

Dark Angel VS3

Notta Normal Day

*By Lelu, Queen Gwenyvere and
Star24*



Episode VS3.03

Prologue

Jam Pony - early morning

(SCENE MUSIC 19-2000 GORILLAZ)

Normal was walking to work as usual. It was uncharacteristically bright and sunny for an early Seattle spring day and he smiled quietly to himself. As he turned the corner to Jam Pony, he saw the driver of a truck bearing the name "The Glass Company" get out and come toward him.

The young man walked up to him and said, "Sir, we installed your new safety window today. Here's the bill and your keys back. Thanks for using The Glass Company." He put the bill in Normal's hand, got back in the truck and drove away.

Normal looked at the bill and his eyes widened. "This is highway robbery," he sputtered. "Damn Max and the bike she rode in on. She's always been trouble." His smile quickly turned to a frown as he walked to the entrance. A group of messengers was waiting idly by the locked front door. "Bip bip bip. Packages wait for no one," he commented as he unlocked the door.

"We're just waiting for you and the keys. We can't deliver packages with the door locked," Andy snapped back insolently.

"Watch yourself, sparky. If I weren't down four--well, maybe three--of my best riders, you'd be out on your keister." Normal's frown deepened.

Just then, Sky rode up. "What, you're on time! Is the sky falling? Has a comet sped across the sky and unleashed

some cosmic debris? To what do I owe the honor of an actual on-time appearance?" Normal stared at Sky as if he were a particularly noxious insect.

Sky simply responded, "It's payday," and rode his bike indoors.

Normal shook his head and followed him inside. It wasn't even 8 a.m., but the phone had already started ringing. Normal put on his headphones and reached for the phone. "Yes, ma'am, we will get that package and deliver it promptly. Here at Jam Pony, we pride ourselves on the service we provide to our customers. Thank you for using Jam Pony."

"OK, you cretins, bip bip bip. This is a place of business," Normal called out as his riders straggled in for the day.

Pam, Lane, and Toby, three of the Jam Pony riders, shuffled over to a corner. "He misses her and Alec, I know he does," said Toby. He was a tall, lanky kid, about eighteen years old, with blonde hair, tattoos and four earrings in each ear.

"Well, duh, Einstein, he's been worse than usual lately and really getting on our ass," Pam offered. "Hey Normal, any word on you-know-who?" she called.

"Max is a vexation to my life. Would have been better if I'd never met her or Golden Boy. Here, take this package and get lost, loser. Bip bip bip." He tossed a package Pam's way. She deftly caught the package and rode out the door.

"People, I don't pay you to stand around. Let's go. Hot run." Normal began throwing packages to the riders and they started to make their runs for the day. Lane grabbed a package and took off up the ramp, barely missing a man and a young girl as they walked down it.

They approached the desk, looking around furtively. The man was of medium height, about twenty-two years old, with brown hair and gray eyes. The girl with him was about ten and her green eyes were clouded with pain and fear. She was holding her left arm close to her body.

"Excuse me, are you Reagan Ronald?" the man asked. "I saw you on TV. We need your help. I'm Cain, and this is Regina."

"Place of business. Help would be at the Red Cross or Salvation Army," Normal responded brusquely, turning back to his packages.

"We're relatives of one of your messengers. We need to get to her. It's a family emergency," Cain responded, stressing the word "family."

Normal looked at the twosome with the dawning realization that they were transgenics. They were looking at him for help. "Oh, for the love of Mike," was all he said.

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Act One

Infirmary, Terminal City

The street on which the infirmary was located was quiet—very different from the usual din in Terminal City. Max walked down it briskly and headed through the door labeled Infirmary.

The woman in the room turned around to face Max and immediately sprang to attention and saluted. "I'm sorry, Commander, I didn't realize it was you."

Max appeared startled by the salute and took a moment to answer, studying the woman standing in front of her. The medic was tall, with auburn hair, and had creamy skin dotted with freckles. Her long, sensitive hands were covered with smooth leather gloves.

"I'm not a commander. Please don't stand at attention or salute me."

Aveta relaxed her pose and looked at Max quizzically. "I thought you commanded the troops here, ma'am."

Max shook her head. "There's no army here, no troops, just a group of people trying to survive. We're all free to do as we please. I'm just trying to coordinate what goes on."

"So," Aveta said with impeccable logic, "you are the commander, no matter what you say."

Max sighed and raised her voice in irritation as she answered, "Commander, bike messenger, freak, whatever. Just call me Max!"

Aveta flinched at Max's raised voice.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you. I need some information." Max lowered her voice.

"It's OK. It's just my hearing is extremely heightened, which means that I have a hard time unless I'm focusing on a patient. What can I help you with?" Aveta turned her full attention to Max.

"I have some friends in Terminal City I'm worried about. They're not transgenic and I'm afraid the toxins will affect them if they stay here too long."

"You mean they're ordinaries? What are they doing here?"

"I wouldn't call them ordinaries. They risked their lives to save us and ended up stuck here," Max said curtly, being careful not to raise her voice.

"I didn't mean to offend you; I was just surprised ordinaries would be here. In order to answer your question, I'll need to process effect time, treatments, and the possibilities of prolonged exposure to the toxins here," Aveta answered slowly. She continued with a smile, "Would one of them be a tall, handsome man with sandy-colored hair, who seems to be on a mission, even though no one knows what it is?"

Max grinned, "Yes, that would be Logan. How do you know him?"

"I've talked with him before about getting medical supplies for the infirmary," responded Aveta as she turned to the door. "In fact, I hear him coming now."

Logan entered the room quietly. "Aveta, do you have the list of supplies for me?" he asked, and then turned to Max. "Hey you, what are you doing here?" Their eyes met for a moment.

"Hey yourself," Max replied with a half-smile. "I was just asking Aveta about the safety of you, OC, and Sketchy here in Terminal City."

Logan raised his eyebrow. "Just for the record, I'm not leaving Terminal City, period. You can forget it. As long as you're here, I'm here. I agree that Original Cindy and Sketchy should go. They can leave and help guide the supply shipments in."

Max started to respond, but Aveta stepped in. She quickly stripped off her gloves and took Logan's hand in hers. She held his hand for a moment as she looked at him appraisingly. "He's safe, for now. There's Manticore in him. I can feel it."

Logan quickly changed the subject. "Do you have my list?"

Aveta smiled. "This is really long, but if you can get half of what's on the list, I'll be pleased."

"Logan, we need to talk about this some more. You're not safe here." Max turned on her heel and walked out of the room.

Logan sighed. He looked at Aveta. "We'll talk later, I promise." As he turned to walk away, Aveta looked at him, her gaze lingering on his legs. She smiled enigmatically.

Jam Pony

"Who's Mike?" Regina asked with ten-year-old innocence that Manticore hadn't taken away.

"Quiet, Reggie," Cain snapped.

Normal was standing there, his eyes darting around Jam Pony.

Cain arched a brow, "Are you gonna help us, or do we hafta do this on our own?"

Normal widened his eyes and came out of his stupor. "Follow me," he said gruffly, leading them to his office. He ushered them in and quickly shut the door behind them. Sitting in his desk chair, Normal retrieved a bottle of ant-acids from a drawer. He chewed several quickly, despite the chalky taste. He took a deep breath and raised his eyes to the two transgenics before him, but said nothing, as if restraining himself from kicking them out.

Regina was staring at him, her eyes pleading with him. She may have been created to be a soldier, but in reality she was just a kid. They all were.

Normal sighed. "The rest of the--I suppose you people don't call yourselves transgenics-- the genetically-enhanced Americans are holed up in Terminal City."

"We know," Cain replied. "We scoped it out already. Can't get within three blocks of the place on any side. The cops and the feds have it sealed off really well."

"We've been in hiding since we got to town. We saw what they did to that X5," Reggie said. Her tone was as calm as if she was talking about a children's cartoon show rather than a gruesome lynching.

"We saw you on television after 452 and the others held you hostage," Cain finished.

Normal replied, "Well, Max and her cohorts may have asked us all to stay here, and they may have threatened physical violence, but they were only doing what they had to do."

"So you're gonna help us, right?" Reggie asked, her relief visible on her angelic features.

Normal took another deep breath, looking at the two desperate people in front of him, and nodded. "Follow me. Don't talk to anyone. We'll figure out how to get you to Terminal City after I close." Before he opened his office door, he added, "And in the name of George Herbert Walker Bush, do *not* go anywhere."

Cain and Regina nodded and they headed out of Normal's office. As he led them to the stairs, he yelled at his employees.

"Sky! This isn't your mother's living room. Why the fire truck are you watching TV when there are packages to deliver? Find one that takes you longer to deliver than the last one! Bip bip bip! Come on, people, I'm trying to run a business here. Let's go!"

Everyone ignored him and his companions, as they usually did when he yelled, and went about their business, doing things at their own pace.

He continued to lead Reggie and Cain up the stairs. "OK, it's right in here. Try not to do too much walking around or people will hear you. I get Fed visits every so often, so stay quiet." He hesitated. "I'll bring you food later on."

He opened the door to the second floor and stopped dead in his tracks. There in the bullet-riddled room stood two individuals, twin girls of about nineteen.

"Hey, Kit. Hi, Kat," Cain said, grinning briefly at his fellow Xs.

"We heard you could get us to Terminal City," one of them said.

Normal rolled his eyes, looking skyward. "Oh, for the love of Mike!"

Living Quarters, Terminal City

(SCENE MUSIC BUTTERFLYZ ALICIA KEYES)

Joshua walked through the damp and dreary maze of tunnels that connected the Terminal City living quarters. A pharmaceutical company had previously constructed the tunnels to connect its office space inside the complex. Despite the enormity of the complex, some of the ceilings in the tunnels were too low for Joshua to walk under. "Big fella's too tall," he growled to himself as he ducked to avoid a concussion.

Rounding a final bend, Joshua stepped into the living quarters. They were divided according to species, with the Xs further divided by series number. He weaved his way among the endless sea of bedrolls, stepping over whatever belongings people had brought with them or managed to acquire in the nightly poker games that Alec and Mole orchestrated. Finally, he made his way to Gem's quarters. Gem and her daughter had been awarded one of the actual offices in the structure, to give them some privacy. With its cracked glass door and broken blinds, it was the best home they could give the first child born to the Freak Nation.

Joshua rapped lightly on the door in the event that one or both of them were sleeping.

"It's unlocked," he heard Gem call softly, and he opened the door.

Barely a second later, he yelled and slammed it shut. Covering his eyes with his hand, he heard Gem laughing and then cooing to the baby, who had started to cry when Joshua slammed the door. He gingerly uncovered his eyes. He was lucky he hadn't shattered the glass altogether.

"It's okay, Joshua," Gem called gently when the baby stopped crying.

Joshua tentatively opened the door once again. His eyes widened, but this time he resisted the urge to yelp. There before him sat Gem, nursing her infant daughter, her bare breast completely exposed except for the area covered by her child's tiny mouth. The baby's hand clutched at the skin around Gem's nipple, and she appeared to be asleep, though suckling with great gusto. Gem was gazing down at her baby lovingly and with awe.

"I still can't get used to this," she confessed quietly as Joshua closed the door behind him, this time a bit more gently.

He inched toward mother and daughter. "Does it...hurt?" he queried, as curious as a child himself.

She shrugged. "It did, at first, but I got used to it."

Joshua frowned. "You just said 'I still can't get used to this.'" He looked beyond confused.

Gem smiled but said nothing as she switched her baby from one breast to the other. Joshua shut his eyes hurriedly until he got the "All clear" from Gem. He slowly opened his eyes and sat down cross-legged on her bedroll, beside the milk crate she used as a chair. Then he simply watched in quiet admiration.

Finally, Gem said, "I never had a mother, or a father."

"Father," Joshua echoed, his voice holding a hint of longing.

She smiled at him, understanding, and continued. "And yet, when she was born, I just *knew*. I don't know where it came from, but I knew I had to take care of her and that

my body could provide everything she needed. Warmth, nourishment, protection."

"Protection," Joshua repeated.

"You got some parrot in your cocktail?" Gem asked good-naturedly.

Joshua blushed and bowed his head.

In a delicate balancing act, Gem removed her daughter from her wet bar and pulled her shirt back down. "Do you want to burp her?" she asked, holding the dozing infant in Joshua's direction. He raised his head, excitement in his eyes. Then he reached out and gently took the baby from her mother. Tenderly, he held her to his chest, supporting her head against his shoulder and lightly patting and rubbing her back. Despite his size, he accommodated the small creature well.

"I can protect her," he blurted out after several minutes of peaceful quiet.

Gem got off the milk crate and sat next to him. She leaned her head against his arm and ran her finger up and down her baby's arm. "I know you can, Joshua," she replied, her voice sincere and grateful.

Finally, the baby let out a rather forceful burp, which was promptly followed by Joshua's boisterous laughter.

Gem couldn't help but join in as her baby settled down to sleep in the arms of her protector.

Jam Pony

Normal looked at the two girls with something akin to horror in his eyes. "Oh, Lord, what have I gotten myself into? I deliver packages, not people! I didn't sign on to

deliver people! You're going to have to leave." Normal's voice began to rise in panic, the pacing of his words staccato as he began to back toward the door.

The transgenics looked at Normal, surprised at his behavior. Cain said to him, "But you agreed to help us. We won't be able to get through the city without you. We barely got through a sector checkpoint as it is. If you won't help us, we don't have a chance."

Normal looked at Cain, his face contorted into a mask of denial. "Look, sparky, I agreed to help you and her!" He said, pointing to Regina. "There is no plan to make my place an underground railroad. The Federales are all over me like a cheap suit. I just can't afford this."

The transgenics were silent. Normal looked at Regina and his face softened. "Look, let me see what I can do. No promises, no promises."

"Thank you," a tall redhead said as she appeared from a darkened area of the room. Normal looked around and saw six more transgenics. Blanching, he hurried down the stairs and into his office, closing the door behind him. A knock at the door made him pause.

"What do you want? Go away!" he yelled.

"Normal, it's us--Sky, Pam, Lane and Toby. We need to talk to you."

Normal flung open the door. "What do you cretins want? Can't you see I'm busy?"

Pam offered, "We know what you have upstairs. We put them up there. We need to help them; they came to us."

Normal's eyes began to bulge. "You did what?" he screeched. "Are you crazy?"

"No, we're not crazy. We need to help these guys get into Terminal City. If we don't, they're going to be killed."

"Well, just how do you propose to do that, sparky, huh? How?" Normal was in high dudgeon now.

Toby looked at Normal and said, "We'll get a message to Original Cindy and Max. We already have a plan. Lane and I are going to create a diversion, and Sky and Pam are going to sneak them into Terminal City."

"Just like that, you're going to waltz into Terminal City, right under the nose of the police and National Guard?" Normal raised his eyebrows.

"Yeah," said Lane enthusiastically. "We just need a map of the sewers around there. You think you can help us?"

Normal looked toward the heavens. "Terrific," was his response.

Command Center, Terminal City

Terminal City's nerve center was overcrowded. Logan and Luke were analyzing the latest computer readouts of the level of manpower that continued to surround Terminal City, while checking for any recognizable Familiar presence among the crowd of protesters, onlookers, vendors, sector police, and federal agents. After the Familiar infiltration, they were all more on edge and a bit more cautious. The toxicity levels didn't protect them from every outside invasion.

Mole and Alec pored over the munitions list, checking to see what they had and what they still needed. Alec and Logan's supply run had been moderately successful. Asha had at least come through with the ammo and a few handguns, despite the fact that she had allowed Terminal City

to be attacked and infiltrated. However, they still needed more weapons.

Joshua was giving the baby a guided tour of the Command Center, showing her off to some of the other transgenics who were working in the area, while Gem stood off to the side, watching contentedly. Max and a few transgenics were having a meeting as she assigned some of the X6s to scavenging runs.

Suddenly, a shrill ring pierced the air. The baby began to cry and Joshua began to rock her gently, murmuring to her to quiet her as he walked in Gem's direction. Everyone looked around to see who actually had cell phone reception in the concrete structure. Logan, Alec, Max, and a few others checked their phones to see which of them was ringing.

Alec held up his phone. "It's me," he announced to everyone.

Max and Logan exchanged glances, and Max silently mouthed, "Asha."

"Hello?" Alec said, glancing at Mole and shrugging. His eyes widened a bit. "Normal?"

Max snapped her head in Alec's direction. "Huh?" She turned to Logan. "What does he want?"

Logan shrugged and grinned playfully. "His Freak Nation secret decoder ring?"

Visibly annoyed, she swatted in his direction and returned her attention to Alec, who was deep in conversation with Normal.

"Yeah. Hmm...Really? OK, hang on." Alec turned to Max. "Normal's got about a dozen of our 'family' hidden on his

second floor. They want him to get them here. Sky and some of the others think they have a plan, but they might need our help."

Max snatched the phone from Alec's hands. He grunted in reply. "Normal?" she said, rather loudly. "What's the what? You're not just getting back at my ass for all the times I faked sick on ya, are ya?"

Normal growled, sounding frustrated. "Listen, Xena, Warrior Princess, I have better things to do than harbor the fugitive relatives of you and Golden Boy. Are you gonna help us or not?"

Max sighed. "What's the plan?"

As Normal filled her in on Sky's plan, Max signaled to Logan that she needed a pen and a piece of paper. He searched quickly and furtively, and produced a napkin and a short remnant of a pencil. It was better than nothing. Max took the pencil and paper and wrote hastily, "Get me OC and Sketchy--NOW!"

Logan nodded and called, "Mole, we need Original Cindy and Sketchy down here ASAP."

Mole rolled his eyes. "What do you need that waste of human DNA for?"

"Just get him!" Logan and Alec snapped in unison. They exchanged quick glances, and then both glared at Mole, who took the hint and jogged off.

"Okay, okay, OKAY, Normal!" Max was saying. "I understand the plan. I was a government soldier myself once." She chuckled as she heard Normal grind his teeth. "How about we not bring any more non-transgenics into this toxic-waste dump? Tell Sky and them thanks, but I can have my people cover it and keep the Jam Pony crew off

the potential casualty list. We'll hit you back to let you know who's gonna play Sojourner Truth and when." She closed the flip phone and tossed it back to Alec.

"So," Gem asked, cradling the baby, "what's the plan?"

"We gettin' busy?" Joshua piped up the look in his eyes slightly mischievous.

Max chuckled. "Not like that, big fella." She turned her attention to the assembled. "Listen, people, we've got a dozen X-series on their way here, and they need our help to get past the sector cops. I'm gonna need a team effort on this."

"You got it, Max!" someone yelled from the crowd.

"Go spread the word," Max told a few, who scampered away to spread the news and mobilize their units ASAP. She turned to Logan, Luke, Joshua, Gem, and Alec, who had moved to the same general area of the Command Center. "I'm gonna send Sketchy and Original Cindy out to get them, rather than have Sky and them try to trick their way in here. It'd be too messy that way."

"Did I hear someone say my name?" Original Cindy called as she entered the Command Center. Sketchy was at her heels, trying to avoid Mole's intimidating stare.

Max smiled at her best friend. "You sure did, girl. Ready to become an honorary black-helicopter good guy?"

Cindy raised an eyebrow. "Well, I thought I already was, but if this is the last initiation, then sign Original Cindy up."

Max chuckled at her best friend, then turned her attention to Mole. "I'm gonna need you to get Sketchy and Original Cindy out through the sewers and over to Jam Pony."

Mole merely grunted in reply. Max took that as a yes.

She looked at Sketchy. "Sketch, I'm gonna need you too on this one. Think you can hack it?"

Sketchy looked at Max, then to Alec and Logan. Finally, he looked over his shoulder at Mole, who was standing with his arms crossed.

"Well, can you?" Mole asked snidely. "Think you can pretend to be a hero just this once?"

Original Cindy smacked Sketchy upside the back of the head. "Answer them, fool."

Sketchy stared at his feet briefly before raising his head and making firm eye contact with Max. "I canhack it," he said determinedly.

Max grinned. "That's what I hoped." She raised her voice. "All right, people, let's bring 'em home!"

Max stood on the catwalk over the Command Center, while the assembled transgenics hooted, hollered, and mobilized into action. Logan watched the Freak Nation's de facto leader and smiled proudly.

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Act Two

The Atrium, Terminal City

(SCENE MUSIC WHY DO I FEEL SO SAD ALICIA KEYES)

Logan stood in a crumbling inner courtyard that probably had served as an outdoor lunch spot on rare sunny Seattle days before the spill. He breathed in the fresh air, taking respite from the darkness of Terminal City. He sighed rather heavily and began rolling his shoulders and stretching his neck. His eyes had started to cross from staring at computers too long and he had taken a walk to stretch his legs and renew his spirits.

Ironically, it had been one of those rare sunny Seattle days, but no sooner had Logan stepped into the courtyard than the sun vanished behind a thick wall of dark and dank clouds. Once again, it was a normal day weather-wise in Seattle. He smiled as the fresh--though toxin-filled--air filled his lungs.

Suddenly, he felt his cell phone vibrate in his pants pocket. He reached in, switched on the mini-scrambler he kept attached to his cell, and answered.

"Hello?"

There was a brief silence before he heard a familiar voice say tentatively, "Logan?"

He sighed, having been dreading this phone call. "Hi, Asha." His tone was heavy.

"Look, Logan," she said. "I know I screwed up. You'd think that after all this time with S1W, I'd know better."

"You'd think," Logan retorted before he could stop himself. He winced at his callousness.

Asha sighed. "I deserved that."

Logan tried to explain himself. "Asha, I told you not to come here. The toxicity levels are dangerous enough, never mind White, his goons, and their spies."

"I should have been more careful," Asha agreed somewhat patronizingly.

"You should have done as you were asked," Logan told her sharply. "You could have gotten us all killed, or worse. Look, Asha, I know that you're sorry, and we appreciate the ammunition and guns you got us. It's going to be a great help when..."

He paused.

"But," he continued, "given everything that's going on, I think that it'd be better if you didn't try to contact me for a while."

"Logan!" Asha began.

"Asha, I've got to go," Logan said quickly. His tone was firm, although it was laced with just a bit of contrition. She was, after all, still a friend. "Keep your head low," he said quietly.

"Stay safe," she advised him, sounding sad and resigned to the fact.

"Yeah," he replied.

"Wait!" she said quickly. "Logan?"

"Yeah?"

She sighed deeply. "Tell...tell Alec and Max that...I'm

sorry." Her voice was heavy with sadness and regret. "For everything. I never meant for anyone to get hurt."

He paused. "Okay." Pursing his lips, he said, "Bye, Asha. Take care of yourself."

"Bye."

He returned his phone to his pocket and began walking back into the building. He needed to get back to work.

Outdoors, Terminal City

(SCENE MUSIC TWERK A LITTLE BUBBA SPARKS)

"Man, I am so glad to be getting out of here. This place is really giving me the creeps." Sketchy, ever the diplomat, was talking to Original Cindy. They were standing next to the sewer entrance they would be using to exit Terminal City. All around was a wasteland of empty streets and garbage. There were no signs of life anywhere. It was an eerie feeling; even the returned sun couldn't brighten the scene.

"Sketchy, if you didn't keep poking your head where it don't belong, maybe they wouldn't be after yo' ass. But no, you gotta keep takin' pictures, trying to get an interview. Man, they ain't into that..." Original Cindy stopped as she saw Max and Mole approaching.

"Hey, boo, you come to say goodbye? You know I'm coming back and bringing a ton of supplies with me. There's a severe lack of fingernail polish here, and you know this girl has got to look good," Cindy babbled nervously.

Max walked over to Original Cindy and hugged her tightly. She hugged Sketchy goodbye as well. Standing back from her friends, she said, "Be careful, peeps. Mole, I expect you to take care of them for me. No screw-ups.

OK?"

Mole looked disdainfully in Sketchy's direction. Removing the ever-present cigar from his mouth, he said, "The only way that won't happen is if I stuff him into a sack and drag him out. He's pretty useless even for an ordinary." Alarmed, Sketchy backed away a step or two.

Max looked at Mole, her eyes narrowing. Mole shrugged his shoulders. "I'm kidding, I'm kidding. OK, people, let's move out. Have to get you home before dinner." With that, Mole opened the manhole cover and waved Original Cindy and Sketchy inside.

"Man, I already don't like this," Sketchy was whining.

"Hush up, Sketchy! You know Max ain't gonna let nothing happen to us, so just chill, aiight? Original Cindy ain't none too happy 'bout this neither, but we're doing it to help Max and her family." Cindy turned to Mole and said, "Let's get going!" Mole looked at them both, snorted, and without another word turned on his heel and led the way into the sewers.

Mole signaled, and two more transgenics appeared out of thin air. He spoke into a comm. "Command, which tunnel is least guarded? We need the shortest route out."

Luke's voice came back, "Scouts report that the left tunnel about half a klick ahead will take you straight to Sector 3. It's the least guarded, probably because the tunnel narrows and the ordinaries don't want to get their feet dirty. From there you can send Original Cindy and Sketchy above ground and they should be able to get back to Jam Pony on their own."

"Listen up, people, we're going to be moving fast. You need to keep up and pay attention." Mole glared at

Sketchy. "Got it?"

"I've got it, man, don't worry." Sketchy looked up and saw the party was already twenty meters ahead of him. "Hey, guys, wait up." He started running to catch up and stepped into something soft and squishy. "Oh, man. Gross! I don't even want to know what that is." Sketchy kept running, squishing as he went.

He caught up to the group at the turnoff to Sector 3. "Man, what's that smell? Sketchy! What did you get into?" Original Cindy waved her hand in front of her face to get away from the smell.

"Man, there is all kinds of stuff you don't want to get into down here." Sketchy was trying to rub his shoe off. "It's only on my shoe; it could be worse."

Mole looked disgustedly at Sketchy. "You are a moron. Newsflash, this is a sewer. Keep moving and stay downwind of us." Mole waved to the scouts ahead and the group began moving forward.

Bringing up the rear, Sketchy looked at Mole's back and muttered, "You sound just like my boss."

The small group moved at a fast clip. They came to a junction in the tunnel system and Mole asked quietly, "Luke, can you hear me?" The only answer he received was static. "Damn, must be some interference." Mole hand-signaled the other two transgenics to scout the tunnels ahead. When they returned, Mole signaled for everyone to move out.

Sketchy had been daydreaming about his headline story, and when he looked around again, the group was gone. "Guys," he hissed. "Guys...guys?" He looked in a panic at the three tunnels in front of him.

"Left, I'm sure they said left." Muttering to himself, he took off hurriedly down the left tunnel. As he pelted down the corridor, the stench grew stronger. He hit a slick spot and tripped, falling face-first into the muck. "Oh crap, this completely sucks." He dragged himself upright and turned to find himself face-to-face with Mole. He was so startled that he squeaked and jumped back three feet, falling back into the muck.

Mole grabbed Sketchy and pulled him to his feet. "You moron. If it weren't for your friend, I'd leave your sorry ass here. Now move. We have another two clicks to cover before I can get rid of your smelly ass." Mole unceremoniously pushed Sketchy into a quick trot, and then looked at his hand where he had touched Sketchy. "Crap," he said, trotting after him. They caught up to the others and traveled in silence until Mole signaled the group to halt.

Original Cindy looked up at the manhole above her. "We goin' out here?" she asked. "That gonna be safe?"

"As safe as anywhere. There are a few guards, but we've got a distraction planned. You first, then him." Mole pointed at Sketchy.

Above them, a young man in jeans ran up to the police officer standing guard over the manhole. "Officer! Officer! There's one of those things trying to get into the sewer down the street! Hurry!" The young man ran down the street and the officer followed, talking into his comm as he went.

"It's a go! Move, people, move!" Mole snapped out.

Original Cindy climbed quickly out of the sewer, followed closely by Sketchy. She immediately lost herself in the crowd and started moving toward Jam Pony. Sketchy followed her, a miasma of stench accompanying him

down the street.

Command Center, Terminal City

Aveta approached Max, who had found something of a quiet spot in a corner of Terminal City's Command Center to take a quick rest. Returning from his break, Logan had brought her a cup of the substandard horse piss they were calling coffee, which she was drinking with gusto.

With some cotton balls in her ears serving as earplugs to protect against the inevitable noise of the Command Center, Aveta said to Max, "I've got some bad news."

Max's head snapped up in alarm, her respite interrupted.

Aveta sighed. "Original Cindy and Sketchy both came to me today complaining of mysterious rashes. I don't think they're reactions to some bad food rations. I think the toxicity levels are starting to affect them."

"What about Logan?" Max asked grimly.

"The only thing I've been told he complains about is a lack of adequate cooking supplies," Aveta said with a wry smile before quickly sobering. "They need to leave before the effects are irreversible."

"They are leaving," Max agreed, standing. "Original Cindy and Sketchy are leaving to act as convoys for some of the fam in hiding that want to join our little community."

"What about Logan?" the medic queried softly.

Max glanced at Logan and sighed. "He needs to leave. I can't risk putting his life in even more jeopardy." A heaviness hung in the air as Max took one last swig of her coffee, took a deep breath and walked toward Logan, who was good-naturedly trying to explain the computer read-

outs to Joshua.

"Logan," Max said. "We need to talk."

"Uh oh," Logan said, turning in his chair to face her, grinning with boyish charm. "This sounds serious." His voice was laced with enticement and his eyes twinkled ever so slightly, disarmingly, but the effect was lost on Max, who didn't return his smile.

"It is," Max said. "You and OC and Sketchy need to leave Terminal City. Original Cindy and Sketchy have rashes that could mean the toxins are starting to build up in your systems. You all need to leave before the effects are permanent."

"Original Cindy and Sketchy have left," Logan told her. "After this thing with Normal's transgenics, we won't let those two back in."

"You need to leave too, Logan," Max insisted stubbornly.

"I'm rash-free," he shot back firmly, not missing a beat. "I'm not leaving."

"You could get sick and die!" she hissed angrily. "And I wouldn't even have to touch you for that one!"

"I could get hit by a truck as I cross the street, too," he retorted through gritted teeth. "You need my help and I'm not leaving." He pursed his lips before continuing. "Besides, you know that I can't leave now. Either I die in here, or I die out there for my 'crimes.'" He sighed. "I'm a wanted man. You heard Asha."

"Logan..." Max began, her eyes flashing with the kind of anger only he could elicit.

"Max," he said in response, and pulled on the gloves he always kept handy. "I could die if I forget to do this..." He

held up his gloved hands, "...before I do this," he finished, gently brushing some hair from her face with his fingers.

She closed her eyes briefly, seemingly reveling in his touch. "Damn you," she whispered hoarsely, opening her eyes. She looked at him, her expression revealing neither anger nor acceptance. She turned her back to him, throwing her head back a bit as if to relieve tension, and let out a loud sigh. Walking to a nearby support pole, she leaned against it and returned her gaze to his. Her hair fell over one eye so that her expression, which was enigmatic only moments before, now became mysterious and darkly intense.

She took a breath. "All right," she conceded. "You can stay."

A pause.

"For now."

Logan grinned, having won the battle, if not their own personal war. But once again something unspoken seemed to lie between them.

Jam Pony - late morning

Normal paced back and forth, muttering to himself. He had a dozen-plus transgenics on his second floor. Occasionally he glanced furtively at the staircase. "Hot run, 408 Viaduct. Go...get lost...I don't pay you people to lounge... bip bip bi--" Normal's face paled as he saw two people coming down the ramp. "Oh please, God, not more!" he whispered to himself. "Andy, get over here and take this package to 2851 Miller. Now, slacker!"

Andy took the package and left. Normal hissed at the two people now standing at his desk. "What are you doing

here? What do you want?"

The two people looked askance at each other. "Man, we were just looking for jobs. We heard you had openings," said the older of the two.

"Oh," said a relieved Normal. "I thought you were someone else. Here, fill out these two applications. You can start tomorrow!"

Tinker, the younger of the two, said, "Sir, can we fill out the applications upstairs? If you don't mind."

Normal's face fell. "Take me now, Jesus." He looked skyward as if for help.

Cup a' Joe Coffee Shop, Seattle

Ramon Clemente took a sip of the strong black coffee that a harried waitress had slapped down in front of him and regarded Matt Sung seriously.

"Sung, the reason I asked you to come here with me was that I didn't want to have this conversation at headquarters. Too many ears there." He took another sip as Matt waited, sipping his own coffee. "Three weeks ago I assigned you to find more information about Logan Cale. I've been told that you're a damn good detective. Yet in those three weeks you haven't come up with a single new fact about Cale." He stopped and waited.

Matt took a gulp of coffee, buying time. "Sir, I've been trying. Agent White already gave you the same information I've been able to dig up. Nothing new to add yet."

"So you're telling me this man has no friends, no family, no known haunts? Until his apartment was mysteriously trashed by parties unknown, he lived there as a hermit? I find that hard to believe. He had to go out to buy food, he

had it delivered, or someone bought it for him. One of the above. Why do I get the feeling that you're stalling me, Detective?"

"I don't know, sir." Matt kept his face impassive. Clemente reached down to his lap and brought out a large envelope.

"Well, I have some more information for you. A search of old hoverdrone files turned these up." Clemente threw four 8 x 10s on the table in front of Sung. One was of two people: a man and a woman, walking side by side down a dark Seattle street. Their faces couldn't be made out, but Matt could see that the man was tall with spiked hair and the woman had long, dark hair. The second picture was of the man standing alone. He was looking up at the hoverdrone, face clearly visible in this shot. The final two photos were of the same man, standing on a debris-strewn beach, arms around a woman with long, dark hair. Her face was hidden against his chest, but his could be easily seen as he gazed directly at the hoverdrone.

"These two sets were taken ten months apart, and it appears to be the same woman in each picture. So our friend had a girlfriend, at least for that time period."

"Appears so, sir."

Clemente threw another picture in front of Sung. This one showed Max riding a hoverdrone. Sung waited.

"One last picture. It's the transgenic who turns up rather frequently. Max, I believe her name is," Clemente said conversationally. "What I find very interesting is that her height, build, and hair appear to match that of Cale's girlfriend. A girlfriend who doesn't seem to want her face photographed. What do you have to say to that?"

"Interesting, but hardly conclusive, sir. Could be just a

coincidence."

Clemente gave him a sharp look. "I've learned not to believe in coincidences in this business. I believe the woman in these pictures with Cale is Max, the transgenic from the Jam Pony incident--the leader of the group holed up in Terminal City. That puts Cale squarely in their camp. In fact, I wouldn't be at all surprised to find out that the reason we haven't been able to locate him is that he's still in there with them."

"If what you're saying is true, we aren't going to get our hands on Logan Cale anytime soon," Sung observed.

"Possibly not. But let me leave you with one more thought, Detective Sung. This man made an incredible leap onto the top of a patrol car. He fought alongside the transgenics in the Jam Pony situation. He has been seen and photographed with a known transgenic. Makes me wonder exactly who...or what...he is." Clemente observed somberly.

Sung was clearly startled at the direction of Clemente's thoughts. "But, sir, Cale is a paraplegic. He uses a wheelchair. And his background, his family, it all checks out. The Cales are one of Seattle's leading families."

"Explain how he suddenly shows up fully mobile and performing rather incredible physical feats. Records can be manipulated and planted. You know that as well as I. No, I think there's more to Logan Cale than meets the eye. And I expect you to find out what it is. I want a report, with some answers, on my desk within the month. No more excuses. Is that clear, Detective?" Clemente's voice was hard.

"Yes, sir."

"Finish your coffee. I'll see you back at headquarters." Clemente threw several bills on the table and walked out of the coffee shop, leaving Matt staring at the pictures on the table in front of him.

Jam Pony

It was lunchtime at Jam Pony and, as usual, the messengers were clustered around the big-screen television. Some were sprawled comfortably on the battered sofas, while others sat eating their lunches at the scarred tables that Normal provided.

"BattleBots" was showing, and several of the messengers were betting amongst themselves on the winner of the match. There were loud groans and even a few pieces of food thrown at the screen when it fritzed into the Channel 3 News Flash header, just as one Bot seemed to be winning the match.

"This is Melissa Michelle, live at Terminal City. As Day 31 of the transgenic standoff wears on, police and federal agents maintain their watch. The National Guard is heavily patrolling any and all possible escape routes from Terminal City. Seattle residents, as well as local and national government officials, are all calling for a quick and decisive end to the standoff. But our sources tell us that the police task force, headed by Detective Ramon Clemente, hopes to bring this to a peaceful end by starving the transgenics out and forcing them to surrender and return to military control."

The reporter paused, and Andy called out, "Just let 'em all starve to death in there. Why bother to let 'em out? Freaks."

"We still have no confirmation of previous reports that

Terminal City was infiltrated by one or several federal agents. The police department insists that the mobilization of forces we witnessed in week two was in response to reports of a possible transgenic escape. They maintain that upon investigation it was found to be nothing more than several animals scavenging for food."

"Animals is right," Andy commented.

"Shut up, fool. You think Max and Alec are animals?" Sky challenged him. Andy started to reply, but several others glared at him to hush as the reporter continued.

"...which poses the question: how well equipped are the Seattle police to handle such a serious situation?"

"Po-pos are equipped for payola and shakedowns, and that's about it," a female messenger chimed in. Normal walked up just as she spoke and gave her a glare.

"That'll be enough of that, missy-miss." He turned and walked away, muttering to himself, "No respect for authority anymore..."

"As the siege continues on Day 31 at Terminal City, it appears that all parties involved are in it for the long haul. This has been Melissa Michelle for Channel 3 News. Now we take you back to our regularly scheduled programming..."

Act Three

Jam Pony - afternoon

"Eww, what is that smell?" Normal looked around for the source and saw Original Cindy and Sketchy coming in the door. His face lit up like a beacon, but he quickly changed it to a scowl. "And to what do I owe the honor of a visit from you miscreants?"

Original Cindy, knowing the game and playing along, said, "Wa'nt no need for us there no more. 'Sides, Original Cindy ain't about glowin' in the dark, so it was time to bounce. Not to mention there ain't no place there for Sketchy to get his drink on."

"Yeah, besides, some of them are really scary. Man, they gave me the creeps," Sketchy chimed in. "They wouldn't let me interview them or anything."

"Get out of my sight. You're an affront to my olfactory senses. Don't come near me until you smell better, idiot." Normal grimaced, then whispered, "Get back here soon. We need to talk."

Sketchy grinned. "Sure, Normal, and I'm glad to see you too." He headed back to his locker, encountering Sky on the way. "Sky, my man, what's happening?"

Sky wrinkled his nose in disgust and said, "Man, you smell like you've been rolling around in a sewer. I've gotta jet, hot run. Good to see you. I'll talk to you more when you smell better." Sky took off with a speed no one would have believed he was capable of.

"Man, what is with you people?" Sketchy asked as he con-

tinued to his locker.

Normal looked after Sketchy, shook his head, and turned back to Original Cindy. "Well, how is she?" he asked.

"Max is doing fine," she replied.

"No, no, no, not Max. She can take care of herself. I meant the baby." Normal looked at Original Cindy expectantly.

Original Cindy grinned. "Normal! You mean you're all worked up 'bout a little baby?" she teased. "Elfie is one fine baby girl. She owns Terminal City."

"Elfie? Gem named my godchild Elfie?"

"No, Normal. She named her Elefteria, but that's too hard to get your tongue 'round every day, so we call her Elfie, and she is one beautiful little boo. You did good, helping her into this world."

"Elefteria, Greek for 'freedom.'" Normal sighed happily. His smile sagged as he saw Andy watching him and Original Cindy.

Andy looked at Normal in a speculative way and then he glanced toward the stairs leading to the loft above. He rode his bike slowly out of Jam Pony.

Infirmary, Terminal City

Aveta and Logan were in the infirmary, taking inventory of the meager medical supplies. "We have eleven bags of fluid: eight normal saline and three lactated ringers," Aveta said. "There are only enough dressings for three major casualties, and not much in the way of antibiotics. There are plenty of IV catheters, but tubing is scarce. We have enough to start six, maybe seven, IVs. There's

not enough here to make an impact in a firefight."

Logan looked up from writing. "We'll be OK. My sources are very reliable."

"I hope that's true. I wonder how soon it'll be before something happens. Will I be prepared?" Aveta wondered out loud. Her eyes took on a distant stare as she remembered the night Manticore went down.

She and her sisters were working in the infirmary. The patients were nomlies, less than human, just experiments gone terribly wrong. It was the job of the medics to keep them alive. Aveta watched as her sisters tried to calm one horribly maimed patient. He was covered with tumors; some were open, oozing blood. He kept screaming in agony. Tia and Ave's best efforts were not calming him. Aveta was trying to keep the rest of the room calm, and she was being taxed beyond her ability.

The explosions started. She didn't realize what was happening at first. Surely help would come. They wouldn't leave them here to die. Time passed. Aveta came to the realization that no help was coming. She made the only decision she could. Turning to her sisters, she gave the order. Quickly and efficiently they killed all the patients. They wouldn't leave them to burn. Upon completing their job, they went into the chaos. They were separated quickly...

"Aveta, are you OK?" Logan asked, concern evident in his voice.

She came to herself with a start. "I'm OK. Just thinking about my sisters."

"Aveta...Who..." Logan looked at her and said, "Never mind. This isn't the time."

Aveta smiled at Logan. "I know you'll get the supplies we need. I didn't mean to sound ungrateful earlier."

"No problem." Logan smiled at Aveta and turned to leave. "Take care, Aveta."

"You too, Logan Cale." Aveta turned back to her inventory.

Jam Pony - late afternoon

Normal, Original Cindy, and Sketchy were deep in conversation in a corner of Jam Pony.

"We can't keep them here much longer. We need to move and soon. We have some serious hate going on here. Andy and some of the others are beginning to get suspicious. They would be happy to see all the transgenics dead." Normal spoke with none of his usual sarcasm. He was being very careful not to be overheard.

"Normal! We got the 411 on that. Don't get your freak on. A plan is working. My boo and her squeeze will get them into Terminal City; don't you worry none." Original Cindy spoke with more assurance than she felt.

"Here, hot run, you slacker!" Normal tossed a package at Andy, who was hovering too close for comfort. Andy grabbed it and rode out the door.

"Man, we need to blow this joint. That guy's trouble." Sketchy was worried.

"Get on upstairs. We gonna bounce soon." Original Cindy was already heading for the stairs, with Normal and Sketchy close behind.

Sketchy pushed past Cindy on the way up the stairs, and as he emerged, he saw Andy's head appearing in one of the windows. "Hey," he yelled, sprinting toward the window. At Sketchy's cry, Andy dropped to the ground below. Sketchy, without thinking, dove out the window after

him.

Sketchy landed on Andy, throwing him off balance. Getting to his feet, Andy threw a punch and caught Sketchy square in the stomach, knocking the wind out of him.

"Transgenic-loving scum!"

Sketchy, gasping for breath, still managed to grab Andy around the waist, and they began to wrestle. Original Cindy, curious as to what had sent Sketchy diving through the window, stuck her head through it and saw Andy and Sketchy wrestling.

She called, "Sketchy, you fool! Just what you think you doin'?" Sketchy was distracted and looked toward her voice just as Andy pushed him hard, sending him stumbling backward through Normal's new safety glass window. Andy jumped on his bike and took off.

"Uh oh, Normal, that rat's blazin' straight to the po-pos," Original Cindy exclaimed.

Upstairs, Normal groaned as he heard the sound. "Oh God, my new window. Girly girl, you need to get on the horn to Max and now. Our time has just run out."

Command Center, Terminal City

"You're up."

Max slid into a chair next to Logan in the Command Center. He placed a comm unit on the counter in front of her so that she could communicate with Original Cindy, who was awaiting instructions at Jam Pony. Max took a deep breath as she placed the earpiece in her ear.

"Boo? You readin' me over there?"

"Damn, girl!" Original Cindy exclaimed. "Don't be scarin'

Original Cindy like that!"

Max had to laugh. "Sorry."

"Forgot Logan rigged me up with this comm thingy," Cindy replied.

"You ready for this?"

"Ready as I'm gonna be," her friend replied.

"How's it lookin'?" Max asked, looking at Logan, who nodded in confirmation that he was listening in.

At Jam Pony, Original Cindy surveyed the scene. "We're upstairs. Normal's pacing. Sky and them are wishin' you'd let them go to Terminal City, but Original Cindy told them all about latrine duty and they changed their tune faster than a drag queen changes her make-up." She chuckled. "As for your fam, they're all about your age, give or take. 'Cept they got a little girl with 'em. Says her name is Reggie."

"X8," Max murmured, more to herself than anyone else. "Is she about ten years old?"

"I guess," Original Cindy said with a shrug. "And my fool Sketchy's taking interviews like the village idiot he is."

"He doesn't quit," Max replied. "But tell him he's gonna hafta stay at Jam Pony this time. I don't need to worry about the both of you out there."

"Well, thanks," Cindy said sarcastically. "Good to know I'm more expendable than our boy, Sketchy."

"Don't go wiggin' on me, girl," Max said. "You know it's that I trust you more than Sketchy."

"And you know I'm just playin' with ya. Did Mole tell ya how homeboy nearly screwed up the walk back to Jam

Pony?" Cindy asked.

"Hey!" Max heard Sketchy call. "I didn't screw it up...I was sight-seeing."

"You trippin', homeboy," Cindy responded. "So what's the dealio, boo? What am I doin' now?"

"You've got X-series only, so it shouldn't be too hard for you to stay above ground. Try not to walk as a pack, since there's so many of you, but stay close, stay quiet, and stay as out-of-sight as you can. There's gonna be street cops looking out for any suspicious behavior, so try to be as inconspicuous as possible," Max told her, her tone very matter-of-fact, as she slipped into battle mode.

"Original Cindy has never been one for the quiet life, but this time she'll try to stay low-profile," Cindy replied.

"Good, boo," Max said. "Logan's gonna send a rendezvous team to escort them here."

"How these people gettin' in? Isn't it gonna look whacked if a bunch o' normal-lookin' peeps go crawling down a manhole?"

"There's an access tunnel," Logan added in. "Fortunately it isn't too heavily guarded, so there shouldn't be too much of a problem getting back in."

"Thanks, Richie Rich. I'm glad you've got my girl's back, and ours," she said, smiling.

"Anytime," Logan replied, glancing at Max out of the corner of his eye. "Your rendezvous point is 4th and Seneca. There'll be a couple of our Xs there to bring yours home."

"OC, once you meet up with our guys at the rendezvous point, I want you to go home," Max said. "Don't come back in here."

"I know," her friend said. "Original Cindy ain't all about this rash she's been gettin' in there. How am I supposed to meet myself a hot new lickety-boo if I'm walking around glowin' and lookin' like a leper?"

Max laughed. Sobering, she said, "Okay, this is it for now. Good luck. Be safe."

"Love you, boo," Cindy said.

"Back atcha," Max replied, as Logan reached out with his glove-covered hand and squeezed her forearm.

"Good luck," he said.

"I'm out," Original Cindy replied as the comm line went silent. Turning to the assembled in the upper room of Jam Pony, she yelled, "Aaight, people, let's bounce!"

The Last Stop Bar, Terminal City

(SCENE MUSIC IN DA WIND TRICK DADDY)

Max was working off her pent-up energy by stalking through Terminal City. "When I find him, his head's going to be on a stake. You're supposed to be in the Command Center, Alec," she muttered angrily.

Her unwitting prey was sitting with Mole, drinking beer and kicking back. "Mole, we need to get some better beer. This tastes like horse piss. Maybe I can get some imported stuff from Logan's supplier," he mused out loud.

"Screw Logan," Mole said angrily. "He doesn't belong here. He's not one of us." Mole rose and began to pace back and forth. "The only reason he's not gone is because Max is protecting him. He's no use to us.

"Not so sure about that," Alec looked up at Mole. "Can't find computer skills like his just anywhere. And he's got

the supply lines to keep us going. Wouldn't exactly call that useless."

The other transgenics in the Last Stop Bar looked curiously at the two men. This might get interesting. They began to gather around.

"Hey, boys, what's goin' on?" Max asked sweetly. The gathered transgenics began to scatter. Something in Max's voice told them they didn't want to be on the receiving end of her wrath. "Mole, Alec, neither one of you is at your post. You want to tell me why?"

"Hey, Max, uh, well, Mole and I were just having a discussion." Alec was trying to avoid the topic of conversation.

"About what?" Max snapped.

Mole spoke up. "We were talking about whether Logan could get us some imported beer for the bar."

"Beer. We're in a crisis situation, we have twelve transgenics who need to get to Terminal City, and you're talking about beer? What is wrong with you? You idiots. Alec, report to the Command Center. Mole, I need you to back up the rescue group. When you finish, you're both going to walk the pipes for the next week. We need to make sure our water supply is safe and the sewer pipes are intact. We can't let them know we have running water here."

"Max! No way! I've already done my housekeeping duty," Alec protested.

"Well, Alec, maybe you won't leave your post next time," Max said sweetly.

"What if I refuse?" Mole stretched to tower over Max.

"Are you challenging me, Mole?" Max asked. Her eyes narrowed as she looked up at the transhuman.

Mole thought about it and then backed down. "No, no challenge, Max." He muttered under his breath as he turned away, "...yet."

"What did you say, soldier?" Max barked.

"Yes, ma'am, orders received."

"Back to your posts, both of you. Now." Max walked away.

Jam Pony

"Listen up, people, we've got to move now." Normal was surprisingly calm and collected. He went to the door, opened it, and called down the stairs to his riders. "Sky, Lane, see if you can catch that hooligan, Andy, and when you catch him, tell him he's fired. Sketchy, are you OK? You idiot, you're going to have to pay for that window."

Sketchy came dragging up the stairs, holding his bleeding arm. "Normal, I'm hurt. Cut me some slack."

"For the love of Mike, get up here. How bad is it?"

"Let me take a look. I'm a medic. I can help." The tall red-head came up to Normal and Sketchy. "The cut isn't deep, just long. Do you have any type of dressing? I also need some magazines if you have them, and tape." She began to give orders as though she expected to be obeyed.

"Normal! Where's that first-aid kit?" Original Cindy was already heading down the stairs. "Damn," she said to herself, "that's one fine female!"

"Here's the plan." Cain began to speak rapidly. "We were planning to go out in two groups. That's no longer an option; we have to leave together and soon. Kara!" he said, pointing to a female transgenic. "Take point; I'll bring up

the rear. Trice, keep everyone close. Tia, stay close to Reggie; she has a broken arm. People, get ready. You've got five minutes."

Tia spoke up. "I've got two injured people I have to take care of before we can leave. Where is that first-aid kit? You, come here and sit down." She pointed to Sketchy. He quickly complied and sat next to her. Tia took his shirt and ripped it to get a better look at the wound. "Good, no veins or arteries compromised." She gently explored the wound with her hands after removing her gloves. "Just needs minor closure. Where is that first-aid kit?" she said distractedly.

"Right here, sugah. Normal keeps everything hidden, bless his raggedy white ass." Original Cindy looked at Normal as he paced back and forth, chewing his nonexistent fingernails. "I got some packing tape and magazines too. I hope you're into Glamour and Time." She handed the supplies over to Tia.

"Thanks." Tia turned her attention back to Sketchy. She quickly closed his wound with dressings from the kit. "You'll need to rest. Don't stress the wound." She turned her attention to Reggie. She touched Reggie's forehead and saw the young X8 relax. "Reggie, I'm going to move your arm. It will hurt a little."

"OK." Reggie's voice was distant, her eyes unfocused. Tia took Reggie's left arm and quickly manipulated it. With a sickening crunch, she moved the broken bones into place. Reggie groaned once and was still. Tia took the magazines and made a splint, taping the magazines around Reggie's arm. She then took the tape and made a sling. With the last of the tape, she taped Reggie's arm close to her body to prevent movement. Tia looked around at the group. They were all watching her, in awe of her skill.

"Wow, could I interview you? That was amazing." Sketchy said, ever hopeful.

"Sketchy, fool, we don't have time for that. We need to leave now!" Original Cindy said sharply.

Normal checked down the stairs and saw only sympathetic faces. Sky and Lane came in, looked up at Normal, and shook their heads. "OK, let's go. Bip bip bip. Move it, people. We have packages to deliver. Pam, Sky, Lane, you create a diversion so we can get our 'packages' out of here safely."

"Sure, Normal, no prob!" Pam was eager to help. She, Sky and Lane took off quickly.

"Go. Kara, guide the first group out. Tia, take Reggie and go in the first group. Groups of four..." Cain was all business. "Mingle with the crowds; that way they won't be able to get a good shot at us if they see us. Trice, bring up the middle group. I'll bring out the third group. Who's leading us all out?"

Original Cindy put up her hand. "That's me, sugah. You ready to get this rollin'?" She moved next to Kara and led the first group out the door. They moved quickly and efficiently down the street, followed closely by groups two and three.

Three blocks from Jam Pony, two sector police stopped Kara. "Turn around and show your neck," they demanded. "We have a report of transgenics in the area."

As Kara began to turn, the cops were distracted by a voice saying, "I'll race you." They turned around to see three Jam Pony riders coming full-tilt toward them. One seemed to lose control of his bike and went into a slide, heading directly toward the cops. The cops scattered to get out of the

way.

Kara called, "Go now!" and the transgenics in her group began to run.

"Stop or we shoot!"

The transgenics ignored the order. They kept running, blurs of motion to the human eye.

Unnoticed in the confusion, Original Cindy and groups two and three slipped quietly past, as the police spoke frantically into their comm units. "Unit 645 calling for backup. Transgenics on 5th and University, heading southwest."

Jam Pony

Normal was watching the news from the desk, as usual. Suddenly, he yelled, "Everyone shut up!"

"This is Melissa Michelle, live from Terminal City with breaking news. We've received reports that police and National Guard are pursuing a group of transgenics, who are possibly accompanied by some human Seattle residents. According to reports, this group was sighted near Jam Pony, the site of the hostage crisis that began this siege. By all estimates, the group is headed for Terminal City, which had become Transgenic Central even before the standoff began over a month ago. Police and National Guard have made it clear that no one is allowed to enter or leave Terminal City. If captured, the transgenics will be turned over to military control."

Someone switched the channel.

"Hey!" Normal yelled. "What the fire truck do you think you're doing?"

"Channel 9 always has hoverdrone footage!" Sketchy yelled back.

"Police hoverdrone footage shows the group of transgenics several blocks from Jam Pony, the site of the hostage crisis that marked the beginning of the Terminal City siege. No reports on whether these transgenics came from Jam Pony or were merely passing by as they made their way toward what one can assume is their final destination-Terminal City. Police and National Guard are in pursuit, hoping to catch them and turn them over to military officials. No word yet on what the military plans to do once they have these or any of the transgenics in custody."

"Oh, for the love of Mike!" Normal hollered. "You!" he pointed to Sky. "No reporters are allowed in here! Close the gate halfway!"

Sky ran up the ramp, hurriedly ushering several returning messengers inside. As he brought the security gate down halfway, he saw reporters already rushing Jam Pony.

"Normal!" he yelled. "We've got visitors!"

Normal ran to the gate, stuck his head under it, and yelled, "We have no comment! Jam Pony has no comment at this time regarding the latest transgenic pursuit. Now get off my property before I have you arrested for trespassing!"

As he returned his attention to the television, he heard a reporter say,

"...may have to use force to capture the transgenics."

Command Center, Terminal City

Max, Logan, Alec, and the others were watching the news broadcasts as well.

"Damn it," Max said, slamming her palm against the table.

"What do you wanna do, Max?" Alec asked.

Max didn't waste a beat. "Let's go get 'em. Mobilize."

Logan, Alec, and Mole nodded. "All right, people, let's rock and roll!" Mole bellowed, running off toward Munitions to outfit the TAC team Alec had already begun assembling.

* * * * *

Act Four

Jam Pony - early evening

"Man, my arm hurts like a bitch," Sketchy said to the empty room. He stared out the window, looking longingly after the long-gone group. He sat down heavily on an old couch that had seen better days.

The door opened and Normal came in, carrying a sandwich and a soft drink. "Here, sparky." Normal said gruffly as he gave the food to Sketchy. "What the hell were you thinking? You broke my new window. You could've gotten yourself killed!" Normal was uncharacteristically letting his concern show.

"Thanks, Normal," was all Sketchy said.

"Just don't get any ideas. You're still paying for that window." Normal quickly reverted to form.

Sketchy grinned back at Normal, seeing through the façade. "It looks like we've got an underground railroad right here at Jam Pony. How are we going to make it work?"

Normal sighed and rolled his eyes skyward. He sat down near Sketchy and they began to plan.

Disembark Point, Terminal City

Alec strode over to the TAC team as they milled around, waiting for word that the rescue mission was a go. As he approached them, seventeen-plus years of military training kicked in, and he assessed the team dispassionately.

He had assembled eight transgenics, all of them X5 or X6.

Five were female, three male. They had an assortment of weapons, ranging from single-shot rifles to an AK-47 or two. Since this was a quick in-and-out mission, none of them wore full field packs, but several had ammunition belts slung over their shoulders. They were standing around and cracking jokes, seemingly relaxed, but there was an underlying tension that could be seen in the tautness of their movements.

"Ten-hut," Alec snapped as he drew even with the group. He smiled as they quickly arranged themselves into two neat rows, standing at rigid attention. Without speaking, he assessed them, and then allowed them to stand down with a soft "At ease."

"X5-494, checking your readiness for this mission," he continued. He picked out one of the females and shot a swift question at her. "Designation and specialty, and give me the ten-word explanation of the mission."

"Sir. X5-725, a.k.a. Glory, sir. Sharpshooter and team leader. Tactical rescue of troops caught outside, possibly under fire, sir." Alec nodded and indicated that the next in line should continue.

"X5-834, a.k.a. Fox. Sniper and ordnance expert."

"X6-392, a.k.a. Radar. Comm specialist."

"X5-928, a.k.a. Chica. Sharpshooter."

"X5-863, a.k.a. Joe. Infantry."

"X6-278, a.k.a. Mite. Infantry."

"X5-936, a.k.a. Reese. Demolition."

"X6-345, a.k.a. Kik. Sniper and demolition."

"Good. My specialties were assassination and covert ops,

but a little butt-kicking never comes amiss." Alec grinned at them and received answering smiles in return. He motioned to a couple of transgenics who had followed him with several boxes. "We picked up a few weapons in our little run-in with the Phalanx a while back, and I got approval to release some for the mission. Besides your obvious weapons, I assume you all have knives?" At their nods he continued. "Those who have single-shot rifles, leave them behind. We have a few M9s and ammunition to go with them, plus some flash-bang grenades. Nice of our Phalanx friends to give them to us."

"Sir, may I ask a question?" Glory inquired. Alec nodded. "Shouldn't these weapons be held in reserve for a serious situation? This is a simple rescue."

"X5-452 authorized the use of these weapons herself, along with orders that you are to bring this group in, safe and unharmed, by any means necessary." Glory looked like she was about to ask a further question, but at that moment Alec's comm unit crackled to life in his ear.

"Alec, is the team ready?" Logan asked.

"Ready, willing and able," Alec responded.

"They need to move out. Rendezvous point is Seneca and 4th. Time is of the essence." There was an underlying urgency in Logan's tone.

"We're on it." At Alec's nod, Glory gave the order for the team to move out. Alec turned and headed back to the Command Center, but not without a last look behind him as they entered the sewers.

Sector 5

Original Cindy looked around, getting her bearings. She knew the Seattle streets backward and forward, but that was from riding a bike down the middle of the streets, not sneaking on foot from alley to alley. The close call soon after leaving Jam Pony had forced them to take a wide detour. Now they were slowly working their way above ground to the rendezvous point.

"How far?" Cain asked her urgently, looking at the sky. Cindy followed his glance but saw and heard nothing. "Chopper heading this way," he explained. She remembered that the X5s had enhanced hearing abilities and nodded.

"Two blocks, but we hafta cross the open street--no way 'round it. Chill." This last as the precious comm unit Max had insisted she take crackled in her ear.

"OC, how close to rendezvous are you?" Max asked her.

"Two blocks, boo, but ya know 4th in this 'hood." Cindy responded, "Whatchyou doin' hittin' me 'stead of hot boy?"

"I wanted to. You be careful, 'k? I'm giving you back to Logan; he's going to get you to the TAC team. They're almost at rendezvous. We got your back all the way."

"I know, boo. We gonna be fine. Now gimme hot boy, but first tell him to get that fine ass of his in gear and get us home."

"I got you and my 'fine ass' is already in gear," Logan's voice responded with a chuckle. "The TAC team is ready and waiting for you. You just need to get to it. The Guard troops are a block away, so you need to move now."

Original Cindy acknowledged Logan's warning and quickly apprised Cain of the situation. He nodded and turned to the Xs grouped behind him. Cindy watched as he swiftly went through a series of hand signals similar to those she had seen used casually by the transgenics in Terminal City. Then he turned to her and nodded.

"We're ready. Which way?"

Cindy pointed.

"Keep close to the buildings until we get to the cross street," Cain instructed. "When we get there, we make a run for it. Trig, Original Cindy is your responsibility." He directed the last to a well-built, husky young man.

"Hey, I ain't no shrinkin' violet. Original Cindy kin care of herself," Cindy protested.

"You can't move as fast as we can. Besides, I promised your boss we'd take care of you."

"Like he cared." Cindy shrugged.

"Well, it was more along the lines of his not being able to afford to lose another rider," Cain admitted with a grin.

Original Cindy tossed her head and muttered something about "tight-ass money grubbers." Then, with a signal from Cain, they were on their way. Hugging the buildings, they quickly made their way to the intersection.

At Cain's signal, they began to slip across the street in teams of two, using their speed to appear as blurs of motion to Original Cindy's eyes. In minutes all were safely across, leaving behind only Original Cindy, Trig, and Cain. Cain motioned to Trig and Cindy just as a shout sounded down the block to their left.

"Halt or we shoot!" Half a dozen National Guardsmen

stood there, one of them holding a heat-seeking device while the others held M4s aimed directly at the three. Before Cindy could catch a breath, Trig tossed her over his shoulder. She felt the air rushing by her as he sped across the open street, closely followed by Cain. She heard a series of cracks, followed by a whining noise, and felt Trig stumble but then regain his balance.

In seconds they were in an alley across the street. Trig paused while Cain looked at Original Cindy in inquiry. Still out of breath from having been unceremoniously thrown over Trig's shoulder, she pointed down the alley. Cain signaled and the group moved forward. When they reached the other end, they stopped. Before they could venture further, a young woman stepped out of a doorway and halted them.

"I'm X5-725," Glory said. "I head the TAC team sent to bring you in. Slight change of plans--the rendezvous point was compromised and we had to fall back. Get your people inside. The street out there is crawling with unfriendlies."

"Yeah, well, there are more right behind us..." Cain started, only to be interrupted by the crack of gunfire coming from the other end of the alley. Not wasting any more time, they hustled into the building, where they found the remainder of their group. The building appeared to be an abandoned hotel and they were in its dilapidated lobby. Members of the Terminal City TAC team were deployed at the windows and doors, and Cain's group was huddled around what had once been a seating area in front of the hotel check-in desk.

"I have a few extra weapons here--mostly handguns..." Glory started to say. Before she could finish, the transgenics gathered around, and she handed out the weapons.

When she came to the last one, she found herself looking into the face of Original Cindy.

For a moment she refused to release her grip on the gun, recognizing Original Cindy as the ordinary friend of Gem and Max. "You know how to use this?"

"You bet yo' sweet ass, sugah. Original Cindy done made Expert back in the day, when she served her country. You hand that sucka' over. Those black hats wanna come in here and mess with my peeps, Original Cindy's gonna show 'em the what." Their eyes locked, and then Glory shrugged and let Original Cindy have the gun. She watched as Cindy expertly looked it over. Then, seeming to be satisfied that Cindy knew what she was doing, Glory walked over to the window to check out the situation.

"OC?" Her earpiece crackled. "Come in. Status." Logan's voice in her ear was calm.

"It's all good. We hooked up with the X-men," she advised him.

There was a flurry of noise from outside. A bullhorn blared and was accompanied by the whir of a chopper setting down in the street. "You, inside the building. We have you surrounded. Drop your weapons and come out with your hands up."

"Like hell we will," Glory muttered. "Command, are you there?" she continued into her comm unit.

"Here. You're surrounded on three sides," Logan returned, as calmly as if he were giving the weather report.

"What about basement access to the sewers?" she asked.

"I'm working on it. Trying to find the plans for the building. Takes a bit of time." As he spoke, an object crashed

through one of the few front windows that still had glass in it instead of plywood boards.

"Tear gas. Get rid of it NOW!" Glory yelled, but Fox had already grabbed the canister and flung it back out at the troops in the street. There were some startled yells and curses as the gas caught them by surprise.

Cain chuckled to Glory. "That'll teach 'em to use tear gas against transgens." He turned and was walking toward one of the windows when all hell broke loose. Angered by the reversal of their gas, the troops outside opened fire. A hail of gunfire came through the broken window and through the plywood that covered the other openings into the building. The transgenics returned fire, and for long minutes there was no time to talk.

Command Center, Terminal City

The Terminal City Command Center was packed with transgenics who were working the computers, comms, and monitors they had set up, and there was barely room to move. Logan was seated at a workstation, using his laptop to pull up his extensive data files on Seattle. His gloves lay discarded on the desk next to him, freeing up his hands to quickly key commands into the laptop.

Max had given up her seat to Dix, who was working with the comm tech on the TAC team. As she stood behind Logan's chair, watching his screen intently, she let out a sigh and Logan turned to face her. "Wish you were out there with them, don't you?" he said sympathetically. She managed a brief smile in reply before he turned back to his work.

"Bingo. Sewer access in the basement next door...now just let me..." he was muttering to himself. "Max started to ask

him a question, but she was interrupted by the sound of gunshots coming over the speakers. At the same time, the Command Center lights flickered and several of the monitors went black. The speakers crackled and died.

"Damn it, who's in charge of the backup generator?" Mole's voice boomed out over the sudden hubbub. Logan's screen stayed on, powered by his backup battery, and his voice was calm as he spoke to Glory.

"Have your demolition guy blow a hole through the interior wall into the next building. Their basement has direct sewer access; yours doesn't." He paused, listening. "Right. That should work. You don't have much time. My hack into their communications shows that they have two SWAT teams heading in. I'd say you've got five or six minutes to blow that wall and get out."

The lights flickered once again and went out for good. There was a rush of activity as the transgenics frantically tried to keep their systems up and running.

"Get the backup hooked in," Mole directed. Max stayed where she was, standing behind Logan, out of the path of activity.

The Bates Hotel, Sector 5

"How are those charges coming?" Glory asked Kik, who was frantically working at the wall. She was answered by a 'bang' as a large hole appeared in the wall.

"Incoming!" shouted the guards at the front and the back of the building simultaneously. The Jam Pony transgenics had already started through the wall, led by Original Cindy, who was directed by Logan's voice in her ear. Glory and her team, joined by Cain and a few others, fought a rear-guard action to delay the incoming SWAT

teams.

Guided by Logan, Cindy found the stairwell and led the transgenics to the bottom, coming out to a short hallway. They followed it to the end, only to be met by a solid steel door.

"Logan, we gotta problem here..." Cindy began, breaking off as the rear guard came flying down the stairs and took up positions at the bottom.

"What the hell's the problem?" Glory called out.

"Steel door--gonna blow it, but it may take a few," Reese answered laconically. "Hey Kik, toss me some plastic. I think I may need extra for this bitch."

"Expedite. We're low on ammunition and they're at the top of the stairs. We can't hold them long," Glory rapped out.

Command Center, Terminal City

"Once they blow the door, Original Cindy, you're home free. There's a sewer access manhole and you'll be in a section we know inside and out. From there, any one of our techs can bring you home with no problem." Logan's voice was level despite the chaos around him as the transgenics pulled wires and made connections to bring their systems back up. His laptop's backup battery kept him online while the others were scrambling to get operational once again.

Max stood behind Logan, helpless and out of the fight. Someone came to stand next to her, and she turned to see Alec.

He nodded at her and softly said, "I'd like to be part of it too. But you have to be here. Logan's the best we have, but

they would never let him do this if you weren't around. And there's no one else here with his level of skill. You did the right thing, staying behind."

Alec turned away and leaned down, placing his hands on the desk next to Logan as he studied the schematics on Logan's laptop screen. "Logan, if you can get them into the sewers, they can lose the pursuit at that junction." Logan nodded and continued to speak softly into his comm.

There was a sudden commotion as several transgenics pushed past, carrying pieces of equipment. Caught off balance, Max stumbled sideways. Her reflexes kicked in and she reached out to catch herself, coming down briefly on a hand where it rested next to Logan's laptop.

"Sorry," she muttered to Alec as he straightened up.

"For what..." he began to ask her, confused. Max had already turned aside as the lights came on and the loudspeakers came to life, drawing everyone's attention.

The sound of gunshots came over the speakers, followed by Glory's voice. "Blow that door! We can't hold them." Her voice cut off.

"Glory, status?" Logan was asking, his voice low amid the confusion.

"Damn," Alec cursed, as they heard more gunshots and what sounded like an explosion.

Max turned back to Logan. "Logan, was that the door? Did they get through?"

Alec had already started toward one of the other comm units when something made him turn around. Logan was lying slumped over his keyboard as Max stood next to him, and chaos swirled around them. Max's panicked

voice sounded loud in Alec's ears as she stood frozen, looking at Logan but unable to touch him.

"Logan! Logan, talk to me...Logan..."

TO BE CONTINUED...