

Heroes on Display

A Teen Titans story
Written by Corey W. Smith

Beast Boy let out an impressed whistle, the sound echoing slightly due to the acoustics of the meeting hall.

“Dude, this room is *huge!* How long has this been here?”

“As long as the rest of the Tower, actually,” Cyborg responded as the two sat down at the large table which dominated the room. “Guess we haven’t had too many big meetings like this, though...or any, for that matter.”

“And we couldn’t manage another bathroom, *why?*” Raven cut in.

“Ummm...” Cyborg stammered, grinning uncomfortably while drumming his fingers together. “Plumbing is tricky?”

Whatever Raven muttered in response was drowned out by shuffling footsteps and sliding chairs as the rest of the young heroes in attendance each took a place at the table. The original core team of Teen Titans, as well as the Titans East, and nearly the entire honorary and extended roster of Titans were present, assembled from all over the globe. It was, as Cyborg had observed, the first meeting of its kind.

Once everyone had taken their seat, Robin stood to address the group. “On behalf of the ‘core’ team of Titans, I’d like to thank you all for coming here today. As you know, we’ve called this meeting to formulate a response to recent charges leveled by various public-advocacy groups that our behavior and activities are setting a bad example for our younger fans, and possibly for society as a whole. In preparation, several of us have been assigned to evaluate our overall public image as reflected through various forms of media, and I believe we’re all ready to begin sharing our findings. Before we get started, does anyone have any questions?”

Speedy raised a hand. “Yeah, I got one. Why does everybody in this town *still* mistake me for you? I’m taller *and* I have better hair.”

“Plus, there’s the whole bow-and-arrow thing,” Beast Boy threw in.

“And you’re also more obnoxious,” Bumblebee added.

“Bite me,” Speedy fired back.

“I rest my case.”

“Well, uh...maybe it’s the masks?” Cyborg suggested, in a desperate attempt to steer the conversation in a more constructive direction.

“They’re not even the same color!” Speedy argued.

“Maybe I should rephrase,” Robin interrupted. “Does anyone have any *relevant* questions?”

Herald spoke up. “Yeah, you said something about assignments...don’t think I got that memo.”

“We split those up between the five of us, to start with,” Robin assured him with a nod, brandishing a clipboard as he indicated his own team. “Since we have the highest public profile, anyway. Starfire researched novelty foods and licensed snack products...”

“Indeed, such a variety of consumable whimsies have been arrayed before me!” the Tamaranean princess beamed.

“...The idea being that her unusual palate might give her a uniquely objective viewpoint,” Robin finished.

“*Objection!*!” Beast Boy barked as he leapt to his feet and pointed dramatically, drawing a number of confused stares.

“What do you mean, ‘objection’?” Cyborg asked, eyeing the green shape-shifter in near-disbelief. “It’s over, everything’s already been done. It’s too *late* to object.”

“Oh...uh, my bad. Too much Phoenix Wright, I guess.”

Raven picked up the slack. “Beast Boy was assigned to troll the online art communities...in every sense of the word, I’m sure. But it seemed like a simple enough job, even *with* his abysmal reading comprehension levels.”

“And Raven took online literature and print media,” Robin cut in, before Beast Boy could respond. “Since she does a lot of reading, anyway.”

“It was a blast,” the blue-shrouded empath stated flatly.

“I went through software – both licensed products, and fan-made, unlicensed modifications – for obvious reasons,” Cyborg explained. “And also viral web videos, and stuff like that.”

“And I got novelty clothing and licensed apparel, because...just *because*, that’s how it worked out,” Robin told Argent’s and Jinx’s dubious expressions.

“Alright, well, how ‘bout we get this show on the road?” Kid Flash prompted, attempting not to look painfully bored, and failing quite spectacularly. “On with the presentation, already!”

“Okay, okay.” Robin waved a placating hand at him. “Beast B—”

“Gnarrk!” Across the table, a huge hand suddenly shot up, cutting Robin short.

The Boy Wonder blinked, clearly taken aback. “Did...you have something to add, Gnarrk?”

The huge, square-jawed Neanderthal nodded vigorously. He stood, cleared his throat...and launched ahead.

“Gnarrk gnarrk. Gnarrk *gnarrk* gnarrk. Gnarrk gnarrk. Gnarrk gnarrk!”

Pausing, he pointed at Robin. “*Gnarrk*, gnarrk gnarrk.”

His finger then moved toward Bumblebee. “*Gnarrk*, gnarrk gnarrk.”

Finally, he pointed at Speedy. “*Gnarrk*, gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk! Gnarrk, gnarrk *gnarrk!*” With that, he spread his arms to encompass everyone sitting at the table.

He held up a finger and cast an intense gaze around at the other Titans, apparently to emphasize his point. “Gnarrk, gnarrk. Gnarrk gnarrk. Gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk-gnarrk-gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk. Gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk, gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk! Gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk. Gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk, gnarrk gnarrk *gnarrk* gnarrk gnarrk.”

The caveman pointed to his eyes, then raised his hand toward the ceiling. “Gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk, gnarrk gnarrk! *Gnarrk!* Gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk, gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk gnarrk.”

Gnarrk folded his arms and, with a decisive nod, sat back down.

The room fell silent as everyone present stared at him without even the slightest shred of comprehension. For a long moment, the only sound that could be heard was the chirping of a lone cricket.

“Quit it, Beast Boy,” Robin told the cricket. “Um...where’s Kole?” Taking note of the empty chair next to Gnarrk, he craned his neck, scanning the room.

“I think she’s in the loo,” Argent piped up.

“The which?” Cyborg asked.

“Er...the toilet?”

Robin’s eye twitched. “Okay, well, in that case, I guess we’ll just have to...”

Starfire raised a finger. “Perhaps, if I were to—”

“*Not* necessary,” Robin interrupted as he made a note of something on his clipboard.

“But Robin,” Starfire continued, “our phonetically challenged friend and ally is attempting to enlighten all of us, and we are unable to discern his—”

“**Thank you, Gnarrk,**” Robin said emphatically. “We’ll, uh, come back to that later. Moving on...alright, who wants to go first?”

Starfire frowned, but said nothing further.

“Ooh! Me!” Beast Boy waved his hand in the air, holding up a partially crumpled piece of paper with his other hand. “Sweet! Check it out, I found...thirty-eight *thousand* pictures of me online!”

Cyborg blinked. “That’s a lot.”

“You’re tellin’ me!”

Robin jotted something down on his clipboard. “Right, so...what’s the upshot of them?”

Beast Boy responded with a blank look. “Huh?”

“What sort of images are they?” Robin elaborated. “What are the most common themes being depicted?”

“They’re pictures. Of me.”

“Doing what?” Raven asked.

“Um...stuff?”

Cyborg sighed. “You just downloaded anything tagged ‘Beast Boy’ without even looking at it, didn’t you?”

“Uh, well...I was *gonna*, but then I had to help you with that thing, and, um...”

“Depressingly predictable,” Raven commented as Robin glowered at the green shape-shifter.

“Well,” the Boy Wonder sighed, “since Beast Boy was the only one assigned to look at artwork, I guess we’ll have to come back to *that*, too...”

Suddenly, Starfire raised her finger. “Oh! Friends, do you remember the computer dra—”

“**Yes,**” Robin grated. “***Moving on.***”

“Uh, right, yeah, so!” Cyborg began, hastily activating the large viewing screen built into the wall behind them while Starfire blew out her breath in annoyance.

“Software. As I’m sure you’re all aware, there are several officially licensed video games that have been released, all of which are...well, not *stunning*, but entertaining enough so as not to be embarrassing. Mostly. Kinda repetitive and limited in their depiction of a lot of our abilities, but...”

“Limited?!” Beast Boy interrupted as footage from the games in question played on the screen. “They only gave me *six* animal forms to pick from!”

“Yeah, well, *I* only get the sonic cannon,” Cyborg retorted.

“Well that *is* about the only thing you ever really use,” Beast Boy pointed out.

“Not the point!”

“An’ then,” the green shape-shifter continued, “they have Raven doing all this dumb karate garbage, which is totally lame, and they didn’t even *try* to add any physics-y stuff to use her powers on... what a waste!”

Cyborg looked dejected. “Aw man, when you put it like that... I guess the only ones they got right were Robin and Starfire. But on the bright side, it’s worth noting that digitally pounding the crap outta Mad Mod really never gets old.”

“So naturally, *that’s* what you were ‘helping’ Cyborg with instead of doing your *own* assignment,” Raven observed as she glared at Beast Boy, who grinned sheepishly in response.

“Well,” Cyborg continued, “let’s face it: when it comes to licensed video games, even the S-man’s had his share of stinkers, know what I’m saying? And at least *our* games are better than that awful ‘*Battle for Atlantis*’ thing from a couple years back.” He shuddered at the memory.

“I had nothing to do with that,” Aqualad stated adamantly.

Mas y Menos simultaneously stuck out their tongues in disgust. “¡Si creció en una ciudad tan desagradable, estaríamos náuseas ante la vista de los tacos de pescado, también!”

Cyborg coughed. “Uh...yeah, what they said. Anyway, some of the fan-made software mods out there are much more imaginative, in both good *and* bad ways...but for the sake of time, I’ll, uh, leave that to *your* imagination for now. Moving on...”

He pressed a button on his forearm, and the on-screen image changed to an external shot of the Jump City Convention Center. “As I’m sure some of you will remember, last month was TitanCon VI.”

Another press of the button, and the view switched to the building’s interior, from the viewpoint of a ceiling-mounted security camera overlooking the auditorium’s floor. Dozens of attendees, many of them in costume, could be seen milling about the place at an unnaturally accelerated speed.

“From this time-elapsed footage,” Cyborg narrated, “you can see that attendance figures have—”

“Hey, hold up, pause it a second,” Bumblebee interrupted, pointing at the screen. “Is that...is that *Control Freak*??”

Cyborg twisted around in his chair to study the still frame. “Huh...looks that way, yeah.”

“What’s he *doing* there?!” Aqualad asked in disbelief.

“Looks like he’s...” Cyborg let the video feed continue. “Buying and selling stuff, like everybody else. For, um, seventeen hours.”

“Dude,” Beast Boy breathed. “That’s...that’s...”

“Pathetic?” Raven suggested.

“I was gonna say ‘awesome’, but yeah, I guess it’s kind of that, too.”

Robin sighed. “Well at least we’ll know where to look for him, the next time he causes trouble. Starfire...?”

“Yes, allow me to commence with my report!” With that, Starfire produced a massive crate and slammed it down on the conference table, which creaked ominously under the box’s weight as she rummaged through it.

“I was surprised to learn of the broad range of consumable products which bear our likenesses and, in some cases, endorsements,” she narrated. “For example, there is the

‘Cy-B-Q’, a sauce of the barbecue which is labeled as ‘Official Marinade of the Teen Titans’ and was formulated by Cyborg while he was under the influence of an advanced processing chip.”

“You better believe it!” Cyborg grinned as he recited the tag line. “If you’re not grilling with Cy-B-Q sauce...you just ain’t cookin’.”

Hotspot blinked. “You have your own *marinade*?”

“Hey, why don’t *we* have any product endorsements?” Speedy asked Bumblebee.

“I thought you *did* have your own line of hair gel,” she retorted.

Speedy paused, then whipped out a cell phone and started dialing.

“I have made a most startling discovery,” Starfire continued, ignoring the interruption. “When applied to the skin, the sauce of barbecue makes a wondrous insulating layer against dirt, sunlight and fire! Unfortunately, for reasons I have been unable to determine, it also attracts the bugs. However, this is not completely detrimental; for the Cy-B-Q also enhances the flavor of uncooked insects as well as it does any other type of animal-based protein!” She beamed.

A moment of queasy silence passed.

“I may vomit,” Argent remarked, to scattered murmurs of agreement.

“I fear I am not equipped with any manner of digestive aids,” Starfire told her, looking apologetic as she dug through her box. “Perhaps it is an area we should consider exploring in the future.”

“Say, that reminds me, I’m hungry,” Kid Flash announced. There was a yellow and red blur between his chair and the door for a fraction of a second, and then he was back in his seat, biting into a deluxe submarine sandwich.

“Next,” Starfire continued as she brandished a pair of aluminum cans, “I present two drinks of energy, one of which bears Robin’s ‘R’ and likeness, and the other being adorned by Cyborg’s Boo-Yah. In the course of my research, I was surprised to discover that, curiously, the two beverages are bottled by competing manufacturers.”

“The irony,” Raven deadpanned.

Cyborg stiffened as Robin cast a suspicious glance in his direction. “I really have no idea how that could possibly have happened.”

“I also learned,” Starfire continued, “that both beverages contain many of the same chemical compounds as automobile fuel and most common machine lubricants. But I was unable to determine whether this factor influences their popularity.” She paused as Silkie climbed into her box. “About the gum of the twinkling super donkey, I have been able to learn little, except that it is still associated with Raven in some fashion.”

“Super,” Raven muttered, without enthusiasm.

“Yes. And twinkle and—”

“I remember, Starfire.”

“Oh.” Peering into the box again, the Tamaranean princess heaved a dejected sigh. “Sadly, despite a truly exhaustive search, I was unable to locate or acquire any cans of the butt-whoop which Cyborg excels at opening.”

“So,” Beast Boy piped up, grinning from ear to pointed ear, “what you’re saying is...you *have* bubblegum, but you’re all outta whoop-ass?”

He received a collection of blank stares in response.

“Yes, Beast Boy,” Starfire answered him, “that is precisely what I am saying.”

“Oh.” His grin faded, and he sunk back down in his chair. “Uh...never mind.”

As Starfire removed the large box – with Silkie still inside it – from the table, Robin stood up again. “All right, well, thank you, Starfire...that was, uh, very educational. Let’s see, who’s up next...?” He checked his clipboard. “Raven?”

Raven froze. Her eyes darted back and forth, taking in the large number of semi-unfamiliar faces assembled around the table, and she seemed to shrink into her seat slightly. “Um...I’m still collating.”

Robin raised an eyebrow. “Oh? Uh, okay, I guess I’ll go next, then.” He cleared his throat and called up a series of sales charts on the display screen.

“On the subject of Halloween costumes and related children’s apparel, it looks like...mine are consistently the best-sellers.”

“Understandable,” Starfire nodded. “The Robining *is* delightful, after all.”

“You don’t say?” Argent wrinkled her nose in distaste as she eyed Robin’s attire. “I can’t quite see it.”

The Tamaranean practically lit up with enthusiasm as she leaned toward the silver-skinned girl. “Then, perhaps *you* should do the Robining with us, as well!”

While Argent pulled back in alarm, Jinx smirked. “Let’s face it, Robin: you look like a traffic signal. Very hard to miss in headlights, at night, so it’s safer for the kids that way.”

Robin scowled at her for a moment before making a note of it on his clipboard. “I...guess we’ll mark that down in the ‘positive’ category, then.”

Cyborg rubbed his chin as he studied the chart. “Huh, there are no Jinx costumes? ‘Cause she’s a recent addition, or what?”

“The look doesn’t work without *these*,” Jinx griped, indicating the horn-like tips that her neon pink hair swept up into on either side of her head.

“Oh.” Cyborg raised an eyebrow. “Yeah, I guess that could be kind of a safety hazard, couldn’t it.”

Speedy snorted. “These numbers have gotta be wrong. Why is *Robin’s* costume the most popular? It doesn’t make any sense, a bow and foam-tipped arrows are *way* cooler than a three-foot stick and some plastic dart things.”

“Birdarangs,” Robin corrected.

“Whatever, they’re still lame.”

“Well, uh...maybe there’s some name-related confusion?” Cyborg suggested.

Speedy’s head snapped toward him. “*Ex-cuse* me?”

“¡Sí! ¿Quién tuvo la idea loca de nombrar tú 'Speedy'?” Mas y Menos exclaimed in unison. “¡Sólo sentarse en su trasero y peinarse el pelo! ¡Hemos visto burros, tortugas y los caracoles que correr más rápido que tú! ¡El secado de la pintura tiene más velocidad que tú!” The high-speed twins snorted in derision. “¿Te nombrado en la noche de los diccionarios sarcástico?”

Speedy glared at them. “Say *what*?”

“They say you are not fast,” Pantha translated.

“Hey, just because I don’t *run* fast, doesn’t mean I don’t do *other* things fast.” The crimson-clad archer leaned back in his chair and winked at Wonder Girl, who rolled her eyes.

Mas y Menos looked at each other. “No pensé que las chicas le gustaba rápido.”

Robin cleared his throat meaningfully. “Well, in summary...the only really alarming thing I noticed in my research was the fact that there’s a Slade costume being marketed right alongside the rest of ours.”

“Eh, I wouldn’t worry too much about that,” Kid Flash assured him, having finished his sandwich and moved on to texting someone on his cell phone. “Kids like to act out battles, and they can’t do that if they’re all ‘good guys’, can they?”

“Worst thing that could happen,” Beast Boy added, “is they might start running into doors a lot. But hey, that’d just end up making *his* costume less popular, right?”

“Boys,” Raven sighed in disgust.

Robin frowned. “Well, uh...I guess that’s all I have, then. Raven, are you finished...collating, yet?”

The room fell silent as all eyes turned to the pale girl in the blue hood.

“Uhh...yeah, okay, sure,” Raven muttered, reluctantly getting to her feet as Robin sat down. She coughed, shuffled a stack of papers in front of her, pursed her lips, then looked up and began.

“My assignment led me into the bowels of the internet, to plumb the hellish depths of what’s commonly referred to online as ‘fan-fiction’. I managed to return with my sanity mostly intact, though I can’t promise the same for everyone else here. But, if nothing else, the experience was...revealing.”

“In terms of how we are viewed by the public?” Red Star asked.

Raven nodded. “The perceptions of the online writing community are drastically different in many ways from the rest of our self-declared fan base...or, at least, I hope they are. For example, my initial findings suggest that the most popular member of the core team is...um, inexplicably and against all logic, me.” Looking up from her notes, she appeared genuinely baffled. “Yeah, I really don’t get it, either. Followed by...Robin, then Beast Boy, then Starfire, with Cyborg coming in last.”

“Ha!” Beast Boy crowed. “I totally beat you guys out!”

“Yeah, what’s up with *that*?” Cyborg frowned, directing his question to Raven.

“No clue. But most writers do tend to portray you as little more than a stomach with legs. As for Starfire, there’s an even split. Half of her stories depict her as a flawless saint – sometimes complete with halo – and the other half make her out to be an airheaded bimbo.”

“Please,” Starfire asked Jinx, “What is the ‘bimbo’?”

Jinx froze. “Umm...ask Argent.”

“What was that?!” Argent cried indignantly.

“Moving on...” Raven attempted, only to be interrupted by Beast Boy.

“Ooh! Ooh! Lemme guess, the fangirls are all totally in awe of my rugged looks and raging sex appeal!”

Raven’s answer, for several seconds, was a blank stare. “Well, um...” she coughed, obviously uncomfortable. “As horrifying as it is to imagine...kind of, yes.”

There was an audible **snap** as Robin’s pencil broke.

Beast Boy’s mouth fell open and he gaped at her in disbelief. “**Dude!!!** Seriously?? No way...!”

Cyborg looked appalled. “This ain’t happening,” he muttered.

A deranged grin was slowly beginning to make its way across Beast Boy’s face. “You mean...I actually get more action – in the stories people write – than *Robin*??”

Swallowing, Raven stared down at her notes in an attempt to block out everything else. “Well, more, um...*hetero* action, anyway.”

“Say *what?!?*” Robin and Cyborg simultaneously exploded; Robin looking shocked, while Cyborg looked gleeful.

With a resigned sigh, Raven visibly disconnected from her emotions and forged ahead dispassionately, addressing Robin. “Yeah, when they’re not writing about you boinking either Starfire or me – or sometimes both of us – they’re writing about you cuddling up with Kid Flash, or Red X, or Slade, or...”

Kid Flash looked up from his texting long enough to add his two cents. “Well hey, really, you could do worse...er, provided that either of us actually swung that way, that is,” he added after Jinx elbowed him.

Beast Boy shuddered. “*Slade???* Dude, that’s just *wrong*.”

“Pretty much anyone with a pulse, basically,” Raven confirmed. “Those exact words are used in a number of stories, in fact.”

Robin continued to stare at Raven, his jaw slack, in what was looking more and more like a catatonic stupor with each passing second. Meanwhile, Cyborg wasn’t even trying to hide his grin as he backed up his audio/video feed of the last thirty seconds.

“Before you get too smug, Cyborg,” Raven informed him, “there seems to be a widely-accepted assumption that you’ve modified and adapted the T-Car for your... ‘action’, as Beast Boy puts it.”

That stopped Cyborg cold. “Wh-*wha...???*” he sputtered. “People actually think I...with...the *car...???*”

“Or Jinx, in more than a few,” Raven noted.

“Some of those are actually kind of hot,” Jinx commented, then realized that everyone was now staring at her. “...What? I’m just *saying...*”

“Or Bumblebee, too, for that matter,” Raven added.

“Say *what?!?*” Bumblebee exploded.

“Aw, man,” Cyborg muttered under his breath, “now the car thing doesn’t sound so bad.”

“Well, if it’s of any consolation, there are a really disproportionate number of rape fantasies about me,” Raven told them, ignoring the shocked looks this drew. “There are also a lot of stories that involve me writing emo poetry, killing myself, or dating Beast Boy.” She grimaced. “Those are actually a lot more disturbing than the others.”

Speedy chuckled as he adjusted the strings on his bow. “Well, at least I don’t have to worry about people making up wild crap like that about *me* on the internet...there are too many girls out there who know the truth, firsthand!”

“Actually,” Raven informed him, “the vast majority of people who write about the Titans East seem to be under the firm belief that you and Aqualad are an item.”

Speedy’s bowstring snapped while Aqualad’s jaw hit the floor. “You’re kidding,” the latter muttered desperately. The two of them exchanged a horrified glance.

Raven shook her head. “Nope, sorry. There’s a strong consensus.”

Kid Flash actually stopped texting and looked up. “Really, even after that sexual harassment thing with what’s-her-name, last year? That’s amazing. Wasn’t there even, like, a restraining order and everything?”

“Yeah, that was pretty sweet,” Speedy grinned.

“Most amateur writers, like most professional journalists, don’t let little things like *facts* get in their way,” Raven droned. “Judging by their work, the vast majority of them tend to view us collectively as a pack of hormonally-driven, incestuous sluts.” Blinking, she glanced over at Speedy. “Okay, so in some cases the facts *do* support that conclusion.”

“Please,” Starfire asked Bumblebee, “what is the ‘slut’?”

“Ask Spe—er, no, wait, that is...” Bumblebee backpedaled furiously.

“I’d like to be able chalk this perception up to the fact that most of the people who write stories about us are younger than we are,” Raven continued. “However, my research also suggests that there may be a small handful of fic-writers who are at least twice our age...but those people are just *creepy*.”

Bushido abruptly stood. “Jikan no muda da! Yappari koko ni kurunjanakatta.” With that, he walked out of the room, passing Kole – who was finally returning from the bathroom – on his way out.

Meanwhile, Jericho snapped his fingers at Robin, who appeared to have been paralyzed and was still staring blankly in Raven’s direction, his mouth hanging open. Reaching across the table, Jericho waved a hand in front of the Boy Wonder’s face; there was no response.

“I think Robin has left the building,” Herald observed.

“Quick,” said Jinx, “somebody grab his clipboard, before anyone *else* gets hurt.”

Raven coughed, her earlier discomfort returning. “So, uh...any questions?”

Kole, having taken her seat next to Gnarrk, raised her hand.

“Yeah, um...what’d I miss?”

-End-

Special thanks to The Phiend and Ben Listen for their linguistic assistance!

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(This story is based on Warner Animation’s version of those characters.)