

Author's Note: Okay boys and girls, it's me again. Yes, I know it's been so long that most of you have forgotten all about me and this story – so consider this a reminder that's been long overdue! So sorry to have kept you guys waiting on this – Chapter Nine of *Phoenix: Death Wish*. Truth is I had like 90% of it completed a while ago, but with final exams breathing down my neck, an outreach program and then a stupid research project (which I'm still in the midst of) I just couldn't find the time.

Now this is just a reminder again that I would like to receive emails **only** at adriananderson587@gmail.com. Yeah, I still can't trust my Yahoo email accounts to get my mail to me in a timely fashion. Oh well...

Another thing too. I'm aware that I have sort of a large cast. And I hope that it's not confusing anyone. Most of them are in supportive roles only, especially where it comes to the Beta and Gamma squadrons of Generation X. I believe that I gave you guys the team roster in Chapter Two – yeah a **long** time ago. But to spare any lazy bones from having to check, here's the rundown again...

ALPHA SQUADRON

Team Leader: Risk

- **Reymundo Ortiz** - Risk (Alters probability through the use of Chaos Magick. Can cause the near impossible to become possible and vice versa. Causes unlikely events to occur. Also can bless, or curse others with random effects. Can calculate the odds of an event occurring.)

Age: 19

- **Theresa Cassidy** - Siryn (Flight, Sonic Scream, Echolocation)

Age: 19

- **Sooraya Qadir** - Dust (Metamorphosis of self on a molecular level - transforms to a mist or dust like state)

Age: 19

- **Donavon Hunte** - Achilles (Invulnerable body, energy resistance, superhuman strength)

Age: 19

- **Jeremy McGinnis** - Flare (Flight. Generation and manipulation of light energy, including laser energy and holographic illusions with a "solid" feel.)

Age: 18

- **Tabitha Smith** - Meltdown (Plasma bomb generation and detonation)

Age: 18

- **Samuel Guthrie** - Cannonball (Projects a kinetic field from his lower body. Can absorb physical blows, as well as energy into the field as a defensive measure, bolstering his

strength to a degree. Can also fly by explosively expanding the field.)

Age: 19

- **Tyrel Holder** - Trinity (Possesses the triple psionic gifts of telepathy, empathy and psychometry)

Age: 18

BETA SQUADRON

Team Leader: Tarot

- **Marie Ange Colbert** - Tarot (Can foresee the future to a limited extent. Can psionically manifest the archetypes and/or attributes of any of the Tarot cards she carries on herself or others. May also manifest them as standalone constructs)

Age: 21

- **Katherine "Kitty" Pryde** - Shadowcat (Can alter her body so that it becomes intangible, allowing her to phase through matter.)

Age: 20

- **Noriko Ashida** - Surge (Electrical absorption and discharge, enhanced speed in the superhuman category.)

Age: 20

- **Rahne Sinclair** - Wolfsbane (A wolf / werewolf shape shifter. Enhanced strength, reflexes and senses while transformed.)

Age: 21

- **Jim Delaney** - Venom (Immune to all known metabolic poisons. Generates a variety of bio-toxins and anti-toxins that have various effects, either positive or negative. Activates power through skin contact, launching 'needles' out of his fingertips or by secreting pheromones into the air)

Age: 21

- **Ryan Fuentez** - Hotshot (Generation and control of all forms of heat, flight, immunity to fire and heat damage)

Age: 20

- **Justin Kent** - Whiz (Exceptionally advanced intelligence. Can instantly determine the design, function and weaknesses of any piece of technology. Can perform extremely complicated calculations mentally in mere seconds. Ability to build any object he has seen, limited only by the materials he has to work with.)

Age: 20

- **Ashton Greer** - Ares (Inborn fighter's instinct. Possesses innate knowledge of a unique fighting style that allows him to capitalize on the weaknesses of other fighting styles and fighters. Can instantly determine how best any weapon can be used. Heightened senses and reflexes, healing factor in blood)

Age: 21

GAMMA SQUADRON

Leader: Rune

- **Brian Delaney** - Rune (Mutation attunes him to ancient, mystical energies. Rune can manifest the higher and lower aspects of various fundamental forces. He carries about bracelets on his wrists that are studded with sockets that hold runic characters. He uses these runes as a focus to channel the mystical energies he is linked to. Can also predict the future through the use of his runes.)

Age: 24

- **Alison Blaire** - Dazzler (Possesses the ability to convert sound into laser and light energy.)

Age: 22

- **Cecilly Kincaid** - Mercury (Can transform into either a solid or liquid metal form.)

Age: 22

- **Julian Keller** - Hellion (Telekinetic)

Age: 22

- **Julio Esteban Richter** - Rictor (Generates seismic waves from his hands, can cause localized seismic phenomena.)

Age: 23

- **David Owens** - Morph (Ability to shape shift into any animate or inanimate object he has seen or can think of.)

Age: 23

- **Sally Blevins** - Skids (Generation and manipulation of force fields.)

Age: 23

- **Everett Thomas** - Synch (Can temporarily copy the powers of other mutants in his vicinity. Copied powers are not of the same strength though, but he can copy more than one power at a time. Does not require physical contact to do so.)

Age: 23

Whew! There, that's done. Where we last left off, all of the Alphas were with the rest of the school body at one of the Worthington hotels, remember. And all of the Beta squad were with John as his bodyguards basically. And when they fled the Mansion a few Gammas went with them, namely - Sally Blevins (Skids), Cessily Kincaid (Mercury), Alison Blaire (Dazzler), Julio Esteban Richter (Rictor). So **that's** cleared up.

As usual text in **bold** is for emphasis, text in *italics* indicates telepathic conversation or individual thoughts, depending on the context. For this chapter there's no real need to indicate electronic communication as...here's the biggest change...as I've decided to change the format of the story altogether and go from a first person viewpoint to a third person one. I don't know how well it will be received but I figured I should try it as it's generally accepted

that third person is superior. That and I don't like switching from first person when John is in charge to third person when we need to go somewhere else where he isn't. So anyway, I've bored you long enough – go read and send me your thoughts, 'kay!

Oops, ONE last thing. Lolol. I see that the comedy oriented *Slutty X-men* by Demetris Mitsaso is back on, lol! Seeing it there made me realize that I too have to get my act in order and update already. Okay, **now** you can go read.

Phoenix: Death Wish

CHAPTER NINE

Logan's nose crinkled in (much more than mild) disgust as he trudged along the cold, dark and smelly corridors of the Manhattan sewers. For those with an ordinary sense of smell it was unpleasant at best. With his acutely developed olfactory gift - it was nigh unbearable. "I swear to God, every time we come down here the sewer stink just keeps getting worse," he muttered.

Scott grumbled in agreement as he, Logan and several others steadily made their way in the direction of Morlock Haven. None of Scott's experiences in the sewers could be described as particularly pleasant, and so he just wanted to find this Caliban, solicit his aid in locating his

family and the others and get the hell out of there.

The feral mutant turned towards the one called Ororo. "How you holdin' up, 'Ro?"

Several pairs of eyes glanced towards Ororo. It was a well known fact that she was claustrophobic and therefore ill at ease in constricted places like the sewers. However, since the Morlocks would be far more cooperative if the request for assistance came directly from their returning leader, she was obliged to accompany them.

"I'm fine. As long as there's enough light it keeps the suffocating feeling at bay," Ororo answered with a glance to Remy.

Remy took it as a cue to increase the kinetic energy flow to the card he held in his hand. The glow surrounding them all intensified, casting long, hard shadows along the moss covered tunnels.

Professor Xavier, who was being carried by Hank, mentally scanned the area in case Calisto and the other exiled Morlocks were afoot. Thankfully, he had not detected malevolent thought patterns in the immediate vicinity. However he **was** sensing mental activity further ahead. He took it as a sign that they were getting close.

Professor Xavier's brow furrowed in concentration. "I'm sensing thought patterns down ahead...and to our right."

Ororo nodded approvingly as the direction matched her (somewhat vague) recollection. "Yes. That's about right."

The small group walked in the indicated direction for several minutes in alert silence.

Eventually they exited the sewer tunnels and entered a large cavernous recess, at the extreme end of which was a great, circular gate. The entire structure was covered by thick, vine-like flora, forming a virtually impenetrable barrier to entry.

Scott looked around the place a bit, his visor casting a weak ruby glow wherever his gaze roamed. He recognized it to be the right spot. "Yep. Morlock Haven alright."

Scratching his head, Logan asked, "How do we get in again? I forget."

Ororo quickened her pace and stepped forward, leading the group ahead. "I'll handle it. They always have sentinels posted near the door. I expect once we approach close enough they'll announce their presence."

And true to her words once they were within throwing distance of the doorway there was a brilliant amber flash and two drab figures, caked in grime, materialized out of the ether. Both were in aggressive stances until, upon squinting, they recognized who stood before them.

"Storm? Is that really you?" the first man asked.

Ororo quickly responded. "Yes. It is I."

The second man exclaimed, "Our queen has returned!" and gave a literal jump for joy (that had several X-men staring incredulously).

Scott's eyebrows raised. "He seems really...perky."

The second Morlock then turned towards the sealed gate and made a curious motion with his hand. The vines encasing the gate began to stir and writhe. Serpentine-like, they slithered off the gate.

Ororo smiled a little and addressed Scott. "Well, I should think so. After all, you heard the man. Their **queen** has returned."

"If you're the queen - then doesn't that make me the king?" Logan asked, half seriously.

Ororo didn't dignify that question with an answer, but walked regally down the now open passageway and beckoned for the others to follow...

"Did you **really** think you could hide from me?" Magneto asked as he hovered closer to a lone figure clad in white.

Emma Frost frowned deeply as the Master of Magnetism descended towards the balcony of her newly rented apartment. After the failed attempt to wreak her revenge from Xavier and the rest of those responsible for having her committed, she had ditched Magneto and the MALE, choosing to carry out her plans solo.

Emma responded, "Actually, I did. So, did you have that girl...Wits locate me?"

That was precisely what Magneto had been forced to do when his efforts to track his quarry had failed. He had boosted the young telepath's abilities via his electromagnetic powers and she had managed to locate Emma. In order to find their prey however he needed someone trained in the use of Cerebro (which he intended to repair and reconfigure). In addition, he needed someone who knew the mental signatures of those he wanted to track.

If he wasn't worried that manually boosting Wits' powers to a greater extent could fry her brain, he'd have done so immediately without wasting any more time. But as it was, she was a valuable ally and he did not wish to lose her (or the trust of the others should he be responsible for anything bad happening to her).

"So you need me?" Emma asked. "I stuck by my part of the bargain and aided your assault on the Mansion. And look how that turned out. After that fiasco can you blame me if I'm not interested? Besides, I tend to stop short at murdering children so -"

Magneto's look darkened but he kept his voice level. "Whatever happened to all of your talk about wanting revenge upon Xavier and the X-men?"

"Revenge will be that much sweeter if it's completely of my own doing. Besides, I'm not too keen on becoming yet another of your lackeys," Emma replied with an arrogant toss of her blonde locks.

Such talk served no purpose but to draw Magneto's anger. This time Magneto couldn't contain his irritation and resorted to a threat. "I freed you from Happy Valley, Frost. You owe me. I can have you placed back in there just as easily. You know you're no match for me, so why don't you just agree to...**help** me this one time and you can save face."

Emma knew that to be true but still delayed. The metal railing of the balcony trembled ever so slightly, reflecting the subtle electromagnetic fluctuations that arose due to Magneto's burgeoning impatience.

In the end she saw no alternative and for the time being would have to help Magneto. "Very well. What do you need me to do?" she asked resignedly.

Magneto smirked in triumph. "I'll explain on the way. I hope you don't mind but I have to make a stop or two first."

"Whatever for?" asked Emma, not liking the mischievous tone Magneto had used when he

made that statement.

“You’ll see.”

So saying he magnetically levitated Emma from the balcony and the next moment they were streaking across the night sky, bypassing the Xavier Institute for the time being...

John sat upon the bench outside of the motel room which he, Lorna and Alex were sharing. It had been two and a half days since fleeing the Mansion and Professor Xavier had yet to establish contact with the group. Meanwhile, they had settled in a small town by the name of Dundee, just a half hour’s drive from the United States - Canadian border.

The motel they were all staying at was not the best of accommodations. But it was sufficiently close enough to the woods on the outskirts of town. The Hawk had been hidden there and it was important that they be close enough to it in case the need arose to get away quickly.

Currently Lorna and some of the others were out, having left to get something to eat, leaving Alex to keep an eye on John. They’d both taken to organizing shifts with one of them always awake and vigilant. John for his part appreciated the effort they were taking to ensure his safety. But it was becoming quite a bit stifling. Not to mention it wasn’t exactly easy keeping up appearances with them watching over him 24/7.

The headache from before had returned. And that wasn't all. He could hear a faint... *murmuring* in his head. It wasn't distinct enough to make out any particulars, but John knew it to be distorted thoughts of others...manifesting as voices in his head. If he tried he could identify whose thoughts they were, but not what they were saying. Sort of like how someone could tell whose muffled voice they were hearing through the walls from the other room.

He'd taken some Tylenol. Major understatement - he'd taken a **lot** of Tylenol. It had helped considerably with the pain, but not with the telepathic murmurs. It had left him feeling really lethargic and sleepy but at least his head wasn't pounding as much. Since no one present could do anything about it, as there were no telepaths around, John had decided not to worry anyone unnecessarily. Just to be safe though, he'd snatched a single syringe of the mutant gene suppressor drug when they'd left the Hawk. Just in case.

"Man, what is taking Lorna?" came the slightly gruff voice of Alex as he stepped out of the door. "I've tried callin' her but the cellular reception is terrible up here." He walked towards the bench John was sitting on and sat down. He shivered a little as a cold breeze blew past them. "It's a little chilly out. You should be wearing a jacket or something."

"I'm not cold," John said, not being completely honest with him. He was sort of out of it, and continued to stare straight ahead.

"Are you feeling okay?" Alex asked a little concernedly. "You've been really quiet since we got here."

"I'm good," John said, making sure to look Alex in the eye for added credibility.

"I only asked because you..." Alex trailed off, pulling a medicine bottle from his jacket before he continued, "...finished the extra strength Tylenol we got you. And it says to not exceed eight tablets in twenty four hours."

John gasped and felt in his pocket and sure enough didn't find the small bottle of Tylenol in it. He was certain he'd taken it from the bedside table. Apparently his head was woozier than he thought.

"I was coming down with a slight fever," Alex said, "probably due to the weather. I went to take a couple but the bottle was empty. How much of these did you take?"

John kept silent for a little while, trying to figure out the answer. "I'm...not sure. I just take it as needed."

Alex had never really struck John as a particularly observant type before. "Is it the headache again?" Alex asked.

"How did you -" John began before he was cut off.

"I saw you rubbing your temples just now when I stepped out," Alex answered. "John, how

bad is it?"

"It's manageable as long as I'm dosed," John said, blinking a little. His vision had been a little blurred of late. No doubt due to overdosing on the Tylenol. He glanced at his uncle whose face was plainly etched with worry.

"Maybe we should get you to a hospital," Alex said, trying to pull John up from the bench.

John resisted and replied, "I'm fine. It's just Tylenol. You gotta take a lot more than I took for it to kill you. And even then it's more dangerous if it's taken with alcohol. I'm good."

"Well this has got to stop," Alex said. "I am not going to have you turning into an addict on my watch and have your father on my ass about it."

Addicted to Tylenol? John thought. The idea struck him as ridiculous and he laughed a little bit too loud and long.

Great, now he's going crazy on me, Alex thought with raised eyebrow.

John shook his head in the negative and replied, "I am not going crazy! Believe me, if I ever am gonna get addicted to anything, **Tylenol** won't be it."

Alex looked at his nephew in shock and forcibly turned him by the shoulders. "What did you

just say?"

Seeing the serious expression on his uncle's face, John immediately sobered up. "I...said that I wasn't going crazy. What did you think I said?"

"John, I didn't say anything about you going crazy..." Alex said, "...not out **loud**. I just **thought** it to myself."

John paled a little at the revelation that he'd just read Alex's mind unconsciously.

"It's not just headaches," Alex continued, "is it?"

"No, it isn't," John confessed. "I've been hearing stuff. Thoughts. But they weren't clear and easy to make out. You're close by so maybe that's why I made yours out."

"Shit," Alex swore, seriously worried now. "You're hearing other people's thoughts? And just when were you going to tell us that?"

John looked away guiltily.

"Oh my God," Alex groaned. "You weren't, were you?"

"It's not like you guys could help the situation anyway," John said, fumbling in his pocket.

"But don't worry. I got it covered."

"By OD'ing on Tylenol?" Alex asked incredulously.

"That only helps with the headache," John replied, "It doesn't stop the thoughts coming in. And no, I wasn't talking about the Tylenol. I was talking about **this**." He took out a small syringe from his pocket and presented it for his uncle's inspection.

"Oh hell no!" Alex said, in shock. "Just what the fuck is that?!" The elder Summers quickly snatched the syringe away from the younger, all too ready to believe that his nephew was a burgeoning drug addict. "Please, **please** tell me this ain't what I think it is!"

"Melodramatic much?' John rolled his eyes. "That ain't any illicit drugs, Alex. It's a dose of the mutant suppressor drug that the Gammas are using on Mystique. I nabbed this from the jet before we left."

Alex reddened and said, "Oh" before handing over the syringe.

"No, you and Lorna had better keep it," John said, passing it back to him. "I...erm...don't know how to inject it right. First Aid wasn't exactly my favorite class."

Alex nodded. "One shot of this lasts about six hours. Right?"

"I think so," John replied, mentally trying to remember how often Mystique needed to be dosed. He couldn't seem to focus his thoughts enough and eventually gave it up. "Look, I'm a little sleepy -"

"I bet," Alex said. "I'm surprised you even can manage to blink. Come on, let's get you inside."

"Please don't tell Lorna about the Tylenol," John requested, worried about her reaction. "I don't think I could take her screaming at me. Not right now with my head in this condition."

"Fine. Hell, I can't handle her screaming at me with the clearest of heads," Alex confessed with a small, secretive smile. "But don't ever let me catch you trying stuff like that again."

John smiled weakly and nodded. He allowed himself to be helped onto his (semi-asleep) legs and together they headed back inside the room. John fell asleep almost instantly upon lying down. Alex, however, was anything but relaxed. He stared at the small syringe from time to time.

Six hours respite. That was all a single dose of the drug would afford in the event of a telepathic overload. He very much doubted that the Gammas would be pleased to know that John had stolen a shot of the suppressor. Even now, supplies of it were running low and they needed it for Mystique. John must have been pretty desperate to steal it.

Hopefully it won't come to me having to use it, Alex thought. I just wish Xavier would hurry up and contact us...

Meanwhile, in Morlock Haven...

Ororo entered the small room where her companions were seated, bringing with her the Morlock known as Caliban. The X-men were long since accustomed to physical alterations from the so called **norm** and so no one batted an eye at Caliban's tallness, his almost chalk white complexion or his complete lack of hair.

"Caliban has agreed to help us," Ororo said, guiding him into the center of the circle.

Professor Xavier held out his hand in a gesture of goodwill. Caliban however seemed not to know that he was meant to shake it and instead merely mimicked the motion.

"Caliban was born and raised underground," Ororo explained. "Not all of our up-world customs have survived down here."

"Ah," Xavier said in understanding. Then he turned towards Caliban once more. "Thank you for agreeing to help us, Caliban. It is very much appreciated."

Caliban nodded and asked in his long, drawn out manner, "Who do you wish me to find?"

"Some friends of ours," Xavier said. "I understand you need the mental...patterns of those you track. I can provide those if you will allow me to join minds with you."

Caliban looked towards Ororo.

"It's alright, Caliban," she said soothingly. "Professor Xavier will just be giving you the information you need. Nothing more."

"Alright," Caliban said in agreement.

"Thank you," Xavier replied. "Shall we begin?"

When Caliban nodded his assent, Xavier shut his eyes and relayed the unique mental signatures of all those who had fled on the Hawk. It was the psychic equivalent of describing someone's features and traits so that Caliban would know what to **look** for.

The others who were sitting in silence watched on as Caliban's face set in a mask of concentration. His face contorted and became tight and at times his expressions took on a somewhat pained character. Presently his tension relaxed and he announced, "I have found them."

Simultaneously, fleeting visions of a small town surrounded by coniferous forest entered

Professor Xavier's mind. As Caliban narrowed in on the signal the visions became stronger and more lasting. Xavier surmised that Caliban must track his targets using a modified form of astral projection - like an astral bloodhound. The idea was intriguing as it would mean Caliban had an astral projection range that was truly phenomenal.

"A...place called Dundee," Caliban said. "North..."

And as suddenly as they had begun, the visions ceased as Caliban subdued his power.

"Dundee?" Logan asked, perking up. "North?"

Scott looked towards him questioningly. "You know the place?"

"Yeah, I think so," Logan replied. "It's a stone's throw away from the Canadian border line."

"Thanks again for your help, Caliban," Ororo said with gratitude. "You've just done us a great favor."

Caliban merely nodded in his slow, deliberate way and allowed himself to be led out by Ororo.

"Well at least now we know where they are," Remy said. "Now what do we do about it?"

A pertinent question indeed. Their communications technology had been rendered inoperable by Magneto. As had the cell phones and communicators of their missing friends. Or so Hank had surmised, since Magneto **had** tried to stop the jet from leaving with an electromagnetic grip. Even if they had bought new cell phones there was no way to know the new phone numbers.

“How the hell are we gonna get alla the way up to Dundee?” Logan griped. “It’s more than a little out of Kurt’s range. I don’t think we’d want to tire him out and then wind up stranded in the middle of nowhere.”

With the Blackbird out of commission, since their last mission to Alkali Lake, and the Hawk gone the only other option (aside from boarding a commercial flight to the nearest major city...which would still be too far) would be to drive.

“Well, Logan,” Xavier said, “to paraphrase a once popular song, we’re just going to have to get a little help from our friends.”

Before Logan could ask for clarification of that cryptic statement, Ororo entered the room once more and moments later they were footing it out of Morlock Haven as fast as their legs would carry them...

Some time later at the Xavier Mansion...

Betsy frowned deeply as she surveyed the front lawn. From on high Warren did the same, then swooped down and landed gracefully next to her.

“I think this is the worst damage we’ve ever taken from a single incident,” Warren said, noting the large, gaping holes in the ground.

Betsy nodded and replied, “And that’s just up here. The shielding panels in the Cerebro room will need quite a bit of repair, the Med Bay is in a bad condition, as is the War Room. And after John destroyed the Danger Room...I’m afraid we are going to be out of commission for a while.”

“Well,” Warren said, sidling up a little closer to her, “you always said you could do with a holiday.”

“Warren!” Betsy chided, pushing him away and looking behind her back nervously. “Not here, right out in the open! Goodness knows **who** could see!”

The winged man frowned. “I don’t know why we gotta hide. Are you **that** ashamed of me?”

Betsy sighed. “Warren, you don’t know them as well as I do. I’m a telepath and I catch their thoughts. They are a more gossipy bunch than you’d care to imagine.”

“What exactly are you worried about?” Warren asked, confusion evident in his tone. “So I like older women. It's not that extreme a notion – not in **these** times anyway. What’s the big deal?”

“Well,” Betsy began hesitantly, “I was once your mentor when you were a student. And I just know if they find out about us that they’ll be wondering whether we were involved then too.”

“Oh...” Warren said, suddenly understanding where Betsy was coming from. “Betsy, one day we’re going to have to stop living our lives for **them** and start living for **us**.”

“I know,” Betsy said with a smile. “And thanks for being so patient.”

Warren returned her smile and was about to say something but never did get the chance to. The reason being that he was interrupted by a violent shaking of the ground beneath his feet that toppled both him and Betsy flat onto their posteriors a.k.a asses.

“Aww, isn’t this cute,” a once familiar male voice said, dripping with mock sweetness.

Another, gruffer, voice added, “Yeah, draws a tear to my eye.”

Both downed X-men quickly got to their feet and looked in the direction of the voices.

"Oh my God," Betsy said when she saw just who had invaded on their privacy. She immediately sent out a psychic distress call to the few remaining X-men within the Mansion - Rogue, Nightcrawler and Colossus.

Warren sighed angrily. "Avalanche and Sabretooth."

Moments later, with a BAMF, and the smell of sulfur, Nightcrawler, Rogue and Colossus appeared behind Betsy/Psylocke and Warren/Angel.

"Five against two?" Avalanche asked with mock disappointment. "You know I always figured you X-men as the type to stand for fair play and all that."

"Fair play?" Rogue asked with a scoff, "Coming from you?"

Without waiting for a response she and Angel dashed into the air and lunged at the two Brotherhood agents. Avalanche raised his hands and a barrier of solid earth raised from the ground, blocking Rogue's intended assault. She collided with it and fell to the ground temporarily winded. Dealing with Rogue, however, served as a sufficient distraction to allow Angel to swoop down and land a solid kick to Avalanche's chest. He fell down but quickly got back up on his feet. Angered, the ground began to shake once more and column after column of rock like debris burst forth from underground, knocking both Rogue and Angel away from his position.

A short distance away Sabretooth was dealing with a concerted attack being carried out by Colossus, Nightcrawler and Psylocke. Colossus was handling the lion's share of the fight as his durability far exceeded that of the other two.

Psylocke stayed back more as Sabretooth's resistance to telepathic assault rendered her powers less effective. Skilled though she was at martial arts, against the hulking brute, it would be difficult to score massive damage. Especially considering his mutant enhanced healing factor. Though Sabretooth's strength was not classified as superhuman, it **was** greatly enhanced and coupled with his agility, Colossus was having trouble landing hits.

"Around and around and away we go!" Sabretooth said with a evil grin.

"Yah!" Nightcrawler screamed, as Sabretooth grabbed his tail and swung him round and round, before finally flinging him clear across the lawn. He quickly teleported back into the midst of the action and let out an inhuman roar while leaping onto Sabretooth and raining punch after punch onto his face. Sabretooth just laughed like a madman, clearly amused at the thought of Nightcrawler actually being able to hurt him.

"Playtime's over," Sabretooth said, catching first one of Nightcrawler's fists, then the other and squeezing them painfully.

Since Nightcrawler was in physical contact with Sabretooth, teleporting would do nothing to help matters (as he'd just take Sabretooth along for the ride).

To spare Nightcrawler's hands from being wrung off, Psylocke primed up her signature psychic blade and jumped into the fray with a bloodcurdling battle cry.

Not far away, two figures snuck behind the fighting mutants unnoticed and entered the Mansion proper, namely Magneto and Emma Frost. Of course the few X-men remaining would have posed no serious deterrence to Magneto getting into the Mansion, but he wished to save as much time as was possible - hence the distraction. Busting Sabretooth and Avalanche out of prison was something he'd been meaning to do for a while at any rate, it was only Mystique's over cautiousness that delayed it.

He would have used the MALE for distraction were it not for the fact that most of them were still recovering from the telepathic assault that Charles Xavier had subjected them to. Wits had assured him, however, that they should be ready to lend a hand by the time Jonathan Grey Summers was located. And to do that end, the services of Cerebro were required. Hence Magneto and Emma Frost making their way down to the Subbasement with all haste...

Susan Storm let out a heavy sigh as she shut the door on a (what else) angry and complaining Courtney. The Fantastic Four's cantankerous landlady apparently had a big problem with the odd assortment of individuals who were traipsing into **her** (she made a point to emphasize ownership) Baxter building smelling like pig farmers.

"I'm sorry about that," Susan said, leading Professor Xavier and his group into the living room. "It's just Courtney's usual manner. She's like that with everyone except that damned dog of hers. Anyway, please have a seat."

"Thank you for seeing us on such short notice, Sue," Professor Xavier replied graciously. "I know how risky it could be for the Fantastic Four's public image to be seen with an outlaw mutant group."

Susan smiled. "It's fine, Professor. One day the public will appreciate the good work that you all do. You've helped us out in the past. We're not going to turn our backs now that you're the ones in need."

The X-men tried to make themselves comfortable while Susan left to fetch the other members of the Fantastic Four. Considering the circumstances, however, they were finding it quite hard to do so. Professor Xavier in particular and it showed on his face.

"Is something wrong, professor?" Julian asked of his mentor. "Aside from...you know... basically everything."

Professor Xavier didn't wish to worry them anymore than was necessary, especially as there was nothing that they could do to help matters anyway. But after deliberating with himself for a few moments he decided that it was something they probably should be made aware of.

"It's about Jonathan," Professor Xavier finally said.

Scott (and Logan for that matter) instantly perked up.

"What about him?" Scott asked, leaning forward with concern.

Professor Xavier continued. "When we telepathically incapacitated the MALE on the lawn...I had to undo the psychic restraints I'd placed on his powers. I couldn't risk him accessing the full level of Cerebro's amplification otherwise. It would have most certainly overwhelmed him. Unfortunately, due to the events that transpired afterwards, I was not able to reactivate those telepathic restraints."

Ororo's eyes widened as she grasped just what Professor Xavier was saying. "You mean he's going about completely - "

"Yes," Professor Xavier said. "While he had those blocks **on** it was analogous to...damming the flow of his telepathic abilities to a more manageable level. But now it's as if that dam has been broken - I removed the blocks abruptly when ideally they should have been removed gradually thus allowing his mind the time to adjust."

"So you mean that he might not be able to cope with the suddenly increased...flow," Logan said understandingly. "It's been building up..."

"Precisely," Professor Xavier replied.

"Dammit," Scott said. "How probable do you think it is that he might overload?"

"To be honest," Professor Xavier said, "I cannot be sure. This is uncharted territory. In most cases telepathic overloads occur gradually - a thought here and there at first followed by periods of telepathic silence, then the frequency steadily increases until there's no space between one incoming thought and the next and everything blurs together into a chaotic crescendo. At the very end of it all the telepath is unable to distinguish even his or her own thoughts from that of others and truly loses himself or herself. From start to finish it usually takes several days."

"Yes, but as we all know John isn't like most other telepaths now is he," Hank stated.

"No," Scott replied. "He isn't. God, I hope the Fantastic Four agree to help us. If they don't, I can't see how else we're going to get to where they're at quickly enough."

Scott had been thinking about maybe asking Warren to pull some strings with his father, but then thought better of it. Worthington Industries was already helping them enough with accommodating the students without having to tie themselves directly to an outlaw mutant group.

Remy, who had been silent so far finally spoke up. "Well, we **could** steal a plane..."

No one said anything in response to that suggestion from the ex thief.

"It's not like we haven't done it before," Remy added softly.

At that moment the door to the living room slid open and Reed Richards walked in with Susan, her brother Johnny and the ever imposing Benjamin Grimm trailing after him.

"It's good to see you again, Professor," Reed said by way of greeting. Quickly he got down to business. "What's this about the X-men needing our help?"

To save time Professor Xavier gave the Fantastic Four the rundown telepathically whilst the other X-men looked on in silence...

Emma Frost stood in awe at the console of Cerebro. Magneto had indeed done a remarkable job of getting the psychic amplifying device back in functioning order. As it turned out, most of the damage had been done to the metal panels that lined the room. They provided the shielding from external thought patterns that might interfere with the sensors. They also served to contain the electromagnetic fields generated by the electromagnet core of the device. While the damage **was** extensive, it was superficial and nowhere as bad as it had looked. It was a simple matter for Magneto to reform and reposition the panels as required.

As a matter of fact he'd done manual building, repair and recalibration of a Cerebro-like unit before - while under mind control for William Stryker no less.

"Well thankfully the electronic components are intact," Emma said as she booted up the system. "When I first saw the room I thought everything had been totaled."

"My dear," Magneto said, "I never destroy something just for destruction's sake."

Emma merely nodded but said nothing. She had in fact been worried that there wouldn't be a working power source to power the machine. She was well aware (as a former X-man) that Defcon 5 lock down consumed a lot of power. She was pleasantly surprised to find that the remaining X-men had been busy and had already partially recharged the once drained power core of the Subbasement.

"There." With a final gesture, Magneto manipulated the giant electromagnet at the base of the room back into position.

"About time," Emma mumbled.

"Is the computer back online?" Magneto asked as he flew towards Emma's location and landed beside her.

Emma nodded. "Yes. I believe so. Just give me a moment to inactivate the Cerebro artificial

intelligence program before it's fully loaded itself into memory. No doubt it won't grant us access as the good professor will have revoked my privileges."

Magneto nodded and allowed Emma Frost some time to work.

Soon, Jonathan Grey Summers, he thought, we'll see just where it is you're hiding.

"Dammit," Emma said as she slammed her fists on the console.

Magneto frowned. "What is it?"

"It's being stubborn and managed to load itself into active memory despite my efforts."

No sooner had Emma said this did the room go pitch black. Next, along the walls of the room electronic **static** began to materialize. The grainy black and white pattern began to collapse upon itself, churning violently for several moments.

"What's happening," Magneto asked Emma, looking a little disturbed.

Emma shook her head confusedly. "I don't know. Cerebro's never behaved this way before."

"You'd better not be trying to pull a fast one over on me, Frost," Magneto said, eyes narrowing in suspicion. "I assure you that the consequences will be -"

Emma viciously replied, "I'm not! Must you be so damned paranoid -"

Her sentence was cut off as an electronically synthesized male 'voice' could be heard yawning as if awakening from a deep slumber. Both Emma and Magneto's eyes widened. The seething black and white static warped several more times until finally an assortment of different facial images quickly flashed by on the display.

"What the -" Magneto began.

At last a definitive, teenaged, male face took form and Cerebro yawned once more. The face in fact was a composite form created from the images of numerous telepathic students on file, all of whom had at one point or other used the device.

"This is new," Emma said. "I wonder if maybe McCoy reprogrammed Cerebro and gave the AI some cosmetic improvements. The fur ball was always tinkering with it."

Cerebro's avatar looked a little sleepy but quickly blinked and 'roused' himself. He looked at the two people who were standing before him and compared their faces with the profiles stored on the X-men's various databases. Presently his virtual face morphed into one of unpleasant surprise.

"Magneto and Emma Frost," Cerebro's voice boomed in an accent reminiscent of the

stereotypical 'surfer boy'. "What the fuck are you two doing in my room?"

"Cerebro's got an attitude problem," Magneto whispered to Emma. "I don't believe that this is Beast's work. Somehow I don't think that Charles would authorize such a modification of the AI."

"True," Emma replied, noting the swear word that Cerebro had used. "Or that McCoy would program the AI to be so crude."

"Just try and access the telepathic amplifier," Magneto ordered Emma. "See if you can circumvent the need for the AI's cooperation."

Emma shrugged and took a seat at the console. She began to pound furiously on the keyboard, entering code after code only to find that they had all been changed since her (less than honorable) dismissal from the Xavier Institute.

"Hey, lady, do you mind?" Cerebro said a little heatedly. "I ain't got nothing against girls. You're nice and all but just not my type. So stop touching me like that!"

Emma and Magneto slowly looked at each other as something dawned upon them.

"Now I know for certain that the administration had nothing to do with this," Magneto said.

"A gay AI. Whoever heard of such a thing?"

“Well,” Emma said, trailed off for a minute, “the HAL AI from *A Space Odyssey* **was** gay for David Bowman. And in the end he actually **did** get his man. See what had happened was that when Bowman's mind was digitized the two of them eventually bonded and formed the entity known as Halman and -”

Magneto was surprised not so much at the information but at the source from which it came.

“Okay, so I like science fiction novels,” Emma said with a roll of her eyes. “Anyway, about this AI not being sanctioned – think again.” Emma began typing at the console furiously once more, accessing the system information specifics. “It’s apparently running off of Cerebro’s protocols. I think it **is** Cerebro. They probably could have modified the AI-”

“That doesn’t explain it’s crudity,” Magneto said snidely.

“Well, computer programs and data sometimes become corrupted. And maybe quite literally in this particular instance,” Emma said. “It’s very possible that when you were down here earlier and wrecked the shielding panels, your electromagnetic powers could have damaged hard drive sectors storing the AI’s operating data...resulting in...**this**.”

“Just try and disable this nuisance,” was Magneto’s response.

So Emma continued to pound away at the keys to no avail. Cerebro quickly figured out what

she was up to and executed defensive measures to keep itself online.

“Who the hell do you think you are trying to put me outta my own damn house?” Cerebro asked, face twisting angrily. “And I told you - STOP TOUCHING ME!”

The console sparked and Emma screamed as she was subjected to a minor electrical shock. She jumped up from the seat and treated the now smirking holographic avatar to a very dirty look.

Magneto was getting upset at her failure. “Can’t you do anything right?”

“Why don’t **you** try then?” Emma asked with some heat, nursing her numb hand and for the moment not caring if she angered Magneto.

Magneto approached the console, confident his control of electromagnetism would protect him from such a trick. “Fine then. I will.”

“Let’s see if you’ll have better luck,” Emma said.

“Eww,” Cerebro said before Magneto could respond. “I like old geezers even less. I’m into **daddies**. Not **grand-daddies**.”

Magneto’s fist tightened. He’d had it. “Listen you! I helped to create you and you will show

me some respect.”

The look on Cerebro's virtual face grew solemn as the AI checked its stored data files on Magneto. Finally it replied, “Okay, so you **did** help create me. But that doesn't change the fact that you're a very bad man.” The avatar then looked in Emma's direction. “And you, didn't you get your ass kicked out? What are you doing back here anyway? According to the information in my files you're supposed to be in the Happy Valley psychiatric facility. ”

Emma realized that this new avatar, unsanctioned by Xavier though it might be, had access to all of the old Cerebro's files and information. Given that fact, she didn't think that they would be able to secure its cooperation. It knew too much about them to be easily tricked into playing along. She relayed this point to Magneto while guiding him away from the console and instructing him to lower his voice to prevent the AI from learning anything more of their plans.

“...and I don't see how we can disable it,” Emma continued in a subdued voice. “Neither of us has the skill. And you can't use your powers to wipe the computer here because it's got heavy electromagnetic shielding to protect it from the electromagnetic core below. If you remove them to erase the AI, you might damage the machine itself.”

“Well then,” Magneto said, “we'll just have to get someone with the skill. Won't we?”

Time was fleeting and this did not sit well with Magneto. Especially when coupled with the

fact that he didn't know the whereabouts of the other X-men. For all he knew they could already have located Jonathan Summers and be in the process of whisking him away to some other location that would be even more difficult to trace.

"Hmmm, aside from Beast," Emma said, considering, "the nearest person I know of with the knowledge and technical ability to manipulate Cerebro's programming to any significant extent is Reed Richards."

Magneto's eyebrows raised. "Mr. Fantastic?"

"Yes," Emma said. "He and the X-men have worked together in the past. He has a mind that the word 'genius' doesn't quite do justice to. Too bad he's off limits and -"

Magneto didn't bother with the last part of Emma's statement. "Then we'll just have to meet with Mr. Fantastic and persuade him to lend us his aid," he said, turning towards the door.

"You want to go up against the Fantastic Four?!" Emma asked incredulously. "And kidnap Reed Richards?"

"Do you really think," Magneto asked haughtily, "that they pose any sort of threat towards me?"

"Erm," Emma began, bracing herself for Magneto's possible anger. "Yes. As a matter of fact I

do.”

“I - I who have fought the X-men in their entirety and bested them time and time again?” he asked with a roll of his eyes and a melodramatic toss of his cape. “Do you think that **four** cheap mutant knock-offs stand much of a chance?”

“Point taken,” Emma said in a small voice. “I guess you won't need my help until Mr. Fantastic disables the AI, right? So there's no need for me to accompany you to-”

“I'd much rather have you close by where I can see you, Frost,” Magneto replied to that, cutting her off. “You are a runner and I don't have the time to waste tracking you down again. Besides, depending on how resilient Mr. Fantastic is to physical attempts at persuasion - which I suspect a man of rubber will be - your telepathic skills may be required. Now come along.”

Emma sighed in frustration but could do nothing else but obey the Master of Magnetism. Together they walked towards the door.

“Don't let the door hit ya where the good Lord split ya!” came the mocking voice of Cerebro, after which it broke down into peals of adolescent laughter at seeing the look on their faces.

“I really do think we'll be doing Charles a favor by disabling that cur of a computer,” Magneto said under his breath. “Let's go.”

Emma paused at the doorway. "Do you think that we should try to completely shut down Cerebro for now so it can't alert the X-men? I mean, I know the external communication systems are out...but what if they decide to come in here?"

Magneto shook his head. "The shutdown mechanism to completely disable the device requires a security code. I don't have the time to hack the system. And who knows what alarms might be tripped during the process - the X-men have already begun to repair the Subbasement. The security system may be partially running again. In any event, I seriously doubt that childish AI will pose any significant danger to my plans. We've dilly dallied long enough - come on!"

"Alex, I really think we should use the mutant suppressor drug now," Lorna said in an insistent tone.

She and her boyfriend were currently watching John toss, turn and moan in his sleep. Since her return to the motel room she had been appraised of the situation. The very first thing she did was to complain about not being notified sooner, to which Alex defended himself by bringing up the lousy cell phone reception in the area.

"I don't know," Alex said, remembering that his nephew had said that the mutant suppressor was to be used as an absolute last resort only. They only had one dose of it and they had no

idea how long it would be before they were found by Professor Xavier and the X-men.

Lorna scoffed and pointed to the restless boy on the bed. "But look at him."

"Lorna, one dose of this drug lasts about six hours on average," Alex said, trying to reason with her. "That's not even half a day. We don't know **when** the others will come get us. We need to hold off on using this until it is absolutely necessary."

"Fine, fine," Lorna relented, wiping some beads of perspiration off John's forehead. "But I don't like it. You said he stole that from the Hawk?"

Alex nodded and took a seat on the opposite side of the bed. "Yeah. I'm a little surprised that no one's noticed it missing. Especially considering that supplies of it are limited. I'd have expected that they'd have been keeping a close eye on the remaining stock."

"Well, it **is** just **one** dose of the drug," Lorna said. "It's easy to miscount I suppose."

Alex shrugged. "You could be right."

Several moments passed by in silence as they both took to pondering the events of the last couple of days and the turn that their lives had taken. Before coming to the Xavier Institute their lives had both been pretty uneventful and the definition of conventional.

"Lorna, I've been thinking..." Alex began carefully but eventually trailed off. This was going to be a sensitive issue to raise and he didn't want to anger Lorna any more than was necessary.

"About what?" she asked, urging him to continue.

"There's no real need for you to stay with us," Alex said seriously. "It's an...unnecessary risk. You don't have any specialized training and -"

"Neither do you!" Lorna replied emphatically, foreseeing where he was taking it.

"Magneto is **hunting** John," Alex said. "And I think he is going to take down whoever gets in his way. I could talk to Marie Ange and see about transferring some funds and getting you a ticket outta here and away from us."

Lorna's eyes narrowed on hearing the words coming out of Alex's mouth. "So why don't you come with me then? You're just as much a novice at this as I am."

"He's my flesh and blood," Alex said. "I **have** to stay with him. He's family."

"Isn't he **my** family too, Alex?" Lorna asked. "If it's one thing I thought you of **all** people would understand, is that family don't just mean blood. I helped raise him too, he's just as much mine as he is yours. And therefore I have an obligation to do whatever it takes to keep

him safe. Not to mention there's **you** to think about."

"Lorna! For **once** will you just not contradict me?" Alex asked forcefully, getting a little frustrated.

"You need me," Lorna said simply. "We don't have as many people here with defensive powers as I'd like. There's no way that we can **overpower** Magneto, so we need to focus on **defense**. In case it's slipped your mind - I can shield pretty effectively."

"Which is precisely what will **make** you a target!" Alex insisted. "You would be placing yourself in Magneto's way directly. He'd have to literally go **through** you to get to John! And in case it's slipped YOUR mind - John can shield too."

"He's only just gained the skill," Lorna said. "He's only got basic shielding ability and in a situation like this I don't think that there's such a thing as TOO safe."

He tried to reason with her but his attempts were in vain. For every argument he made, Lorna was easily able to counter it. Finally, in exasperation, he blurted out, "Do you want to end up like Jean?! God...why can't you listen to me this **one** time and just do what I tell you to?"

Lorna let out a shaky breath. "Alex...I..."

She didn't get a chance to respond as Alex's outburst proved to be enough to rouse John. He stirred for a few moments before finally waking up altogether. Quickly, Alex and Lorna remedied their expressions and drew closer to the bed.

"John, sweetie, how are you feeling?" Lorna asked softly, brushing aside some stray wisps of hair from his face.

John blinked several times, trying to focus his eyes. Alex had wisely lowered the light in the room, remembering that too bright light could exacerbate headaches. "Lorna?" John asked woozily.

"Yes, it's me," she replied. "Alex told me that the headache is back."

John swallowed and nodded in the affirmative. "With a vengeance." John suddenly recalled something - namely his little Tylenol OD thing. He turned towards Alex and asked him mentally, *You didn't tell her did you?*

"Tell me what?" Lorna asked curiously.

Both Alex and John looked at her in shock. What was meant to be a private telepathic communication between them had obviously been detected by Lorna.

"Damn," John mumbled under his breath so that no one heard him, "it must be getting

worse.”

Lorna, thankfully, chose to ignore the incident and instead asked, “How much worse is the headache now compared to how it was in the woods? Has it gotten worse or is it...I dunno...**stable**?”

“The pain itself hasn't gotten much worse,” John admitted. “But the – wait. Did he tell you about the voices I'm hearing now? Or just about the headache?”

“He mentioned both,” Lorna said, assuming that this was what John was asking Alex about moments before.

“Oh,” John said. “Well anyway, the headache itself isn't much worse. But the murmuring is a bit **louder** than it was earlier.”

“He mentioned the suppressor drug you...borrowed,” Lorna said, pointing to the syringe on the bedside table.

“Erm...yeah,” John said, eyeing Alex a little uncomfortably. “For emergency use. Just in case.”

“The minute you feel you can't cope, you tell us. Okay?” Lorna said with insistence. “Don't try to be a tough guy.”

John sat up with a groan and said, "Yeah, I will. The last thing I feel right now is tough. Is that Chinese I smell?"

Lorna nodded. "Um, yeah."

"Good. I am starved," John said, getting up and walking over to the small wooden table in the center of the room. The adverse effects of the Tylenol overdose had for the most part worn off by then and he was a good deal more steady. Sitting down with a small helping of noodles, John asked his aunt and uncle, "So what were you two arguing about just now?"

The question seemed to take them both by surprise. At any rate they both seemed uncomfortable at being asked that.

"Is this a relationship thing?" John asked with perked eyebrow.

Alex shook his head and got up, heading for the door. "Something like that." With a final, meaningful look at Lorna, he left the room. She sighed and leaned back in her chair.

"Okay, what's wrong?" John asked, putting down his food and walking over to her.

Lorna shook her head and said, "Nothing."

"Lorna," John began, "Bear in mind that I'm a psychic on overdrive at this point in time. Even

if it wasn't otherwise obvious that you're lying - I can **sense** that you are not being completely truthful."

"It's Alex," Lorna finally said. "He thinks that I should leave and that it's unsafe for me to be here. An **unnecessary** risk, he said. So what do you think about that?"

"I'd be lying if I said it didn't cross my mind a couple of times," John admitted.

Lorna rolled her eyes in exasperation. "Oh not you too. He has the same basic level of training I have but you don't see him running for the hills. It's because I'm a woman isn't it?"

"Of course not Lorna..."

"Or maybe," she continued softer and more hurt, "it's because I'm not blood and therefore am not **obligated** to be here like he seems to think he is."

Oh boy, John thought (he hoped) to himself. Lorna must be in one of her emotional moods again. Although, considering the circumstances I can't blame her.

"Lorna, I have never thought of you as anything **other** than family," John said emphatically.

"There's never been a time that you haven't been there for me but -"

"This is no different from any one of those times. So don't either of you mention me leaving

again," Lorna said, getting up and heading for the door.

Magneto, Emma Frost, Sabretooth and Avalanche stood on the rooftop of one of the neighboring buildings that surrounded the Baxter building. Once the tallest building in the area, the Baxter building was now shadowed by more recent skyscrapers and was not quite as impressive a sight as it once was. Be that as it may, it was still one of the most visited landmarks in all of Manhattan – for it was the residence and base of operations of the Fantastic Four. This fact proved to serve as a complication to Magneto's plan to kidnap Reed Richards.

The building itself was not located in some relatively out of the way location like the Xavier Institute. Instead, it was smack dab in the middle of a bustling metropolis. People were swarming on the ground below like ants. Should they become aware of the presence of the infamous Brotherhood, the authorities would be alerted and a confrontation would no doubt ensue, resulting in yet more wasted time.

"Don't even think about it," Emma said, snapping Magneto out of his musing.

"Don't think about what?" Magneto asked, puzzled.

"Oh," Emma responded. "Not you. I was speaking to Sabretooth. He's been staring at my ass in a manner most unbecoming for some time now."

"Cut a fella some slack, toots," Sabretooth said with a grin. "I only just got outta prison."

Magneto's look darkened. "Shut up both of you and listen."

All were agreeable.

"Avalanche," Magneto said, turning to the man at his right. "I want you to create a localized earthquake to distract the people down below and in the buildings near here. I want them so panicked that they won't notice what we're doing."

"You got it, boss," Avalanche said with a thumbs up.

"Good," Magneto continued. "I will be responsible for disabling their security system and making it look like a technical issue. We don't want them to have any forewarning of what's coming."

"True that," Avalanche said.

Next, Magneto turned towards Emma. "Frost, I want you to mentally scan the building first. Tell me how many people are in there and locate the precise position of Mr. Fantastic. Please do so now."

“Very well,” she said, acquiescing to his authority. “Just make sure that a certain someone doesn't make a pass at my ass while my mind is elsewhere or I might be shocked and end up telepathically announcing our presence.”

“I will,” Magneto said, giving Sabretooth a look of death. His slight, ever so fleeting cringe, was satisfactory.

“Well, here goes,” Emma said, closing her eyes and opening her mind up to its full telepathic receptivity. “Hmm, there are around twenty people in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th floors. Basic ancillary staff and such. There's a tour group of around fifty on the ground floor. As to the top floor, there's - dammit!”

“What?” Magneto asked quickly, flashing a look at Sabretooth (who treated him to an **it wasn't me** expression).

Emma's eyes snapped open. “Charles. Charles and some of the X-men are inside.”

Avalanche and Sabretooth looked at each other incredulously.

Magneto's expression grew grave. “Did he detect your presence?”

“No,” Emma said. “But it was damned close. I was lucky he didn't notice me. His mind seems to be distracted...*troubled* somewhat. Given the situation they're in - it's perfectly

understandable.”

“What would they be doing in there?” Avalanche mused. “You think they know about our plan?”

“No,” Magneto said with certainty. “I think not.”

“What if Psylocke sensed something?” Sabretooth asked.

“Myself and Emma were the only ones aware of the plan before we all left the Mansion,” Magneto explained. “My helmet makes it impossible for her to so much as detect my presence, far less read my mind.”

“And I’m perfectly capable of shielding my presence and thoughts from her,” Emma added.

“The X-men are **not** here because they suspect we’re up to anything. My guess is they must have come here for some kind of help. We’ve...I mean, **they’ve** worked with the Fantastic Four in the past. Given the decimation of the Subbasement, they must be trying to call in some favors.”

“It’s quite possible,” Magneto said. “And given that Charles himself went to them, it must be quite urgent indeed.”

“So er...” Sabretooth began, “are we still gonna kidnap Richards or not?”

"No," Magneto said firmly. "We wait, and we watch."

"What the hell were you thinking?" Betsy asked, her angry tone betraying her relief.

"Sabretooth could have torn you to shreds!"

Warren sat on one of the more decent beds in the ruined Med Bay. Despite his healing factor, Betsy was bandaging his arm. He figured that she was doing it more for her peace of mind and as a coping mechanism than anything else, and so he didn't try to stop her. Besides, it felt nice to be pampered by the one you loved...until she started to tie the bandages so tightly that they actually hurt and cut off circulation.

"Betsy, I **do** have a healing factor, you know," Warren said softly, taking her hands into his and stopping her frantic bandaging.

She scoffed. "Wouldn't have done you a bit of good if he'd decapitated you!"

"But he was lunging for you!" Warren said in his defense.

"Yes," Betsy admitted. "But Rogue would have handled him. Or Colossus. They both have invulnerable skin or nearly so!"

"You know," Warren said, trying to lighten the mood, "Most women would be honored to have a man who would be ready to lay down his life for them."

A fat lot of good a man was to a woman dead, Betsy thought to herself.

Betsy rolled her eyes a tad bit haughtily. "Well I'm a step up from most women, Warren. And don't you forget it."

"True," Warren said, leaning in to kiss Betsy now that her temper was somewhat defused.

Their lip locking did not long last as it was interrupted by the sound of an exaggerated, "Ooh".

Immediately Betsy pushed Warren away and muttered, "What was that?!"

Both of them began to scour the Med Bay (both visually and telepathically) for any sign of an intruder. They found nothing suspicious.

"It didn't sound like any of the others," Warren mused. "And this is the second time today we've been discovered."

"Yes, you're right. The voice sounded a little young. We'd better investigate," Betsy whispered. "What if it's one of them MALE?"

Warren scratched his head. "But why would they announce their presence like that?"

"Beats me. But with the way things are, we had better not take any chances," Betsy said, before telepathically alerting the other X-men on the surface to join them in the Subbasement...

Meanwhile, in the parking lot outside a small motel in Dundee...

A group of five individuals stood in the car park of the Rest In Peace motel. Of their number, three were women and two were men. All were casually dressed and didn't draw much attention to themselves from the few patrons of the establishment wandering outside. Their attention, however, was riveted to one particular motel room directly across the car park from their position.

"Are you sure he's in there, Lil?" one of the two men asked a little dubiously.

Lilandra nodded in the affirmative. "Yes, I'm positive. Do you really need to keep asking me that?"

"Uh," the man responded, "Yeah, I think I do. You said it was difficult to track him. I just wanna make sure we don't go barging in on some unsuspecting couple like last time." He

shook his head a little, evidently trying to clear the image from his psyche.

“Rest easy, Ken,” another of the women said. “This time we know for sure that we're correct.”

“How can you be so sure, Tessa?” Ken asked. “Considering your track record so far.”

“The telepathic emanations now radiating from his mind are like a beacon,” Tessa answered.

“They started up quite suddenly...”

“And drew us here like moths to a flame,” the last woman said in her usual cool, crisp voice.

“I just hope we don't end up getting burned. His mind seems quite unstable, but thankfully only in the preliminary stages of overload. I hope this doesn't turn ugly.”

Ken nodded. “Me too, Sibyl.”

All of them halted their conversation as a shadowy silhouette appeared at one of the windows of the room.

“And he's not alone either,” Ken said, stating the obvious.

“There are...” Lilandra began, closing her eyes for maximum concentration, trying to break through the telepathic interference John's mind was throwing out. “Two others with him.

Both mutants. A man and a woman. Quite possibly family or close friends – I sense a great

deal of concern for his welfare from them both.”

Ken squinted a little. “Yeah. And?”

Lilandra stared at him a little curiously. “And **what?**”

“Can't you tell us a little bit more?” Ken asked.

“Yeah,” the other man, who had since been silent, added. “Like what their mutant abilities are for instance. In case they were to attack us.”

“Why must you assume that their first reaction will be one of violence?” Tessa asked with an upturned eyebrow. “Maybe they can be reasoned with.”

“Yeah...” Ken trailed off not quite convinced. He turned his attention to Lilandra once more.

“So, got anything else for us?”

“Unfortunately not,” she said with regret. “Our telepathic senses are somewhat dampened and -”

“Huh?” Ken asked.

“It's like this...” Lilandra began. “In terms of light...Tessa was indeed accurate when she

likened him to a beacon. The psychic energy he's channeling really is comparable to a blinding light, blotting out much of everything else from our sight. It places a limit on how much we can glean telepathically. In any event, we don't want to push too hard and alert him to our presence. It could cause alarm. And with his current mental state it wouldn't be smart."

"Well, I suppose it's better than nothing at all," Ken admitted. "So how are we going to do this? You want me to make a distraction so you can slip in through the back and -"

"Actually," Lilandra said, "I was just going to knock on the front door."

Both men looked at her a little pointedly.

"You're serious," Ken said more than asked.

"Yep," Lilandra said, walking towards the room.

"Sis," Ken called out, "maybe I should come with you."

"No," Lilandra stated firmly. "One of us is quite enough - unless there's trouble, in which case I'll alert you. We don't want to appear threatening in the least. Once again, considering his mental instability right now - it wouldn't be wise. Just let me handle this. And Sibyl, Tessa - don't try to probe any of their minds for more info thinking they'll be distracted with me. If they detect someone messing with their heads they could turn on me and then this could all

go down the drain.”

The other four accepted this and watched their leader as she made her way to the door of room 27 and gave it a strong knock...

Back at the Mansion...

“Guys!” Rogue call echoed down the Subbasement hallway. “Um...there's something I think that y'all should see!”

Her urgent cry resulted in Peter, Betsy, Warren and Kurt running into the Cerebro room. When they saw the state the room was in – repaired – they all gasped.

“Mein Gott!” Kurt exclaimed, teleporting down to the bottom of the spherical room and back up. “The electromagnet core has been fitted back into position too. It looks as good as new.”

Betsy walked up to the console and started to boot up the computer. “Everything appears to be functional. But who could have -” she paused as something suddenly clicked. “God, who else **but** Magneto could have done this?”

He must have had Sabretooth and Avalanche distract us while he snuck in down here, Betsy thought. No doubt he planned to use Cerebro to track down John...probably with Frost's help.

"I really did think the attack on the lawn to be suspicious," Kurt said. "It seemed aimless at the time. But it makes sense now."

"And we fell for it," Rogue said with a sigh. "Dammit."

"Well," Peter said, looking on the bright side. "At least it saves us the trouble of fixing Cerebro. No?"

With a beep, the computer finally booted up and white static played on the walls of the room (which also served as a display unit). Betsy picked up the helmet with the intention of giving Cerebro a dry run. If it worked, she might even be able to make contact with the others. Before she could put the headpiece on, however, Warren ran over to her and knocked it out of her hands. Betsy just managed to catch it in midair.

"Hey! Careful with that!" Betsy exclaimed.

"Magneto was in here," Warren said. "We don't know **what** he might have done in the way of sabotage. Or have you forgotten what Mystique once did to Cerebro? It knocked the Professor out of whack for nearly -"

Betsy blushed a little for having forgotten that. "You're right. Thanks."

"Nice save, fly boy," a voice boomed.

All present in the room jumped at the unexpected sound.

"That's it!" Betsy whispered. "That's the same voice."

The room blinked from light to dark and back again as the static on the wall formed itself into a blurry human face.

"Oh my God," Warren said softly. "It looks just like Zordon!"

Several pairs of eyes looked at him incredulously. Apparently he had not spoken softly enough.

"Er," Warren said with a nervous chuckle, clearly embarrassed at the Power Rangers reference. "Forget I said that."

Presently the blurry facial image grew much sharper until a clear picture was apparent to everyone. That of a dark haired, green-eyed, teenaged boy.

"Well?" the avatar asked. "Aren't you gonna say something? It's rude to just stare at someone."

Everyone looked at Betsy, as if she could possibly enlighten them.

“Don't look at me,” she said quickly. “I've never seen anything like this before. And I'm not a computing genius either.”

The gathered X-men began to discuss some things amongst themselves, largely ignoring Cerebro for the time being.

“What if it's some kind of virus that Magneto's placed into the system?” Kurt suggested. “We can guess that he repaired the system to use it to locate the others. What if he left this virus here to ensure that we couldn't use Cerebro to find them ourselves? I really doubt that he'd want us to profit from his endeavors.”

“An excellent point. And yes, Magneto **was** here together with Emma Frost,” Cerebro said, quickly pulling up information from the archives about Magneto's profile. “And he **is** capable of planting such a virus. But - ” here Cerebro made a buzzing sound “ - in this case you're wrong. Nice theory though.”

“It seems to be self aware,” Betsy said. “Much, **much** more self aware than the usual artificial intelligence.”

“Yeah,” Cerebro said, nodding and looking at her with a wicked expression before paraphrasing an earlier statement of hers. “I'm a step up from most artificial intelligences,

Betsy. And don't you forget it!" Cerebro then laughed at the look on Warren and Betsy's faces.

Self aware and quite infantile! Betsy thought to herself.

"I don't think this is the work of Magneto," Peter said, after several minutes of contemplation.

"His sense of humor has never been taken to this level before. And given the dire circumstances I find it hard to believe that he'd be humorous at a time like this."

"Hank will have to investigate this thoroughly when he gets back," Kurt said. "For now, I think it best that we manually shut down Cerebro. You do have the code, do you not, Betsy?"

She nodded in the affirmative.

"Huh, shut down?!" Cerebro exclaimed, expression becoming fearful. "W-wait. There's no need to do any of that! Really!"

"Awe," Rogue said, thinking the AI to be quite cute - like a virtual pet. "I think he's scared."

"Rogue," Warren said exasperatedly, "it's a computer program. It's not alive."

"Be that as it may - it certainly **is** self aware," Betsy said.

*Not alive but self-aware, she thought to herself. Now **there's** a paradox if ever I heard one.*

Betsy directed their attention to the console. "And look at this. It's operating at a frequency that's closely matching human brainwaves. And..."

She paused as she took the time to scrutinize the information displayed on the monitor. "I'd been trying to locate Cerebro's system files to try and get **him** back online. I thought that maybe Cerebro's files had been kept under lock down by this other program but apparently..."

"Yeah? And?" Warren asked impatiently.

"Well, the thing is," Betsy said, "This AI **is** running using Cerebro's system files. I think it **is** Cerebro!"

"There must be some mistake," Rogue said, walking up to the console. The others followed her.

"No," Betsy said. "What's more, I checked the logs. The files **have** been altered. But the time at which they were altered is logged as -"

Betsy was nudged out of the way as the others commandeered the console. Soon they realized that what she had said was the truth. The AI before them was indeed running on

Cerebro's system files. And the files themselves had been altered days ago and therefore **not** by Magneto as they had originally thought.

"Hey, wait a minute," Rogue said. "The date and time of the changes is set right about when the attack by Magneto and the M.A.L.E. was going on. What if Magneto altered the files **before** trashing the place?"

"Lemme try something," Warren said. "Gimme some space."

The others complied and Warren sat down, typing away furiously.

"Guys, check this out," Warren finally said after several minutes. "I cross referenced the last user with the time of the file alterations. Now, if it **was** Magneto who altered the files, he would have had to have used a hack into the system since he's not authorized to use Cerebro. In the case of a hacked entry, the system wouldn't be able to tell us who modified the files. And..." Warren squinted at the screen. "It turns out that isn't the case."

"Who was using Cerebro at the time?" Kurt asked.

Warren typed in a command and the profile of the user came up on screen for all to see. Next to a photograph were the words in glowing red letters - Jonathan Grey Summers (Phoenix).

"John?" Rogue asked. "But he surely couldn't have reprogrammed Cerebro. He's not exactly a

genius.”

Betsy stared at the worried looking avatar who had gone silent (no doubt due to Kurt having suggested they shut him down). Of course John couldn't have reprogrammed Cerebro – Hank himself sometimes found it a task to do so whenever the system needed updating or debugging. And he **was** a certified genius. But the fact remained that Cerebro's protocols had been altered at a fundamental level while John was using the unit. So much so that the AI (Betsy was starting to believe) was truly sentient.

“Cerebro?” Betsy spoke up.

“Y-yeah?” the AI asked a little shakily.

“I'm going to make you a deal,” she announced. “If you help me try and locate my friends, we won't shut you down for the time being.”

The AI's expression lost some of its tension. The same could not be said of Betsy's companions. Especially the winged one.

“What the hell?!” Warren asked her. “We don't know what this thing is capable of or where its loyalties lie.”

“With you!” Cerebro said vehemently. “I'm a good guy! I didn't help Magneto when he asked

me to.”

“I ain't talking to you!” Warren said, angrily snapping at the avatar.

“You know,” Cerebro mused a little dreamily, “you were a whole lot cuter with your mouth shut.”

Everyone's jaw dropped at that.

“Did Cerebro just...” Kurt trailed off.

Rogue nodded. “...Yeah, I think he did.”

“Anyway, back to business,” Betsy said, sitting down at the console. “Do we have a deal?”

“Yeah,” Cerebro said. “We do.”

“Betsy, I really do think we should shut it down,” Warren said. “Who knows what mischief it might end up doing.”

“The external communications system is down so there's no way he can spread himself outside of the Subbasement network,” Betsy said, defending her decision to leave Cerebro active. “And as he certainly wasn't created by someone with bad intentions I don't think

there's any real danger. Altered or not – he **is** still Cerebro. And in order to use the machine to its full potential – like we need to right about now – he needs to be active.”

“It's not a **HE**, Betsy,” Warren said in frustration. “It's an...**IT**.”

“My decision stands,” Betsy said, glaring at Warren and mentally daring him to challenge her authority as most senior in rank.

“Fine,” Warren said to her tersely before turning to the avatar. “But I've got my eye on you.”

“Why, Warren,” Cerebro said, making its virtual cheeks redden mockingly. “I'm so flattered.”

Warren chose to ignore Cerebro's comment (as well as Rogue's and Peter's laughter). “You try anything funny and I'll pull your plug.”

“Oh, is that what you call it?” Cerebro asked with a grin and a wink. “You must **really** wanna *get me off* huh?”

“That's it!” Warren said, reaching for the console's master control switch. Not that it have done much good without the clearance code.

“Warren!” Betsy said, knocking his hand away with a resounding THWACK. Then she turned to the avatar. “And you – you had better behave yourself...er...young man. Now, let's

get started.”

“Yes, ma'am,” Cerebro said, expression growing serious. His image disappeared from the display on the wall, freeing it up for whatever might follow during Betsy's scans.

“Now, let's see if I can make contact with the others,” Betsy said, feeling the limits of her mind expand as the machine activated. “Ooh, yes. This is excellent,” Betsy mumbled, clearly pleased with Cerebro's performance.

Behind her stood a muttering Warren and Kurt as well as a giggling Rogue and Peter.

“Could you possibly go make your noise elsewhere?” Betsy asked with mild irritation.

They simmered down and allowed the telepath to work undisturbed...

It was a quarter past eight at night. To take his mind of his bad (but thankfully non-worsening) headache, John chose to rivet his attention on the television. Lorna too joined him behind the tube, leaving Alex for the time being to handle the responsibility of keeping vigilant. Even so, he found his mind wandering away from the task at hand every now and then. He was still worried about the risky situation they were all in and the fact that Lorna had made up her mind to remain – come what may. And so it was that he was taken a little by surprise at the KNOCK, KNOCK at the door.

Across the room, Lorna and John looked away from the TV and made to get up. Alex set then both at ease with a glance, wordlessly conveying the message that he would handle it. He got up, readying himself for anything untoward. He knew better than to check the peephole. That was a common mistake many people made, placing their head at precisely the level where the person on the other side of the door could fire a shot and be reasonably sure it got the target in the head.

Instead he called out, "Who is it?"

There was a brief pause before a female *voice* responded. However the reply was broadcast on the telepathic band.

Someone who's here to help.

It was Lilandra, who had wisely chosen to knock first before barging into anyone's mind. She didn't wish to overly shock anyone inside.

"What the -" Alex began, stepping back from the door instinctively.

This time Lorna did get to her feet. "Alex, what's wrong?" she whispered, glancing at the door warily.

It was John who answered, well aware of the telepathic presence. In times past he would have most likely have missed such a telepathic message targeted at one specific individual (that wasn't him). But now with his heightened sensitivity he *heard* it loud and clear with no straining at all.

"There's a telepath on the other side of the door," John explained to Lorna in a whisper, not daring to use his own telepathy due to the possibility of his message being similarly overheard by others it was not intended for. "A woman. She says she's here to help."

"Well, that sure as hell sounds suspicious," Lorna said, walking across the room and joining Alex. "It could be some kind of Brotherhood trick."

"I don't know," John said. "Other telepaths in the area might very well be sensing something off."

"In any event," Alex said, "why ask permission to enter? Magneto's taken an all out confrontational stance. With his kind of power AND the backing of the MALE, he doesn't need to use subtlety."

"Yeah, well subtlety may not be **his** style but he had that bitch -" Lorna cut herself off before she could blurt out that Magneto had the aid of Emma Frost.

John looked at her curiously. "Huh?"

"I mean," Lorna quickly said, "he had a telepathic girl with him. It could be one of her mind tricks."

"To what aim?" Alex asked. "Wouldn't she be better served using her telepathy to try and knock us out instead."

Hello? Lilandra asked again, uncertain if Alex was still inside the room. Being closer to the source of the telepathic emanations – John – was numbing her own psychic senses. All she could tell for certain at this proximity was that John was inside.

Alex didn't attempt to respond to her but turned to Lorna and John. "What do you think we should do?"

John looked at Lorna whilst simultaneously hovering her new cell phone over (courtesy of Marie Ange, they had all been outfitted with them to serve as non-suspicious communication devices). "Lorna, call the others and alert them. I don't want to risk mentally contacting them and having my message intercepted by our...visitor or her friends should she have any. Have them stake out the front and back."

Lorna nodded and began dialing Marie Ange, the most senior X-man present.

"Alex, I say we open the door and find out who she is," John said. "If she's just a fellow

mutant who happens to be staying here and is concerned...then we thank her for her concern and tell her everything's okay. Then we send her on her way."

"And if she isn't?" he asked.

"Then Generation X will handle the rest," John said, glancing at Lorna.

"Gen X have got us surrounded," she confirmed. "They're ready."

"Okay," John said. "Alex, open the door. Lorna, in case of an attack, you be ready to shield."

"Right," Lorna said resolutely. "Just in case though, I want you to be prepared too, okay?"

"She's a telepath Lorna," John said. "But that doesn't rule out the possibility that she might have some physical ability or such. Or she might even have someone else with her. If she or they are hostile, it's your job to protect us from a possible physical threat. As for the possible telepathic danger - I'll have to shield against that."

Alex's eyebrows raised dubiously. "Can you do that?"

John gave him a look. "All telepaths are taught those basics at the school. Okay, sure my telepathy back then left some to be desired. But I **have** got the basic method down. And I'm willing to bet that with my current level of psionic output - I'll be able to do a fair job of it."

"Okay, okay," Alex said defensively. "I was just asking. Sheesh."

Hello?

John and Lorna nodded, signaling him that they were ready.

"I'm coming!" Alex called out, walked up to the door and turned the handle.

The door swung open to reveal a middle aged woman with raven hair. Immediately upon seeing her, John had a mental flashback to the first time he'd met her - in the mall's car park on the night his father had been abducted by the Morlocks. The memory was vivid - in fact it could be classified as eidetic, total recall. She was...

"Lilandra..." John trailed off.

Alex and Lorna's stances became a tad bit less defensive.

"You know her?" Alex asked.

"Not...exactly," John said. "But we've met...the night dad...went missing."

Lilandra Neramani. So her card had said, as John recalled. She was the director of Rebirth

Center. Unconsciously his eyes trailed to her neck and sure enough she was wearing the symbol of her institution – the silver phoenix pendant. Before the latest turn of events it had been the plan of Xavier to infiltrate their mysterious organization and assess its true intent. As it now stood they had no clue as to the real aims of her group. For all they knew they could be just as bad as the Brotherhood.

“I see you remember me,” Lilandra said, eyeing Alex and Lorna. “May I come in?”

“I don't think that's such a good idea, lady,” Alex said.

“Very well,” Lilandra conceded.

“What are you doing here?” John asked.

“Like I said,” Lilandra replied, “I'm here to help. I'm aware of your current telepathic crisis of sorts.”

Both Alex and Lorna glanced at each other uneasily at that.

“No offense,” John said, “but you really can't expect me to allow you into my mind. You're a complete stranger and to be honest I don't know just what your intentions are. For all I know, you might have some kind of cult thing going on. What with the *twice blessed* talk and all -”

"Cult?!" Lorna gasped. She once more assumed a more defensive posture and stepped partially between John and Lilandra.

"Not that the word *cult* in the sense you seem to figure is appropriate," Lilandra said. "But why does that word frighten you so? It's merely a root word meaning a set of a beliefs and practices and adherents of such beliefs and practices. The word *culture* is derived from it."

"Enough with the etymology lesson," Alex said impatiently.

"Fine then," Lilandra said, before turning to John. "In regular circumstances I wouldn't be approaching the situation in such a brash manner. But as it is there isn't much choice. Your mind is quite unstable at the moment and you pose a danger to those around you, as well as yourself."

"We've got the situation under control," Alex said to that with as straight a face as he could manage.

Lilandra gave him a pointed look. "Do you now? Is that why the emanations from his mind have been steadily increasing in power and frequency for the last two days? Bang up job it is you're doing."

Lorna's eyes widened. "How did you know that? I mean - yeah you're a telepath. But there is a concept called range..."

"Yes there is," Lilandra said.

"What the hell is your range?" John asked. "And how did you find me?"

Especially when Professor Xavier hasn't yet? John thought.

"Let's just say I used a non-conventional method," Lilandra said. "Anyhow, back to the matter at hand. Unless we do something to limit those telepathic surges of yours, the people around you may soon start to be affected. Not to mention that you yourself might be overwhelmed by **their** thoughts and wind up going all crazy. Already it's dampening telepathic communications in the area, making it difficult for other telepaths to communicate."

John tried to think of what his father would have him do. This Lilandra was an unknown in the equation. Sure, it would be great if she could indeed help reinstall the telepathic blocks on his mind. But considering the circumstances it was probably best not to take any chances. Quite frankly, Professor Xavier was the most talented telepath on the planet. The best. And John didn't want anyone but the best performing what amounted to psychic surgery on his mind.

Besides, as the Professor had pointed out, his mind was unique. Surely not something that Lilandra would have encountered before. Even with the best intentions things could go

horribly wrong. At least Xavier had information from those tests he and Hank had run to help guide him. In any event, if things got too bad they still had the option of using the mutant suppressor drug he'd stolen. It would at least buy them some time and with any luck the others would have located them by then. Lilandra Neramani seemed to be an unnecessary risk.

"Thanks for the offer," John said. "But I'm going to have to pass."

"But you **must** reconsider," Lilandra began. "Surely you -"

"He's made his choice," Alex said. "Now if you don't mind..." he made to close the door but paused when John monopolized all their attention.

"Guys," John began. "We're being telepathically scanned. I sense at least three different minds trying to make it through the telepathic defenses I've placed about us."

Accusative eyes turned towards Lilandra, who immediately said, "Hey, I admit I didn't come here alone. But I've told my companions to back off and let me handle matters. I can assure you that it's not my people."

"She's right," John confirmed. "They seem familiar to me but I can't make them out."

"They could be the Prof-" Alex began, cutting himself off when he remembered that Lilandra

was still there. "They could be the others."

"Maybe," John said. "But I'm keeping the defenses up. One of those telepaths makes me...uneasy." John turned toward Lilandra. "Look, I think it's time for you to go."

"But-" she began.

"Go!" Lorna snapped, shutting the door on Lilandra.

"Alert the rest of Gen X," John said to Lorna as soon as the door was shut. "I can't be absolutely sure. But one of the telepaths who were scanning us didn't strike me as a **friendly** sort. She could be that MALE telepath. We'd best be prepared for anything."

"Right," Lorna said, reaching for her phone to dial Marie Ange. She dialed and placed the device to her ear. A look of bewilderment swept across her face. "Stupid service here..." She hit redial and growled in frustration as once again the call didn't go through.

Alex reached for his phone and handed it to her. "Here. The antenna in this one seems to be stronger. The service signal bars are always a little higher on mine than on yours."

"Good idea," Lorna said, dialing once more on Alex's phone.

Before she could punch in the third digit, however, there was an earthshaking crash outside.

Lorna instinctively put up a shield around them. And not a moment too soon as shards of broken glass blew inwards from the windows. Terrified screams could be heard from the outside as the motel's patrons ran for dear life. The surge of such strong emotions made John wince.

"Shit," Lorna swore. With the activation of her powers she could now sense it – an electromagnetic force blanketing the area that was **not** of her doing. No doubt it had been responsible for the cell phone trouble moments before. She quickly relayed this information to the others.

On hearing that bit of news John felt his legs weaken (still further after the jarring shock just before) and had to lean against the wall for support.

Alex ran to the now gaping hole where a window once stood and peered out. At the border of the motel's property lay a medium sized jet that currently was going up in smoke. Keen eyed as ever, Alex could make out the blue "4" painted onto it's side. It could only mean **one** thing.

"The Fantastic Four," he said in some surprise. "Their jet is outside. Crashed."

"What?" John asked, rushing to the window to see for himself. "Fantastic Four?!" John exclaimed, remembering the familiar mental patterns of the minds scanning them a little while ago. "I think...I think they're here! They must have went to the Fantastic Four for help!"

"Easy there," Alex said. "If what Lorna told us is true then Magneto is also out there."

"Yeah," Lorna said worriedly. "He must have crashed the plane. I sure hope they made it out okay."

"Of course they did," John said. "And even if they didn't, the Invisible Woman could have easily shielded them from impact. Her force shields are almost impenetrable I hear."

"Can you sense them?" Lorna asked.

John closed his eyes and tried to concentrate. "No. I just hear lots of...voices murmuring. Familiar thought patterns but nothing distinct. I guess it's the downside of this increased sensitivity. I sense **everything** and it's all mixed up. I can't selectively choose what I want to detect - it's all or nothing."

Some more blasts raided the air but the three of them couldn't see anything (due to the lights outside being blown apart by the shock wave created by the crashed aircraft).

"That sounded like it came from the front," Alex said. "They must be duking it out in the front parking lot. We'd better get moving."

"Yeah, we'll be at a disadvantage in a confined space," John said. "Besides, they'll have their hands full with Magneto and will probably need all the help they can get." At that John began

walking towards the front door but was promptly stopped by Lorna.

“Whoa!” she said. “Just where do you think you're going?”

“To help -” John said before being interrupted by Alex.

“No, you're not,” Alex said vehemently. “We're going to get you as far away from here as possible.”

More explosions, quickly followed by shouts, could be heard in the distance.

“Okay, so we run,” John said. “And Magneto just comes after us again. Over and over like a stuck record?”

Alex didn't know what to say to that.

“Your father would want us to get you away,” Lorna said, trying to reason with her nephew.

“True,” John said.

“I thought Magneto scared the hell outta you,” Alex said, looking bewildered.

“Yeah, he does. But that's what courage means - doing something even though you might be

scared shitless," John said, repeating something that Logan had once told his squad. "Pardon the language. Logan's words, not mine. Unless Magneto is put down hard he is just going to keep coming after me. And our running away must be doing wonders for his already over bloated sense of self-confidence. What if we end up being the ones who tilt the scale in our favor? Guys, I don't think I can live like this. I felt like I was going out of my mind these couple of days - and not just telepathically."

"I don't know..." Lorna trailed off, jumping a little as the ground shook beneath their feet.

"Look, if we intend to get anywhere fast we need to make it to the Hawk," John said, pointing with his hand. "And it's parked in the woods, which is quite a ways **that way** from the motel."

"He's right," Alex said. "We gotta go through the thick of the action anyway."

"How about we compromise?" John offered. "We try to make it to the jet and get the heck outta here. But if we can't - we kick ass, no holds barred."

Lorna and Alex looked at each other, saw no alternative, and nodded.

"Just one more thing," John said. "Lilandra said that I was radiating mental energy. It's how she found me apparently. The MALE telepath just might be able to track me down using those psionic pulses as a guide. So running might not help us much. And if Magneto brings

down the Hawk while we're in it like he did to the Fantastic Four's plane - I really don't think either Lorna or I will be able to shield against the impact."

John looked at them both meaningfully. Finally, they crumbled.

"Oh alright," Alex said with a groan. "I guess there's really no choice is there?"

"No, I don't think there is," John said with repentant shake of his head. "I'm just sorry that you guys had to get dragged into all of this -"

"Stop right there," Lorna interrupted. "We don't want to end up arguing like before."

"Yeah, you're right," Alex agreed, leading the way to the back door. "We take no chances.

Alright?"

"Right," Lorna and John said together.

"Let's do this then," Alex said, resignedly. "And try not to think of Scott tearing us all new ones when it's all over..."

"Just what the hell is going on here?!" Ken asked as he and the rest of Lilandra's number took cover behind two vans in the parking lot. "That guy with the cape over there is Magneto!"

One of the most wanted and infamous terrorists on the planet...

Across the car park an all out battle was being waged by Magneto, his henchmen and the MALE versus Professor Xavier, the X-men, Generation X and the Fantastic Four.

"I'm not exactly sure," Lilandra said, sighing in frustration as she tried to extract information from the minds in the area. "Thanks to Jonathan, all telepathic communication and probing is being dampened. He seems to be nervous and his mind is acting up even more. I have the distinct feeling that this has something to do with him though."

"I told you guys that you should have just tried to place blocks on his powers," Ken continued. "Instead of wasting time trying to talk with them. What the hell did **that** accomplish, eh? They shut the door in your face."

"We can't just go delving into people's minds without permission, Ken," Lilandra said.

"Especially if we want them to trust us in the future. He would no doubt have detected something was off. He was able to tell that we were being scanned shortly before this brawl began."

"I'm sure if we had the time to explain things properly," Tessa said, "he would have listened. His mother was quite reasonable when we approached her. It's not your fault, Lilandra."

"You're right," Lilandra said. "Well, there's only one thing to do now. We have got to help them. I don't know what plans Magneto has for that boy but they can't be good. Let's go!"

At that, all five of them emerged from their hiding places and entered the fray...

With amazing agility the Human Torch executed perfect evasive maneuvers, dodging hex bolt after hex bolt that the MALE's Scarlet Witch threw at him. His luck soon came to an end though.

"What the hell?!" the Torch exclaimed in surprise as he found his flames being pulled away from his body and extinguished.

Behind him, Pyro was manipulating the Torch's flames and rendering him powerless. The Human Torch began to plummet down to the ground below.

"Johnny!" Susan a.k.a. The Invisible Woman cried out, temporarily turning her attention away from Toad (who she had repelled with her force field) in order to surround her brother in a protective force bubble and lower him down to safety away from any immediate attackers. Once that was done she ran around the corner of the building to make sure no one was lurking in the darkened area, waiting to surprise them.

"Ah!" she cried out as Toad took a cheap shot and tongue whipped the back of her knees

whilst her attention was diverted.

The slimy green villain performed one of his gravity defying leaps, preparing to stomp the Invisible Woman into submission while she was winded from the initial assault. It was not to be, however, as a ray of energized plasma came streaking across the field, blowing him clear away and into a nearby clump of trees. The Invisible Woman quickly got to her feet in time to see three individuals running up to her position.

“Are you alright?” one of them, a blond man, asked.

The Invisible Woman nodded. “Yes. I'm fine. Thanks for the help.” She scrutinized the other two quickly, immediately recognizing the red haired boy from the photograph the X-men had shared with them before their departure from the Baxter Building. “Jonathan Summers I presume.”

The boy, clearly speechless at meeting one of his personal heroes, could only nod.

Lorna quickly introduced themselves. “I'm Lorna,” she said. “And this is Alex, Scott's...er should I say Cyclops...”

“It's alright,” the Invisible Woman replied. “We know who he is.”

“Well, that's Alex,” Lorna continued. “His brother.”

"Okay," Susan said. "I want you three to stick with me. Alright?"

Finally John found his voice. "Yeah. You got it!" he said with admiration in his tone (as if the look on his face weren't enough).

Despite the dire circumstances, Alex found the time to nudge him and grin a tad bit wickedly. Lorna cleared her throat and the two of them reddened a little.

"Where's Magneto?" Lorna asked, looking around and not seeing the Master of Magnetism.

Thunder rumbled overhead at about the same time Susan pointed to the sky. "Storm blew him upwards into the lower atmosphere," Susan said. "She's trying her best to keep him there as long as she can. The rest of us are attempting to neutralize the others while he's unable to support them but it's no small task."

"But you're the Fantastic Four," John said. "You kick ass!"

"Even so," Susan said with a small smile, "They're remarkably well trained. I hear Mystique had a hand in that."

John nodded. "Yeah. We got her locked up in the Hawk for now."

"Where is the Hawk?" Susan asked.

Alex indicated the direction with his arm.

"Damn," Susan said. "To get there you'd have to--"

"We know," Lorna said. "We'd actually decided we might as well just make a stand here."

Something suddenly occurred to John. If he could find and convince Professor Xavier to remove the telekinetic blocks from his mind, then maybe the telekinetic equivalent of what had happened to his telepathy might occur. With the increased telekinetic power coming in a surge he might be able to use it offensively and help turn the fight. After all, look at what he did to the Danger Room. If anything, it might make Magneto think twice about coming after him again. "Where is Professor Xavier?"

"He's busy dealing with the MALE's telepath," Susan said, indicating the area around the corner of the building. "With all of the electromagnetism in the area her powers are being boosted. As if that weren't bad enough Professor Xavier also has to deal with Emma Frost and --"

Too late did Susan see Alex and Lorna shaking their heads vigorously behind John's back. At the mention of the name, Frost, John's blood really did run cold.

"Emma is here?" he asked tightly.

Susan nodded, quickly realizing that she had made a mistake in mentioning the renegade X-man. But it was pointless to try and cover it up now. "Yeah, she is. I understand you all have had some trouble with her turning on you."

"Oh yeah," Lorna said. She turned to John, who was by now fuming. "You okay, sweetie?"

"No, I am not!" John said angrily. The windows of several nearby cars shattered as his telekinetic powers flared, reflecting his state of mind. "I **told** them that Happy Valley was too **good** for that bitch! They shoulda sent her ass to jail! I'm sure the Professor coulda worked something out if he'd wanted to."

The mention of jail brought something else to Susan's memory. "Oh, one more thing," she said, bring them up to date. "Magneto also busted out Sabretooth and Avalanche from prison."

"This just keeps getting worse and worse," Alex groaned.

"I suppose I should be flattered that he thinks I'm such a threat." John said bitterly. "Come on, let's not waste anymore time and just do what we gotta do."

"My thoughts exactly," a new (male) voice said, intruding into the conversation.

All four turned in the direction of the sound to see three individuals standing in aggressive postures. One was so inhumanly obese that he could count as twenty and could only be the MALE member referred to as the Blob. The second was the flame manipulating Pyro, a ball of fire already hovering above his palm in anticipation of the upcoming fight. And the third, the one who had spoken, was a rather tall and muscular man whose entire body, save his head, was encased in dull gray, metallic body armor. He could only be the infamous Avalanche.

Without wasting anymore time the three of them charged. John and Alex had to leap out of the way as the incredibly fast and agile (for his size) Blob lunged at them with the intention of flattening them both under his bulk. At the same time Lorna took to the air to avoid being toppled by the seismic wave assault courtesy of Avalanche. Susan for her part was kept busy preventing her premature cremation at the hand of Pyro and his searing flames.

“Hold still!” Blob bellowed, getting to his feet and lunging at John again in vain.

“As if!” John shouted back as he jumped out of the way yet again.

Thank God for agility training, John thought to himself.

Trying to distract the obese mutant away from John, Alex aimed a plasma blast at Blob's rear to good effect.

“Ow!” the fat one screamed, turning around to face Alex, his face a bloated and grotesque mask of rage. “I’m gonna pound ya into the ground for that!”

Alex said nothing in reply, just powered up once more and unleashed a steady beam of plasma to try and push back the ever advancing Blob...to little effect. The momentum Blob was traveling with was overcoming the repelling force and his thick blubber provided excellent protection from the searing nature of the beam.

“Hey, lard ass!” John shouted, trying to distract Blob (who was by then within ten feet of his uncle) without any luck. Finally he had to resort to telekinetically ripping out two metal benches from the ground and hurling them at the Blob's head. This was quickly followed by several trashcans, a concrete partition and finally a volley of bricks. All hit their target, serving as more as an annoyance than as a major blow.

“Fuck!” Blob swore, turning around once more to face John and thus lessening the pressure on Alex. “Two can play at that game!”

At that Blob punched his fist through the front window of a car next to him, got a solid grip on the metal body of it and threw it towards John, who (knowing he couldn't run away in time) instantly put up a shield. It was stopped in midair though by Lorna's magnetic manipulation.

John looked upwards and smiled, breathing a sigh of relief. The look Lorna gave Blob was a

murderous one as, eyes blazing green, she hurled the car towards him, knocking him across the car park. When it wasn't enough to put him down for the count, she began using the car as a battering ram to pummel the chunk of blubber into submission. Some fifteen smacks later, Blob **finally** went down with a groan and a curse.

Lorna landed next to John's position and Alex quickly ran up to them. A short distance away Susan was holding her own, shielding herself from the torrent of flame Pyro dished out as well as attempting to squeeze Avalanche unconscious with her unseen force field. It was pretty evident that she was tiring though.

"We have to help her," Lorna said, taking to the air once more. "You stay here, John."

"But-"

"No arguments!" Lorna snapped, her eyes flashing green (which was always very intimidating).

"Yes, ma'am," was all he could say.

Alex followed after her, his hands already surrounded by a yellow glow as he primed up another plasma blast. Whilst John was distracted watching the scene unfold, a long, slithering tongue emerged from the nearby bushes along the ground. Toad, who had been thrown by Susan into the trees at the edge of the car park, had decided to skulk around until an

opportunity to take someone by surprise presented itself. And it seemed like such an opportunity had finally come along as all of the adults were occupied, leaving Jonathan Summers alone for the moment.

The venomous tongue slithered silently, ever closer to the distracted boy's position. Just before Toad could succeed in ensnaring the boy, however, someone reached for his neck. The sliminess of his skin prevented them from getting a good grip, but the shock of it caused him to yelp...which was enough to alert John, who immediately turned around and saw the long tongue on the ground behind him.

"Damn!" he said, putting some distance between himself and it.

Moments later painful screams could be heard from the bushes, which also shook violently, as Toad was punched and kicked senseless by an unknown man (one of Lilandra's accomplices). John squinted, straining his eyes to get a better look in the darkness as an exceedingly tall, muscled up man dressed in simple blue jeans and a black tee emerged from the bushes dragging a dazed Toad out with him. As he stepped into the light something around his neck glinted. Upon closer visual examination John saw that it was one of the pendants that Lilandra and her people wore.

The man tossed Toad onto the ground and then grimaced as he saw the state of his fists and forearms, covered as they were in the foul slime of the amphibious mutant.

“Ugh,” he groaned, wiping his hands furiously on the back of his tee shirt. When he was finished he gave Toad one final kick to the side to make sure he was incapacitated and then walked towards John. “You alright?”

John nodded. “Yeah. I take it you're with Lilandra?”

The man nodded. “Yeah. Name's Cal.”

John opened his mouth to introduce himself but didn't get the chance to as an electromagnetic force field materialized between them, courtesy of Lorna.

“Get back from that guy,” Alex called out.

John complied but pointed to the unconscious Toad saying, “Toad was about to try a fast one behind my back. But Cal over there stopped him. He's with Lilandra.”

“Oh. I still think we should watch him though,” Lorna whispered, before lowering the shield.

“Uh, thanks for your help,” Alex said, feeling obliged to say it even though he didn't trust the newcomer.

“No problem,” Cal replied, while walking over to a sign, ripping it out of the ground and bending the metal pole upon which it was hoisted. “You all had better get moving. I'll just

tied these four up.”

Susan nodded, then turned to her charges. “Alright. Professor Xavier explained to us all about the telepathic thing you got going on, Jonathan. So I know the opposing telepaths will likely be able to track you. But I'm still going to try and sneak you guys outta here by rendering you invisible. It might not work but it's worth a shot. Okay?”

The three of them were agreeable. Not that John had much hope that it would do much good anyway.

“Okay, here goes,” Susan said. “You might find it a little awkward to coordinate your movements at first since you won't be able to see your limbs. But it's easy to adapt. And here...we...go...”

The sound of Storm screaming drew all eyes upwards to the sky. A beam of electromagnetic force emanated from above, blasting the Weather Witch down to the earth below. Before she could collide with terra firma, her descent was slowed and finally stopped courtesy of Julian's/Hellion's telekinesis. He levitated her barely moving form behind the relative safety of the now ruined motel's walls.

“Ororo,” Julian called desperately as he began to check her vitals. A thin trickle of blood was issuing from her nose but thankfully her pulse was strong and regular and she was breathing

on her own, if somewhat laboriously.

She stirred, eyes resuming their regular azure tint.

“Ororo, can you hear me?” Julian asked, squeezing her hand partly for attention and partly for comfort.

A strained look of focus appeared on her face. “Just...stunned...” She struggled to continue. “...manipulated iron in blood.” It was all she could manage and finally slumped unconscious. Julian, however, got the gist of her brief explanation.

Breathing a sigh of relief that things were not worse with her, Julian set her down gently on the ground, peeked around the corner and dedicated his attention to the fray. Magneto had by then descended from the sky, surrounded by a brilliantly white and aggressively pulsing glow. His appearance resulted in him being targeted by a variety of ranged attacks courtesy of the gathered X-men and Fantastic Four – not the least of which were full strength optic blasts courtesy of Cyclops, and salvo after salvo of fireballs launched by the Human Torch. The air around the Master of Magnetism shimmered as his signature magnetic shield coalesced from the ether, encasing him in a near impenetrable bubble that showed no signs of weakening.

Distracted by the goings on of the battle – the second really major one that Generation X had ever faced (the recent mission at Alkali being the first) – Julian failed to notice that he was

being targeted for attack himself by one of the MALE, a girl who seemed to have a penchant for tight, fitted red leather. The bolt of probability altering energy she hurled his way, however, did not get a chance to strike its mark having been intercepted by a telekinetic shield that materialized between him and it.

“Dammit!” the Scarlet Witch swore at her failed attempt to eliminate one of the opposing side’s prime defensive members.

Julian quickly turned at the sound of her voice to find a man (in his early twenties or so) to his right, and a shield between them and the Scarlet Witch (who was by then blasting the barrier with bolt after bolt in the hopes of wearing it and its maker down).

“Who the hell are you?” Julian asked, getting into a defensive stance.

“Name’s Ken. And I’m the guy who just saved your ass,” the unknown man answered a tad bit sarcastically. “Duh.”

Julian opened his mouth to say something to that but was forestalled.

“Yes - I know you must be confused,” this Ken said. “No - I and my people not with them. Yes - we’re here to help. No - you can't afford to **not** trust us. And yes - we’ll explain when things calm down. Okay?”

Julian nodded somewhat dumbly, risking a glance behind his shoulder at the main battle.

Squinting a little, he could just make out two unknown women in the distance who were standing next to Professor Xavier. All three were facing Emma Frost (who had assumed her diamond form to render herself immune to their combined telepathic might) and the MALE telepath, Wits, who was on her knees grasping her head...doing her utmost to maintain her defenses but obviously failing. Since the Professor seemed willing to accept the aid of these newcomers, Julian put his reservations aside.

"Look," Ken finally said. "I'm kinda new to this telekinetic thing and can't maintain this shield forever. It's taking up a fair bit of my focus anyway. So would you mind dealing with _"

"Got it," Julian said, focusing his telekinetic grasp on the struggling Scarlet Witch. He throttled her for a bit before shutting her mouth and nostrils. Eventually, she passed out from lack of oxygen and he flung her back out into the car park. She collided with the ground in a manner that looked to be most painful, bumped once or twice, eventually stabilizing in an unnatural position. "Oops," Julian said nonchalantly. "I sure hope she didn't break anything."

"Your...friend over there..." Ken asked, pointing to the still unconscious Storm. "Is she okay? Can we leave her here?"

Julian nodded. "Yeah, it's about as safe a place as any. She's just stunned."

“Good,” Ken replied, pointing to the former car park. Magneto had since begun levitating the wrecked shells of motor vehicles into the air. “Cuz I really think we should get our asses over there.”

“Fall back!” Logan’s shout rang across the frenzied battlefield. “Take cover behind the building and spread out!”

The X-men, Mr. Fantastic, The Thing and the Human Torch followed his command, dragging the wounded with them behind the ruined motel. Magneto smirked wryly at the thought of a building in shambles possibly being able to protect them from him. With a mere gesture the very foundations of what was left of the motel shattered and so did the structure itself.

The X-men had no choice but to hightail it into the nearby woods, taking the unconscious Storm with them (as they’d seen her lying on the ground). The trees, however, were none too sturdy so they couldn’t be relied upon to serve as effective cover.

“So much for **that** idea,” Johnny Storm/The Human Torch said with some sarcasm. He was all for standing his ground and fighting to the last – not retreating a.k.a. running away.

“Surrender the boy to me, X-men,” Magneto’s voice boomed overheard even before he came into view, “and I might just spare your lives...even after the considerable inconvenience you

have put me through. You can't really ask for a better deal than that now can you?"

No one bothered to gratify him with a reply, and so another car came sailing through the air aimed right towards their location. Remy and Hank were only saved from being flattened by the quick actions of Kitty/Shadowcat, who rendered them intangible just in the nick of time.

Hellion, Skids and Ken immediately raised their respective shields providing temporary respite from further bombardments, allowing those gathered some breathing room and time to regroup and plan.

The loud crashes and earthshaking tremors finally proved to be enough to rouse Storm and she stood, supported by Marie Ange/Tarot and Alison Blaire/Dazzler.

"Any sign of John so far?" Ororo asked, finally over her previous near paralysis.

Scott shook his head. "No. Thankfully. Maybe Alex and Lorna managed to get him outta here."

"Incorrect," the newcomer known as Lilandra said with certainty.

Professor Xavier nodded in agreement. "He's still around here somewhere. His psychic emanations are blanketing the area. I can't seem to communicate with him...or anyone else for that matter."

“At least the telepathic attack frequencies haven’t been affected,” the woman accompanying Lilandra said. “For now anyway.”

Professor Xavier nodded, thankful for small blessings, and continued. “John’s telepathic sphere of influence is by now quite large, so pinpointing him down to one small area will be difficult – which may actually be a godsend. Just in case Emma Frost were to attempt to track him. She’s in diamond form for the time being, but goodness knows for how long she’ll be willing to sacrifice her telepathy for durability.”

The Weather Witch looked around at the individuals around her. There were three newcomers – one man and two women – but some of her comrades were missing. “The others?”

“Probably around the back,” Logan replied. “Can’t say for sure since we can’t link up with the comm. badges. Magneto’s powers fried ‘em.”

“I haven’t seen Sue since she saved my hide from that chick in red leather earlier,” Johnny said, sounding worried.

Indeed, the Fantastic Four were down to three.

“Two of my people are unaccounted for as well,” Lilandra added.

“Well, at least the MALE’s numbers have dwindled too,” Scott said. “Blob, Pyro and Toad have vanished.”

“Not to mention Avalanche,” Tarot said with some relief. “He could have caused some real problems right about now. We so don’t need to deal with death from above **and** below.”

“Damn shame Magneto came down on us when he did,” Logan grumbled. “I almost had Sabretooth.”

“Alright, people. We’re wasting time.” Scott said authoritatively, putting them all into focus again. “For the time being, we have to deal with Magneto, Emma Frost and that speedy guy – er – what’s he call himself again?”

“Quicksilver,” Professor Xavier helpfully provided.

“Right,” Scott continued. “Them three. We won't worry about the others for now, but are not to assume they’re out of commission. First thing’s first – we get rid of his support. Skids, we’re going to need that frictionless force field of yours to deal with Quicksilver. He needs a running surface and if you *provide* him with a frictionless one he won’t be going anywhere fast. Then it’s a simple matter for anyone with a ranged attack to take him out.”

Skids nodded. “Right, I understand. So basically I spread my field all across the ground

around him.”

Scott nodded. “You got it. Now as to Emma Frost – she’s currently immune to telepathy but super strong and durable. The best person for the job I’d wager would be The Thing.” Scott turned towards the hulking orange brute.

“But won't ya need my help with Magneto?” Ben asked, a little surprised that he was being asked to handle Frost when he felt his immense strength could be put to better uses.

“Emma may be superhumanly strong now, but against a brute force of sufficient potency she cannot resist,” Professor Xavier said, recalling how easily she was dispatched by Colossus while in her diamond form. “You are such a force Mr. Grimm. I’m confident that you will single handedly be able to deal with her as long as she’s in her diamond form and can’t access her telepathy. Against Magneto however...well no offense...but brute force will be more of a liability.”

“Yeah,” Johnny said patting Ben’s back in mock consolation. “Defeating Magneto will take tact and skill, Ben. So let us handle it, huh.”

“Watch it, Johnny,” Reed said with a warning edge to his voice, playing peacemaker now that Sue wasn’t there to assume the role. “The first order of business should be to get rid of his shield,” Reed continued. “And the fact that it’s magnetic in nature has given me an idea.”

“What?” Ororo asked hopefully.

“Well, magnetic fields have two points of origin – a north pole and a south pole,” Reed explained. “Nearest to those points the field is strongest. But the area that is at maximum distance away from those points is the weakest.”

“Of course...” Hank said, feeling like kicking himself for never having seen the obvious.

“You’re losing your touch, Hank,” Reed said with a small smirk.

“But how on earth do we figure out where those points are?” Ken asked.

“Well, since they are the strongest parts of the field,” Reed says, “it would seem logical that Magneto will have one of those poles located directly in front of him to protect against frontal attack. His style is to **face** his enemies head on. So he’ll want his front to be well protected.”

“You’re right,” Logan said. “That’s where most of the attacks will come from too.”

“And I’m guessing,” Reed said, “that the next point might be to his back, to protect against a sneak attack.”

“Not to mention,” Hank said, “that since magnetic poles need to be directly **opposite** to each other – if one’s to the front, then the other **must** be to the back. What were you saying about

my touch, Reed?"

"Touche," Reed replied. "So all we need to do--"

"But why not the side?" Julian asked. "Why can't the poles be located to Magneto's sides?"

"Oh even I know **that** one," Logan said with some pride. "All magneto has to do is glance sideways to see threats and deal with them. But he can't see to the back of him for nothin'. So having his...pole to his back takes precedence over having 'em to the sides. Right?"

"Right," Hank confirmed. "I'm impressed, Logan."

"Now the field will still be quite durable even at its points of weakness," Reed warned. "So don't anyone think that this will be easy. But at least now we might have some more luck getting through to him if we focus our attacks near a point of weakness in the field."

Scott nodded. "You heard the man. Avoid attacking Magneto directly to the front or the back. Aim for the sides, directly below or above - but watch out for a possible counterstrike. Any questions?"

Kitty's hand went up.

"Yes?" Scott asked.

“Er, don’t you think Magneto’s being a little **too** quiet all of a sudden?” she asked.

She was right – the bombardment had since stopped without any of them noticing it. It was not like Magneto to withdraw once he had committed to an attack, so they had to assume that he was up to something.

“Alright, we move out now,” Scott said. “Keep your eyes open and be ready for anything.”

Meanwhile, in the woods on the other side of the motel compound...

John, Alex and Lorna were being led towards the Hawk by Susan. All were under the influence of her powers, and thus completely invisible. It turned out that she had been able to sneak them past the battlefield after all. Alex and Lorna were grateful, but a part of John was a little disappointed that he would not be a part of the fight. Especially as it was a fight that hinged upon **him** in the first place.

They’d managed to sneak out of the compound and into the surrounding woods. The aim was to circle around one of the smaller hills to put as much distance between them and the fight, and then head towards the Hawk where Alex, Lorna and John were to take off and go as far away as possible – like the X-men leadership would no doubt have insisted upon had they been the ones to find John.

Ahead of the other three, Susan paused and whispered, "Guys, stop."

Alex, Lorna and John obeyed immediately.

"What is it?" Lorna asked, in a whisper herself.

Susan looked around, scanning the shadowy surroundings of the woods. "I just thought I heard something."

"I didn't hear anything," Alex said, checking the vicinity for himself.

"Me neither," John added, dismissing Susan's concern.

Susan finally shook her head. "Must just be my nerves acting - "

She didn't get the chance to finish her sentence. She was, however, proven wrong. A tall, muscular male figure with wild blond locks, sharp pointed fingers and feline eyes lunged at her with blurring speed. Invisible though she was, he hit his mark and brought her down beneath him. Concentration broken, she faded back into view - as did her three charges.

"Just because I can't **see** ya," Sabretooth said maliciously, "don't mean I can't **smell** ya." He took a dramatically long sniff of her hair. "Love your shampoo. You smell mighty fine by the

way.”

“And you smell like a wet dog,” Susan replied, grimacing as the man above rubbed against her in an obscene manner.

“Susan!” Lorna shouted, arm raised to blast Sabretooth away from his captive.

Alex held her back. “Don’t! He’s got a real tight grip on her. If you knock him back he’ll just take her with him.”

“And he just might slash her out of spite too,” John warned.

Sabretooth tightened his grip on Susan and brought one hand up to her neck. Claws extended from his fingertips and they were poised at the Invisible Woman’s jugulars. “Don’t be tryin’ any of your force field tricks,” he said, lightly raking his claws against the soft skin of her neck for emphasis. “Unless you think you can form one before I can rip your throat out.” He then turned towards the other three. “Ah, so there’s the little runt.”

John stepped back a few paces, mental fingers just on the telekinetic trigger in case Sabretooth were to try something.

“Guys,” Susan said, “head for the jet.”

"Shut up you!" Sabretooth snapped, throttling Susan, before turning to the others once more.

"You're going to lose anyway you slice it. So, why don't you just hand the runt over and that way you lose one -" Sabretooth shook Susan a little to drive his point home, "instead of two... or more."

"We can't just leave her here," John whispered to Alex and Lorna, not taking his eyes off Sabretooth's claws for even an instant.

"**We** won't," Alex responded. "**You** will. Go on to the jet, sit tight and wait for us."

"But -"

The look Alex gave him brooked no disobedience and John knew when he was beaten. He slowly began to withdraw from the scene, which did not sit well with Sabretooth. He tossed Susan aside and lunged.

"Run!" Lorna shouted, manipulating her magnetic force field to try and ensnare the feral mutant.

Alex meanwhile was checking Susan's condition while Lorna held Sabretooth at bay. She had hit her head pretty hard on a tree trunk upon being thrown and was knocked out. Aside from that she appeared to be unhurt.

"We can handle him," Lorna said to the stalling John. "We'll meet you at the Hawk. Now go!"

John nodded stiffly, turned and ran.

"I've been expecting you," Mystique said with a smile as Magneto stepped into the Hawk (after manipulating its metal doors open).

After following his fleeing adversaries into the wooded area surrounding the motel compound, Magneto had detected a rather sizeable mass of metal located somewhere in said forest. It was small matter for him to guess that it could only be the jet that Jonathan Summers and the others had fled in. It was his intention to disable any possible means of escape (quietly so that none would realize it until it was too late). Finding Mystique inside the aircraft, however, was a welcome surprise.

"I'm sorry, my dear," Magneto replied, releasing her restraints. "But I had to make a few stops before coming here. And it's been one inconvenience after the other. It was purely by chance that we even found this location in the first place."

Mystique wrung her raw wrists as her shackles fell off with a clatter. The mutant power suppressors she had been dosed with had not yet worn off. She wasted no time in informing Magneto of this fact.

"Pity," Magneto said. "You, of course, are an able martial artist. But considering we're also up against the Fantastic Four...and some other people...I'd have much preferred that you were fully empowered."

"Fantastic Four? Other people?" Mystique asked confusedly.

"Oh yes," Magneto said. "But you'll see soon enough. We'd best be on our way. I haven't seen or heard heads or tails of that boy since we arrived and the clock is ticking. After all the ruckus we raised it will only be a matter of time before the authorities arrive at the scene. After you."

Mystique nodded and walked towards the door. At the threshold, however, she stopped suddenly and shut the (partially open) door, turning around with a grin that was both devious and grateful (at their luck).

"What is it?" Magneto asked, stepping forward, ready to go on the offensive.

"Peep through the glass and see for yourself," she said mysteriously as she stepped aside.

Magneto shrugged and approached the small glass panel on the door. Several seconds later he too smirked. He turned around to see Mystique with her finger across her lips and a syringe in her hand.

“Shackle me up again so he doesn’t see me loose. That way he won’t suspect anything as soon as he enters,” she whispered softly. “And hide in the side cabin. I will distract him and then you do the rest with **this**.” She tossed the syringe of the self-same mutant suppressor drug that she had been dosed with to Magneto.

Together they assumed their positions and waited for Jonathan Summers to enter the Hawk...

“I don’t get it,” Scott grumbled as he and some others reassembled in what was the front car park of the motel. “Where the hell did Magneto get to?”

By then all of Lilandra’s accomplices had joined the larger group. It was verified that Avalanche, Pyro, Blob and Toad were all tied up thanks to Cal. Quicksilver had since been taken down by Skids, as was the Scarlet Witch courtesy of Julian. Wits, the MALE telepath, had not yet recovered from Professor Xavier’s, Lilandra’s and Sibyl’s psychic stun. Emma Frost lay on the ground, muttering weakly in her regular form, after having been beaten into submission by The Thing minutes before.

The X-men for the most part were avoiding Emma as much as they could, choosing to leave her to The Thing (in case she were to try making a dash for it) and Professor Xavier who (though not immediately present) was keeping a telepathic lookout for any attacks she might

make. Everyone knew that if they focused on Emma at the moment they'd likely lose their cool and waste valuable time and energy, berating her for the fact that she was working with Magneto (on so heinous a mission as the murder of a minor).

This only left Sabretooth and Magneto still unaccounted for.

"Any luck?" Scott asked Ororo as she swooped down from above.

"None whatsoever," Ororo said with regret at the fruitlessness of her aerial reconnaissance.

Scott let out a deep, frustrated breath and leaned against the not too sturdy wall of the motel.

"Dammit." The X-men leader turned to the small group of Generation X members (accompanied by Hank and Remy) who were returning from carrying out a ground search.

"How about you guys?"

"No sign of Magneto," Remy replied, adding more sympathetically. "Or John and the others."

"The thought of Sabretooth unaccounted for makes me nervous," Hank said. "Especially due to his healing factor. Even if someone were to have seriously wounded him and he fled - it's just a small matter of time before he's in top fighting form again. He's out there somewhere - and so are John, Alex, Lorna and Susan. Forget Magneto for now, we need to comb the woods around here and try to find Jonathan and the others manually."

“We cannot afford to split up into small groups and enter those woods,” Scott insisted. “That would make us prime pickings for Sabretooth’s tactics. He can see better in the dark, smell us before we even get close to him, is stronger and faster than the overwhelming majority of us...not to mention has far more experience than Generation X. It would be sending them like sheep to be slaughtered.”

Personally, though, Scott agreed with Hank. If it were only up to him then he’d be out in the woods searching for his family. But as things stood he was the team leader and he couldn’t in all clear conscience order such an action that carried unreasonable risk to the safety of the team.

“In any event,” Ororo said, “Logan is already in the woods trying to track them. He’s the best shot at it that we have – especially in this light. The rest of us **must** maintain a unified front of defense for whatever Magneto is planning. We don’t have access to proper communication tech – so if we split up and something arises...each group may not be alerted in time.”

“Fine,” Hank acquiesced. “I just don’t like it.”

Scott nodded and opened his mouth to say something but was interrupted by a shocked shout from Kitty and a surprised grunt from The Thing.

“Cyclops!” Kitty shouted. “Something’s happening to Miss Frost!”

All eyes drew towards the form of Emma Frost, which was surrounded by a ring of orange light. It took a moment for what was happening to register, and even then only in the minds of the senior X-men and Gamma Squad members (who had seen it happen and experienced it during the recent Alkali Lake mission).

It was the work of the MALE's remote teleporter. In the next instant, before anyone could act, Emma Frost was engulfed by an orange aura and simply vanished from sight. A shout from the other side of the ruined building rang out moments afterwards, with Julian running in from around the corner to announce that Avalanche and the MALE members on that side had also been teleported away.

All those present assumed defensive stances and gathered together in one place, expecting anything now that the MALE and Brotherhood were regrouped.

X-men, came the mental voice of Professor Xavier over the telepathic band.

Professor, Scott responded, *you've finally managed to break through the telepathic blockade. Can you locate the oth –*

No, I didn't break through the blockade, Scott, Xavier interjected, mental dread coloring his thought patterns. *It's just **stopped** all of a sudden.*

But what about John? Ororo asked.

I...I can't sense him, Xavier replied. The interference is gone, and I've managed to locate Alex, Lorna and Susan, they're in the woods...but there's no trace of Jonathan. I sense that Magneto's cronies are in the woods as well, to the north, and -

"Everyone!" Scott shouted, cutting off the mental discourse with the Professor. "We're going into the woods. Follow my lead!"

"Wait," Hank cautioned, gripping Scott's arm. His enhanced hearing had detected a faint, mechanical sound.

Scott frowned impatiently, not wanting to waste anymore time. "What is it?"

"Sounds like an...engine powering up..." Hank said thoughtfully. Then it hit him. He turned towards Marie Ange. "Where exactly did you hide the Hawk?"

Her eyes widened and she pointed to the north. "About a mile that way."

By then the sound of the Hawk's engines had intensified to the point that everyone was able to hear it - enhanced hearing or not. Overheard in the northern skyline several lights could be seen glowing against the backdrop of the mountains.

"It's the jet!" Kitty exclaimed, looking from one to the other of the senior X-men (who were temporarily in shock as they took in what was happening).

Scott was the first to recover. "Everyone who's flight capable - engage and bring down the Hawk! Everyone else, follow me!"

Storm, Hellion, Lilandra, Ken, Hotshot and Torch took off into the air, leaving the rest to give chase on foot...

John stirred in his seat slightly as he regained consciousness. When he came to, he realized that his arms and legs had been shackled by solid metal restraints - no doubt courtesy of Magneto. It took a few moments for him to piece together what had happened. He remembered opening the Hawk's hatch door and entering the jet. He had warily went to check on the ever sneaky Mystique to make sure she was still safely tied down. He'd gotten into a little cuss out with her...and then he felt a pricking sensation to the neck. It was quickly followed by a sudden surge of dizziness and he'd blacked out.

And now here he was tied down to a seat in the Hawk with - he looked around - members of the MALE and the Brotherhood sitting up front. For a moment he was too shocked to do anything but stare with his mouth open. But then he remembered his survival training and figured it would be better to not let them realize that he was awake. And so quickly shut his eyes, even though every instinct in his body was against him letting them out of his sight.

It was all too plain to him that he'd been injected with mutant suppressor drugs. The telepathic droning that he was becoming accustomed to earlier was completely silenced. The individuals up front, however, were anything but quiet. They seemed to be debating something or other and John didn't have to strain too hard to hear what they were saying.

"I say we stick to the original plan," Mystique said emphatically.

Emma Frost scoffed. "Yes, when in doubt just kill 'em all. And here I was thinking you were one of the big brains in the Brotherhood. I would have expected that primitive sort of thinking from Sabretooth. Not from you."

"Hey," the aggrieved Sabretooth responded (and was ignored).

"Miss Frost's idea has merit," Magneto said, turning to Mystique. "If it's possible that we can permanently disable his powers without killing him then -"

"With all due respect, Erik," Mystique interrupted, "she's a former X-man."

"Emphasis on **former**," Emma said with a roll of her eyes.

"His father makes her panties wet," Mystique said without hesitation.

Emma gasped. "I beg your pardon!" she said after recovering her speech.

Avalanche, on hearing this, burst out into loud laughter (in addition to several members of the MALE). He slapped Sabretooth on the back consolingly. "No wonder you ain't had any luck with her, dude. She's into pretty boys. You never stood a chance."

They laughed once more, this time at Sabretooth.

Sabretooth bared his teeth and growled menacingly at them, before breaking down and laughing at Emma's expression along with everyone else.

A stern glance from Emma, that promised pain, shut them up eventually.

Mystique continued, "How do we know she's not trying to keep him alive to score points...so she can go back to them or something?"

"After what I've done - helping you lot - do you **really** think they will forgive me?" Emma asked incredulously.

Mystique scoffed. "Well, they **are** a bunch of goody-two shoes."

"Well, I'm sure I've come too far to turn back now," Emma said, the slightest bit of regret in her tone. "Anyway, my position still stands. The only reason you want to kill him is to get his

powers out of the way. But if you surgically modify the parts of his brain that control his powers, you needn't kill him."

"So we lobotomize the kid," Mystique said. "And he ends up as a vegetable for life. How much more merciful an alternative to death is that? If it were me I'd rather be put out of my misery."

"Well it's **not** you," Emma argued. "And just think about it - how many times in the past have you lot gotten away scot free due to the X-men pulling their punches with you? If you kill Scott's son, do you **really** think you will be shown any mercy ever again?"

A murmur started up among them. Emma pressed home her point. "For instance, Sabretooth, wasn't it Scott who stopped Logan from gutting you like a fish, and instead left you in the hands of the authorities? And even **you** Magneto - some of the X-men were all in favor of finishing you once and for all after the Liberty Island stunt. Do you think Charles will argue to spare your life in future if you were to kill Jonathan Summers now? Even **if** he did, who the hell would listen to him?"

Her words seemed to be having an impact. "You never know when in the future you might somehow benefit from their **goody-two shoes** mannerisms - their single greatest weakness. But all that will come to an end if you **murder** that boy," Emma concluded.

"Fine," Mystique said quietly. "Let's assume for a moment that I agree with you - what if we

operate on him, return him to the X-men and then they reverse what we've done? They **do** have healers you know."

"Look at his father," Emma said quickly. "His brain is damaged permanently from the accident he had as a child, such that he can't turn off his powers. Have they ever been able to heal him? I don't think their best healer has the skill to properly mend that level of brain trauma or poor Scott wouldn't still be imprisoned behind his visor. "

"So," Avalanche said, "we do the same thing but in reverse? **Damage** his brain so that he can't turn **on** his powers."

"Well," Emma said, "basically, yes. Although **damage** is not the word I'd prefer to use. Of course we'll need to have a neurosurgeon's assistance. But that will only be a matter of some mind control to secure the cooperation of one, if they want to be stubborn about it."

His heart pounding as if to break out of his chest, John listened with bated breath at the conversation taking place up front. As if what they were planning for him weren't shocking enough, there was the fact that Emma Frost was arguing in favor of keeping him alive! Granted, she had not actually tried to kill him before (merely get him committed to an institution) – but it was still surprising.

*As long as there is life, there is hope, John thought to himself in an effort to reign in his courage. Isn't that what the Professor always says? Things **could** be worse. They could have already killed me*

and been done with it. There's still time.

John refused to think about the fact that (since the Fantastic Four's plane had been downed) Magneto had made off with the only long distance transport the X-men had access to. That for all he knew the X-men and Fantastic Four could have suffered massive casualties in the (unknown) time he was out of it. To brood upon those things would have resulted in succumbing to despair, which he couldn't afford. And so his mind resorted to an oft used coping mechanism – denial. Breathing slowly and deeply (both to calm his nerves as well as maintain the façade of sleep) John listened on as Magneto and his cronies fleshed out their insidious plans...

Lilandra, Ken, the Torch, Hellion, Storm and Hotshot swooped down to ground level, landing at the clearing that formerly accommodated the Hawk. Their chase had proven ineffectual, as they suspected it would considering that the Hawk was able to fly at supersonic speeds.

The other X-men, as well as Reed, Johnny and Ben of the Fantastic Four had by then arrived at the clearing. In addition, Susan, Alex and Lorna had made it out of the woods on the other side, and were in the process of approaching their comrades. Upon stumbling out of the trees they were shocked (to say the least) at seeing an empty space where they were expecting the Hawk.

"Susan," Alex said, "you aren't by any small chance making the jet invisible are you?"

"No," she replied. "I'm afraid not."

"Damn," Alex said resignedly. "I didn't think so. I guess we're stranded here for the time being."

All three of them were currently working on the assumption that John had been instructed by someone else to initiate the Hawk's autopilot and get as far away as possible, leaving everyone and everything behind.

The three of them rushed towards the gathering in the center of the clearing. Ororo was the first to take notice of their arrival.

"Alex, Lorna, Susan," Ororo greeted, taking in the blood on Alex and Susan's clothing. "Are you two alright?"

They nodded. "Yeah, it's not our blood. I had to impale Sabretooth with a force spike. He ran off screaming like a girl," Susan explained. "What's up, Ororo? Where's the jet?"

Her look darkened. "I'm afraid it's been stolen. Magneto and his accomplices must have made off with it and -"

“Oh my God!” Lorna exclaimed on hearing the news. “We told John to go to the jet!” She ran past Ororo looking for any sign of him. There was none to be found. The expressions on everyone’s face told her all she needed to know.

Alex went after Lorna, who was by then squatting next to Scott on the far edge of the clearing.

“Scott?” Alex asked, noting the vacant look on his brother’s face.

The elder Summers sibling was sitting on the ground at the edge of the clearing, his back leaning on a tree for support. Everyone else was at the center of the clearing, busily strategizing and trying to come up with a course of action. Since he, as leader, was incapable at the moment, Professor Xavier and Ororo were handling things.

“It’s over,” Scott said tiredly without looking up.

“What do you mean it’s over?” Alex asked incredulously, stooping at Lorna’s side.

“I mean he’s dead, Alex!” Scott said tightly.

Lorna gasped. “Scott! Come on now. We don’t know that -”

“Don’t we?” Scott asked. “Magneto teleported all his lackeys away **moments** before John’s telepathic field went offline. And then the next thing we know the fucking jet took off. John is

nowhere to be found. The Professor can't sense him even though all telepathic functions have been restored. Do the math."

"Listen to me," Alex said insistently. "We have to believe that he's still alive."

"Really? Like Magneto wouldn't have killed him the first chance he got," Scott replied sarcastically. "Like he tried to in the Subbasement."

"Think about it, Scott," Alex continued. "Magneto doesn't need a jet for transport. He's got that remote teleporter person."

"That's right," Lorna said quickly. "The only logical reason he would have stolen the jet would have been to impede your pursuit."

"Which," Alex went on, "would make no sense if he had already...done what he came to do. Once his objective was accomplished he could have simply teleported himself and everyone else away. He wouldn't have bothered to steal the jet unless he thought you could make use of it to somehow stop him from completing his objective."

"He probably caught John," Lorna admitted. "But why would he worry about you guys catching up to him if he'd already did what he came to do?"

"Because he knows what we'll do to him when we catch him," Scott replied with a dark look.

"What we shoulda done to him a long time ago."

Lorna shook her head at the sight of what Scott had been reduced to. "Since when has Magneto ever backed down from a fight? I know it's hard, Scott, but John needs you to be strong now more than ever." This had little effect, so Lorna pointed to the others in the center of the clearing. "And they need their leader."

"For God's sake, Scott!" Alex exclaimed. "Work with us here will ya! John has to be alive. The signs clearly point to that." He caught hold of his brother's shoulder and gave him a good, strong shake. "You're giving up too easily! And that's not like you at all!"

Scott seemed to see the state of Alex's clothes for the first time. "You're bleeding."

"It's not mine," Alex said, sighing. "Focus, Scott."

X-men...

Everyone in the clearing perked up as a mental presence made itself felt.

"That sounded like Betsy," Lorna whispered.

Yes, yes it's working!

Alex nodded. "Yep. It's her."

Everyone, give me a moment to establish a telepathic link up, came the mental voice of Professor Xavier, so we can all communicate more effectively...

End Notes: Well, that's Chapter Nine. Personally I don't think it's quite up to par. I think if I had some more time and wasn't so tired these days that it could have been a little better. But it's just been so long since I last updated, I figured I might as well post the thing rather than keep anyone waiting for much longer.

I just know that certain avid readers will make mention of a few things in this chapter. So lemme say it right now - yes, I know that the Fantastic Four are not mutants (born with an X-gene) but **mutates** (humans whose DNA has been altered by some sort of environmental factor - like cosmic radiation). So when I had Magneto call them "cheap, mutant **knock offs...**" I wasn't under the impression that they were mutants. Hello, KNOCK OFFS. There, that's for alla the nit picky ones, lol.

Once again, I'd love to hear comments, criticisms and ideas on future developments.

Remember, the email address is: adriananderson587@gmail.com.

Thank you everyone who has borne such patience with me since 2007 with this story. Your emails and IM messages never fail to perk me up! Oh, and the people on Fanfiction.net who

actually take the time to leave a review :P Well, that's it for now!