throne room as well.

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

The cawing of the crows and the flapping of their wings echoed loudly throughout the deserted city streets -- Sage frowned up at the unnatural clouds that remained overhead, casting the abandoned city in a twilight-like gloom. Her frown deepened at the sight of the Japanese fortress that jutted up from the clouds. Everyone was just gone, their cars abandoned, the streets empty; trashcans were knocked over and windows had been broken in the abrupt rioting and panic. The blonde stood beside the tall bluenette, the archer gazing up at the castle seeming to float in the sky. Cars were turned on their sides and crashed into light poles and walls from where they had lost power or the person driving had lost control.

It was an eerie, terrifying sight, one that Sage was certain would linger with each of them for a long time.

"This is the Dynasty's power?" Rowen murmured, frowning as his eyes remained focused on that foreboding castle. "...it's terrifying, but I know we can beat it. We have to."

"We will. After all, we have trained all our lives, even if we didn't know it would be for this moment," she replied softly.

"I don't like this waiting around though. If we hesitate, those who depend on us will get hurt," he muttered, arms crossing over his chest as he continued to scowl petulantly at the floating castle.

"And rushing in blindly will get us hurt -- then who will protect them?" the blonde chided him, elbowing him gently in the side. "I want to go after them to, but we need a plan before we attack."

"...I want payback for what they did to Cye. You know -- an eye for an eye," he said looking down at her, closing one eye and tapping the closed lid with the pad of his armored forefinger to emphasize his point.

A few feet away, the tiger turned his head away from the pair of teens. The plaintive mews and whines of the pet and stray population had Whiteblaze's head tilting, even as he studied the surrounding area. The tiger stood guard at the entrance to the subway station the armored teens and their civilian charges had taken refuge.

Looking over his broad shoulder, the tiger rumbled reassuringly to them, even if they couldn't hear it – none would get past the Guardian Tiger...

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The subway station was one of the smaller, off the mainline but its relatively unknown location was a plus for them. Cye was stretched out on a bench, forbidden to do any heavy lifting; as it was she was watching as Ryo and Kun arranged the baskets of food that the woman and boy had gathered. Slowly she sat up and accepted the food passed her way, opening the first of her hamburgers carefully, mindful of the strength her armor gave her. The pair of civilians sat on the low concrete wall around one of the columns that bore the station number, the preteen boy held a can of soda between his hands, a half eaten hamburger on the wrapper spread across his lap. The armored teens were all practically inhaling piles of hamburgers that had been found in one of the abandoned fast-food chains nearby.

"According to legend, the power of the Dynasty is greater than anything one could ever imagine -- more than Hell's Cove or even the United States is in danger," the scholarly woman murmured. She smiled reassuringly at the boy beside her. "But I know everyone will be alright, with the Samurai Troopers here now, I bet we'll find your parents in no time, Yulie!"

"...yeah..." the long-haired preteen looked at his lap. Yulie frowned slightly, the metal of the can in his hands only barely cool since without the power in the city, there was no way to keep food and drink stored safely. "...I just wish I could do more to help, Mia."

"Don't worry; I fully intend to smash this Arago and his Dynasty -- with my bare hands if I have to," Ryo reassured him. The preteen looked up at him hopefully and the Wildfire-bearer gave him a reassuring smile. "Besides I know you'll prove to be a big help to us; not sure how right now, but I have this feeling you two were supposed to be here."

"You won't be going after Arago and his Warlords alone though," Kun reminded him, swallowing down a bite of her hamburger with her lukewarm soda. "We all intend to have words with Arago and if his Warlords happen to have a problem with that, we'll smash their heads together."

The boy's hazel eyes darted to the Chinese-American and they lit up as he smiled bashfully. "I'm Yulie Yamano... Thanks for the save back there."

"No problem. Just remember to return the favor in the future and we're even," she said with a grin.

"I'm Ryo Sanada," the older teen introduced himself to the preteen, tiger-blue eyes smiling. "You probably didn't get my name before."

"And I'm Lei-Kun Shu – feel free to call me Kun, though; my folks own a restaurant just a few blocks from here... The Imperial Dragon, you ever hear of it?" Kun said, gesturing in the general direction of her family's business.

"Actually, yeah I have!" Yulie brightened in realization. "That's where Mom and Dad were planning to go after we got through shopping..."

"Don't worry, after this is over, I'll treat you and your parents to a nice dinner there," the dark-haired teen offered. "Hell, all of us, us five Samurai Troopers, your folks, and you too... Uhh... What is your name, Miss--?"

"Mia Koji. I'm a research assistant specializing in Ancient Legends and Mythology – I help my grandfather out at the community college," she introduced herself, setting her empty can of soda aside. The quiet chestnut-haired teen who'd taken the nasty blow to the ribs for them caught her eye, sitting perched on the edge of the bench she'd been lying on, delicately nibbling on a hamburger. "...and you are? I didn't hear your name before. ...thank you for what you did earlier, it was very brave."

"Me? I'm Cy. Cy Mouri," she introduced herself, smiling slightly. "I did what had to be done."

"We all do." Kun said, running a hand over her shaggy short hair. She'd chopped it off with a pair of dull scissors when she found herself in subarmor in her room above the restaurant.

The sounds of the other two troopers approaching gained their attention. Halo was glancing over her shoulder back the way the pair had come from and sighed when she looked back at them. "It's totally deserted out there – no people at all, only stray animals and a bunch of crows."

"We'll be stuck down here I guess," Rowen sighed.

"This is Sage Date and Rowen Hashiba," Kun introduced the pair to the civilians of the group. The blonde and bluenette studied the woman and boy as Hardrock introduced them. "And this is Mia and Yulie."

"Nice to meet you," Sage murmured to the pair, her arms crossed over her chest; to her dismay – and that of the other two female Troopers – they had found the armor was cut for a man's body and therefore was constricting painfully across the chest.

"Sorry it's like this though," Rowen said with a disgusted shake of his head.

Yulie opened his mouth and was about to speak when the ground rumbled above them; startled by the sudden noise after the eerie silence that had fallen over the empty city, he tilted his head back, looking up at the concrete above them. "---what the hell was that?!"

The group scrambled for the stairs leading above ground. Peering out cautiously, they

could see fighter jets streaking in the sky overhead and the unnatural stillness of the city was broken by a sound...a strange rumbling sound. Kun's eyes widened as she realized what those sounds were when they began to hear artillery fire. "Tanks?!"

"The military's here? That's great -- we won't have to fight the Dynasty alone!" Rowen said, excited by the prospect of fighting side-by-side with the elite men and women of the military as he craned his head to get a better view of the military of his homeland in action. It almost looked like they were targeting that castle, which was a good plan since it seemed to be the heart—

--his optimism vanished when the rockets were sent back against the fighter jets that had launched them. Rowen's eyes widened in horror and beside him he could hear Kun's strangled gasp and felt her grip his bicep when the fighter jets -- frantically trying to escape -- exploded into fireballs. There were no parachutes... No...no survivors. In the distance they could hear the sounds of the tanks being destroyed, metal ripping apart and explosions echoing in the distance, faintly distorted by the many buildings making the exact location unknown to them.

"...no. Oh God no..." Cyé whimpered softly, her face white and worried eyes darting her friends.

Sage's face could have been carved from stone, with the only sign of her distress her fists clenched tightly, while Kun had buried her face in Rowen's subarmored chest, shoulders shaking as she fought back sobs of despair. Above them the unnatural lightning crackled and crashed, buildings toppling in the distance. The sky turned an eerie blood-red momentarily and above them, perched on the concrete alcove that shielded them, Whiteblaze roared his anger at the Dynasty.

"H-how...how could that happen?!" Rowen demanded hoarsely, his arms wrapped protectively around Kun, rubbing her back. "That's the fuckin' United States Military -- the Air Force, the Army! We've got some of the most lethal fire power in the world and it just... It was just...!"

"The weapons of modern man shall be turned against them," Mia seemed to intone, eyes shimmering with tears of sorrow at the lives that had just been taken. "I had thought maybe, but against such a foe, who use such dark magic..."

"Technology is no match for the dark magic of the Dynasty's forces is it?" Yulie asked; his naturally tanned skin was pale and his hands were trembling. Those pilots, those soldiers... Dead, like his parents could be... The hatred he felt for this Arago seemed to burn deep in his gut and grew stronger.

Any further conversation was cut off abruptly when Whiteblaze landed from his perch before them, roaring in warning; his ears were flat against his broad skull, stripped tail lashing. Ryo turned in surprise at the tiger's behavior; something had to be terribly wrong.

"Whiteblaze? Is it them?" He asked; the other Troopers tensed, looking around warily. "Is the Dynasty here?"

The answering roar seemed to confirm this and Ryo turned to Mia and Yulie, pointing back down the stairs to the subway station they'd taken as their temporary shelter. "Get back below, we'll cover you."

Armored boots clanged against the concrete steps, muffling the squeaks of the rubber soles of the civilians' sneakers. They'd just managed to get into the station and had stopped, forming a five point formation automatically around the pair when they heard it – heavy footfalls, armored boots against the broken pavement above them. The sounds seemed to echo about them, almost deafening in the oppressive silence that had fallen since the failed attack by the military.

"...well at least this way," Kun murmured grimly, her eyes darting around as she tried to track the source of the echoing boot-steps, "We don't have to go looking for them."

Yulie swallowed hard, his hands curling into small fists as he felt Mia's fingers digging into his shoulder, keeping him inside the relative safety the rough pentagram made by surrounding Troopers gave them. The footsteps paused and on the street above them, the Warlord smirked; he could feel them, the five children, apparently huddled together given how close their energies were located.

Shuten spun the weighted end of his kusari-gama, the sharp whistling of the chain and spiked weight ringing through the air before he lashed out. The spikes of the weight smashed easily through the pavement of the street, the layers of concrete separating him from his young prey. The edges of the resulting hole crumbled under the force of the blow, forming a jagged opening a couple yards in diameter. There they were! Those samurai children and their civilian charges...

The pair of civilians had stumbled when their formerly safe haven shook and trembled. Yulie had tripped over his own feet and was sprawled on his back with Mia on her side beside him. She peered over her shoulder with wide blue eyes through a veil of auburn hair and falling gravel at the hulking, armored form looking on the lip of the opening above them. He stood, tall and intimidating in his armor, holding onto the chain that was attached to the weighted end embedded in the concrete floor in the center of the protective formation the young Samurai had formed.

"You sonovabitch!" Yulie howled, scrambling to get back on his feet, shaking an indignant fist at their attacker. "Come down here and try that! I'll take corkscrews and gouge your eyes out!"

"Violent little boy, ain't he?" Rowen muttered in surprise, eyeing the defiant civilian preteen, who scowled up at the Warlord. There was something rather familiar about this kid, but now was not the time to think about it in depth.

Shuten's crimson brows arched at the boy's threat and the lack of fear flashing in those hazel eyes; truly a remarkable child. His eyes flickered over to the Scholar and he smirked. Good, she was here as well. He jerked hard on the chain, uprooting the spiked end and sending chunks of debris flying. Gravel and chunks of concrete rained down around his prey and the large piece of pavement attached to the end of his

kusari-gama cut a graceful, deadly arc through the air.

"Yulie!" Mia tackled the preteen out of the way and the chunk of pavement shattered against a concrete support pillar.

"You coward!" Ryo bellowed his outrage, fists clenching as he tensed, preparing to lunge at the Warlord who was spinning the kusari-gama once more. "You want a fight?! Then bring it on!"

"We can't run off and leave Mia and Yulie unprotected," Sage chastised the Wildfire-bearer. "We need some form of a shield or barrier to protect them before we can engage in battle!"

Shuten smirked savagely at the sight of the pair's quarrel; Anubisu was a keen old wolf, perhaps this was more proof that a rift could be made, the children could be manipulated into fighting amongst themselves... He lashed out with the weighted end and the spiked weight tore through the pavement until found a solid anchor. Jerking back sharply with his arm, he cut through the pavement of the street before him. Debris and small chunks of pavement rained down in the subway station below as a thin ravine formed from where the chain had ripped the street apart. The tiger's roaring mingled with the sound of the collapsing of the concrete support pillar as the Warlord yanked the spiked weight free.

Cye stifled a gasp of pain, clutching her ribs as she stumbled, the earth shaking around them. She could hear Mia's muffled cry of surprise, the sound of the debris impacting on the concrete floor. Everything seemed almost hyper-aware for the Torrent-bearer and her head turned when she heard Sage's muttered curse.

"Be careful, dammit! This place is coming down around our ears!" The blonde shouted and turned her head a fraction of an inch towards the pair of civilians. "Mia, you and Yulie are our top priority -- we need to get you two somewhere safe!"

"Right. We need to get them away from here," Ryo agreed. He eyed the delicate Torrent-bearer and saw her discreetly pressing a hand against her ribs. Immediately he knew she wasn't up to another fight so soon, that she needed time to rest and heal her wounds. "Torrent, how well do you know the area?"

"Not as well as Hardrock," she admitted. "Why?"

"We need someplace for Mia and Yulie to go," Ryo said, eyeing the Warlord, who seemed ready to strike with his chains again, to bring the entire subway station down around their ears. "Take Whiteblaze and get them out of here."

Cye was a gentle person, not much of a fighter to be honest, but still it galled her to be ordered to run from battle; she turned to snap at him when pain shot up from her ribs. Immediately she bit her tongue to muffle both her whimper of pain and her insubordinate retort -- he was right to send her away, she'd just be in the way of the more able-bodied. "...alright."

Wildfire looked grateful as he smiled at her --- his tiger-blue eyes were warm, almost tender, and his white teeth flashing against the copper hue of his skin – and she felt a hot blush burn her cheeks and hid it by turned to the civilian pair and the white tiger. “You heard him – I need to get you out of here!”

“But--!” Yulie began to protest the decision, only to be cut off when the tiger suddenly lunged, knocking the preteen and woman out of the way of the spiked weight of the Warlord’s kusari-gama.

“Go, we’ll hold him off,” Rowen murmured to Cye, gently pushing her towards the two civilians and the guardian tiger.

“Be careful,” she murmured, jogging after them; pain lanced up her side, but she forced herself to ignore it. Their safety took precedence over her pain and once they found a safe haven, then she could rest until the others rejoined them.

As Torrent escorted them deeper into the subway station, seeking the rear exit, the four remaining Troopers leapt high to intercept the Warlord, dodging the chain that swung their way.

Ryo snarled at him savagely, “Your fight’s with us!”

Exiting the ragged hole in the street, the four fell into defensive stances around the armored Warlord; he was probably an inch taller than Rowen though the crest on his helm seemed to add to his height. He spun his kusari-gama and chuckled darkly. It was that laugh combined with the weapon and haori that made Ryo’s eyes narrow in sudden recognition.

“You’re Shuten Doji, that Warlord from yesterday!” Wildfire snarled in disdain, his eyes narrow and hands curled into fists. Halo, Hardrock, and Strata surrounded the Warlord, standing in a four point containment formation, each at the ready to attack.

“You think you can stop me, little children? I’ll get to those three as soon as I handle you and given Torrent’s wounded state, well, your little comrade won’t be much a challenge for me.” Shuten said snidely, the sneer on his lips visible through the opening at his faceplate.

His senses were battle-heightened and he reveled in this moment before combat began, that unnatural calm, the sounds of armored boots scraping faintly against pavement as the samurai children shifted their weight mingling with the scent of their sweat and musk. Shuten’s nostrils twitched suddenly in surprise. The Warlord had expected the scent of the teenaged males, but hadn’t been expecting only two of the four to be males! The female musk he could detect told him those ‘pretty boys’ were female and he laughed suddenly in dark amusement, a mad cackle that echoed in the deserted city street. ‘Anubisu, you sly wolf!’ he thought, grinning widely. ‘I always did admire your subtle sense of humor... Very well then, this shall be our little joke on Rajura and Naaza, until Naaza gets close enough to them to scent them...’

The four Samurai Troopers flinched at the sudden laughing of their foe; he was

mental, they decided warily. Wildfire could see Hardrock crouching slightly in preparation, saw the Warlord suddenly lash out with the spiked weight of his weapon. The crimson-and-white armored teen twisted his body to avoid the strike in the same second the Chinese-American girl leapt forward, taking to the air in order to slam a kick at their enemy's helm. The chain of his kusari-gama tangled around her ankle as he blocked the blow and he twisted his torso, pulling her from her path of attack with a sharp yank. Armor grated against armor as his hand suddenly lashed out and gripped the front of her subarmor.

Kun cursed virulently as she was yanked forward, the armored fingers curling harshly over the thin armor over her throat, the backs of his fingers digging against her windpipe, making it difficult to breathe. Behind him she could see Sage attack the Warlord through the veil of her eyelashes with doubled fists to his lower back; he didn't seem effected, shrugging off the blow and lifting the kama of his kusari-gama. Rowen's battle cry echoed the same second his armored heel slammed into the underside of Shuten's forearm, causing the Warlord to release his hold on Hardrock.

She tumbled back away from her opponent the way her grandfather had trained her and saw Rowen somersaulting through the air, twisting his body to land lightly on his feet, The Warlord of Cruelty turned, the blade of his kama coming to point at Halo and Wildfire.

"Shit! Watch it!" Ryo yelled as he and the blonde sprang out of the way in separate directions; there was a starburst of destructive energy, which tore through the pavement as the Wildfire-bearer bounced upwards between a pair of skyscrapers. "Dammit! We need to stop playing around – let's finish this guy!"

Immediately Shuten was in pursuit, even as the raven-haired teen kicked away, using the momentum he'd built up to drop back towards the Warlord; Ryo managed to slam a savage kick across his helm, actually sending Shuten reeling from the force of the blow. Snarling, the Warlord's fist clenched and he retaliated even as they dropped through the air with a savage punch that launched the younger armor-bearer across the street at high speeds. As Shuten landed on his feet on the pavement, he saw Hardrock leaping up and snaring the heel-hooks of Wildfire's subarmor in an attempt to catch him.

Ryo impacted hard against the side of one of the buildings across the street in the same second Rowen and Sage attempted to double team their foe. The teen wheezed to regain his breath and opened his eyes to see Kun and the deep ragged trench she'd made when she'd dug her boot-heels into the pavement in her attempt to slow him down. She jerked him down from the impression in the side of the building, even as Rowen and Sage jumped out of the Warlord's attack range to regroup.

"You alright, Fearless Leader?" Kun asked as he pushed himself to his feet. "'Cause we don't have any time to catch our breath; he's smacking us around like rag dolls!"

"Yeah," Ryo grunted and the pair darted back into the fray.

They had to keep him away from wherever Cyé had taken Mia and Yulie... And to do

that, they needed every advantage available to them...

"Troopers! To Arms!" Ryo called out the command, feeling the roaring power of Wildfire racing through him.

"Now you're talkin' my language, Fearless Leader!" Kun purred savagely, feeling the rush of power in her veins at the command.

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Cye peered out from the shelter of the subway entrance, searching for any sign of Dynasty soldiers; beside her the Tiger rumbled softly, his broad head swinging to and fro before looking up at her and it seemed to her the Guardian tiger was giving her the all-clear. Turning, she beckoned to them and the pair scrambled out of the dubious safety of the subway.

"Why did it seem like he was aiming for me?" Mia murmured in confusion; she kept a tight hold on Yulie's wrist to keep the preteen from charging back after the four other Troopers and the Warlord they fought.

"He was," Cye answered, her voice softly pitched as they headed down the street. They could hear the sounds of battle echoing about them and their eyes lifted as supernatural lightning flared and the ground trembled. "It could have been a way to provoke us into battle, to get us so angry we charged in recklessly..."

Lightning flared again, an unholy crimson that was far from natural; worried, Cye looked up and could faintly see the outline of the Warlord mid-air. Her heart felt like it was in her throat as the unnatural lightning seemed to strike down at his command, the demonic command of the Warlord echoing...

"QUAKE WITH FEAR!"

"Oh no! The others!" Cye cried out in concern, her naturally pale peaches-and-cream complexion going white.

The ground trembled under their feet and those streets over where the battle was taking place, they could see beams of that same energy the Warlord had summoned, had thrown, slamming into the sides of buildings. Whiteblaze roared in rage, tensing until Cye placed her hand on his powerful back.

"Whiteblaze, stay with them, please -- I need to help the others," Torrent murmured grimly.

"But, Cye, your side!" Mia pleaded with the younger teen, stepping forward and reaching out to grab her arm; the Torrent-bearer stepped out of her reach, the younger woman's eyes sad but determined. "Your ribs are very likely broken, one

wrong move, you could puncture any of your vital organs!"

"I'm a Samurai Trooper, Mia. I have my duty and honor compels me to fight by the side of the others even if it means my death," the female Trooper replied softly, the determination on her face making her look older, more like an adult than the teenager she was.

"You won't die, you'll beat that Warlord jerk," Yulie said, confident in the older teen. "You'll beat him and the Dynasty!"

"...not just me, all five of us will." Cyé reassure him. "Stay with Whiteblaze; he'll protect you."

And with that, the Torrent-bearer raced off, adrenaline and the almost siren's call of her armor washing away her pain, giving speed to her steps as she raced away from the pair of non-combatants, not knowing they had a second protector who stood on the rooftop of a parking deck, the metal rings of his staff ringing softly in the breeze.

"I will protect them as well, young Torrent," the monk murmured, a smile of pride on his lips. "Now go, fight by your brothers and sisters."

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Location: Warlords' Tower, Arago's Castle, Dynasty, Youjakai

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

"Well, he has them separated, but they seem to be most determined," Rajura noted, sipping his sake. They had summoned a smaller version of the Mirror in the common room of the Warlords' tower, observing the battle -- Shuten was doing well, as expected, but his overconfidence had both Rajura and Anubisu concealing cringes. They sat around a table, a bottle of sake between them, with the Spider Warlord sitting farthest back and leaning against a pile of pillows.

"I told you they wouldn't beat him," Naaza murmured smugly, refilling his own saucer.

"I thought I taught you better than that, Naaza. Don't try to collect your kill before the hunt is even finished," Anubisu reminded him, his wolf-green eyes sliding over to give the younger Warlord a disapproving look. "Torrent's still out there and with that display, bound to come running to the rescue."

"On those ribs? I doubt it – its obvious why he was sent away, because he'd just get in the way with his injury, just as those civilians would get in the way of the fighting," the Snake Warlord disagreed, turning to frown at the second oldest of the Warlords. The man had practically raised both Shuten and himself, and later on Kayura when the infant had been presented to the only one Arago could trust who actually had known

how to handle a child so young. "He's probably curled up with the woman and the brat licking his wounds--"

"Oh? Then what do you call that?" the white-haired Warlord snorted in amusement, leaning over Naaza's shoulder to point to the Mirror.

Startled, the younger Warlord turned, and his mouth dropped open at the sight of Torrent running full tilt in subarmor towards the battle. The young man's hair was loose and was flying out behind him in a cascade of chestnut curls and that too-pretty face of his was set in a frown of determination as he suddenly attacked Shuten, seeming to ignore any pain caused by his ribs. Naaza blinked in shock, both at the young Samurai's boldness and at unexpected surge in his chest – was that pride? No, not pride in his young enemy's determination, it was too dark for that emotion. It almost felt like he was jealous.

Jealous? But why was he jealous? He certainly wasn't jealous of Torrent, not when the boy now had Shuten's undivided attention, but it was almost as though he was jealous of Shuten for being the object of Torrent's attention. ...but why? He didn't like other males, unlike Shuten who bedded either gender...

Naaza took a shot of sake before answering Rajura. "I call that being an idiot."

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

Shuten had to admit, he'd not been expected for Torrent to try and tackle him, hadn't been expecting her at all. The shift in wind had been his only warning, carrying the sounds of armored boots against the broken pavement; he turned the same second the Torrent-bearer had lunged -- he snagged the petite warrior and the scent of water lilies, combined with a unique feminine musk and the familiar copper of blood washed over him. The feline Warlord's nostrils flared behind his helm, his eyes partially closing, reveling in the scent even as he snagged her arm and slammed her into the side of the building of the ledge he stood on. The pavement cracked outwards from the impression of her body and the sound she made – a soft, breathless whimper of pain – was just delicious.

Even through the armor on his hand and her subarmor, he could feel the lean muscle of her bicep and his hand tightened, squeezing. Torrent took a deep gasping breath, exhaling on a cry of pain, pain from the painful jarring of being slammed into the wall, the shooting pain up from her ribs. The Warlord found himself distracted by the new arrival, the sounds she could make when in pain, the way her pretty face twisted in a grimace of agony behind a veil of chestnut curls, the cat playing with his prey that he almost forgot where he was and leaned back to dodge the golden arrow that

slammed into the concrete side of the building right where his eye had been.

"Get your filthy hands off of Cyé!" Strata screamed in outrage, his eyes practically glowing in his anger of the youngest of his girls being manhandled by that damn demon!

Torrent took advantage that his grip on her arm had loosened, jerking away and leaping down to join her fellow Troopers. The pain she'd been able to ignore was back and she coughed while backing up, a sharp pain shooting up from her abused ribs; she felt wetness on her lips even as the other four Troopers took stances before her, keeping her far from the Warlord. She felt a vague annoyance mixed with appreciation – annoyance they felt she had to be protected and appreciation they cared enough to want to protect her.

The Warlord's eyes seemed to brighten as they locked on the bright red blood on Torrent's full pink lips and he smirked evilly. Immediately he sprang forward, moving swiftly, bouncing forward to meet the Samurai Troopers in a clash of weapons and armor. With a graceful twist of his body and a vicious kick, he sent Hardrock reeling. Ducking beneath Strata's spinning kick, he sent the boy flying the same second he blocked Halo's Nodachi with the curved blade of his kusari-gama's kama. Cyé's eyes widened as he seemed to bat them out of his way; they were in full armor and he was just--!

She barely had time to bring her arms up to block the chains; the metal links wrapped around her forearms, yanking them together sharply. With a turn of his wrist he had her stumbling forward within his range. Strong armored fingers were suddenly digging into her cheeks, forcing her jaw open, her lips to part. A startled shriek of outrage was abruptly silenced when she felt the Warlord's mouth slant over her own, felt a raspy, almost cat-like tongue suddenly intruding, licking the inside of her mouth, then her lips. Was it her imagination or was he purring?

"Such sweet, delicious blood," Shuten purred against her lips. "Pure and innocent... Are you a virgin, my pretty little water-warrior?"

A sharp twang reverberated in the air and a golden arrow sudden protruded from the back of Shuten's shoulder guard. Strata stood defiant behind him, feet firmly planted, bow at the ready, reaching for another arrow. "I told you before – keep your filthy hands off of Cyé!"

Snarling, Shuten began to turn, keeping a tight hold on his captive; oh he'd keep this one, listen to her cries of pain and pleasure--the bitch kicked him in the crotch! Cyé had taken the advantage given, jerking backwards and lashing out in as hard a kick as she could managed. It probably didn't hurt him, she knew given the fact he had a greater deal more armor than she did, but it was enough a distraction for her to free her hands from the chain--

--and for Kun's shoulder to slam into the Warlord's side; he was lifted up off his feet in the football-styled tackle before Hardrock body-slammed Shuten into the pavement. Cracks radiated outwards from the broken indent left behind from the rage-fueled

attack.

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Location: Warlords' Tower, Arago's Castle, Dynasty, Youjakai

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

"He didn't!" Naaza stared at the Mirror, his jaw dropped and serpentine black eyes wide in his disbelief. "Pouncing on the enemy mid-battle?!"

"He did," Rajura groaned, shaking his head as he refilled his sake saucer, "You know how he gets when he sees blood, especially on such a pretty boy as Torrent is."

Anubisu snorted, biting back a chortle of laughter, "The look on his face when Torrent kicked him--"

The green-haired Warlord blinked before smirking, a snicker of amusement escaping him at the outraged look in Shuten's feline green eyes. "He left himself wide open for that!"

"Such a sneaky tactic from that brat, it certainly was clever," agreed the one-eyed Warlord before looking thoughtful. "He doesn't seem as much combat-oriented as the other four..."

In the Mirror, Shuten had cuffed Hardrock in the head to knock the furious Samurai Trooper off of him and returned to his feet. Reaching back over his shoulder, the youngest of the Warlords fumbled for a moment awkwardly to pull the golden arrow from his shoulder-guard, finding it at an odd angle – the Archer had been kneeling when he'd loosed the bolt, causing it to go into the shoulder guard at an inverted almost forty-five degree angle. It came free and he snapped it easily, even as he was surrounded by the five. Torrent was once more kept to the rear of the formation.

"Torrent could be the strategist or even the medic of the group," Anubisu murmured, picking up on Rajura's train of thought. "As one of those or even both..."

"It'd make sense to protect him and keep him from possibly getting severely hurt, which would cripple their team," Naaza concluded, picking up on the train of thought, a vicious smile crossing his lips. "Torrent is Trust, isn't he? And a fighting unit without Trust will soon crumble in on itself..."

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

Rage thrummed through his veins, hot, like molten lava, seeming to be in synch with each beat of his heart. Ryo kept himself firmly between Shuten and Cyé, not wanting the Warlord to touch her again; she'd summoned her full armor and he could hear the rattle of her maga-yari, the hinged blades opening in preparation for combat. The Trooper and the Warlord sprang forward at one another seemingly in unison and their weapons clashed in a spray of sparks. Shuten laughed even as he leapt up, bouncing between two closely placed skyscrapers. Cursing, nearly blinded in his outrage, the Wildfire-bearer immediately gave chase.

"Come back here, you sonovabitch!" Ryo's howl echoed through the empty streets as they rose higher and higher; the supernatural lightning flashed in the distance, striking down from the unnatural clouds and striking in the distant parts of the abandoned city.

"So you wish to be the first to die?" The Warlord mocked, rebounding off the side of one of the skyscrapers. Shuten seemed to soar, the spiked weight of his kusari-gama spinning and Ryo's eyes widened, the sense of déjà vu overwhelming him as that crimson lightning flashed. That chain attack again--! Biting back a curse, he clicked the hilts of his paired katana together and focused; everything seemed to slow down as he felt that familiar, welcoming roar of flame rushing through his veins, even as the Warlord began to lash out--

"QUAKE WITH FEAR!"

The spiked weight impacted square in the center of his breastplate and it hurt, his sight immediately overwhelmed with brilliant crimson light as the dark energy ripped through him; an involuntary howl of pain escaped him, his form enveloped in a cornea of blood-hued energy. His eyes opened, staring unseeing where Shuten had landed on the top of one of the shorter buildings, and he gritted his teeth, bringing up his joined swords as white energy enveloped him. The raging fire in his veins washed away his pain as he swung the joined blades, launching his sure-kill.

"FLARE UP – NOW!"

To those below the brilliant white of Wildfire's attack was blinding as it eclipsed the virulent crimson of the Warlord's own, shooting down the chain. The white-hot beam of fire sliced across the Warlord's chest before hilts unclasped the same second the chains formed. They raked over Wildfire's armor, pulling at him, jerking on his limbs until he dropped one of his paired katana.

"D-dammit!" Ryo snarled between pain-clenched teeth, futilely reaching out for the falling weapon; it tumbled hilt over tip to embed tip first into the pavement of the street below.

The chains holding him up broke and he tumbled through the air; he regained control

of his fall and bounced off the side of a building at a steep angle and leapt onto the same rooftop as the Warlord. The landing sent a fresh jolt of pain up his legs and one knee gave out, forcing him to kneel as he gasped for breath. The broken chains that encircled him fell away as he pushed himself to his feet, clutching his remaining katana. Behind him stood the Warlord of Cruelty, who faced away from him; Shuten took a careful breath, carefully probing the vicious slash over his breastplate and his haori.

"You'll suffer for that," Shuten promised, his pride smarting; how could he let the brat get that hit in?! Anubisu was going to increase the daily training exercises, he just knew it.

The Wildfire armor felt heavy as Ryo turned to face the Warlord. There was rage in Shuten's eyes as they faced one another and the Samurai Trooper let out a soft sigh of relief when Hardrock and Torrent landed on either side of him, their respective pole-arms held in ready stances. Behind Shuten was Halo with her sword in an aggressive stance and perched on the roof's ledge beside her, a golden arrow notched and ready was Strata. The Samurai Troopers stood at the ready to defend their leader.

"Ryo, are you alright?" Rowen called out, his keen eyes never leaving the Warlord in his sights.

"He doesn't look so good," Kun murmured to Cye as they slid closer to one another; Wildfire visibly swayed on his feet.

"...nnnn..." Ryo groaned softly, his tongue seeming to deny him the ability to form coherent words as he turned towards Torrent. His knees gave out on him and the blue-eyed Trooper suddenly collapsed, landing heavily on his side.

"Ryo!" Cye gasped, going to kneel by his side and she could hear Kun stepping before them protectively, the rattle of her armor and naginata.

Rowen gritted his teeth, knew Cye was going to the Wildfire-bearer's side, which was probably the best – she'd be acting as the medic for their team, given how many times she had to patch up Sage, Kun, and himself in the past. "You sonovabitch, you think we're gonna let you get away with this?!"

"Prepare for a beating you'll never forget," Sage promised grimly, shifting her grip on her Nodachi in preparation to strike.

"You foolish children -- your courage is impressive, but you lack the skill and sheer strength to back up that boast!" The Warlord dismissed them as a serious threat, beginning to swing the spiked weight over his head; the lightning crashed around them and thunder rumbled ominously over head...

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Location: Arago's Castle, Dynasty, Youjakai
Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon
Invasion: Day Two

Arago stared at the Mirror intently, studying the four remaining Samurai Troopers; their armor gleamed, pulsing with power, their resolve unwavering even with their leader unconscious and one of their number wounded. "The circle of power remains unbroken, even with only three truly able to fight, their power spread evenly among them. This will not do, no...not at all."

Unnatural wind began to stir, whipping about the spectral helm, stirring his white hair, his voice echoing as the wind began to churn the air outside the castle. "I will not allow them to have the chance to make use of this power against me!"

Dark energy crackled among the lightning forming a cyclone that was an unforgiving black against the overcast sky...

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA
Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon
Invasion: Day Two

She could feel it, a sense of impending danger, darkness. Sage's head snapped around, staring at the castle in the sky and the sudden gust of wind almost sent her staggering. From the corner of her eye, she could see Rowen's helm turned toward the castle, could hear Kun's confused murmur, "What the hell--?"

From where she knelt by their fallen leader, Cyé shuddered, a chill of unease going down her spine as she pulled the older teen close, slipping her arms around his waist; pain shot up from her ribs at the strain. "Ryo... Ryo! You need to wake up! Please! Ryo!"

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On the streets below, Mia lifted a hand to hold back her hair as the wind howled, whipping around the two humans and Guardian tiger angrily. She tried to peer through the sudden whirlwind of dust that had been stirred up, reaching out to pull Yulie closer to her and Whiteblaze. "What? This wind! This must be the Dynasty's doing!"

"Mia! That's bad news for the guys!" Yulie exclaimed, pointing to the overcast sky; his

loose braid of hair lashed about him in the wind, but he ignored it, his eyes intent on the dark cyclone of energy he was frantically pointing towards.

It descended onto the rooftop the Samurai Troopers stood on as they faced their enemy, tearing into the structure even as it sucked the five warriors up. They were thrown around like rag dolls, battering their bodies as they were taken further up the narrow body of the cyclone. The wide top of the cyclone seemed the source for the dark lightning that struck down onto the abandoned city, toppling skyscrapers and ripping deep gouges into the streets.

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Location: Arago's Castle, Dynasty, Youjakai
Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon
Invasion: Day Two

"Samurai Troopers, this will be the last time you shall stand together against me," Arago promised, staring at the five pulsing orbs of energy that represented the five defiant teenagers within the cyclone. "I will bring you into my Dynasty and force you to submit to your fate."

The Demon Emperor watched as the cyclone pulse, preparing to bring them to him when an orb of golden light slammed into the cyclone; the orb appeared to be absorbed a split second before light exploded outwards as Arago howled his displeasure, destroying the cyclone and sending the five energy orbs representing the Samurai Troopers scattering in separate directions, streaking like comets against the overcast sky...

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA
Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon
Invasion: Day Two

"No," Mia whispered, shaking her head, her blue eyes wide in shock as the five orbs scattered to the wind. "How could this be?"

"Shit!" Yulie snarled, biting down on his lower lip; his slender hands clenched into small fists as he howled. "You bastards! Bring them back!"

The preteen's demand echoed with Whiteblaze's roar; on the rooftop of the skyscraper above them, leaning heavily against the roof access, the monk panted for breath. His hand clutched at the material covering his heart before he swallowed and

rasped out softly, "Be careful, Samurai Troopers... I have done what I could to keep you out of Arago's hands for now; the rest, I'm afraid is up to you. I'll do what I can for the Innocents, but I fear old age is catching up with me..."

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The wind had died away, but they were still chilled to the bone; Mia kept hold of Yulie's wrist as they walked through the deserted streets, searching for a safe haven in the midst of the rapidly decaying city. The preteen looked around warily, scanning the gloom, the dark alleyways. What if that Warlord was still around and what if there were more of those Dynasty Soldiers? Without the Troopers to protect them, the only one they had to rely on was the Guardian Tiger...

Her jaw clenched as she surveyed the ruined city; Hell's Cove looked like something from a post-apocalyptic horror movie and she knew that if Arago wasn't stopped now the rest of the world would end up looking like her hometown. They had to find shelter, someplace the enemy couldn't find them until they could figure out a way to find the Samurai Troopers; but where? And they'd need to get some form of bedding. Thoughtful blue eyes slid over to study the store fronts and Mia repressed a sigh as she concluded they'd have to salvage something from one of the stores.

"We need to get some blankets, find a shelter and in the morning, we're going to start searching for the Troopers. They rescued us and now we need to repay that debt," she murmured softly.

"That store," Yulie pointed to a storefront with a now crooked sign with the silhouette of a man in a kayak. "It has camping supplies; Dad took me here for ours last year."

She nodded in understanding, "Let's check and see if there's anything we can use in there then."

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Location: Warlords' Tower, Arago's Castle, Dynasty, Youjakai

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

"...he's strutting again," Naaza noted with an annoyed sigh as he leaned forward, elbows resting on the table; his tapered forefinger idly circled the rim of his empty sake saucer. "Like he did it all himself, as if Arago-sama didn't have to intervene."

"...tch," Anubisu shifted on his cushion, leaning forward to refill their saucers. "The

boy will have to be reminded of that fact then.”

“Aaah.” Rajura made a sound of agreement, long pale fingers picking up the freshly refilled saucer. “Better us to remind him then him getting overconfident in battle and blinding himself to danger because of it.”

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Location: ?

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

Warm...

So very warm...

Felt so very nice and he hurt and was so tired... Ryo buried his face into the soothing warmth, feeling it slid and move over his armor, pulling him deeper into the embrace of the warmth. He sighed softly, letting himself drift deeper into slumber.

A few more moments of rest wouldn't hurt, would it...?

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Location: ?

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

Sage didn't know what had happened after being sucked up into the cyclone, her sharp mind dulling as soothing energy had crackled over her armor when the world stopping spinning so fast; her thrashing slowed, halted and she stilled, giving into the call for slumber. Her eyes closed and breathing evened out as she slumped over.

She could figure it out when morning came...

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Location: ?

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

The call of the ocean soothed her battered body and Cye murmured in sleepy contentment as the sea swirled over her armor and schools of fish drifted by her. Sea-green eyes closed as a healing sleep beckoned her and one by one, her muscles relaxed. She was so tired and hurting so much...

Perhaps a nap was a good idea...

Perhaps she'd feel better when she woke again...

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Location: ?

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

The need to rest warred with her need to find Shuten and smash him to pieces; to her dismay, Kun found that her limbs were becoming sluggish to respond. She had to get up, had to fight! Her friends needed her! The darkness encroached on her vision, overwhelming her despite her attempts to remain awake.

Rest, the earth bade her, rest for now, gather your strength.

With that ancient reasoning, she finally surrendered to slumber...

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Location: ?

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

Floating, high and away, as light as air... The stars glittered light diamonds and Rowen smiled sleepily, burrowing into the comfort of the sky as his eyes closed. Sleep, the stars sang soothingly, sleep, star-child, and we shall watch over you.

Trusting the song of the stars, he relaxed.

He'd wake when he had to, when they needed him...

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Location: Hell's Cover, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

He watched and waited, the tip of his tail twitching as his powerful muscles remained tense under his dual-toned fur. The woman and boy were asleep now and the tiger surveyed the abandoned bus station they had taken refuge in; it wasn't a large building, mostly concrete and glass and through the windows, he saw the shifting of their foes in the darkness of the night. So the Dynasty was looking for them, as to be expected.

The tiger shifted his weight, looking down at the preteen curled up beside him. How odd this child, he smelled of Spring and like a cat to Whiteblaze. Spring the season long associated with the Warlord of Cruelty and the nine armors were connected to not just the five elements and the four seasons, but to certain animals as well – Corruption the Wolf, Venom the Serpent, Illusion the Spider, and Cruelty the Cat. His head turned to study the woman, the Scholar who knew to rally the Troopers together. From the conversations he had overheard, she was the granddaughter of another Scholar who had known the legends of the Troopers, of the Dynasty.

His head lifted and he studied the Ancient, who leaned just out of the line of human sight and the man's head lifted. Even though Whiteblaze could not see the man's eyes, he knew their gazes met. The Guardian Beast nodded once, letting the Ancient know he'd start his search for Ryo in the morning.

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Kaosu, last of the Ancient's Clan smiled slightly; if he should fall, at least Whiteblaze would be there. The inevitability of his demise made the Monk look over at the pair of civilians. Wildfire had been right, there was a reason they hadn't been taken with the others. Within the boy he felt the echo of Cruelty, meaning this was a potential armor-bearer while the girl, her knowledge, incomplete as it was, would be invaluable to the Troopers. He'd fill in whatever gaps she had, pass on what he knew before he died...

Kapitel 3: Chapter Three: Under the Sea of Fire

THE AMERICAN SAMURAI TROOPERS

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DISCLAIMER: I do not own YST/Ronin Warriors, only this story and the alterations I have made to the characters, histories, ect. No profit is being made from this; this is being written solely for the enjoyment of myself and others whom like to indulge in the scenario of 'what if?'.
AUTHOR' NOTES: One of my infamous 'What If?' fanfics, where I take some of my ideas, the plot of an anime and throw them in the blender set on puree just to see what happens.

Abandon hope all ye who enter here... For here be gender-bending, cross-dressing, and teenagers being teenagers! And 500+ year old Dark Warlords being perverted old men! And a pretty-boy gay teenaged Yulie too, later on! I've taken elements from the original version and the Americanized version to so there will be the original names for the warlords and the Americanized names for the Troopers in the same story. General insanity shall abound as I unleash this twisted creation upon the world...

"Some believe it is the ability to speak that separates us from the animals..."
'I think, there for I am...'
:Our minds are as one...:
SUMMARY: A 'What if' fic. What if the story of the Samurai Troopers took place in modern times, in the USA? What if three out of five Samurai Troopers were female? Pity Ryo, Rowen, and the Warlords, because dealing with three powerful females with PMS and often violent mood-swings won't be pretty...
CHAPTER SUMMARY: With the dormant volcano Mt Helios showing signs of unexpected activity, Mia and Yulie head there with hopes of finding Ryo of the Wildfire. They find him and Shuten Doji as well...but it won't be as easy to find the other four Troopers...
RATING: R
WARNINGS: Violence, swearing, and sexual innuendo and situations...and my depraved sense of humor XD
GENRE: Action & Adventure/Drama/Supernatural/Humor
ARCHIVE: FanFiction(dot)Net, FicWad(dot)Com, Zpan Sven's Works, others please ask
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CHAPTER THREE: UNDER THE SEA OF FIRE

Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 27, 2007, mid-morning

Invasion: Day Three

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Within the dubious safety of the bus station, the Guardian Beast lifted his head to regard the Ancient. Many hours had passed since the five Samurai Troopers had been scattered in an attempt to keep them out of Arago's clutches and now they would have to journey to find the young Samurai. Kaosu placed his hand reassuringly on the broad head of the tiger and smiled faintly.

"It's time my friend. I'll watch over them while you begin the search," the old monk's voice was soft and whispery, strained from age and failing health.

Whiteblaze rose to his feet silently before looking down at the sleeping pair. The preteen shifted in his sleeping bag, salvaged from the store he'd led Mia to. To the tiger, the boy was a cub, a cub that smelled of the Spring with loyalty forever branded in his heart and soul. Wise brown eyes lifted inquiringly to the Ancient, who nodded once.

"I feel it to, the call to that armor within him. And if we can, then they shall be able to as well..." he sighed softly. "They will not get him, just as we shall not allow them to get the Troopers."

Seemingly satisfied with this answer, the Tiger turned and exited the bus station, leaving the two mortals within under the Ancient's care. The Monk sighed, sitting down on one of the hard plastic benches in the shadows to wait.

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The scent of blood and magic hadn't faded since the battle; to the tiger, it remained as pungent as if it had just happened. Around him, the city continued to decay, an entrance to the subway crumbling in on itself. Not good, not good at all, Whiteblaze knew, his head lowering as he scented the ground. He could smell it, a trace of the armor of Wildfire. Tail swishing to and fro, the Guardian Beast continued his search, his large paws moving silently over the cracked, broken pavement. After a few moments of tracking the magic-scent of Wildfire, he found it at last...

...one of the paired katana belonging to the Wildfire armor, embedded point first into the pavement. It gleamed, shimmering like a heatwave and the tiger nosed the hilt, and nostrils flaring as he inhaled the scent of his cub Ryo. He snorted, turning his head away and surveying the surrounding city; it was crumbling, decaying as though abandoned centuries ago instead of only two days ago. The cubs were missing and he had to find them, and to do that he'd need the help of the female and that younger cub. So be it, it's not like he had any other choice.

Neck arching as his head turned, opening his jaws, Whiteblaze carefully gripped the hilt of the katana in his mouth and after a few tugs, had it free from the pavement. Working his jaw to settle it comfortably, the tiger scanned his surroundings warily and saw darting shadows here and there. The Dynasty's Soldiers were becoming more active, meaning they were searching for the tiger and his wards. Not good, he had to move and move fast...

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Shifting in the salvaged sleeping bag, Mia rolled onto her back and wearily opened her eyes to stare at the ceiling of the bus station. So...it hadn't been a dream then, the world really was ending and unless she helped find the five teens that could halt the Invasion then all hope was lost. Her body protested having slept on the hard bench for

several hours as she forced herself to sit up, unzipping the sleeping bag. Swinging her legs out of the sleeping bag, she paused after slipping her feet back into her shoes; her mind, still whirling to process the events of the previous days has caught on the fact that it was the third day of the invasion and that lead her thoughts to the date.

Tomorrow was her nineteenth birthday and here she sat in the middle of the end of the world...

Mia bit back a groan and shook her head. No, now was not the time for feeling sorry for herself because if she even wanted to celebrate any more birthdays, if anyone else wanted to celebrate another birthday, then Arago had to be stopped. Bringing her hands up, she raked back the strands that had escaped the braid she'd pulled her hair back in before lying down and wondered if there was any running water. The sound of Yulie shifting on the next bench had her lifting her head and she smiled sadly at the sight of the pre-teen. The poor boy, first losing his parents in the Invasion, then witnessing the Earth's only true defense get scattered to the winds...

Sluggishly he awakened and Yulie stared at her blankly before blinking the sleep from his eyes as he pushing himself up. He sat for a moment, mentally reviewing the events of the past two days before interlocking his fingers and lifting his hands over his head. His back arched as his arms stretched and there was a pleasant popping of vertebrae realigning before he unlaced his fingers and dropped his hands down. Unzipping his sleeping bag, he looked over at her.

"Have you seen Whiteblaze? He was sleeping between us when I finally fell asleep..." Yulie murmured, rubbing at the lingering stiffness in his shoulder.

Startled, she looked down at the spot on the floor between them; the blankets they had spread out for the tiger was rumpled where he had slept. Confused, she stood and heard Yulie tossing back his open sleeping bag, his feet slipping into his sneakers as he rose to his feet. "I don't know. Perhaps he needed to use the bathroom or he's prowling around..."

"I sent him to begin searching for Ryo of the Wildfire, actually," an older man's voice, soft and whispery, informed them.

Surprised, both turned to face the old monk who stood at the large window looking onto the street. He was tall and slender, his shoulders broad and square despite the age his long white hair suggested. The man wore not the garb of a Christian monk as they might have expected given the predominately Judah-Christian culture of the region, but rather what Mia recognized as a Japanese Buddhist monk, complete with the traditional conical straw hat, an amigasa. The blue of the monk's over-kimono appeared almost black in the dimly light morning.

"W-who the hell are you?!" Yulie was the first one of the pair to regain his voice and he took a step forward, bristling indignantly.

"I am Kaosu, young Yulie," he introduced himself, turning to face them; the amigasa hung at an angle that hid his eyes away in shadows.

"Kaosu?" Mia murmured; her eyes lingered on the staff he held, its very top was even to his shoulder and the numerous rings chimed softly. That staff, it looked like... "Are you the Ancient?"

"The who?" Yulie asked skeptically, eyeing the old monk, who tilted his head, bowing faintly to the auburn-haired young woman.

"I am he, Mia the Scholar. Your grandfather has taught you well," he complimented her; surprised by his praise, the young woman blushed faintly. "Whiteblaze, is as you have obviously noticed, no mere tiger. He is the Guardian Beast of the Samurai Troopers and if anyone can help start the journey to find them it is he."

"Then Ryo and the others are alright?" Yulie asked, brightening in relief that the five teens weren't possibly killed by that black tornado of energy.

"Yes, right now they are just resting, regaining their strength. If I had not intervened when I did, they'd be in Arago's hands now," the Ancient informed them as the pair started to gather the supplies they had salvaged. "Whiteblaze shall return shortly, and then we can depart to retrieve Ryo of the Wildfire."

As though summoned by the monk's words, Whiteblaze pushed the door open and entered the bus station with his discovery; the katana blade gleamed with energy, shimmering unnaturally. The monk regarded the recovered sword with interest, holding out a hand. The katana was handed over to the man who had forged it, its twin, and the armor the blades went with. Turning it, studying it, he made a thoughtful hum in his throat at the way the energy that lingered on the mystical weapon pinged with his, telling him all he needed to know about young Wildfire's present location.

So the armors had returned to where he had forged them. It was the most logical thing for the nearly-sentient armors to do really, retreat to the place of forging, to gain the strength the bearers' need to properly wield them. He turned to the Scholar and boy to see they had shouldered the packs with their sleeping bags and supplies.

"We will need to move swiftly from here on out – the Dynasty is searching for us," the Ancient advised as he handed the katana over to Mia. "Perhaps if we can rig a sheath, it'll be easier to carry..."

A few moments later and the tiger was peering cautiously out the door; finding it clear Whiteblaze looked back to the Ancient and nodded once before stepping out of the bus station. The trio of humans followed the Guardian Beast, the recovered Wildfire katana secured with canvas and rope in a hastily made sheath on Yulie's back, and together they walked further into the city...

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Location: Mt Helios, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 27, 2007, mid-morning

Invasion: Day Three

The long dormant volcano seemed to be waking from its long slumber, with a thick black plume of smoke that lazily drifted up from the crater. The interior was awash in a brilliant orange glow, with waterfalls of magma cascading to gather in the crater, forming a massive pool of molten rock. Floating face down in the magma was Ryo of the Wildfire, his armor a few shades darker than the magma itself. The molten liquid bubbled slowly before it began to ripple as he stirred to consciousness.

'Righteousness...'

Groaning behind his faceplate, he shifted, his hands dragging over the stone at the bottom of the pool of magma; bracing himself he pushed himself up on shaking arms. His voice was raspy, strained as he croaked out in confusion. "...what?"

Lifting his head, his blurry vision took in the glow; as his vision cleared, he frowned in surprise, studying the orange glow that illuminated the crater. The last thing he remembered clearly was the fight against Shuten Doji and that twister that came out of no where, which had to be Arago's doing. "...a volcano?! You've got to be kidding me!"

He stumbled even as he pushed himself up to his feet, the soft rattle of his armor mingling with the cascades of magma splashing around him; looking down he found himself unharmed by the magma that dripped from his armor – this must be the armor's work, then, protecting him from the intense heat. Standing fully, he looked up at the lip of the crater, far over head. An aggravated sigh escaped him. "Great...stuck down here when I need to be up there. Well, time's wasting -- I need to get back to the others..."

If it hadn't been for the training of his grandmother, the fact he had to climb so far up might have been disheartening. But as it was? He made a promise to buy his Granny something extra nice when this was all over, because without her training he'd have been dead in the first actual battle with that Dynasty Soldier. His armored fingers dug into the side of the rock, finding purchase even as he carefully tapped the rock with the tips of his armored boots to form foot-holds.

A third of the way up, he paused, resting his helm against the rocky wall as he took a calming steadying breath before looking back over his shoulder. Immediately he averted his eyes, focusing on the lip of the crater. That...was a long way down...

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Location: Arago's Castle, Dynasty, Youjakai

Date & Time: May 27, 2007, mid-morning

Invasion: Day Three

The throne room was empty and dark save for the light of Cruelty's candle and the Viewing Mirror. Shuten's chortle echoed in the empty chamber as he observed the demolished building the previous day's battle had taken place on. Ohhh victory, how

sweet it was... Those little armor-wearing brats never stood a chance against the might of the Dynasty!

"I would not be so quick to laugh quite yet, Shuten," the familiar voice of Anubisu chastised him.

The red-head spun gracefully on his heel and he frowned sullenly at the older Warlord, who appeared even as his candle lit. Illusions' candle flickered to life and the eldest Warlord stood there as well, a hand on one hip. Of course, the old men had to make their opinions known, he concluded grumpily even as he questioned them. "And why not?"

"Because you did not see them die. You have no way to verify your kills," the Wolven Warlord reminded him sharply, a hint of disapproval in that guttural voice of his.

The wolf-green eyes gleamed in the dimly lit throne room as they studied the younger Warlord. For a moment Shuten felt like he'd just gotten Cruelty again and was just a young man standing before them instead of the centuries old Warlord he was.

"For all you are aware they survived and are recovering," Rajura added as Venom's candle began to burn; the second youngest Warlord stood farther back, his arms crossed over his chest.

"They were most certainly killed – destroyed so utterly there was nothing left of them," Shuten insisted.

"If that is the case, then it would be due to the fact Arago-sama interceded on your behalf," Anubisu stated logically.

"For children they fought a remarkable battle," Rajura grudgingly admitted. "They fought back with everything they had, even when the odds looked hopeless."

"You certainly did well," Naaza commended before arching a brow. "But they got to you too. That Torrent, with his injuries – you were obviously not expecting him to rejoin the battle like he did. And as for Wildfire...well, that was quite impressive, sending his surekill down your own chains at you."

"They were stronger than you believed them to be," Anubisu added, crossing his arms over his chest. "They might have been young and lacked the experience you did, but there was no reason to dismiss them as you did before."

"Hmph. They didn't stand a chance, even with those armors. They went in a Trooper short to begin with!" Shuten proclaimed, gesturing to the Mirror and the devastated city it showed. "They were weak."

"You are certain?" Rajura queried, arching a brow questioningly as he turned to look over the Mirror. "While the devastation unleashed is impressive, their armors are much like our own."

"We saw the entire battle, Shuten. It almost seems that they taught you a lesson or two," Naaza agreed, his lips quirking faintly in sardonic amusement.

"Lessons I already thought you knew," Anubisu chided him reproachfully, frowning his disapproval.

Immediately they could feel it, the Emperor's presence even as his voice echoed, the spectral helm appearing at the dais, "This is not the time for idle chatter, my Warlords."

"Arago-sama!" Shuten spun to face the demon Emperor and all four Warlords immediately bowed to their Master in greeting, their armored fists slamming over their chests in reflexive salute.

"The Samurai Troopers have been defeated, by the dark power of the Dynasty," Arago reminded them bluntly.

"Hai, Arago-sama," Shuten murmured in agreement. "It was a glorious display of your strength, one that they would never recover from had they survived it--"

"Now is not the time for you to be so optimistic," Arago informed him. "While my power was overwhelming, their armors and an outside force protected them from destruction. They could eventually return to resume their battle against my Dynasty. In fact--"

The Mirror behind them changed its view, from the devastated cityscape to focus on a massive white tiger, with a familiar pair on his back; the two civilians watched over by Torrent and the Troopers' Guardian Beast! Shuten's eyes widened at the sword the boy carried on his back – that was---!

Anubisu stepped forward beside Shuten, studying the scene thoughtfully; so the female and pup was leaping into the fray were they?

"Given the angle of what little sunlight there is, I'd say they're heading in a north-northeastern direction," the hunter-tracker of the four murmured thoughtfully, his eyes narrowed. "They're making good speed – they could be to the boundary in moments."

"The one called Ryo of the Wildfire shall rise shortly should these mortals find him," the Emperor stated and the youngest Warlord spun to face him, bowing.

"I understand, Arago-sama," Shuten acknowledged and slide his eyes to glower at the mirror. "Please, allow me to finish these annoying insects off on your behalf."

"Go, my Warlord, and show them the Cruelty of my Dynasty!"

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 27, 2007, mid-morning

Invasion: Day Three

The katana rattled with every stride of Whiteblaze's legs, thumping almost reassuringly against Yulie's back. His arms were wrapped securely around Mia's waist and even through the denim of his shorts and the Beast's fur, he could feel the bunching and coiling of the supernatural creature's powerful muscles; to be able to carry both their weight while being able to run at a full gallop... If he'd held any lingering doubts about the creature's origins, this would have washed them away. The wind whipped around them, the faint whistle mingling with the tiger's paws striking the pavement.

Her knuckles were white from the tight grip she had on Whiteblaze's coat, clinging to his back stubbornly with the fear of falling and dragging Yulie down with her in the back of her mind. She knew the Ancient One was near, would rejoin them after he handled the biggest obstacle in their way.

A sound that didn't belong was Yulie's warning and his ears seemed to twitch; he glanced back over his shoulder to see the rapidly gaining horsemen and chariots. His hazel eyes widened in surprise – the Ancient was busy clearing their path! They'd be caught in a pincher formation--!

"Shit! Mia, we got company!" He yelped even as the first arrows whistled past their heads.

With a quick glance over her shoulder, she bit her lower lip before returning her gaze ahead of them. "We have to have confidence in the Ancient..."

Right. Confidence in the old monk; he tried, really he did but the more arrows that whizzed by his head was really shaking that confidence...! Turning his head he glared at the force chasing after them; his eyes landed on the largest of the chariots and the familiar armored form of Shuten Doji. Dammit! Was there no escaping that guy?!

Turning his head back to face forward, he swallowed the knot of dread that welled in his throat. "Mia, we got a Warlord on our tail!"

Licking her suddenly dry lips, Mia prayed in silent desperation for the Ancient to hurry back to them...

From where he stood on the chariot, Shuten watched his archers herding the two civilians and their supernatural steed; once they were in the blind alley... He chuckled darkly in grim amusement. "You'll not get away that easily!"

As the next volley of arrows was prepared, he could hear a noise, over the clattering of hooves and chariot wheels, a sound that was abnormal given how soft it was... Chiming, rings of metal tinkling against each other melodically. It was the only warning the Warlord had when the tiger suddenly veered from the course they had been herding him towards, the same second something – a spear? – impacted in the pavement of the street ahead.

Throwing up an arm to shield his sensitive eyes from the sudden flaring of golden-hued light, his sense of hearing was overwhelmed by that blasted chiming, seeming overwhelm even the sound of the earth breaking open. Even as he reeled, he was already undoing the chain of his kusari-gama from around his waist. The brilliant wall of holy light broke the ground open, slicing through buildings, light-rail tracks, anything that stood in its way, forming a deep fissure the charging Dynasty forces fell into, having no time or chance to stop and save themselves.

Startled by the earth suddenly trembling, the flood of sunlight washing over them as the unnatural cloud cover was broken, the pair of civilians found themselves sliding off the back of the tiger as he came to a halt. Whiteblaze turned, regarding the fissure with a contemplative gaze and rumbled a greeting at the familiar sound of chimes. The Ancient approached them, and he smiled at them wearily.

"The power's back on," Yulie exclaimed, his head snapping around to take on the life restored to this section of the city. "How did...?"

"You did it, when you made that?" Mia inquired of the warrior-monk, gesturing to the deep split in the city pavement.

"Indeed, young Scholar," Kaosu affirmed for her and his head tilted, his shadow-covered eyes regarding her. "You're going to need as much time as you can get to return the sword to young Ryo."

"Where do we look?" the auburn-haired young woman asked, frowning in confusion; she turned when she felt Yulie tap her arm.

"How about there?" He asked, pointing to the 'mountain' in the distance, which had a thick black cloud of smoke lazily rising from its peak. "That's Mt Helios. It's supposed to be dormant, right?"

Turning, she regarded the volcano in a mixture of shock and wonder; could it be? That Ryo had impacted there, stirring the long dormant volcano to wakefulness?

"You have good eyes, young one," the Ancient praised and smiled as he gestured to a familiar red SUV. "I believe you'll find that your trip will go by much faster in your vehicle."

"What about you? Aren't you coming with us?" Mia questioned.

"My place is here. I'll do what I can to keep the Dynasty forces from spreading further," the Ancient reassured her. "Go, time is of the essence."

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Location: Near Hell's Cove, Washington, USA
Date & Time: May 27, 2007, late-morning
Invasion: Day Three

A portion of their nation going off the map, obscured from viewing by satellite was unnatural and garnered the attention of the military to investigate. One of the higher ranking Generals was already in the area, going to visit family that lived in the very city in question; under the command of General Shu – he was tall for a Chinese-American and very fit for his age – the near riot that occurred in the unplanned and unorganized evacuation of the panicking city had been quickly brought under control. Lives were still lost in the confusion, from being trampled to death in the stampeding or killed as tempers flared out of control. It was he who organized the investigation and the strike force against the ‘castle in the sky’. Every life lost in that failed operation, he took personal blame for.

But thankfully it took only a few hours for the colleagues he had requested had arrived, some from DC itself and a pair from near where a temporary military camp had been set up to observe Hell’s Cove. All the roads leading in and out had been cleared and closed off, placed under strict military observation. It was with these close family friends, the heads of the Sanada, Date, and Hashiba families that he studied the most recent sat-feed they could access out of the dead-zone.

“So the legends are true,” Rin Sanada murmured, frowning faintly as she leaned in over Takeo Date’s shoulder to study the image of three humans and a familiar white tiger.

The grandmother of Ryo was a petite Japanese-American woman, her short black hair only starting to streak silver at the temples, with the lean muscular build that showed that despite her age she was still active as a kunoichi. Her garb was stark, unforgiving black, from the bottom of her jaw on down, in an outfit that merged traditional ninja-silks with modern American military body armor.

“Aaah,” Takeo agreed, studying the staff and garb of the monk; it was the staff that held the silver-haired Clan Head’s attention most, with its unique design. “The Ancient One himself.”

Takeo, like the other Clan Heads was almost unusually fit for a man his age, something Genchirou Hashiba had theorized might be due to the fact they had carried the armor orbs they had passed to the current generation in their youth and growing years. He forwent his normal suit for more combat-ready black military fatigues, similar to his son-in-law Mitchell; the blond man stood with Rin’s only son Ken, the two pouring over the maps of Hell’s Cove and the surrounding region. The pair of men were as opposite as night and day, the only thing they had in common was they were both men dressed in black -- Ken only just above average height for a Japanese man, with his black hair pulled back in a loose tail at the nape of his neck, his garb in a style much like his mother’s own, while Mitchell was a tall man with golden blonde hair trimmed short and combed back from his piercing violet eyes, his strong chin graced by a short beard.

General Shu glanced over as Yurie Date entered the tent; Takeo’s only daughter nodded in greeting, a folder tucked under her arm. Like her father and husband, she wore black military fatigues, her long black hair pulled back in a braid that fell to her

waist.

"We've tracked those comets from yesterday," she announced, setting the folder down by the maps; opening it, she placed a photo of a different colored streaking comet by different locations. "The closest is Mt Helios; they radiate out towards Hell's Pit, Mount Helena in the Olympic State Park, even the infamous Diablo's Current. The fifth went straight up – according to our satellites, it's in a gradually decaying orbit around the Earth. No one's able to get a close enough look at it as all the imaging equipment seems to malfunction."

"Back to the Forging Sites," Takeo breathed. "Then the Children--"

"They're alive," Rin snapped. "Look at the size of the comets, not the size of the armor-orbs, but of bodies. The Children are probably hurt but alive if the armors sent them back to the Forging Sites."

"They'd need to return to the source of their creation, to heal their bearers," Gen agreed thoughtfully; his eyes narrowed behind his glasses as he leaned in to study the maps, before looking back at the monitor, at the Ancient and the two humans with their tiger companion. "The Ancient One seems to be entrusting those two in helping retrieve the Children."

"Then we'll do what we can as well to help them," General Shu murmured. "The roads in and out of Hell's Cove are closed; if we shift the troops, we can give them clear access to each of the four Forging Sites so they can retrieve the Children."

"Let's get to it. We can't let Outsiders know about the armors. Imagine the threats to the Children," Takeo agreed, frowning in concern.

"This is the task the Ancient has entrusted to our families for generations – we shall not fail him or the Children. If we do, our world is lost," the Sanada kunoichi stated grimly.

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 27, 2007, late-morning

Invasion: Day Three

It was official; this looked like the start of a very bad day.

Hanging from the chain of his kusari-gama, Shuten looked over his shoulder down to the broken wreckage of the chariots and the walking suits of armor that composed the infantry of the Dynasty. The screams of the dying horses had tapered off and he cringed a bit behind his faceplate. Anubisu and Rajura were going to be upset about that; the horses were their joint venture started back when they were the only Warlords, a way for them to find common ground, breeding mounts that would be suitable for the Warlords and even though those that were not 'suitable' were dispersed into the lower ranks, they were still quite proud of the beasts. With a sigh,

the red-haired Warlord shifted, bracing a foot against the side of the chasm and sprang upwards.

Landing gracefully in a crouch atop the roof of one of the shorter buildings, he recalled the kama of his weapon to him with a flick of his wrist. Straightening, he studied the returning life of the section of the city and he grimaced at the smell of vehicle exhaust, even as he studied the skyline. A crimson brow arched at the sight of the smoking volcano. That was supposed to be inactive.

His lips curled in a wicked, knowing smirk. "There you are, Wildfire."

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Location: Mt Helios, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 27, 2007, early-afternoon

Invasion: Day Three

He didn't know how long he'd been climbing; often he had lost his grip or the rock had crumbled beneath his fingers, sending him sliding back down several feet before having to resume his climb upwards. Ryo was certain he'd been scaling the inside of this crater for the past couple hours and he was so looking forward to getting the hell out of here – he had to find the others so they could kick the Dynasty's collected ass!

Ryo had hope though – he could see the top of the crater, the blue sky beyond it and smell the sweet, fresh air. Just a little further and he would be out of the volcano and on his way to retrieve the other four--! A relieved smile crossed his features behind his faceplate as his fingers gripped the lip of the crater. Beneath his armor, his tired muscles flexed as he pushed up, throwing an arm over the lip of the crater. His fingers dug into the rocky soil for purchase as he took in a breath of fresh air and was about to finish the climb out when an armored boot stepped into view.

It was at the same time familiar, yet not. It didn't look like any worn by the armor-bearers of his Set...

His eyes widened, lifting to see Shuten Doji standing there with a yari in hand, as the Warlord smirked down at him from behind his crimson faceplate. "Nice to see you again, boy. Worked up a bit of a sweat I see – such a pity it's all for nothing."

"Fuck," Ryo snarled under his breath; it wasn't language he normally used but right now he was so pissed off he didn't care. "Shuten Doji!"

"You seem so surprised; did you think we wouldn't know you survived? It would have been better for you if you had just given up and died down there. But we can rectify that---now!" the Warlord goaded, lashing out with a powerful thrust with his yari at the arm Ryo clung to the lip of the crater with; the crumbling rock gave way when Wildfire shifted to avoid the strike, sending him back inside the volcano with a curse.

Even as he tumbled back through the air, Ryo drew his remaining katana as he twisted his body and lashed out, driving the steel blade into the side of the crater, just under

the edge leading to freedom. His armored body slammed hard into the rock-wall; a grunt of pain escaped him and his head tilted back as he glared up at the lip of the crater above him and the Warlord he knew was up there now. He heard the whistling of steel through the air, the glint of the yari's tip as it embedded in the rock wall beside his katana; leaning over the lip of the crater, jabbing ruthlessly was the Warlord in question. Pulling the pole-arm free, Shuten jabbed again and again, chipping away at the rock-wall while laughing madly.

The rock-wall was slowly beginning to crumble and he could feel the enchanted steel blade holding him up shifting in the rock, angling downward bit-by-bit. Cursing under his breath, Wildfire shifted his weight, driving the tips of his armored boots into the side of the rock-wall for stability when he heard the familiar roar of the Guardian Beast the same second it slammed into the Warlord, knocking him away from the teen under his protection. Strength surged through the Samurai Trooper and his muscles coiled beneath his armor. Springing up, he flipped gracefully through mid-air to land on the outside of the crater beside Whiteblaze, who had his other katana clamped securely in his powerful jaws.

"Whiteblaze! Good to see you again, boy," Ryo murmured gratefully as he held out his hand; the tiger dropped the katana into the teen's waiting hand and, as the Wildfire-bearer rose, stepped up beside the human with a defiant snarl to the Warlord. Gracefully Ryo spun his paired katana and smiled grimly at Shuten. "I won't be defeated by you this time, Shuten Doji."

"We'll just see about that, you impudent brat!" the Warlord snarled, spinning his yari as he lowered into a ready stance.

Crawling up over a rock formation off to the side of the pair of armored warriors were the pair who had been chosen by the Ancient to help find and unite the Samurai Troopers; Yulie's eyes lit up and he turned to Mia, his voice an excited whisper, "Mia! I see him! Ryo's alright!"

"Careful, Yulie!" She cautioned the pre-teen, grabbing the back of his jean-shorts' waistband and tugging him down out of harm's way.

Ryo's head snapped towards the pair's voices. "Mia! Yulie! You're alright!"

"Ryo!" Mia called out the warning as Shuten Doji moved in a blur as he lunged for the distracted Trooper.

The raven-haired teen's attention was back on his opponent and he brought his swords up, barely blocking the rapid blurs as the Warlord struck at him repeatedly with vicious jabs from the yari. Metal clanged and screeched against metal as the weapons wielded by both samurai blurred clashed in rapid blurs; the Trooper's teeth were gritted as he tried to focus on the fact he had to keep his footing steady and fend off those ruthless jabs and thrusts from the Warlord's yari. Baring his teeth behind his faceplate, the younger Samurai found himself struggling to keep his footing, the rocks crumbling as he was driven back near the lip of the crater.

A powerful jab from the yari caused him to twist his upper body, his weight shifting abruptly; the ground gave way beneath him and he tumbled backwards, flailing in surprise. Sensing victory, Shuten lashed out, catching him with the side of the yari to launch him back into the volcano. The screams of the civilian pair mingled with Ryo's own shout of "Daaaammiiiiittttttt----!"

The red-armored teen fell back into the volcano he had so laboriously climbed from, disappearing from the Warlord's keen eyesight. Shuten peered down into the crater and laughed over the wail of distress from the scholar and the preteen behind him, "Well that takes care of the brat."

Whiteblaze roared, glaring down into the crater as he urged his cub to return, to finish the fight; the black and white tail of the Guardian Beast lashed to and fro in agitation and he turned his eyes to the laughing Warlord, baring his massive canine teeth – arrogant fool, thinking he'd killed the cub!

Faintly at first, the ground began to tremble, a tremble that grew into a violent shaking that startled the Warlord from his mad laughter.

"What?" Yulie murmured, stumbling and catching onto a rock outcropping. "What the hell is going on?"

"I don't know, Yulie," Mia gasped fighting to keep her balance. Beyond them the crater glowed.

The Warlord snorted at the pair's questions and smirked confidently; with the training he'd undergone, he could handle anything! "It's nothing I can't control."

He threw up a hand before his face to shield his sensitive eyes from the bright glow as magma spewed upward from the crater. The Warlord shifted and within the magma he could feel it, the armor of the Wildfire. Lips pulling back in a savage snarl he spat, "Impudent brat! If you refuse to just give up, then prepare to die!"

"Sorry, that's just not on my agenda today!" Ryo retorted as he sprang from the magma spray at the Warlord; faintly he could hear Yulie's whoop of joy cheering him on – as it was, the most he could hear was the pulsing roar of the magma, the volcano. He landed a couple feet away from the Warlord of Cruelty and steam immediately rose, wafting around him, hissing loudly as he crossed his blades before him.

"Wow..." Yulie breathed, watching the Trooper engage the Warlord in a display of speed and power; it was like Ryo had gained a boost somehow. "Mia, look at him! It's like--"

"--like the volcano's given him a boost in strength," Mia murmured, completing the preteen's thought, nodding in agreement as she speculated, "Ryo's armor is the Wildfire and the volcano's immense heat may have given him the boost he needs right now to take that Warlord down."

"I hope it works," the boy muttered.

"From the legends my grandfather and I have studied, this is like something described in them. Right now, this is our only hope."

Shuten eyed the teen before him warily, at the steam that rose about him where super-heated metal boots touched the soil outside the lip of the volcano's crater. Snarling wordlessly, he lunged forward once more, jabbing out ruthlessly with the yari; the Trooper's katana lashed out and with surprising force disarmed the older Samurai. The yari landed tip first into the soil several feet behind Shuten.

"Don't think so," Ryo growled, his blades crossing before him once more.

The Warlord eyed his yari, a frown forming behind his faceplate. 'What is this? It's like he's grown stronger somehow,' Shuten thought as his eyes slid back to observe his young foe, spinning the spiked weight of his kusari-gama. 'No matter.'

Shuten lashed out with the spiked end and the Trooper reacted automatically, swatting the chain aside. Even as the younger Samurai did so, the Warlord stepped back, reaching behind him and retrieving the yari in a blur of movement. With a feline snarl, he lunged forward with a vicious spear-thrust to the exposed portion of the Trooper's throat; the yari tip clanged against the katana blades, trapped as the teen snagged it in a scissoring motion. Golden energy gleamed where their weapons were tangled together before exploding outwards. The blades of the paired katana in the Trooper's hands gleamed with power before steam rose rapidly up in a veil between the dueling Samurai.

Ryo growled, a low feral sound that rumbled in his throat before he twisted his blades, pushing out with all his strength--

--and the blade of the yari shattered, the tip falling to embed in the ground by Ryo's armored foot. Surprised by the sudden boost in strength, Shuten had leapt back for distance and now looked between the ruined weapon he held and the teen with calculating green eyes. Behind him, he could hear the preteen's exclamation of awed surprise.

"Holy shit, didya see that?!" Yulie crowed, grinning in satisfaction while the Warlord tossed the broken yari aside and lifted his kusari-gama. "Ryo's gonna kick that demon's ass all over this mountain!"

'Kick my ass? As if, little boy,' Shuten thought to himself at the boy's words, fighting back the urge to snort as he began to spin the weighted end of his kusari-gama again. 'This Trooper will just have to face my full strength. A pity I have to do so, but maybe I've found a worthy opponent at long last...'

'What... What the hell is happening to me? It's like...like I'm burning, like I'm on fire from inside out,' Ryo thought; everything seemed hyper-aware to him, from the scents in the air to the faint whistle of the spiked weight of the Warlord's kusari-gama as it sliced through the air. 'And yet, I've never felt so strong, so powerful...'

The Warlord crouched and sprang upwards in the air; red lightning flashed against the dark clouds and Ryo tensed at the sight, knowing it must be that attack again.

"QUAKE WITH FEAR!"

The spiked end arced gracefully, gleaming with malevolent crimson light as it impacted against Ryo's chest-plate; energy began to explode outward as the chains multiplied. Shuten was almost back on the ground, a smug smirk forming when the teen's blades suddenly lashed out, batting the forming chains away, sending them right back at the Warlord.

"---what?!" Shuten yelped in shock as the chains formed, wrapping around him and knocking him off balance enough to slam into a pile of rocks. Never in his centuries of life had this happened---! Oh sure, Anubisu could catch the chains, but send them back to ensnare him?!

Ryo stalked forward, steam rising up with every step he took. The teen's eyes seemed to blaze like blue flame as he adjusted his grip on the hilts of his paired katana. "Had enough? Or are you wanting more?"

Shuten growled in his throat, his eyes narrowed as he shifted, the chains of his kusari-gama loosening. 'Of course... The Wildfire armor, its drawing strength from this volcano like mine draws strength from the season of Spring!'

The younger Samurai charged forward and the Warlord tensed before springing up, gracefully flipping over the younger warrior's head. Twisting mid-air he landed in a crouch on a rocky outcropping over where the pair of civilians had taken cover. The Scholar cried out in surprise, pulling the preteen behind her as the Warlord's large shadow fell over them. A harsh chuckle escaped him as he eyed the pair of potential hostages.

"You bastard! Get away from them!" Ryo roared, stalking towards the Warlord angrily.

'This...is not good, its like the Warlord knows about how Ryo's armor gained the boost in strength...' Mia thought, biting her lower lip as she pulled the preteen further away from the looming figure of the Warlord; she turned, pushing the long-haired boy. "Yulie...run!"

"But--!" the boy protested, glaring back at the Warlord.

"Run!" She urged, grabbing his wrist. "We're just in the way!"

Convinced, he darted along side her and Shuten's mocking laughter put Yulie's teeth on edge. Dammit! Running away like a coward! It really grated--

"I didn't say you could leave!" He called out after the fleeing pair, lashing out with the spiked weight of the kusari-gama expertly; it wrapped around the pair, chaining them together at the waist.

"No!" Ryo snarled and Whiteblaze roared, lunging and chomping down on the Warlord's forearm guard.

"Damn you! Get off!" He snapped in annoyance, shaking his arm to loosen the powerful jaws of the Guardian Beast. With a faint grunt, he dislodged the tiger's hold, throwing the tiger into a nearby pile of rocks.

"Whiteblaze!" The young Samurai darted forward to attack even as the Warlord yanked, pulling the pair of civilians to him, using them as a human shield. Ryo skidded to a halt, eyeing the kama of the older Samurai's weapon, the deadly point hovering at the vulnerable underside of Yulie's jaw. Jaw clenching, the teen growled. "Let them go."

"I'll make you a deal, brat. I'll let them go, but only if you surrender!" Shuten taunted, grinning malevolently behind his faceplate; if he was right – and he probably was, given the heat he himself had felt – then the unprotected pair of civilians would get quite the dose of the heat emanating from the boy's armor, enough to make him surrender or retreat to keep from hurting them.

--and Anubisu was so going to kick his ass later for this stunt, Shuten just knew it.

"As if," he snorted, lunging forward in a blur of speed and lashing out with his paired swords while Shuten shifted his weight, bringing the kama up to block the attack. Steam rose as the steel of both weapons visibly grew red-hot and distorted waves of heat emanated between them; Yulie could feel the sweat beading and trickling down his neck and face.

"Holy shit, it's hot!" Yulie growled, squirming in the rapidly heating chain that bound him to the Scholar.

Ryo's eyes flickered down at the boy's words and noticing the sweat gleaming on both their faces; he sprang back, landing in a loose crouch. Behind his face-plate he frowned, his mind racing. 'What? My armor, it must be scorching hot, like the power that's burning inside me...'

"Problem, Wildfire?" Shuten asked, chuckling nastily and smirking behind his faceplate, "I thought you were all ready to fight me, boy."

'With my armor like this, if I get too close to Mia and Yulie, the heat coming off my armor could end up burning them alive!' the younger Samurai realized, his mind racing as he tried to figure out a better way to save them...but time was running out, that Warlord could slash their throats or throw them into the volcano any second--!

"Ryo, don't worry about me, get Yulie out of here!" Mia called to the younger teen, struggling futilely in the chains to loosen them; she felt the armored fingers of the Warlord dig warningly into the soft flesh of her shoulder through her light-weight cotton blouse.

"And leave you alone with this demon?! Are you insane?" Yulie snapped at her and

turned his eyes to Ryo. "Mia's more important than a kid like me, she knows what's what -- do what you gotta do!"

"This fight's between you and me, Warlord, so why don't you stop hiding behind them and face me!"

A nasty chuckle escaped the Warlord, "Well have it your way -- I'll just bring them to you!"

Ryo's teeth ground together as the Warlord forced the captive pair forward; unwilling to expose them to the deadly heat of his armor, he began to surrender ground, backing away until the ground crumbled beneath his heel. Glancing swiftly over his shoulder, he found himself at the lip of the crater once more. Damn, this was not good, but he needed to get the pair free without accidentally killing them!

"It appears you've no where else to run," Shuten Doji noted snidely.

"Perhaps," Ryo agreed, bring his swords up, crossing them before him. "But you're dead wrong if you think I've lost the will to fight. Now let them go and fight me, man to man."

"Why not? But first things first!"

With a laugh, the Warlord suddenly shoved hard on the Scholar's shoulder, launching her and the preteen into the air before plummeting into the crater. In the back of Shuten's mind he heard a wolf-like snarling and suppressed a cringe; if he could hear the old man over the telepathic bond the four shared all the way here, ohh yes, the Wolven Warlord was so pissed off at him right now...

"Ryo!" Yulie screamed, his voicing mingling with the panicked shriek of Mia.

Without hesitation the younger Samurai dove into the crater after them; as he descended though, he recalled the heat his armor produced. 'I can't touch them in this. My subarmor should be more bearable for them to touch -- at least, I hope so!' he concluded and with a fervent prayer to whatever deities were listening, shed his full armor in a flurry of petal-like energy, his subarmor gleaming in the latent light of the magma below.

"Mia! Yulie! Hang on!" He shouted, pulling his arms in tighter to increase the aerodynamic profile of his falling body; he gained on the swiftly and threw his arms out, wrapping a strong arm around each civilian's waist.

Immediately he forced his weight to the side, spinning them rapidly until his feet slammed into the side of the crater's wall with enough force to rebound them upwards. Spring boarding between the rocky outcroppings on the walls, the Trooper carried the pair upwards swiftly. Clearing the lip of the crater for what he hoped to be the final time, he landed heavily on his feet on the opposite side where the Warlord stood before falling to his knees, his grip loosing on them. Mia slid free to land heavily on her side and she watched in amusement as Yulie suddenly clung to the Trooper's

neck.

"Thankyouthankyouthankyou!" He chanted over and over again, kissing the older boy on the cheek. "You're the best! I thought we were going to die down there but then you were there and---!"

The Trooper laughed slightly, ruffling the younger boy's hair. "Its alright, I understand. Now, you two need to scram, okay? I don't want him to catch you again..."

"R-right!" Yulie pulled back, blushing hotly while scrambling to his feet beside Mia. "We'll be waiting at the foot of the mountain, Mia's got her SUV and---"

The boy's words were cut off when the weighted end of the Warlord's kusari-gama sliced through the air from the other side of the volcano's crater and wrapped the chain around Ryo's throat and torso. Gagging in surprise, the Trooper grabbed the chain across his throat with his free hand, trying to pull it off him when he was yanked off his feet, soaring over the crater to land hard at Shuten Doji's feet. The air whooshed from his lungs and he took a desperate wheezing breath as he struggled to get back to his feet; to be taken by surprise like that---!

"Did you really think it'd be that easy, brat?!" Shuten snorted contemptuously.

A foot connected hard into his midsection, a blow he felt even with the protection of his subarmor and the chain fell free, releasing him. The air was forced from his lungs as his diaphragm forcibly contracted right before a spiked elbow descended. On sheer trained reflex he was moving before it could connect with the intended target of right between his shoulder blades. Instead the attack was a glancing blow on his shoulder and pain lanced from his shoulder as he felt the joint forcibly dislocated from the impact and the fleshy part of his shoulder gouged where the spike had pierced his subarmor. Taking a careful breath, Ryo was backing away to give himself room to maneuver.

Clenching his jaw, the dark-haired teen gripped his bicep and with a painful sound of bone scrapping bone, forced his shoulder back into joint, with only a minor grimace on his face even as blood flowed more freely from the sudden aggravation of his shoulder's wound. Shuten had to admit, he was begrudgingly impressed by the pain tolerance and aptitude the Trooper was displaying; really it was almost like he trained as a shinobi...

Eyes narrowing in thought, he watched the movements of his opponent more carefully before concluding with certainty that yes, the boy was trained not as a samurai but as a ninja. And Shuten knew this for one very important reason; Anubisu had them all cross-train in the shinobi arts so that they could know how to fight against potential assassins. It had been a very successful strategy too.

"Nothing in life worth having comes easily," Ryo said through gritted teeth, quoting his grandmother as he rubbed at his shoulder, feeling the slickness of metal against blood.

"You know, without that armor, you're quite pathetic, downright pitiful really. Look at you, so wounded as you are, not compared to how you were before!"

The Warlord's observation was mocking and set Ryo's teeth on edge. He growled under his breath, the heat of his anger mingling with that burning power still coiled within his gut. His hands flexed as he tensed; the smirk he could barely see, the sheer confidence in the body language of his opponent made the Sanada teen wary. What was he up to?

Shuten moved in a blur, launching the spiked weight and Ryo barely had time to bring his forearms up in a cross-block before him. The chain coiled around his forearms and he was jerked forward, pain shooting up his arms and shoulders right before the Warlord's knee slammed into his abdomen. Ryo's body curled automatically with the blow to lessen the damage and in the same movement, he drew his bound hands up against his chest; his body twisted as his elbow lashed out, slamming into the crimson faceplate.

Metal gouged against metal with a high-pitched screech that made Shuten's ears ache and his grip loosen. Immediately the Trooper took advantage, rolling away and out of the older man's range. The ground crumbled ominously beneath his heels and with a quick glance over his shoulder to the Volcano behind him, Ryo made note of how close they were to the edge. A feral grin crossed his face as he regarded the Warlord, who was shaking his head to clear away the deafening ringing of his ears.

"You brat! I'll kill you!" Shuten shouted, pressing a hand to the side of his helm over where his ear was.

"Maybe," Ryo growled, moving slowly in a slight crouch as he circled outside of the Warlord's arm-length. "But if I die here, I'm taking you with me!"

Moving in a blur of crimson and white, the Trooper tackled the Warlord, locking his arms around the older man, over Shuten's arms to keep him from moving as they fell into the volcano. Shuten yowled in outrage, struggling in Ryo's grip; the air whipped around them as they fell headfirst towards the bubbling lava below. Shifting, twisting, the spike on the Warlord's elbow guard gouged painfully into his young opponent's gut. Ryo's grip loosened and the red-haired man twisted out of his grip, slamming a foot into Wildfire's chest.

The chain of the kusari-gama seemed to move on it's own, coiling in the air around it's master before Shuten gripped the hilt of the kama end and with a spin, released it, launching the curved blade. The weapon embedded into the volcano's wall and halted the Warlord's descent; he grinned in triumph as his young enemy continued to fall, a grin that turned to a snarl when Wildfire suddenly spun, using the momentum to reorient himself and land on a rocky outcropping protruding from the volcano wall.

The teen glared up at him with eyes gleaming like blue flames and Shuten swore virulently under his breath before scaling up the chain onto an outcropping above. Dammit, he was to bring the brat back alive but so far that didn't seem possible! The rock beneath him trembled as the volcano rumbled ominously, bringing his attention

back to the deathtrap that surrounded him. If it wasn't for his armor, he'd be dead long before now in this environment, from the heat to the toxic fumes.

A spout of lava shot up past where the Warlord was perched and he leaned back, his head tilting back to look at the distance back to the top; not enough time to climb up, because this volcano seemed ready to erupt in mere seconds. The cracking of rock and falling of debris caught his attention...and gave him an idea. A wicked grin crossed his face before he looked to see that Wildfire was bouncing his way back up the crumbling sides of the volcano.

"Too hot in here for my liking – time to make an exit," Shuten muttered, turning and lashing out with the tip of his kama. The blade embedded into the rock face above him; rock splintered in a rough oval shape and a chunk of the wall fell down into the churning lava. Leaping down onto it, he eyed the rate the lava ate away the stone before grinning viscously at his young opponent, who was looking over his shoulder at the Warlord.

The volcano rumbled and the rock he was crouched on jerked back and forth before shooting up under the pressure of another lava spout. Shuten dug armored claws into the rock for stability and faintly he heard over the roaring of the volcano Wildfire's voice.

"Oh hell no!" The Trooper swore; turning, he pulled his hand free and bracing himself. As he sprang at the ascending chunk of rock through the wall of magma, he summoned his armor to him. "Armor of Wildfire – Dao Jin!"

In the span of the seconds it had taken him to leave the rock wall and shoot through the flow of magma, then rock itself, his armor had formed. Shuten jerked back as part of the rock wall he rode on shattered and there stood the defiant younger samurai, a katana in each hand. "I don't think so!"

Wildfire lashed out with one sword, which the Warlord countered with the kama of his own weapon, blocking with the hilt just beneath the curved blade; the chain rattled as Shuten caught the other katana. The blade hummed, vibrating with power before breaking the chain of the Warlord's weapon. Swearing, Shuten twisted his body as the blade sliced downwards, the tip catching and gouging part of his shoulder guard.

Springing back, he found the determined teen pursued him doggedly with swift, viscous strikes. Mindful of the precious little amount of maneuvering room that was steadily shrinking as the lava ate away at the rock, he found himself on the defensive, blocking repeatedly with the kama. 'Not good, not good. This environment is giving him strength and seemed to be sending him closer to a berserker state. In these close-quarters, there's not much I can do!' Shuten thought to himself grimly before eyeing the rim of the volcano crater; certainly he could just teleport away but he didn't want to go back empty handed...!

"Just give it up, brat!" Shuten growled from between clenched teeth.

"Not happening. This time, you lose!" the Trooper snarled. "You're going to be as

totalled as your kama since you can't use that attack with your chain broken!"

The paired katana thrummed with power and steam hissed off both blades before the kama shattered under the intense heat. Shuten didn't even have time to try and dodge as the paired weapon sliced down full force in an X formation directly over his breastplate. The enhanced strike sent him staggering back and the high kick that followed launched him off the shrinking rock.

The long dormant Mt Helios erupted violently, spewing molten lava high into the air, thick angry black smoke churning and stark even against the grey clouds overhead. Part of the crater collapsed, sending a flow of magma down the side of the volcano away from where Mia, Yulie, and Whiteblaze were...and away from the small town at the base of the volcano, thankfully.

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Location: Arago's Castle, Dynasty, Youjakai

Date & Time: May 27, 2007, mid-afternoon

Invasion: Day Three

He hurt, his subarmor was scorched, blackened from soot and his hair was singed making the ends jaggedly uneven. Humiliated by his defeat, he was on a knee with his head bowed to the spectral image of his Master.

"Shuten. Of all your centuries of service this has been the first time you have ever failed me." Arago's voice boomed, echoing his defeat in the throne room. The flickering light of the four candles, the quietness in the back of his mind was unnerving.

"Yes, Master," he murmured; from the corner of his eye he could see the other Warlords standing there, observing him; the fact they weren't even speaking to him over their armor-induced telepathic link disturbed him greatly.

"I underestimated the power of the Wildfire armor, the skill and determination of the bearer. With he as a prime example this shows the other four will be certain to return to the fight. You must tread carefully. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master." The silence from the other Warlords after the ghostly helm had vanished was driving him crazy. He stood and even when they still said nothing, he whirled on them. "Spit it out already, you were right I was overconfident and I got my ass handed to me for it!"

"We don't have to say anything – you've beaten yourself up over it quite nicely," Rajura said blandly.

"You've survived this defeat, so the question will be now, have you learned from your mistakes?" Anubisu asked.

Shuten hung his head and sighed. "...we really can't just kill them? It'd be easier--!"

"If they die before being brought here, the armors will go dormant and back into hiding, you know that. We have to take them alive and with doing as little damage to the armors as we can," the eldest reminded him.

Shuten sighed noisily. "Just lovely..."

"I'll tell you what's lovely," Naaza said blandly and when he had the other three's attention grinned wickedly. "The look on Kay-chan's face when I tell her that you need a hair cut!"

"No!" the red-head protested. "C'mon, 'Za, haven't I had a bad enough day?!"

"Not just yet!" the Serpent quipped as he vanished from the throne room, his candle extinguishing.

"Aww dammit!" the feline groaned, his shoulders slumping as the room echoed with the older men's chuckling. He sighed and lifted his head, regarding the older pair of Warlords. "...I'm sorry."

Anubisu looked at the youngest of the quartet in surprise. "For being defeated? Yes, you were overconfident but it's alright, you survived..."

"Not about that. I mean...about the horses..." Shuten said softly, rubbing the back of his neck and grimaced as he further ground soot into his hair.

The pair exchanged a glance of understanding and Anubisu reached out and clasped the red-head's shoulder. "That's not your fault; it was an ambush by the Ancient, there was nothing you could have done in time."

"So instead of worrying about what you couldn't avoid, perhaps you should worry about Kay-chan dying your hair bright orange or pink?" Rajura deadpanned and couldn't conceal his grin at the feline's panicking.

"Shit, I have to find a place to hide now!" The red-head said in terror before vanishing.

As his candle guttered out, the other two vanished as well to leave the throne room in darkness.

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Location: Mt Helios, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 27, 2007, late-afternoon

Invasion: Day Three

They had worried they'd have to travel to where the magma had pooled to find him, but he had come running to them in his subarmor, encouraged by Whiteblaze's roars. Reunited with the pair of civilians and guardian beast, he paused to look back at Mt Helios.

"I won this battle but we won't be lucky every time. We need to find the others if we're to win this war," he said softly.

"They're alive, just out there somewhere like you were here. We'll find them, don't worry," Mia reassured him as she walked towards where her SUV was parked and waiting.

"And when we do, they'll be just as ready to kick ass as you were," Yulie agreed. "Then Arago and the rest of them won't know what hit 'em!"

Whiteblaze roared his agreement before nudging his cub towards the SUV; certainly after that, he'd need to rest!