

Important Announcement – Must Read

Yeah, so it's me again with a long overdue update. I had much of this written quite a while ago and even told some of you in emails so. It's just that I've been really busy and couldn't complete it for posting (even though it was 95% finished, lol). So sorry about the delay.

As you no doubt have noticed by now (even if you didn't read my previous announcement) I have started to update the story using PDF files instead of HTML. Some people prefer HTML I know but this is the most convenient format for me right now. Oftentimes there are issues due to the different browsers people use and I just don't have the time to be sprucing up HTML code that will suit everyone. Besides (^_^) it's so much easier to have pretty pictures using PDF files since Nifty don't allow direct picture links. Also, for your convenience, this story will now have bookmarks for easier navigation...considering the length of some of the chapters.

Oh and by the by – I have deleted my Yahoo group. So don't go to the address listed in previous chapters. It no longer exists. Sorry to be repeating so much of the previous announcement but you will not believe how many people ignore reading those. I just need to be sure it reaches everyone.

With regards to sending in comments, criticisms and the like – I would much prefer to be contacted ONLY at the following email address:

adriananderson587@gmail.com

Why? Because, sadly, I have been having some issues with Yahoo email. Both **my phoenix 587@yahoo.com** and **birdofflame 587@yahoo.com** email addresses. For some reason or other I am only NOW receiving mail that was sent to me since the end of October, 2008. So if you haven't received a reply from me, I am sorry and will do my best to respond when time permits. So it goes without saying – do NOT email me using those Yahoo addresses. Stick to adriananderson587@gmail.com and we should be fine.

Now, with regards to the formatting of this story. There's been a few changes. Bold text still is used for emphasis, and italicized text still indicates telepathic communication. However – big change – text in this color (**MAGENTA**)

indicates that electronic communication via intercoms, radios, computer voice synthesizers etc is taking place.

Oh and about the picture underneath, I was just playing around, lol. It actually came from a set of Phoenix oriented pictures that were posted on my then group by one VanirElf. Including one (not shown) with a Dragon and Phoenix seemingly locked in combat. It was shocking when I saw it because there were the Dragon and Phoenix together! Posted before I even wrote about them in my fic!

Anyways, enough rambling! Go on and read the story!



PHOENIX: DEATH WISH - CHAPTER EIGHT

I woke up blurry eyed with the realization that someone was carrying me through the corridors of the Subbasement. Whoever it was had some really big biceps, I absently thought to myself while trying to figure out who it could be. Being in a semi-dazed state didn't help any. Eventually my vision cleared and the face above took form. It was Peter. Thankfully, whatever Mystique had

injected me with seemed to have been merely to incapacitate me and not actually kill. Or else sleepiness would have been the least of my problems. At least she was truthful about that bit. As it was, I had a mild headache and felt a little residual dizziness.

Peter: "Professor, he is awake."

The response from the Professor came via Peter's communicator badge. Which was conveniently just right across from my head.

Professor Xavier: "I will notify Scott. Continue on to the Med Bay, Peter."

I couldn't seem to form words with my mouth and when I tried to focus my thoughts for telepathic communication, the dizziness intensified. So I figured it would be best for me to just stay calm and wait for Hank or Ororo to help me out. In short order, I was carried through the Med Bay doors and deposited onto a bed. Hank peered over me for a moment, then waved someone over. As the person got into my line of vision, I made out that it was none other than Josh Foley - the school's premier psychic healer.

Josh: "This is getting to be something of a habit."

So saying, he placed his hands over me and I was bathed in a healing aura of warm, golden light. Almost immediately, the headache lessened in intensity and went away altogether. The dizziness soon followed and pretty soon, I was able to speak again and gather my thoughts.

“Thank you,” I said, “And for last time too...”

Josh: “You’re welcome. Is that all Mr. McCoy?”

Hank: “Yes, Joshua. And remember, like last time, you are not to divulge anything of this to anyone.”

Josh rolled his eyes but nodded in agreement. Then he left.

Hank: “Are you feeling alright, Jonathan?”

“Yes. All better now. Mystique. You guys caught her, right?”

Peter: “She is in a holding cell in the Brig. The others are awaiting her return to consciousness.”

If Mystique hadn't yet recovered from that wicked optic blast, then that meant she hadn't yet had the chance to divulge anything. Which meant that my secret was still safe. At least until the bitch woke up and started to squawk - er - bark. The truth would probably find its way out inevitably. Mystique would no doubt be very bitter at having been double crossed by me as it were. And a bitter woman is a thing to be feared!

Inwardly, I reasoned that it would be far better for dad to find out from me personally than from the ravings of a ticked off Mystique. Goodness knows how much embellishment she could throw in to make the pill more bitter for me. And in any case, she wouldn't tell it the way it should be told either. I had to confess to him at the very least before she regained consciousness.

"Where's dad?"

Hank: "He's in the Brig with the others. Like Peter said, they're awaiting Mystique's return to the land of the waking. Your father really let her have it with that optic blast."

Peter whistled low, adding non-verbal emphasis to Hank's statement.

Peter: "She is lucky that tree got in the way. Or she could have been swept right across the grounds and into the Mansion's walls."

Hank: "Yes. And the resulting momentum would have been more than enough to fracture every bone in her body."

I looked at them both oddly, experiencing a weird mix of emotions. Dad **had** said he'd get back at her for what she did. After almost losing my life in the Danger Room because of her - not to mention her latest plan to execute me in the grove - I won't deny that that she was worthy of **some** degree of punishment. But dad lashing out like that...was more than a little disturbing. I started to wonder about whether he was really genuine about the death threat he'd extended to Callisto in the sewers. What do you know? My dad's getting more and more like Logan. Wonder if it means they'll start getting along better?

"I think I'm gonna go to the Brig. I need to see him."

Hank: "Maybe you should lie down for at least half an hour first."

I begged to differ with that suggestion.

"I feel fine."

Hank: "I insist."

"You wouldn't by any chance be trying to keep me from the Brig so I won't hear what Mystique says, would you? Getting all hush-hush on me again?"

Hey, it was logical to assume so given the secretive way they had been conducting business of late.

Hank: "Again with the paranoia, Jonathan. I merely think you should just rest for half an hour to make sure Joshua's healing took care of the problem completely. So we can see if any dizziness or the like recurs."

"Oh. Well, in any case I need to talk to my father. It's...sort of urgent."

Peter: "I am going to the Brig now. I will relay your message."

"Thanks."

At that, Peter turned and left the Med Bay, leaving me with Hank, who seemed to be a little nervous about something or other and was making small talk. Not usually like him.

Hank: "So, you seem to be spending a lot of time in here of late."

"Not by choice."

First after Emma knocks me out after her so called therapy session. Then the Danger Room incident. And now this.

Hank: "Would you mind doing me a favor?"

Ah. Knew it. Hank doesn't make small talk for no reason.

"Depends on what it is."

Hank: "We've sampled DNA from your relatives on your mother's side of the family. As well as from your father. But I need a fresh sample from you in order to finalize my testing."

“What do you plan to do with all of this DNA?”

I'd made up my mind. If he was frank and honest with me, I'd cooperate. If not - then no needle was going into my arm to draw any blood out of me.

Hank: “We want to compare your DNA to the other samples and attempt to determine the specific sequence of genes responsible for your abilities and power level.”

Sounded reasonable. And as simple as Hank was capable of putting something. I reasoned that he was telling the truth. He must have just been nervous about my reaction to his needing a DNA sample from me so soon after my reaction to the last set of DNA samples he'd obtained.

“Okay then.”

Hank: “Thank you for cooperating.”

At that, Hank approached my bedside with a syringe and requested that I allow him access to my forearm. I complied and watched as the tube slowly filled with my blood.

“So, have you guys run any tests on the other DNA samples yet?”

Hank nods in the affirmative.

Hank: “As a matter of fact, yes. Just basic gene sequencing though. And I haven't yet even begun to interpret the results. I figured that I might as well wait until I got a sample of your DNA. Which I now have.”

He withdrew the syringe and firmly pressed a small ball on cotton at the site of the needle's entry into my arm. At that moment the double doors to the Med Bay slid open and my dad entered. Hank realized that it was time to offer us some privacy and, after a brief word or two with dad, went into one of the adjoining rooms.

Scott: “You feeling okay? Did -”

“I'm feeling good, yeah. Whatever she injected me with wasn't life threatening. Joshua Foley healed me right up.”

A look of relief flashed across my father's face and he took a seat next to my bedside, slumping a little in mild exhaustion.

Scott: "So Peter said you wanted to see me about something? Something important?"

"Yeah."

It was funny how calm I was when I considered the necessity of coming out to him before Mystique managed to tell him anything. But when it came right down to the actual telling of it - I got nervous. I certainly didn't speak right away and spent a considerable amount of time in mental debate with myself on how was the best way to go about it. Somehow just spitting out - "dad, I'm gay" didn't seem the right way to do it.

Scott: "John? Erm...my time's kinda limited right now. Mystique..."

"She's unconscious and I'm sure that as soon as she awakens they'll send for you. You **are** their leader after all. I'm sure they keep you informed at all times."

Scott: "All the same, I'd really like to be there when she wakes up. As a matter of fact, I want my face to be the first one she sees. The idea of her trying to lure you out there..."

His hand clenched into a fist and he pounded it onto the bed in anger. I looked away as a little nervousness shot through me.

Scott: "Come to think of it...why would she believe she could ask you to meet her there and you'd even consider going?"

Blackmail! That's how she did it!

Scott: "John?"

"She..." I trailed off.

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

Dad's attention was drawn to his flashing communicator badge. Cutting our talk for the moment, he activated it and Logan's voice (more gruff than usual and

that's saying something let me tell you) could be heard coming across the com link.

Logan: "Sleeping beauty just woke up, Summers."

Oh hell.

Scott: "We'll talk later. I gotta go."

"Wait!"

Scott: "Later, John. I promise. Right now, we gotta settle with this bitch."

By this time, Hank, who had been waiting in an adjoining room, rejoined us.

"Dad - "

Scott: "Take care of him, Hank."

And with that he all but ran out of Med Bay heading for the Brig. I knew I had to stop him! So I immediately started getting out of bed. Hank, of course, had a problem with that.

Hank: "Jonathan, I thought we agreed that you'd rest for half an hour."

"Yeah, well...situations change. I gotta see my father."

Hank: "I really do think -"

I didn't pay him anymore attention and instead ran out of the Med Bay myself and into the corridor. Down the far end of it I could see my father approaching the doorway leading to the Brig where Mystique was being kept. Futilely, I tried to activate my power and fly down the length of corridor. But it was a no go and I merely landed back onto the floor after my jump. Must have been some residual effects of the drug Mystique dosed me with I figured. Kinda like what Hank had warned me about just earlier.

By that time dad had entered the doorway and I was running towards it full speed, shouting, "Dad, wait!"

He paused in the threshold and I managed to catch up.

Scott: "John, what are you doing out of Med Bay? I thought you were supposed to be resting and - "

"I'm fine - "

Logan and Rogue's irate voices could be heard arguing indistinctly in the background through the open doorway to the Brig. I paused and listened for Mystique's, but heard nothing.

Logan: "Hey, fearless leader? We're waiting on you!"

Scott: "I gotta go."

And with that he dashed into the room. Before the door could close I followed suite. As soon as I entered the room, I was subjected to some disapproving stares by a few members. However, the majority of them didn't seem to mind it. After all, I felt I had a right to be there since I was like, you know, the bait in their trap and had kept Mystique distracted long enough to make possible her capture.

Mystique: "Oh look. The man of the hour."

I really didn't like the (seemingly) sarcastic tone she used when she said 'man' and instantly glanced at a few faces in the room to see if anyone had registered anything. Thankfully, it looked as if they did not. In retrospect I know I was being paranoid but having seen firsthand what she was capable of, I felt that I was justified.

Scott: "She divulged anything useful yet?"

It was only then that I realized that Mystique actually didn't direct that statement to me. But to dad - judging by the way everyone was looking at him after she said it. She herself was eying him in a manner than promised violence. Must have had something to do with him being the one to blast her into unconsciousness I figured.

Rogue: "Nah, Scott. We was just 'bout to beat a confession outta her."

Despite the imminent threat behind Rogue's words, Mystique paid no attention to them and instead chose to shift her focus from dad to me.

Mystique: "Ah, Jonathan. You're looking well I see."

"No thanks to you."

She smirked evilly and gave me a knowing look. Paranoia or not, I knew that the next words she let out of her mouth would not bode well for me.

Mystique: "And so nice of you to come checking up on little old me. But did you go see that boyfriend of yours yet and let him know you're okay? If you didn't he'll be so worried."

My jaw dropped and I instantly looked towards the others, ready to fire out denials in earnest – to lie, lie, lie then lie some more. However, they were all muttering to each other as if nothing out of the ordinary had been said. All except Professor Xavier and Betsy (who was wearing a very mischievous smirk by the way).

Mystique's look of shock must have mirrored mine. It quickly changed to confusion as to why her words had next to no effect on those gathered.

Mystique: "What the hell?!"

Betsy: "So your plans backfired and you got your blue ass caught – as usual. I should think you'd be used to it by now. There's no need to be spiteful, Mystique."

Mystique: "You! You're...doing something!"

With a roll of her eyes, Betsy's tone and expression became mockingly sarcastic.

Betsy: "Oooh, we have a genius in our midst."

"Betsy? What are you doing?"

Betsy: "She may be telepathically immune and therefore cannot be mind wiped, John. But, our teammates are not. They can be...gently conditioned to ignore any statements made by Mystique about your sexual orientation."

Hey I wasn't going to complain about that mind you. But still it seemed to go against the X-men's code of ethics when it came to the use of psychic power.

Instinctively I looked towards Professor Xavier to hear what he had to say on the matter.

Professor Xavier: "It's not exactly mind wiping or telepathic coercion. We aren't subverting anyone's free will. And we're only doing it for the greater good - to avoid the instability that would result should Mystique have her way. We have far more pressing issues to deal with than people's sexual orientations."

Betsy: "Whenever Mystique mentions anything of your sexual orientation, the rest of the team will not register it. Instead they'll be faced with an image of Mystique being stubbornly silent and most likely assume she's just sitting there withholding information."

"Cool."

It was my turn to give Mystique a wicked smirk of my own. She scoffed in more than mild irritation and, opening her mouth, she began to yap.

Mystique: "Interesting how you justify your exceptions to the rules, Xavier.

Whoever made you the ultimate authority on psychic ethics?"

We'll I'll be!

“You’re one to talk about morals, bitch.”

Betsy: “I think it’s time to get this show on the road. And no more spitefulness, Mystique. It won’t work. And the more you try, and appear to be stubborn, the angrier people in here will get...and that won’t be too good for you. So it’s in your best interest to be cooperative.”

The grumbles Mystique made were incoherent at best. But eventually she simmered down as she accepted it was pointless to try and spite me. In the other corner of the room the rest of the team had since stopped their mutterings and now made their way closer to the cell.

Ororo: “I trust you appreciate the gravity of your situation, Mystique. We’d much prefer not to have to resort to coercion but if you persist in being obstinate we’ll have no choice but to - ”

Mystique: “Spare me your long winded babbling, Storm. I won’t be here long enough for you to get anything out of me. Do you really think Magneto is just going to sit idly by whilst his best agent languishes in the custody of the X-men?”

Professor Xavier looked deeply troubled at that confident statement.

Mystique: "If there is one thing Magneto is - it's loyal to those who are loyal to him. Why, if it weren't for me he'd have attempted to break Avalanche and Sabertooth out of prison a long time ago. He relies heavily on my expertise. He will come for me. Hell, he's probably on his way even as we speak."

Scott: "Now you look here, Mystique. We have a pretty damn good idea why it is you came to the school."

All eyes briefly flashed over to me before turning once more to the prisoner.

Mystique: "Oh really?"

Scott: "My son almost died because of the stunts you've pulled. You've committed murder before. But this ain't like all the other shit you tried. This time it's fucking personal."

Mystique may have been cool and collected before. But after witnessing just how pissed off dad was, she seemed to be getting a little worried judging by the widening of her yellow, catlike eyes.

The Professor's voice interrupted the exchange.

Professor Xavier: "Enough. We don't have time for an interrogation at this juncture. We need to evacuate the school and relocate the students immediately."

Warren: "What? But -"

Professor Xavier: "Mystique is right. Magneto **will** come. Not only to reclaim Mystique. But possibly to carry out the mission that he tasked her with. A mission she failed at. It's quite obvious now that he feels threatened."

Dad's menacing sneer quickly faded as his sense of duty took over. Immediately he began giving orders to relocate the student body into the subbasement.

Professor Xavier: "I don't want the students on the grounds at all."

Logan: "Where the hell are we going to find accommodation for all of 'em at such short notice?"

Warren cleared his throat and called for attention from those present.

Warren: "I can pull a few strings and have them bunk at one of dad's mega-hotels. Heck, I think we better call up a transportation service too."

Professor Xavier: "It would be most appreciated, Warren. I don't want them anywhere near the grounds should that madman come over here."

"Erm, Professor?"

Professor Xavier: "Yes, Jonathan?"

"I don't understand why we need to evacuate the students. Shouldn't the Subbasement be safe enough for them? I mean, you have the entire X-men team, not to mention Generation X stationed here. All against Magneto. You really think that he could make it to the Subbasement faced with all that opposition?"

A devious cackle raided the air. Who else? - Mystique.

Mystique: "Fool. Magneto is **the** most powerful mutant on the planet. When driven by his cause he does not hold anything back. You X-men do. And therein lies your greatest weakness. You lot have done enough damage to the cause of mutant liberation. When Erik gets here he'll - OW, FUCK!"

We all looked at Ororo – who had thrown her cup of (I’m guessing HOT) coffee at Mystique – in not so mild surprise. I would have expected something like that from Rogue. Not the ever calm Ororo. She rolled her eyes at us in response to the staring.

Ororo: “What? She was seriously working my nerves. I needed to vent. It was either that or a mini-thunderstorm up in here.”

Awkward silence...

Ororo: “I thought so.”

Professor Xavier: “Ignore Mystique for now. Let’s get the evacuation underway.”

Logan: “You guys can handle it. I wanna have a little chat with her about that incident down in the Danger Room.”

Scott: “As would I.”

“Me too,” I piped up.

Professor Xavier: "Later. I need to discuss mansion security with ALL of the senior X-men. And I don't want you anywhere near her while alone, Jonathan. Period. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir."

All three of us grumbled but obeyed the Professor and followed him out, leaving Mystique shackled to the chair in the Brig...

Mystique: "Hey! I need to pee!"

ARE YOU SCARED?

Kitty: "Hey! Your powers are back online!"

"Yup! They sure took long enough."

I ceased levitating the statuette and replaced in on the mantelpiece, glancing at the clock on the wall as it did so. It was just after seven in the morning. The

Mansion was basically devoid of students. Warren had pulled some strings like he said he would. The students were quite angry at being woken up in the middle of the night and told that the school was being evacuated. But once they heard **five star hotel** stay, they got their asses in gear. Following their departure the entire school grounds was placed on lock down with maximum security settings enabled and regular patrols instituted. Things were quiet and there was a prevailing lull in activity that was boring some of the more hotheaded in our midst to no end.

Ryan: "I wish that Magneto would just come if he's coming already. Alla this suspense..."

Kitty rolled her eyes and patted Ryan's shoulder.

Kitty: "It's called striking when your opponent least expects it, Ryan."

Ryan: "But Mags don't need to do that. He's powerful enough to stage an all out assault."

I nodded in agreement. I (and the other Gen X'ers) had been reading up the school files on Magneto and his exploits. From what we could see, time and time

again, Magneto was able to single handedly beat the entire senior X-team into a standstill. And a lotta other times he just plain old beat them. If he wanted Mystique back so badly I didn't see the deal in making us wait. At one point I actually assumed that she was bluffing. But Logan said that she wasn't. It wasn't her style to do so.

Kitty: "So, are you scared, John?"

It was a simple question which begged a simple answer.

"Honestly - yes."

It had been made very plain to all of us that Magneto likely was not just coming back to reclaim his top agent. If he saw a way to accomplish the mission he'd entrusted her with, he'd probably take it upon himself. Which was why I was supposed to go into lock down in the Subbasement vault with the Beta Squad should Magneto show his face. The rest of Alpha Squad (which I belonged to) had been sent along with the evacuated students to keep order. The Beta Squad (of which Kitty and Ryan were a part) was entrusted with basically body guarding me. With regards to direct fighting with Magneto, only the Gamma

squad were being allowed to join with the seniors as they'd had the most training.

"I just wish we had some idea of what he's up to," I mused more to myself than anyone else.

Kitty: "Same here..."

GAINING THEIR TRUST

Erik Lensherr surveyed the group of young adults that constituted Mystique's M.A.L.E. His scarf and hat did much to conceal his facial features from the M.A.L.E. members. Mystique had not yet revealed just who it was pulling their strings due to her concern that they might not wish to follow the orders of a man who had been branded a terrorist of the highest order. But Mystique was no longer here. She had missed her scheduled check in calls with Magneto and he therefore knew that something had come up. And so he'd come to the M.A.L.E. Hideout, which as it turned out was a rather nice sub-urban house in a charming neighborhood that Mystique had bought (using stolen funds) under one of her many false identities.

It was time to determine if they had the steel to take up the cause of championing mutant rights. The time would have eventually come when they would have to be tested to see just how strong of will they were. And Erik reasoned, now was as good a time as any. He reasoned with himself - why waste anymore time, effort and resources on people who might just turn out to be too soft hearted or mutinous later on? And so he pleaded his case.

Pyro: "Just how do we know the boss lady sent you again?"

Erik reached into his coat and pulled out a vid disk. Handing it to Pyro, who seemed to be the oldest and something of a leader amongst them, Erik urged them to look at it. Promptly, Pyro inserted the disk into a DVD player and all eyes turned towards the television screen.

Mystique: "...and in the event of my death or disappearance, you are to follow the directions of the bearer of this disk. He is your true leader. I have merely been relaying his directives to you until such time as you proved yourselves worthy of him revealing -"

Quicksilver: "That disk don't mean shit to me, pops. You coulda made that yourself."

Erik: "Rest assured it is legitimate my boy."

Toad: "And we're supposed to just take your word on that, mate? Just who do you think you are?"

With a smirk and a dramatic motion, Erik removed his hat and scarf, revealing himself as -

Pyro: "M-Magneto?!"

All present drew back upon the realization. Erik surveyed their faces looking for signs of fear. What he saw was a mixture primarily of awe and disbelief. But definitely not fear. It was a promising sign.

Erik: "Yes. It is I."

Wits: "But I thought that the authorities said you were last seen somewhere up in Canada?"

Erik merely laughed. The humans were still clueless as to his real whereabouts.

Erik: "They saw someone who LOOKED like me. Namely Mystique."

Pyro: "So alla this time...YOU were the one calling the shots?"

Erik: "Indeed."

Pyro: "So you were using us?"

A murmuring began resonating throughout the group.

Erik: "Not exactly. We, Mystique and I, didn't think you were ready to -"

The murmuring grew more pronounced and Magneto realized that unless he turned things around quickly that he'd lose them and their cooperation.

Erik: "I'm not here to try and pull your strings like a puppet master. I'm here now because Mystique is in dire danger."

Pyro: "What?"

Erik: "Surely you know of her last mission?"

Quicksilver: "Infiltrating the Xavier Institute? Yeah."

Erik: "Well something's come up and I have good reason to suspect that she may have been discovered. I'm not asking you to follow me because I get off on ordering others around like some kind of control freak. I'm asking you, for Mystique's sake, to trust me."

Everyone looked at each other nervously. And for good reason. They could all see where this was leading. Magneto obviously wanted their help in rescuing Mystique.

Erik: "Come now! Surely you lot have more loyalty than this. You - Blob."

The said Blob looked at Magneto in surprise. He had been silent throughout the exchange (leaving the discussion to more intelligent heads) and was surprised that Magneto knew his name.

Blob: "Yeah?"

Erik: "Didn't Mystique rescue you from a life of shame and maltreatment, working as a circus freak down in Hicksville, Texas?"

Blob looked downwards, overly plump cheeks reddening in shame.

Blob: "Uh huh."

Erik then turned his attention towards the one known as Toad.

Erik: "And what about you, Toad? Starved and half frozen to death on the streets with not a soul to turn to?"

Toad: "How do you know about tha-"

Erik: "I know about all of you. Mystique saved you from squalor, gave you a goal and purpose in life where there was none before. And now she has need of you. Are you in?"

Several moments of silence went by until finally Pyro spoke up.

Pyro: "I'm in."

One by one the sentiment was echoed by the M.A.L.E. members. Aside from Gateway who never spoke anyway. He merely nodded.

Erik smiled.

Erik: "Come then. We have work to do. However, before we go for Mystique I have to see an...old friend."

DESPERATE TIMES CALL FOR DESPERATE MEASURES

Professor Xavier: "You understand that the only reason we're doing this is due to our dire circumstances? Right, Jonathan."

I nodded in understanding.

"Yes, Professor."

Professor Xavier, Betsy, Julian and myself were seated in the War Room together. It was around eight thirty in the morning and still there was no sign of Magneto. Mystique however maintained that he would be coming for her and when she got out she would personally snap our necks for the way in which we'd been treating her (she was made to go without meals and water in the hope that hunger induced weakness would silence her never-ending tirade). Unfortunately it didn't do much good and served merely to increase her threats of vengeance.

Betsy: "Normally we'd much prefer that students work towards developing their skills through diligent effort. But it just can't be helped."

Their plan was this. I needed to learn to shield telekinetically. And since there was no time to learn the old fashioned way...they were going to extract the skills needed from Julian's mind and implant them into my own.

"So stuff like this can actually be done? Skills transferring I mean. I know Cerebro has that tutorial mode and stuff but -"

Professor Xavier: "Oh yes. It's an advanced telepathic skill."

Betsy: "How'd you think I learnt to pilot the Blackbird - rest her soul. I simply absorbed the information from Scott's mind."

"Cool."

I looked over to where Julian sat. He flashed a small smile at me and I returned in kind. I honestly thought that he'd have more of a problem with the Professor and Betsy digging around in his mind. Maybe not as all out a problem as I had. But all he said when they made the suggestion to him was, "yeah, I think it's for the best." Julian may have been seemingly at ease. But let me assure you that I... was not. I kept having visuals of the Professor stumbling across some compromising memory in Julian's mind of...you know...**stuff**. And then there was the fact that they'd need to also enter my mind after his - yet another opportunity to witness said **stuff**.

"Um, a question?"

Professor Xavier: "Yes, Jonathan?"

I'm sure that I was blushing every shade of red and the way Betsy was looking at me wasn't helping matters any.

“Just...what’s the general likelihood of you straying into our memories?”

Betsy, who had obviously been struggling to suppress her laughter, erupted in a minor explosion of little, girlish giggles. Julian rolled his eyes at her.

Julian: “Miss Braddock...”

Betsy: “Oh, I’m...so sorry. It’s just...”

Julian: “...that he’s so cute when he blushes like that.”

Betsy: “Exactly.”

The look on Professor Xavier’s face made my face heat up even more.

“Erm, I asked a question?”

Betsy: “Oh, Jonathan, why must you always be so insecure whenever one of us has to enter your mind? I mean, so what if we happen to stumble upon

something now and then? It's all in the strictest confidence anyway. And believe me, we've seen far more shocking than what you two have to offer."

I gave her a pointed look.

"Betsy, do you remember when I accidentally read your mind during that written exam you guys gave us?"

Betsy: "Yeah."

"Well I seem to recall you being quite concerned that I didn't happen to have read other thoughts out of your head. You asked if I saw you doing...well **something**. Something of what nature exactly, I cannot say. But one can only wonder since -"

Betsy: "Okay! Point taken!"

Professor Xavier: "Well, Jonathan. In response to your question, the chances of us inadvertently witnessing that which you would rather not be witnessed are quite minimal. Elizabeth was merely having some fun with you. No need to worry. There are different types of memory you see. What we're delving into here is

SKILLS based memory. Memory of how to perform certain tasks. Not memories of experiences and such. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

I sighed in relief. Then I gave the smirking Betsy a dark look.

You big meanie.

Betsy: Hey, with the situation so tense around here don't begrudge me a little laugh.

I'm glad you find my concerns so amusing.

Professor Xavier: "Well then, let's begin. Is everyone ready?"

We all nodded and the session proper commenced...

NOT WHAT I SIGNED UP FOR

Location: M.A.L.E. Hideout

Erik: "I'm sure that Mystique made mention of a certain boy to you. In fact, some of you have already come into contact with him. Quicksilver, Toad and Pyro I believe. At the Santorini warehouse?"

The various members of the M.A.L.E. all nodded in the affirmative.

Pyro: "Yeah. What of it?"

Erik: "Well, he is the main reason she infiltrated the X-mansion on this last occasion."

Quicksilver: "So who is he?"

Erik had decided that while he was at it, he might as well test the loyalty of his new followers completely. And that would require that he give them access to what was formerly privileged information. This was a war they were fighting. And in a war there was bound to be fatalities. The enemies of mutant kind would not hesitate to end their lives on the field of battle. And so he needed to be sure that his followers – his army – had it in them, if need to be, to similarly take life. No one ever said that war was pretty.

Erik: "He is the son of one of the X-men. Their field-leader in fact."

An appreciative murmur of comprehension rippled through the gathering.

Toad: "What would she want with him?"

Scarlet Witch: "Maybe kidnap him and hold him ransom so they wouldn't interfere in our plans. Like they did that time at the Santorini warehouse?"

The idea made logical sense...

Erik: "No. Mystique went to monitor this mutant. After your failed Santorini affair, she stole into their base with the intention of sabotaging their operation. She's done it before. Quite successfully I might add."

Erik sighed as he recalled the handiwork of Mystique that crippled the X-men shortly before what came to be known worldwide as the **Liberty Island Incident**.

Erik: "However, it was during that trip that she first learnt the fine details concerning that mutant. His name is Jonathan Summers by the way. His mutant name is Phoenix."

Pyro: "Phoenix, huh? That's funny. He seemed to be telekinetic when we fought him. No fire powers."

Erik: "Why, Pyro, I'm quite impressed. I see you know a bit about ancient myth."

The fire manipulating mutant smirked at the praise.

Pyro: "When I was running through code names I once considered Phoenix."

Erik: "Oh. Anyway, this Phoenix is indeed telekinetic. As well as telepathic."

Wits, their resident psychic, who had been silent so far now spoke up.

Wits: "Hmm, a uncommon trait."

Erik: "Indeed. But that's just the beginning. You see, Mystique discovered that this mutant's powers have the potential to develop without limits. A phenomenon previously only speculated upon theoretically."

Once more murmuring resonated throughout the gathering.

Erik: "I trust you see our problem. Can we allow him to be warped and twisted by their fatally flawed ideology? Imagine how much more damage the X-men would be able to do to the cause of mutant liberation if such a thing came to pass?"

Pyro: "So what do you want us to do? Try to turn him around to our way of thinking? Cuz lemme me tell you, boss man, we tried that night. Dude's either really dumb or really stubborn."

Erik: "Oh, if it were only that simple, Pyro. This isn't just another of their brainwashed **students**. He's...family. Even if he were to turn from their beliefs – which he won't do having been brainwashed from childhood – he would be very reluctant to turn against his family. In fact, when Mystique tried to enlighten him...she wound up caught and imprisoned."

Quicksilver: "So if we can't turn him then..."

Quicksilver left it unsaid but Magneto nodded all the same.

Scarlet Witch: "You surely can't mean -"

Erik: "One life weighed against the lives of countless others."

Scarlet Witch: "But...but he's just a kid."

Erik: "To them he is a weapon in the process of being molded. The day must not dawn when he is fit to be wielded."

Quicksilver: "Magneto is right. This is a war. And if they aren't with us they're against us. They're traitors to their own kind. They made that plain the first time we met them. At Santorini's we explained to them and everything and even after all that they still turned on us."

Toad nodded and angrily replied,

Toad: "They don't pull any punches either, mate. One 'o them tried to slice off me tongue."

Scarlet Witch: "Look, I don't like it. I mean, he's a mutant like us. Alright?"

Human scum is one thing but -"

Pyro: "He's not a mutant **like us**, Wanda. He and...these X-men turned their backs on their own. Sure as hell wished I knew why."

Scarlet Witch: "We don't even know how much of a threat he actually is."

Erik reached into his pocket and retrieved his cell phone. Stored on it was the video of Jonathan Grey Summers decimating the Danger Room that Mystique had recorded and sent to him at their last scheduled check point.

Erik: "Actually, I have here some video evidence to back up my claims. Just in case anyone was doubtful."

So saying Erik passed the phone to Scarlet Witch. She took it hesitantly and played the video clip.

Scarlet Witch: "Oh...my God..."

Pyro saw the blood drain from her face and instantly snatched the phone from her. The others drew behind him to have a look for themselves.

Erik: "Do you still believe he can be allowed to live? Do bear in mind that his growth is not nearly complete."

Scarlet Witch: "I..."

Pyro: "Fuck! But...he was so pathetic that night when we fought him!"

Quicksilver: "I don't understand. That night at Santorini's he seemed pretty average to me. Why such a big change in so short a time?"

Possibly because he was never really pushed to his limits before, like he was in the Danger Room due to Mystique's tampering. But Magneto of course didn't mention that. Instead he quickly diverted their attention back to the main matter at hand.

Erik: "Mystique may have the answers for your questions. If so we'll have them once she's freed. Now, knowing what you know now, how many wish to carry out this undertaking?"

One by one they agreed until finally only Scarlet Witch and Gateway remained. No one was too surprised that Gateway wouldn't join in as he had (to their twisted way of thinking) a weird sense of morality. They put up with it because of the extreme rarity and usefulness of his gift. But the Scarlet Witch was a different matter.

Pyro: "Wanda?"

Scarlet Witch: "I will go with you and help free Mystique. But I won't have anything to do with regards to the boy. I didn't sign on to become a murderer of children."

She gave a piercing stare to the one called Quicksilver.

Scarlet Witch: "And I didn't think you did either, Pietro. Now, if you will excuse me, I have to go make ready."

With that final statement she turned and left the room.

Pyro: "Dude, I think your sister really needs to just - "

Quicksilver: "She'll come around."

Erik: "Very well then. Follow suite and make yourselves ready whilst I go see that friend I mentioned earlier. Wits?"

Wits: "Yes?"

Erik: "You shall accompany me. I will be in need of your services."

Wits: "Um, okay."

VISITING A DEAR FRIEND

Location: Happy Valley Mental Hospital

Attendant: "I'm sorry, sir. But we have strict orders that all visitors of this patient be cleared with Dr. Bentley first. And at the moment she just cannot seem to be reached."

The woman behind the desk frowned in apparent frustration as she tried yet another number to absolutely no avail. Finally she gave up all hope of contacting the good doctor and merely apologized once more and asked that Erik and his **granddaughter** come back a little later in the day.

Erik smiled and asked softly, "Miss Frost is a rather dear friend of mine. Won't you please reconsider?"

So saying, he slightly nudged the girl at his side, the M.A.L.E. telepath known as Wits. With a barely perceptible nod, she activated her mutant power and infiltrated the mind of the woman at the desk. The attendant's expression appeared momentarily dazed. Presently she seemingly recovered, giving her head a little shake as if recovering from a spell of dizziness.

Attendant: "Well, I suppose just this once won't hurt. Come, I'll lead you to her room and if anyone asks I'll take full responsibility."

Erik and Wits smiled, thanked her profusely, and followed the mind-controlled woman down the hallway. After a short stroll they stopped at Room 213. The attendant swiped an access card across the locking mechanism of the door and led them in.

Attendant: "Well, here we are. The sedatives we gave her should wear off in a little while. So don't wake her before then. Okay?"

She left them with a smile.

Wits: "Gosh, I thought she'd never leave. Even with my leading her along mentally she was really hesitant to go. So who's this broad again?"

Erik slowly walked up towards the bed where Emma Grace Frost lay sleeping. Lying here, on a bed in a mental hospital, was the most **decent** he'd ever seen her. He often did wonder where she got the idea for her X-men battle attire from. Considering it possessed very little protective potential (should her armored diamond form fail) and she couldn't very well sex her adversaries into submission...it was a wonder that her design was approved.

Wits: "Helloooo? Magneto?"

Erik: "Sorry, my dear. She is Emma Frost. Among other things, she's a telepath like yourself. A most skilled telepath. In fact she's one of the most powerful in the world."

Wits whistled low at hearing that. If a mutant of Magneto's stature could make such a claim...

Wits: "So why is she here? Is she looney or something?"

Erik: "No. Her mind was assaulted and her memories sealed by the X-men. I tell you, Wits, there's precious little those lot won't do to those who stand in their way."

Wits' expression grew grave. These X-men must be really bad news. But what she didn't get was why they'd seemingly work against their own interests by siding against Magneto. They were mutants too after all. And Magneto was fighting for mutant rights and equality. Anyhow, she reasoned, Magneto would most likely explain in his own good time.

Erik: "Now, Wits. I need your utmost attention."

Wits: "Um, okay."

Erik: "Emma's mind needs to be...reset as it were. And then her memories should be no problem for you to restore."

Wits: "Reset?"

Erik went on to explain. Brainwaves were of an electromagnetic nature and his powers allowed him full control of the electromagnetic spectrum.

Electromagnetic manipulation of brainwaves was the basis of Cerebro in fact. Metallic manipulation was just the tip of the iceberg where Magneto's powers were concerned. Basically, Erik intended to reboot Emma's mind by manipulating her brainwaves - shutting down all brainwave activity then restarting it.

Then, before Charles Xavier's memory blocks could be fully loaded and integrated into place again - Wits would disable them. As long as they timed it correctly, they would be able to ensure that Emma Frost's consciousness came back online from the shutdown **before** the memory blocks. And then she herself

could assist Wits in permanently deleting Xavier's memory suppressing blocks. And the White Queen would be as herself once more.

Erik: "As soon as I give the signal, enter her mind. This may take us quite a few tries. The one who did this to her was...rather skilled."

Wits: "I understand."

IT BEGINS...

Later that day in the War Room...

Julian: "Great! See, there IS something to be said about creative visualization."

"Hmm, I guess it ain't just smack after all."

I smiled and ceased visualizing. The glowing, blue orb of force that previously enshrouded me dissipated. Grinning, I walked over to one of the chairs in the now empty War Room and took a seat. It was definitely time for a break.

“So you mean all I have to do to trigger it is...imagine?”

Julian nodded and explained what the Professor had done once more. He'd basically eliminated any problem I'd have with manipulating the shields by linking the ability directly to my imagination.

Julian: “You think and therefore it is.”

“Was that how it was with your shields? When you just learnt how to make them I mean?”

Julian: “Nah. When my shields actually first manifested they were almost completely outta my control.”

I frowned in curiosity.

“What do you mean?”

Julian: “Well...”

He walked over to the chair next to me and took a seat.

Julian: "It was like a reflex thing. You know how you'd instinctively try to block an incoming blow with your arms or so?"

I nodded in understanding. I knew all too well since (before this new shield thing) that was the only way available for me to block anything.

"Yeah?"

Julian: "I guess you could say that it was the telekinetic equivalent of that. It just happened."

"You obviously can control them really well now."

Julian: "Thanks."

"So do you imagine them into existence NOW if not then?"

Julian: "No. I eventually learnt to control them. But my trigger is a little bit different."

“Different how?”

Julian: “Well...it’s complicated.”

“I’m not just a pretty face you know,” I said with a smirk. “I do have some measure of intelligence.”

Julian: “See...the entire thing about shielding is...well it’s about safety. It’s usually linked to a certain emotion you have to feel before the shield will even form. You know how psychic powers are strongly linked to the emotions.”

“Yeah.”

Julian: “For most of us, generating a shield requires that we bring to mind something that makes us feel safe.”

“Oh.”

Julian: “That’s why people who are forever nervous or really insecure have totally lame shields. That’s if they even manage to form one in the first place.”

Hmmm, interesting concept. I never went through the shielding training in psionics class for the simple fact that it was felt my powers weren't strong enough to sustain a shield.

"So what do you think about?"

Awkward silence.

"I'm...sorry. If it's too personal."

Julian: "What? No, no. Of course not. Whenever I wanna make a shield I -"

He paused and reddened a little.

"What?"

Julian: "It's a little embarrassing."

"Gosh, now I HAVE to know."

I did mention before that he's not the type to blush much. Right?

Julian: "It...might ruin your fantasy image of me as an uber mutant warrior."

Excuses, excuses.

"I'm willing to chance it."

He rolled his eyes in surrender at last.

Julian: "Fine, fine. It's like this. When I was eight I climbed the tree in my grandparents' backyard and couldn't get down again."

"Awwwwwwe."

Julian: "And I'd started slipping and...it was quite a drop. And my grandfather was at the base telling me to jump and that he'd catch me. And I didn't believe him cuz when we played in the backyard he never could catch the damn baseball."

"Yeah, I would have been dubious too."

Julian: "Anyhow, my grandma was panicking and bitching about the damn firemen taking too long and that they came within five minutes when the neighbor's stupid cat got caught up in a tree and...then I couldn't hold on anymore and I thought - this is it. I'm gonna die."

"Gasp."

Julian: "Well I didn't get the hard landing I was expecting. My grampa had made a dive for it and caught me. He injured his shoulder in the process."

"Damn. How bad was he hurt?"

Julian: "He got better. It was a dislocated shoulder. They were so cool about the whole thing that they didn't even tell my parents what I did. Then I'd have been in a lotta trouble. Grampa's motto was 'boys will be boys'."

"So whenever you wanna form a shield..."

Julian: "Yeah, I think of my grandfather."

I mock sniffled and held my hand over my heart.

“That’s so beautiful and touching. My boyfriend. Mr. Sensitive.”

Julian: “You little pric -”

INTRUDER ALERT! PERIMETER BREACHED! INTRUDER ALERT!

The grins from both our faces faded quickly and we looked towards the monitor. One by one the footage of the security cameras was replaced by raw static. In the last screen all we could make out was an assembly of individuals at the front of the mansion. The gate and wall behind them shattered beyond repair. In short order even that image was obliterated as the last camera out front was taken out of commission.

Julian: “Oh God. Stay here! I have to go topside.”

He bent for a quick kiss and then ran towards the door.

“Be careful!”

Julian: I will.

I shifted my telepathic focus to the Mansion above where the rest of the X-men were stationed in waiting.

Dad!

Professor Xavier: We are aware, Jonathan.

Scott: Stay in the subbasement. The Beta Squad is on its way to protect you. And Alex and Lorna as well.

No sooner had he said that did a sudden surge of some heightened emotion (that I couldn't quite identify) penetrate through to me via our mental link.

Dad?

Silence...

Dad?!

Scott: Okay, everyone's down under. Lock down the Subbasement now. And no matter what happens, do not unlock unless we give you the all clear. Okay?

I shuddered at that ominous commandment.

Okay.

I entered the command at the console as he requested.

Scott: Gotta go now. They've just disabled the auto-defenses.

But they'd only just arrived!

That quick?!

Scott: Magneto's electromagnetic powers are very effective against machinery. You sit tight and let us handle this.

Right... Good luck, dad. Stay safe.

Scott: You got it, son.

He terminated our mental conversation just as the War Room's doors slid open. Some members of Beta Squad came running in ready for duty. Namely Kitty (Shadowcat), Ashton (Ares) and Marie-Ange (Tarot). Since the Professor had declared a state of emergency we had all changed into X-attire in anticipation of this very moment. Their squad leader - Tarot - seemed confident and in control.

"Hey, where are the rest of your team, Tarot? I thought you were all supposed to -"

Tarot: "The rest of them are in the Brig with Mystique along with some of the Gamma Squad. The Professor felt that it wouldn't be wise to leave her on her own during the chaos. Especially as the electromagnetic effects of Magneto's power might disrupt our generators...which would mean the Brig's locking mechanisms might fail."

"I...see. How many are with Magneto?"

Shadowcat: "I dunno. We weren't outside and the Gamma's and Seniors were manning the observation station at the time."

Ares: "I was by a window. I counted five with him. But who knows. There could damn well be more."

Just then, the doors slid open once more revealing Alex and Lorna at the threshold.

"Hey, guys."

They slowly walked inside having every appearance of being badly shaken.

Lorna in particular seemed a bit shell-shocked. Alex wrapped his arm around her and gave her a comforting squeeze.

"Lorna? Are you alright?"

She slowly nodded.

Lorna: "Uh, yeah. It's just..."

I didn't miss the look that Alex gave her right then. A look that made her check herself.

“What?”

Lorna: “Um, Magneto. He’s got quite the entourage.”

“Yeah. In all likelihood, the M.A.L.E. membership. Mystique was running the show on his behalf and their loyalty no doubt lies with him now. I’ve seen them fight. She’s trained them well.”

Alex: “Trained by bitch face? Not a very comforting thought.”

“It’s so...quiet. Without the surveillance tech working we’re deaf and dumb to what’s going on out there.”

Since there was nothing that we could do about that for the moment we all just took a seat and did our best to remain grounded in the midst of this latest crisis...

RETURN OF THE...QUEEN?

Magneto stood confidently before the assembled X-men at the doorway to the Xavier Mansion proper. Behind him were the newest incarnation of The

Brotherhood: Pyro, Toad, Quicksilver, Scarlet Witch, Blob and Wits. However, it was not the sight of these mutants who had the most impact on the X-men. But rather that of the extremely angry, blonde woman standing next to Magneto's side.

Scott: "E-Emma?! But you're -"

Emma: "Supposed to be in the madhouse you lot left me to rot in?"

Professor Xavier: "We sent you there to get the **help** you needed, Emma."

Emma: "I've always been a big believer in self-help. And I'm here to help myself alright."

Professor Xavier: "Emma, please consider what it is you are doing."

Emma's only response was to shift into her diamond form which afforded her superhuman strength, excellent defensive capability and virtual immunity to telepathic attacks. The time for talking was long over in her book.

Magneto: "I don't wish to drag this out, Charles. You know why I have come. I have no desire to spill mutant blood if it can be avoided. So I'm giving you the option of cooperating with us."

Magneto would have said more but was interrupted by a young man sporting an Aussie accent who made the demand that Mystique be freed immediately - or else.

Magneto: "Silence, Pyro. Let me do the talking."

Wolverine: "Having trouble controlling your lackeys, Mags? You really think these raw recruits stand much of a chance against us?"

Magneto: "From what I heard, Toad alone was able to hold his own against you, Storm and one other. So my answer is yes. Mystique did train them you know. We get by, even though we don't have access to a Danger Room of our own. Though of late the situation has changed. Hasn't it?"

Logan bared his teeth and let out an unconscious growl. Magneto merely smiled wryly.

Magneto: "How **are** the repairs coming along by the way?"

Professor Xavier: "That's enough, Erik!"

Magneto: "Yes, I suppose you're right, Charles. We want Mystique and the boy, Charles. I'm giving you the opportunity to avoid needless conflict. See, I'm trying to arrive at a peaceful resolution. Aren't you proud of me?"

Rogue: "Is he for real? You expect us to just hand over -"

Magneto: "If you want to make it out of this alive you will. I've been merciful long enough. We are at a most critical juncture and I will not see mutant kind suffer due to your misguided philosophy. A war is -"

Cyclops: "A war is coming. You bet your wrinkled old ass a war is coming. Take one more step and you'll find out just how close to the brink it is."

Ordinarily, the other members of the X-men might have been surprised at Cyclops' manner. But considering what he had been through lately and what Magneto was now demanding, it was to be expected. Every man has his limits after all.

Magneto: "So...you would defy me?"

Cyclops: "I **would** like to do a lot more than that. That cape you got there would make a really nice shroud, dontcha think?"

Emma: "Would everyone just stop it with the bullshit dialog already and do what you came to do?!"

Erik: "Very well, my dear. We've got to work on that temper of yours. Forward, my Brotherhood! Charge!"

Emma: "Just stay away from baldy! The old geezer is mine!"

GENIUSES NEED THEIR SPACE

"What are you doing?"

Justin Kent (Whiz - a member of Beta Squad) was busily hammering away at the console. He had been for close to half an hour.

Whiz: "I'm hacking the access codes to Hank's lab."

Lorna: "Why the hell are you doing that?"

With relish, Whiz explained his motives to us.

Whiz: "Hank has an aerial probe the X-men sometimes use for reconnaissance in dangerous territory. When I get the lab open we can send that out and maybe get a picture of what the heck's going on out there."

"Oh! Good idea."

Whiz: "Well I AM a certified genius you know."

He looked more than a little proud of himself at that statement.

Computer: "Access Denied."

Whiz let out a frustrated breath.

Alex: "You were saying?"

Whiz: "Could you all just gimme a little room to work? I feel like I'm boxed in tight. Geniuses need their space, alright."

"Right...right..."

THE MASTER OF MAGNETISM

Angry, dark gray clouds swirled above the Xavier Mansion, twisting into a towering thunderhead. Hovering above the school grounds was the X-man known as Storm, mistress of the elements. Under her unspoken command, bolt after bolt of blue lightning coursed across the sky, then down to the ground below.

Pyro: "Yaah! She almost got me!"

The angered fire-manipulating mutant formed a massive ball of flame that he prepared to hurl at Storm. However his aim was thrown badly off due to the painful bolt of psionic energy that struck him courtesy of Psylocke.

Pyro: "You bitch!"

Psylocke: "I've been called much worse."

The two of them prepared to face off. Meanwhile, Magneto was surrounded by Cyclops, Wolverine, Rogue and Gambit. Under the non-stop assault of super-powered punches and kicks from Rogue, Adamantium slashes from Wolverine and energy based bombardment from Cyclops and Gambit – Magneto's electromagnetic shield held firm.

Magneto: "Pathetic."

The Master of Magnetism's patience was wearing thin and with a glance at Wolverine he levitated him six feet above ground. Seconds later Wolverine was subjected to unspeakable pain as the Adamantium lacing his bones was manipulated by Magneto – warped this way and that at a whim. The usual result (serious internal injury) came as was expected.

Wolverine: "Fuckin' hell! Don't you ever get tired of using that cheap trick?!"

Magneto: "What can I say? It's a classic."

Further expletives erupted from Wolverine as he began to rise higher and higher into the ether. Just as Storm tossed another of her prize lightning bolts, Magneto threw Logan directly into its path.

Logan: "Arrgggghh!!!"

Storm: "Logan!"

The Adamantium in his body made for excellent conduction and his scream was bloodcurdling. Wolverine was knocked unconscious long before his body made contact with the ground below. He landed with a sickening thud. Magneto once more extended his metal warping influence towards Wolverine's prone form. But fortunately Colossus was on hand to save him from further damage.

Colossus: "I have him!"

Magneto: "Enough of this!"

The Master of Magnetism forcefully expanded his shield, knocking Gambit, Rogue and Cyclops flat onto their backs. As they got back up to continue the assault they noticed a distinctive rumbling beneath their feet. Rogue immediately took to the air, looking about for the source of the tremors.

Gambit: "What..."

Cyclops quickly figured out what was going on.

Cyclops: "There's metal everywhere, Gambit. Even when we can't see it.

Countless pipelines and high density power cables run underneath the school.

Magneto must be -"

Before that statement could be completed the earth underneath Magneto split open and segment after segment of pipeline burst forth from beneath the ground.

Magneto: "I truly wish it had not come to this."

The entire battlefield drew to a standstill as the pipes came into alignment and began to seemingly liquefy. It didn't take long for all present to realize that

Magneto was manipulating the metal on the molecular level, warping it to suit his fancy.

Angel: "What the hell is he gonna do with alla those?"

Beast: "I suspect we'll soon find out, my friend."

Magneto: "Humanity's plans for the mutant race will never come to fruition. Not as long as I draw breath. If you do not stand with us, you stand with them. And you shall **fall** with them. For good and all I shall bring your misguided principles to an end."

As Magneto said this, all of the pipe segments had liquefied and assimilated into a immense orb of fluid metal above his head. The sphere exerted an attractive influence in the immediate vicinity and the metallic objects nearby began to bend towards its direction. Eventually it grew so strong that lamp fixtures, garbage bins and various metal attachments on the benches broke off and merged with it, feeding the ever growing orb. Colossus had to assume his flesh and blood form to avoid being pulled along with everything else, as well as hold onto Logan with all his strength to keep him from the same fate (due to his Adamantium covered bones).

Magneto: "A day of freedom is approaching, X-men. And you have been judged unworthy to witness its dawning!"

At this moment the metallic orb pulsed twice and extruded countless tentacles that streaked across the field of battle towards the gathered senior X-men and Gamma Squad members. The M.A.L.E. members paused at this awesome display of mutant power as it was pretty evident to them that Magneto was basically dealing with their adversaries single handedly. This was to Magneto's satisfaction as he wished his newest followers to witness firsthand what he was capable of. Every leader needed to command respect and at least a little **fear** from his followers...

Magneto: "Why, Beast, you're looking very curious and intrigued. But then again, you **are** a scientist. Here, why don't you examine them for yourself."

With a gesture several thick tentacles streaked towards Beast, rending the ground in the process.

Beast: "They're extremely flexible and at the same time diabolically strong!"

The blue furred mutant desperately attempted to use his agility to evade the marauding tentacles of metal. Eventually he began to tire and could no longer maintain his speed. The metal ensnared him in serpentine coils that began to squeeze ever so tightly. Breathing became increasingly more difficult and eventually impossible. Loss of consciousness was inevitable and the Beast fell with a slump...the second X-man to be felled by the Master of Magnetism...

WE GOT A PROBLEM

Ares: "Fucking hell."

Shadowcat: "Ditto."

Shortly before the worrying earth tremors began, Whiz managed to hack the access codes to Hank's laboratory. It was felt that since the battle was likely going on in the greens to the front of the Mansion (as validated by Betsy when I contacted her mentally), we could open the hangar exit a crack to let the probe out. The exit to the hangar is directly under the so called basketball court to the back of the school. Sure it serves as an actual court but more importantly it serves

as an effective disguise as to what lies beneath its surface. In times of need it slides open to reveal the exit way for the X-men's aerial transportation.

We released the probe and Whiz remotely controlled its movements, commanding it to fly high enough overhead to avoid any unwanted attention from below. Once that was done it was made to fly above the Mansion and towards the front of the school. The picture was at first grainy due to electromagnetic interference (so Whiz explained). So we had to have the probe elevate itself even more (away from the source of the interference) and use its zoom function.

What we saw was not comforting in the least. The entire area out front was torn up and looked as if it had undergone heavy excavation. In several areas water sprung out from the ground in jets leading us to believe that water mains had been compromised. What was even more disconcerting was the sight of...well from what I could make out, some kind of metallic looking octopus thing (with a whole lot more than eight arms) laying waste to the Mansion's formerly impeccable front lawn. It didn't take a genius to figure out that this metal monstrosity was responsible for the tremors.

Whiz: "Guys, we got a problem."

Great. Another one. I feel oh SO blessed.

Alex: "Music to my ears..."

Tarot: "What is it?"

Whiz: "Well, I suspect that Magneto pulled all that metal up from under the ground. We got water mains, waste pipelines, electricity cables and other stuff running beneath the Mansion."

We nodded slowly, urging him without words to get what he was getting at.

Whiz: "It's the power cables that's worrying me. In addition to the cables themselves, there's also the metallic pipelines sheathing and protecting them. Magneto must have pulled out a good few of them in the process because our power reserves in the Subbasement are almost spent."

Lorna: "What? But...surely, there's emergency reserves?"

Whiz: "Well...yes. But we need those reserves to keep the locking mechanisms for the Subbasement operational."

"But what about life support systems? The gas-exchange system?"

Alex: "Oh my God! Without power they'll shut down and we'll asphyxiate."

Whiz: "Yes. The gas-exchange system continually refreshes the air supply in the Subbasement. The Subbasement itself is completely airtight. So no air from the external environment can get in without going through the exchange."

Lorna: "Well what's the point of that?"

Whiz rolled his eyes in mild exasperation.

Whiz: "It means that no toxins or airborne chemical weapons can enter either. The gas-exchange also filters and purifies the air. A useful feature if we were besieged and under attack by chemical weaponry but now...well..."

“So what you’re saying is we have a choice. We either use the emergency power to keep life-support running and terminate the lock down in the process. Or we sacrifice life-support and keep the locking mechanisms active and -”

Shadowcat: “Better learn to hold our breaths?”

Whiz nodded gravely.

Tarot: “What about re-routing power from the Mansion?”

Whiz: “I’ve already tried that. There’s no interconnectivity between the Subbasement and Mansion with regards to power supply. It must be another security feature so that anyone attacking wouldn’t be able to knock out the power from up there in the event of a siege or something.”

I took a seat and inwardly cursed at the entire situation. Security features that were meant to keep us safe would end up doing us in.

Tarot: “Well, I suppose there’s no choice.”

My blood froze for a moment.

“You’re not seriously saying that we open the locks are you?”

Whiz: “Not at all. She’s saying we get Noriko to try and give us some extra juice.”

Noriko...Noriko. That name sounded very familiar. They must have read the expression off my face.

Tarot: “Noriko or...Surge is a member of my team. Her powers deal with electrical generation, absorption and discharge.”

I smiled at the sound of that. That meant that Surge would be able to charge up the Subbasement core!

Tarot: “Hopefully she can buy us some more time. But you must understand. What we’re proposing is quite dangerous. Surge herself is not fully able to control her powers and relies on specially adapted gauntlets to allow her to channel the energy.”

I didn't see the problem. I mean I really doubted she left them in her dorm room or anything like that given that we were all supposed to have been ready for anything since the day before.

"Yeah...and? She's got the gauntlets on I assume."

Tarot: "Yes. Of course. But they were only meant to channel a certain level of power. If she tries to power up the core and the electrical energy she's channeling exceeds the limits of the gauntlets...she runs of the risk of frying them and discharging all of her bio-electricity simultaneously. It has happened once before. It almost killed her."

"Oh crap."

Lorna: "I don't know about this. It seems to me that juicing up a power core would require channeling a lot of energy."

Whiz: "It does."

Tarot: "I'll go fetch her. She's in the Brig with the others overseeing Mystique."

That reminded me of something.

“What about power to the Brig? I suppose the locking mechanisms there have enough power to...”

Tarot: “Don’t worry. Skids from Gamma Squad is in there. She has orders to surround Mystique in a force bubble should the Brig lose power.”

As Tarot left to inform Surge of our energy crisis I lay backwards in my chair and took several deep, calming breaths.

Whiz: “Hey, take it easy on the oxygen will ya.”

I was so developing a dislike for him...

I WILL HAVE MY REVENGE

Meanwhile, upstairs in the Xavier Mansion...

Julian: “Professor...she’s really taking a lot outta my shield...”

Julian closed his eyes and channeled more power into the force field that enveloped him and the Professor. From the moment it became clear that Emma Frost intended to first take her revenge out on Xavier, Julian had convinced the good Professor to abandon the battlefield outside and accompany him indoors and as far away from Emma Frost as possible. For the very good reason that Emma in her diamond form was immune to telepathic attack. Not to mention that she also had very good physical defenses too. In addition to enhanced strength.

Emma: "Get out of my way, boy! It's not you I'm after!"

Julian gritted his teeth and said nothing.

Professor Xavier: "Emma, if you don't give up your insidious agenda don't blame me for the consequences!"

Emma: "You're powerless against me while I'm in this form! And..."

Emma drew back, building strength up for one final massive assault.

Emma: "...I've had just about enough of this kid's ridiculous attempts at heroics!"

With a super powered punch Julian's telekinetic shield shattered and he was thrown backwards with the backlash. Charles Xavier's eyes widened as Emma walked towards him with menacing intent gleaming in her eyes.

Emma: "I will have my revenge on you, Charles. When I'm done you'll be needing the same kind of mental **help** you claimed I did. I will enjoy erasing your most precious memories, one by one. Just like you did to me."

Professor Xavier: "You may be immune to telepathic attack for now Emma. But this form also comes with a price. You lose access to your own telepathy. As soon as you revert and try anything I'll be able to defend myself."

Emma: "True, Charles. But I'm a patient girl. All I need do is dose you with a nice mutant gene suppressor. And then you're all mine. Of course it will take time. First thing's first, we need to go somewhere more comfortable where we won't be disturbed."

Xavier drew backwards in his hover chair as Emma made to grab him.

Fortunately she didn't have the chance to as she was shoved aside by Colossus (who had come in to deposit the unconscious Beast inside where it was relatively safer).

Emma: "Damn it!"

Strong though she was in her diamond form, Emma Frost knew that her strength didn't compare to Colossus'. Of course she could have reverted back into flesh and blood and taken him down with telepathy. But that would mean opening herself up to attack by Xavier himself. Nevertheless, she had come too far to turn back and flung herself full force at the Russian mutant. With a heavy hand he swatted her aside as he would an insect and she went crashing through the window to the yard outside.

Julian had by now recovered from his collision before and shakily stood up.

Julian: "Nice save, Colossus. Damn, what happened to Beast?"

Colossus: "The battle goes badly outside, comrades. The M.A.L.E. have once more taken up active fighting, Professor. Between them and Magneto..."

Professor Xavier: "I know, Peter. Magneto and Emma may be immune to my powers. Courtesy of his helmet and her diamond form. And I sense they have quite a powerful telepath on their side as well. But I will do what I can – what I **must**. You and Julian must defend me. I will need maximum concentration and will be in something of a trance."

Both Julian and Colossus nodded. Professor Xavier closed his eyes and his brow furrowed...

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS

Subbasement – Power Core

"Are you SURE you know what you're doing?"

I looked towards Whiz who was tinkering with the...well it was something akin to a massive, gray, metallic octahedron that was held suspended above several anti-gravity rings. Numerous thick cables sprouted from its surface.

Whiz: "Yes, I know what I'm doing. I AM a - "

Lorna: "A genius. Yes we know. But considering how many attempts it took you to override Hank's security codes to his lab..."

The look Whiz gave her was not a kind one.

Alex: "What she means is you tried and failed multiple...multiple times. And it was okay - in THAT instance. But we're not sure if a power core will be as forgiving of so many failed attempts."

Whiz: "Look, Mr. Summers, we're doing what needs to be done. Okay? We're X-men - "

"In training."

He ignored me and continued on a tad bit irritated.

Whiz: "We're X-men and we're doing what we've been trained to do. You two are just regular teachers. Now would you please stop second guessing our every move?"

Lorna: "Well excuuuuuuse me."

Whiz tilted his head at an angle meant for distance and called out to someone outside.

Whiz: "Surge? Are you ready?"

An Asian girl stepped across the threshold. Instinctively my eyes were drawn towards her hands. Just like Tarot said, they were covered by metallic gauntlets that each boasted a blue crystal attachment that glowed with an electrical radiance. She looked confident enough but as she passed close to me I could sense the nervousness...no not nervousness. More like gut wrenching fear.

"Wait."

Whiz: "Oh for God's sake what is it NOW?"

I glared at him for good measure then turned to Surge.

“You...you don’t have to do this if you don’t want to. I mean, I heard about what happened last time. How you almost died.”

She smiled shakily.

Surge: “Don’t worry. I – I think I can control it better this time. That was years ago. I’ve learnt a lot since then.”

Whiz: “Sometime **today** people.”

Surge gave him a very mean and frightening look and I swear I saw her eyes spark when she did this. Whiz paled a little and quickly went back to tinkering with the core control systems. Behind me I could hear Lorna and Alex chuckling and despite the situation I allowed myself a small smirk. With a crude smile of her own, Surge stepped towards the core and activated her mutant ability. Her hands took on an electric blue glow and seconds later the core was inundated by her bio-electrical energy. Electrical sparks arced across its gray surface and along the cables that were connected to it.

Whiz: “Yes. Core energy levels rising.”

Alex: "Are you okay?"

Surge: "Yeah...so far so good."

We kept our fingers crossed as Surge persevered in her efforts to power up the core...

WE ARE BEING OVERWHELMED

Wolverine slashed at two metallic tendrils that attempted to ensnare him. The pieces cut off fell to ground, liquefied and then sluiced towards Magneto. Effortlessly he recycled the material and rejoined it to the parent body of metal hovering overhead.

Cyclops: "Logan, do you think it's wise to be fighting out here given all the metal in your system? Magneto's orb is attracting and absorbing all the metal around here."

Two more tendrils came coursing across the field. Cyclops nimbly dropped and rolled, avoiding one and blasted the other out of his way.

Wolverine: "I'll be fine, Cyke. When I start floating mid-air then you can worry."

As the ground beneath their feet was torn apart by a fresh volley of assaulting metal tendrils both X-men dove into the nearby grove of trees. Each took cover behind a large trunk. A gust of wind blew past them, rustling the branches overhead and Storm dropped in next to their position. She was carrying with her an unconscious Angel. His uniform was blood soaked and indeed there was a wicked wound to his torso. But even though he was knocked out his healing factor was doing its job to ensure he remained alive.

Storm: "Cyclops. We are being overwhelmed."

Storm pointed across the field. Some Gamma Squad members and a couple X-men were occupied in dealing with the M.A.L.E. And the rest of the X-men were having a hellishly difficult time with Magneto. The scene reminded Logan of flies bothering a donkey. Magneto was basically swatting them aside whenever they got too close. At present the X-men's tactics qualified as a nuisance to Magneto and not a serious threat.

Logan: "We just need to get close enough to Magneto. If we can knock him out then the battle's basically won."

Cyclops: "Easier said than done, Logan. Those damn metal...**things** repel our every attempt."

From across the battlefield Magneto could see the three of them huddling behind trees. As if bark, branches and leaves could save them from him. For the time being they posed no threat to his plans. Glancing aside he saw that his new followers were ably taking the X-men head on. He smiled to himself. Mystique had certainly managed to churn out a decent crop of warriors. Ah, and there was Emma Frost making her way into the fray, knocking Nightcrawler unconscious as he happened to teleport in front of her in his efforts to evade being stomped by Blob. They could handle the X-men (the ones who were still standing that is) while he himself took on the main task.

With the majority of the X-men occupied he would be able to make his way to the Subbasement, the most heavily fortified area on the grounds. Or under it rather. No doubt Jonathan Summers was being kept there for safekeeping. Breaking through the defenses of the Subbasement would take time and effort.

He just needed to be left alone long enough to breach the locking mechanisms. If the odd X-man happened to get in his way, he would deal with them as required.

Closing his eyes, Magneto redirected all of his metal tendrils back towards himself and away from his adversaries.

Storm: "Now why would he do that?"

Seconds later Storm's question was answered and the said tendrils began tearing up the ground beneath Magneto, creating a tunnel through which he descended.

Cyclops: "He's heading for the Subbasement!"

ALL I CAN DO

Surge: "That's...all I can do."

Surge stumbled away from the power core and was promptly caught by Alex as she almost fell from exhaustion. Those of us gathered in the core control room

looked eagerly towards Whiz who was monitoring the core power levels at the console. The look on his face wasn't as hopeful as we would have liked.

Lorna: "Well?"

Whiz: "Um, it's a start."

Surge looked at him incredulously.

Surge: "But that's all I got in me."

It was a damn pity that Ray wasn't there with us. His electrical generation powers were quite potent. He didn't have the sort of finesse a Generation X member would have in fine control of his powers. But in terms of raw strength Ray was an Elemental capable of generating immense electrical energy. Oh well, no sense in wishful thinking.

"Assuming we keep the Subbasement on lock down and use the remaining power only for life support - how long can we make it last?"

Several moments passed by as Whiz ran the numbers through his head and performed the mental calculating that he was well known for.

Whiz: "About forty minutes."

"What?!"

Whiz: "Maintaining Defcon-5 lock down is VERY power intensive, okay!"

I so did not appreciate the tone he was (yet again) taking with me. I opened my mouth fully intending to give him a piece of my mind. No matter that he was senior in rank to me. Unfortunately, at that moment an incoming message from the Professor came through. I decided that telling Whiz off would have to wait for the time being.

Yes, Professor?

Professor Xavier: Jonathan, I want you to listen to me very carefully.

All ears, sir.

Professor Xavier: Magneto and his followers are gaining the upper hand outside. Several X-men have fallen -

Fallen?! You mean...

I broke off communication with him and began scanning the surrounding area above ground for the minds of dad and Julian. Within a few seconds I was able to tell that Julian was alive and well. But before I could ascertain dad's status my search was interrupted by the Professor forcibly setting up a mental link again. He didn't so much as give me a chance to protest.

Professor Xavier: Your father is alright, Jonathan. When I said fallen I meant knocked unconscious.

Oh, I'm sorry. It's just the way it sounded...

Professor Xavier: Understandable. Now to turn this battle around I need your assistance.

What do you need me to do?

Professor Xavier: I need you to activate Cerebro. In tutorial mode. Then I need you to -

I sighed. Cerebro. The super computer and psionic boosting device that no doubt required a very large amount of power to operate. I glanced at the power core and frowned.

Professor Xavier: What's wrong?

I quickly appraised Professor Xavier of our grave power situation.

I would have alerted you guys earlier. But we didn't want to risk distracting you in the middle of a battle.

There was a brief pause in the conversation that I took to mean he was weighing up our options.

Professor Xavier: I see no alternative. This needs to be done. I want you to go to Cerebro and activate it. The system will ask for a security code. Alpha - 1942 is the code you will enter.

Whoa, slow your roll, Prof. The others down here might have a problem with that idea.

I'm guessing Cerebro will seriously drain our reserves.

Professor Xavier: Which is why as soon as you do as instructed I want you all to open the locking mechanism of the hangar. Take the Hawk and get as far away as is possible from the Mansion. Do you hear me?

But -

Professor Xavier: This is no time to argue, Jonathan! I've already appraised your father and he agreed with me. It what he wanted as well. Magneto's lackies and Em - er - I mean, the M.A.L.E. are very effectively handling the X-men, leaving Magneto free to approach the Subbasement.

Oh shit! Anyhow, we only had like forty minutes of power left in any case.

Professor Xavier: Hurry! Get to Cerebro. I will inform your peers of the situation. And have them ready the Hawk.

US VS THEM

Meanwhile on the grounds...

Cyclops rejoined the land of the waking with a curse at himself for not seeing Toad sneaking up behind him. With a vigorous shake of his head to clear it, he rejoined the battle.

Cyclops: "X-men! Regroup! Stop Magneto from reaching the Subbasement at ALL costs!"

As soon as the M.A.L.E. saw what their leader was up to, they positioned themselves between his self-made tunnel and the X-men to bar any interference.

Rogue: "We're...kinda occupied ..."

Rogue was at that very moment dealing with Blob. She had made the painful mistake of assuming that a guy that large lacked speed and agility and ended up beneath his...considerable posterior struggling to breathe. Gambit tried in vain to persuade him to move by dumping an entire deck of kinetically charged cards onto him to no avail. Cyclops gritted his teeth and let loose a few swear words that had Logan raising his eyebrows in surprise. Two optic blasts from Cyclops did nothing but expel some air from Blob's bloated stomach in one massive burp (that left the vicinity smelling of ham).

Blob: "Hey, thanks, man. Been needin' to get that outta me since breakfast."

Rogue: "Better...that end...than the one I'm under..."

The X-men team leader did not take to Blob's taunts very well.

Cyclops: "Fuck!"

Storm: "I'll handle him!"

Orooro began charging up a bolt of lightning.

Wolverine: "No! You'll electrocute Rogue too! Those things hurt like a mother fucke-!"

His comment was cut short in surprise as they both witnessed Cyclops removing his visor. In the next moment raw, unfiltered optic energy pummeled the Blob, eliciting a bloodcurdling scream from him. The force of Scott's deadly gaze blasted the obscenely obese mutant off Rogue's prone form and clear beyond the

Mansion's gate. In the distance they heard him fall and the ground shook. All present on the battlefield paused for a moment.

Quicksilver: "Fred!"

Toad: "You okay, mate?!"

There was no response to indicate that he was. All looked across the field to the source of the blast.

Storm: "Cyclops! These are basically kids! Misguided kids but -"

Cyclops: "**Kids** who came here to murder my kid! They look pretty grown to me. They've made their choice. Us or them, Storm."

The X-men team leader raised his voice so the M.A.L.E. members across the field could hear him.

Cyclops: "We are done pulling our punches with you! Persist in what you're doing and all bets are off!"

Unfortunately the display the M.A.L.E. had just witnessed as well as the X-man's words (which were perceived as a threat) bolstered what Magneto had told them before they set out for this dangerous mission – that there was no telling what lengths the X-men would go to. Magneto was so right, most of their number thought. The X-men were most definitely a threat to the mutant race's continuing survival. And they had, for the good of all, to be eliminated.

Pyro: "Burn in hell you traitor!"

Searing flames began to spiral across the field towards their position, obliterating all obstacles in their path. Storm, Wolverine and Cyclops braced themselves. At the last moment the flames collided harmlessly with a telekinetic shield. Turning to their left they saw Julian looking out of a window and waving. With a scowl geared towards Pyro, Cyclops reached for his visor once more. Storm watched on, astounded, as Scott once again removed it and fired...

TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

As I entered Cerebro's specially constructed room I noticed that the tremors had started up one more. I ignored them for the time being and booted up the computer at the console.

Cerebro: "All functions currently locked. Please submit activation code."

"Alpha - 1942."

Cerebro: "Psionic augmentation circuitry active. Warning - power levels approaching critical."

I expected as much. Cerebro likely wouldn't be able to function for longer than a few minutes. Five to seven minutes at the most judging by the readout on the console. No wasting anytime I seated myself in the chair and the helmet clicked into position.

"Activate tutorial mode."

Cerebro: "Affirmative."

Professor Xavier: Listen carefully, John. I need you to utilize the telepathy boosting feature, settings on maximum. Then I will require access to your mind. Do not fight me. I will not be performing any scans. But I need to access your telepathic centers in order to temporarily reverse the blocks I have placed.

Okay, that confused me. We had a big fight over him entering my mind to install those blocks in the first place. Without which Betsy had said I'd be like – and I quote – a “ticking time bomb” with no idea how much time was left before I eventually blew.

What? Why? You said that without the blocks I'd be a danger to myself and others. And now you wanna take 'em off, with me being boosted by Cerebro no less?

Professor Xavier: There are...two quite powerful telepaths out there, Jonathan. They have excellent defenses and are shielding the others from attack. I can't come down to the Subbasement to use Cerebro myself. Psylocke is also unconscious and I therefore can't rely on her assistance. So I need to act through you.

Ohhhh...

Professor Xavier: To make matters worse their powers have been augmented – albeit temporarily. With all of the electromagnetism Magneto was channeling outside I’m surmising that the powerful electromagnetic fields must have bolstered their abilities.

That made logical sense. Brainwaves were electromagnetic in nature. Professor Xavier explained that to me once. At the core of Cerebro itself was a massive electromagnet that generated intense fields...and was draining power even as we spoke. No more time to waste.

Okay, settings on maximum. You can start now...

ANYBODY ELSE WANT SOME?

Meanwhile, outside on the Mansion grounds...

Cyclops: “Anybody else want some?!”

Pyro lay unconscious upon the ground. He was knocked out by a single shot of Cyclops’ optic beams after his heat shield failed to absorb the energy of the blast. Storm inwardly prayed that these misguided children (to her way of thinking)

would just take a hint and spare themselves further pain and suffering. She was not alone in her wish as the few Gamma members present and the remaining X-men were seriously unnerved at this – heretofore unseen – side of their commander in chief.

Emma: “Wow, Scott. I’m amazed you had that in you. Isn’t it dangerous for you to release all of that energy uncontrollably without the aid of your visor? You don’t want to get hurt and go blind do you?”

The former White Queen had assumed her flesh and blood form when she rejoined the battle on the grounds. Together she and Wits were projecting a field of psychic protection upon their associates just in case Xavier were to try something from inside the safety of the Mansion. The strong electromagnetic energy traces left from Magneto’s handiwork were doing wonders for her psychic powers, as well as Wits’, allowing them to project a mental shield strong enough to thwart even the mind of Charles Xavier. Without access to Cerebro (due to the lock down of the Subbasement) Emma was confident that he wouldn’t be able to telepathically subdue them anytime soon.

Emma: “Are you trying to find out how much energy your eyeballs can channel that way before they pop?”

Cyclops ignored her and gave menacing looks to the gathered M.A.L.E. Beneath his feet the ground trembled as Magneto tunneled his way further down to the Subbasement. If they didn't move themselves from between him and the tunnel's entrance in the next twenty seconds or less then so help him God he'd -

Storm: "Professor?!"

All looked upwards, following Storm's gaze and sure enough, hovering above them all was Professor Xavier, sans hover chair, in his astral form. To everyone's surprise the image blurred and was replaced by that of Jonathan Summers. Without saying a word the figure's eyes flashed an intense golden hue as... flames began to engulf him.

Wits: "Ahh....Oh...God..."

All eyes turned towards the M.A.L.E. telepath who was by then on her knees clutching her head in pain. Emma Frost went over to her and regarded her curiously before she too followed suite, falling with an agonizing shriek.

Emma: "Damn you, Xavier!"

The instant both Wits and Emma Frost went down the flames surrounding the (now unrecognizable figure) intensified and exploded forth, bathing all present in psionic 'fire'. X-man and M.A.L.E. alike braced themselves but it was only the M.A.L.E. who were affected – on a telepathic level. Their screams filled the air. When the light died down the figure was gone and all of Magneto's cronies lay unconscious upon the ground, knocked out by massive telepathic overload. Cyclops was the first to recover from the spectacle.

Cyclops: "Everyone, down the tunnel!"

THIS WON'T HURT A BIT

Down in the Subbasement...

Cerebro: "Insufficient power. Shutdown immanent."

Shakily I got to my feet, throwing off the now useless headset manually. I was in no way expecting actual astral projection. I thought that the Professor was simply going to act through me via Cerebro and that he'd disable everyone from

the Subbasement. I guess I was wrong as I'd just had my first ever astral experience. It was a pity it left me disoriented and boasting a splitting headache.

Professor Xavier: Quickly now! To the Hawk!

Yeah. Just lemme try and get used to being back in my body, okay?

I began to stumble towards the doorway.

Professor Xavier: I had no idea that would happen.

Hmmm, I guess he didn't plan it after all. After shaking new life into my legs I was ready to go. At that point there was a massive earth tremor and the Subbasement perimeter breach alarm went off.

I think Magneto just breached the Subbasement perimeter somewhere! I think that stunt with Cerebro must have drained too much power and the locking mechanisms musta shut down.

Professor Xavier: Get out of there now!

He didn't have to tell me twice. My legs still weren't being too cooperative so – braving the headache – I took to the air and began to fly down the corridor.

Guys, is the jet ready?!

Alex: Yeah. Everyone's already inside. Hurry!

The screeching sound of metal being ripped apart echoed down the hallway from the direction of the Med Bay. It was not too far off from my position and I had to pass it in order to reach the Hangar. Magneto must have penetrated the Subbasement and ended up inside the Med Bay. Gritting my teeth I flew past just as the double doors leading to the Med Bay blew apart, crashing into the corridor's wall and falling to the floor with a clang. It was a damn good thing I wan't running past and on the ground – I'd have been flattened!

A couple seconds later a figure, none other than Magneto himself, floated through the gaping hole and emerged in the corridor. His face was set in an expression I'd seen before, on my father's face no less. The grim, dutiful façade of a man on a mission.

Magneto: "Jonathan Grey-Summers."

“Egotistical self-righteous psychotic megalomaniac – erm – I mean, Magneto.”

Magneto: “I think you know why I’ve come, boy.”

“Yeah, I might have an inkling.”

Magneto: “And I think you know you don’t stand a chance against me. Make this easy on yourself and your death will be made merciful.”

I tried to make a dash for it down the passageway but, with not so much as a gesture, the metal panels lining the walls tore off and sealed the way to the hangar shut.

Magneto: “I am not a sadistic man, Jonathan. Nor am I unmerciful. I don’t wish to have you suffer without need.”

Dad! He’s blocked the way!

Scott: We’re almost down there. Magneto was always an old gasbag. Just full of hot air.

Keep him talking. Distract him for one more minute or so!

“Um...well that’s good then. Cuz I’m not into pain.”

Magneto: “I want you to realize that I do this with no malice. And I understand that it is not your fault that you’ve been brainwashed by Xavier’s rhetoric.”

Magneto was approaching my position slowly. As he drew nearer I attempted to compensate and put some distance between us by backing away. Eventually however my back was against the metal barrier that he had constructed.

Magneto: “Now stay still, don’t fight me and this won’t hurt a bit.”

His eyes grew white and luminescent. Like Storm’s did when she was channeling her powers. Just as he was about to raise his hands footsteps were heard and dad, Logan, Rogue, Remy and Ororo (looking a little winded which I suspect was due to her claustrophobia and having traveled through that tunnel). Rogue let out a battle cry and charged Magneto. His attention was drawn away from me and towards putting up a shield.

Magneto: “These constant interruptions are growing **quite** annoying.”

Rogue started to rain enraged punches against his shield, holding nothing back. While Magneto dealt with that, Logan slashed at the metal blocking the passageway and two of Remy's kinetically charged cards were enough to blow it apart.

Ororo: "Be gone!"

Ororo raised her hands and gestured violently, her eyes taking on the same white glow as Magneto's. The stagnant air began to shift and within seconds she had a gale going. Magneto was being pushed backwards, shield and all, by the sheer strength of the winds she was generating.

Scott: "Get to the hangar! Now!"

"R-right."

I turned and ran down the hallway but Magneto just wouldn't give up so easily. Metal panels began sliding off from the walls, slicing past me with more than enough force to decapitate. Optic blasts courtesy of my father threw off the aim of several whilst I made use of my new shielding skills, successful deflecting

potentially fatal hits by surrounding myself in a force bubble. As soon as I turned the corner the panels stopped assaulting me.

Alex: John?

Start the jet up. I'm right outside the hangar!

IF MAGNETO WANTS A TUG OF WAR...

In the Hawk...

As soon as I entered the Hawk I was smothered by Lorna who kept asking me if I was alright.

Lorna: "The Professor just filled us in."

"I'm fine."

Whiz: "Okay. We're ready to fly. You can open the hangar's overhead doors now Miss Dane."

Lorna: "Right. On it."

Lorna ran over to the cockpit, her eyes taking on an emerald green glow. I looked on in confusion. Alex explained to me that the power levels were so low that there wasn't even enough energy left to move the hangar doors so that we could exit the Subbasement from beneath the basketball court. Hence, Lorna would have to use her own electromagnetic powers and move them herself.

The doors opened overhead, revealing the light of day and we rose vertically into the air. Several moments passed by and the jet didn't move forward. I hastily looked out the window to the Mansion below.

"Well, move the damn jet!"

Whiz: "I'm trying! We have thrust but something's holding us... Oh shit!"

Tarot: "It must be Magneto!"

That old geezer just wouldn't quit!

Whiz: "Everyone buckle your safety belts! I'm going to increase thrust!"

The engines roared as he did just that. We moved a bit forward and slowed down, eventually stopping again. Basically we were in a tug of war – our engines versus Magneto. Whiz continued to rev up the engines and we moved forward a bit more.

Dad, we need you to distract Magneto. He's holding the Hawk!

Several moments passed by.

Dad?

There was no response.

Logan?

Similarly he did not answer.

Storm?!

Professor Xavier: They've been knocked unconscious, Jonathan. They're alive.

Lorna: "That's it. I've had enough of this fuckin' bullshit."

Everyone looked at her with open mouths.

Alex: "B-babe, what are you gonna do?"

Lorna: "If Magneto wants a tug of war, I'll give him one."

Lorna's eyes took on their glow again as a green aura engulfed the Hawk. Our bird began to move forward once more as Lorna began to pull on it with her own electromagnetic powers.

Lorna: "Help me out here, Whiz. Gimme some more thrust!"

Whiz: "Any more and the mechanical stresses generated by this...tug of war could tear the Hawk apart!"

Alex: "If we stay here much longer what do you think Magneto will do?!"

Whiz nodded and began messing with the controls, manually overriding the fail safes and forcing the thrusters beyond their “safety” threshold. Lorna let out an angry shriek as she too pushed herself to her limits. The aura surrounding us intensified and with a sudden, breath stalling jerk, the Hawk shot forward like a missile released from a slingshot. Lorna let out a long breath of relief and rubbed her temples.

Lorna: “Man, I hate Magneto! Mhmmm...”

No doubt she was suffering from the same sort of massive headache I had experienced shortly before.

“I feel your pain.”

Whiz: “Where the hell do we go?”

Alex: “For now, as far away from the Mansion as possible.”

WHAT HAPPENED HERE?

Magneto relinquished his hold on the metal crushing Rogue, the last of the X-men to oppose him. She fell to the floor unconscious, bleeding from the mouth and nostrils. Far above, he could no longer sense the X-men's jet and he cursed under his breath. Repeated attempts to contact his followers all failed. In addition, Mystique was nowhere to be found and in all likelihood had been 'abducted'. With an enraged cry Magneto sheathed himself in a shield and flew vertically upwards, tearing through the Subbasement, various rock strata, soil and emerged on the ground floor of the Mansion.

When he made his way onto what was once the front lawn, he saw that the X-men had all vanished and instead the M.A.L.E. were all unconscious save a weakly moaning Wits. Emma Frost was missing. At first guess Magneto assumed that the X-men took her with them, unwilling to allow a former comrade divulge anything useful to himself.

Magneto: "Wits. What happened here? The battle was going our way when I left."

Wits: "That Xavier guy and the kid did something. Knocked us all out."

Magneto: "And what of Miss Frost. How long have you been conscious? Did you see what became of her?"

Wits: "I saw her going off on her own just as I was coming too."

Magneto scoffed. Just like Frost, ever so independent. He'd track her down eventually.

Magneto: "Did you chance to see a jet -"

Wits indicated the south west.

Wits: "They took off doing some serious speed."

Magneto: "Of course they did. Well it's a start at least."

Wits: "What about...the X-men?"

Magneto: "I can only account for five in the Subbasement. The rest must have retreated somewhere. Maybe even been teleported onto the jet as it took off by Nightcrawler. Leave them. They're crippled as it is. They have no long range

transportation aside from automobiles. I did massive damage to their Subbasement, including their psionic amplifier – Cerebro – as well as their cherished War Room. Xavier will be blind without Cerebro.”

Wits: “We need to wait until the others regain consciousness at the least. It could take hours. The only reason me and Emma recovered so quickly is cuz we have higher mental resistances than they do.”

Magneto: “I can’t afford to wait for hours. You and the others will go back to base. I will track the runaways myself. That way it will attract less attention from the general public should they be hiding in populated areas. We don’t need law enforcement complicating matters. If I need assistance I’ll have Gateway open a portal and send you through.”

Wits: “Yes, sir.”

WHAT NEXT?

In the Hawk...

We'd been flying for about forty five minutes and were currently over a secluded, heavily wooded area. All attempts to contact the Mansion via secure channels had failed. So we had to resort to trying cellphones. Unfortunately, we didn't have any luck that way either. Whiz a.k.a. The All Knowing One had an explanation.

Whiz: "Magneto was saturating the area above ground with electromagnetism during his attack. It likely disabled their cellphones and probably all cellphones in the nearby area."

Alex: "I think we should ditch the jet, you guys."

"Why?"

Alex: "Well for one thing we don't have access to fuel for it. We can't keep flying forever. And we may need that fuel later on. I say we land down there where it's secluded and hide it. Then we take cover in the woods."

Whiz: "He's right. Not to mention that in these times the sight of this unidentified bird flying around will likely draw attention as a suspected terrorist aircraft. We need to stay on the down low."

Lorna: "And then there's the fact that Magneto will more easily be able to track this big hunk of metal than us on our feet."

I looked towards the room in the back. The entire Beta team was in there plus a couple Gamma members. In another room off that Mystique was being kept under watchful eyes.

"What do we do about Mystique? She'll slow us down and sabotage our efforts at hiding any chance she gets."

Alex: "We could leave her in that cell."

Lorna: "But if Magneto tracks the Hawk down and we don't manage to get inside and take off in time he'll just free her. They really don't want to lose Mystique or they wouldn't have made us carry her along."

I sighed. Mystique had been dosed by Hank with potent mutant suppressor drugs and had a pellet implanted under her skin for a sustained release effect. Her mutant powers were thus effectively inhibited. But she was still extremely dangerous without her powers due to her in depth knowledge of martial arts

and cunning mind. At least she couldn't shapeshift and escape the manacles we had on her.

Whiz: "I guess we could knock her out and take her with us. It might slow us down a bit but at least we won't have to worry about her escaping twenty-four seven if she's right in our plain sight."

Alex: "True. Hey look, there's a good spot."

Whiz: "Aye, aye, cap'n."

AWAKENING

Logan awoke with a weak growl. For the second time that day, his insides had been re-arranged by Magneto. Without question the second time was the more painful. As soon as he managed to shake the cobwebs out of his head and vision cleared, he rushed over to where Storm lay, partially covered by metal debris. Throwing the shattered panels off her he made sure that she was still breathing. Thankfully, aside from some cuts and bruises she seemed to be relatively well. He then checked on his other comrades.

Remy was sporting a very nasty looking gash to the side of his head but the bleeding had since stopped it seemed. Rogue, thankfully had not been sliced to bits by Magneto's assault owing to her impenetrable skin. However she had been subjected to a rather powerful 'squeeze' and when last Logan saw, had been coughing up copious amounts of blood. For her he could at least do something. Pulling off his gloves and touching her face with his bare hand would do the trick. As expected, his life force began to flow from him to her. A little more and so would the essence of his mutant abilities. As soon as he saw her eyes flash open he pulled back with a groan.

Rogue: "L-Logan..."

Logan: "How're ya feelin'?"

Rogue: "I'll be fine. Thanks. Oh, Remy."

Rogue rushed over to where he lay.

Logan: "I checked on him. He'll be okay."

Rogue: "Where's Scott?"

Logan: "I dunno."

Rogue: "You don't think Magneto took him or anythin'?"

That was a disturbing thought. Logan ignored the question for the time being. Instead he surveyed the damage to the Subbasement. Most notable was the new tunnel on the ceiling of the passageway. Through it he could see the light of day far above. Magneto must have taken off after the jet, he thought, working on the principle that the shortest distance between two places is a straight line.

The passageway to the Med Bay was blocked by rubble and so they couldn't leave the same way they came. And without power the elevators were not going to be of any use. At least with the big tunnel leading to the surface fresh air made it through so they didn't suffocate, Logan thought, grateful for small blessings.

Logan: "Rogue, are you up to flying us outta here, darlin'?"

They both jumped as Ororo stirred.

Ororo: "Did I just hear you calling another woman, darlin'?"

Logan rushed over to her side and helped her sit up. Rogue smiled weakly at the sight, glad that Storm was okay.

Rogue: "I'm feeling a lot better now. I should be able to in a few minutes at the rate this healing factor is going."

Logan: "Good. Now we gotta contact the others."

Clicking on his communicator badge proved to be useless as the electromagnetism Magneto had subjected the area to had fried them.

Logan: Prof? You there?

Professor Xavier: Logan, you've all have regained consciousness?

Logan: We're okay. Only Remy's still outta it. But we got a problem. Scott's missing.

Professor Xavier: He's up on the surface with me. He was separated from you all by debris but was able to make his way out through the tunnel in the Med Bay.

Logan: Good to hear he's okay. Now about -

Professor Xavier: Not exactly, he's been injured pretty badly and has lost a lot of blood.

Rune's doing his best to heal him. But I really do wish Joshua Foley was around.

Logan: Professor, did the jet make it?

Professor Xavier: Oh yes. I'm sorry for not appraising you of that. They were being held by Magneto's powers but they broke away. While Magneto was down in the Subbasement and the M.A.L.E. were unconscious I had the X-men retreat into the woods to the west of the school for cover. You'll find us there. From what I could tell through astral spying, Magneto only has a general idea of where the Hawk took off to.

Logan: We have to find their location before he does Professor. But I have some bad news.

Professor Xavier: What?

Logan: During the fight Magneto seriously damaged Cerebro and the War Room. Not to mention that when he tunneled through to the Med Bay he did a fair amount of damage there too. And along the corridors...it's just a pile of junk.

Professor Xavier: Cerebro being down complicates matters considerably. I expected that the communications and tracking equipment would have been compromised by the electromagnetism and thought to rely on telepathy. It seems that Magneto will not allow us this luxury. Anyhow, rendezvous with us to the west of the school and we'll formulate a plan of action.

Logan: On our way.

Logan glanced towards his teammates. Remy was stirring a little and making little moans of pain. Storm and Rogue were tending to him, rubbing his head comfortingly as if he were a baby. Women, Logan thought, rolling his eyes.

Remy: "Mhmmm...faster, cher...yeah...Gambit like it just like that...ohhhh..."

Logan's eyebrows raised at the sound of that. As did Storm's. She stopped her rubbing and unconsciously wiped her hand on her uniform. Logan smirked a little. It seemed that Remy was 'seeing things' while unconscious. Rogue was scowling. Without warning she clocked him one (considerately on the side of his head that was uninjured) and he woke up completely, asking what the hell was going on and who had hit him. Storm gave Rogue a look of displeasure.

Rogue: "It brought him back to the land of the living didn't it?"

Logan: "Now that sleeping beauty's up you'd better get us outta here, Rogue."

Storm took to the air, flying up the tunnel. Ordinarily she didn't mind carrying someone. But considering her beat up condition and the fact that Rogue was super strong, she decided to let her handle the heavy lifting.

Rogue: "Right. You two grab hold of my arms."

They complied.

Rogue: "My ARMS. Not my ASS Remy!"

Remy: "Oops. Still a little disoriented and woozy. Ears ringing too from that smack you gave me."

Rogue rolled her eyes and took off upwards and fast as she was able. The sudden speed caught Remy off guard and with his 'woozy' condition he felt close to hurling.

Remy: "Slow down, cher!"

Rogue: "Why? I thought you liked it **fast!**"

Logan inwardly groaned as the two of them began to bicker...

DON'T YOU PEOPLE KNOW ANYTHING?

Meanwhile, in a heavily wooded area...

It was close to nightfall. But it seemed darker than it should be due to the heavy cover afforded by the trees. We had traveled considerable distance from the jet. So much so that I was worried that we might get lost and not be able to find it again. That was until Lorna reminded me that she was a living compass and could easily find our way back towards the Hawk.

Alex: "Man, I'm hungry."

Lorna rolled her eyes in mild exasperation.

Lorna: "Sometimes I feel like I'm dealing with a child. I just gave you one of the energy bars half an hour ago, Alex."

Alex: "Hey, I gotta fast metabolism. I ain't no child. I'm a man with a man's appetite. I need something a little more substantial."

I myself could agree with his sentiment. But I didn't want to sound whiny. In any case I needed to pay more attention to my mind than to my hungry stomach. Since that stunt with Cerebro I had been going about with fully unblocked telepathic powers. Something that Betsy and the Professor had warned me would be quite dangerous considering that I didn't have the training as of yet to fully control them. In light of this I figured that I had to be very careful and monitor each and every thought. As well as restrain myself from extremes of emotion.

Lorna: "John? You okay, sweetie. You've been very quiet."

"Just... a little tired is all."

Alex: "And hungry too I bet."

I blushed as at that moment my traitorous stomach let out a growl. We weren't the only ones experiencing hunger.

Justin/Whiz: "Hey, don't eat those berries! You don't know if they're poisonous! Didn't you listen to anything in survival training, Kitty?"

We looked ahead of us where Whiz was telling off Kitty and throwing away the berries she had collected. Restraining my not so kind thoughts of him had led me to see that underneath the know-it-all mask he wore, and the short temper at times, his heart was in the right place.

Kitty: "Well I'm hungry and you made it quite clear I've already **exhausted** my share of the rations! What's a girl to do?"

Ryan: "I'd be more than willing to give you some of MY rations, Kitty."

He leered at her suggestively. She ignored him.

Ryan: "Here Kitty, Kitty. Here Kitty - OW! Noriko, you bitch!"

She had zapped his ass with a tiny bolt of electricity.

Noriko: "You're such a pig, Ryan."

Alex: "And this is the next generation of the X-men."

Lorna: "I shudder to think."

We walked on a bit more until our designated leader – Marie Ange (Tarot) – ordered us to stop for a rest break. It was practically night by then.

Marie Ange: "Ryan, some light if you will."

The somewhat sour looking Ryan complied and blasted a ball of fire onto the ground. Noriko threw some pieces of wood onto it and the flames lit up.

Justin: "Don't you people know anything? It wouldn't be wise to light a fire. Its light and smoke might attract attention from pursuers."

The older Gamma members all reddened in shame at not thinking of that. The Gamma members present included Sally Blevins (Skids), Cessily Kincaid (Mercury), Alison Sinclair (Dazzler) and Julio Esteban Richter (Rictor).

Ryan: "Well it is dark in here. How the hell are we supposed to get around?"

I myself wondered why on Earth the Hawk hadn't yet been stocked up properly with flashlights and other supplies. That was just plain carelessness on the X-men's part.

Alison/Dazzler: "I can provide some fire free light."

At that the area was bathed in multicolored light that sort of reminded me of Jubilee's "fireworks". I was acquainted with Alison (or Dazzler's) mutant ability. She could absorb sound energy and convert it into light and laser energy. My guess was that she was currently making use of the background noise of insects, the wind rustling in the leaves and such to power the low intensity glow.

Justin: "Much better. We can't afford to take unnecessary risks. How would it look if our stupid mistakes end up getting Jonathan killed when the X-men fought so hard to keep him safe?"

Ryan: "Okay, okay. Someone needs a chill pill."

Kitty: "You're right, Justin. I'll just take care of this fire."

With a look of absolute horror on his face, Justin snatched the water bottle out of Kitty's hand when he saw her make to douse the fire with its contents. Instead he began throwing dirt upon the flames and pretty soon they died out.

Justin: "Kitty?! That's our drinking water! I think I'll handle that bottle from now on."

Kitty smiled embarrassedly and backed away. Justin meanwhile turned his attention to Ryan once more.

Justin: "This may be an adventure to you, Ryan. Just one big game - as always. But to the rest of us it's a matter of life and death. So at least try and act mature for once."

Ryan: "You self-righteous know it all! I oughta - "

Marie Ange: "Both of you shut up and cool it! We have enough trouble on our hands without internal conflicts. We should be spending our energy more constructively. Like figuring out how to contact the school."

Alex: "You think you might be able to reach them telepathically, John?"

Everyone's faces lit up with hope.

Alison: "Hey yeah. You reached all the way to Alkali during that last mission."

"I did that with Cerebro."

Marie Ange: "And just our luck that the Hawk isn't outfitted with a portable Cerebro unit."

"If the Professor was connected to Cerebro I'm sure he could find us anywhere on the planet. But on my own, unaugmented, I don't have the range."

Well, I did sort of wonder if it would be possible to try and boost my power levels by surrounding me in an electromagnetic field courtesy of Lorna. Just like what had happened back home with them two M.A.L.E. telepaths. Their powers

were augmented due to the increased strength of the local electromagnetic fields. But I figured that it might not be such a hot idea. And probably not safe since it wasn't something I recalled the Professor ever trying. Not to mention that I wasn't sure what might happen in my currently unblocked state. It wouldn't do to risk a surge. At least Cerebro offered fine control of the boost...

Alex: "I wish we had some way of finding out if the others are alright. Or if Magneto's left and it's safe to go home."

Safe to go home? I didn't see what was to stop Magneto from simply pulling a repeat performance. Especially before we got the defenses up and running. Oh wait...those didn't do a damn thing to so much as slow him down any. The entire team of X-men couldn't stop Magneto and were only able to delay his progress (and almost not in time). It was a damned good thing that dad was right and Magneto really was full of hot air. If not he wouldn't have wasted any time down in the Subbasement talking to me and would have killed me on sight.

I took a deep breath and leaned back against the sturdy tree behind me. I closed my eyes and pretended to be taking a few winks so that no one would disturb me with useless conversation. I really just needed some alone time to think about

the turn my life had taken. Due to the circumstances I would just have to withdraw into myself to have that time.

I never thought that I'd ever see the day when I'd appreciate the old saying - "be careful what you wish for because you just might get it." That's because for the greater part of my life I'd never gotten what I wished for. But now, in the form of these souped up abilities, I had been granted a former wish of mine. And though it seemed like an unmitigated blessing at first it had reached the point where it placed my very life in danger. Not to mention other people's lives. It turns out that I was safer when I was a pathetic weakling - how ironic.

At least I could be fairly certain that the others were still alive. According to Marie Ange (Tarot), Magneto was after me and, while he wouldn't hesitate to do what it took to get to me, as long as the X-men were no longer in between the both of us chances were he wouldn't kill them out of spite (unlike that bitch Mystique). At least the M.A.L.E. would be out of commission for a while so Magneto would be left on his own to track us.

Alex: "John?"

"Mhmmm?"

Alex: "We're ready to move."

Lorna: "Yeah. And you better levitate Mystique along this time. That headache of mine is coming back again."

"Okay."

BACK TO THE SEWERS

Meanwhile in the woods near to the Xavier Mansion...

Logan: "The M.A.L.E. They're all gone."

Professor Xavier: "Yes. Magneto's cronies must have teleported them away."

Storm: "Professor, what did you do exactly? We saw you...then John...then an explosion."

Professor Xavier: "We both merged mentally and with Cerebro's aid, we broke the psionic shielding of their telepath and Emma. I didn't expect John to astral project with me."

Rogue: "Speakin' of the old Whorefrost, did John see her?"

Professor Xavier: "No. We know how foolhardy he can be. So I blocked Emma's presence - he neither saw nor heard her. I didn't want him to try something foolish - like coming up to **settle** with her."

All present nodded at that. An audible groan was heard as Scott stirred, finally healed sufficiently by the Gamma Squad leader Brian Delaney (Rune).

Scott: "Where - "

Professor Xavier: "We're still on the grounds, Scott. In the woods."

Scott blinked a few times to clear his vision. He inwardly cursed as he realized he was now paying the price of removing his visor. Ordinarily it acted like a 'safety lid' of sorts, preventing the escape of too much optic energy at any one time.

Without it the sheer amount of energy being channeled could result in some very

unpleasant side effects. Anyhow, Scott reasoned, blurry vision was a hell of a lot better than a head splitting headache. Or complete blindness.

Scott: "Any idea where the jet took off to? Where they are?"

It had been decided beforehand that they wouldn't give any orders as to where the others should escape to with John. Just in case Magneto decided to forcibly extract the information from any X-man he managed to capture. A very wise precaution since it turned out that Magneto had managed to persuade Emma Frost to join his ranks. Not to mention he had his own M.A.L.E. telepath.

Professor Xavier: "Logan has just informed me that Cerebro has been damaged
_"

Logan: "Totaled."

Professor Xavier: "And the War Room as well. So satellite tracking from there is out of the question."

Scott: "Dammit! He must have done that on purpose."

Ororo: "I suspect as much. Professor, we must locate them. And I have an idea."

Professor Xavier: "Yes?"

Ororo: "The Morlocks."

The Morlocks - Scott inwardly cringed at the sound of that word. Storm was their rightful ruler. The right of rule won by combat with Callisto years ago. She had left the one known as Marrow to rule in her absence and banished Callisto from their Haven on her departure.

Logan: "Not the god damned sewers again! It's frickin' hell on my nose!"

Scott himself groaned, remembering his recent experiences down there after having been kidnapped by Callisto and her goons.

Ororo: "But there is a Morlock, Caliban, who has the power to track or conceal any mutant signature. And his range is phenomenal. Why, when I left the country to return to Africa he knew about it."

Rogue spoke up as the light of recognition dawned upon her.

Rogue: "Tall fella? Pale? Bald?"

Ororo: "Yes, Rogue. All we need do is have Professor Xavier transfer one of their mental signatures to him telepathically and Caliban should be able to find them."

Scott: "Well -" ***sigh*** "- I guess it's back to the sewers."

WHERE TO NOW?

Alex: "Johnny, come on. Get up. We gotta move."

I woke up to Alex and Lorna shaking me gently. Yawning a little I realized that somewhere along the line I had dozed off. I rubbed my eyes and looked around to find several of our companions missing.

"Where...are the rest of the guys?"

Lorna: "Mystique woke up and they took her to...freshen up before they dose her again."

While a little embarrassed at having fallen asleep while the rest of them remained vigilant I was grateful for the shuteye. The lingering mental exhaustion I'd been feeling since using Cerebro earlier and channeling the Professor had all but dissipated.

"Where to now?"

Both Alex and Lorna looked towards Tarot, our leader for the time being, for guidance.

Tarot: "I believe that we have thrown Magneto off our trail for the time being."

Ryan/Hotshot: "So you think maybe we can go back?"

Tarot: "I don't think that's a wise course of action. We need the Professor's guidance."

Kitty/Shadowcat: "We can't keep cowering under the trees forever."

Tarot: "Of course we won't be doing that. No doubt Professor Xavier is searching for us and trying to make contact. Until then we need to lay low. What I propose is that we make our way back to civilization, discard our uniforms for more civilian attire and hole up somewhere until Professor Xavier makes his wishes known."

I for one was only too willing to get out of the dark, creepy and cold woods. And I did wish that Professor Xavier would hurry up and give us some guidance. I mean, yeah, I saw the advantage in not alerting him as to where we were headed when we fled the school. That way if he were coerced by Magneto he couldn't give up any information as he wouldn't have known anything. But the consequence that came of it, of sitting around just waiting for him to locate us was getting to be nigh unbearable.

Alex: "So we fly the jet somewhere close to a backwater town or so - "

Lorna: "And rent some motel rooms?"

"Erm, that requires MONEY."

Tarot: "As a team leader I have access to funds. So money won't be a problem."

“Oh. But what about our appearance? I mean yeah, you say we can just go and buy some clothes. But what do we do in the meantime? People will see us approaching the store, dressed like this, and freak out.”

Tarot: “Mr. Summers and Miss Dane are already in civilian garb. They can shop for the rest of us, as well as rent the rooms. Kitty can phase us into the rooms through the ground clandestinely and we'll wait there for the clothes. After that we just need to basically lay low.”

Yeah, all well and good. But what about Mystique?

“I really don't think we can keep drugging her.”

Lorna: “Your conscience getting to you?”

“As if. No, more like I don't think we've got enough of the drugs left to make that plan feasible.”

Tarot: “You are right about that. We're almost out of both the drugs we used to knock her out as well as the mutant gene suppressors.”

Alex: "I guess a good old fashioned gag and restraints will have to do."

Lorna: "That and constant vigilance."

Kitty: "Sounds good to me. I don't know about the rest of you guys, but I am just about ready to ditch this place."

"Same here."

Alex: "Yeah. These mosquito bites are playing havoc with my sensitive skin."

He began to unconsciously scratch.

Tarot: "Well, let's all head back to the jet then."

TO BE CONTINUED...
