

[David Lance POV]

As I arrived at Apokolips through the boom tube Granny Goodness had opened, I could feel the weight of Darkseid's presence bearing down on me. He was waiting for me, lurking in the shadows of his throne room.

Following the furies and their trainer, I walked through Apokolips as we made our way to the castle at an almost leisure-like pace. Just as I remembered, the planet was a dark, nightmarish place filled with endless suffering and despair.

The air was thick with the stench of death, and the ground was littered with the bones of those who had dared to challenge Darkseid. No matter how many times I visited Apokolips, it would still unsettle me.

Eventually, as we continued to walk, we finally reached the throne room, where Darkseid was seated on his throne like a king of old. His eyes burned with hatred for even the furies and their trainer.

He glared down at us with contempt and malice, so much so that it felt like an icy chill was entering my spine, and it wasn't out of fear.

"Your will has been done," Granny Goodness reported, kneeling down alongside her furies in a show of adoration.

Darkseid simply nodded and responded, "You may leave."

Once the furies and Granny Goodness were gone, I was left alone in the throne room with Darkseid, where I could feel his gaze bearing down on me as if judging every fiber of my being. If I had to describe what it felt under his gaze, I would say it was like being stared at by a force of nature that could not be controlled or reasoned with.

I guess that was to be expected, considering the character. After all, Darkseid was negativity incarnated, the being who embodied evil and hatred to its very core.

"It's been a while, Darkseid," I said, my voice steady and without a trace of fear.

Darkseid simply stared at me for what felt like an eternity, but eventually, he spoke. "You are brave," he said in a low, deep voice. "Braver than most."

"Coming from you, that's a compliment I will take to heart," I replied with a faint smile, the tension in the air slowly dissipating.

"Reports say the Kryptonian is no more," Darkseid said, his eyes glowing ever so lightly.

"And those reports would be correct," I confirmed. "Unless they revive him somehow, he's dead."

Darkseid nodded and stood up from his throne, slowly walking toward me. He stopped mere inches away from my face and glared at me intently before saying, "You have done well."

"I didn't do it for your praise," I replied, matching his gaze. "I did it because, more than anything, I wanted to kill him."

Darkseid looked at me and nodded. Though his face remained emotionless, I could tell he almost seemed... impressed. "As I promised before, anything you desire will be yours, within measure."

I paused. First, he saves me, and now he still offers what he offered last time?

"Not to sound ungrateful, but why?" I asked. "First, you saved me, which by the way, I still don't understand why, and now

you offer me a wish? Please do excuse me if I sound crazy, but it just doesn't add up. On my way here, I had rationalized you had saved me just to clean any outstanding arrangements between the two of us, any debts or promises. Alas, it doesn't seem like that was your intention."

Darkseid nodded, his eyes burning like fire as he spoke. "You are correct. Had no one intervened, I would've let you die; for it was your weakness that led you to be captured. Nevertheless, I owed Wioska a favor for last time, a favor she used on you."

So it was Wioska the reason why Darkseid had saved me. Hm... Somehow that feels even harder to believe than Darkseid just saving for no reason.

"I see. That explains that, then," I replied, still rather stunned at the fact I had been saved by Wioska.

"Now, what will you do?" Darkseid asked, his arms crossed behind his back.

I paused and thought for a moment about how to word out what I wanted to say before replying, "Well, like before, we have an enemy in common, though, unlike Superman, this one is more of a business enemy."

"Brainiac," Darkseid replied. His tone and body language showing this wasn't news to him at all. "I have been aware of him and his puny ambitions for decades. He represents no threat to Darkseid."

In other words, he has no intention of destroying Brainiac.

"I don't doubt that. Nevertheless, Brainiac is a pest that needs to be erased, one that happens to be very difficult to fully eliminate, given the complexity of his tech and the vastness of his resources, and while now he's not a threat, who says he won't be one in the future," I replied, trying to guide the tyrant's head to my same space of thinking.

Darkseid walked past me, arms still behind his back. "Don't think I don't see what you're trying to accomplish. You want my help, but manipulation won't work on me," he said simply, his voice devoid of any emotion.

I guess there goes my chance to have him on my side for this particular enemy.

"And if I used my wish within measure?" I asked.

"No," Darkseid replied bluntly. "I have no interest in being part of this pathetic conflict; it serves Darkseid no purpose." At this, he paused for a moment as he turned to look at me before

continuing, "If you need resources, I will grant some, but you will have to win this war by yourself."

Not the result I had been looking for, but still acceptable. Sure, it would've been easier to fight Brainiac with Darkseid as a temporary ally, but not everything in life comes the way you want; I was the living proof of that piece of wisdom.

"Very well," I nodded, accepting this offer.

"You may rest in the same quarters you used last time; by the time you wake up, you will have what you need to wage war," Darkseid said as he started to depart from the room, when all of a sudden, a voice echoed through the halls of the castle.

[Inhabitants of Apokolips, my name is Brainiac. And I have come for the individual known as Black Bolt; surrender him, and you will be spared. For facing me is a fatal error.]

For an artificial intelligence that boasts of being the superior being in all of creation, that was pretty dumb.

I turned to look at Darkseid, who simply remained silent and still, like a storm building in the distance.

"You dare?!" Darkseid muttered in a deep low tone, the ground around him shaking as his eyes burned with fury and hatred

aimed at one who had dared to challenge him in his own kingdom, promising to show them the full extent of his wrath. "YOU DARE?!"

[Don't make a foolish mistake by overestimating your chances, Darkseid. I have studied your every move and action from the beginning of your reign to now. Your power cannot touch me. The only logical thing to do is give me what I want.]

Darkseid clenched his fists in anger. "Do not concern yourself with what I have done, machine; rather, tremble at the thought of what I am about to do to you."