

Future Shock

Part 1

Genhance Expo: 2047 Version: 5

By Shadar

Las Vegas, NV

It was the biggest bodybuilding and fitness show on Earth.

Ever since the invention of genetically engineered medical nanobots that could splice a person's DNA to insert elements of alien DNA, mostly Kryptonian genes, humans had taken a huge leap forward. Men and women were now vastly stronger than they'd been in the early 21st century, and more durable as well, all without the health issues that steroids and overdevelopment had been plagued with in earlier years.

Now, anyone who could afford the cost, which was astronomical, could become superhuman.

Genhance worked on every cell in the human body, improving not only strength and durability, but vision and hearing and even intelligence. Ordinary gunfire could not kill a Genhance and a scalpel could not cut their skin, nor could they contract any human illness.

Even better, their super-fitness pushed sexual endurance and pleasure to an entirely new level. *Pleasure Without Consequence* was the latest marketing theme.

LuthorCorp was doing its best to promote that last message, given everyone knew that sex sells. This year they had a bevy of Playboy centerfolds at their huge booth, all of them Genhancees, courtesy of Mr. Luthor himself. Like Hefner before

him, it was said he slept with all the centerfolds in his magazine.

Bruce watched as two of the girls wrapped a third playmate in heavy chain, and then began pulling hard enough on the ends to crush an ordinary human. The other super-Playmates formed a circle around the three of them to protect the crowd.

The lovely inside the chains began to huff and puff as she inflated her already oversized chest, her shoulders flexing powerfully as she struggled to raise her arms. The case-hardened chains, each one tested to thousands of pounds, suddenly exploded into fragments as the hard steel reached its breaking point.

The shrapnel harmlessly peppered the surround Playmates, tearing holes in their clothing, which hadn't amounted to much to begin with. Then the Playmate who'd been in the chains reappeared without her top, which had apparently disappeared with the broken links. She made no effort to cover herself before walking over to join two other Playmates who were loudly extolled the virtues of super-sex to a large audience of men. According to them, super-sex was pleasurable beyond the furthest boundaries of human imagination. It could go on for days.

They finished by saying that they were always available to help a new enhancee explore the benefits of Genhance. It was part of the new dating service that Playboy ran for Genhances.

The last disgusted Bruce. It was the typical over-the-top bullshit that LuthorCorp promoted. Every since Alex Luthor, grandson of Lex Luthor, greatgrandson of Lionel, had purchased the fading Playboy brand, his borderline solicitation masquerading as marketing had set a new low for vulgar advertising.

Unfortunately, it also set new highs for viewer interest. The Playboy booth at the center of the LuthorCorp tent was packed with fanboys. ComicCons and bodybuilding shows had always had their share of sexy self-promotion, but LuthorCorp took everything to the limit and then a bit beyond. And given they owned all the patents for Genhance, they were making billions from the technology.

Of course, not everyone who could afford LuthorCorp's fees had good intentions for their new bodies. Despite a very elaborate screening process, Genhanced supercriminals were keeping the Legion busy these days. It took a superhuman to stop a superhuman.

In a gesture that seemed uncharacteristic of that infamous corporation, Luthor had just announced they were making a low-cost variant of Genhance. They planned to give it away in the third-world. This new version made people more resistant to disease, dehydration and malnutrition without increasing their strength level.

Bruce assumed it didn't have the libido-enhancing effects of the original formula, given that was one of the product's key selling points.

As much as he disliked the sexual focus of Genhance marketing, his real concerns had to do with superpowered criminals who the police were powerless to stop. He was hoping that the camera fitted to his cowl, which transmitted everything he saw back to his crime computer, would be able to get a facial match on one of those criminals here at the Expo. Everyone who was anyone in the Genhance world was supposed to be here.

Despite being eighty years old by the calendar, he was still fighting crime as the Batman. He'd been the very first person to be infused with the advanced militarized version of the Genhance cocktail. He'd spent a full month in the Nurture tanks, his DNA slowly changing to incorporate key Kryptonian genes. When he woke up, he had a twenty times the strength he'd had in his prime. He also looked half his age.

Being a Genhance didn't detract from the contempt he felt toward the ultra wealthy elite who pranced around him, showing off 30" biceps and abs that were sharp enough to cut steel. Many of them performed feats of astounding strength for the hordes of ordinary humans who came to gawk and dream.

Bruce was a wealthy man himself, or at least his alter-ego, Bruce Wayne was, and he had the same muscular body as these show-offs, but he despised such

ostentatious displays of power or wealth. Humility was the proper attitude of a gentleman.

Even worse, there were a number of children present this year who'd been through Genhance.

He couldn't understand why someone would enhance a child, given the endless challenges they would encounter in trying to grow up among ordinary people. Unless, of course, they lived in a Foundation enclave. An organization called the The Family Foundation was building closed enclaves, and only families with at least one Genhancee were allowed to live there.

His biggest fear was that the countries of the developed world were well on their way to creating a super-class of citizens whose allegiance to each other was stronger than their bond to any country. Given they all needed a yearly booster serum to prevent genetic unraveling, it was likely their true allegiance was to LuthorCorp.

He scowled as a blonde ten-year-old girl wearing a Supergirl costume engaged in an energetic tug of war with ten grown men. She was slowly working her way down a set of stone stairs, using the steps for leverage as she dragged the struggling and straining group of men toward the edge. Her muscular definition was outside of any bounds for a girl her age, her height that of a grown woman.

The contest ended when the first man lost his footing and fell down the steps. The young girl dropped the heavy hawser and grabbed the man to steady him before he could get hurt. Turning, she gave his companions a little curtsy, and then leaped high into the air to perform a series of backward flips that carried her fifty feet off the ground. Bruce stared in amazement as she nailed a perfect gymnast landing inside a circle of teenage boys. They crowded close around her, showing way more interest in her than they should have, given her young age.

As inappropriate as that was, he decided it was a parenting issue, not a crime issue. At least at the moment.

Turning, he worked his way through the crowd toward the main pavilion. In

years past, he would have been the focus of all the attention, standing as tall and powerful as he did, dressed in his black armor and bat cowl. He still got a lot of looks, but he wasn't the only one at the Expo dressed as Batman. Cosplay had taken on a new twist with the Genhances. Several of the men had builds that could rival Superman's, and some of the costumes were good enough to fool the casual observer.

He intended to have a brief talk with Alura before the main event of the day began. Her vigilante actions were getting out of hand and it was time to read her the riot act. While he couldn't physically reign her in, the combined power of the Legion could, and he was serving a term as Chairman of the Legion. He could make her life unpleasant if she didn't cooperate.



He was heading toward the glass entrance of the pavilion when Alura appeared, her feet floating a foot off the floor as she headed out the doorway. All heads turned to gawk at her. She was wearing an Asian-styled silk dress that left her back and shoulders bare, along with a hemline that pushed the boundaries of decency. Her flaming red hair and long legs drew male attention from all sides.

Bruce couldn't help but frown at the spectacle she was creating. Alura was indeed her mother's daughter.

Kal El had exercised the worst possible judgement in his ill-fated relationship with Maxima, especially given it had occurred while he was still married to Lois.

Kal had told him it was all part of a bargain to get Maxima to return to her home-world. She'd been causing havoc on Earth as she alternated from opposing the Legion to becoming too supportive in working with the Legion. Her arrogance and power ensured that when it came time to reign in a super-criminal or deal with one of Darkseid's minions, people generally died.

Kal was the only one who could stand up to her power-wise, and when he tried to forcefully remove her from Earth, the two of them fought to a draw. He was stronger, but she had her psi powers. His blasts of wierdling energy more than made up for her lesser strength.

She'd claimed from the beginning that she was only on Earth to make Superman her mate, something he'd refused. Beyond his marriage to Lois, he didn't want to burden the universe with a despot who had both his and Maxima's powers. The Almercan's, Maxima's people, were known for the warlike tendencies.

As angry as his refusal made her, Maxima didn't give up. She remained on Earth, always in the middle of one form of chaos or another, and always the target of exploitation by the Luthors and others. No matter how hard Kal and the Legion worked to advise her, to keep her on the straight and narrow, she always made the worst possible decisions.

Bruce understood the game she was playing right from the start, and

eventually Kal did too. She planned to be a nuisance until Kal granted her request for a child.

Bruce advised Kal to continue ignoring her. He felt she'd eventually give up and leave. But Kal simply shook his head, convinced she'd keep escalating her bad behavior until innocents began to die. He had a duty to prevent that.

Looking back, Bruce realized that was the first evidence of Kal's moral unraveling. For the first time in his life, he'd taken the easy way out. He'd also given in to his basest desires. Far from being a sacrifice, Kal had thrilled to his first experience of unrestrained passion. Their wild lovemaking in the lonely canyons of Utah had jiggled seismometers across the planet.

The affair lasted for a month, at least according to the seismometers, and then Maxima was gone. Fortunately, nobody other than Bruce knew about Kal's moment of weakness, least of all Lois.

Then, seventeen years later, the age of maturity on Almeric, a young woman named Alura arrived on Earth, her hair as flaming red as her mother, her powers clearly Kryptonian in origin. She came to meet the father she'd never known.

Lois had succumbed to her cancer the year before, so she thankfully never learned the truth about her husband.

Alura quickly proved that she not only had her father's power, but also her mother's arrogant disdain for human laws and culture. Growing up as she had on Almeric, she'd been worshipped as a goddess.

She plunged into Earth's culture, dating the most eligible men, applying for membership in the Legion of Superheroes (which was refused) and she appeared on the cover of every entertainment and news magazine. She convinced Playboy that she was eighteen (they could hardly check her birth certificate, and posed nude in their centerfold, which turned out to be their best selling issue ever. Her centerfold spread showed her holding an Army tank over her head — one-handed.

She used her status as a celebrity to surround herself with hundreds of so-

called friends, and used her powers to amass great wealth by mining diamonds from the Antarctic, where treaties had forbidden any such exploitation. She claimed the treaties only applied to humans, and the courts had reluctantly ruled in her favor.

Her Ice Diamonds were in high demand in some circles, even as they were despised by members of the environmental movement. They'd all seen the damage she'd caused in the formerly pristine Antarctic while digging them out.

After the Legion rejected her, she was hired as a special investigator for Interpol. The international police had run into extreme difficulty dealing with criminal Genhances. While the Legion dealt with the worst of them, Interpol needed someone of their own who could arrest and detain Genhances they wished to interrogate.

She'd promptly disgusted Bruce by using lethal force to take down several perpetrators. While it was virtually impossible for a Genhance to be killed by ordinary weapons, let alone arrested or confined by ordinary police or jail cells, her half Kryptonian and half Almerican powers were more than sufficient to end their lives if they resisted her. Several proud and defiant Genhances made the mistake of resisting arrest and paid the ultimate price.

Interpol and the courts ruled the deaths were justifiable given the superhuman violence the rogue Genhancees had displayed. Bruce disagreed. He'd been to the dark side himself. He knew better than most people where the boundaries between policing and vigilantism were, and Alura was well past them.

A half dozen Genhance criminals had since turned up dead. Interpol claimed ignorance, saying the victims weren't even on their list to investigate, but Bruce was certain that Alura was behind it all. He just couldn't prove it.

He'd decided it was time to remind her that while she might consider herself a goddess, nobody was above the law. If the killings were her doing, he'd eventually find a way to prove that.

Alura, unfortunately, took one look at him as he gestured for her to come his

way, and then flew even higher to avoid him. Bruce angrily turned to follow her on the ground, but she raced across the huge grounds to land in the middle of a crowd of admirers.

Cursing, Bruce listened as the loudspeakers began to announce the main event of the exposition. The demonstration was to feature both Alura and Supergirl.

The sponsors had built a full-sized but nonfunctional replica of an old steam engine and a couple of freight cars, and had laid a mile of track across the exposition grounds. Alura was slated to be the powerhouse who accelerated the train, and Lara El, better known as Supergirl, was going to stop it.

Lara was Kal and Kara's daughter, which ensured that her genetics were 100% Kryptonian. Her invulnerability, like Alura's, was absolute, her strength many hundreds of times greater than even a combat Genhance like himself. And, of course, she could fly.

Flight was the Holy Grail of current LuthorCorp research, but they'd so far found no way to splice those Kryptonian genes into a human helix.

Looking around, Bruce saw no evidence of Lara. Everyone was focusing on Alura as she worked her way through the crowd, signing autographs and posing for pictures with the elite Genhances (but never with ordinary humans). She eventually made her way to the massive steam engine.

According to the Expo program, the replica steam engine weighed 500 tons. Alura slowly bent down, giving the photogs plenty of time to snap pictures of what her tiny skirt didn't cover, and then grabbed the hard-point on the front of the engine. She flaunted her supreme strength by slowly lifting the front half of the engine off the ground, holding it with one hand as a maze of hard muscles reshaped her slender arms and legs. She held that pose as the cameras clicked.

The ten-year-old girl he'd seen earlier rushed over to pose with her.

Bruce felt an unwanted shiver of excitement course through him. Despite his extreme dislike of Alura and her haughty disregard for human life, there was

something about Kryptonian-grade strength that always turned him on. Every since Kara had first arrived on Earth, now more than fifty years ago, he'd been secretly thrilled by the way feminine beauty and extreme strength could be so marvelously intertwined.

He'd struggled to contain those desires while working with Kara in the early years, especially during the period that she and Kal had their falling out. He'd taken over the role of training and guiding her.

He knew his obsession with her strength was part of the same fatal flaw that had allowed him to fall in love with Selena Kyle back when she was still Catwoman. He'd looked the other way when Selena broke the law. He'd allowed her wild, noisy nearly endless desire for sex to distract him. He'd jumped at the chance to make love to a woman who was as much cat as she was human. A woman with all the strength of a wild tiger.

It was Kal who convinced him to break up with Selena. Who convinced him that Batman was better than that.

It was around that time when S.T.A.R labs approached Kal with the results of their genetics investigation. They'd been looking for artificial ways for him to continue his race through cloning, but had concluded it wasn't possible to clone invulnerable Kryptonian cells. There was only one obvious solution, now that he was widowed.

Six months later, Supergirl began to show a tummy bump which grew rapidly. She eventually went public to say she was carrying Superman's baby.

The media went crazy, and Kal finally admitted that they'd decided to have a family. While they never married, the Kryptonian cousins now shared both a home and two children, Lara and Jorel. The world watched with fascination as the super-children grew up.

The public's fascination with the El family turned into action. A write-in campaign to elect Kara to be President of the United States went viral. It overwhelmed both the Democrat and Republican party candidates, earning her

65% of the popular vote. However, given she was foreign-born, to say the least, the Constitution forbid her from taking office.

The majority of voters who'd written her name in were clamoring for a constitutional amendment to allow her presidency, but in the meantime, the newly-elected Vice President Sharon Angle was sworn in. She made a point of emphasizing that she was and always would be an ordinary person.

Meanwhile, while the political wrangling went on and on, Lara had taken her mother's old title as Supergirl. She was going to prove she deserved that title today.

Or so Bruce hoped.

He watched Alura closely as she climbed into the back of the engine. She positioned herself against the foot-thick metal plate that was attached to the frame, the cameras zooming in as she slowly worked her fingers deep into the thick steel, making it look no more substantial than soft clay.

The Genhances who'd initially crowded around the engine began to run toward the far end of the track, moving faster than cars on the nearby freeway. A series of school buses loaded up the ordinary people to trundle the mile to the far end of the track as well.

Bruce rode in the first bus as opposed to running with the other Genhances. He wanted to keep an eye on them from a distance.

He took up a position at the very end of the track—a dangerous place to be if Lara failed to stop the train in time. He could do little to slow a train, but he'd do his best to move people out of the way if he had to.

Down at the far end of the track, he saw the engine starting to accelerate toward him. It didn't take long to decide that Alura, as usual, wasn't following the rules. She was supposed to accelerate only to moderate speeds, but it was clear from the way the engine was rocking back and forth as it rushed down the tracks that she was ignoring that.

People saw it racing toward them, and began to run away from the tracks. All except the Genhances, who crowded even closer.

Three-quarters of the track had been used up and the train was still accelerating when Bruce went into overdrive. He looked around to inventory who he had to carry out of harm's way in case the train didn't stop. He was about to grab a couple of pregnant women and a family with kids when a loud BOOM nearly knocked him off his feet.

A red and blue streak flashed over his head, only to be followed by a deafening CLANG as the young Girl of Steel smashed into the front of the engine, her cape billowing behind her. She dug her fingers deeply into the thick steel as she poured all her flight power into the effort to slow the train.

The train began to slow, but not fast enough.

In desperation, she jammed her feet down into the roadbed, her long legs disappearing in a blaze of flaming wood ties, her skirt lifting over her waist as friction ignited the shattered wooden ties.

Rocks and shattered ties and metal spikes began flying upward all around her body. Bruce was nearly blinded by the fireball. His mind filled in the gaps as he imagined the violence that was thundering upward between her bare, outstretched legs. Violence that would have instantly torn an ordinary woman to shreds. That would have even injured a Genhance.

He thrilled to Lara's total invulnerability, to her indomitable power. Power no man other than Superman could ever hope to match. She was indeed her mother's daughter.

She was also young and inexperienced. She was stopping the engine too quickly, and the two freight cars behind buckled and came up off the tracks, ripping themselves free of their couplings, their back ends rising as they spun upward and to the side.



Bruce gasped in horror as he saw a catastrophe in the making. The tumbling freight cars were headed directly toward a crowd that was mostly ordinary people. For all his enhanced abilities, for all those of the Genhances who were in that crowd, they were helpless to catch the freight cars in mid-air.

Even worse, Lara couldn't go after them given she had to stop the engine before it raced through the crowd. Alura was still inside the engine, presumably testing her powers against Lara's and paying no attention to collateral damage as usual.

And that's when she arrived. Cassie dove from above to grab the coupling on the lead freight car. She swung the car around at fantastic speed to smash the second car up and away from the crowd.

Debris flew everywhere.

Ordinary people dove for the ground as the Genhances proudly stood with arms extended, forming a barrier to protect the others. Many of them were knocked down by the falling debris, but the people beneath them were spared serious injury.

Once the rain of debris ended, Cassie slowly dropped down into the crowd, holding what was left of the 20 ton freight car over her head. She was working hard to keep it balanced until enough people could scramble out of the way to give her room to set it down.

Cassie was the original human enhancement. An ordinary girl who'd been granted fantastic powers by the Amazons. Of course, calling her Wondergirl these days was a bit dated given she was far older than she looked. Amazons didn't age very fast, if at all.

He turned back to see Lara and Alura struggling with the massive engine. It gave off a deep, screaming groan of tortured steel as the proud daughters of Superman used their fantastic strength to fight each.

That wasn't part of the program.

Alura had momentum on her side along with most of her father's strength, not to mention a portion of her mother's psi powers.

Lara was a pure-bred Kryptonian, her alien strength undiluted.

The two super girls wrestled for control as the 500 ton engine twisted and crumpled between them.

The crowd screamed and tried to get out from under its shadow, but the engine twisted left and right and even spun around in midair as the titanic struggle continued. The groaning squeals of overstressed steel forced most people to cover their ears.

The engine finally stopped and began to move backward as Lara proved to be the stronger of the two. Alura angrily released her mother's psi power to augment her native strength, and drove the engine downward into the freight car that Cassie had set on the ground, crushing the car to bury Lara beneath the huge engine. All that was visible on the surface now was a corner of her red cape.

Alura's silk dress was hanging from her body in tatters as she floated above the smoking, mangled wreckage to deliver a blast of heat vision that melted the front of the engine, the white-hot liquid steel filling the hole that Lara lay in.

Instead of applause or cheers for her victory, there was only silence as everyone stared open mouthed at the wreckage, wondering, hoping, praying that Supergirl was OK.

Seconds passed, and then the wreckage shifted slightly. Then it began to slowly lift upward, steel groaning. It rose higher and higher until Lara reappeared, the flattened freight car and huge engine resting on her shoulders. Her body was coated in molten steel. She was breathing hard by the time her feet were safely hovering ten feet above the ground.

Cheers and whistles broke out, and then quickly filled the air. Suddenly

everyone was applauding wildly as the crowd went crazy. They knew they'd just witnessed an unscripted fight, and in the course of it, they'd gone from excited to terrified to relieved in seconds. The unexpected spectacle of Superman's daughters fighting had shocked and thrilled them all.

The applause became even more thunderous as Lara made a slow circuit over the grounds, carrying the wreckage on her back.

Alura floated away, angry that all the applause was going to her sister, despite the fact that she was the one who had truly won the contest. The torn remains of her dress fluttered to the ground, given the guys who were looking up — and many were — a show they didn't deserve. Several people scrambled to gather up the remains of her dress to keep as souvenirs.

Fortunately, most eyes were focused on Lara as she set the engine down in an open area, and then rose high into the sky to vibrate herself at hyper-speed to shake off the dirt, the wood splinters and the crudely melted steel that had cooled to encase part of her body. She then floated back down over the crowd, looking not only heroic, but fresh and untouched despite the violence she'd just endured.



Alura lifted off the ground and started to fly away, but Lara flew after her, grabbing

her flaming red hair to jerk her to a stop. Alura spun around, eyes blazing in fury as she prepared for another fight, only to have Lara embrace her. She wrapped her cape around Alura to provide some modesty as the two of them settled back to the ground.

Lara smiled as she held her half sister cheek to cheek while launching into an obviously prepared speech about why superheroes must always work together in the end. As she described it, the two of them might have their differences, but when the chips were down, they would always fight their enemies as one. She claimed the bond of blood was stronger than anything else when it really mattered.

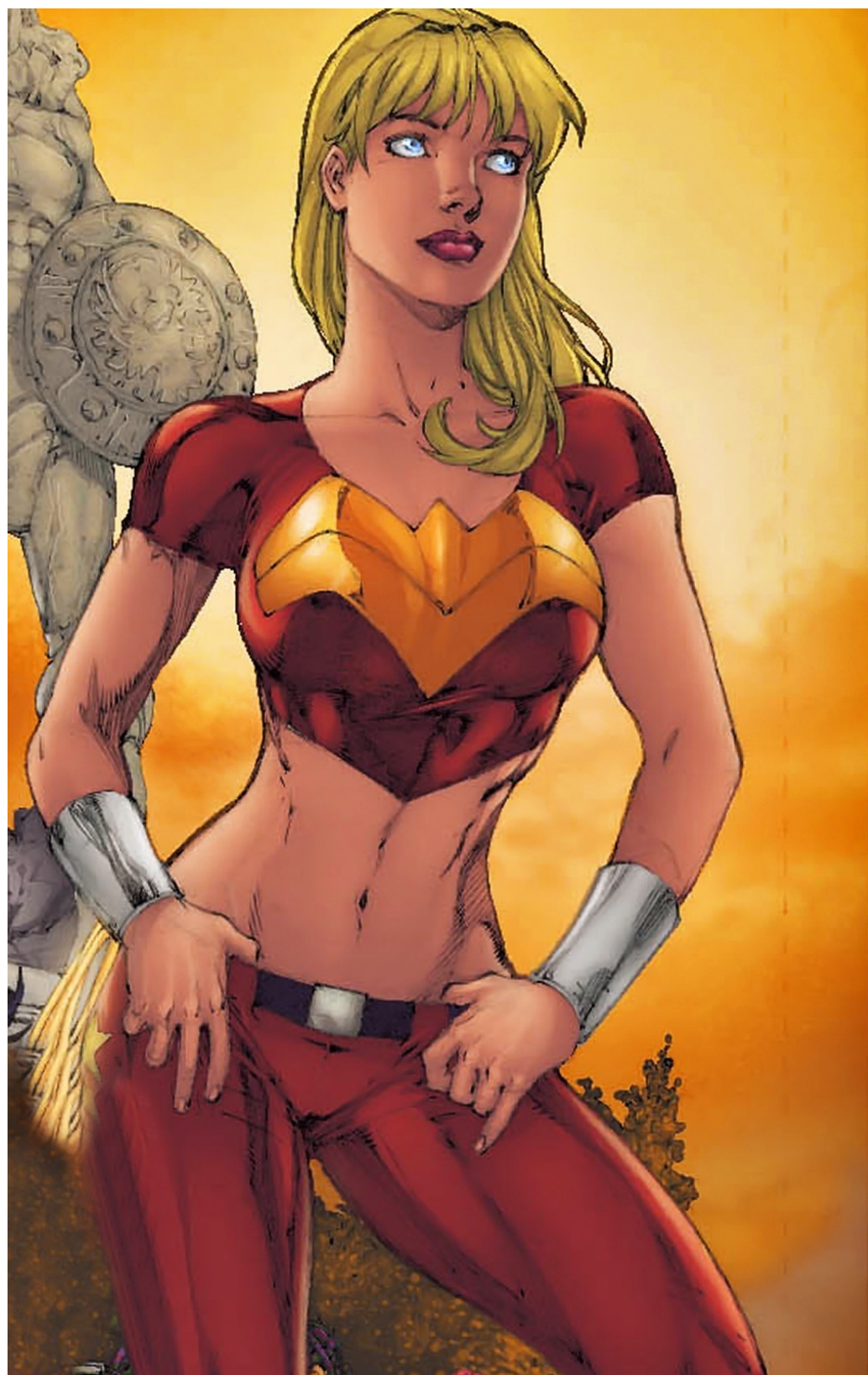
Bruce knew bullshit when he heard it. He could see Lara's muscles flexing powerfully as she used a very great deal of her strength to hold Alura to her side. There was no love lost between those two. Alura cared little for ordinary humans. If people had died today, crushed under the engine, she would have simply blamed her half-sister.

But it was a good story, and few people could see the silent battle of strength that was going on under her cape. Bruce hoped the Genhancees would take her message to heart. He needed them to work together to stop crimes, especially those committed by rogues. To stop them without using excessive force.

He found himself smiling, something he rarely did while wearing his cowl. Lara had found a way to get her message out despite the unexpected battle over the steam engine. She was a daughter her father could be proud of.

He was proud of her.

"Well, they're certainly getting their money's worth today, Bruce," a soft feminine voice said from behind him. "Despite paying a hundred bucks to get in."



He turned to see Cassie floating behind him, her thumbs tucked behind her belt as usual. She was keeping her eye on Alura as she flew up and out of sight.

Bruce found it appropriate that Cassie was floating on air in front of a statue of Wonder Woman, given she was now fulfilling that role.

He wanted to hold her in his arms and kiss her to thank her for arriving in the nick of time, but he just scowled as usual. They hadn't told anyone about their newfound relationship yet. He wasn't looking forward to sharing this secret with Kal.

"You didn't have to wait until the last moment," he said. "People were seconds away from dying."

"I wasn't even supposed to be here," Cassie replied, struggling to sound a bit annoyed despite being so glad to see Bruce. "You could have called me if you thought the stunt was going to become dangerous."

"I assumed Kal El had checked it out," he said, feigning ignorance for the benefit of those who could overhear them. "You think you can remove that engine from the field?"

"Why?"

"The way Lara left it, I'm afraid its going to fall over and crush someone."

She made a fist and flexed her arm, revealing an astoundingly defined biceps. "I've got a few muscles, but I think you've got me confused with a Kryptonian. That thing weighs 500 tons. No way I can lift that much."

Bruce felt his blood pressure surging, his heart racing. Cassie knew exactly how flexing her arm would affect him. She thought it was cute that he was so turned on by her super-strength.

"Well, then we better tell Lara," he said.

"I'm surprised Alura didn't fly away with it. It would have been her style to lift it over her head and walk through the crowd, holding it one-handed, just to show she's as strong as her sister."

"She was naked, Cassie."

"All the more for her to exploit her fans."

Bruce's heart missed a few beats as he thought of that. It was all he could do to keep his voice low and calm. "You don't like her very much, do you?"

"Does anyone? Other than her stable of Genhance guys she keeps at stud all the time. Its disgusting. I don't know how she finds time to do any real police work."

"I think the point is that she doesn't. Once Interpol gives her a target, she just kills them and then goes back to her male harem. I think she's also been acting on her own lately."

"She's her mother's daughter. Wish we could do something about her, but that's her father's job. I don't know why he puts up with her. He should kick her off Earth like he did her mother."

"Hopefully not as pregnant as her mother was."

"Ah...the real issue emerges," Cassie smiled. "Maybe he needs her. You know, to propagate his dying race. She's capable of helping with that."

Bruce looked shocked. "She's his daughter."

"If you were the last human male alive, would you let that bother you? Besides, Krypt genetics are so clean that there is zero chance of birth defects. Remember that he and Kara are first cousins. Plus Alura didn't grow up around him. They have no bond. His fatherhood is merely a technicality."

Bruce shook his head. "I still don't believe that's why he's keeping her here."

Cassie lowered her voice so only Bruce could hear. "Well, she told me otherwise. I'm not sure I believe her, she's always trying to fuck with my head, but given the way Kal has been acting these last years, who knows."

Bruce cursed softly beneath his cowl. Kal had indeed changed. Once he decided to do what he must to keep his race alive, he'd made a lot of questionable decisions. But this would be the worst, assuming it was true.

Bruce wasn't sure he was the one who should talk to Kal about it, though. Given he was dating Cassie, who was a third his age, the pot had no right to call the kettle black.

"You've never told me whether you could do that," he asked, his voice very low. "Carry a Kryptonian child."

She turned to lean close to him. "I thought you wanted me to carry yours?"

"We don't know if that's even possible. Despite my Genhance, I'm not really in your power class. But with Kal..." His voice drifted off. He didn't want to think about that.

She shrugged. "It's been discussed. S.T.A.R. labs thinks I can. But Diana has given up her lasso for that privilege. After we understand how her kids turn out, the discussion will come back to me, I suppose."

Thankfully, before their discussion could get any more awkward, Cassie turned her back to him and bent down to leap into the sky. Her fantastically strong legs cracked the concrete pad they were standing on as her leap carried her a quarter mile upward before she began to use her flight power.

Bruce coughed as she left him standing in a cloud of dust. He wanted more than anything to follow Cassie, to continue their discussion in private, but he knew she was already ten miles away.

Besides, he had to find Lara and convince her to remove the crumpled steam

engine.

He also had to continue what he'd come here for... looking for rogue Genhances.

Batman's work was never done.