

The American Samurai Troopers

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?

Von Zpan_Sven

Kapitel 1: Chapter One: Troopers in America

THE AMERICAN SAMURAI TROOPERS

AUTHOR: Zpan Sven

E-MAIL: Zpan(underscore)Sven(at)hotmail(dot)com

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

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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! Cye! 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, Cye 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, Cy 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 than normal..." Cy 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 off, 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 then 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 than 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, Cyé! 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.

"Cyé!"

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 Cyé, 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 Cyé'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 than 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 lightning 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 to 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 you 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 tins 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 Cye 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 tin can down and do it now! That thing got a good hit on Cy'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. Cy 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 Cy 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.

"Cy!" 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 Cy 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 Cye. 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 Cye 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," Cye 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.