

Part 1

<CEREBRA online>

<Danger Room activated>

Authorization: BYPASS

Password: *****

<WARNING: GRPD Protocol requires an observer in the Control Room in case of system malfunction>

<GRPD Protocol over-ridden>

<Executing "Cityscape@Sentinel_Mk_II.drh">

<Run subject scan>

Subject 1:

Rogue

Real Name: Unknown

Age: Unknown, estimated 17

Eyes: Green

Hair: Brown with a White Stripe

Height: 5' 8"

Weight: 120 lbs.

Powers: Power Theft: Rogue drains the life energy and memories of any person she touches. In the case of mutants or other meta-humans she also gains their powers. She generally retains the powers and memories for a limited time, but in cases of extended contact the transfer can be long-term or even permanent.

Adamantium Transformation: After her altercation with Colossus/Famine and Sabertooth/Death, Rogue has gained the ability to change her entire body into living Adamantium. In this form her strength and damage resistance greatly increase. She also regenerates wounds while in this form. It is unknown if she will have this power forever or if it will eventually fade like her other borrowed powers.

Subject 2:

Changeling

Real Name: Garfield Logan

Age: 17

Eyes: Green

Hair: Green

Height: 5' 8"

Weight: 150 lbs.

Powers: Zoological Shapeshifting: Changeling can become any real, Terran animal. This includes extinct species. This includes changing in size, and he gains all the natural abilities of that animal (i.e. sense of smell, venom, flight, water breathing).

Subject 3:

Cannonball

Real Name: Samuel Guthrie

Age: 17

Eyes: Blue-Gray

Hair: Blonde

Height: 6'

Weight: 150 lbs.

Powers: Invulnerable Flight: Cannonball can fly, but only at speeds in excess of 200 miles per hour. His maximum speed is somewhere around Mach 2. An addition, while he is propelling himself (and for 5.02 seconds afterwards), he is surrounded by an energy shield that renders him functionally invulnerable.

Subject 4:

Impulse

Real Name: Bartholomew Allen

Age: 15

Eyes: Yellow

Hair: Brown

Height: 5' 1"

Weight: 110 lbs.

Powers: Super Speed: Impulse moves at super human speeds. His maximum speed has been recorded at approximately 4% of the speed of light. His senses are more acute to function at high speed and thought processes are also accelerated. However as a side effect he suffers from a meta-human version of attention deficit disorder; he thinks so fast that he has often moved on to something new before everyone else.

Subject 5:

Mercury

Real Name: Ami Mizuno

Age: 16

Eyes: Blue

Hair: Blue

Height: 5' 3"

Weight: 118 lbs.

Powers: Water Control: Mercury can control water, changing its shape, making it fly, and causing it to become hard as steel. She can also make water freeze or boil, but she cannot control ice or steam. The extent of her powers is unknown; she is almost always

holding back. The one time she came close to cutting loose, she controlled all the water in both of the X-Men's Olympic size pools at a range of over 500 feet.

Subject 6:

Firestar

Real Name: Angelica Jones

Age: 16

Eyes: Brown (Orange while using powers)

Hair: Red

Height: 5' 1"

Weight: 101 lbs.

Powers: Heat Control: Firestar can generate massive amounts of heat, and control the heat in objects around her. She can directly heat to anything within 100 feet or herself, or fire focused bolts of heat to melt or burn objects further away. She can absorb heat energy, but only to a temperature of 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Finally, by expelling heat from her body, she can fly.

<Subject scan complete. Training sequence loading. Run program?>

"Yes," Rogue snapped, "If y'are done spelling out our complete histories, activate the program."

Instantly the domed room disappeared. Instead the young mutants found themselves on a street amidst skyscrapers. Holographic citizen were going about their daily business. They pointedly ignored the students in their combat training uniforms. But there was something the constructs did not ignore.

A scream ripped out a pair of coeds. They pointed to the sky, to the six giant robots dropping to the ground. The Sentinels landed surrounding the teens. Each of the 30-foot tall robots pointed a palm energy cannon at the X-Men in training.

"Surrender, mutants."

"One each," Rogue noted, shifting to her armored form, "Everyone except Impulse, take one. Bart, watch our backs and help out where you can. And whoever finishes first can work on the last one."

"Greeaat," Cannonball groaned. He blasted towards his chosen Sentinel, but the robot dodged and fired a missile at him. The explosion deflected him, but he was uninjured. Guthrie readjusted and flew into the machine from behind. He emerged from its chest, sending a shower of metal and silicon to the ground.

Changeling also charged a Sentinel, but this one didn't dodge the young man.

Unfortunately this was a bad programming path, as at the last second, the green beast boy transformed into a Triceratops. The armored skull and 7 tons of mass behind it tore its leg

clear off at the knee. The robot managed to avoid falling by using its flight jets, but it was still off balance and its energy spikes missed.

Mercury triggered a device on her belt, and roughly a gallon of water burst out of the high-pressure container. Instead of falling to the ground, the liquid twisted around in mid air and flowed all over Ami's body. The H₂O armor absorbed the lasers with little evaporation and no damage to the young woman underneath. She pointed and a spear of water detached and shot at the machine. It pierced the armor, and then vanished inside.

"Sayonara," the Japanese girl said, with a slight grin.

A second later, a series of small explosions ripped through the Sentinel, and it collapsed as all of its systems short-circuited. Mizuno turned and addressed the unoccupied robot.

"Show off," Firestar razed her, sending a bolt of heat at the robot's head.

"That was not my intent," Ami apologized, even as her armor blocked another laser.

"Relax, Amy," Rogue said as she dug her fingers into the hand that had grabbed her. She pulled the Sentinel's fingers apart, but did not release the robot, "Angie's just givin' ya grief."

"Ami, not Amy," she corrected for the 97th time. She was keeping track. She formed a dagger of the water, and threw it. The robot shot it with a laser, and this time her weapon vanished in a puff of steam.

Firestar stuck her tongue out at her female friends, and proceeded to systematically melt her foe into a lump of slag.

"HeyAmi," Impulse ran past her, "GivemeacoupleofthoseknivesI'llgetthemclose."

She complied, and the speedster bolted at the robot. He adeptly dodged the lasers and missiles it shot at him. He stabbed the first blade into a knee joint, and then ran up the Sentinel's body and inserted the second dagger in a blank in the neck armor. Then Ami worked her powers, pulled the water into the robot, over circuits and through wires. The technological titan quickly ceased functioning.

Rogue flipped her target into the ground, and then jumped on it. She pulled her feet out of the dents in its chest, and stomped up to the head. She finished it off with a double punch that took off its head.

"Simple and clean," Rogue commented, "No casualties, little property da..."

But before she finished her little assessment, another laser struck Firestar in the chest. Blood fountained as the blazing mutant dropped to the ground; and two more Sentinels stepped out from behind a building

"Bart," Rogue shrieked at her younger friend, "You were supposed to be keeping watch."

"Oops," he shrugged as he slowed down, "I forgot."

Rogue and the three boys attacked the two newly arrived robots, while Mercury hurried over to Firestar. She checked the wound, and shook her head.

"You are made dead, Firestar," the blue haired mutant said.

"Oh frell," the red-head exclaimed, "This is the second time in five runs."

Impulse and Cannonball both buzzed around one of the Sentinels. Its attacks did no damage to the flying mutant, and could not connect with the speedster. However, it seemed to have learned, it was not letting Cannonball get an attack in. The machine began to focus too much on Guthrie, and Impulse took the opportunity to open a maintenance hatch on the robot's right heel. He crossed wires at random, and had to jump back as the hover rocket on the foot fired. Off balance, the laser went wide, and Cannonball got in a clean slam that decapitated the weapon.

Rogue and Changeling defeated their opponent more easily. Gar became a humming bird, until he was on the robots shoulder. Then he transformed into a prehistoric tiger, his claws cutting into the armor, even as his now 5000 pounds tipped the automaton forward. Rogue simply pounded into the thigh armor. Between the two assaults, the Sentinel fell. Once they had it down, they quickly disabled it.

"Training sequence complete. Casualty noted." Cerebra announced, removing the holograms.

"Bart," Rogue sighed as the hexagon panels reappeared, "Ya gotta quit spacin' out. If this had been real..."

"I know," the fleet lad finally stopped. He opened his mouth to continue, but was cut off by the keening cry of a bird. As the sound faded, a young woman appeared in mid air. Impulse started to try to catch her, but Changeling was already there. The girl looked around their age, with pale skin, purple/black hair, and a small red gem glued over her forehead. Her eyes fluttered open, and she looked at the trainee X-Men who had gathered around her.

"Help..." she gasped, before passing out again. As she said that, the howling of a wolf filled the room, and with an odd tearing sound, a dozen and one demons appeared.

"Cooool," Impulse enthused.

"Umm, this is part of the program, right?" Changeling asked in surprise and fear.

The thirteen demons were identical in form. Each was basically a human woman, six feet in height. They had three 5-inch horns curving up from their foreheads. Each of the creatures also had 2 pairs of bat-like wings, one pair from the shoulders and one from the hips. Finally, their tails were 2-feet long, and split into four a few inches from the end. Also each wore an identical black toga. Though they were all shaped the same, their colorings varied wildly. Hair, skin, and eyes were random colors, from all across the spectrum. Three had stark white hair, two jet black. The rest had locks of varying shades of reds, greens, and oranges. Their skin tones were more pastel, though one was a deep forest green, and another was metallic gold.

"Give us the offspring," one of the demons intoned. The mutants only gave them confused looks.

"The girl," another clarified, "She does not belong here. Give her to us."

Rogue raised an eyebrow in askance. Before she even completed the gesture, Cannonball, Changeling and Mercury give slight negatory head shakes. Firestar gave her a disgusted look; and Impulse smirked and shrugged.

"Ah'm afraid we can't do that," Rogue told the demon, standing to her full height. In her Adamantium mode, she was just a hair taller than the invaders.

"She asked for our help, and Ah'd guess that extends to keeping her away from you."

"Then be destroyed."

The creatures unleashed lightning on the students, but Mercury was a step ahead of them. She created a dome of water around them, stopping the attack. The Japanese girl shuddered slightly from the strain.

"Cerebra run Cityscape@Empty program," Rogue shouted, "Gar, guard the girl."

The metal belle charged through the liquid barrier, and clotheslined one of the demons even as the artificial city returned. Changeling transformed into an ape, gently lifted the unconscious stranger, and loped down an alley. Three of the demons made to follow him, but Cannonball blasted into two of them. One of the pair was twisted oddly, her back obviously broken; and she faded out of existence. The one Rogue struck also vanished. Firestar flipped over the demons firing at her, landing behind them. She fired her own energy right between their shoulders. But neither seemed to care, as they turned to fire at her again.

"Don't mind a little heat?" Angelica grimaced, as she lifted off to avoid a deadly shock, "Then how about an active volcano?"

She placed her hands together, and sent out one wide burst of heat that could have melted steel. One of the demons was reduced to ash, however the other only lost her left arm

below the elbow. The ashes also disappeared, but the injured one just grimaced and continued to attack.

"Firestar, please watch your aim," Ami requested politely, as a decent portion of her 'armor' boiled off. She triggered another of her water packs to replace the lost liquid. The aqua around her body channeled the lightning into the floor, making her immune to the demons' ranged attacks. So the two who had chosen her closed to swipe at her with their claws. Mercury shaped some of her ammunition into an elegant sword, and cut into one of them. Her wounded opponent grabbed the blade to trap it. But she merely released her metal hold on the water, and it flowed around the demon's fingers. Mercury stabbed again, and this time hit something vital just above her opponent's waist. An odd green gas escaped the wound as the otherworldly menace withered.

Impulse ran circles around another demonic duo. He landed the occasional punch, but primarily he dodged just in time to make them hit one another. But the demons were not stupid like Sentinels, and they quickly stopped shooting each other. This didn't help them to hit Impulse, but his punches were doing as much damage to his own fists. As he shook his hands out, he looked around for a way to hurt them. His eyes settled on one of SUVs parked on the street. In less than a quarter of a second, he had totally disassembled the phantom vehicle. Selecting the two sturdiest pieces he could carry, he returned to rapidly strike his opponents. Though the Danger Room safety protocols made the impact of the metal bars like those of a soft foam bat, a soft foam bat, moving at 200 miles per hour, hitting you a dozen times a second, is still significant damage. Bruises gave way to cuts, which in turn became cracked bones. Once neither one was able to stand or shoot at him, Impulse backed off, and looked to see how his friends were doing.

Their numbers reduced by almost half, the demons were faltering.

"These can't be mortals," gasped the other one fighting Mercury. She drew back from the hydrous teen, and looked to another of the outsider for orders.

"They must be descended from the Titans of old," the one with the golden skin agreed, "We must withdraw, before we are all banished."

"But our lord..."

"Silence," the leader snapped, "If we lose track of the offspring, our master will be much more furious than if we strategically delay."

The protester acquiesced, and with another lupine howl, the remaining demons vanished.

"What happened?" Changeling walked up, gently carrying the girl. He had a sour look on his face, like he had tasted something gross; and there were slight burns around his mouth.

"We drove them off," Firestar landed next to him.

"No," Ami shook her head, "They left so they could come back later."

"So what do we do with her?" Bart seemed unconcerned with the possibility of the demons returning.

"Take her to my room," Rogue instructed, "Cerebra, end program and erase Danger Room log of the last 40 minutes."

She took the unconscious teen from her green teammate, and exited the Danger Room even as the last of the city was fading away.

Due to the danger her mutant power posed, Rogue was one of the few students afforded a single suite. Which suited the private and rebellious girl fine.

Angelica quietly closed the door while their hostess laid the unconscious stranger on her bed. Rogue then reverted to her normal form and settled into the plush recliner.

"Now what should we do?" Ami asked, sitting on the edge of the bed, looking at the pale young woman.

"We should go to the X-Men," Cannonball whispered firmly, "One of the Xaviers."

"And say what?" Firestar snapped. The others shushed her, and she continued in a quiet hiss, "We were using the Danger Room, after hours, and without permission. And then this girl and a bunch of demons just appeared. How much trouble do you want to get in?"

"What about Nightcrawler? Or Wolfsbane?" Gar suggested, "They're cool."

"Maybe we should wake her up," Bart zipped over to the edge of the bed, and leaned over an inch from the girl's face. Mercury reached over and pulled the hyperactive boy back.

"Bart, give her space."

"But we wanna know who she is and where she came from and why she's here and what those things were and why were they chasing her and what's that crystal on her forehead."

"I am called Raven," the girl opened her eyes, and then shielded them from the light. Everyone started except Ami, who frowned slightly at the statement.

"Where am I?" Raven sat up and looked around.

"Rogue's room," Bart answered. This didn't appear to clarify things for their guest.

"She's Rogue," Changeling aimed a green finger at the relaxed Southerner, "I'm Gar Logan, but everyone calls me Changeling. That's Ami, Sam, Bart, and Angelica."

"You are at Xavier's Institute for Gifted Youth," Mercury provided a useful answer.

"Then I missed my target," Raven sighed, "I am not in New York."

"Oh y'all are in New York, just the state, not the city," Rogue explained, "The city's a ways that way." She gestured south.

"Than I should be going. Thank you," As the mysterious girl tried to stand, her legs couldn't hold her. Impulse caught her as she fell, and he and Cannonball helped her back onto the bed.

"You should not strain yourself," Ami cautioned, checking Raven's pulse.

"So why were those demon ladies chasing you?" Bart stopped examining Rogue's Siam Shade poster and zipped back over uncomfortably close to Raven. The girl leaned back in a bit of shock, and then her face clouded over.

"The Hounds followed me here," she whispered in concern. Then her fear became confusion, "Wait, how are all of you still alive?"

"They weren't that tough," Changeling gloated.

"We're mutants," Rogue said, bracing herself.

"Hmmm? What is a mutant?"

Waiting for fear and ridicule, the X-Teens were slack-jaw stunned by her reaction.

"We were born with special powers." Angelica explained.

"You must be special indeed to defeat a hunting pack."

"Well," Bart frowned, "They ran after we beat the first five."

Raven's eyes widened in abject terror.

"They left? Then they can come back. And they can lead reinforcements," the young woman was all but babbling, "I've put you all in danger. I have to leave."

Before the students could protest, there was a knock at the door.

"Rogue, it's Clark," the younger Xavier's voice wafted in, "Can I speak to you?"

The six mutants froze instantly, and Raven shut up in suit.

'Now what,' Cannonball mouthed.

"Umm, I'm not decent, Mr. Xavier," Rogue stammered, stalling.

"Rogue, there are 7 distinct heartbeats in your room, one of which I don't recognize," he countered, "So if you aren't 'decent', this will become an entirely different discussion."

The students all groaned slightly.

"I'll take that as an admission," Superman continued, "Sam, you are closest to the door, would you please unlock it?"

Guthrie grimaced slightly, but he dutifully reached over and unlocked the door.

Clark opened the door to see six guilty faces and one unfamiliar and slightly confused face. None of the students would meet his eyes, so he appraised the newcomer sitting on Rogue's bed. She was slight, about the same height as Impulse and Firestar. Her black hair was straight, and cropped at the shoulder. She had pale skin, and her deep purple eyes returned Clark's frank appraisal, seeming somewhat disdainful of his long bathrobe. She was wearing simple brown robes, and a ruby on her Ajna Chakra; though there was nothing that Superman could detect holding it in place.

"Who is your friend?" he asked gently.

"She calls herself Raven," Ami answered. The mysterious teen inclined her head slightly in agreement.

"Perhaps we should move to the War Room," it wasn't a question.

Phoenix and Professor X were waiting when Superman escorted the 7 teens into the meeting room. Impulse instantly settled into Gambit's traditional seat, while the rest of the students hovered around the door.

"Please, sit down," Charles requested.

"Jean, Dad, this is Raven." Clark said, sitting next to his fiancé. Gar and Sam each pulled a chair for the new girl; but she took her own seat, opposite the X-Men. Rogue and Angelica shot them dark looks, while Ami pointedly ignored them as she sat down next to Professor X. The adults waited patiently for the teens to settle in.

"Well, then," the elder Xavier started, "What happened after you snuck into the Danger Room?"

Rogue looked ready to protest, but the other X-Teens just looked guilty or hung their heads.

"Don't worry," Jean smiled, and Clark chuckled.

"Using the Danger Room after hours is something of a tradition at the Institute," Professor X added, "I would be somewhat disappointed if you didn't."

Initially reassured they wouldn't be punished; the students explained what had happened. Their guest seemed fascinated by the Danger Room. But Raven remained silent, even when the discourse turned to her appearance and subsequent revelations.

"Perhaps we can help you," Charles offered when the students had concluded, "Why were you going to New York?"

Raven met his eyes, but did not speak.

"She is going to see Doctor Strange," Mercury offered. Her teammates shot her confused looks, while Raven re-evaluated Ami. Professor X smiled with pride.

"Why do you think that, Ami?" Superman asked.

"This entire event screams magic. Demons are generally magical creatures. Raven's appearance and that of her pursuers did not set off the Institute alarms, which is most easily accomplished via spells. And Raven identified her self with the phrase 'I am called', a wizard's trick to avoid giving her true name without lying."

The corner of Raven's mouth twitched upwards, and she nodded.

"I need to see the Sorcerer Supreme. I must get to this New York City as soon as possible."

Superman nodded, "It's a long trip, and you still look tired. I think you could use some assistance."

The Kryptonian turned to look at the eldest of the teens.

"Sam, you just passed your licensing test for the Helixes, didn't you?" Clark asked, referring to the X-Men's half dozen helicopters. As what he said sunk in, the various students reacted differently. Firestar, Impulse, and Rogue all looked excited, while Mercury and Cannonball looked skeptical. Changeling kept his face carefully neutral, but studied Raven's reaction.

The young woman frowned, slightly.

"It may be dangerous. The Hounds will almost certainly return. I cannot ask you for help."

"We're offering," Garfield countered evenly, "All you have to do is accept."

Raven looked touched, and relieved. She nodded again. Bart let out a small whoop, and Ami nodded back.

"This is not a joyride," Charles admonished, "You are going to protect Raven. Once she is safely in the care of Doctor Strange, return to the Institute immediately."

The six students agreed.

"We should find you something better to wear," Jean told Raven, "Angelica, you look to be about her size..."

Phoenix led the two girls out, and the other two followed.

"Cannonball, take Impulse and Changeling with you to prep Helix 3," Superman instructed. Bart saluted, and zipped out. Sam and Gar quickly followed.

"Are you sure about this?" Clark looked into the shadows in the back of the room.

"This is their path," Destiny stepped into the light, more for Charles than for herself or Clark, "We can only help them. Have I ever led you wrong before?"

"You were the one who introduced Mystique to Kryptonite," Charles pointed out.

"And because of that, you know of the threat it poses to your son. And because of that, Rogue gained her extra power."

"Cyclops," Superman had removed his robe to reveal his full uniform, "They will be leaving shortly. Jean and I will join you in the Danger Room as soon as they are gone."

"I will go with you," Irene stated. Both Xaviers looked at her in askance, and she continued, "We must buy them every moment we can."

Superman paused, and a shudder passed through him. Then he left, to make sure his charges had a safe start to their journey.

Part 2

Cannonball steered the Helix through the night sky, his face alternating between glee and concern. The others sat in silence. Rogue, Ami, and Gar were staring at Raven, who in turn was examining the Helix in obviously restrained wonder. Angelica, in the co-pilot seat, monitored the instruments and the sky.

"ROAD TRIP!" Impulse suddenly shouted gleefully once they were far enough from mansion. Everyone but Sam turned to stare at him.

"Sam, put her in hover," Rogue instructed. Guthrie complied, and then he too rotated his seat to look at the young speedster.

"Bart," their de facto leader stared harshly at Allen, "This ain't a pleasure trip, and it certainly ain't a Danger Room simulation. Raven is afraid those demons'll come back, and Professor X obviously agrees. That's why we're all here. Someone could really die here. X-Men with more training and experience have died on similar missions. If ya can't focus, can't take this seriously, Ah will have Sam turn around and take ya back."

Then she looked at the rest on the mutants.

"That holds of all of y'all," she added quietly, "If ya aren't ready for this, it ain't too late to turn back. No one'll think the less of ya."

Changeling gulped, but didn't say anything. Impulse looked down at his feet, and then nodded.

"I'll be careful, Rogue," he said, slowly, "I'll pay attention. I won't let you down. Any of you."

The Southern grinned slightly, and then nodded to Cannonball. The pilot spun his chair back around, and resumed course.

"We're still about 40 minutes out," he noted, "But the question is where do we land?"

"Dr. Strange has a big open roof," Firestar, the native New Yorker, answered, "From what I've heard... Well, lets say it should support the Helix."

"Good," Changeling commented, "The quicker the better."

Raven gave them all an apologetic look.

Even at 3 AM, and even with its silent mode, the Helix attracted some concerned and confused stares. Not that the X-Teens noticed.

"177A Bleecker Street," Cannonball stated, "In Greenwich... That doesn't mean much too me. Firestar?"

"Just southwest of Washington Square Park," the fiery redhead answered. Sam edged the chopper across the Hudson, and followed Clarkson east. After only a few seconds, Angelica pointed at a three-story townhouse. But even with out her indication, they would have recognized the obviously arcane building. Guthrie maneuvered the helicopter over the roof. He very carefully landed so that the Helix was only half in the pentagram inscribed on the platform. Even as he touched down, the roof access door burst open, and an angry looking Asian man stalked out.

"What are you doing?" Wong shouted quietly at them as they disembarked, "This is a private residence, not a helipad."

"Where should we have landed?" Ami asked honestly.

"Maybe the airport?" Wong lost some steam at her question and its tone.

"It is alright, Wong," Stephen Strange stepped onto the roof, "The sealing circle is not in use, and they are here to see me."

"Hello, Raven," the sorcerer turned to address the young woman, "Why are you here?"

"Azarath is gone," she stated with a concealed sorrow, "Azar told me to seek you out, before controlling my powers to send me here."

Strange nodded, and started to lead them inside.

"Umm, we are supposed to go back," Changeling said.

"Please, stay," Raven requested.

"You should remain," Strange agreed, "We may yet require your protection, and you may need mine."

The others looked at Rogue, who nodded.

"We were sent to keep Raven safe. If ya think she's still in danger, we'd best stay."

Cannonball shut down the Helix, and Strange and his assistant lead them inside.

"You all look tired," the wizard said, "Can I offer you some refreshments? Something to drink?"

"Ah don't think..." Rogue started to decline, but was interrupted.

"Waddaya got?" Impulse asked, "I'd take anything in a soda pop. Except Pepsi. Or Orange."

Cannonball sighed and hung his head, but Wong just chuckled and Strange smiled.

"I will bring a selection a beverages," Wong stated, continuing down the stairs as the Doctor lead them into the library.

"Raven," Strange began once they were all seated, "I'm not sure how much you have told your friends, or even how much Azar told you; but I apologize in advance if I betray any confidences."

He steepled his fingers, and then gestured over the table. A map of the Solar system appeared.

"Millions of years ago," the Sorcerer Supreme intoned, and the map zoomed in on the sixth planet, "A race known as the Titans lived on the moon of Saturn that still bears their name. Before they destroyed themselves in their war with the Gods of Genesis, the Titans had built a great and noble empire. At the same time a demon lord named Trigon ruled over the Earth. Trigon hated the Titans. He loathed their beauty and their compassion." The map went back to Earth, and showed a cloud of beings leaving the planet and heading to the outer planet.

"Three times he sent his Hounds to Titan, and three times he was defeated. After his third invasion, the Titans realized Trigon would not relent, so they sought a way to end his threat. They could not kill him, for he would just reform. Instead they used their science and magic to banish him from this dimension forever."

"Except forever, ain't," Rogue smirked.

"True enough," Strange agreed, "Trigon continually seeks a way to undo what the Titans did and reclaim the Earth."

"And what about that Azar guy?" Changeling asked.

"Azar was the Sorcerer Supreme before my Master. Along his path, he discovered the secret of immortality. But living forever cost him his aggression. Unable to fight, and thus defend the Earth, he passed the mantle of Sorcerer to the Ancient One. Azar then left Earth. He found an empty world, and invited others who shared his views to join him. They created their own paradise, free of war and aggression. That world is called Azarath."

"And that was where I was born," Raven spoke.

"Until this Trigon invaded," Mercury deduced.

"Azarath is very close to Earth's dimension," Strange confirmed, "And although Trigon cannot return to Earth from Azarath, he can use it as a staging ground, from which he can send his slaves to Earth."

"So Raven was sent here to warn you about what happened to Azarath?" Firestar asked.

"Also to keep her from Trigon," Mercury whispered. Raven glared slightly at her, and Ami nodded just as slightly.

"The Hounds said they wanted the girl," the hydrous mutant added, "So they must want her for some reason."

"Raven's powers might help Trigon to return to Earth," Cannonball said, "If that Azar guy tapped Raven's powers to send her to Earth, maybe the demon can do the same thing."

"Trigon has returned to Earth once before. Though the Titans unbound and banished Trigon, he could still be summoned or find his way back to Earth, and possibly rebind himself. So the Titans created three talismans to prevent Trigon from ever entering this dimension."

The mutants stared in rapt attention, and he continued.

"During World War 2, Nazi sorcerers found one of the seals. They determined that it trapped a demon, so they destroyed it and use its mystical energies to summon that demon. But because of the remaining seals, Trigon was blocked. He appeared, but in the form of a human, and with most of his powers blocked. He betrayed and killed his summoners, and sought a way to truly return to Earth. My master learned the demon lord again walked the Earth. The Ancient One tracked him down, and in a great battle, managed to banish Trigon."

"So Trigon wants to force Raven to summon him the same way?" Changeling frowned.

He looked to Dr Strange for confirmation, but the Sorcerer Supreme was staring at the door.

"Wong should be back by now," he observed.

"I'll go find him," Impulse jumped out of the chair and sprinted towards the exit. Before he reached the door, it exploded inwards. Splinters peppered the young mutant as a lightning bolt carried Wong into the room. Bart bounced back and caught Wong in midair. The student carried the injured aid to the back of the library.

"He's still breathing," Impulse noted as he turned back to look at the door. No one was surprised to see the demons filling the portal.

"The girl belongs to our lord," the familiar gold skinned Hound stated, "Give her to us, and we will spare your pathetic lives."

"Iron Will of Agador, bar their path!" Strange incanted. A septagram appeared over the frame of the door. The lead demoness snarled, and slammed her claw into the shield.

"That will not delay them long," Strange noted, "I will fight them while you escape."

"And go where?" Cannonball asked, "They already found us here."

"Haven't you got any spells to get rid of them?" Firestar suggested.

"Perhaps, but the incantations are lengthy and require concentration."

"Then we'll hold them off while you cast the spell," Changeling offered.

"I do not think..." the Sorcerer shook his head.

"That must make it tough remembering spells," Impulse interrupted.

"We can't run," Rogue countered, "But Ah know we can take these wenches. At least long enough for you to finish your chanting."

GGRRRAAAPPP!!! A crack appeared in the magical barrier.

"It appears we have no other choice," Dr. Strange agreed reluctantly. CCRRIICCKK!! A small hole appeared in mystical wall.

"Raven, you'd betta stay back," Rogue instructed.

"No," the mysterious girl stepped forward, "I am the cause of this trouble. The least I can do is help you."

"Doc, can we go out without breaking the shield?" Changeling asked.

"Yes, the Iron Seal of Agador is only meant to keep my foes away. So you, my allies, may pass through it freely."

"Good," Rogue shifted, "Amy block that lightnin' for a sec so the rest of us can close to melee range."

"Ami," the Japanese mutant corrected again, even as her water flowed around the septagram, intercepting the demonic electricity.

"Alright, team, let's do it." Rogue exclaimed, charging at the demon closest to the door.

Rogue splashed through the watery shield, and swung a roundhouse at the gold-hued demon leader, but her blow was blocked. Through the contact, the invader sent a shock through the hero-in-training.

"Fool," the demoness pronounced, "Gold is always superior to silver."

"Maybe," the mutant countered, "But Ah ain't silver." Her next blow slammed the invader's jaw, knocking her into the wall.

"Ah'm Adamantium."

The Alpha Hound scowled, and motioned for two of her minions to attack the Southern belle.

Raven gestured, and two arcs of black energy shot from her hands. The shadows cut a pair of demons in half. But instead of fading from sight, the creatures shrieked in unearthly pain, and the pieces dropped to the floor, leaking ichor. Raven's face split slowly with a grin of dark pleasure. Then she squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head.

"Azarath Metreon Zinthos," she whispered, twice. When she opened her eyes, her mask of control was back in place. She attacked another Hound, but this time with a blunt energy that made the demoness fade like normal. The mysterious girl let out a sigh, and turned to another target.

Mercury frowned slightly as she observed their new friend, but was forced to return her attention to the globes of water she was using to keep 4 of the invaders at bay. Dozens of small spheres of water floated around Mizuno, intercepting any of the demons' attacks. Lightning and claws alike were locked in liquid and thrown aside. But Mercury was focusing solely on defense, and shortly 2 more enemies closed on her, draining her focus.

"Firestar, onsen," she requested. The redhead pointed her left hand, and the globes dancing among the demons exploded into a cloud of superheated steam. The Hounds didn't so much fade as implode from the assault. Ami gathered the water she had used to shield herself, and triggered another of her reservoirs to replace the vapor she could no longer control.

Angelica Jones found her actions limited. She could not unleash her full fury without potentially igniting Doctor Strange's home. Nor could she fly under the 10-foot ceilings. Still she was able to incinerate any demon that got too close. But after they figured that out, it became a gunfight: fire versus lightning at medium range. Firestar had yet to be directly struck, her smaller frame making her harder to hit. Still, they had her outnumbered, and she could be killed while they were merely banished.

Impulse zipped around, pulling tails and tweaking wings. Demons were looking about in a fury, but unable to locate the source of the annoyances. But ultimately, annoyances were all his attacks amounted to, and Bart knew it.

"Carp," he muttered to himself, shaking out his sore fingers,
"Ineedsomethingthatcanhurththem."

"HeyDoc," the speedster ran back through the shield,
"YougotanythingIcanusetohurtthesethings."

"... Mo Gue Gui Fie Di Zao," Strange chanted, seeming oblivious.

"Mr. Allen," Wong croaked, "Take this."

Clutching his ribs with his right hand, the bodyguard extended a wooden tonfa with his left. A kindly green glow surrounded the weapon.

"Cooooool," Bart took the weapon reverently, and then spun it with surprising skill. Then he raced back out of the library, knocking out a demon that almost snuck up on Firestar on the way.

Changeling took the form of a mountain gorilla, and charged towards the stairs leading up. He knocked one of the attackers aside, but the demons behind her were firing lightning. With a squeak, he became a mouse to avoid being crisped. He scampered between legs, and then became a bear, slamming the winged horror he was under into the ceiling, banishing her. Almost immediately, he became a fly to avoid more electricity.

'OK, need something that can hurt them, but still quick enough to avoid their attacks,' he thought, 'A raptor? No, too trite. And their blood burns like acid. Hey, I know...'

The green kangaroo jumped forward, landing a neck snapping kick before bouncing back. He dodged another demon's claw, and landed an uppercut on her. She stab again, but he bounded aside and smacked her with his tail.

Cannonball hung back with a frustrated look. In the narrow halls of the Sanctum Sanctorum, his explosive propulsion was all but worthless. So he stayed behind the shield, ready to help in any other way he could. But all he could really do was observe that no matter how many Hounds his friends banished, there was always one or two more to fill the void. And that late at night, the teens' exhaustion was beginning to show.

The demon's magic claws were cutting insignificant furrows in Rogue's Adamantium flesh. These minor scratches quickly healed, but the fact they were scored at all was disheartening. At one point a sharp blow to the head flooded her brain with a light/dark sensation, and her body started to change back as she almost passed out. With an act of raw will, she grabbed hold of her consciousness, and crushed the ribs of the offending demon. A cyan skinned Hound took the place of her fading lime ally. She slashed, but Rogue caught her arm, crushed her wrist, and then hip-tossed her into the deep purple demon sneaking up on Mercury.

Three aqueous katanas danced around the Japanese mutant; deflecting lightning, and slicing fiendish flesh. After the 'hot springs' combo, she had formed 4 swords, but between the demons combined fire and her failing energy, one of the weapons had been disassociated. So she had gone on the offensive, send the blades out amongst the demons closest to her. They had quickly decided to give her a wide berth, and by virtue of that distance and her fatigue she had to keep the weapons close and return to focusing on block their ranged attacks.

Firestar's left arm hung limp at her side. She had taken a lightning bolt to the shoulder, and she was fortunate her uniform had resisted enough that the appendage was only numbed. Her 'firepower' reduced by half, she found herself dodging more and shooting less.

'Ow,' she thought as an arc hit her foot, 'I need to try something else.' She cast her mind about, and her memories settled on a Danger Room session her class had observed. A scene of Superman and Cyclops, combining their optic attacks, to take down a replica of Magneto. Raw heat pouring from Clark's eyes.

"Worth a try," she said aloud. She focused the energy flowing through her body, and tried to direct it to her eyes. With a 'whoosh', the energy boiled out, and instead of a pair of precise beams, a cone of fire shot from her eyes. Three of the demons in front of her were exiled by the attack, but she also incinerated an expensive looking end table, and scorched the carpet. She blinked at the uncontrolled fury of the attack.

'Control, focus,' she berated herself. She tried again, and this time the cone of fire was more manageable. But she felt her knees buckling; using her eyes was more exhausting than her hands by a large degree.

With Wong's enchanted weapon, Impulse was instantly a threat. Smashing joints, breaking bones, the young speedster raced back and forth down the hallway, doing his level best to watch the backs of all of his allies.

Every hair on Garfield Logan's body stood on end as another evil spark narrowly missed him. He had abandoned the 'roo and was now a jaguar. He had decided the burning around his teeth and claws was an acceptable trade-off for the increased damage of sharp weapons. And as an unexpected bonus, the supernatural women initially seemed genuinely afraid of the big cat. They retreated as much as space allowed, and their attacks were erratic. But then he tore the throat of one, and she faded like normal. That seemed to remove some of their cowardice and they had attacked again. Changeling wondered if a real jaguar might have had a different effect, or if shifting to a leopard might help.

Sweat dripped from Raven's brow. Though she had been trained in the use of her Shade Magics; she had never before used them for actual combat, nor in such quantity. Something in her mind urged her to kill again, to stop simply banishing the Hounds and to end their lives, as she accidentally had with the first two. She denied that evil in her

soul, as she had her whole life, and continued to strike the demons with blunted attacks. She could feel the mana gathering around Doctor Strange, and knew that shortly, the battle would end. Then an unexpected claw landed on her shoulder.

"No," Impulse shouted, switching directions as he saw the invader reach Raven. A flurry of electricity cut him off, and he turned to zip around it. Another barrage blocked him, and this time he lead with the tonfa and charged through the area of least current. As with his teammates, the insulated costume only stopped so many amps, and his speed plummeted as his muscles jerked and went numb. He could not reach Raven before the demoness sent a jolt through her, rendering her unconscious. The Hound, whom he recognized as the golden leader, scooped up the limp girl.

"I HAVE HER," she shouted in triumph, "Finish these interlopers, and then return."

A lupine howl echoed through the Sanctum as the Alpha and Raven vanished. Impulse reached the spot as the rip in the dimensions closed. Rogue muttered something unladylike, and shattered a Hound's knee with a stomping kick. But her rage clouded her skill, and a trio of lightning bolts struck her chest, staggering her. Despair and the loss of a combatant settled on the X-Teens and they were quickly pushed back to the library. Cannonball stepped towards the shield.

"Sorry, Dr. Strange," he said as he prepared to blast into the gap between Changeling and Mercury.

"Wait one moment more, Mr. Guthrie," Wong counseled; forcing himself up, and then slumping against a shelf.

"This Place is Mine, BEGONE!" the Sorcerer Supreme invoked. A circle of white energy pulse out from him, banishing each Hound as it touched her. The mutants seemed to collapse as the battle ended. Except for Impulse.

"Wegottagoafterthem," he placed himself in front and Strange, and started talking before the doctor had even opened his eyes,

"WehavetorescueRaven.Senduswhereevertheywent."

"Bart," Firestar trudged over and placed a hand on his shoulder, "We all want to save Raven. But we're exhausted, and we..." She trailed off, unsure what more to say.

Dr. Strange studies them each in turn.

"They took her back to Azarath," he said at last, "If really want to save her, I may be able to assist you. I can recover your strength. And I can transport you to Azarath. But by now Trigon will control that world. And he has other servants, stronger than the Hounds. But are you willing to risk your lives for someone you just met?"

"We promised we'd help her," Rogue stated simply. The others all nodded.

"Alright, then," the wizard waved his hand, "Tempe Morte."

All of the teens froze in place, except for Mercury.

"Wong, they will need the Elixir of Helios. And I must speak to Miss Mizuno alone."

The bodyguard/butler nodded and walked out.

"You have figured it out, haven't you?" he asked carefully, "about Raven?"

"They referred to her as the Offspring. She is Trigon's daughter," she answered simply.

"When Trigon was on Earth, he found one of the remaining talismans, but could not touch it," the wizard explained, "So he crafted another plan. He found a young woman with great magical potential, and courted her. He sought to create a new kind of servant."

"Raven," the Japanese mutant concluded.

"Yes. He seduced her mother. But Angela discovered what her lover was, and fled. She found my master. That was when the Ancient One sought and banished Trigon. My teacher then sent Raven's mother to Azarath."

"He hoped the peace of the realm would contain Raven's evil half," Mercury interrupted again, "and it has not entirely worked."

"Which is why we are speaking," he nodded, "If Raven is brought before Trigon, she could become a slave to his will. She might be able to anchor for the demon lord, drawing him fully into Earth. Or she may be able to destroy the seals, where Trigon and his full demonic thralls cannot. Whatever the case if she is controlled..."

"I will not kill her," Ami said simply and quietly.

"I am not asking you too. But if she cannot be saved, she must be stopped, in whatever way possible..."

Wong coughed at the doorway, and stepped in bearing an ornate bottle, and a number of teacups. Strange gestured again, and time resumed.

"The Draught of Helios will restore you," the Sorcerer explained, as his friend poured, "In the long run it can be dangerous, but in single, infrequent doses it is better than a meal and a good night's sleep."

They each took the potion, and Strange continued.

"I can send the six of you to Azarath, but I must remain here. To guide you back."

"We are ready," Ami offered with uncharacteristic assertiveness.

Dr. Strange started a different chant, and for the 6 teens, the world seemed to melt away.

Part 3

It had been beautiful. It could truly have been called paradise. Amidst the forest of giant oak, there had been a village. Buildings of the purest white stone had been not built but shaped into and around the trees. Lush, soft green grass covered the ground, except where carefully tended gardens grew. Even the birds and beasts of the woods had no fear of the inhabitants. The faint echo of children's laughter still echoed.

That was yesterday. Only a few trees still stood, and they were smoldering wrecks. The rest had been blasted down, and mostly burnt to ash. The white stones were broken and scattered, and etched in crimson and coal. The grass and flowers were gone, scorched to the dirt. Here and there, small mounds of earth and planted sticks marked hasty graves.

The teenage mutants stood transfixed. More than a few tears trailed down their faces, even as their eyes and jaws set with righteous determination.

"He wants to do this to Earth," Rogue told her team.

"Who's there?" a small voice asked. The would-be heroes turned to look at the source. A small boy, no more than 6, was peaking out from behind a rock. His thin face was smudged, and one pointed ear was damaged.

"You're not monsters?" he asked, stepping out.

"No," Changeling said gently. Rogue reverted to normal, and knelt next to the child.

"Are you OK?" Impulse asked, "Can you tell us what happened?"

The lad nodded, and said, "The lightning ladies came. They destroyed the village and the people."

"Did you live here?" Firestar probed gently.

"No," he answered, looking down, "I came here looking for..."

"Safety? Or your family?" Cannonball supplied.

"No, fun," the boy corrected, "I came here for fun. But I didn't..."

He was interrupted as his head separated from his shoulders and bounced away. The others turned in horror as the watery lash darted back to Mercury.

"Ami," Changeling gasped, "What... Why?"

"Look," the girl pointed. They turned as the decapitated head dissipated in a familiar manner.

"That hurt," growled the head sprouting from the child's left shoulder.

"It looks like I'll get my fun after all," giggled the head sprouting on the opposite side. The boy was growing, his fingers merging and lengthening into three talons. His faces became draconic, and a third eye appeared in each forehead. Wings unfolded from his back, and as he grew, he quickly towered over the teens.

"And to think I was planning eviscerate a Hunting Pack," they grunted in unison, "I'm sure you will taste much better." But even as he stepped forward, two whips shot out from Mercury, carving furrows in his now grey-green skin.

"A little help, please?" the hydrokinetic asked. The other students started, and attacked the devil dragon. The creature tried to take off, but a living metal statue and green elephant grabbed his legs, holding him down. Guthrie launched into the monster's left shoulder, crippling the arm and wing connected to it. As the monster crashed back down, Garfield, still an elephant, spun and donkey kicked the demon, shattering ribs. Angelica fired a bolt of her most powerful heat at the stump of the middle neck, which had been starting to regrow. Mercury continued to thrash the dragon, sending pink blood flying.

"What are you?" the invader gasped, trying to withdraw and being blocked. Cannonball veered back, and snapped one of the remaining necks. Mercury sent an arrow deep into his chest, and Changeling sunk the fangs on a black adder into the leg he had been holding down. The demon's remaining head spit gobs of acid at them. Mercury and Firestar stopped the attack, trapping or evaporating the deadly liquid. Rogue caught a boost from Cannonball, and began to strangle the last active neck. The creature tried to shake her off, and when that failed, started to roll over. Changeling transformed into a brachiosaurus, and held the dragon down to protect Rogue.

As the creature faded back to its own dimension, her friends turned to face the blue haired girl.

"How did you know?" Rogue asked.

"I can sense the water in people," she explained, "You, me, Raven, we are all mostly water. The Hounds had no water in them, and neither did the ryu... dragon."

"OK," Gar shrugged, "Now what?"

"Where is Impulse?" Cannonball asked.

"I'm here," Bart Allen ran back to the group.

"What were you doing?" Rogue asked, annoyed.

"Keeping an eye on them," he pointed back at the tree he had been behind. They turned to look at the remains of the redwood.

"There are humans hiding back there," Ami informed them. A middle-aged woman and two teen boys emerged warily.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" the woman asked.

"We are here to rescue our friend. The Hounds abducted her," Rogue answered gently.

"Hounds?" they didn't understand.

"The lightning throwing demon ladies," Impulse explained.

"If the demons took your friend..." the woman started.

"And didn't just kill her outright," the younger boy shouted bitterly.

"... she is probably in the Capital," she continued. She pointed to the horizon. Through the trees, they could almost see a towering purple inferno. "That is where they first arrived, and where they are gathering."

"That is quite far," Ami noted with dismay, "We will be too tired to fight if we walk there."

"You are going to fight them?" the older boy asked quietly.

"If we have to," Sam said equally quietly.

"We should give them the rider," the teen told the woman.

"But what if we need to escape?" the younger boy looked like he would panic.

"We can hide," the woman said, "And we have the runner."

The older teen led them to a pile of burned brush. He cleared it away, revealing an eight-foot diameter wooden dish, with a set of handlebars mounted on the edge. He twisted the handle, and the device floated two inches into the air.

"Push the direction you want to go. Twist the handle clockwise to ascend, counter-clockwise to descend."

"Thank you," Ami bowed. The mutants all climbed into the vehicle, and Changeling gripped the handles. Impulse waved back at the survivors as they floated away.

After a few hours of coasting over the ruined landscape, the heroes came across an oddity. In the midst of the desolation, Changeling drove them into a shallow pond. The rider drifted to a stop, and the teens got out to push it back to shore. But unlike everything else they had encountered the large pool was pure, clean, and unspoiled.

"Do you think they missed it?" Rogue asked, before drinking deeply of the clean water.

"Maybe," Cannonball looked at the depression, "It's small enough."

"Or perhaps they couldn't dirty it," Mercury suggested, drawing some of the liquid into a sphere floating over her hand. She studied the water, before sending it into two of her empty reservoirs.

"There is something unusual about this pool," she added, "The water is strangely pure."

"Well, it sure tastes good," Firestar commented. They each drank their fill, and then feeling again restored, they continued.

The city was mostly intact. The buildings were made of the same white stone as the village had been. Most were standing, though a few were destroyed, and many bore lightning scars. They drifted their transport into a damaged building, where they could see Hounds, dragons, and other, worse horrors milling in the streets. As if they were waiting for something. But no humans were visible, which may or may not have been a good thing. Making sure the vehicle could not be seen, they gathered at the blasted doorway.

"now what?" Cannonball whispered.

"i'd say a direct attack is out," Firestar sarcassed.

"even if we had all the X-Men and every other student at the institute, a direct assault would be out," Rogue agreed.

"so, we need to sneak in," Changeling took the role of Captain Obvious.

"we need a diversion," Impulse deduced, "and that would be my job."

Rogue nodded.

"bart, run around to the other side of town, and cause some commotion. but try not to be seen," the metallic girl instructed.

"i wonder what he'll do?" Firestar pondered quietly.

"i'm sure Bart will think of a thousand things," Cannonball said, "one or two of them are bound to work."

About a minute later, a ripple passed through the demon horde.

"What is happening?" a sphere of tentacles, each ending is a mouth, asked.

"A Drakoid attacked a Rafgarth," a Hound grinned.

"Oh this must see," the sphere squelched through the crowd, which was moving quickly towards the other side of the city.

Rogue nodded, and the team darted into the city, towards the base of the pillar of arcane flame.

"HEY," a voice shouted behind them a half minute later. They all jumped, and spun to glare at Impulse.

"bart," Rogue hissed in angry warning.

"sorry," he grinned sheepishly, then continued, "how did it work?"

"what did you do?" Cannonball asked.

"have you seen those things that look like skinned were-rats?" he asked, "well, I grabbed one of their tails, put it in two mouths of a dragon thing and slammed the jaw shut." Seeing their faces, he slowed back down, "a few thrown rocks and pulled tails later, and it was a full fledged brawl."

"we should keep moving," Ami interrupted.

"i found where the purple stuff is coming from," the speedster informed his teammates.

"ok," Rogue nodded slightly, "bart, lead the way. but not too fast."

He nodded back, and directed them into the city.

The building was strangely impressive. It was made of the same white stone, in the same natural manner. But it was larger than the rest; it was the only two-story building, and had a larger floor plan. Over the double door was the inscription 'ATHENA'. And breaking out of the center of the building was the tower of violet energy. But none of this was what caught their attention. The structure radiated intense goodness, which was at

odds with the extreme evil radiating from the flames. The conflicting energies filled the mutants with a nervous power.

"Athena," Changeling said, curiously. Due to the hum of the demonic force and lack of demons, he spoke at slightly louder than normal volume, "Isn't that a Greek Goddess?"

"Athena is the goddess of wisdom and invention, and defender of the weak," Mercury supplied.

"So, this is a library?" Cannonball asked.

"Or a school." Firestar supplied.

Impulse and Rogue pushed open the doors, with Mercury and Firestar covering them. A single Hound inside the first chamber jumped out of her chair when she saw them, but twin strikes of heat and water banished her before she could raise an alarm.

The room could have been a library or a classroom. The walls were lined with bookshelves, and tables were still mostly organized throughout the center of the room. At the back of the room was another door, closed. Rogue signaled all clear, and the X-teens scurried into the room, closing the doors behind them. Rogue had Changeling help her block off the front entry with a trio of the large, heavy tables. They gave the area a quick search, but there was nothing of interest; and the comparatively room contained neither Raven nor the flames of Trigon.

Beyond the inner door, a hallway lead left and right, and a set of stairs directly ahead went both up and down. Behind the stairs, a green arcane shield blocked a pair of double doors.

"Now what?" Impulse asked, "Should we split up and try to find another way in?"

Rogue shook her head, "Too dangerous. Ah'd bet Raven is in that room, and she's gotta be guarded. It's too dangerous to split up now."

"You don't you and Cannonball just blast through the wall?" Firestar asked.

"Maybe..." Rogue considered.

"Shh," Changeling's ear twitched as he quieted them.

"Father, they don't sound like demons," a young voice drifted up from the lower level.

"We cannot risk being discovered, Laurana," a deeper voice answered.

The mutants all glanced at Mercury. The Nihon-jin's brow creased, and then she nodded. Rogue gestured, and her team moved down the stairs.

A man of middle years looked shocked to see them, and spread his arms to shield the dozen or so children behind him.

"How did you pierce my shield?" he looked at them in restrained fear, "Trigon's followers can't even see the stairs."

"We will not hurt you." Mercury reassured.

"We ain't demons," Rogue spat, "We're humans."

"How?" the man relaxed a little, but did not lower his arms, "No one else survived. We couldn't fight them."

"We met a trio of survivors," Rogue informed him

"And anyway, we aren't from here," Firestar pointed out blandly. The man scowled and raised an eyebrow.

"We're from Earth," Changeling said, "and we can survive, because we're mutants."

"Why did you come here?" he pressed.

"We came to rescue Raven." the green mutant answered.

"Raven... No, I sent her to the successor. She is not here."

"The Hounds followed her, Azar-san," Mercury explained, "We tried to protect her, but they were too many, and Raven was captured."

"Azar?" Firestar gaped, "This guy?"

Impulse nodded along with Ami, "He'd have to be a strong wizard to hide these kids."

"We think Raven is in the room above us," Rogue looked him over shrewdly, "Strange said ya 'lost your aggression'. But ya think you could help us get past that magic shell."

"If Raven was brought before Trigon," Azar seemed to wilt, "we are lost. It is too late."

"NO," Gar shouted, "It CAN'T be too late. We can still save her." His eruption faded out quickly, "we have to try. Right?"

"You don't understand," Azar shook his head, "Trigon knows Raven's True Name."

"How could he know her real name?" Impulse interjected.

"In the same manner the demons found their way here," Azar answered briskly, "We were betrayed by one we thought our friend."

"But Raven is Human," Mercury frowned as she spoke, "Her True Name would only make the compulsion more effective, not absolute."

"It may be that a Human can, in rare cases, counter the power of his or her True Name," the wizard countered, "But it requires a strong will. And Raven is only half Human. I would not expect her to break the demon lord's hold."

"Half Human?" Firestar asked, "What do you mean? That's she's a mutant like us."

"No," Azar shook his head, "She is half Demon. Her father is Trigon."

Mercury watched her friends react. Cannonball looked like he'd been hit, and Firestar's jaw dropped. Changeling carefully controlled his face, but both Impulse and Rogue were genuinely not surprised.

"You didn't know?" Impulse queried Angelica and Sam.

"You did?" the hot-tempered red head barked back.

"The Hounds did call her 'the Offspring'," Rogue answered, "Did ya think they meant the band?"

Firestar sputtered, but Cannonball just nodded.

"Would it have made a difference?" Garfield asked them quietly. Everyone looked at him.

"We said we'd help her. And she is a good person, despite her genetics. Isn't that what the X-Men are all about?"

Mercury smiled and impulsive hugged the green shapeshifter.

"You've got me there," Firestar shook her head ruefully, her shock and anger dissipated.

"So," Rogue faced immortal again, "Can you get us past that shield?"

"It won't help."

"Even if we banish her father?" Sam Guthrie suggested.

"That might work..." Azar contemplated. Then he shrugged sadly.

"You seem intent on throwing your lives away. I will help you, so you do not reveal our location."

"Thank you," Rogue replied.

Azar instructed his young charges to stay behind, and then followed the mutants back to the main floor. The wizard studied the shield for a moment, and then turned to them.

"I have a charm that will let you pass through the barrier, once. If you are victorious, the shield will unravel on its own. And if not..." he shrugged slightly, his face still sad.

"We know the risks," Gar said.

"No, you do not," Azar replied, "At the very least, you will be fighting both Trigon and Raven. And that assumes he has none of the rest of his army present..."

"A valid assumption," Mercury interrupted, "He would not want his followers to learn Raven's True Name."

Azar frowned in that, and then nodded, "I had not considered that. But you are likely correct. For all the good it will do you. Trigon alone has powers like onto a god. I ask one more time, are you committed to this course?"

They all nodded, and the immortal sighed. His face then set, and he straightened his frame.

"In the name of Artemis, the Moon," he sang, holding his hand before them, "Let no barrier hinder your hunt. Aloha Mora."

A tingling passed through them, and the green barrier looked paler. The students could now see a series of interlocking runes where before it had appeared a solid wall. Rogue stepped forward, once more metallic. She stretched out her hand, and it passed through the arcane shield with no effect. With a slight grin, the Southern nodded, and opened the door. Cannonball and Mercury both whispered thanks to the immortal as the students snuck through the gate.

"It took you long enough," a voice rumbled above them. He might have been human, two arms, two legs, a single head, no wings or tail. Only three things separated the monster from mortals. First was his skin, deep red in color and possessing a slightly metallic sheen. Second was his size; though of normal, if muscular, human build, the demon was thirty feet tall. And last, his eyes; four orbs, of terrible ginger, stared down at them. They were lit from behind by an evil flame, which occasionally flared out from behind the orbs.

And the creature was not alone. She had been stripped of her borrowed X-Men training uniform. Instead Raven wore a leotard, with her slim legs bare except for the boots that

stopped just above the ankle. Her hands were bare as well, but her dark energy pulsed around them. She also was garbed in a cape and hood styled to match her name. The hybrid teen floated in the air beside the giant demon, seemingly of her own free will.

"So you are the adolescents who have troubled my Hounds and tried to keep my daughter from me," Trigon remarked, nonplussed, "Could you truly be descended from my ancient foes?"

"Yup, that's us, just a bunch of Teen Titans," Rogue said sarcastically, "Give us back Raven."

"Of course," the demon acquiesced, "She is free to go with you, if that is her desire. 'Raven', would you like to go with these humans?"

The girl's expression remained sinisterly blank, and she said nothing. But she also floated back, closer to her father.

"Good girl," Trigon smirked.

"Now," the demon lord's voice grew harsh, "destroy your 'friends'."

Raven raised her hand and an arc of Shadow cut towards them. A wall of water interposed itself, and though an inch thick and harder than steel, it barely stopped the magical/psionic energy. And sweat formed on Mercury's forehead from the strain.

"Raven, stop," Changing begged, "We don't want to fight you."

"And you do not want to fight us," Ami continued, "Trigon is controlling you."

Raven paused, and a line appeared at the crown of her nose. Then she attacked again, and this time the students dodged.

"What she wants does not matter," Trigon half-laughed, half growled, "She is my daughter and by her True Name she must obey."

"No," Mizuno dodged another spear of darkness, and flew up to Raven on wings of water, "Raven you are Human. You don't have to obey. You can choose."

"Choose?" Raven frowned deepened ever so slightly as she muttered in askance.

"Choose to fight his power. Choose your path in life. Choose to be one of us."

Raven's eyes narrowed, and a hiss escaped her down-turned lips.

"ENOUGH," Trigon roared. Four bolts of energy from his eyes converged on Mercury. Her liquid armor mostly protected her, but it evaporated as she fell from the air. Cannonball caught her, and his shield protected him from Trigon's next assault.

"Emalla," Trigon shouted, "I command you. KILL. THEM. NOW!"

Raven's face blanked again, and her power ripped up part of the floor and hurtled the splinters at them. Firestar incinerated the attack before it hit them.

"Mercury, Changeling, keep tryin' ta get through to Raven," Rogue instructed, "We'll handle Daddy."

Mercury nodded, and replenished her ammunition. The water flowed over her again, and her shell lifted her back off the ground. Changeling assumed the form of a parrot, and flapped up right around Raven's face.

"Raven, please," he squawked, "You saved me from that Hound, back at Dr. Strange's house. I won't fight you now."

"Father commands your death," her response was in a dead, monotone.

"You wanted that we protect you from Trigon," Ami pointed out, "We cannot do that if we are killed."

Raven's eyes narrowed as she considered that.

Rogue charged into Trigon's right leg with all the speed and strength her 600 some pounds of Adamantium could muster. She was stopped cold. The monster tried to kick her away, but she rolled away, and hammered her fists into his other calf. He grunted, but still did not move. Cannonball slammed into the knee of the leg Rogue was beating. Under the combined attack, Trigon lost his footing and slipped to his knee. The invader pushed down on Rogue, and used her to regain his feet. Firestar started to fire her heat ray at him, but was forced to expend her energy to dodge a swatting hand.

Raven lashed out, and Mercury stopped the shadow from severing Gar's left wing.

"You could join us," Ami offered, "I am sure you would be welcome at the Institute. You'd be safe, and have friends. You could practice more with your powers. You could learn more about Earth. And you could help people."

Raven fired another semicircle of shadow, but Changeling and Mercury both noticed a tear running down her cheek.

Trigon's eye beams lanced out, striking Rogue and Cannonball. But the demon's ire rose as they recovered without injury. Then villain howled in pain when Impulse flooded his already injured ankle with a barrage of blows from his borrowed tonfa.

"Bart," Rogue admonished, "Why didn't you give that back?"

"Wong didn't ask. And I thought I might need it." Both Rogue and Firestar glared at him. "I'll return it when we g..."

His reassurance was cut short as the fiend's giant hand sent him flying. He landed on what appeared to be a stage at the back of the room, and didn't move.

"BART," Rogue and Mercury shouted at the same time.

"Raven," Changeling cawed, "Are you going to let him kill us all?"

Though another tear rolled down her cheek, she punched the green bird, knocking him from the air. He barely recovered before crashing, and he kept his distance.

"Raven," Ami's voice grew hard, "if you can't fight Trigon's control, I will have to fight you, defeat you."

She triggered another reservoir and sent out a dozen tendrils to gently restrain the mystic thrall. But to her surprise, Raven let out an unearthly scream as the water touched her skin.

Raven's howl wrenched everyone's attention to her. Trigon and the five mutants all stared as another shriek echoed out of her throat. Mercury withdrew the water, and the hybrid dropped to the floor.

"What did you do?" Changeling accused, landing beside Raven and resuming human form. He reached out for her, but her powers pushed him weakly away.

"Nothing," Ami answered in confusion, "The water barely touched her and... The water?" She looked at the storage cell she had triggered, then studied the water around her again, "This is the water from that pond."

"Mercury," Raven gasped. As she looked up, her eyes were clear and focused for the first time, "Can I really stay with you?"

"NO! Destroy them, Ema!la!" her father ordered. Her eyes died again and she floated back to her feet. Mercury was prepared, and her wall of water stopped the shadow blades.

"More," Raven whispered, as she lashed out again, scoring a light cut on the green bear.

Firestar poured every BTU of heat she had at the demon lord, but he just laughed it off. He shot his eye beams at her, but she gracefully spun out of the way. Cannonball and

Rogue continued to hammer the fiend, but he seemed more annoyed than injured. A giant hand flicked the metallic girl away, but she kipped up and charged again.

'More?' Mercury pondered, barely avoiding another arcing strike, 'the water from that pond hurt her, but it also seemed to let her break through. The pond wasn't despoiled, or couldn't be. This liquid has good energy, and it both hurts and weakens Raven's demon side. So she wants more water to help her become free.'

"Gomenasai, Raven," Mercury said, as she added the other reserve of blessed watered to her arsenal. Then she sent the aqua streaming at the girl. Raven screams shook the teens emotionally, but Ami did not relent. She wrapped Raven's body, only allowing her a gap to breathe. The hydrokinetic saturated her friend's clothing, every inch of her skin; and Mizuno even dribbled some of the water down her throat. Trigon roared in anger, and tried to shoot Mercury, but Cannonball interposed himself. Raven's cries slowly trailed off, and then her eyes began to glow.

"I am Human," Raven whispered to herself, as Mercury pulled back the water, "I can choose."

"Emalla, obey me," Trigon demanded.

"no," she countered, "NO! I am Emalla no more. I am not your slave. I am called Raven, and I stand with my friends."

She gestured, and a mass of razor sharp energy struck Trigon. He was injured, but the cut was frighteningly shallow.

"If you stand with your friends," he sneered, "you die with them."

His four orange beams lanced out. Mercury stopped them, but lost more water in the process. Changeling became a T-Rex and mauled Trigon's left arm. Rogue frowned slightly as Raven retreated, but was reassured when Raven landed next to Impulse.

"Bart," she said gently, touching his face, "I'm sorry. For me..."

Another tear leaked down her cheek, and a white light sprang up around her hands. A shudder passed through the speedy mutant, and his eyes opened

"Ow," he grunted, then paused to consider, "Well, not really." Then he noticed who was sitting next to him. "What happened?"

"I wanted to take you pain away," she seemed confused and shaken, "And I did."

"Talk later," Rogue shouted as she skidded to a stop next to them, "Fight now."

Though he was not howling in pain, Trigon was obviously hurt by the mystical water also. Each time Mercury struck, it left odd, green welts on his scarlet skin. Cannonball swarmed around the giant, slamming into him from every side, keeping him off balance. Changeling had all but torn off the demon's left arm. Firestar had discovered that though Trigon's skin was immune to fire and heat, the tissues underneath were not. So as her friends cut his epidermis, she scorched away the muscle underneath. Impulse retrieved the enchanted weapon he had dropped, and began to rapidly batter Trigon's legs. Rogue also continued to attack his lower limbs, the only part she could reach. Raven flew forward, and her power became a set of chains, binding her father's arms to his sides. Together, Rogue, Cannonball, and the elephant that was Changeling knocked him over.

"Grztnk!" Trigon intoned. A sphere of purple energy pulsed out from him, freeing him from his daughter and knocking them all back. He sat up, and smacked Cannonball to the floor before standing.

"Iriririri," the demon shouted, and a blue-black axe and shield appeared in his waiting hands. Mercury shot a bullet of water at him, but the invader caught the attack with his buckler. He then blocked Firestar's assault with the head of the cleaver, before swinging it down at Rogue. She leapt aside, but not quickly enough. The weapon clipped her arm, and took off a shaving of Adamantium. Rogue dropped to the floor, crying and clutching her wounded limb. Trigon aimed his next swing at the metallic belle's head, but Mercury and Raven each put a protective dome around her. The double defense barely stopped the attack, and the pair rushed to her side. The other four stepped up their attacks, to buy them time.

"Rogue, what is wrong," Mercury gently pried the metal fingers back, but the wound had already regenerated.

"Why is she still in pain?" the water mistress asked.

"That weapon must inflict pain magically," Raven said, "I will try to help her as I did Impulse."

She placed left hand on Rogue's forehead, and chanted, "Azarath Metreon Zinthos."

A prickly black and yellow sphere formed over the spellcaster's upturned right hand,

"What should I do with this?" she asked, her face tightening in effort.

"Give it back," Impulse shouted. She nodded and pointed her hand at her would be master.

"Engwa de Verfose," she announced, and the sphere darted up at the demon. He guarded once more with the shield, but the power of the magic seemed to infect the shield. The dark buckler turned a sickly yellow-green. Cannonball slammed into the device, and it broke apart. The mutant carried though, and slammed into the side of Trigon's head. Off

balance, he was knocked down as Rogue stormed to her feet and into his. He fell against the wall, cracking the white stone. Impulse followed their opponent, focusing his barrage on Trigon's knees and ankles

"Bart, let me see that for a second," Rogue asked quickly, and he handed her the bludgeon. She grabbed the weapon in both hands and brought it down with all her might on the demon lord's shin. With a loud double crack, the weapon shattered, as did Trigon's bone. The monster howled in pain. Distracted, he was unable to stop the attacks of Raven, Mercury, Firestar, and Cannonball. Rogue and Changeling took turns beating on the broken leg, keeping the demon in pain. Impulse grabbed the splinters of the broken tonfa, and began to throw them at high speed. The enchanted shards of wood pierced Trigon's skin, giving Firestar more points to exploit. The demon swung his axe wildly and weakly, clearing the space around him. Then, he dropped the weapon and raised his other hand in submission.

"I yield," the fiend said. The Teens halted their attack, but also surrounded him warily.

"Raven may go with you," he added.

"Not enough," Impulse said, "You will leave."

"You will take all of your demons, and leave Azarath, never to return," Firestar insisted.

He nodded his agreement. But as he did, he moved his right hand over his dropped axe. He flicked his hand forward, and the hatchet flew straight at Raven.

"Look out," Impulse shouted. The speedster knocked Raven out of the way. As they tumbled, Raven gestured, and the axe reversed course, burying itself in its Master's chest.

"You cannot win," Trigon coughed, flecks of pink blood appearing on his lips, "I am a god. You cannot kill me."

"We do not have to kill you," Azar's voice rang out from the door. He was wearing more formal and impressive looking robe, embroidered with eldritch symbols. But Trigon only snorted.

"You? What can an impotent old warlock hope to do?"

Azar reached into his left sleeve, and took out a small bag. He poured out the contents, fragments of gold, silver, ruby, and emerald, which floated in the air before him. The demon's red face turned a pale pink.

"I see you recognize this. When my apprentice sent Angela here, he also gave me the pieces of the broken seal," the immortal's eyes shift to Raven, "I will need your help with this."

She nodded, and together they began to chant.

"Yu Mo Gue Gui Fie Di Zao," they intoned in unison. The parts of the Titan artifact began to glow. The monster began to squirm. He fired his eyebeams at Raven, but Rogue interposed herself. The talisman pieces flew across the room surrounding Trigon.

"This is not over," he growled, "I will find another path to Earth. If this wretch will not obey, I will create others. You cannot win, because I will never stop."

"Maybe," Rogue informed him, "And we'll be ready for the next time."

The space between the fragments decreased, and the invader shrunk in turn. The area of the spell grew too small, and the axe disintegrated. Trigon reached for a part of the seal, but his hand froze over, and he yanked it back in pain. Finally, Trigon vanished from view, as the mystical emblem finally reformed.

Raven and Azar both collapsed from the effort.

"It is done," the wizard said, "We may not be Titans, but Azarath should be safe."

"Ya could have told us you could do that," Rogue snapped, but with no real fury.

"I could not have," he shrugged, "Without Raven's help. Or had you not been able to restrain him. And I did not expect either."

"What will you do now, Raven?" Changeling asked, "If the seal will protect Azarath, it is safe for you to stay here."

Raven frowned slightly as she considered her newfound ability to choose....

Epilogue

<CEREBRA online>

<Danger Room activated>

Authorization: BYPASS

Password: *****

<WARNING: GRPD Protocol requires an observer in the Control Room in case of system malfunction>

<GRPD Protocol over-ridden>

<Executing "Blasted_Heath@Brotherhood.drh">

<Run subject scan>

Subject 1:

Rogue

Real Name: Unknown

Age: Unknown, estimated 17

Eyes: Green

Hair: Brown with a White Stripe

Height: 5' 8"

Weight: 120 lbs.

Powers: Power Theft: Rogue drains the life energy and memories of any person she touches. In the case of mutants or other meta-humans she also gains their powers. She generally retains the powers and memories for a limited time, but in cases of extended contact the transfer can be long-term or even permanent.

Adamantium Transformation: After her altercation with Colossus/Famine and Sabertooth/Death, Rogue has gained the ability to change her entire body into living Adamantium. In this form her strength and damage resistance greatly increase. She also regenerates wounds while in this form. It is unknown if she will have this power forever or if it will eventually fade like her other borrowed powers.

Subject 2:

Changeling

Real Name: Garfield Logan

Age: 17

Eyes: Green

Hair: Green

Height: 5' 8"

Weight: 150 lbs.

Powers: Zoological Shapeshifting: Changeling can become any real, Terran animal. This includes extinct species. This includes changing in size, and he gains all the natural abilities of that animal (i.e. sense of smell, venom, flight, water breathing).

Subject 3:

Cannonball

Real Name: Samuel Guthrie

Age: 17

Eyes: Blue-Gray

Hair: Blonde

Height: 6'

Weight: 150 lbs.

Powers: Invulnerable Flight: Cannonball can fly, but only at speeds in excess of 200 miles per hour. His maximum speed is somewhere around Mach 2. An addition, while he is propelling himself (and for about 5 seconds afterwards), he is surrounded by an energy shield that renders him functionally invulnerable.

Subject 4:

Impulse

Real Name: Bartholomew Allen

Age: 15

Eyes: Yellow

Hair: Brown

Height: 5' 1"

Weight: 110 lbs.

Powers: Super Speed: Impulse moves at super human speeds. His maximum speed has been recorded at somewhere around 2% of the speed of light. This also effects his senses and thought processes. However as a side effect he suffers from a meta-human version of attention deficit disorder; he thinks so fast that he has often moved on to something new before everyone else.

Subject 5:

Mercury

Real Name: Ami Mizuno

Age: 16

Eyes: Blue

Hair: Blue

Height: 5' 3"

Weight: 118 lbs.

Powers: Water Control: Mercury can control water, changing its shape, making it fly, and causing it to become hard as steel. She can also make water freeze or boil, but she cannot control ice or steam. The extent of her powers is unknown; she is almost always

holding back. The one time she came close to cutting loose, she controlled all the water in both of the X-Men's Olympic size pools at a range of over 500 feet.

Subject 6:

Firestar

Real Name: Angelica Jones

Age: 16

Eyes: Brown (Orange while using powers)

Hair: Red

Height: 5' 1"

Weight: 101 lbs.

Powers: Heat Control: Firestar can generate massive amounts of heat, and control the heat in objects around her. She can directly heat to anything within 100 feet or herself, or fire focused bolts of heat to melt or burn objects further away. She can absorb heat energy, but only to a temperature of 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Finally, by expelling heat from her body, she can fly.

Subject 7:

Raven

Real Name: Withheld

Age: 16

Eyes: Purple

Hair: Black/Purple

Height: 5' 1"

Weight: 98 lbs.

Powers: Shade Magics: Raven possesses an energy field called Shade Magic. It seems to have properties of both Magic and Psionics, but is also different from both. In expression it is like telekinesis, allowing her to move object with her mind. But unlike pure TK, it can also interact directly with other energy (true TK cannot interact directly with energy, but can appear to using matter, like air, as a medium).

Empathy: Raven can sense the feelings of others (both emotions and tactile sensations), and can also drain them.

Healing: By combined her two powers, Raven can enact a limited form of healing. This is limited easing pain and repairing minor injuries.

<Subject scan complete. Training sequence loading. Run program?>

"Yup," Rogue grinned, "Teen Titans, GO!"