

[Turn 31]

[Outside the Lexington Police Station]

Jake hails a passing taxi and climbs in. There was no way he was going to get a ride back to campus in a cruiser. It was embarrassing enough as it was. To be hauled in like that pissed him off to no end. _What did those jerks think they could accomplish by bringing me in._ Taking shots at his ego like he was an amateur. If they thought he would fall for that they were gravely mistaken.

But they were right, Jake should have found something out about Jason. He hadn't been giving it his all. That's going to change. The taxi pulled up in front of the Young Library parking lot, Jake pays the driver and makes his way to his bike. He starts going over the fragmented pieces of information concerning Jason's disappearance. There is something that he is missing, some connection that he just can't see. His thoughts are interrupted by the chirp of his cellphone.

What now?

It's Josh and "the group". They finally deciphered the info from the Double C's records. There was going to be a drug transaction tonight at the tracks. That's just what Jake needed to get him out of his funk and clear his head. He's not happy with the situation but he'll go along this time. Jake hops on his bike and checks that his "suit" was still in the saddlebag where he last put it. "God that thing is hideous, no wonder I don't want to be a super hero." Jake speeds off to the location near the tracks that Josh gave him to meet the rest of the group.

"When is the drop? How much time do we have to make a plan? Do we have data on how many gun man and what sort of armament should we expect? Any potential powereds in Ellis' employee?" Sound asks Colin tapping on the tips of his gloved fingers as he asks each query.

"The drop will take place Wednesday night, sometime after dark. I don't know about powereds, but I'm certain there will be at least five or six armed men present. We have time to plan, and I do intend to accompany you."

"Thank you, Mr. Blake. You've been very helpful. Please convey our thanks to your grandfather when you see him again." Phoenix glances at Josh. "We'll need to move quickly, I think. Kill the cars and round them all up, or do you think it would be better to target Ellis and let the rest go? Would we be able to pick him out?"

"Odds are we'll have to knock out a few of them to get to Ellis...Can you give us a description of him, Colin?" Sound inquires.

Blake taps on his computer, bringing up a recent copy of The Blood Horse front cover. Ellis is in his mid-50s, heavy set, with lidded eyes and a flattened nose.

His brown hair is thinning badly, and comments about ears like taxi doors would be appropriate. Not the most handsome fellow, but he has made his place on The Blood Horse front cover by shelling out an outrageous fortune for a pair of horses after Keeneland's fall meet last year.

"We also have to consider how to make sure the authorities can make the arrest..." says Colin.

"Good point. We'll have to be a bit more careful about this one than we have been, I think." Sound begins to give the issue some thought.

"I recommend videotape," Colin answers. He removes another case from his BMW, produces two 2 inch cubes from it. "Current state of the art in improvised outdoor surveillance, and they pick up whispered conversation at a hundred meters. We can plant these in advance of the drop, and they'll transmit back to a tape unit up to three miles distant. Ellis will find it difficult to escape from his own testimony. We as private citizens aren't as subject to rules of evidence collection as the police; we'll let the man hang himself."

"You got that right," burred the Nightcrawler's voice in their ears. "As far as th' trucks," he continues, "I c'n glop over exhausts, keep the vehicles from movin' off, but we definitely wanna crack at Ellis before somethin' 'accidental' happens to him in custody."

Subvocalizing in response to 'Crawler's comment and his own question on the table, Sound asks "...so how do you want to play this out with the cops, amigo?"

A bubbling sound that may have been a confused growl sounded. "I'd _like_ ta phone 'em in once we get a handle on Ellis, I mean I gotta believe we c'n handle two cars a' hired muscle. If he's sportin' powereds, tho', that changes the equation. Did I hear Jeeves Jr. say he wanted in on this? You catch a 'vibe' off him?" referring to the 'trust' effect of powereds.

"Fine by me -- I want this bastard's cover to get blown. I'll hang up my super hero underoos if we can't handle some two-bit thugs but If Sony can hire four powered hitmen Ellis might be able to scrape a few pennies together and hire a knucklehead or two...I'm not vibing with Colin but the guy can handle himself."

"How does this sound," Phoenix suggests a bit tentatively. "The Nightcrawler and I could do a bit of reconnaissance, make sure the area is clear beforehand, and plant the cameras. I mean, for all we know, the cops already know about this. Wait for them to make the switch. Ellis is after the money, so he'll be in one of the cars then, right? MagnaFlux's abilities seemed to work on that pretty well last time, if we can get in close enough. Maybe I could carry him? Then they won't be going anywhere, at least."

"They worked well on those assassins' guns too earlier...looks like we have a real ace in the hole with you on this mission, MF." Josh says trying to make their new member feel at home in this bizarre new world.

Having stayed silent due to feeling a little under confident after his assessment of the mystery surrounding Dominique seemed to fall short of being as important as he thought, Chase breaks his silence reminding them all, "I am hover-capable also. I won't need to be carried. Just trying to conserve some energy right now." He pulls his backpack off and empties out his skate pad gear and new paint-ball goggle/mask.

"I'm not sure if I can maintain a field, the switchboard, and attack so we might be forced into radio silence in the thick of things. Let's use a buddy system to accommodate that eventuality: Nightcrawler and Colin should guard each other's backs. Fury will have my back and vice versa. If Phoenix stays airborne we can scope out the entire area and see can watch all our backs...MagnaFlux can keep his eyes peeled for any ambitious snipers that aim for her."

"What do you guys think?" he says thoughtfully hoping he didn't miss anything...

While pulling off his long-sleeve to reveal his black wet suit with watery blue streaks on the arms, Chase adds, "From an aerial perspective, if I stay airborne behind Phoenix before I strike, I should relatively be masked by the light she projects. I could easily free fall from behind her to pick up some speed and disarm the sniper types. I got yo' back..." He straps on his wrist and elbow pads.

"Sounds pretty good to me," Phoenix assents after a moment's uncertainty. He's obviously been giving this whole thing some thought. "Unless someone gets into trouble, then, I'll stick to rounding up strays -- don't want to accidentally incinerate the evidence, after all, if I hit one of the cars." *Really* gotta learn some fine control on this pyro stuff, she thinks to herself. One of these days....

"I'm down with it. You seen this guy's mug, Sound. You'n Jake oughtta focus on him, leave the polish ta us. Phoenix, you spot Ellis breakin' some other direction, you c'n audible the play." The Nightcrawler refrained from voicing any further reservations over the possibly open 'line.' Ellis following through on a plan the bad guys know was compromised, that seemed wrong. Carl wondered if it's just greed and hubris that the code hadn't been cracked, or if something more sinister is afoot. As presenter of this stuff, the Nightcrawler intended to keep a _very_ keen eye Colin's back. This was the kind of wheels-within-wheels that made Carl's head hurt. And _really_ miss Jeeves Sr.

"Ok...I'll cue in Fury and we can get moving..."

Seeing the "2000" call blink through Jake hesitates before answering tersely "What?"

"We're taking the Double Cs drug supply out tonight..." he quickly but succinctly rattles off the plan to his estranged brother.

Begrudgingly Jake says "Fine. I'm in. I want to put those dogs down too and I finish what I start...but that's it. No more. Got it? We got other fish to fry anyway"

"Who do you mean?"

"We gotta find Jason ASAP. The cops just grilled me..."

[Late Wednesday night/early Thursday morning. Duncan Avenue, across from Red Mile Road]

Shiv K took up his lookout point, night vision binocs in hand and a cel-phone in his pocket. The TEC-9 hung from a strap off his shoulder. A car would go by, and Shiv K would eyeball the license plate. He'd speed-dial a prearranged number and repeat the license into the phone, and find out if it was 5-0 or not.

This was how they played the deliveries. Lookouts on South Broadway, on Red Mile

Road, the parking garage at the police station. Anything looks strange, any lookout can make one call, stop the delivery. Better safe than sorry, RoJo had said. Too much money at stake.

There was a sound behind Shiv K, and he wheeled, the TEC-9 dropping into his hand. But there was no one there. When he turned back around, someone hit him, hard, and Shiv K involuntarily abandoned his lookout duties. He had no way of knowing the other six lookouts were already out of action, since RoJo hadn't considered someone watching the watchers in case something like this happened.

[At the track]

Jake parks his bike next to main grandstands, making sure that it couldn't be seen readily by any approaching traffic. The Red Mile, Jake was never into harness race. Thoroughbreds were another story. He had learned a long time ago he had to stay away from that track. He didn't have much money and he couldn't pick a winner if he had to. Jake made his way around the side of the grandstands and around by the entrance to the stalls. It is a bit startling when suddenly there's a voice in his head.

"Josh?"

"Yeah, it's me. But keep it down. Just whisper."

"Neat trick you got there. You could really drive someone crazy with that. Where are you?"

"Center section of the Grandstand. Come on over. Phoenix and Magna Flux are doing recon now."

"Where's the 'Blob'?"

"He's over by the west entrance."

Jake makes his way over to his brother's location. At least they know how to stage an ambush. Jake thinks to himself as he starts up the stairs. He sees Josh now and makes his way over to him.

"I can't believe you actually called me."

"What do you mean?"

"I said I didn't want a part of this. You're just lucky I felt like kicking the shit out of someone."

"I just thought..."

Josh's response is cut short by a incoming message from Amanda. The game is on.

"We don't have time to argue now. We'll talk about this later."

"Damn straight we will."

The two move in to position without another word, the others noting the tense dialog that just occurred...this has got to get resolved -- one way or another!

[In the air, over Duncan Avenue.]

"Just like the others, this one's out too," Phoenix said to MagnaFlux.

"You can see that far down?"

"Sure can," Phoenix replied, then wheeled toward an area where Sound could hear her over the 'switchboard'. "All seven lookouts are unconscious, and bound up. 'Crawler, you think the Snowman did this?"

"Not if they still drawin' breath, it ain't. Who could it be?" The Nightcrawler, turned to Colin, who was observing the road with a set of small binoculars, a Walther P99 in his hand.

"Here come the trucks," Colin said. "Is everybody set?"

"Ever'one ready to kick ass?" Nightcrawler asked the switchboard.

"We're on the way back," Phoenix replied on Magna Flux's behalf.

"Ready," Sound said.

"I see them too. Ok," said Fury.

The grounds were very wide open, once you got off Red Mile Road and entered the parking area, which was nothing more than a dirt field. There were some trees nearby on either side of the entry, where Nightcrawler and Colin Blake waited, while Sound and Fury were near the Red Mile structure itself. Phoenix and Magna Flux would be overhead very soon, but were waiting for a signal before approaching. Earlier, it was decided to let Dominique stay with Colin's car and keep an eye on the tapes. She had a cel-phone and a small aluminum tube containing chemical mace at hand. Dominique did thank Sound for the mace, though she seemed to act as if it were unnecessary.

Two large panel trucks sandwiched around one Lincoln Town Car sped into the parking lot from Red Mile Road; Phoenix had watched them all the way down Virginia Avenue. The two trucks pulled to a stop, the car between them, about ten feet of space between each vehicle. On the left, the truck's back gate lifted up, and Phoenix immediately saw that yes Ellis could afford powereds, if this guy was any indication.

[Phase 54 - Phoenix]

Over the switchboard, after giving a quick thanks for her remarkable eyesight, Phoenix says "Ok, the guy who just opened the truck, he's over eight feet tall, and built like the Hulk!"

[Phase 39 - Phoenix]

Knowing that she had to wait for the exchange, Phoenix drifted quietly. She felt the fire of impending combat with powereds burn through her blood, and realized she'd never felt it this strong at this distance before.

"Magna Flux, you might want to move off a bit, and get ready to dive. I'm going to hold position here until someone breaks from the scene, or I'm needed as backup." (Action delayed)

[Phase 33 - Magna Flux]

"Right. You aren't going to go kaboom again, are you?" He accepts her glare back as an answer, and decides not to press the issue. (Action delayed)

[Phase 33 - Fury]

Despite his anger at his brother for involving him, Fury felt good about being here, ready to bust some heads. The Lincoln disgorged a couple of the Double Cs, and Mr Ellis, while from the truck on the right three more Double Cs stepped out.

[Phase 33 - Silverstream]

From the truck on the left, a woman emerged from the passenger side and approached Mr Ellis. "You're a fool for insisting on this delivery, Ellis. We're never doing business with you again."

"Not your worry, young lady. This is my retirement party. Care to accompany me to Antigua?"

She spat on the ground, noisily. The Double Cs raised their guns slightly. "Come on, Ellis, let's finish this. You going to inspect the merchandise?"

"Of course. Gadge?" he spoke to one of the Double Cs. The ganger walked over to the truck where the big man stood in the back. The big man stepped down, and Gadge jumped inside. Another ganger handed Ellis a briefcase, which he opened. A computer was inside.

Gadge reemerged from the truck, carrying a device used by Customs to sniff out drugs and bombs. "Readings consistent with the expected delivery, Mr Ellis. It's all there."

"Well ain't that grand. Glad to see there aren't any surprises, despite your worries." Ellis tapped on his keyboard, and a cel-modem hummed quietly while the woman removed a Palm Pilot from her hip and watched the display.

"Ok, Silverknight, get Silverstar and let's go," she said. The big man knocked twice on the side of the truck, and the driver emerged. The two men, the driver being more average in size than the other man, walked toward the other truck, while a pair of Double Cs headed for the truck they'd vacated. It was a simple exchange. Drugs in one truck, delivery people leave the truck behind and take the other vehicle.

"So tell me, Kayla," Ellis said to the woman. "This 'powered' thing, what's it like?"

She regarded Ellis for a moment. "Useful. Goodbye Ellis. Don't ever try to contact me again."

"Oh don't worry. I'm retired as of now, heh heh heh."

[Phase 33 - The Fury using held action]

"May as well get the party going, before the bad guys get away," Fury said, and moved quickly to the Lincoln. He pounded hard on the front of the car, and was rewarded with a shattered radiator. He smiled under his mask as everyone suddenly turned in his direction. "Anyone need a lift, just line up right here."

[Phase 33 - Silverstream using held action]

"Ellisyouidiotyouldusintoanambush!" she shrieked, and ran at Fury, then around him. He tried to turn to watch her, but she was incredibly fast. Fury felt himself yanked from the ground and smashed into the Lincoln! (10 points to invulnerability, can't roll for it due to not having steady footing against this particular attack)

[Phase 33 - Magna Flux using held action]

"Sound of stuff hitting fan, right?" He moved down toward the two gangers approaching the truck on the left, their attention on the fight between Silverstream and Fury. With a confident wave, Magna Flux disarmed both Double Cs of their TEC 9s and sent them flying. _Wow! I can't believe how easy that was!_ (Yeah, it's kind of easy when you attack from above, with complete surprise, and roll two 1s for the disarm.)

[Phase 25 - Colin Blake]

"Damn. Looks like we're getting started. Try to keep up with me, Nightcrawler." Colin dashed from cover, the strides of a trained athlete carrying him to the truck on the right. Taking careful aim, he sends two quick shots at the big man, and utters a curse as both special rounds bounce harmlessly off the man's solar plexus. "Mother said there'd be days like this."

[Phase 39 - Phoenix using held action]

"Nice going, Magna Flux!" But she saw Colin Blake's rapidly developing dilemma, and her need to protect outweighed the tactical concern for the moment. _I'm fast, I can recover if someone starts to flee._

She dove down, stopping above the massive Silverknight. He looked up at her, and made a 'bring it' gesture. "My pleasure," she answered, a mighty blast of flame enveloping him (13 points!) But as the flames cascaded and faded, she saw him smile, unscathed.

[Phase 24 - Phoenix]

"That's just the warmup, tough guy," Phoenix said, firing at him again. The followup was almost as powerful as the first one, but the result was the same. She watched in horror as the steel-melting heat merely washed around Silverknight, who shook his head sadly.

[Phase 23 - the Nightcrawler]

"Keep up wit' you? Tell you what li'l Jeeves, you live through this, we see who's faster." Like a vengeful wave of lordly wrath, the Nightcrawler made his way to the truck on the left. "That poison goes nowhere t'nite." He punctuated the thought by filling the exhaust with several cubic feet of plasmic goo.

[Phase 21 - thugs 3 and Gadge, newly disarmed]

Shocked by Magna Flux's appearance and effective disarming, the two Double Cs drop to the ground, hands on heads, and beg him not to kill them.

[Phase 20 - thugs 1 and 5]

"Ellis, you chump, we ain't staying around for this." One of the thugs raises his weapon, and fires at Ellis. He drops, clutching at his gut, while the two Double Cs run for Red Mile Road.

[Phase 19 - Sound]

"Oh no!" he says, as Fury gets spun hard into the wrecked Lincoln. He concentrates on the sound of Silverstream's motion, and redirects it at her. But the shot goes wide, and all the windows in the Lincoln suddenly blow inward.

[Phase 18 - Silverstream]

Realizing she'd come under attack from another direction, Silverstream shot toward Sound's direction. "Youwantabeatingtoonooproblem." She blazed toward him and fired a blast of energy at him, but he 'read' her aim, and felt his powers take over and duck him under the bolt, as pieces of the racetrack wall cracked and fell behind him.

[Phase 18 - Magna Flux]

He quickly senses the various metals on the two thugs, and in a blur of magnetic power, binds both men's wrists with their metal studded gun slings. "Busted. Don't make me come back over here."

[Phase 18 - Fury]

Pulling himself from the dented Lincoln, Fury chased after Silverstream, and threw a punch at her as he arrived. He connected with satisfaction, but her speed helped her to roll off much of the punch, a blow that would have opened a hole in the wall, easily.

[Phase 17 - thug 2]

Seeing the fight going badly real fast, and Ellis down, the thug grabs the computer Ellis had and begins to leg it out toward Red Mile Road.

[Phase 17 - Silverknight]

As the big man decides between attacking Phoenix or Blake, he suddenly turns in the direction of the racetrack. With muscles like powerful springs, Silverknight flew toward the Red Mile. He aimed himself at Fury and clubbed him with a big fist, staggering him (11 to invulnerability, 7 more to power).

[Phase 17 - Silverstar]

The smaller of the two men snapped a salute at Phoenix and Blake, and he too flew toward the Red Mile. He held his position in the air and aimed his arms at Fury. "Sorry, pal, but when you attack one of the Silvers, you get all of us." A blast of silvery energy hits Fury, knocking him to the ground. (Rolled for 8, took 5)

[Phase 10 - Colin Blake]

"I'll get after the gangers!" he says, and begins running toward Red Mile Road also. As he closes on the one carrying the computer, Blake raises his gun and fires, hitting the man lethally in the lower kidney area.

[Phase 9 - Phoenix]

"Damn!" She looks to Red Mile Road, where Blake has stopped one gunman and has two more ahead of him. She looks to the racetrack building, where a huge melee between the Brothers Faulkner and these silvery powereds, who also seem to be the drug suppliers, has begun. Making her decision, Phoenix does what she planned to do: keep any strays from escaping.

Her wings take her quickly after the two gunmen, passing over Blake to fire a warning blast in front of them. One fireball later, the pair have come to a very quick and obedient halt.

[Phase 8 - Nightcrawler]

"No!" he shouts as Ellis falls slowly to the ground. He extends a pseudopod and snaps his way to Ellis. "You ain't dyin' on me, moneyman, you got people to talk to like th' D.A." The Nightcrawler realizes the other truck is still functional, and carefully aims a blast of goop at its exhaust as well, to keep it from departing.

[Phase 4 - Sound]

The situation has gotten out of hand real fast. Figures a bunch of powereds, evil ones by his growing nauseous feeling of antipathy, would be drug runners. And the woman attacking him seemed almost as fast as Phoenix.

He tried again to use the sound of her movement against her, and is more successful this time as his blast knocks her a good twenty feet away.

[Phase 3 - Silverstream]

"Staraurora!" the villainess yells, and waits. (Delaying)

[Phase 3 - Fury]

"Let's try this my way, tough guy," Fury says to the big man, Silverknight. He clenches his jaw and extends his anger outward; Silverknight's face changes from an almost aloof confidence to a shattering rage. Fury breathes inward, feeling the power fuel his desire to fight. (Emotion control attack succeeded)

[Phase 3 - Magna Flux]

"Hmmm, silver is metal, but not a magnetic one. But I bet that Lincoln has some metal in it." Magna Flux directs his power at the wrecked hood; it separates from the car with a satisfying rip. Then, he floats it in the direction of Silverstream, and swats her with it. Or rather, tries to, as she deftly slips out and away from the hood slamming into the ground.

[Phase 2 - Silverstar]

Nodding in Silverstream's direction, Silverstar throws his arms outward. Suddenly, the whole side of the Red Mile is illuminated in silvery light. Sound, at the last moment, instinctively ducks his head into his black jacket. But Fury and Silverknight both catch the blaze of light fully, and find themselves fighting blind!

[Phase 2 - Silverknight]

Already enraged by Fury's power, the huge villain lashes out, arm like a light pole, but cleaves nothing but air in his assault on Fury's last location.

[Phase 1 - Ellis]

Herschel Ellis, horseman, money launderer, and now dying old man, looks into the pitiless face of the Nightcrawler without really seeing him. "So close...shouldn't have tried...shouldn't..." And to spite the rage of the Nightcrawler, Ellis passes on, dead at the hands of the gang he enriched for years.

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Subject: The Four Winds - Turn 32

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[Turn 32]

(Between turns action: recover from blinding attack: Fury - no;
 Silverknight
 - no; Recover from Emotion Control: Silverknight - yes)

[Phase 53 - Phoenix]

Damn. As the strange light fades, Phoenix realizes that she has no
 idea
 what to do with her two captives now. _Something to remember next time,
 I
 guess. Have to make do for now._

"Okay, you two. Close your eyes and lose the guns. Put some arm into
 it,"
 she orders, dropping her voice to a slightly more authoritative
 register.
 She has no trouble seeing where they've landed in the scrubby bushes
 near
 the road; they can pick up the evidence when this is over with. "Now
 lie
 down and make yourselves comfortable." Accounting for everyone with a
 quick
 glance, things seem pretty under control here; she leaves the thugs in
 Colin's capable hands and heads back toward the action.

Silverstream seems to be in charge, and she's fast enough to be giving the guys a hard time.

"I'm on her," Phoenix murmurs for the switchboard, on the off chance it's still up, moving at her fastest and trying to catch the woman from behind while Magna Flux has her occupied, then arcing straight up to avoid any attacks coming her way. But the woman is preternaturally fast, and she sidesteps the incoming fire blast with ease.

[Phase 40 - Silverstream]

"Heymachomancomedownandplay," she yells toward Magna Flux, then begins running in a circle underneath him. A current of air pulls him down hard into the ground. (And, karma being what it is, does 12 points which Magna Flux can't roll for, and 12 on percentiles...night-night, Magna Flux)

[Phase 38 - Phoenix]

At the apex of her climb, she spares a fraction of a second to look for approaching lights and sees all quiet before she dives again. There's no time for analyzing the interwoven emotions driving her, the side effects of combat almost familiar now, unthinkable even two months before.

Got to be smarter...she's fast...use that against her. Phoenix watches as Magna Flux gets slammed to the frozen ground, horrified. She wheels and fires along a path, steps she hopes Silverstream will take. Her aim is perfect; Silverstream and the impacting fireball become one for a brief moment, before the villainess soundlessly collapses through the fire.

[Phase 36 - Fury]

His world a swirling mass of white, Fury angrily lashes out at the last place he remembers Silverknight. Clang! He connects, his fist hitting Silverknight broadside and seeming to crumple the big man's side a bit, like putting a dent in a fender.

[Phase 24 - Silverstar]

"Here you go, tough guy," Silverstar taunts Fury and fires a blast at him. The white cannonade hammers into Fury, who can't see it coming. (21 to Invulnerability! 6 to hits! Can't roll what you can't see, unfortunately.) Fury slams to his knees, the burning of Silverstar's attack igniting his skin in waves of pain!

[Phase 23 - Phoenix]

My God! she screams silently, as the power of Silverstar's attack blasts Fury into the ground. _Can't worry about the bruiser now, this guy's tough too!_ Without thought, Phoenix turns and fires at Silverstar. He catches the fireball in the gut, and caroms into the side of the Red Mile!

[Phase 22 - Nightcrawler]

"Silvers are all fer one? Guess what, you step to one Millennium, you get US all too." Leaping forward as the light from the blasts fades, the Nightcrawler goes straight over the wrecked car for Silverknight. He easily hits the blinded villain, and tries to restrain him with many pseudopods of sticky stuff.

[Phase 21 - Fury]

Fury drags to his feet, eager to continue with the brawl. But the blow must have disrupted his power over Silverknight. No matter. He can hear Carl calling him. "I've got the big guy, Fury, aim at my voice an' bust him up!"

He lurches forward and swings, connecting with the solidly built villain. Hard. Hard enough to overcome the silver man's supertough skin, and knock him and Nightcrawler back 15 feet. Unfortunately for Nightcrawler, he can't dodge the ground. (Silverknight takes 5 points, Nightcrawler takes 1 after they hit the ground.)

[Phase 21 - Colin Blake]

As he secures the bonds on the two gangers, all of the thugs being members of the Double Cs he notices, Colin suddenly whips his gun straight up at someone who's quietly approached him. Seeing who it is, he lowers the gun.

"Thought you might be around when I heard about the sentries being knocked out. Your doing? Of course it was." Colin drags the two bound gunmen to the side of Red Mile Road. "I hope you're coming here isn't a reflection of your opinion of me."

Glassjack shook his head. "Of course, not, grandson. But I felt wrong about leaving my comrades, no matter who was taking my place. Besides, it

seems
you're needed in Finland."

Headlights approach the two men, and Colin recognizes the BMW's distinctive engine. Dominique pulled the car to a stop, and exited. Glassjack smiled at her.

"Thank you, my dear Miss Parisi. You've been a great help tonight," Glassjack said.

"You're very welcome sir. Mr Blake, I'll drive you to the airport and come back with the tapes," she replied, and nodded to Colin. The younger man smiled at Glassjack.

"I do hope you've booked me on a later flight," he said, smiling his most dashing smile at Dominique while he spoke. She smiled back, a smile of tremendous warmth and sincerity.

"Mr Blake, remember when you told me not to touch anything in the car, or I could be hurt? It's my turn to give you that warning." Smiling the whole time, she opened the passenger door for Colin as his ego deflated ever so slightly.

"That hurts."

"You'll live, Colin. Take care of yourself. I'll be in London tomorrow night."

[Phase 18 - Sound]

The combat's been a blur to him. Magna Flux getting smashed into the ground, Silverstream getting baked by Phoenix, who then bounced Silverstar off a wall. Fury and Silverknight fighting blind while Nightcrawler hangs on.

He couldn't think of any place he'd rather be. And as much as he wanted to help Fury, he was too close to Silverknight just then. Sound looked up at Silverstar, almost directly above him. "Let's see if you like a taste of yer own medicine fly-boy..." He blasted upwards, but only succeeded in loosening some more bricks from the side of the Red Mile. "Damn!"

[Phase 18 - Silverknight]

Silverknight hauls himself to his feet, Nightcrawler still clinging to him.

He stopped, and made an elaborate show of placing hand to chin, as if deep in thought. Then, with a smug look at Fury that would have infuriated him more had he seen it, Silverknight shone dully in the darkness. To Nightcrawler's horror, the dented and bashed skin of the big man was suddenly new again, and intact. And as he wondered what would happen next, Silverknight simply stood his ground and waited. And whistled loudly. (Delaying action)

[Phase 9 - Silverstar]

Hearing the whistle, Silverstar flew upward, then down, and fired at Silverknight. Well, actually, fired at Nightcrawler. And for the first time ever, the Millennium heard the Nightcrawler scream in agony. In a tangle of wet gore, the Nightcrawler slides to the ground. (Oh the pain. Nightcrawler takes 30 after rolling for 6, and was that a 13 on those percentiles?)

[Phase 8 - Phoenix]

"That's enough from YOU!" Phoenix screams and fires at Silverstar. The blast sends him back into the Red Mile, bashing out more bricks from the face of the building. But the villain must have incredible reserves of endurance, for already Phoenix can see him pushing himself out of the broken edifice.

[Phase 6 - Fury]

"Sound, where is he?" Fury yells, not realizing that he is betraying his own position to the massive Silverknight. (Delays)

[Phase 6 - Silverknight taking delayed action]

Thundering toward Fury's voice, Silverknight avoids tripping on any of Nightcrawler's 'remains' and goes powering toward the Faulkner brother. But his dazed sight causes him to swing well short of Fury's chin.

[Phase 6 - Fury taking delayed action]

He lunges forward, trying to grab the villain and pound him at close range, but Fury misses as well. "Damn you!"

[Phase 3 - Sound]

"Focus. Can't miss this time." Sound looks at Silverknight, certain that Phoenix has Silverstar well in hand, and channels his power into a

solid
field of energy. "I hope this works."

[Phase 3 - Silverknight]

Hearing a stream of taunts and curses, Silverknight pounds in the direction of the building, not realizing the power of Sound was deceiving him. He swung hard and connected with the building, drilling a huge hole into it. Then, Silverknight realized he was stuck, his arm pinned in between several pipes and other supports just behind the wall! (Gave Sound a percentile chance vs INT to aim Silverknight, and got a 10!)

[Phase 1 - Nightcrawler from 7]

There is a moment of lancing pain at his shoulder, and Carl finds himself sucking in a lungful of frozen air. He rolls to his knees, then suddenly aware of where he is, stands straight up.

"For modesty's sake, lad, turn your powers back on," said Glassjack, removing a small disc from his hand. "Better than smelling salts. SBS wears these on their legs for emergencies. They're called autopeppers. Shouldn't you go back over there and kick some arse?"

(Between turns recovery rolls: Fury - yes; Silverknight - no. Fury out of blindness effect. Magna Flux - yes, no longer unconscious.)

Looks like this one's going to take one more round. Responses due December 10th.

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[Turn 33]

[Phase 49 - Phoenix]

Relieved to see her comrades stirring, if somewhat shocked by their old friend's abrupt reappearance, Phoenix keeps her attention on the author of half their woes. _Watch "everyone's" back... sure, no problem...._

She glances over to make sure Silverstream isn't moving yet. Satisfied she is still out, Phoenix thinks to Silverstar's last attack. _Well, I don't know if 'Crawler can take another one like that, and if I can keep this idiot busy for a few moments, maybe everyone else can take down that behemoth down there._

Streaking over the battlefield toward where Silverstar is extricating himself from the side of the building, she intends to keep him pinned down where he can't maneuver easily, kind of appalled in the back of her mind about all the damage this fight is doing to the surroundings as bright flames splash against the bricks yet again. The villain, curse his luck, slips under the blast of purifying fire, and a nearby window shatters inward. Somewhere in the building, a fire alarm triggers, and emergency

spotlights come to life all around the massive structure of the Red Mile,
illuminating the battlefield.

[Phase 34 - Fury]

Once again aware of his surroundings, Fury locates Silverknight currently trapped near the wall. He hears the sirens inside the building, but ignores them in favor of administering what Carl would call a check into the boards. He charges Silverknight. WHAM! The impact drives the big villain into the building, through the wall.

[Phase 34 - Magna Flux]

Chase comes to in agony, his body bruised in various places he never knew existed. Gathering his barings and sensing that the danger hasn't quite passed, he generates an EM field around himself. Staying close to the ground, waiting for sight of Silver-sucker, swearing that'll he won't let her suck him out of the sky again, and trying to get a fix on his deck. _...wasting too much energy. She fast, but I'm agile. Just gotta give her time to make a mistake..._ Soon he sees that she's out, and that just aggravates him more, as he looks around to see how he can lead a hand to his friends. (Activates magnetic defense, delays.)

[Phase 34 - Phoenix]

She keeps a close watch on Silverstar, ready to shield her eyes if necessary and wondering how many times he can generate that kind of overpowering light. _Won't be much help to anyone blind._ Another fireball flares out, and smacks the villain back into the building. "Excuse me, but feel free to give up at any time, unless you like being a paddleball," she says.

[Phase 30 - Silverstar]

"No thanks." With that, Silverstar flies down to Silverstream, watching Phoenix the whole time, without attacking.

[Phase 25 - Sound]

Damn! Everything's moving too fast! Sound had hoped to finally get a coordinated attack against Silverknight, but Fury's pummeling had pushed the big villain into the Red Mile, and out of sight. (Delays.)

[Phase 24 - Nightcrawler]

"Hey? How did you...AIIIIIIIGH!" Nightcrawler tries to address Glassjack, but the newly lit floodlights cause him great pain, and all Nightcrawler can do for the moment is back away from the battlefield. (Nightcrawler uses movement to back away from the battlefield, and is currently 25" from Fury at the wall of the Red Mile.)

[Phase 22 - Glassjack]

As Nightcrawler moves away at speed, Sir William lets out a 'Good Heavens'. He looks toward the back of Silverstar, and sees the prone figure of Magna Flux raise his hand slightly from the ground. A dented hood of one of the cars begins to rise. Magna Flux looks at Glassjack, who indicates a direction around the wrecked car and behind Silverstar. Magna Flux gives a small nod, and goes to strike Silverstar.

[Phase 22 - Magna Flux (delayed)]

The car hood moves like a quiet balloon, behind Silverstar, then suddenly snaps forward like a great mouth. Silverstar is trapped within the grip of Magna Flux's power!

[Phase 19 - Fury]

"Oh no, you don't; come back here!" Fury shoves his way into the building, and unleashes a couple of weeks worth of frustration at Silverknight's jaw. And connects. But the big jaw is like hitting a wall. Fury's fist rebounds away, and he sees Silverknight shake his head in disappointment.

[Phase 19 - Magna Flux]

Now that he has trapped Silverstar, Magna Flux sends the villain up and then back down into the ground. "Oopsie, I think I broke the villain," Magna Flux says as he looks at the now unconscious Silverstar. (Took him out on percentiles :)

[Phase 19 - Phoenix]

"Nice one, Magna Flux!" she says as she heads into the building in pursuit of Silverknight. The many pillared interior gives her a moment's unease, but

Phoenix navigates them fine. They are inside the Red Mile, where the bettors gather, and except for a few concrete pillars the area is mostly open. Quickly she finds an angle and attacks Silverknight, but *again* the massive man shrugs off the waves of fire. Phoenix begins to feel the first hints of fatigue at the edges of her adrenaline fired nerves, too.

[Phase 19 - Silverknight]

Eager to make Fury pay for his mistake at getting too close, Silverknight latches a huge hand onto Fury's skull and tries to open the Faulkner lad like a bottle of Blanton's. But he doesn't get a good grip, and Fury is able to duck out of the lethal grasp.

[Phase 10 - Sound]

Coming in now, Sound sees how Silverknight just attempted to seriously hurt Fury, and is barely able to keep his own anger in check. Instead of firing, he murmurs over the quickly opening sonic switchboard "With me, Phoenix, 5,4,3..." (Delays to 4)

[Phase 9 - Nightcrawler]

"Arrggh!" the Nightcrawler angrily growls. "Got somethin' for those lights, Jack?" (Delays)

[Phase 7 - Glassjack]

"Lucky for you I borrowed this from Blackwell," Glassjack says as he draws a small remote control from his jacket. He strides across the ground, gives Silverstar a boot to the head in passing as the villain was attempting to stir, and aims it at the building. There is a whine barely perceptible to Nightcrawler (though very noticeable to Sound inside) and the floodlights shatter in a Niagara of tumbling glass.

"One foe left. Mind the shards." Glassjack says as the Nightcrawler goes raging past him, Magna Flux close behind. When they gets inside, they can hear Sound's countdown, and have the presence to realize they needs to hold back for the briefest of moments.

[Phase 4 - Sound, Phoenix, Fury, Nightcrawler, Magna Flux]

The moment will stay with the group for a long time, Sound leaping up and firing a sonic blast; Phoenix thrusting her arms out to match the effort with a ball of fire; Magna Flux and Nightcrawler looping in from either side of the villain, while Fury charged straight up the middle, all three hitting at once. Silverknight took a moment to fall, a look of surprise on his face, and if Sound was right, a barely perceived nod of congratulations from a foe to his enemies.

Questions for Glassjack and other stuff due Friday the 17th. Happy holidays!

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Subject: The Four Winds - Turn 34

CC: patric@patric.net, John Stith <stith-john@galls.com>, Jay
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 Christian <cdirish@earthlink.net>, DLowe <David.Lowe@hotelinfosys.com>, Bec
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GM's stuff - Last post of 1999, all. Thanks to everyone who's been along for the ride. Hope you've all enjoyed it so far. We're on winter break now. I'm available for questions, etc, but I don't need a post from anyone until January 7th. This means that in the meantime I'll try to get sheets updated with xps and trainings. If anyone's got comments or criticisms they'd like to see addressed, now's the time. Just be sure to make a good argument. Despite my completely evil GM nature, I'm a lawful evil type, so make sure your points are thorough and well-stated :) That's it. I'll update the last few posts to the web site tomorrow. Tell all your friends.

david

[Turn 34]

After what seems a very long moment of quiet, Phoenix asks, "Are you all

right?" glancing at Magna-Flux and the Nightcrawler.

"My luck with women has GOT to change!!!" Magna-Flux groans. "Anybody have some icepacks?"

The goop in the center of Nightcrawler's face bubbled behind his strained affirmative grunt. "I was thinkin' I was gettin' a little pale. Guess I c'n cancel that tannin' booth." Fading his visibility slightly to get some relief from the intense sunburn sensation, Carl continues. "Policia's incoming. We oughtta grab the hardware, them computers, an' a informant or two 'n' beat feet." To Glassjack, "We got you t'thank for the down sentries?"

After Glassjack nods assurance Sound adds, "Fine. Glassjack can snag the hardware and disappear quickly. You can bag a "witness" and bolt. I'll hitch a ride with Fury. The fliers are pretty set. We should reconvene at Commonwealth Stadium. I'll leave a "message" to warn the cops about the Silvers.

Phoenix nods quickly and darts out into the open to check the area. "Still clear for the moment..." she relays. "What happened to Ellis, anyway?"

"Got capped," was the Nightcrawler's disgusted reply, before he arced over to collect Ellis' bodyguards and sling towards the stadium.

Stunned for no good reason, all she can say is, "Oh." Then, "Um, I guess I'll keep an eye out overhead for you guys. See you there." A bit more slowly than usual, she climbs to a good height, the flames that surround her dimming out gradually. From that vantage she can see what's left of the battlefield clearly while she waits for the others to move out, strewn with unconscious Silvers, wrecked vehicles, and one dead man.

Explains the missing heartbeat Sound thinks to himself as he takes a moment to pause at the notion of anyone else dying on their watch...

Fury races his engine as Sound joins him on the cycle. He looks back as he sees Glassjack leap "through" the windshield of the sedan with the equipment in tow. Before racing off into the night he plants a specialized decibel trap set to relay the message *Powered Criminals Present...Proceed with Caution.* He wonders what the dispatcher code for something like that is as he nods to Phoenix and Magna-Flux. "The cops have been warned..."

The heroes depart.

In their wake, 150 kilos of prime Colombian cocaine, unconscious villains, a dead financier.

The firefighters arrive first. They take one look at the scene after triggering Sound's decibel alert, and promptly call a Code Paul. Paul with a P. P as in Powered.

Ten minutes later, two of the modified Bradleys employed by the local SORT squad arrive. In the cold air and dull starlight, the massive armored troopers look like the first men on Neptune. Hovering overhead, a modified Apache helicopter shines its spotlight on the scene like a cold star over a dying planet.

They rush forward and gather the Silvers, putting heavy restraints on their arms, and activating some sort of device built into the restraints. The one they try on Silverknight doesn't work. It malfunctions as soon as they try to activate the other part of the restraint.

Two of the SORTies glance at each other. Then a third approaches, almost as big as Silverknight. But it moves with the deliberate motion of a machine. A SORT robot, built from three different ones. The SORTies watch as the SORTBOT wraps Silverknight in steel cable, and walks toward one of the Bradleys. It hooks itself into the side of the transport and waits.

Thirty seconds after they arrived, the SORTies have left. Beat cops arrive in their wake, and make appropriate noises at the cocaine and the body of Ellis. Nothing to see here, everyone move along. Nothing left but the paperwork and the overtime.

Meanwhile, enroute to the stadium...

Shadowing the others at some distance overhead, it's clear that no police are following them. The stadium is starting to seem like a home away from home. Phoenix supposes they should stop using it so often, but it is convenient, and safer than meeting out at somebody's house.

She feels kind of weird. Tired, too. _Seems to be an awful lot of death

around here lately._ She's not quite sure how to feel about it. _Bad guys, definitely. But still.... I don't know._ She sighs, unhappy and impatient with what she supposes to be her own naivete, and drifts down to land...

From a nearby window to a darkened office, Glassjack steps out to the hallway. There would be 70,000 people here in a few months, but tonight, it's only the arriving Millennium group, somewhat bashed about, but ultimately in decent spirits. They fought the bad guys, kept the drugs off the street. Most likely saw a huge turning point in the who and where of criminal power in the city.

"Rough night?" Glassjack asks.

"You were there," she shrugs, her tone somewhat subdued. "Somewhat to everyone's surprise, I think. Your grandson said you were stuck in England on important business? Is he going to be joining us?"

"Colin is already enroute to other duties. The young lady, Miss Parisi, is taking him to the airport."

Phoenix cocks her head slightly at the muted sound of a motorcycle engine's steady growl, loud in the winter silence...

....just as Sound and Fury arrive. Jake cuts the engine and removes his helmet to reveal in addition to black and blue bruises a face filled with conflicting emotions and quiet contemplation. Clearly unsure about what direction his life should take. Following along on autopilot.

Josh discards his helmet as well and begins to move up the tunnel as if it was routine behavior already toward the seating bowl for greater privacy than the parking lot allows.

Glassjack watches them approach, and nods. To Amanda, "Who was the fellow on the flying skateboard, anyway?"

"Magna-Flux. We just ran into him a little bit ago. Young, but he seems to have a pretty good grip on stuff. He should be along in a moment." She gives him a curious look. "So you're leaving again, already? We don't even know why you're here yet."

"I better smoke this fast too....I got the impression the kid doesn't

cotton
to it." Sound says as he rolls his ski-mask up places a Camel filter on
his
lip and strikes the wheel of the Marjorie across his thigh to ignite
it.

Recalling what Book said about Glassjack stepping into the breach he
says,
"Not that we're not glad to see you...mind you but it must be important
if
it brought you back from the UK."

Josh exhales deeply waiting for Sir William's reply to the question on
the
table and notes his brother's reaction to being in these halls again.

Jake's mind is swirling. He can hear the cheers of his by-gone days of
grid-iron glory calling to him. He hears nothing of the conversation
going
on around him. He just stands there staring out over the field and
empty
stands. It has been quite awhile since he had been in the stadium
while it
was empty. The eeriness of it all is stunning. But it helps him come
to a
realization that seems so clear to him now. It all seems to fall into
place
now. Though he thought his last revelation was so clear before but
since
this last battle it seems as though everything has changed. Through
the
pain in his side he feels finally at peace.

"I found myself recalled to active duty. Official Secrets Act. No
sooner was
I off the plane, I was whisked to a meeting with His Royal Highness the
Prince of Wales. Think what you will of the monarchy, when the
embodiment of
the history of the UK begs a service of you, you aren't likely to say
no.
But afterwards I felt guilty. Don't misunderstand, I have every
confidence
in Colin. But this fight wasn't his, and I was wrong to involve him in
it."

"So you found Dominique, and went after the sentries?" Amanda asked.

"Correct. You are all aware she's one of us, aren't you? I had her
drive me
to the various checkpoints, and did the dirty work myself. Though none
of
them will wake up with more than a bad headache."

Glassjack continued. "I did have a great deal of time to study the
evidence,
and Ellis' death will leave a vacuum in the power structure of the
criminal

circles of the city. There are likely to be a number of gang-violence incidents; the last time there was a large scale arrest and confiscation of drugs in Lexington, four people were killed in the month that followed. All were suspected of being informants. I didn't know if you knew that; the streets are likely to be dangerous for some time now."

The Nightcrawler splotched into the group, bearing two unconscious bodies. His rattling breath testified to a stress analogous to carrying a heavy bag of groceries up a flight of steps. "Dangerous fer them. Somethin' we c'n use. Even if these cucarachas an' the hardware dead ends, nice ta' take a small victory anyway. The erstwhile bodyguards glitched into stadium seats, coated into place with slime. To Sound, "Might wanna slap that cone a' silence onta these two 'till we're ready."

"Great minds..." says Sound. When the gangers finally come to they'll be blind and deaf and effectively dumb thanks to the twin efforts.

To Glassjack, "'preciate the assist back there, Jeeves. 'Zis hello again, or goodbye again?"

"The latter, I'm afraid. I expect to be rather busy for the foreseeable future." Glassjack looked at the computer retrieved from the gangers. "Take care of this, you may find it of some use later," he says, handing it to Nightcrawler.

Sound drops his filter to the ground and extinguishes it under his boot, and turns to the Nightcrawler, "So when do you start the John Romero fright fest routine on those two?"

"Next show in five," burbled the Nightcrawler with relish. Holding out the laptop like it was a dead fish, he continued with less assurance. "Somebody wanna drive this thing? Mebbe there's something in here ta loosen their lips. If it ain't on espn.com I ain't gonna find it."

Not seeing anyone else jump at the opportunity Sound says "well it hasn't been _that_ long" he sighs "...let me see what I can find..." He opens the laptop and turns it on using the hum of the abundant power supply to create a pedestal to place it upon. "Anything in particular you guys interested

in?"

Sound's enthusiasm deflates as the system boots straight into a Common Desktop Environment prompt: "Please enter username:"

"Anybody got any ideas what a drug runner's password might be?" he almost laughs.

Having maintained his distance while the smoker's air cleared, Magna-Flux, who's exhibiting uncharacteristic restraint in his wisecracks due to the amount of pain he's in, floats in to offer his assistance. "Sound, why don't I take that role... My senses and E.M..powers will help if there are any password barriers to get through and I can scan the info a little quicker than a key-tapper."

"Be my guest. I knew there was a reason I liked you..." Sound quips as he bides his time between cigarettes...

"Not to mention being handy with a car hood," Phoenix remarks, perking up a bit now that there's something else to think about. "Anything they might have about the people in local government who are turning a blind eye to all this would be interesting to know, I think."

"Damn. Ultra-waste of time," Magna-Flux says as he hands the laptop back to Sound. "Standard install, except for one shell script. Enter a phone number, enter a password. Nothing in the buffers. I'm betting whatever was on the other end was waiting for information based on the time of day. Impossible to crack when the criteria changes all the time. I'd do it like that if it was me."

"Lemme ask our guests," the Nightcrawler says.

And with the help of Sound's silence, and Phoenix's flames, the Nightcrawler did ask many questions of the two Double Cs in his custody. And though they did not give him the answers he wanted, for they did not know the answers to give him, they did confess to many crimes against humanity. And let it be known that their confessions were delivered at high volume with the complete

sincerity that comes from believing one's life is about to end in a couple lungfuls of sludge. And it was with minimal ceremony that the two gangers were delivered to 155 East Main Street, home of the police, all bound up with plasma, and signed confessions attached. And they were all grateful that Glassjack had a notebook and a pen handy.

February 29th, a rare leap year day, since 2000 is divisible by 400.

Though the name Lexington Athletic Club offers up the image of sweaty CEOs checking their pulses and going through the paces of a trainer-supervised workout in an excellent workout facility, one would be remiss in ignoring the first-class restaurant overlooking much of downtown Lexington that is also part of the Club. Conrad Bass was not one to ignore such a thing. The banker, only slightly wider at the waistline than most 63 year olds, nodded quietly to the maitre d' as he arrived. Bass resembled the fellow in the Dean Witter commercials, the old time broker with the whispery voice addressing his starched-shirt staff sometime before the crash of '29.

Life was good. Bass was one of those fortunate men who learned to accept his limitations and work around them. After two marriages left him divorced and house-hunting, he decided that investing in thoroughbreds and the stock market would be a better use of his time and money. Both had paid off for him very well, much more so than what he now considered the money-sink that his marriages would have been had either continued.

Bass wasn't a mean-spirited man, far from it. He was a shrewd judge of character, and possessed great business acumen; both attributes figured in his dealings with people, that's all. Also, he was very charitable for a banker, and well-liked by those under him.

He was, most importantly, valued highly by Lexington's upper class community. This was what brought him to breakfast this morning at the LAC. Some clients, you simply don't insist on their coming to your office. You go to them. And Alan Bloomfield, public safety supply magnate, was one of those clients.

Mr Bloomfield had arrived just before Bass, and was at his table enjoying a Bloody Mary (Reggie, the day chef, was one of only three people in the city capable of making a decent Bloody Mary, as far as Bloomfield was concerned). Bass stepped over and shook hands before sitting down.

"Conrad, how are you doing?"

"Just fine, Alan. Good to see you. How was Aruba?"

"Hotter than a damn sauna. But fun. The boat handled great." A waitress arrived; Bloomfield ordered steak and eggs, Bass ordered grapefruit and cottage cheese, and toast on the side.

"So what have I missed while I was on vacation?" Bloomfield asked.

"Herschel Ellis finally got what was coming to him. They found him dead at the Red Mile with a few hundred pounds of cocaine nearby."

"How about that. You always thought he was dirty. I guess I should be glad you've advised me not to do any business with him."

"His bank's a mess. People from the Treasury department have been there for days now, going over records. Rumor has it he was heavily laundering money for some local dealers. There've been four murders in the city since then; cops aren't saying, but the media is hinting these victims may have been informants."

"Any news on the powered phenomenon?"

"No, pretty quiet. But there was one odd visitor from last week. You remember Harry Marvin? Owned a couple of tractor dealerships?"

"Hmm, yes I do. He was a champ wrestler in high school, back in the 40s when I was a kid. He still around?"

"Oh yes," Bass replied, taking a bite of his recently arrived grapefruit.

"Quite a story. Let me tell you about it..."

Maria Wells was not happy. She was in a hurry, and naturally the bank was going to give her a hard time. Today. They wouldn't cash her check in the drive-thru and insisted she come inside. A lady escorted her into an office, where Mr Bass was waiting.

"Good morning Mrs Wells. I'm sorry to take your time up this morning."

"Fine. Apology accepted. Have someone cash my check and I'll be out the door."

"I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid I can't do that." Bass looked back at her.
Maria was in her mid-40s, dark hair, and a love for gold jewelry. She wore chains and rings in a way that Bass found terribly gauche, despite her still striking features.

"You can't do that."

"The power of attorney has been revoked from the accounts. You no longer are legally able to touch the remaining funds."

"Now wait a minute. My father granted me power of attorney. He is in Breckinridge..."

"...suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Am I correct in guessing you haven't visited him in some time?"

"That's none of your business."

"True. But his accounts are. Imagine my surprise when my old friend Harry Marvin walked into my bank, came right up to me, and shook my hand with a grip that would have crushed brick."

"Mister...Bass, is it? My father did not come to your bank. He doesn't even know what day it is, or what he last ate."

"I'm sorry, but he was not only very lucid, he also had signed documentation from the facility and two neurosurgeons attesting to the complete absence of any sort of neurological disorder from his body. As you know, his brother had power of attorney over his confinement to Breckinridge; that was rescinded this morning."

Maria Wells sat in shock, staring at Bass over his glasses. "People do not recover from Alzheimer's..."

"That's the same thing I said to your father this morning. 'Harry,' I said, 'people don't get better when they get Alzheimer's.' He smiled at me and said, 'I did.' Oh, I was concerned about this, and I did go so far as

to insure it was indeed your father. He had his fingerprints on file with us, for his deposit boxes. They matched. We talked about current events, we talked about things that happened decades ago. He was as clear-minded and intelligent as anyone in this building."

"Oh dear..."

"You know, that's what he said when he saw his account balances. I'm surprised he hasn't contacted you already; he was not very happy. Anyway, thank you for stopping by. I would be grateful if you would turn in any items associated with your father's accounts to the security man outside the door."

"That's something, Conrad," Bloomfield replied when Bass had finished his narrative. "And it was really Harry?"

"Sure was. Fully recovered, without a trace of Alzheimer's or anything else. He looks twenty years younger than either one of us. I saw him late last year, before he was put in Breckinridge, and he was a spindly shadow of his younger self. Now, he's built like a pro athlete again."

"What's he doing now?"

Bass frowned. "Harry had quite a bit put away before he got sick. Between his daughter and the facility, there wasn't much left. But Harry said he'd rebuild that into what it was. Last I saw him, he got a cab and was going to the auctions to find a car. I gave him my number and told him to call me if I could help him, but I haven't heard from him."

"Proud man, as I recall. You'll wait a long time for him to ring. If he does, though, tell him to come see me. I've got a warehouse that needs an ass-kicker like him to get things sorted the way I want them to be."

"Thank you. Now, Alan, what can I do for you this morning?"

Best laid plans, thought the Nightcrawler, usually get screwed.

That wasn't exactly the philosophy of Carl de la Cruces, but it was close enough most days. He'd planned to spend some quality time stalking the streets of Lexington, maybe shake down what had to be the few scared

remnants of the Double Cs. RoJo's days were numbered, with Ellis' death and the cops hauling away a truckload of prime Colombian blow. With any luck, Carl would get that rematch with the Snowman he felt he had to have.

But John Lennon's thought's on life proved apropos to the Nightcrawler. Just when he was heading out the door to meet up with Magna-Flux to track down the still at-large powered nutboy called Eightball, Carl's agent called. He was so excited Carl had to tell him to sit down and chill. Reason to be excited, though. Hell, Carl should have been delighted at a ten-day contract with the Islanders, who were in the midst of a slew of defender injuries. They flew him first class out of Lexington, and straight on to Philadelphia for a match with the Flyers. Nice way to start a ten day tour, trading elbows with Lindros and LeClair. And the money for a short stint wasn't bad, either. It would take care of child support for a couple of months, and pay the rent too.

As they passed over the Ben Franklin Bridge, Carl saw a blaze at one of the huge docks. He was pretty sure he saw Doc Liberty, flying in and out of the scene, while firefighters played water over the fire. Carl wondered how the Doc was helping this time; he'd find out later on the nighttime news that Doc Liberty's powers allowed the hero to simply remove the oxygen from an area and snuff flames like a candle. Firefighters loved the guy; they'd made him honorary head judge at some big charity chili cookoff coming up later in the spring.

He played well, and finished +4 for his tour. Even scored a goal and set up another. The coaches promised to keep him in mind for late-season call ups. He should have been thrilled, but instead Carl was troubled by the prospect of NHL life on the road. Why? It's what he'd always wanted, so he'd thought. Or were his new abilities, and comrades, giving him pause?

With his powers, Carl could do the sort of good he'd always wanted to do for those who couldn't protect themselves. The typical street thug couldn't threaten him. There were threats, though. Silverstar had shown him a world

of pain he hadn't dreamed existed. Like every cell in his body exploding outward. And the pain of the floodlights at the Red Mile, he hadn't realized his sensitivity before to bright lights. Something to guard against in the future. Maybe buy some Oakleys.

Then there was the Snowman. The one topic that kept Carl from thinking as clearly as he should. The Snowman took charge of their encounter, right from the start. And all Carl could think about was another shot at the chilling vigilante, implacable in his helmet and his fatigues. What was it, Carl wondered. Was it the way the Snowman rendered him...irrelevant? Or the way he floated up to that Double C, and brought him to the ground, and started to carve him with blades of mono-molecular ice?

Or was it because the Snowman used the only approach that would ever make a difference on the streets?

The thought repulsed him. No matter how deep the evil, Carl always believed that somehow, a difference could be made for virtually anyone. He would not ever allow himself to fall into the easy way of judge, jury, and executioner. Never.

It wasn't the Snowman Carl wanted to defeat. It was the part of himself that quietly craved the easy path, free of guilt or morality. The Snowman embodied all Carl despised in himself.

Carl hoped he'd survive the experience, if and when it should happen.

Jake Faulkner received two intriguing offers on Leap Year Day.

The first was while he drank coffee at a student café in the Patterson Tower. A man approached him, all Texas smile and Southern good old boy charm. Jake thought of Joe Don Baker when he saw the man, with his huge Rodeo belt buckle and alligator boots.

"Howdy, Mr Faulkner, please, don't get up on my account."

"Hadn't crossed my mind to do that."

"Name's Wade Watterson. I run bail bonds companies from Texas out to Arizona and up through Tennessee. I hear tell your daddy died not long ago, is that right? I'm real sorry."

"Thanks. You knew him?"

"By reputation. We met once, in Amarillo, in passing, but that was years ago."

"What can I do for you, Wade?"

"Straight to the point. Ok. I'd like to buy you out. Lock, stock, and barrel. Three million, cash. Here's the paperwork my legal eagles wrote up."

Wade handed a sheaf of documents to Jake. "I'm staying at the Hyatt right down from your office for the next two days. Room number's on the front page on a sticky note. If you're interested, and I hope you will be, I can have the deal closed and the money in your bank inside an hour. You have a good day, Mr Faulkner."

Wade Watterson got up, tipped his hat, and strode out of the café as smoothly as he'd arrived. Jake stared over the contracts after him.

How about that?

The second offer came as he walked to the bookstore, past the Singletary Center for the Arts. Something slammed off his upper arm, and Jake watched a hard rubber ball bounce away from him toward a young woman running toward him.

She was blonde, and tall, and curved in an athletic way. Wearing grey Kentucky sweats and a blue t-shirt over a long sleeved white shirt, she also wore heavy padded gloves and a caged helmet. Not a football helmet, though. She was toting an aluminum stick with a leather basket on the end, the letters STX on the shaft.

"Nice block, there," she said, her voice deep and breathy. "Most guys would be on the ground crying for an ambulance." Jake noticed her eyes. He'd always heard of people having a smoldering gaze, but he'd never seen one himself. Until now. Smoldering? Hell, try pyrokinetic. Jake imagined a trail of ashes following her from grade school onward.

"It's called lacrosse. You're a local, right? Never heard of it?" she continued.

"Heard of it, yeah. Didn't know UK played it."

"Club level. Means we practice when we want and drink beer after matches.
I'm Rachel."

"Jake."

"Think you can handle a stick, Jake?"

"Um, what?" He changed the subject. "Is this a women's team?"

"Except for me, no. I'm the Title IX poster child. We're in need of more bodies. You seem to have one. Want to join the few, the proud, the insane?"

"I've never played."

"Good. You won't have any bad habits I'd have to break. I'm coach too."

"I'll think about it?"

"Weak, but it's a start." She took one of Jake's contract pages and a pen from his pocket, and wrote on it. "My number. Next practice is Saturday. Call me before that and I'll scrounge up some equipment for you. Cup's your responsibility. Believe me, you'll only forget that once."

And with a snap of the stick, Rachel snagged the ball and whipped a pass forty yards to another player, and was gone.

As he approached the bookstore, across the parking lot where Amanda and her father had encountered Shock that very first time, Jake spotted Emma McBell watching him from her car. She drove away with barely a glance at him.

"Figures," Jake shook his head and went inside to give the bookstore more of his money. Maybe selling out isn't a bad idea...

"Amateurs," Chase thought when he went to the computer lab to retrieve his assignments for printout, only to find that, once again, his directory had been erased. "Like, catch on to world of high technology. CD-R is the only way to save the day." He withdrew a disc from his bag and, after checking the drive for any nasty tricks like razors or needles hidden within, put it in the computer. He glanced quickly behind him, and saw Todd Troyer leaving the lab with a displeased expression on his face.

"Culprit identified. Taste of 'rm -r' for his files, perhaps?" Then, Chase heard his name over the loudspeakers, summoning him to the office.

"Oops. Mind control lasers must have picked up that one. Sigh. Another great day begins," he mused as he retrieved his CD and trudged to the office.

To make the trip even worse, there was the Colonel, waiting for him.

"Let me guess, a surprise trip to Disney World for getting straight As last quarter?"

"Chase," his father began, not even acknowledging the remark. "I'm going to be in Richmond on base for a while."

"Ok."

"Rita runs the house. I don't want your grades taking a nosedive while I'm gone."

"Believe me, sir, the last thing I want is to jeopardize my chances at a good college," Chase replied. To himself, he added, as far away as possible.

"Good. Look. For what it's worth, I'm sorry."

"About what?"

"Everything."

"Even the time you..."

"I have to go. Take care, Chase." And with a parade ground turn, the Colonel was out the door. Chase looked after him with a bit of surprise. "Go figure."

As he headed to his next class, a hand grabbed him by the shoulder and pulled him into a room. "Whuh...oohhhh!"

"Chase, chill." It was his friend, Jill.

"Sorry. Thought I was being abducted. What's up?"

"This," she said, and handed him a paper bag. "I found this in my car this morning. I'm guessing it made the nice hole in the passenger window that was there, too."

Chase drew in a deep breath. Inside the bag was an 8-ball, with Chase's

name
written on it with some sort of grease pencil.

"You weren't kidding about this powered thing you tried to tell me about after the Red Sky Diary show, were you? You'd better level with me, Chase, right now."

Amanda always had the strange dreams after a really busy day. Tonight, she dreamt about the opening to 'The Meaning of Life', where the old accountants set sail for Wall Street like pirates and lay waste to yuppies in office buildings. Only, the pirates were the band, and she was with them, and they were boarding the Sony building near the Shinjuku in Tokyo. Raising all kinds of merry hell and tossing white-shirted salarimen out of windows. She was wearing a red bandana, a red and white striped halter top, and a leather skirt with a cutlass hanging from a belt. The guys were calling her the Brassy Lass.

She woke up and promptly downed two Aleves and a glass of water. _I've got to take a vacation._ she decided, then remembered why she hadn't.

Ever since the attack before her debut performance with the Red Sky Diary, the band's business manager, Shelley, had disappeared. The guys were concerned, but Amanda was concerned on another level. Despite the incredible loyalty their staff had demonstrated, it was possible someone, even Shelley, had been compromised somehow. Alex had told her they'd reported Shelley as missing, and the FBI was involved now as well.

Got to be more to this. I wish I knew where to look for her; shame I don't have any psychics on the Roladex... Amanda stopped. She went straight to the bathroom, cleaned up and dressed in record time, and was out the door in her VW in minutes.

At Park Place, the apartments above the Lexington Public Library's Main Street branch, Amanda knocked quietly on the door. Dominique opened it; she'd been waiting since Amanda called her from her car a few minutes earlier. "Hi, come in."

"Thanks, Dominique." Amanda entered, and the door closed behind her. "I'm

sorry to wake you up this late."

"Don't worry about it. What can I do for you?"

Amanda noted, with a bit of jealousy, that for someone who'd just been awakened a few minutes earlier, Dominique looked like what TV shows think people should look like when they wake up. Her eyes were clear, as was her skin, and her hair was nicely combed instead of being in a bed-head mop.

"Let me just ask this, straight out. Are you psychic?"

"It seems likely."

"Ok. I know what you can do from the quarry. Do you think you could find a missing person?"

"I don't know. I've never tried before."

"I'd like to take you to the studio, to a woman's office. From there, I'm hoping maybe you can help me find the person who works there."

"All right. I can't promise anything, but I will try."

"Thank you."

The two women departed, and Amanda quickly drove them to the Red Sky Diary mansion. There were still guards working, and with apologies they checked Dominique's ID for a few minutes before sending them on to the house. Amanda looked at her watch; it was 4 a.m.

"This is Shelley's office," Amanda said as they arrived on the second floor.

"I'm sorry, I don't know what to do next."

"Well, I think I'm supposed to handle some of her personal objects, and get some kind of impression from them." Dominique walked around the office, turning on a couple of the smaller lights. She sat behind Shelley's desk, picking up a pen here, a portfolio there. Then, her look changed, her face paler like a mask. Dominique stood up and stared out a window.

"She's very upset, but calming down. I see her in a robe, sitting in a bathtub. It's a small bathroom, with beat up fixtures. There's a towel...it has the word Fortune on it in green letters." Dominique's head snapped back, the color coming back to her face. "Amanda, she's going to suicide."

"Oh my God. Fortune, Fortune..." she began tearing through the desk looking for a phone book. "Fortune Motel, 808 New Circle. Dominique, take my car. I've got to go." Amanda ran to a window, opened it, and leaped. She hoped Dominique was seeing the present, or even a bit of the future, and not the past.

Dominique watched her go, and closed the window. When she turned around, she found someone watching her from the doorway.

"Hi. I'm Alex," the figure said.

"Hi Alex. I guess this is where I'm supposed to tell you who I am and why I'm here?"

"That would be a good start."

"Ok. Them too?" she asked, nodding past him toward the hallway.

As he turned, Alex realized two things. One, he'd just fallen for the oldest sucker play known to humanity, and two, the dark-haired lady hit like Ali. But he didn't dwell on either thought, because he was too busy losing consciousness.

Dominique carried him to a small couch in the office, laid him down, covered him with a coat from a nearby rack, and kissed him on the forehead. Then, she carefully left the mansion and drove the VW straight back to Park Place, where she would now wake up someone who lived there.

Josh was dreaming. He wasn't entirely sure why he was dreaming of pretzels, and when he woke up he forgot all about them. Which was a good thing because he hadn't bothered dreaming about mustard for them.

He woke up because of a knock knock knock at his door. Clad in a Broken English t-shirt and running shorts, he looked through the peephole to see Dominique standing there. The door opened.

"Hi. I'm sorry to wake you up," she apologized.

"S'ok. What's up?"

"The quick version, Amanda asked me to try to help her find Shelley. Psychically, kind of like what I did at the quarry. We went to the place where she works? The band's place?"

"Right, I know the place."

"I had a vision. Shelley was going to suicide, at someplace called the Fortune Motel. Amanda found out where it was and flew over there. I had to punch Alex so I could leave and come here to get you."

"Ok. Let me throw on some sweats and I'm with you." _Never a dull night._ Josh practically leaped into another layer of clothes, pulled on his jacket, and followed Dominique to the stairs. They got in Amanda's VW and were on their way.

As they turned onto Broadway to head over to New Circle, Josh's brain caught up with his consciousness. "You punched Alex?"

"I didn't have any choice. You wouldn't expect me to lie to him, would you?"

"I don't know. How hard..."

"Out like a light. I sort of sucker-punched him."

Josh couldn't help himself, in spite of the potentially grim destination ahead of them. "Bwah haha haha ha ha ha! And the worst thing is I can never bring it up to him."

The drive ended quickly, behind a closed furniture outlet. The Fortune Motel certainly didn't reflect its name, not at 18.95 a night. Even with HBO.

"Which room?" Josh asked.

"I don't know," Dominique replied.

Harry Marvin was remembering vividly that early morning, just after the New Year. He woke up, his face and pillow covered with mucus and blood, and his glass eye under his cheek.

He'd staggered into the bathroom, which he couldn't have done unassisted a week before that, and turned on the light. Running the water, Harry cleaned

his face as best he could, and looked to where the hole should be for his left eye.

It was occupied. By a real eye.

The glass eye rested in his hand, as Harry blinked at his two-eyed reflection. He'd lost the left eye years ago, unloading a truck in '58. A wooden crate snapped, and a sharp length of wood pierced his left eye. The doctors had to remove it, and Harry had made his way through life with the one eye after that.

Now, it was back. And he was standing at a sink, unassisted, with the water running.

He heard a nurse entering the room, and quickly dropped the glass eye into the toilet and flushed. She made him go back to bed, and had an orderly bring in restraints so he wouldn't go wandering the rest of the night.

Harry cried for the first time in years, humiliated. And broke the restraints. They were lengths of nylon and Velcro, enough to keep a weakened sufferer of Alzheimer's in place. But that wasn't Harry any more. His mind was returning, and now, so was his body. Carefully, he fixed the restraints, and fell asleep.

Four weeks later, Harry Marvin departed the Breckinridge, the staff in shock at his recovery. He was ready to rebuild his life. Unfortunately, his daughter had taken great liberties with his savings. There was barely sixteen thousand dollars left for him.

Harry had been pocket-lint broke before; this was nothing. After meeting his old friend Conrad at the bank, and fixing his accounts, Harry departed for a local auction. Conrad had provided a letter of credit for Harry, so he could purchase a vehicle. Harry found a ten year old Dodge pickup in fantastic shape, and bought it for \$250. When all the paperwork was finished, and proper insurance had been arranged, Harry drove to Andover Hills, and paid half his remaining savings on a year lease for a large apartment. Finally, with a copy of the classifieds in hand, Harry went to a bookstore in the nearby shopping center, and applied for a stock position. Fortunately for him, Barnes and Noble were desperately short-staffed, and very

impressed by
his letter of reference from Conrad Bass, esteemed banker. Harry being
a
senior citizen would help out the corporate hiring numbers, too.

He worked diligently, and assisted customers with the sort of grace and helpfulness that were hallmarks of his generation. After his first day, Harry bought two books. One on using the Internet, and another on investing.

He read both that night, in his empty apartment, over a bottle of water and

a baguette from the café. In the morning, he drove down to the library, logged on to an Internet terminal, and began to rebuild his fortune.

And,

his back twinging, he remembered to pick up a mattress and box spring, and

some sheets and pillows, after work.

Something odd had happened at work that day, leaving Harry a bit confused. A

well-dressed man and his wife were shopping the shelves, and the man had

approached Harry to ask about some political titles. Harry couldn't stand

the man; in fact, he wanted to belt the man right in the face. The other man

felt the same, Harry was sure, for he quickly moved away from Harry to the

books he sought. Harry listened from nearby as the man spoke to his wife.

"Robert, are you all right?"

"Fine, Rose. Must be the shrimp."

"Poor thing. Let's go get something for your stomach."

"Ok. Damnedest thing." The couple paid for their books and left. In the back

of Harry's mind, he thought somehow, someday, he and 'Robert' would run into

each other again.

But not today.

"I will show you terror in a handful of dust." -- TS Eliot

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