

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 2: Chapter Two: The Scattered Heroes

THE AMERICAN SAMURAI TROOPERS

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

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

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

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

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

:Our minds are as one...:

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

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

RATING: R

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

GENRE: Action & Adventure/Drama/Supernatural/Humor

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

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CHAPTER TWO: THE SCATTERED HEROES

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

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

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

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

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Location: Arago's Castle, Dynasty, Youjakai

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

place. In perfect unison, their armored fists slammed over their hearts in a salute to their master.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"They are children, nothing more!"

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

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

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

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

The screen showed the city, then seemed to 'blink' before focusing in on the female civilian of the duo gathering canned food goods, passing them to the long-haired preteen. Anubisu's face was carefully composed, but his wolf-green eyes sharpened, tracing the delicate profile of the young woman who had caught his attention on that campus. Her auburn hair was loose and cascading free, no longer in the bun like before; it flowed around her shoulders as she turned, a reassuring, gentle smile on her face as she spoke with the black-haired preteen. When Arago spoke, the Warlord had to force himself to focus on his Master's words.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Naaza followed but paused, turning back to look at the Mirror; his eyes sharpened when it showed the armored children – Torrent to be precise stretched out on his side on a bench in some underground location, a hand to his wounded ribs. The predatory instincts in the Warlord screamed for him to hunt down his chosen prey while he was weak, but he gritted his fangs, forced control over those instincts and deliberately turned on his heel. However, his fists were tightly clenched as he left the throne room as well.

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

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

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

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

"I don't like this waiting around though. If we hesitate, those who depend on us will

get hurt," he muttered, arms crossing over his chest as he continued to scowl petulantly at the floating castle.

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

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

A few feet away, the tiger turned his head away from the pair of teens. The plaintive mews and whines of the pet and stray population had Whiteblaze's head tilting, even as he studied the surrounding area. The tiger stood guard at the entrance to the subway station the armored teens and their civilian charges had taken refuge. Looking over his broad shoulder, the tiger rumbled reassuringly to them, even if they couldn't hear it – none would get past the Guardian Tiger...

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

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

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

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

be here.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Me? I’m Cye. Cye Mouri,” she introduced herself, smiling slightly. “I did what had to be done.”

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

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

“We’ll be stuck down here I guess,” Rowen sighed.

“This is Sage Date and Rowen Hashiba,” Kun introduced the pair to the civilians of the

group. The blonde and bluenette studied the woman and boy as Hardrock introduced them. "And this is Mia and Yulie."

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

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

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

The group scrambled for the stairs leading above ground. Peering out cautiously, they could see fighter jets streaking in the sky overhead and the unnatural stillness of the city was broken by a sound...a strange rumbling sound. Kun's eyes widened as she realized what those sounds were when they began to hear artillery fire. "Tanks?!"

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

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

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

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

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

"The weapons of modern man shall be turned against them," Mia seemed to intone,

eyes shimmering with tears of sorrow at the lives that had just been taken. "I had thought maybe, but against such a foe, who use such dark magic..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

center of the protective formation the young Samurai had formed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Right. We need to get them away from here," Ryo agreed. He eyed the delicate Torrent-bearer and saw her discreetly pressing a hand against her ribs. Immediately

he knew she wasn't up to another fight so soon, that she needed time to rest and heal her wounds. "Torrent, how well do you know the area?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ryo snarled at him savagely, "Your fight's with us!"

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

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

"You think you can stop me, little children? I'll get to those three as soon as I handle you and given Torrent's wounded state, well, your little comrade won't be much a

challenge for me." Shuten said snidely, the sneer on his lips visible through the opening at his faceplate.

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

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

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

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

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

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

to catch him.

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

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

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

They had to keep him away from wherever Cye had taken Mia and Yulie... And to do that, they needed every advantage available to them...

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

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

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

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

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

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

"QUAKE WITH FEAR!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

"Well, he has them separated, but they seem to be most determined," Rajura noted, sipping his sake. They had summoned a smaller version of the Mirror in the common room of the Warlords' tower, observing the battle -- Shuten was doing well, as expected, but his overconfidence had both Rajura and Anubisu concealing cringes.

They sat around a table, a bottle of sake between them, with the Spider Warlord sitting farthest back and leaning against a pile of pillows.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

Shuten had to admit, he'd not been expected for Torrent to try and tackle him, hadn't been expecting her at all. The shift in wind had been his only warning, carrying the sounds of armored boots against the broken pavement; he turned the same second

the Torrent-bearer had lunged -- he snagged the petite warrior and the scent of water lilies, combined with a unique feminine musk and the familiar copper of blood washed over him. The feline Warlord's nostrils flared behind his helm, his eyes partially closing, reveling in the scent even as he snagged her arm and slammed her into the side of the building of the ledge he stood on. The pavement cracked outwards from the impression of her body and the sound she made -- a soft, breathless whimper of pain -- was just delicious.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

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

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

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

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

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

surrounded by the five. Torrent was once more kept to the rear of the formation.

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

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

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

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

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

"QUAKE WITH FEAR!"

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

pain as he swung the joined blades, launching his sure-kill.

“FLARE UP – NOW!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rowen gritted his teeth, knew Cye was going to the Wildfire-bearer’s side, which was probably the best – she’d be acting as the medic for their team, given how many times

she had to patch up Sage, Kun, and himself in the past. "You sonovabitch, you think we're gonna let you get away with this?!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From where she knelt by their fallen leader, Cye shuddered, a chill of unease going down her spine as she pulled the older teen close, slipping her arms around his waist;

pain shot up from her ribs at the strain. "Ryo... Ryo! You need to wake up! Please! Ryo!"

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

"Mia! That's bad news for the guys!" Yulie exclaimed, pointing to the overcast sky; his loose braid of hair lashed about him in the wind, but he ignored it, his eyes intent on the dark cyclone of energy he was frantically pointing towards.

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

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Location: Arago's Castle, Dynasty, Youjakai

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

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

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Location: Hell's Cove, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

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

The preteen's demand echoed with Whiteblaze's roar; on the rooftop of the skyscraper above them, leaning heavily against the roof access, the monk panted for breath. His hand clutched at the material covering his heart before he swallowed and rasped out softly, "Be careful, Samurai Troopers... I have done what I could to keep you out of Arago's hands for now; the rest, I'm afraid is up to you. I'll do what I can for the Innocents, but I fear old age is catching up with me..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

"...tch," Anubisu shifted on his cushion, leaning forward to refill their saucers. "The boy will have to be reminded of that fact then."

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

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Location: ?

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

Warm...

So very warm...

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

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

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Location: ?

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

She could figure it out when morning came...

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Location: ?

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

Perhaps a nap was a good idea...

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

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Location: ?

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

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

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

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Location: ?

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

Trusting the song of the stars, he relaxed.

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

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Location: Hell's Cover, Washington, USA

Date & Time: May 26, 2007, early afternoon

Invasion: Day Two

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

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

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

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Kaosu, last of the Ancient's Clan smiled slightly; if he should fall, at least Whiteblaze would be there. The inevitability of his demise made the Monk look over at the pair of civilians. Wildfire had been right, there was a reason they hadn't been taken with the

others. Within the boy he felt the echo of Cruelty, meaning this was a potential armor-bearer while the girl, her knowledge, incomplete as it was, would be invaluable to the Troopers. He'd fill in whatever gaps she had, pass on what he knew before he died...