

Better the devil you date...

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/5701015) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/5701015>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Teen Titans (Animated Series)
Relationships:	Beast Boy/Raven (Teen Titans) , Robin/Starfire (Teen Titans) , John Constantine/Zatanna Zatara , Slade/Circe
Characters:	Slade , Arella (DCU) , Cyborg (Character) , Beast Boy , Robin (DCU) , Starfire , Zatanna Zatara , John Constantine , Traci Thirteen , Kent Nelson , Circe , Satan
Additional Tags:	Cuddling & Snuggling , Nudity , Kittens , Lingerie , Relationship Advice , Sexual Humor , canon ships , Immortality , Classical References , MST3K References , Magical Artifacts , Teen Romance , Films , Epiphanies , Single Parents , Mother-Daughter Relationship , Falling In Love , Meeting the Parents , Pre-Quest , Relationship(s) , Evil Plans , Latin , Libraries , Translation , Magic , Alcohol , Sexual Tension , Prophecy , Ancient History , Operas , Middle Names , Collaboration , Humor , The Devil is a Sneaky Bastard , BAMF Slade Wilson , American History , Beds , Literal Sleeping Together , Weird Biology , Kissing , Auroras , Penises , Worldbuilding , Sex Magic
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2016-01-12 Updated: 2022-06-01 Words: 20,690 Chapters: 20/?

Better the devil you date...

by [Whim_Wham](#)

Summary

Gar & Rei-Rei fall in love, and go on a slightly non-canonical quest. Mayhem, madness, mothers, merriment, kittens and a highly non-canonical villainous backstory ensue!

Ravening Beast Boy

Chapter Summary

Dating between the emotionally spastic and purposefully restrained is going to be so much fun!

On the threshold of the tower's den, Beast Boy paused: something wasn't right. His eyes surveyed the room and its inhabitants. Nearly everything and everybody looked and acted as they had countless times before : Starfire was in the kitchen fueling her alien dietary requirements with mustard and mold ; Cyborg battled Robin in the algorithmic arena of Carpoolypse Racers, and Raven was reading one of her dusty, musty, fusty old tomes of Things Best Not Known By the Minds of Teens.

Only she wasn't really reading : she was watching.

The book was a hunter's blind, and Garfield was her quarry. Gar found the implications unsettling. Besides Robin, Raven was the single most focused person that he knew. When she read, she did so with the single mindedness of a black hole inexorably devouring local space-time. Now, however, as Beast Boy stood on the verge of the room, his eyes beheld a different type of Raven, a distracted Raven.

Raven's eyes had skittered over him from over the top of the big book and then back in an alarmingly unsubtle attempt to be subtle. Raven was never subtle : she was the Dark Princess of the Barbed Remark ; as such, there should have been some wry greeting or blistering glare upon Gar's entry to the den. But not today. Today, she continued to silently peek at Garfield from behind a volume that she only pretended to read ; it was the spookiest Raven of all time.

He thought, Raven's not any *spookier* than normal, Gar. Hello! Hell Princess! Not really believing it, he stepped into the room with all of the calm that the gangly, green teen could muster.

Robin and Cyborg weren't so absorbed in their game to not notice the herky-jerky entrance of their teammate. Cyborg nudged Robin, whispered, "What's up with Gar?"

Robin took his eyes off of the digital battlefield to consider Garfield. His opponent smirked as he took advantage; vaulted the enemy car into the oblivion of off track space. Robin directed his second best Batman glare at the cyborg before returning his attention to Beast Boy.

Gar was definitely acting oddly : He walked into the room with the exaggerated composure of an amateurish actor. Something was making him uncomfortable in a place where he should be nothing but a relaxed green teen. Robin widened his search; identified the cause: Raven.

He leant over to Cyborg: “Raven’s spying him; it’s freaking him out.”

Bent over his controller, Cyborg muttered, “It’s about time.”

Robin gave him a sidelong glance as his automotive avatar sideswiped his opponent’s T-Car into a game-time consuming end-over-end flip & fireball crash.

“That he freaked?”

“Dude! Gar’s a nonstop freak-out.”

Robin nodded knowingly as his red and black suspiciously Batmobile-ish car howled across the finish line to fireworks, victory music and the pneumatic gyrations of bikini dancers.

He did a little touchdown dance; spiked the controller on the sectional couch: shouted,

“Score!”

No one but Cyborg paid any attention to Robin’s display: it was standard T-Tower proceedings; however, what followed was a different matter.

Cyborg, not being able to help himself, quipped: “That’s what Raven’s thinking about!” Immediately, he wished he had not blurted, his hands flying up as if to cram the already escaped words back into his big mouth.

Shocked at being discovered, a blushing Raven sat bolt upright; the book and several other items in the room were caught up in a burst of her wild dark energy. The book, pages splayed, took startled flight; the television, uncertain which way to escape, split down the middle and tried for two directions at once; all of Robin’s belted smoke bombs gave up their swirling ghosts in an abrupt fog bank; Cyborg’s detachable drone hand fired out of the smoke to crash through the den’s picture window; smoke shrouded Gar made a noise that could only be described as a surprised squawk that abruptly reduced to an equally surprised squeak; and somewhere deep within the kitchen, it sounded as if Starfire was noisily battling the percussion section of the kitchen sink orchestra, and it sounded like the kitchen was loosing.

Regaining emotional control, Raven spoke her three word signature intonation and gestured a twirling hand gesture: the smoke wheeled into a roiling point that vanished with an audible ‘pop!’ to reveal den debris.

Everything and everyone was a mess. Robin, his utility belt singed, was sprawled across the top of the couch. Cyborg, sitting on the couch, stared at his stump dumbly before shouting, “Give me back my hand!” and stumbling to the shattered picture window to peer with extended optics for his missing appendage. A food covered Starfire flew, literally, out of the kitchen only to stop, jaw dropped, at the scene of devastation before her.

“Are we under attack?”

Raven turned to her and meant to say something witty in her gothic fashion, but she caught sight of what had befallen Garfield; she scooped him up and fled.

Starfire, looking very worried, grabbed her significant other by both shoulders.

“What is going on?”

Robin looked up into the eyes of his alien princess girlfriend—Yes, Robin you’re in Outlanders¹—and smiled crookedly: “Raven’s finally into Gar.” He raised his head, took in the mess that was once a den; declared: “Really into him!”

Having once really being into Raven, Star knew exactly, immediately and intimately what had transpired.

She moved her hands to cradle his face as she brought her mouth down to his for a happy kiss.

“Their dating is going to be even more gloriously messy than a G’lorg Snarr on the Apex of Hoop’La!”

Having some idea of the true nutty hullabaloo of Tamarainian culture, Robin could only imagine that it meant messy teen love times ten thousand. He wiped away the strawberry jam and mustard ghost of his boo’s buss as he thought out loud, “Have we G’lorged?”

Star laughed, delightedly ; whispered in his ear.

He did his best Keanu Reeves: “Whoa!”

Garfield regained consciousness within a room that he had only been within one other time: a scary, illuminating, and oddly endearing encounter with the hidden multiple facets of Raven. Three things registered upon his consciousness in rapid succession. He was very small. He was something with a forked tongue that tested the air. Most significantly of all, he was in Raven’s lap! She was looking down at him with an expression that was half avid, half bemused. He squeaked, the tongue lancing out past piranha teeth, and he felt what seemed to be the unfurling of leathery wings.

‘What in the heck am I?’

As if reading his mind, Raven held up the book that she had been ‘reading’. The cover of the leather bound book bore an embossed design of an intertwined pair of winged lizards.

“You’re a winged horny dragon.” She coloured immediately as she had meant to say, “Thorny! I meant thorny dragon. Moloch Horridus!” She finished, somewhat lamely and far too scientifically for the extra wide eyed spiky lizard on her lap. What she found embarrassing he found endearing and comforting. The enigmatic and sarcastic Raven could be as fantastically awkward as Garfield. With this realization came the key bit of awareness that had eluded him for so long. Their gawkiness was mutually endearing.

To prove it, he managed to lisp a high pitched, “Wow, you’re as much a spaz as I am!”

She rapped him gently upon the head.

“Ow!” He was currently very spiky.

¹ The forty eight minute adaptation of Johji Manabe's manga was one of the two first anim  watched by the author on super grainy VHS. The other was *Laputa* aka *Castle in the Sky*.

Materfamilias Extra Dimensionem

Chapter Summary

Thus continues the madcap development of what will almost be certainly the love life of one Garfield Mark Logan.

I have deviated from canon : in my timeline, Azarath is not magically restored following Trigon's defeat (The End Part 3, Season 4)

“Dude, what’s with the modern art?”

Beast Boy stood on his tip toes to tug at one of a multiplex of flexible antennae projecting from a beachball sized sphere that projected like a crazed chandelier from the den’s ceiling.

Cyborg rolled his organic eye. “You obviously don’t know a broad band energy sink when you see one, Gar. Stop playing with that!”

Garfield ceased twirling one of the many ceramic tipped metal tentacles into a corkscrew.

“Is that the scientific name for a disco ball? Awesome!”

Cyborg gave an emphatic final growl of torque to his Robertson tipped screw middle finger as he finished securing the assembly in place.

“It’s not a disco ball! It’s a...”

Starfire entered the room bearing a enormous bowl of popcorn and a precariously balanced stack of movie discs.

“Friends, I bring snacks and all twenty six seasons of Space Viking Princess Contagion!” She stopped at the sight of the new addition to the den:

“Oh, pretty! What is it?”

Beast Boy effected the cliched Travolta dance pose: “It’s a disco ball, Star!”

Cyborg grabbed the sides of his head to keep his brains from exploding: “Energy sink, Gar! En-er-gy sink!”

Starfire was far too busy listening to the fun explanation to catch the actual one.

“For dancing? Yay!”

Koriand'r grabbed Beast Boy and elevated him in a more ballroom than disco maneuver at exactly the moment that Raven glid moodily into the room. Her reaction to the Mary Poppins dance routine, a single, sharp flint of jet formed an exclamation point above her head ; then her envy regarding Star and her disdain for Garfield collapsed into shock as she suddenly felt her released essential energy yanked away from her body.

Raven's eponymous spirit bird shrieked into the newly repaired room. The new couch, television and other contents of the den exited the floor to ceiling window. Star yelped as, still airborne, she was separated from a plummeting Gar, to be buffeted out into the bay with the short-lived furniture. Almost as quickly as it formed, the spirit raven distorted into a river of black energy flowing into the brightly illuminated sphere of the energy sink's sphere. Cyborg ran to the machine, opened a panel; threw a switch: nothing happened.

"It won't shut off! I don't under..." A scintillating tangle of energy writhed across his metal body; he whirled, writhed in blue lightning, to the floor.

The current cut abruptly.

Raven collapsed, unconscious.

Garfield shouted her name, ran to her side; touched her.

A brilliant flash of emerald expanded and contracted in an almost subliminal firework, and Beast Boy's inert body fell across Raven's supine form.

Beast Boy woke to the murky view of a vast domed ceiling pierced high above him by an oculus. The mote dancing light that shone down directly upon him pierced the complete darkness that flooded the chamber with a spear of light. He bolted upright, shouting Raven's name ; it entered the darkness only to be hurled back at him mockingly by unfeeling architecture. Then he was answered.

"Garfield Mark Logan, do not fret: Raven is unharmed." It was a calm, adult, feminine voice that somehow made Gar think of the of resonant roll of waves on a beach. He would have relaxed except he knew of one other person who used a tightly controlled and unruffled voice.

He hopped off of what appeared to be a dais of black glass ringed by eight statues half seen in the gloom just beyond the column of light.

"How do you know? Who are you, anyway?"

"A mother always knows." A spark of white light ignited within the darkness, and formed into a white cape and cowl'd woman hovering in the air. The outfit, the hovering, the bindi and the statement combined within Beast Boy's brain to blow his mind.

"But weren't you... when Azarath was destroyed?"

The woman lowered her head, her face hidden by the shining cowl.

“Azarath was not completely destroyed. Enough was saved, it endures. With your help my daughter will recover it.”

Garfield had a flash of Robin level insight: “You know your daughter’s fine because you arranged this meeting!”

The head raised, and her face came back into view with a contrite, knitted brow.

“ There are strict constraints regarding direct familial thaumaturgic contact : I am restricted to the ephemera of dreams and enigmatic foretokens when it comes to contacting my daughter.” She saw by Garfield’s baffled expression that she was bringing too much esoterica to bear for his teenage brain ; she rephrased it to, “My magic doesn’t allow me to...phone Raven : it forces me to send her dream clues and hints.”

“What’s the rulebook say about friends of family?”

“Very little.”

Garfield’s eyebrows shot up: “Dude, your magic’s messed up!

The woman’s rueful expression lightened. “It is! Oh, is it ever!”

They shared an odd laugh in the very odd space.

“So, who’d you ‘zap!’ to get me here? Cyborg?

She nodded. “His invention is really a magical device he acquired while under my... direction.”

“You know, the more you talk the more you sound like the kind of people we fight!”

She looked pained: “Raven did not understand the clues that I left behind for her the last time she visited Azarath : the intact city seal, and the fact that her Azarath incantation is still effective.” She sighed. “That is one of the reasons why I brought you here: so I would be able to be direct.”

“There’re others?”

“One other: A mother is entitled to meet the boy with whom her daughter is,” A playful little curl crept into the smile. “bewitched!”

Beast Boy’s eyes goggled: “Bewitched?!”

Arella raised her hands in appeasement.

“That magic is entirely yours!”

Beast Boy ruffled his left hand through his shock of hair.

“I think you’ve got bewitching mixed up with annoying!”

“There is no difference: her feelings for you cause confusion, and her confusion makes her nettled.”

Both hands pushed back his hair away from his forehead. “You’re telling me that when she bites my head off it’s ‘cause she’s crazy about me?!”

“Precisely!”

“Can we please talk about the other reason why I’m here, please?”

Pneuma Confusion

Chapter Summary

Nothing is normal when dating a devil. That includes meeting her mother. Parallel dimensions, dream states, cryptic messages and mad science all crowd into a page and a tad of chapter.

My canon divergence: Azarath is not magically reinstated at the completion of The End.

Hair a wet comet tail, a soaked Koriand'r reentered the den as a shocked Robin rushed into the newly wrecked den.

"I leave for half a day and..." Then he caught sight of his three insensate team mates.

"Star, what...?"

She landed in his arms : "Friend Cyborg's disco ball has trapped Raven...and Cyborg and Beast Boy too?"

"Disco..." Robin was interrupted as the spirit raven made a second raucous appearance from the sphere to re-emerge with its fountainhead, Raven ; displaced the green gleam that swum out of her body to sink into Gar's skin.

"Ball?" Robin lamely finished.

Star, who had more first hand knowledge of spirit transpositions than her beau, reacted to the esoteric energies with alien princess aplomb: "Ah, it is a pneuma confusion like I shared with Raven when the Puppet Master attacked. They are coming out of it."

Robin wasn't exactly certain what a 'pnu-ma' was but the energy pattern did look like what occurred when the sentient puppet villain robbed the Titans of their vigour, spirit, energy or 'pnu-ma'. He decided to sidestep the esoteric issue with some good old direct leadership.

"Stay with them Star; I'm going to check Cyborg." He reached his companion at exactly the moment when the prerecorded 'Boo-Yah!' indicated the initiation of a successful Cyborg reboot.

Face down in Raven's chest, Garfield woke with the comfortable stupor of a cat curled up in a sunbeam, while Raven's return to consciousness was the other extreme: immediate, crystalline and *most* displeased at Beast Boy's bosomy burrowing.

Fidgeting between Raven's breasts, Gar drooled a pool of saliva into the dent of her sternum. She scowled, raised a fist.

Almost all the way back to consciousness, Garfield murmured five words that transmogrified Raven's intent: "Corvine, Azarath awaits the Orb!" The descending fist blossomed into a palm that, joined by its partner, lifted Gar's sleep-gluey eyes level with her own.

"Oh, hi..." He said, thickly. Then, becoming very aware of his intimate arrangement with his team mate, he blurted: "Raven! Wha...?"

There was an intensity within Raven's dark eyes that steadied Garfield and made him remember his dream in a rush. He bent his head forward; planted a peck on a very startled Raven's mouth—he had been aiming for her cheek, but missed.

"That's from your mom!"

"She's alive?" Raven sounded incredulous.

"Yes." Garfield stated, factually, even though his proof was only dream-stuff.

"She's alive?" Raven sounded hopeful.

"Yes!"

"She's alive?" Raven sounded tearful.

"Yes!" Garfield gathered up his girlfriend in his arms and marvelled as she wept.

Koriand'r, who had been standing solidly upon the floor, floated gently aloft with her happy response to the scene unfolding before her emerald eyes.

A Raven by any other name

Chapter Summary

Two couples delve further--separately, but with some slight overlap--into the heady mysteries of love.

Garfield sat on the edge of a corner of Raven's bed. He had zero other places to plant his green behind: there was exactly one chair ; it was occupied, by Raven. That was fine as it was a creepy assortment of unfurled wings and staring eyes whereas the bed, still fairly spooky with a headboard of dancing devils, was merely the bed of the girl who, according to her extra dimensional mother, really dug him.

"So the monks of Azarath only knew you by a nickname?"

Raven nodded, leant forward in her scary chair. "I was Corvine. My *Vocamen* was known only to the abbot and my mother."

Garfield, fascinated, almost leant off the edge of the bed: "A secret code word?"

Raven nodded.

"My identity was password encrypted directly into the abbey's crux-stone as a defence against being replaced by a doppelgänger."

"Uh, what's a dopplewhanger?"

Raven reframed things for the confused teen, suddenly comprehending the role of accommodation in love : she dipped into her growing knowledge of her boyfriend's jumbo scary movie memory.

"Pod people."

"Ohhhhh! So it kept Trig...."

She interrupted him by suddenly sitting next to him on the bed.

"Yes." She leaned in close and planted an awkward, close mouthed kiss on Garfield's lips. His eyes widened ; blushing furiously, she jerked her her head away.

"I didn't me...I'm so...."

He pulled her back for an equally amateurish encore which surged into a mutually fierce clutch. It ended with the panting, flushed couple gazing across a very intimate lack of

distance into each others shining eyes. By mutual unspoken consent, they broke the clench for a less intense side by side arrangement upon the made bed. He stroked her violet hair; she did the same to his shock of jet: it was the safest, least volcanic activity that either could conceive of as a display of mutual fondness.

Garfield declared, "Now I know what 'take it slow' means!"

Raven agreed with an earnest, "Dude!"

Gar giggled: "I never thought that I'd hear you say that!"

She cozied up against him; spoke in her more typically undemonstrative manner.

"We're rubbing off on each other."

Beast Boy's eyes widened : "Like sex?"

She bopped him upon his noggin.

"Like personalities, *dork!*"

The 'Thud!' halfway up the wall one room over interrupted Beast Boy's mock 'Ow!'.

"Wow," Gar goggled, "What are those two doing in there?"

"Probably training." She experimented with a little physical contact wriggling to wrestle her man's mind away from other matters. It worked masterfully. He threw an arm around her; drew her in as close as was physically possible while still being fully clothed.

Flat on his back next to the bed, Robin shot his airborne girlfriend an annoyed gaze.

"Star, are you here with me, or over there with them?"

Koriand'r with an ear to the wall replied with, "I hear nothing! I was sure both would be noisy!" She actually began to look a tad concerned. "Do you suppose that they are maybe not okay?"

Robin's frown somersaulted into a grin.

"They could making quintuplets in there and still be less noisy than you!"

He could see the future queen in Star's almost subliminal counter gaze before she effortlessly scooped him back up into their aerial make out session.

"And I think that you have yet to hear me at my loudest, Par'Queeze!" She kissed him loudly, eagerly.

He wasn't exactly sure what a 'Par'Queeze' was: boyfriend, lover, fiancé. He had plenty of time and desire to learn; and the lessons were fantastic!

The Thing Called Love

Chapter Summary

Both couples have a flappable and considerably less flappable participant: I will demonstrate with a little breakfast bungle.

The following morning, one member of either couple was squirming against the need to know what the other pair had been up to the previous evening; their significant others were, according to their personalities, either blithely or sardonically indifferent. Intent upon fishing the facts out of Garfield's head by the act of stare induced ESP, Starfire missed the mustard and squirted a dollop of ketchup into her morning coffee ; and Gar absently buttered his toast with Raven's Hefeextrakt¹ as he tried not to stare too openly at Star.

Koridand'r sip turned turned into a spray of tomato scented coffee. Not missing a beat of his breakfast, Robin handed her the intended yellow squeeze tube. Beast Boy bit into his not butter-buttered bread, and gagged ; flung the toast. It stuck to the wall, Hefeextrakt side down.

Both bungled diners quickly scrambled for their actual food targets : Star noisily squeezed a dollop of mustard straight into Robin's half finished coffee, and bolted her boyfriend's brew. Gar swiped a hefty dollop of peanut butter spoon across his tongue to erase the taste of potent yeast paste as Raven bit into her black, Hefeextrakt slathered toast.

Garfield looked on in horror : "H'aow ca' yaou' ea' tha?"

Raven considered her ridiculous beau with a little smile that Starfire, cradling a refill of mustardy java , happily noticed was not actually mocking.

"Hefeextrakt tastes as grim as it sounds ; I love it."

"Who doesn't like the taste of grim?" He punctuated his statement with another fresh spoonful of buttered legume across his taste organ.

Rebooted and rested, Cyborg sauntered into the room, took the empty chair at the table; heaped a tower of flapjacks that he began to drown in butter and syrup.

Raven countered, "You don't and that's why I..." She stopped, flustered, as the others interrupted their breakfasting to listen.

"Why you, *what*, Gal'Xath²?" Star's eyes were even more lustrous than usual.

"Why..." Raven rallied: "Why I tolerate the lot of you is beyond me!"

Cyborg cut a perfect wedge out of his pancake stack, stabbed it with his fork ; flourished it with its dribbling foodstuff in time to his declaration : “Mechanically, tolerances are improved by alloying in those elements that improve performance ; relationally, tolerances are improved by...” He popped the piece into his mouth to give dramatic pause. “...love!” He and his pancaked fork concluded, both directly addressing a ruffled Raven.

Laughing, Beast Boy held up his hands in surrender.

“I’ll admit it before we have to rebuild a third time!” He cast a look at Raven that was slightly more jaunty than jittery; she relented, grateful for the rescue from her innate emotional reticence with a nod : Gar marvelled at what he hoped to Azarath was a newfound sophistication regarding his knowledge of his girlfriend. There was only one way to know for sure : he went around to her side of the table, slid an arm around her; she flinched slightly before snaking an arm around him.

“We’re a thing.” She stammered.

¹ A German yeast spread akin to Vegemite & Marmite. It really does taste of sadness, broken dreams and lost puppies.

² A portmanteau of the Tamarainian word for BFF, Galmaron, and Raz’Xath, the Azerothian concept of entwined souls : it is their special shared word for the connection of literally knowing what it is like to be the other person. This references the Teen Titans episode, *Switched*.

One of these Things is not like the others...

Chapter Summary

Movie time in the Tower!

Cyborg didn't miss a beat: "Seeing that your boyfriend is a shape changer, of course you're now a Thing!"

Robin snorted laughter and orange juice; Beast Boy tried to look offended before he too was struck down by the giggles.

The space-viking and demi-demon regarded the male tomfoolery with their own characteristic reactions : Star's was wide eyed with wonder ; Raven's was narrow eyed with impatience.

Star jumped in as the female envoy at a conference where the other side had seemingly lost their collective minds.

"Please, is this a 'guy thing'?"

Beast Boy turned into the most grotesque creature in his mental menagerie, a blesmol¹, shook off the giggles; trundled over to the entertainment console, and pawed at the controls ; the Universal logo orbited the Earth in three hundred and sixty centimetre 12K glory. He reverted to his usual, angular self, called out, "We have Movie Sign²!"

Raven sat next to him on the couch.

"This will explain?" She sounded her typical ironic self.

"Everything!" Cyborg took the far end of sectional, leaving the intervening space for the remaining couple, the female member of which interjected, "That is not what the Earth looks like from orbit! It is too..." Robin pulled her in close and whispered, "Pay attention, or you'll miss the message!"

"Ohhh!" Starfire concentrated on the screen in time to see an erratically flying saucer approach and appear to burn-up in Earth's atmosphere.

"That is also not what the..."

Everyone shushed her.

Raven commented on the slow, steady electronic build of musical dread: "I like the score."

The camp fire blazed brightly ; the cardiac score throbbed; the screen darkened.

Mouse Garfield peeked out of Raven's popcorn that Robin and Cyborg had made partway through the movie. They had needed a reason to leave the room that wasn't, 'Can't stay: too scared!' The girls, absorbed by the movie, hadn't even noticed that the boys had left until their grudging return, snack laden, to the chamber of horrors.

Raven declared: "That would be my favourite movie, except zero women!"

Starfire plucked mousy Gar from Raven's popcorn bag; stoked him between nervously twitching ears.

"There is plenty of the ladies, friend Raven! The Thing is a girl super-colony³!"

"What?" The boys spoke almost as one entity. Rodent Beast Boy was far too busy going slowly cross eyed under Star's stroking to squeak.

A laughing Star explained : "A bunch of men discover women and resent it horribly when they end up changed for the better!"

Cyborg shivered. "Staying single forever!"

Robin laughed ruefully. "Alien space princess girlfriend logic!"

Raven's jaw dropped minutely: "Whoa! Favourite movie of all time!" She reached out to Star. "Now, give me back my mouse! He needs...improving."

Laughing, Starfire passed the concerned looking myomorph over to his better half.

Raven addressed her mousy man as she carried him from the room : "and you thought you were the monster in this relationship! Adorable."

Beast Boy managed a very good, high pitched movie-geek reference before vanishing in the clutches of Raven.

"Help meeee!³"

Starfire considered her boyfriend with inquisitive eyes.

"What was the message, Par'Queueze?"

"It turned out that it was for me, Star."

"Yes?" She leant her eyes in close to his.

He whispered in her ear.

"Hooray!"

She awarded him a canoodle⁴.

Cyborg, sounding positively puritan, grouched, “Gah, wait until there isn’t any one around to scar!” He left, mumbling: “I’m never going to be able to scrub that off of the hard drive!”

¹ A blesmol is a naked mole rat ala Ron Stoppable's pet in Kim Possible.

² Of course nerd-king Gar loves MST3K!

³ Super-colony refers specifically to ants ; Star has kidnapped it to mean a single life-unit composed of a mass population of independently capable single cell organisms. Star’s assessment of the Thing’s inherent sex lends an uncomfortable battle-of-the-sexes & Incel themes which only added to the male Titans unease. NOTE 1: If this seems far fetched, Alien, made only three years earlier (‘79), based upon the fetishist phallic monster designs of H.R. Giger deals with, amongst other horrors, an extension of the female experience of rape into the world of men. NOTE 2 : The original Dan O’Bannon script, a darker reworking of the earlier film, Dark Star (Dir: John Carpenter, 1974), had the ship crewed entirely by men.

⁵ Canoodle : (verb) To kiss & cuddle all lovey-dovey like.

Study Date

Chapter Summary

Orbs, tomes, hormones!

A henge of tomes sprouted towers of leather and vellum across the floor of Gar's room. Within the musty, bookish heart of the henge, Raven paged steadily through the huge, illuminated pages of a book large enough to be its own coffee table. Squished in next to her, Gar puzzled over a tiny tome entitled flashily across its red moroccan leathered cover, *Arcane Resque Gestas Mundi*¹.

"Well, there are only three balls in this book. It's gotta' be a Palantír, a Lok'Nar meteor, or..." He flipped forward to the 'V's. "Or this!" He pointed to a beautifully hand inked picture of a luminous blue sphere covered with an elaborate pattern of gold trceries and symbols. "The *Venit Sphram*!"

Raven quirked an eyebrow. "That would be correct if 'orb' referred only to perfect spheres: it doesn't." She flipped an enormous page.

Beast Boy looked confused. "There are other types of orbs?"

"Four others: a cross surmounted sphere denoting royalty, a celestial body, the ten degree radius around a celestial body, and an eyeball."

"Ewww! I hope it isn't an eye!"

"Probably only a metaphorical name for a amulet and not a real eyeball at all."

"A what?"

Raven sighed, marked her place with a velvet book mark; closed the tome; parked a patient kiss on her arcanelly artless boo's lips.

"Real eyeballs are too squishy to make into useful orbs."

Gar looked vastly relieved: "Good!" The look suddenly withered to worried: "Wait, how'd you know that?"

Raven took his head in her hands, smiled gravely: "Practice! Do you want to see?"

"Nope!" He was pretty sure she was joking. Pretty sure.

“Aw!” She didn’t sound too put out as she kissed him again. “Now, show me what you’ve found.”

She opened his book to the Lok’Nar entry; she read aloud: ““...sum of all evils...infests all times, all galaxies, all dimensions....²’ doesn’t sound promising.” She turned to the other page; scanned its contents.

“Scrying sounds interesting.” She read more; moued ; shut the book: “It only works somewhere called Halfway Dirt.” She paged forward to brook her enthusiastic boyfriend, and began to read the entry aloud : "The Venit Sphaeram is a map of what was and what will be : a grave marker for the magic that is lost and for that which will be found again, for good or ill."

She put the book down ; took her beau's head in both hands, kissed him with a serious attention to detail.

He came out of the smooch with a loopy grin : "I did good?"

Feeling the euphoric fizz of their sexual chemistry, Raven answered his question with another, longer kiss.

When they both came up for air, Raven looked into the lustrous eyes of her love and breathily said, "We *need* to find this!" One pale finger stabbed emphatically at the picture of the blue and gold sphere.

¹Google Latin : Arcane Artefacts of the Universe

² Part of how the spherical green Lok’Nar introduces itself in the 1981 animated film *Heavy Metal*.

Spherical Subterfuge

Chapter Summary

The search for spheres leads our couple into too much trouble for so few Titans.

The Venit Sphaeram spun slowly atop the cog dais in the centre of a vast chamber of pointlessly ponderous interlocking gears. Garfield and Raven, standing upon the threshold, backlit by the benign sunshine outside of the warehouse, exchanged an alarmed look.

“Slade!” Garfield uttered the name with a venom that made Raven wince. Slade had a way of making even the most optimistic and positive of people bitter.

The voice, controlled and sardonic, issued seemingly from the orb itself: “I was going to make it more of a mystery, but I did want you to find me.”

Raven cut through the banter: “What do you want with the Lok’Nar, Slade?”

Slade chided her : “Either you are trying to outwit me, or you do not really know what you are looking for : either way, you are a fool.”

“What do you know of my domain, Slade?”

“Have you forgotten that I was an *intimate* part of it?”

“I can never forget!”

“Of course you can't! I was practically part of the family, and you never forget family. Now impress me, and tell me why you are interested in the Kugelkarte?”

It was Garfield’s turn to laugh: “Dude, you’ve got the wro...” Raven nudged him in the ribs. She whispered: “It’s the German name for the Venit Sphaeram.”

The disembodied voice shifted tone from controlled scorn to the composed entertainment of a big cat.

“You’ve done your research, Raven. Now the only one who doesn’t know what we’re talking about is your simple boyfriend.”

“Hey!”

Gar’s boyish pique allowed Raven to recover the poise that Slade had purposefully upset. She kissed her boyfriend on his adorable pout.

“He isn’t wrong: you are green.”

Garfield was a bit confused but seeing as a kiss was involved, he rallied with, “Green all over!” He blushed at the implications of his exclamation ; she smiled, much more normally than she was once able to do.

“If you lovebirds are finished....” Raven did not let Slade finish the insulting statement.

The smile was replaced by a scowl : “Why would I ever enlighten you?”

A squad of Slade-Bots sprang from out of their positions of concealment, formed up into a robotic wedge in between the two Titans and their goal.

“Beyond letting it slip that what I possess is exactly what you need?” A tone of disappointment entered the placidly unsettling modulations of Slade’s voice. “For all your power, you are still just a guileless teenager.”

Gar rolled his eyes: “What do you really want, Slade?”

“It speaks.”

Raven came to the defence of her man: “Of course you confuse innocence with stupidity, Slade : you are a psychopath, after all. Now, answer him!”

“I’m keeping it very simple: tell me why you want the Venit Sphaeram, and I will let you walk out of here with it.” The voice was now completely emotionally neutral as if he were an actor reading his lines for the first time. “Or, refuse...”

A familiar black and orange figure rode a cogwheel out of the shadows, and dropped to a fighting crouch in front of his robot formation.

The door behind Raven and Garfield slammed shut with the echoing thunder of solid steel.

Slade stood, arms crossed : “And fight a battle you can not hope to win.”

Suddenly and strongly, both Titans regretted not involving the entire team in their relic hunt.

Garfield affected a bold stance, pointing an only slightly trembling finger at Slade.

“Dude, you’re just another Slade-Bot!”

The black armoured arms uncrossed into a fighting stance.

“Am I *really*, boy? Come and find out for yourself!”

Altering into a gorilla, Beast Boy advanced to meet him.

Raven shouted her habitual intonation ; englobed her beau in a black ball, whisking him away just as the dual hammer blows of Slade's fists passed through what would have been battered ape. Slade affected surprise, putting unsteadiness into his unforeseen complete miss.

He put a Laurence Olivier performance into his startled gasp as he struggled to regain his footing.

Before stepping into the sphere, herself, Raven glared at a Slade directing his forces towards her. Robots surged towards her.

“I’ll get it from you! If not today...” she stepped into the ebon orb that abruptly vanished with a whoosh of displaced air.

Alone with his bots, Slade’s combative demeanour dissolved immediately. He strolled over to the slowly rotating Kugelkarte, punched it with a gauntleted fist.

It exploded into splinters.

“Only if I actually possessed it in the first place, foolish girl.”

Wrangle & Row

Chapter Summary

The first argument, the first welcoming of the first argument ; the first friend-spiracy!

It was their first official spat as boyfriend and girlfriend.

Gar pouted.

“You don’t think I could have taken him?”

Raven did the last thing she should have, but the combination of her boyfriend’s expression and the absurdity of his suggestion made it impossible for her not to : she laughed. Her little Raven voice whispered, ‘No snuggles for you tonight, Rei-Rei!’

Garfield glared at her. until now, She had never seen his angry face ; and, until now, wasn’t even sure that he actually possessed one. It was a pretty angry face ; she attempted to soften it with soothing words.

“Robin can barely hold his own against Slade, and his combat master was Ba....” That intensified the glare until it was one spectrum away from heat vision.

Raven changed tact : “I should have known it was a trap when I noticed that the warehouse wasn’t part of the official storage for the Museum of Cultural Artifacts.” By Raven’s estimate, the glare lost a degree of intensity. “And we *know* exactly how good Slade is at setting and springing traps! Even the whole team would have been in trouble!” The stare abated a little more ; and then Raven cranked the heat back up to High.

“And there was no need for you to try to impress me.”

Gar had also known just how foolish he’d been in the attempt, but he was too angry at himself to do anything but storm out of Raven’s room.

“Good, because I’m not impressive at all!” He realized how bad that sounded, but his awkwardness only further fuelled the anger. He slammed the door behind him.

At that moment Raven discovered that she understood and accepted that her boyfriend would be moody for awhile. She would have to be patient with him, but what was love if *not* patience? She smiled a remarkably relaxed smile, and fell backwards onto her coroner's slab of extra-firm mattress.

“No wonder I’ve never been in love before : it's the reverse of control!”

Items in her room began to ghost about the room : a giant plush chicken took flight from amongst the pillows by her head, and her prized signed tetralogy of Elegy Lament's *Funerary Rites of Dead Roses* rose like a flock of leather bound gulls.

She raised her head and shoulders off the bed, watched the spooky parade troop by briefly before intoning, "Okay, maybe my love isn't the *complete reverse*." *She spoke her words of focus, and the various items obediently floated to their assigned places about the room. Her inner Raven whispered, 'We haven't even gotten anywhere near full-nookie yet, Rei-Rei! What's going to happen when we do it with Gar : tidal waves, earthquakes and volcanoes?'*

Blushing, Raven attempted to shut her inner voice out with an adorably creepy bout of self-talk : "Shut up! I'm not listening! La la la la la!"

Co-occupying the same dimensional space of a single couch cushion, Starfire and Robin watched a decidedly nineteen fifties movie dinner scene in which an oddly bronzed and big-forehead-ed white haired gentleman was conversing with the very definition of the Square Jawed Man of Science.

Square Jaw: "What do you think of Mr. Mozart, Exeter?"

Exeter: "I'm afraid I don't know the gent... My mind must have been wandering. Your composer, of course."

Starfire laughing, quipped: "But I'm not an alien!"¹

Grumpy Gar stalked through the room, and the movie abruptly became much less engaging for the couple. Robin was about to call out to his friend when Koriand'r stopped him with a gentle, yet insistent silence index finger across his lips. She whispered in his ear, "That is Gaz'zla face : they have had their first fight ; everything will be fine!"

"Like us on that planet we were stranded on?"

Star turned her pert little nose up at him, indignantly and loudly huffed : "You were not my *boyfriend* then, remember?"

She hopped up off the couch, the removal of her prop caused her significant other, looking emotionally blindsided, to collapse supine onto the couch.

"What? Star?"

Starfire winked at him, before rushing off to join a Garfield who had been stopped in his tracks by her performance.

"Come friend Garfield : Both of our Par'Queezes are being really *zar'zax* right now!"

Not exactly certain about either Tamaranean term, Gar decided to act as if he were : "You got that right, Star! Pizza?"

“Pizza!”

Robin, watching the delectable mechanics of his departing girlfriend, admired her emotional acumen ; missed her physical proximity.

“I bet an *Interocitor*³ can fix relationships : they fix *everything* else. ” He settled in for a solo movie experience of the encroaching madness of planet *Metaluna*.

There was only one pizza joint in Jump City as far as Gar and Star were concerned : Papa Pizzaz’s Pizza Palace! They had saved it from becoming a giant self-baking pizza oven after a fight with a very fiery felon by the name of *Ablaze*² ; ever since the owner had happily bestowed free pizzas upon the saviours of his business. These two, alien & shape changer, now enthusiastically tucked into the establishment’s *Teen Tofu Mustard Half Way Supreme* pie on the patio that overlooked the Jump City skyline.

Star, adding a liberal squirt of tawny condiment to an already mustardy slice, observed her dinner partner with emerald eyes.

“is there *anything* you wish to discuss, friend Garfield?”

Gar nodded, but took the time to wolf a triangle of cheese and tofu slathered pizza to give himself time to formulate his reply to his friend’s question.

Licking the grease from his jade fingers, he entered into his very first attempt to talk to a girl about *another* girl : “You’re good friends with Raven, right, Star?”

The green eyes lit, gleefully : “We are the *best* friends, Gar! We talk of *everything*!”

Garfield showed yet another bout of unusually non-spastic emotional acumen : “Including me?”

Starfire grinned, elatedly ; cut to the chase : “ How is the dating of Raven?”

Gar’s face fell.

“Oh, Star, I *completely* spazzed it hard with her!” He held his head in greasy pizza hands.

The laugh, literally buoyant, floated Koriand’r a foot above her chair, a filament of her pizza slice cheese seemingly tethering her to the table. Gar looked at her through his fingers, a hurt look on his oily face.

“It’s not a laugh....”

Starfire disagreed with more laughter, this time of a gentler nature : she floated a little closer to her seat : “It is your *spaz* that she loves!”

Gar’s head was up, hands planted on the tabletop ; he looked at Star with more confusion than hurt : “What does that mean, Star?”

Koriand'r settled back into her seat, took a dainty Tamaranean nibble of pizza—an Earthling chomp—for dramatic pause, chewed reflectively ; swallowed.

“It means the reason she likes me and *loves* you, friend Gar, is we are both so emotionally free.”

The bright spark of hope that lit in Garfield’s eyes made Starfire’s heart leap within its bone armoured casing.

She thought : ‘He is so lovable, I almost wish to betray a lover and a best friend!’

Star communicated something of her affections for the green teen with a kiss on his very surprised mouth.

“You should go back to her before *I* steal you away!”

Garfield goggled.

Starfire gave him her very best serious look ; it was still tinged with laughter.

“You are all of the adorable! After we finish this most delectable fare, you *will* save me from the disowning of Robin for *you*!”

Beast Boy nodded, emphatically.

¹Totally a rip...homage to *This Island Earth* by way of *MST3K : The Movie*

² Ablaze is like the character of Fire Inc. from *Read or Die* by Hideyuki Kurata : a very happy, very crazy fire powered teen girl who lives to burn.

³ An Interocitor is the amazingly entertaining plot-hook device in the novel and film versions of *This Island Earth*.

Bed Intentions

Chapter Summary

Garfield is only Batman in his mind, not in his actions.

Gar didn't go straight home from his pizza palaver with Star. Instead, thinking about Korinad'r's words, he squirrelled about the trees of Jump City Central Park. It was dark when, finished from visiting every tree in the park twice, he crept back into the sleeping silence of the Teen Titan's Tower. He had a plan. He would speak to Raven in the morning.

Thinking himself completely familiar with the tower, Gar stole through the night shrouded rooms and hallways to his particular bedroom door. He slipped inside with the phantom grace of a Batman, shed his clothes on the way to the bed ; launched himself on a perfect horizontal bed trajectory when Raven's voice startled a scream out of him.

"I've been..." She didn't get to finish as ballistic Gar landed smack atop the lump of occupied bed. "Oomph!" was the best she could manage.

"Raven! You're in..."

"My bed." She finished, for him. She intoned a spell, and a will-o'the-wisp popped spectral light over the bed to reveal two things : it *was* Raven's room, and Gar was *naked*. She yelped, recoiled under the covers.

He squeaked, reflexively turning into the first animal that entered his mind : a kitten. He settled down, not thinking too much about the nature of the soft anatomy upon which he rested ; purred loudly enough to hopefully console his affronted girlfriend.

Raven peeked out from over the top of her black bedspread, scooped up diminutive Gar-kit ; looked steadily into wide kitty eyes.

"You really thought it was your room?"

Gar gave a very emphatic feline nod and mew.

"You can stay." She drew him to a breast that was clad only ever so slightly in glossy, frilly satin chemise. "But," She smiled, evilly as feline head pressed up against bosom : "only as my grimalkin."

Garfield's puss brain had no idea what a grim-mall-can was, but it knew exactly what it was squished up against, and how little next to nothing there was between brain and breast ; he was fine with remaining kittenish. He brushed his fuzzy head contentedly across the smooth body heated surface of the cloth and buzzed the loudest purr a kitten his size could muster.

Raven awoke groggily, remembered something about a warm lump on her chest ; turned over directly into the naked torso of the slumbering Gar. Not all of him was in quite the same state of repose. She flushed at the sight, but did not look away.

‘My kitten’s all grown up!’ ran inanely through her mind.

She watched him as he slowly came awake : tiny little tremors and mumblings built to a crescendo stretch and accompanying groan as sleep gluey eyes opened, focussed ; bugged out.

His mouth fell open. “Raven?”

She dryly replied, “Yes?”

He said in a very small voice, “Am I naked?”

She somehow retained her sangfroid : “Very.”

He yelped, snapped up the bed sheet, sending bedclothes and Raven flying, tore out of the room, impromptu toga billowing about his skinny green body.

“Sorry, sorry, sorry!” drifted back through the door that caught the end of the sheet as it closed behind the fleeing Garfield.

“Ahhhh!” filtered through the door as the presumably un-sheeted Beast Boy streaked for the sanctuary of his actual room.

Flat on her back next to the bed, Raven giggled what to anyone else’s ears would sound scary but for her was a sign of nothing more sinister than hilarity : her boy was so adorably gawky, and....She blushed, the red standing out attractively against the glossy black fabric of her chemise.

A Breakfast of Waffles & Euphemism

Chapter Summary

A cross species shenanigans breakfast extravaganza!

Logan Garfield not only looked sheepish at breakfast the next morning. He was a sheep. Lamb Gar nibbled ruefully at his tofu waffle analogue while Cyborg regaled the other diners with his tale of woe.

“I do not know where his clothes go when he animals out, but last night he was all Gar and I still don’t know where his clothes went!”

Star’s eyes went big. “He was without the pants?”

“Star, he was without the *anything!*”

Korinad’r blushed prettily, an orange hand coming up to cover her little grin.

Raven leant into her ; whispered in an orange seashell ear ; Korinad’r’s blush deepened. She held her hands twenty centimetres apart, gasped, “That’s two more tan’klas than Dick’s!”

Gar and Robin bleated at exactly the same time : Robin’s was the articulate expression of Beast Boy’s bleat: “Hey, how do you...” He blushed furiously, glaring at Star.

Star desperately tried to keep a straight face, but she was neither of a species nor a personal temperament much given to pretence ; she blushingly giggled.

Robin gave her his best Batman look : “You peeked while I was sleeping, *Korinad’r!*”

He only called her by her formal name when he was irked at her ; she countered with the ingenuous, “I only wished to know if ,” She flushed, prettily : “you and I could make...” The blush deepened, and she tongue tied, adorably.

Robin’s expression lost all of its serious Wayne in a rush. He blushed in response to his woman’s avowal, and was on the cusp of acknowledging her when Garfield interrupted in a very Beast Boy fashion.

Gar morphed into his angular green boy home identity, and adopted a loud and very hippy victory dance.

“Who’s got two *tinkles* over Robin? This guy!”

Starfire, screaming laughter, interjected, “Tan’Klas, Gar!”

Robin, glowered; was about to be all serious, when, observing his joyous girlfriend, he switched abruptly, wisely, to join her jollity.

Gar added hip thrusts to the dance. “This guy’s got *all* the Tankle Wankles!”

Eating her waffles, Raven gave her man her patented grimsterical stare.

“And they better be all mine, one day.” She finished, blushing alarmingly.

Cyborg laughed : “Dude, listen to your dame!”

Garfield adroitly added, "I better ; this cat does not want to be neutered!" He popped into kitten mode, pounced his big eyed, purring puff ball accurately into Raven's lap.

The team collapsed in a wriggling clump of hilarity ; Raven, trying to look dignified, had no choice but to stroke the tiny velvety head of her loopy lover.

Revelations

Chapter Summary

Slade stirs the pot. As he is a cipher in the show, I have epic-upped his backstory while completely ignoring his blasé comic book history.

The orange and black mask stared from the den's television screen with all of the controlled venom that was Slade's forte.

Robin spoke through gritted teeth : "Slade, what do you want?"

"It's not what I want, Robin." An orange gauntlet rose into the picture, pointed an index finger directly at Raven who sat on the sectional couch with her boyfriend.

"It's what *she* wants."

Robin's scowl lightened.

"She wants what we all want : you to go away."

Behind him, Raven and Beast Boy tried to look innocent. Neither succeeded: his tail was between his legs and he wasn't even in dog form ; she sat just a little too straight for both the furniture and the fact that if was smooched any closer to Garfield, she'd be in his lap. Cyborg was too busy vocally agreeing with Robin to notice the guilty couple, but Starfire was not. Seated on the couch on the other side of her best friend, she caught the full display of quivering remorse.

She thought, 'She is keeping secrets from me, her Glor'som?' Her eyes widened before narrowing. 'The reason better be...' She was interrupted by Slade.

Slade's eye narrowed, he slowly raised his finger and waggled it at Robin. "Your team's keeping you in the dark, Rob..."

Robin switched off the screen ; turned to his compatriots, a vexed look clouding his masked face.

Beast Boy squealed, turned into a bat ; attempted to flit from the room ; was bubbled and 'ported back to his couch perch by his significant other. Perky ears drooped, fruit bat Beast Boy looked resigned before turning back into an equally droopy and resigned looking teenager.

Raven put an arm about her beau, cleared her throat nervously ; launched into laconic goth explanation mode:

“ Azarath survived Trigon.”

Robin’s eyebrows shot up above his mask ; Starfire, looking uncharacteristically stern, moved to her man’s side ; Cyborg wore his patented yet patient ‘Of course magic doesn’t have to make sense’ look.

Eyebrows parked back behind the his domino mask, Robin asserted, “We saw that dimension destroyed.”

Gar, shot a confused look at his girlfriend, burst in with a rushed, “Dude, Raven’s mom moved it to another dimension!”

At the mention of Arella, Starfire’s entire mien altered ; her eyes widened with their usual happy lustre, and she drifted ten centimetres off of the floor.

“Your mother’s alive : that is wonderful!” Then the lustre dimmed slightly ; the ten centimetres became five.

“Why didn’t you tell us?”

Cyborg considered his team mates with an empathetic eye and a cold sensor : “They found out when they stared getting serious.”

Robin looked “So?”

Cyborg gave him a long look.

“You only tell some things to loved ones : didn’t you learn that from Star?”

“My Space Viking six hundred stanzas of happiness poem spouting girlfriend?”

The aforementioned female punched him in the shoulder with exactly just enough verve to playfully inform him that the Space Viking designation was almost precise.

“Robin, please, I am not that bad, am I?”

He rubbed his shoulder, reflected upon the literary side of his Batman training regime : “You’re my Beowulf!”

Not understanding exactly, she hugged him happily. ‘And my Iliad, Odyssey and Aeneid’ he mouthed at the rest of the team : Cyborg grinned at the joke ; Raven’s mouth quirked into something dangerously close to a smile; Beast Boy had zero clue.

“Anyway, that’s great news” Gar looked less droopy, and Raven managed a quiet twinkle. Robin continued, “I’ll have to send Slade a 'Thank You!' card for informing us.”

The couch bound couple’s expressions shifted back towards the uncomfortable end of the social spectrum.

In his latest lair, Slade chuckled ; the laugh echoed amusingly about the be-cogged murk of the warehouse. Teenagers remained teenagers no matter the epoch. He remembered his own youth, so long ago, in Ithica before the rigours of kingship and the martial demands of Agamemnon. However, that was the past ; he had a future to look to, and subjects of his own to discipline. And he had an old acquaintance, a lover of long ago, who would know the location of the artefact that would allow him to set the most powerful member of the Teen Titans on her proper course. It would be interesting to see Circe again.

Latin it up!

Chapter Summary

Finally together, the team seeks the location of the Venit Sphaeram which will hopefully disclose the new dimensional location of the surviving portion of Azarath.

Gar's voice bounced eerily about the cobwebbed and shadowed expanse of ruined chamber as he tortuously read the line Raven ran her pale finger along in the time weathered tome.

"Breve autem in carne una adhuc arcanum est, multis locis: ex bibliotheca et in mente.¹"

Raven considered her man with a level gaze : "And that means?"

"The...animal skin-Gross!—books the Arcanum...are...I must be reading it wrong : "How can it be one place and many?"

Raven's expression didn't waver as she popped a kiss across the surprised Beast Boy's lips.

"You read it right." She picked up where he left off on the translation : "...*ex bibliotheca et in mente* : "a library of and for the mind."

Gar went crosseyed : "But what does that even mean?"

"It might be as simple as a cross dimensional place of learning."

Gar laughed : "Only you'd say that was simple!"

Starfire, running her fingertips along the bindings of the ancient library's shelved books, perked up : "Or it is a place that stays with you as *really* as the place itself."

That made Raven's eyes widen : "A mind link like a library membership?"

Robin dropped into a crouch from out of the shadow shaded heights of the ceiling. Gar startled, fell backwards off the low dais supporting the podium which held the book he had been reading from.

"Dude, stop Sliding around!"

Robin shot a glare at Gar. "I think 'written in flesh' & 'of and for the mind' means it's more likely a fancy way of saying that there's a society of librarians..."

Raven nodded : "Which means that there'd be a central meeting site for a collection that may only exist within the collective memory of a troop of..."

Gar leapt back onto the dais with a Bruce Lee yell and a ridiculous kung fu pose : “Book ninja!”

Raven was about to cuff her boyfriend’s mussed hairdo, shrugged ; adopted her own martial arts posture, and said deadpan, “Totally book ninja.

Robin considered Raven with a frown : “You’re supposed to be rubbing off on him, not the other way around!”

Giggling, Starfire floated over from her eavesdropping only slightly disguised as book spine reading to cuddle up against her *skor ’nook*³ : “I think they are rubbing off on each other, Robin!”

“Poor choice of words.” Blushing as red as any robin, Dick continued, “I was hoping for a little less goofball Gar.”

Beast Boy butted in with a grinning, “Gratias amica mea, ego non iocari latine!³”

Robin face palmed. “Do I even want to know?”

Peeking out from behind a stack of dusty books, Cyborg, straight-faced, reported, “My translation protocols inform me that it means, ‘ Bah weep gragnah weep nini bong!’⁴

Everyone glared at Cyborg, albeit everyone but Robin’s were amused. Cyborg hid behind his tomb of tomes.

Raven decided to deescalate the skirmish of the sillies with, “If the location of the Venit Sphaeram is anywhere, it will be in the collection of the Arcanum.”

Robin finally had some semblance of sense on which to act. He struck that pose that the others thought of as Batman’s in the Room, declared, “We’ll find it, Raven : together!”

¹Latin : Writ in the flesh the Arcanum is one yet many places : a library of and for the mind.

translation site: http://www.stars21.com/translator/english_to_latin.html

² Skor’nook : Tamaranean: (noun) Sweetheart, darling, sugar, squeeze, boo

³Latin : Thanks to my girlfriend, I can joke in latin!

⁴The Universal greeting from Transformers : The Movie (1986)

A Study in Infinity

Chapter Summary

Enter bookish Zatanna. More to come.

“I wear pants now, creep! *See?*” Zatanna Zatara made a dramatic two handed gesture at the portion of her anatomy that lay beneath the belt ; it was fully clad in a denim that wasn’t even body hugging. "Only sad fanboys draw me in that old *Vegas showgirl* outfit!"

One of the pair of the spoken too, what Zatanna had come to think of as her *fanemy* base, turned to the other scraggly twenty something dude, and contemptuously said, “You’re *lame* now Zatanna : the old you had no problem strutt'n it for her fans!"

“Yeah, and I betcha' magic's all dried up, too!”

The jet-black tressed woman smiled winningly, “You’ll find out : Uoy Kcus ta Oediv Arclumis!”

She wheeled about on her comfortable flats, sashayed into the a brownstone that was no more less or more interesting on the outside than all of the other brownstones Park Slope neighbourhood. She ignored the final rude catcalls of the duo before, loosing interest, they slinked away into the afternoon nip of Brooklyn in October.

As she crossed the threshold, Zatanna entered not just one residence, but a multitude of ten thousand of which only one was real : it was this one, the *Studium*, that was the real address. Everything else was defensive obfuscation, paths which led, according to the threat posed by the seeker, to either being merely ejected from the premises or imprisoned deep within the multi dimensional aether...or worse.

She passed through the flashy, iridescence of the portal hidden within the doorjamb of a building that was nothing but facade ; stepped into a vast fractal expanse of slight variances of the almost exact same stately Victorian study each housing various percentages of their home dimension’s ten members, the *Libri Decem*. Over this galactic spiral of studies, a closed book the size of the moon spun slowly on the tilted axis of its vast spine. The title and surface ornamentation of the tome flowed and changed from title to title with a hypnotic flow of mercury.

Inured enough to the incredible setting, Zatanna nodded to the nine seated members of the *Libri Decem* as she shucked her well worn leather bomber jacket--uncovering a 'Witchy Woman' t-shirt--threw it over the back of the extra overstuffed red Moroccan leather chair.

The tenth one, a cocktail shaker mid-shake, nodded back: "Oi, fit bird!¹"

Somehow resplendent in his rumpled suit and stained Burberry, John Constantine presented his sometimes girlfriend with her favourite drink, a Vesper martini. She accepted the chilled goblet with an exasperated eye-roll.

“Not now, John! I just got *that* from *fanemy* asshats.”

Constantine's grin faded to what he wanted to be an empathetic smile, but it twisted into a sarky sickle in the midst of his perpetual six o'clock shadow. It didn't matter : Zatanna *knew* Constantine.

The golden helmet added a metallic ring to the otherwise quiet voice of the seated Dr. Fate.

What is this *Fanemy* : is it a threat to the Arcanum?"

The sometimes couple turned laughingly to face the nearly featureless curved hat that made Zatanna think of gold headed dildos. It fit Fate : he *really* was a self righteous prick.

Constantine bowed at the lady necromancer, "Milady's fans have exactly two talents : they can spot her instantly regardless of her dress, and..."

"...They all treat me like a steak in fishnets! I tell you, John, it's a curse, a *literal* curse!"

"It would be best for a member of the Arcanum not to have such..."

The other seven *Libri Decem* hid expressions of amusement with varying degrees of success.

The petite Japanese teenager giggled, and from behind a rainbow finger nailed hand hiding her smile, she said in a lilting voice, "*Fanemies, master Fate.*" "

Zatanna thought, Get stuffed, Goldie! but, instead, actually said, "We're not here to talk about me." She added to herself : I hope to *Ultima Magus*! She cast her best no nonsense look at her mystic co-workers.

John Constantine poured himself a tumbler of a one hundred year old single malt with so many Scots burrs in the name that even the distiller had a hard time pronouncing it while sober.

“Odysseus is searching for the *Venit Sphaeram.*”

Zatanna shot her drink back : “Hoo boy!”

Dr. Fate drew his two golden gauntlets pompously together into an interlaced fingered clutch.

“Yes, he may soon possesses the trans-celestial coordinates of *all* twelve Caeleste Fragmenta!”²

The newest member of the *Libri Decem*, Traci Thirteen, was the only one not to nod gloomily at Fate.

Thirteen leant forward in her chair, her elbows resting on the whole lot of thigh her short plaid skirt revealed. “The...” She furrowed her brow in concentration, “...Remnants of Heaven? What’re those?”

Toying with her empty glass, Zatanna replied, “They’re the hidden ruins of...” She frowned at Fate, “*eleven* mystical realms destroyed by contact with the Prime Mortal Plane.”

Dr. Fate portentously repeated, “Twelve : the final realm has fallen.”

“Then the prophecy...”

Constantine handed her another martini.

“Is fulfilled, but,” His pale blue eyes regarded her from over the rim of his scotch glass. “we don’t know *which* realm because...”

“You can’t figure it all out ; *that’s* why I’m here.”

Constantine grinned at his cadre : “I make it a point not to date *witless* birds!”

Zatanna rolled her eyes, took a sip of her martini.

“Keep that up and I’ll go lesbian on you.”

“Then who will I date?”

Dr. Fate conveyed distaste at this playful interchange through his crossed armed body language ; keyed in on the chemistry between the older couple, Traci Thirteen tittered.

“Now kiss!”

Suitably amused by the teenager, Zatanna tossed her drink ; swept John Constantine up into a passionate smooch. As she was taller, he had to tiptoe ; for comic effect, he kicked his right brogue back in the feminine kiss-cliché.

Thirteen hoorayed ; the others looked on with various degrees of stoicism and amusement ; Fate glowered.

Zatanna broke the kiss with a breathy little gasp.

“Lay it on me, man!”

John composed himself, theatrically smoothing his blonde hair back with his hands ; declared in his plummiest theatre voice, “When the soul menagerie unites with the wing swept night, the twelfth pillar will crumble ; the power for boon or bane will be encompassed within the Sphere of mortal substance.”

Clarity burst across Zatanna’s mind : “*Azarath!*”

Constantine kissed her back : “Of course! It’s not *soul* menagerie : it’s *sole* menagerie!

The others looked confused.

“Beast Boy is the menagerie in one! He’s all the animals in one!”

Zatanna nodded : “And then the rest all falls into place!”

John threw his tumbler dramatically into the hearth, the scotch igniting a gout of flame. “His little Hell princess!”

“And Azarath!”

His dark blue cape flowing around the back of his chair, Grey Walker raised a white gloved index finger.

"But Azarath was destroyed."

Fate nodded his helmet, "By the Teen Titans."

Traci 13 snorted in derision : "Tell it properly : Raven sacrificed her home and almost her life to ensure the safety of all of the realities from her demon dad! Badass!"

Arms akimbo, Zatanna realized as she looked at the amassed magical knowledge in that infinitely recurring study that they really were too close to their subject matter to be able to see much of anything at all.

"That's the dangerous part of the prophecy : nothing is ever *truly* destroyed."

Constantine, understanding, took up her line of thought.

"Fragments exist of all the fallen realms : Avalon, Olympus, Faerie, Jeune, Myrra, Azarath, and all of the rest. Fragments containing items of myth, artefacts of epics."

Zatanna finished it. "And now the man who brought Troy down with *the* wooden horse has the key for Excalibur, the Aegis, Hearn's torc** and Zeus knows what else! See the problem now?"

Thirteen yawned, "Who is this Odysseus, anyway?"

Zatanna fixed the teen with a grim little smile.

"Just a little guy you know as *Slade*."

That got Traci's attention. She hugged her knees, her eyes wide in fear.

“That chill fucker’d make the Devil shit himself!”

¹ Brit slang for babe.

² Caeleste Fragmenta: Latin : Fragments of Celestial Existence

³The torc allows the user to call forth the Wild Hunt, a spectral hunting party which catches the local mortal population up a grand & grotesque hunt of the prey designated by the wearer of the torc.

Return Odyssey

Chapter Summary

Slade is off on a working vacation to see an old, old, old flame and take in some Old World culture on the way. We'll see what floats Slade's boats...besides, literally, Helen of Troy.

The man who stepped off of the mobile stairs and onto the heat baked tarmac as if there was zero difference in between it and the cooled interior of the Aer Lingus 787 was about as much a tourist as his fellow passengers were warriors : whereas they shuffled and plodded, rumbled towards the terminal, he strode, sharp in a summer-weight suit. As he intended, the government man spotted him instantly. The surest way to win was to allow the enemy the conceit that they were in control when they were not. It had worked entirely at Troy, it had worked long enough at Thermopylae ; it had prevailed with various degrees of success throughout the long millennia of his various identities. His latest one, Slade Wilson, continued to put all of his faith in what was the most time-tested tactic of all time.

By the time he had cleared customs and settled into the limousine-taxi for the thirty minute drive to the W Barcelona beachside hotel, he had a 'secret' tail of no fewer than three cars containing a dozen people shadowing him. He smiled, crinkles forming at the corners of his eyes, one of which was removed a very long time ago by the very sorceress he was looking to seek out in the following days.

He murmured, "The right gift is *everything!*"

"Sir?" The driver flashed a look over his shoulder.

"She'll eat me *alive* if I don't deliver!"

Slade's dark chuckle discomfited the driver ; he had the unpleasant feeling that the eye-patched, white haired, and goateed gentleman in the backseat of his limo wasn't speaking metaphorically. He gripped the steering wheel and payed attention solely to delivering himself as quickly as possible from someone who might very well be the devil himself.

"Ah, Mr. Vale, welcome back to the W!" The manager intercepted the glad-hand approach of the hotel's head concierge, a dashing Latino with a turnout that was a bit too precise : the overall effect made Mr. Cruz a bit of a sham man. "Dante, please see to Ms. Perez." The manager gestured a manicured hand towards a dowager approaching the hotel lobby desk. "I'll see to Mr. Vale."

"Of course, boss!" The vexed glint in the dark eyes didn't carry into the chipper voice or body language of the employee as he rushed off as if this guest's needs had always been first on his mind.

Slade watched the precise little power dance with a tiny smile of appreciation for a well oiled and orderly machine. A good hotel manager and a good military officer marshalled their people with no-nonsense exactitude ; the W's manager was very good at his role. His welcoming smile was replaced by a look of concern only a fraction removed from that of a consoling undertaker.

"Unfortunately the *Thetis* suite is *already* booked, but..." His smooth, slightly plump face lightened with a smile. "I can offer you the *Circe* for the same rate."

Slade hadn't ordered his life according to signs and portents for about a thousand years, but he found this one, minor as it was, amusing in an unsettling way : the thought of seeing Circe again was impairing his travel wisdom.

His laconic reply was, "The penthouse will do."

A tuxedoed Slade took the sole seat in the private box situated in the forestage of the Liceu's¹ enormous white and gold horseshoe amphitheatre. It didn't take him long to identify the various members of the six person squad assigned as his tail. The four women and two men were very good at not looking too out of place, too much like paramilitary toughs amongst the soft rich ; but they had no idea that the person identifying each of them had generations and lifetimes of experience over each and everyone of them.

The lights dimmed, the orchestra began the overture ; Slade settled in to see how this version of Don Giovanni would compare to the 1787 premier in Prague.

It didn't matter how many times he saw it, the hell-descent always made him laugh out loud to the consternation of the audience and sometimes even the cast. His evil chuckle this time had the same effect : the Don himself flung a brief aggrieved look his way as he struggled with his demons.

The hydrofoil cut dual white waves not much larger than the one his penteconter² sliced through the blue waters of the Aegean more than two millennia in the past. The other passengers, with the exception of the squad assigned to shadowing Slade, wondered at the well appointed figure watching the growing bulk of the Mallorca coastline from the windswept perch of the fast-ferry's bow.

The Cuevas del Drach³ glimmered and glinted brilliant flashes of quartz and milky ghost lights of limestone as Slade worked his flashlight about the island in the centre of the still waters of lake Martel.

His vessel, a gaudy tour boat, if its lights had been on, sat in the still lake as if partially embedded in lucite. Slade took a carefully wrapped package out of a very old looking leather bag. The parcel contained four squat candles which when lit delineated a circle of flickering light around the oddly feminine shape of the island's central stalagmite. In Ancient Greek, Slade began to recite something that was less of an incantation than it was a request, albeit it a fairly compelling one. At the end of the minute long chant, as the vibrations of the dead language echoed about the chamber, the candlelight was lessened by a gleam from the core of the pillar of limestone. A female voice issued spectrally from the glowing stone.

“It's been a long time since you brought me gifts!”

Light stabbed from the stalagmite to illuminate the squad of low-light vision equipped people on the far shore of the cave lake. Their cries of surprise and shock altered in the milky glare to the bleats and squeals of the swine and sheep that replaced their human bodies.

Slade bowed slightly at the darkly attractive woman who stood where the stalagmite has been a second before.

“I'd make a terrible ruminant, Circe.”

She stepped forward, threw her arms around Slade ; drew him in for the sort of kiss reserved for a very old flame.

“You're far too interesting for me to turn you into anything but a lover, Odysseus.”

To his surprise, in her clutch, he found that his sex drive was alive and well...at least when it came to the charms of a demi-god.

She laughed. “I'm sure you're here for your trickster nature, but that can wait.” She led him to a sudden luminous appearance of a richly appointed boudoir.

“Only a weekend this time, witch,” he laconically said.

She chuckled, the sound musical in the ancient stone chamber.

“Who has time to lay about for an entire year these days? Not me!” She sprawled enticingly backwards upon the multi-pillowed bed.

The second time with Circe was stranger than the first : oblivious tourists milled about and snapped photos of the central pillar meters from where a re-armored Slade was conversing with a still abed witch covered with a sheet sheer enough to be even more exciting than simple nudity.

Circe stretched out luxuriously upon the mussed bed. "That's it? You're after the *Chartis Kolasis*?" Her stretch turned into a shrug. "All of that stuff's old news. What are you going to do with the Torque of Herne, and the Apple of Discord? Put them on your coffee table?"

Stranding by the bed, Slade cinched his belt. "Relics have training value."

She raised a finely sculpted eyebrow. "Are you playing at Merlin again?"

He bowed sardonically. "What other hobby better suits an immortal?"

Circe allowed a whisper of her laughter to escape past the iridescent film of her seclusion sphere spell. She wagged a disdainful hand at the crowd of suddenly apprehensive tourists. "If your would-be Ajax is cut from that cloth..." She blew Slade a kiss. "He's going to disappoint daddy."

Slade took up a handful of the glimmering sheet draped diaphanously across the peaks and valleys of the exciting territories of the land of Circe. "*This* is closer to the cut, and as to the sex," He whipped the sheet from off of the bed, fully revealing the witch. "*She's* a disappointment to *no one*."

Languor left the body : cold, precise marble spoke exactly : "Are you *manipulating* one of Hecate's daughters?"

The man once known as Odysseus knew the exact time to lie : this was not it. "The Daughter of Shadows."

"And to think that I ever thought you were smart, Odysseus!" She sat up, and held her arms out for him. "I want you one more time before I send you to your doom!"

Slade shrugged. He thought, *Real* control as he unclasped the belt buckle containing the unneeded vial of Witchbane paralytic, shed his clothes ; went back into the embrace of his overly confident confidant.

Sated, the languorous sorcerous whispered in her lover's ear, "What you seek is to found in the trove on the Isle of...."

¹ A famous opera house in Barcelona.

² A type of fifty oared (twenty five on either side) galley used for everything from sea trade, to piracy and warfare. (Wikipedia).

³ The Dragon Caverns, Porto Christo, Mallorca.

Keys & Key Holes

Chapter Summary

Of course the map sphere of lost magical realms & artefacts isn't somewhere normal like a museum or mansion!

"...Nekrós." Gar looked up at Raven from the tome brought to him by the couple with them in the Teen Tower's reading room--seldom seen : John Constantine leant nonchalantly against a bookcase of Raven's favourite gothic fiction ; Zatanna Zatara sat across from the adorable teen couple at an antique black lacquered table. The green teen continued, "Guess I'll have to learn Greek. What's this *Nekrós* thing?"

The fashionably unshaven Constantine ran a hand through his tousled hair, winked at a Zatanna whom glowered at his offhandedness.

"Should I tell them the grisly news, or do..."

"John *Cassiel*¹ Constantine!"

He did his best prickled Humphrey Bogart, albeit with a Liverpool accent.

"Alright, alright *sweetheart*, don't get your bloomers² in a bunch : I'll give them the low-down." He straightened up from his lean, but couldn't, because of his overall rumpled, unshaven mien, completely loose his seeming carefree attitude. Even the serious look he gave Gar and Raven somehow managed to be a little sarky³ Zatanna restrained herself from eye-rolls and face-palms ; Raven noted the the combination of restrained & relaxed body language which she had come to comprehend only after being in her own budding romance. She went to whisper this realization in Garfield's ear, but found him too mesmerized by Constantine's performance to acknowledge her shoulder touch cue ; Zatanna recognized her own attitude echoed in the younger woman's carriage and expression.

Gar enthused, "You're *soooo* cool!"

That replaced the sarcastic trace from the older man's face with a look that was dangerously close to serious.

"You might like me a little less after you learn what what Nek..."

Both women spoke as one, Zatanna's smoky contralto lending resonance to Raven's lighter voice.

"Men!"

The women chuckled at the synchronicity, Gar looked sheepish without actually becoming one, got caught up in the laughter anyway ; surprisingly Constantine found himself to be the sober voice in the room .

"It's the Isle of the Dead."

That stopped the laughter.

Raven's eyes widened ; she exclaimed, "Τάφος!"⁴

Constantine and Zatanna traded an impressed look, before he continued. "We've only rediscovered the place yesterday."

Garfield threw an arm around Raven's waist, and crowed, "That's my hot Hell princess : she's got all the dark low-down!" He drew her in tight against his flank. She accepted it with what Gar identified as her happy scowl ; his reasoning was rewarded when she turned into his intended cheek kiss for a dose of lip lock. When she broke the kiss, Raven gave her beau a stern look : "What did you call me?"

Against his green skin, Gar's blush was, to his girlfriend, super fetching as he awkwardly attempted to correct himself with a stammered, "My...very serious and...wayyy smarter than me, girlfriend?"

She sighed. "That will have to do." She gave him another kiss.

The older woman stifled a smile that her sometimes man wore openly : it was obvious to them that the teenager liked the ridiculous title ; she was putting on a dignified facade because she was Raven in public.

Constantine continued, "We know it's somewhere in the Black Sea near the Crimean peninsula."

Only a little breathless from smooching her beau, Raven remarked, "The threshold to Τάφος is on Dzharylhach."

Constantine's blank look was replaced by a rueful grin.

"I'm not sure that I could even say that without being sozzled⁵!"

Zatanna smirked : "Something you don't know? *Amazing!*"

The messily charismatic man shrugged. "That's why I'm an occult detective, ducks : what I don't know, I rootle⁶ out."

He reached into an inside pocket of his trench coat ; brought out a scarab that twitched and scrabbled on his upturned palm. Winking at his audience, he bent his head over the insect, and stage whispered the island's name perfectly. Zatanna rolled her eyes at Raven while Gar looked even more impressed with the other man in the room.

The beetle spread its elytra⁷ and the wings, covered with tiny sigils, unfurled ; Constantine began to read as the wing pages changed with each wing beat.

"Two hundred salt lakes surrounding a central fresh spring? Of course!" He whispered something to the beetle ; it's wings folded back under the metallic green shell as he placed the insect back within his coat.

He declared, "We've always wondered exactly where it was that the Rebel Angel plunged to earth."

Gar looked confused, but Raven's eyes cleared with sudden understanding. She detached herself from a green hand which had managed, unopposed, to move well south of the foothills and onto an exciting summit of the dual peaks of Mt. Backside ; and with an odd spark of eagerness, expostulated, "*He* would be a lodestone for every *Earthly* artefact!"

Gar couldn't restrain himself ; he blurted, "Who and what?!"

Constantine spread his arms wide, his stained Berberry opening to reveal rumpled oxford shirt & carelessly loosened necktie.

"The Devil, himself!"

Gar snorted. "We kicked him in his big red butt!"

Raven's reaction to Garfield's big-headedness was dramatic : the immediate space around her flickered with creeping tendrils of dark energy, and all of her eyes flared ; then, almost as if it hadn't happened at all, recovered ; and pinned her her boyfriend with a regular two eyed glare.

"Did you actually think that you were dating the crown princess of..."

Constantine thrust his hands into his pockets, and, in response to a glare from Zatanna, shrugged his rounded shoulders. She rolled her eyes, and addressed the irked technical demoness.

"It means that he holds you in the highest regard."

Shrinking in the glare, Gar nodded vigorously ; he squeaked, "The tip top nadir, dude!"

Raven's expression softened as she bopped her boy on the head.

"That's *zenith*, dummy!"

Constantine added, smirkingly, "Or apogee, ducks!"

Looking heavenwards, Zatanna brought the conversation back onto point : "Lucifer's spirit knows no bounds, but his body *is* bound."

Constantine finished the thought with, "Where, banished from Paradise, it fell to Earth : Dzharylhach."

Raven watched this back and forth with her much quieter version of Gar's open mouthed , amazed expression.

"I knew where it was, but I presumed that it wouldn't be..."

Constantine managed to look serious. "quite so dangerous an undertaking?"

Raven mumbled, "Something like that."

Gar piped up, "Dangerous? I don't understand."

The rumpled Welshman struck a match against the underside of the table ; lit a bent cigarette that had magically appeared--it had been behind his ear--in his hand, the small flame flickering the saturnine planes of his face with baleful light.

"Sometimes the devil you know isn't the better choice." Under the glare of non-smokers, he exhaled a double stream of nasal smoke which he instantly drew back into his body with a smooth oral inhalation.

¹ A non canonical invention on the author's part. The name refers to an obscure archangel known for sadness & inaction. Zatanna uses it when she's fed up with his antics.

² Brit slang for panties.

³ Brit for sarcastic.

⁴ Τάφος (Taphos) is Greek for tomb & astonishment.

⁵ Brit for drunk.

⁶ Brit for to search messily. The root is root, as in to root out something.

⁷ The hardened covers protecting the wings.

⁸ A hill raised over the grave of royalty. Also called a barrow.

Line of Descent

Chapter Summary

Down the watery throat of Dzharylhach isle to Τάφος (Taphos : the Crypt).

I've got a Cyborg shortage to make up for! Guess I'm not yet done (July 23, 01)

It occurred to Gar, as he looked out across the desolate landscape of hissing, bubbling shallow lakes and cracked earth rendered lifeless by a bone white crust of salt that the island, Dzharylhach, wasn't the portal to the Underworld : it was its intrusion into the world of the living. He shivered ; instead of sharing this drag-down, Beast Boy decided to play the upbeat card. He broke off a handful of crystal ; grinning at raven, he touched it to his tongue.

"Dude, this island's peppered with salt!"

Raven facepalmed : "That's as seasoned as you'll ever be."

The man in the rumpled trench coat and suit--he looked much more comfortable than he should have in the heat--grinned at the exchange. He winked at the woman wearing jean capris and a black t-shirt gothically emblazoned with, 'Life in the Faust lane'.

"Those two are tighter than kippers in a tin¹!"

Zantanna, well versed in her beau's Britishisms, smiled at the observation ; the others, the entirety of the Titans, stared at Constantine with various degrees of bemusement : Star mused, "Please, what is a tight kipper?"

Cyborg added, "And what does it have to do with Sn²?"

John affected a dismayed forehead smack. "Am I the only bloke³ here who wags the Queen's tongue?"

Zantanna's smile turned wry. "Now you're just inventing fake expressions!" Zatana punched him in the stained shoulder of his coat. "*Unpleasant* ones at that!"

Constantine grinned, "Not the God Save the Queen, Queen : I meant *Mab*⁴."

Looking unsure of the sanity of the older couple, Robin interrupted : "The bathysphere is ready ; are you sure it's the best way down? We could take the T-Sub or Raven could bubble us down." He eyed the ungainly iron swell of the bathysphere hanging from its cradle over the perfectly smooth surface of the perfectly round pellucid pool.

Waggish Constantine vanished in favour of his seldom seen serious, if still unshaven, side. Amid a lot of unhappy looks, he lit a fag⁵ ; inhaled until the its tip was meteoric, and blew a long tapered stream of smoke skywards ; finally answered Robin's question with the rhyming couplet,

In the presence of Old Nick

Keep it simple : that's the trick

The brunette stamped an unfeminine dun hiking boot ; exclaimed, "Just when I thought you were finally going to *not* be opaque!" She pointed a unpainted nailed index finger at her vexatious comrade in conjuring, and solemnly, slowly declared, "From now on : Simple. Answers. Only!"

"That's precisely my point! Down there it's the Devil's world ; he'll be able to mess with us more than you know, hon! Fancy tech & magic won't be reliable." He made the new car prize wave of a gameshow hostess towards the enormous eight-ball bulk of the bathysphere. "However, This old lift⁵ should be tickety boo!"

Raven, one of the other methods of transport, looked uncertain ; grumbled, "It looks *small* for all of us.

Constantine walked up the gangplank, spun the wheel-lock on the curved surface of the hatch ; swung it open, and entered the dark interior of the swollen hull. From inside, his cheery voice was granted an iron weight.

"It'll be a trifle *snug*."

As it turned out, there was a fair bit of doubling up : kitten Gar curled up on Raven's lap, Star squirmed her miniskirted bottom only a little naughtily on a Robin who was equal parts turned-on and embarrassed ; Zatanna perched primly on Constantine's knees ; Cyborg, by himself, recorded it all for future gag purposes.

John Constantine thought, *The devil in the flesh? What are you doing, John?* The answer was all around him. *In for a penny...* Out loud, in his most insouciant voice, he said, "This is your captain speaking : next stop, the Underworld!" He toggled a switch ; the bathysphere jerked, and began its descent. The circular view ports swirled with disturbed water ; settled down into an oddly clear, sunlight infused liquid shimmer lined with a smooth, obsidian tunnel edge.

Constantine quoted,

Hurld headlong flaming from th'
Ethereal skie...

Zatanna picked up on it with,

With hideous ruine and combustion down
To bottomless perdition...⁶

Robin, looking annoyed at the adults, spoke for his team : “What's that all about?”

John smiled grimly, and matter of factly said rather not matter of factly at all, “An old poet who seems to have known something about what he was rhyming about.”

”Perhaps, Robin, you should learn to stop asking the one who enjoys being mysterious.”

In the lap of the speaker, kitten Gar raised a paw in an adorable little clawing gesture at Robin. “Mew!”

The odd combination of gothic adorable burn made it impossible for Robin to be angry. He grinned ruefully ; was about to ask the much more straightforward⁷ Zatara when his attention was shifted by eerie, shimmering points of light shining through the submersible’s thick portholes.

”What’s...”

”Probably dead-lights : ghosts of the Damned trying to escape. Don’t look directly at them.”

”Too late!” Cyborg wished he didn’t possess state of the art optics. “The dude has no head!”

Star goggled out of the port nearest her. “You are lucky : mine has a head ; she screams!”

Robin beat them both.

”You’re both lucky! Mine’s holding its own screaming head!”

Kitten Gar, front paws up on glass mewed pathetically, spectral light reflecting in dual cats eyes. Shaking her head at her supernaturally callow teammates, Raven grabbed Gar by the fluffy scruff ; plopped him back down on her lap ; intoned her magical touchstone : the bathysphere windows shuttered with midnight swirls of her ebon soul energy.

Everybody thanked her.

Ten minutes later, Gar couldn't help himself : he leapt off of goth thigh-high ; morphed into his angular green teen to quip, “Are we there yet?”

Understanding the need to lighten the dark mood, Constantine’s smile was unlike the usual dad frown associated with his response.

”Don’t make me turn this bathysphere around!”

Then, abruptly, they bottomed out. The sphere lurched to over to the side ; Star, Robin, Raven & Gar tilted into the others ; Raven found herself lifting her beau again, this time off of his

face first plant in the dead centre of Zatanna's impressive chest. Rising from its pillowy impressiveness, the bombshell-shocked teen sputtered, "Boobs!"

That earned him a glare from his girlfriend.

"Yes, we are a couple of boobs⁸", Constantine agreed as he searched for a harmless handgrip on the alien princess sprawled across his body. She saved him by gracefully hovering off of his physique with a heartfelt, "I am so sorry!"

His response, "Thanks for making a clean breast of it!" earned him a glare from his girlfriend.

The slow blossom of the grey ash that was the main feature of the landscape that wasn't the organically intermeshed architectural mishmash of tumorous historical periods which spread across a wide plain of powdery grey. The blot grew in a lazy manner suggestive of being suspended in water until the black bulk of the gently settling bathysphere was lost in a seething cloud of particles. Slade lowered his gun scope from the faceplate of his Exosuit⁹ Mk. 2 ; moved away from the single sword sticking upwards upthrust from the open maw of a stone dragon as if it were a gleaming tongue of flame, and into the deeper cover of the surrounding henge stones which warped at their eastern side into the refined marble of a round Roman temple.

The heavy iron door heaved open ; fell against the curved surface of the submersible with the slow resistance of air which possessed the weight of water. Kitten Gar tumbled out in a slow motion sea-kitten¹⁰ ballet to transform back into angular teen just in time to land in a dusty bottom touchdown. The others followed in much more dignified bathysphere exits.

Zatanna shared a look with Constantine ; he shrugged, offering, "This isn't my usual Tube¹¹ station, Zanny, but, and it's a very big butt....

Dusting off his, gar snickered, "He said, Petat magni!¹²"

Everyone but Constantine shushed him. Holding a thumbs-up, and a grin for Beast Boy, John prevailed

"...it seems to me that what's attracted to the Devil is only the *best* of intentions!"

The voice which seemed to come from everywhere at once was low, urbane and amused. "Very astute while still being your good old enigmatic asshole self, John!"

Constantine bowed, and only Zantanna noticed the sweat that beaded the man's forehead.

"Satan."

The others stood amazed as the ordinary looking man in the wretched overcoat launched into conversation with everything and nothing.

"Please, John, down here I'm a man of wealth and taste.¹³" There was an odd shift in the air itself as if a breeze suddenly blew exactly in the direction of Raven ; the disembodied voice rumbled in the pleased manner of a very large cat. "I *see* you've brought *royalty*!"

The force of the presence Raven felt considering her body and soul dwarfed her father's. It insinuated smoothly into her mind, *I'm proud of you for putting your father in his proper place!*

She wanted to be rebellious, to say something snide ; felt her curtsy--her!--and almost simper, "My Lord!" The others watched confused, Zatanna and Constantine concerned, as Raven acted so out of character. She came to her full senses, actually blushed ; mumbled to the others, "I never stopped being an actual demon, *you know*!"

Robin demanded, "What are you doing to her? Titans!" They formed up protectively around their comrade ; Satan, laughing with delight¹⁴, exclaimed, "I'm a rebel angel : why not a rebel devil?"

Starfire, energy ravening hands held up in battle stance, demanded, "You will not harm our friend!"

"More royalty! And from a planet that worships *only* devils! This is a *memorable* day!"

Star found herself strangely mollified ; relaxed her combative body posture. The omnipresent voice effected an 'ahem' which rumbled like distant summer thunder. "But people only seek me out..."

Summoning no small reserve of gumption--she felt the *need* to make amends for her earlier meek acquiescence--Raven stepped forward, where in her core essence she knew, the Devil's flesh was imprisoned. "Your being here is besides the point! We..."

A single, licking flame of vexation leapt up momentarily at the edges of the good humoured cast of Satan's speech as he interrupted the speech of one who was of his own kith & kin.

"There's the little devil who discomfited daddy!" A single, licking flame of vexation leapt up momentarily at the edges of the good humoured cast of Lucifer's speech as he rumbled, "It would do you well to remember that he is but a pawn on *my* chessboard!" And then the squall passed, and all was sunshine again.

"Man, but who's being heavy handed? Let's give that another go, boys and girls!" The thundery throat clearing rumbled. "People only seek me out to fulfill their desires : what do *you* desire?"

To her dismay, Raven curtsied and 'M'Lord-ed' again ; sensing his girlfriend's extra anxiety, Gar, attempting to be gallant, sidled up against her with the hormonal regard of a teenaged boy. She leant into him, felt the poke of that part of his esteem ; gently cuffed his head.

Lucifer chuckled. It boomed and echoed goatishly. "Ah,*that's* the easiest desire of all to stoke! I'll possess your boy ; teach him the wrongs of restraint : fulfillment will be *yours!*"

Raven looked confused, and then blushed furiously. Beast Boy's unofficial superpower, facetiousness, even in the face of the Devil himself, failed ; he bridled with a brayed, "Hey, stay out of me!" And then it was his turn to blush.

Zatanna stepped forward, a disgusted look on her face ; before she could speak, Lucifer interrupted with a amused theatrical aside to Constantine.

"Has she even *heard* the song, John?"

John stepped up next to his woman, his own disgust tempered on the exterior by his own, almost diabolical wit.

"We're not kings & queens, Deceiver."

"Well at least *somebody* got the reference!"

Robin, his hand resting on the upwards protruding hilt of the clean, beautiful simplicity of a sword the blade of which was buried point first into a rock carved into the upraised open jaws of a dragon, shouted, "Enough!" The sword thrummed with a ring of perfect steel, the eyes of the dragon flashed ; before he knew exactly what was happening the teen was levelling the newly revealed, gleaming point of the released weapon at a prismatic shimmer which resolved into an enormous irregular crystal. Within the fractured facets of stone ranging in clarity from milky opacity to limpid clarity moved a kaleidoscope arrangement of the muscular beauty of a fantastically winged male form.

The fallen angel within the impact crystal clapped fragmented hands together in appreciation. "Look at you!" The form stepped to the fore of his gemstone prison ; his features lost their faceted distortion to reveal the almost impossible masculine and winged beauty of Lucifer. The adults were speechless, both of them desperately attempting to half their gazes north of the fallen angel's waist ; the teen's, with one exception, quailed before the perverse beauty.

Robin, somehow bolstered by the blade in his hands, managed an almost Batman contempt, "Maybe Satan should try pants."

Behind their stalwart leader, there came three weaker supporting words, easily identifying each speaker's basic personality : a wintry, "Indeed!" ; an awkward, "Dude!", a flustered, "Do, *pleasewith* the pants!", and finally, "Way too much Satan! Erase! Erase!"

Satan laughed ; made an arcane gesture with us sinister hand, and the lower half of his physiology was blocked out by a spreading stain of crystalline opacity. Seemingly to no one, he said, "You're right : this one *is* promising!"

The new voice, regulated, controlled, menacing, sounded from behind a ring of standing stones.

"Hello, Titans! Being chaperoned this time, I see."

Slade stepped into view from behind a mossy henge stone. Crooked under his right arm was a gem starred sphere roughly the size of a human head.

¹ Kippers are herring, a fish, often canned (tinned) in much the same way as sardines. The expression is, to the author's knowledge, original.

² The periodic table chemical symbol for the metallic element, tin.

³ Brit for dude.

⁴ The naughty Queen of the Fairies referenced by Mercutio in his speech (Act 1, scene 4) to Romeo about what a love sick fool he is immediately prior to his meeting Juliet at the Capulet party. it is also quite possible that John has had dealings with the *actual* Queen Mab as she resides at her court in Childer's Wood, Wicklow County, Ireland. This also happens to be where Arthur unites the kingdom with Excalibur in John Boorman's masterpiece, *Excalibur*.

⁵ Brit for elevator.

⁶ John Milton. Paradise Lost. Book 1, lines 45-47.

⁷ Scots & Irish : A ghost, spectre, phantom.

⁸ Brit for a a foolish person.

⁹ One iteration newer than the 600K deep dive suit by Nuytco Research Ltd. which is a marked improvement on OceanWorks ADS 2000. (gizmodo.com) The main improvement is in streamlining and independent manoeuvrability.

¹⁰ The *one & only time* I'll ever reference the insane, even by their crazy standards, Sea Kitten initiative of PETA. Check it out : it's a facepalm treat!

¹¹ Brit for subway.

¹² Gar's sense of humour (big butt in Latin) is *technically* more sophisticated for being in a foreign language.

¹³ He's very fond of the song and the Stones.

¹⁴ It's devilishly good American Pie!

The Slade in the Stone

Chapter Summary

What is Slade *really* up to?

P.S.

Writing the Devil is in the really difficult details!

P.P.S.

I keep forgetting about poor old *Cyborg*. Cygh!

Robin began, “Slade, what...”

Raven interrupted, “This is really about me!”

The orange and black armoured figure bowed.

“You’re not only the most powerful Titan, you’ve also always been the,” The one-eyed mask winked at Robin. “most perceptive!” The body language of the imposing figure shifted again to a scornful negative shake of the colour halved faceplate.

The leader bristled at the slight ; was about to retort when the infinitely older man continued, “But you’re *still* mistaken! It’s not about you : It’s about your *real* family!” He hefted the sphere.

“Even your halfwit boyfriend must *almost* know what this *is*!”

The aforementioned Gar joined Robin in glaring at their nemesis.

”Dude, this is *extra* evil, even for *you*!”

Crystal embedded Lucifer chortled, “I haven’t been this entertained since an earnest young actor interrupted that terribly dreary *Our American Cousin*¹!”

Only two understood, as Lucifer had fully intended: the one who had actually been present at the obliquely referenced event² itself smiled grimly under his mask ; the supernatural sleuth, who at one time in his career had communed with the spirit which had been released from its earthly bonds at that time and place, grimaced.

”It’s that pivotal is it?”

The multifaceted grin rippled cruelly across the sharp fault lines of the crystal cell.

"More so, Johnny : all of Reality turns on this one ; not just one trifling nation!"

"Oh that I wasn't the git to get caught up in the cosmic carousel."

"That's your delicious curse, John Boy : you're the jaded caretaker of all Creation."

Raven came to a different sudden understanding ; she levelled an accusatory finger at Slade :
"You didn't even have it back at that warehouse ⁴."

He bowed sardonically, reinforced it with the equally wry, "Dear girl, until you and your pup confirmed your interest in the item, all I knew about it was its appearance."

The dark garbed girl groused, "And once again, I should have known better to do anything but engage with you."

"But now you have no choice but to."

The eyes under the cowl flashed.

"Are you so certain, Slade?" She turned her back on the orb holding villain. The others reacted in support : Constantine's expression shifted from glum to surprised ; settled down to conditionally gleeful ; Zatara nodded soberly at the hell princess ; Gar declared, "So burned, dude!" and high-fived Cyborg, as Robin declared, "We're done with you! Let's go!"

The Fallen Angel clapped his hands as he watched the apparent total collapse of Slade's plans as his marks began their return trip to the bathysphere.

"Have you failed, master manipulator?"

"When I fail, they fail : when I win, they win."

Satan paid him the greatest compliment slash insult, "I believe that you may be more dissembling than the Prince of Lies!"

"No you don't, Hades.⁵

"Oddy, *old boy*, I'd be telling the truth if I were anyone but who I am."

Slade chuckled at that ; made his way back to his own submersible ; packed his treasure carefully into its carrying case before he settled into his pressure suit to give the Titans and their allies suitable time to exit Tartarus.

The plan was just one more of his perfectly executed seeming failures : *Now that I know she's ready, phase three can commence*. The face twice removed from view by his face plate and that of the dive suit's wore the same tightly controlled satisfaction that it did at the success of his equine deception at Ilium⁶ three thousand and four hundred years in the past.

"Now where's that sword? Ah, there you are" Amidst all of the glittering trinkets of ambition, there it glowed with the inner fire of force.

Satan raised a multifaceted eyebrow.

"You have *another* plan in motion?"

Slade put a armoured boot upon the moss and lichen encrusted rock ; a gauntlet upon the sword haft of the blade pierced into the heart of stone.

"This isn't a plan : its an obligation to my audience."

The sword slid out of the stone with a singing sizzle of sparks ; the exposed shine of sigil inscribed steel slashed skywards : Slade stood savouring the moment of splendid even for him.

Satan, impressed, inquired, "Rule Britannia?"

The helmeted head shook in negation.

"Nothing so serious, Satan, but everyone else won't know that."

"You are a devil!"

Slade bowed, took his leave--his second one--of Tartarus.

Back at the bathysphere, nobody questioned the decision of the imperious and seemingly resolute Raven ; of everyone, who wasn't an adult, one suspected what was really going on ; one felt what was going on ; one *knew*.

The adults knew that it was a terrible place and circumstance to make a deal ; they also knew better than to intercede. With the uncannily easy unspoken communication of long association which approaches true telepathy or empathy, Zatara & John knew that they would provide fire support to their teenaged allies only if the deadly forces arrayed against them decided that overwhelming force was to be their tactical response to the situation. Neither of them expected to survive such an encounter ; they were both willing to sacrifice themselves to ensure the continuation of the younger generation : Zatanna, would express this honestly ; Constantine would dress it up cynically : both would treat it like Leonidas at Thermopylae⁸. All of this passed in between the oft-times friends, sometimes lovers enmeshed within the nuanced & mysterious universe of Magik⁷ without even the slightest clue of those for whom they stood guard.

Robin & Star both noticed that while Raven appeared aloof and imperious on the return to the submersible, she was always physically glued to Gar: she was attempting to inhabit his space, but with the cool facade of indifference.

The younger couple shared this with their own differently generated insights : Star had literally inhabited Raven ; Robin had the observational skills. Kory brushed up against her

man, and whispered to him, "Friend Raven will be needing the *comforting*. Are we sure that Garfield is ready?"

Observing the uncharacteristic serenity of his friend whom should have been completely freaked at the near complete proximity of the mixed message of cool yet clingy female, Robin whispered back, with a faint smile of certainty, "We're sure!"

Star leaned the wonderful warmth of her Tameranian physiology into him ; he had a sudden insight that Gar wasn't the only one who was about to be initiated into a higher order of the relationship experience.

Cyborg was far too busy checking the Alvin Sphere exterior and umbilicus to notice any of this socio-relationship threshold crossing. He patted the curved surface with a Metallic 'clunk!' which radiated across the artefact and architecture littered sub-submarine plain.

"Baby here's good to go!"

The expense of energy to keep from wildly grasping at the sole artefact which could save her mother as well as whatever still existed of her origin had been enormous. The totality of the characteristics that added up to the sum of the whole of Raven lay stunned & drained within her with one sole/soul exception had bare strength enough to appear to be both close to yet aloof of her love while, in actuality, she simply didn't have the reserves to be unreserved with him as he properly deserved.

It was all so much simpler for Gar. Not that long ago, it would have been as unsettling for him as that first time Raven had so awkwardly initiated their relationship⁹ those months back ; now, he expended energy to do the reverse of what he had done at the start : he kept his cool to be a roc(k)¹⁰ for his Raven.

The presence of the adults kept the rest, barring Cyborg whom was far too busy working the winch controls, and keeping an eye on the various bathysphere dials & indicators to even know that there was anything damped down by anybody. He announced five minutes in, "We've crossed back into *actual* water from whatever that magical mumbo-jumbo fluid was!"

Raven laconically replied, "Aether."

ZatCon nodded as one ; she corroborated with one tiny alteration : "The Underworld variant is technically *Ether*."

Cyborg grumbled, "Magic!"

¹ It played on the night of April 14, 1865 at the Ford Theatre, Washington D.C., U.S.A.

² More of the author's reinvention of Slade.

³ Hellblazer canon : Damnation's Flame by Garth Ennis.

⁴ Chapter 8 : Spherical Subterfuge.

⁵ The Devil's name before the onset of Christianity.

⁶ Troy in the Troad, now Turkey.

⁷ The actual ancient tappable energies of the Universe, and not the misdirection & chicanery of stage magicians.

⁸ Zatana loves John because he isn't any near as cynical as he pretends to be, but sometimes it's hard to always love the pretentious, pretending prat. Regardless, she knows that they share an unshakable core belief in fighting for what they believe in to the very end just like a wayward hero of Spartan o past.

⁹ Her Wednesday Addam's look of love alllllll the way back at the start of chapter one.

¹⁰ A roc is an enormous mythical (Arabian) bird.

“Two sleep, perchance...”

Chapter Summary

Gar's boyfriend duty becomes spookily delightful in a cuddly Sorcerer's Apprentice out of control way which ends up involving all of the other Titans. (With my almost earnest apologies to Willy Shakes for the title pun.)

Somewhere in between Tartarus, and home, Cyborg finally became aware of the elevated hormonal conditions which had swirled up in the two couples, one long established and obvious ; the other : newer, odder¹ and currently totally sarcasm free. He cheerfully quipped over the communal communications channel, “I see that I’m gonna’ have to turn up the white-noise earphones tonight, ya’ll!”

What he didn’t say, but felt deeply within the amalgam of his human and mechanical systems was a longing for his own sweetie ; she was busy as the boss bee of the newly formed Titans East. He made a note, and literally filed it away in his memory to give her a call.

Star giggled, blushed vermilion² ; Robin flushed terrestrial red which sabotaged his attempt at Bat-Stoicism. Raven’s response was a sudden bout of turbulence which kept the banterer from adding any more immediate witticisms as he fought with the jet’s control yoke ; Gar, in the lap of his lady, purred with an embarrassed intonation only another cat could distinguish from that of a regular contented purr.

The combination of constantly brushing up against the slightly higher than human average temperature of a lithe female assiduously attempting to inhabit his very same physical space, and the fact that the aforementioned hot, lithe body wasn’t engaging its mental and oral powers against him in any way, spooked Gar almost as much as it delighted him.

Being this close to Raven for the entirety of the trip back to the tower—she had occupied his pod of the T-Jet with a madly purring lap full of Gar-kitten, and for the remainder of the day, and early evening as his gangly green self—he had noticed, first with feline senses, that the sultriness was accompanied by a coppery cinnamon scent which wasn’t detected so much by the nose as it was directly through the skin. Both did very interesting things which made him cross his legs and slouch down on the couch as Raven leant silently into him.

It was Kori who, based upon her careful study of the teen dating methodologies of the characters in Gar’s dreadful collection of schlocky movie messterpieces³ adopted the typically male opening move of the yawn & stretch arm encirclement to draw her man into their very own anatomically squished together approximation of GarVen. She added an obviously forced foghorn of a Tamaranian yawn before rather energetically adding, “It is getting late, Robin ; we should sleep, *now*.” As she hauled Robin to his now considerably less stoical feet, she winked sprightly at the other couple.

There was a pleased and slightly naughty glee in her voice : “Perhaps you two also should turn in?”

Gar enquired, “What should I turn into?”

His significant other raised a hand for a signature head bop which faded away as she silently led the green teen whom was, like the other towed male, looking a little spooked by their similar situations.

In stereo, they queried their ladies, “Are we going...?”

Star giggled, “To Glar’thrum? Just like Scardavian Blumpflars!”

”Yay?” Robin disappeared through the den’s door in the direction of Kori’s quarters.

Eyes the size of a Sugar glider⁴, Gar beseeched, “Do you know how to Glar...whatever Star said?”

Aware of the fact that they were not alone, Raven mumbled, “How hard could it be?”

Gar’s accidental double entendre, “Very?” had them both exit blushing and rapidly just behind the other retreating couple.

The sole remaining occupant of the room, Cyborg, reached down to the end table beside his gaming chair ; picked up the elaborate headphone set which rested there. He thumbed the power switch, and the unit glowed to life with a completely superfluous luminous blue tracery pattern as he placed it over his head ; returned his attention to the *Greed for Speed : Lords of Traction* monster truck racing game. He revved his truck, Big Root, and at the total throb of engine growl, quietly crowed, “Boo-Yah!”

In their respective skivvies, pragmatic black rayon bra & panties, and Manic Monkey⁴ boxers, Raven and Garfield stood looking at each other in the gloom of her bedroom : he with even wider eyes ; her with a calm expression belied by the jerky tremors of the grim magic books and teen romances on the bookshelf behind her trim grey and almost nude body.

He haltingly began to say, “Rei, I don’t...”

She leant forward, stopped him with an awkward kiss ; led him to her circular bed the scary sheets of which magically turned down for them to enter ; slithered up to cover them.

Face to face under devilishly high thread count spider-silk, each acutely aware of the other’s internal earrings of animal longings with a mysterious shared higher sense of purpose & timing, the couple shared their first proper Heinlein kiss⁵. They fell asleep, their clasp lit spectral lay by the shimmering green and luminous blue aurora shot trough with anxious oranges & reds of her externalizer emotional manifestation.

The slow fireworks, throbbed to her peaceful heartbeat, slowly lost the garish tracteries of anxiety and uncertainty as they slowly expanded to fill the room ; continued outwards unhampered by the material realities of the tower itself.

One room over, the bearer of tightie whities goggled at the alien princess predilection in the perseverance of being panty emancipated. The realization that he had always been only one tiny thigh length away from the *almost terrestrial*⁷ naughty bits of his teammate made Robin blush a red almost as deeply as the colour of his mostly nude girlfriend.

She replied to his obvious stare with the almost medically objective earnestness of, “I cannot concentrate when the Earth cotton rubs against my *nublars*.”

She wriggled the referenced anatomy ; Dick inanely returned the gesture as well as he could with a wrangle of the digits of his right hand as he managed a flummoxed, “O-o-obviously!”

In a similar manner to one room over, she took the in initiative ; stepped forward, wrapped her arms about her beau, and kissed him with the impending threshold passion of going all the way. Partway through the process which was more than successfully fanning all of the fires, the ReiGar nebula swirled through the wall ; the kissers slowly collapsed into a comatose cuddle.

Cyborg hadn’t considered optical events as possible Secondary Observable Nookie Phenomena ⁶ as the auroral glow reached the den, and he nodded off into the cozy realm of Slumberia.

Bereft of his control, his pixilated monster truck vaulted off of the ramp he was attempting to jump to vault trough a gap in the virtual environment to begin an infinite fall through negative space.

¹ That’s saying something considering that half of the more conventional couple is an extra terrestrial princess!

² It sounds better than the very boringly named tertiary colour, red-orange.

³ Messterpiece (noun) : A low-to-no budget film of gonzo brilliance. Examples include such rough cut gems as : Six String Samurai (Director: Lance Mungia, 1998), Death Race 2000 (Director: Paul Bartel, 1975), and Wizards (Ralph Bakshi, 1977).

⁴ A nocturnal flying squirrel-like possum fond of nectar and tree sap.

⁴ The famous rhesus monkey protagonist of *Yakivision Games*’ eponymously named platform jumper, *Manic Monkey*

⁵ A kiss which is as enthusiastic as it isn't awkward and fumbling. Named after the American Grandmaster of Science Fiction whose protagonists, such as Friday Baldwin, know how to buss with proper precision, pride, and passion.

⁶ S.O.N.P. is intimately related to Cyborg's deep down, and almost subconscious belief that no one would ever *really* love a tin man. He OZiously has a heart, but it requires some form of wizarding to help it beat in time to another. This is for the future.

⁷ Dick's Bat-Upbringing innocence assumes that these bits are exactly like *regular Earthly* bits. The description of these differences require a higher (im)maturity rating than the one attached to this story.

...to stream?!

Chapter Summary

Moms!

The view from the aerial platform would have been dizzying if any of the viewers had possessed the physical reflexes and reactions of their physical forms. As it was, the five idealized conceptual constructs of the Teen Titans, each positioned over their carefully rendered spirit summoning sigil etched into the overall magical pattern, had their very own outward view of the mad swirl of elemental chaos attempting to breach the bubble surrounding the surviving splinter of Azarath.

The orange flame over the next sigil on his right had a feminine form which shifted and shimmered in between vaguely fiery feminine and elaborately detailed flame female. The form to the right found itself fascinated even before the identity arose in the perfect energy pattern of its mind.

The clean-lined golden youth, reduced down to the abstract beauty of a single flowing line of Art Deco¹ anatomy, walked to lambent side of Star, and in a voice which was both his while somehow also being those of countless other heroes, inquired, “Where is this?”

The flame flickered through hotter flames : blue, and what should have been searing white ; he only felt the excitement of her proximity as he read the flickering heat patterns as, *I feel I should know, Love!* They touched, and his linear body caught lit ; ran like a fuse until both forms were wreathed together with one brilliant flame.

The next couple to the clockwise curve were a golden lemur possessed of a lion’s power & dignity within its whipcord compactness, and a diamond Corvine² the individual facets of which glowed with the separate colours contributing to its overall shining white light. They met halfway : the resultant fusion of faintly iridescent white gold, almost too bright to consider directly, swirled within with a perfectly balanced pattern somehow much more suggestive of Ying & Yang than the unified circle of binary fusion.

The final solitary figure, a man of iron flesh shining with platinum light commented upon his au-roboto-natural condition with a deep, manly, “Hmmm, no hair...*big!*”³

That got everybody’s attention. Two couples turned as one ; the masculine Yang analogue clamoured, “Dude, you’ve got at least two Tan’Klas⁴ on me!”

The Ying blushed, the facets unifying in a sunset glow as her half of the equilibrium burrowed in tighter against its perfect match.

The Hero's anatomical contour took on the additional peninsular detail on its rapid pass about the body-line ; he groused, "Is everybody...?"

The flame of his heart-mate flickered blue & white with combustible laughter as Star's voice, flickering like a the dancing spark of a candle, spoke.

"It isn't *every's* body that I want : it's yours! Besides," The vocal giggle matched the fiery version. "Your Tan'Klas are all that my Ten'Kles⁵ can...hug : is that the right word?"

Gar-Yang replied, "Dude, I'll never be able to just hug anyone *ever again*!!"

Before anyone could add their discomfort at the alien usage of the once almost completely harmless word, the centre of the circle, its focus, sparked with a flare of white which quickly resolved into a white cloaked and hooded feminine form whom was instantly recognizable to one couple : one for an earlier meeting with her ; one for being raised by her.

The pattern popped and two very recognizable, albeit still spiritual, figures ran to her mother, his mother-in-law to be.

Anywhere else, Raven's completely unguarded tearful joy at her mother's presence would have caused all sorts of chaos ; there was far too great a concentration of Order keeping elemental Chaos at bay for the emotional outburst to have any effect other than its intended emotional release. Ying launched herself into Arella's arms, and somewhere in between her launch and her landing, the luminous curvature became the girl when they had last been together, before....

"Momma, momma, momma! " she bawled.

Wide eyed, Gar-Yang exclaimed, "Any other family, I'd see Rei Rei's baby pics!"

Teen Rei popped back, a more sizeable armload for a surprised Mom, shot a glare at Gar. Arella chuckled, put her daughter down onto her teen dream feet.

The other couple had likewise decoupled : the heroic contour loosing its lit-fuse look just before the crotch kink smoothed out ; it was simply Dick Greyson. Of the other half, orange flame seamlessly and smoothly shifted to orange skinned princess. The two of them also approached the platform's hub, but a little more removed from direct and soon to be direct family.

The voice which emanated from the cowl which shouldn't have been able to conceal the facial features within, but still did, reminded everyone of exactly what it was that had popped into Garfield's mind two months earlier : the only differences lay in the individual details and scale of the surf & sand locales.

Star's beach, thirty light-years distant, had forty metre high combers of luminous purple whispering⁶ across the beautifully even curve of a super-colony of seaweed green Speck-Whits⁷. The rumbling pulse of waves breaking across the living shore, and its murmuring response as its component life soaked up its portion of ocean reminded Kori of childhood days at the beach with her mother ; but the elemental reality went still younger and deeper.

Raven's beach wasn't in the Underworld. It was only the loneliest and most binary sounding land in the world of anywhere : Black Sands Beach, Whitethorn, the Lost Coast⁸. Whenever she particularly missed her mother, Raven would always find herself there. There was something about the murmur of the gentle surf over the water rounded pebbly beach which reminded her of what is really reminded everyone else of.

Garfield's stretch of land & sea interface was Australia's Darwin Beach, Northern Territory. It wasn't a beautiful beach : windswept, littered with driftwood, kelp, rocks and other oceanic debris ; the second most important reason why he loved it was that because of his power-set he could peacefully coexist with the very common beach basking companions, salt water crocodiles. His ultimate reason, only slightly under the surface of his consciousness aligned exactly with the others.

Dick Greyson's beach was, in an essential way, the weirdest of the beaches : Dry Tortugas was a literal fortress island beach. It was a tropical beach which had replaced the jungle and volcano with the scenic rubble of a Bat Cave ; even then it still fit in with the actual overall Truth of all of the Titan's beaches : the earliest memories of the gentle tidal rhythms within the bodies of their mothers.

The contralto rumble of the white cloaked & cowled woman's voice surged a gentle surf across all of these beaches with, "Before anything else, please allow me to apologize for my taking advantage of your personal lives to ensure this complete astral conjunction."

Any irritation which Robin felt, and there was some, was carefully and honestly buried beneath the earnestness of his reply as he stepped forward with a dismissive wave of a red gauntlet.

"If anyone has a right, it's family."

He hadn't intended it, but he felt the extra luminous presence of Star's avatar press up against his dream-form ; he knew that the pleasure put off would soon be increased for his woman's appreciation of his gesture.

Gar, who was very close to becoming *direct* family, supported his leader's position while still feeling somewhat robbed--robed? He stepped next to Robin, to inquire, "How'd you sidestep those wacky magic family blocks?"

Raven's mom blushed ; everyone present found themselves inclined to like her even more, before she revealed the truth of it : "I had to switch to tantric magiks to bypass the familial deterrences."

Cyborg organic eye crinkled in confusion : "Tantric what now?"

Gar tried to deadpan his reply, but he teen it with a gawp at Arella as he squawked, "Nookie magic, dude!"

Cyborg, now also completely afflicted by Teen-O-Citis, gawked ; exclaimed, "That's a *thing*? Whoa!"

Raven mumbled, "Family!" as she nabbed sex-brain-addled Vic & Gar each by an opposite ear—the Yang manifested ears along with its goggle eyes ; twisted.

The boys squirmed, yelped 'Dude!' in unison ; looked a little less pained for the bro stereo moment.

Her voice regained its signature disdain: "Cool it, you two!" For her mom, she levelled a look which was somehow equal parts angry & adoring as she continued, "Mom, skip it : the boys can't handle the details." She moued. "And neither can I : *gross*, mom."

The addressed matron nodded : "That it worked is all you need to know. It was either *that* or a sacrifice."

That brought Gar and Victor back to earth : Gar squeaked, "*Human* sacrifice?"

Arella nodded.

Cyborg lifted a metal thumb in what he really wanted to be a stronger gesture.

"Good call, scary lady!"

Robin-Fire stepped luminously forward, and in a melded combination of both voices, and personalities said, "Destruction and the...*urges* pack the most forceful of the stuff."

"Dudes, let's please keep it to the urges!"

The assembled avatars were all cool with that.

Arella slipped the glowing white cowl off of her head to reveal features uncannily similar to a Raven twenty years further in the future.

"I have something that you all need to know."

¹ A reference to the sculptural architectural style of the '90s Adventures of Batman series.

² A crow, Raven, or related bird. I capitalized it as a proper noun on purpose as a Raven joke.

³ Another Heavy Metal : The Movie reference.

⁴ From Chapter 11, it is the specific Tameranian word for penis length. One Tan'Kla = 1 1/4 Terrestrial inch. Addendum : Surprise, surprise, all the boys pack a wallop.

⁵ The Tameranian measurement of the female generative organ's capacity. Note: Star is on the daintier side of the scale.

⁶ Considerably less whispery than the Terrestrial variant!

⁷ Otherwise known as Sur'Slans, this tiny grain-like life form desalinates portions of seawater which are drawn up into the jungle fringing the deserts covering ninety percent of Tamaran's ninety percent landmass. Note : Like Arrakis, there is no rain. There simply isn't enough of a water cycle to support it.

⁸ A real place in northern California, Whim_Wham kids you not!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!