

**“SOMEBODY GIVE ME A CLEAR FUCKING SHOT!!!”**

Logan pivoted to the right immediately, Warlock flattened himself to a pancake, Kurt disappeared in **BAMF!** of thick, blue-black acrid smoke...

And there he was.

He'd taken a direct hit from Scotty at point-blank range not five minutes into the fight...but the bastard dropped him fifteen seconds later. Peter and James had given it their all, pounding on his blazing TK screens until the very **ground** shook beneath us...something that, if I were thinking straight, I would've stopped the moment it started. How can you line up a shot when you're bouncing like a fucking Mexican jumping bean?

Not that it mattered. He dropped **them** scant **moments** after dropping Scott. Ororo was twitching spasmodically twenty-five or so feet from me, blood pouring from her ears, nose and mouth. Whether she was dead, dying or reduced to broccoli, I couldn't tell. I didn't have the time. A psibolt so powerful that the air **rippled** in its pathway roared past me five seconds ago, forcing me into the rubble, the scent of powdered concrete, scorched mortar and ozone filling my nose. Jesus, what a bad shot! I'd thought to myself...until I noticed Elisabeth no longer stood off to my right.

In fact, she didn't stand at all. In fact, I couldn't **see** her at all...but I **did** see a vaguely anthropomorphic pile of ash steaming in the nite, the lights of Hammer Bay playing games with the sludgy, red residue that spread over three or four square feet...

Gone. Just like **that**...

It was time to bring the hammer down.

TEK!

TEK-TEK!

TEK-TEK-TEK!

TEK-TEK-TEK-TEK!

I felt my body soak up the cosmic rays like a sponge, the effect tessellating off my containment suit in the form of white-on-black concentric circles, building, building, building. One more second...just one fucking more—!

**“AAAAAARRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRGGGGHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!”**

I roared as I released, a massive column of focused power so strong the ground five feet below it *melted* in its wake. It crashed into the bastard's psiscreen with the equivalent intensity of a tactical nuclear weapon. I knew. I'd measured it.

A blazing, acetylene-white bloom of unmanaged, raw plasma enveloped the screen, molten asphalt, rock and concrete riding away from ground zero like so much waves on the ocean. And still I kept pouring on the power, depleting every last cell, emptying every last mitochondria, directly channelling the cosmic rays when my body's reserves were tapped, giving my mutation barely enough time to convert the energy into plasma. "Die, motherfucker! Die! Die! *DIIIIIIEEEEEEEEEEE!!!*"

And then, as quickly as it began, the holocaust stopped. It was like a switch had gone off in my body, tripping a circuit breaker. Completely exhausted, I fell to my knees, surrounded in a pool of molten asphalt, the heat radiating from it barely filtering through my uniform. I felt...light-headed. The fumes of fifteen different combustibles filling my sinuses, making my head *swim* with vertigo...

Random thoughts shot through my mind: does Genosha have an EPA? Am I inhaling carcinogens? Did I ever tell Scotty I slept with his wife? Why does my...face...feel...so...warm...?

Time passes.

It could have been hours but it was probably only seconds. I tried to pull my face from the semi-molten tar that now comprised the totality of Route 1 for 'round a half a klick or so...but found I couldn't. My arms were shaking...no, my whole *body* shook. Electrolyte loss, shock...I was wiped in ways I'd never felt possible. When I get back home, the first thing I'm gonna do is...

What was that...?

crunch

That sounded like...?

crunch

Footsteps...?

crunch

Getting...closer...

crunch

...and *closer*...

crunch

Goddamn it, Alex, open your fucking eyes...!

Silence.

I open my eyes.

It's *him*.

My shaking turns into a shudder now and a spike of adrenaline shoots through my system like a sliver of quicksilver...but it does me no good.

I'm exhausted, my muscles are twitching and jumping uncontrollably, tics taking over my body while it struggles valiantly to replace the essential neurochemicals needed to control nerve tissue. If I'd had six pounds of potassium, maybe I could walk...but I doubt it.

I look up into his eyes—so impossibly far from here!—and realise that I'm a dead man.

I want to be angry. I want to shout vile curses at him, insult his mother, his manhood, his genes...but I can't. I have no energy for even that. Even now, the edges of my vision are darkening, telescoping. It feels like a thousand degrees out here and a cold sweat has broken out on my forehead. But before I go to Hell, I want to know something first. So stupid, really. So fucking typically me. It's an irrelevant piece of information but it's the last thing I want to know before the bell's rung.

"Who...who *are* you?" I croak, my parched throat barely capable of wheezing, my swollen tongue mangling the words as if I'd gargled a mouthful of lye and razor blades.

The response was quick.

He lifted his right foot and for a brief, fleeting moment, I could see that not a *single* blemish was visible on the soles of his boot. His TK screen had protected him from *everything*. He wasn't even walking on the ground...not really. A layer of telekinetic force kept him a millimetre or so off the liquified tar...

A bitter laugh bubbled up from deep inside of me. You know, in that moment when you really lose your fucking mind kinda way. It exploded past my lips, perhaps the last sound that ever *would*...

He said one word...

"*Pain.*"

...and brought his foot down upon my skull with all the for—

blackness.