

J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI'S

# RAISING STARS



issue  
**#10**

Digital  
Edition

[www.topcow.com](http://www.topcow.com)



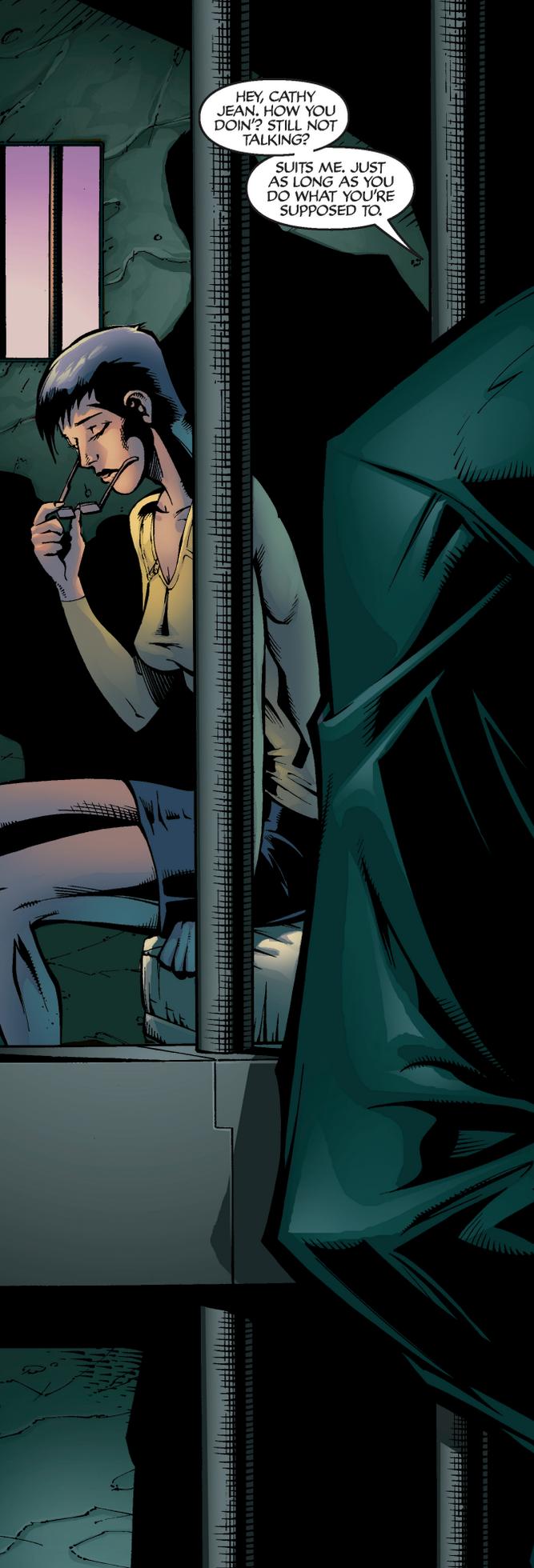
Frank  
Liv

**J. Michael Straczynski • Christian Zanier**

*Rising Stars* issue #10  
cover art by Gary Frank, Livesay  
and Peter Steigerwald

RISING STARS #10





HEY, CATHY JEAN. HOW YOU DOIN'? STILL NOT TALKING?

SUITS ME. JUST AS LONG AS YOU DO WHAT YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO.

TOUCH IT. YOU HEARD ME.

I USED TO THINK I WAS THE ONLY ONE OF THE PEDERSON 13 TO BE BORN WITHOUT POWERS.

TOUCH IT.

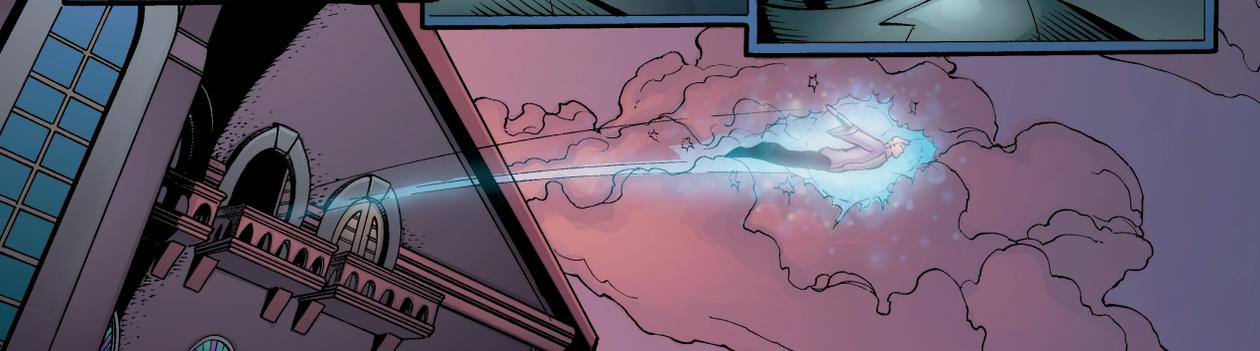
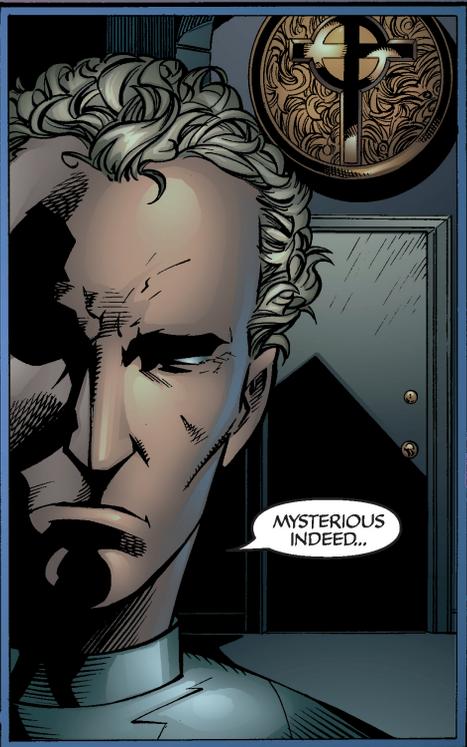
OR ELSE... WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT ELSE, DON'T YOU, CATHY JEAN?

I USED TO WONDER WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO TRULY BE SPECIAL, TO BE WITH THE OTHERS.

GOOD GIRL. I'LL BE BACK IN A FEW HOURS WITH ANOTHER ONE. PLENTY OF TIME TO GET YOUR STRENGTH BACK.

I HAD NO IDEA.

AND NOW ALL I WANT IS TO GO HOME. TO BE NORMAL AGAIN. TO BE CLEAN AGAIN.





THERE THEY ARE, RIGHT ON TIME.

I SEE THEM, RANDY.



I DO LOVE TECHNOLOGY. EMAIL, AUTO DIALERS, PROGRAMMED VOICE MAIL...MAKES MY NIPPLES HARD JUST THINKING ABOUT IT. HEY, GLAD YOU MADE IT!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS, CHANDRA.

I KNOW, BUT I WANT TO. I WANT TO FEEL THAT I'M CARRYING MY WEIGHT.

IT'S DANGEROUS.

I KNOW. BUT I'M OKAY WITH IT. I'M NOT AS PHYSICALLY STRONG AS THE TWO OF YOU, BUT I MAY BE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN HELP GET US PAST STEPHANIE'S SECURITY QUIETLY. THAT MAY COUNT FOR A LOT WHEN THE TIME COMES.

OKAY, HERE'S THE GAME PLAN. I CHOSE YOU BECAUSE ALL OF YOU ARE ON THE RUN, SAME AS US. ALL OF YOU CAN BENEFIT FROM THE DEAL OFFERING US IMMUNITY IF WE CAN CLEAR OUT STEPHANIE MAAS AND RE-TAKE CHICAGO. AND ALL OF YOU HAVE ABILITIES WE CAN USE IF THIS TURNS UGLY.

BUT WE'LL DO THIS IN STAGES. WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT WE'RE WALKING INTO IN ORDER TO USE OUR FORCES WISELY AND AVOID CASUALTIES. SO THE FOUR OF US WILL GO IN FIRST, SCOUT OUT THE AREA. WHEN WE'VE GOT A CLEAR PLAN OF ACTION, WE'LL SEND WORD TO THE REST OF YOU.

WAIT A MINUTE, RANDY. YOU SAID THE FOUR OF US.

THAT'S RIGHT, JOHN.

BUT I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST US GOING IN FIRST: YOU, ME AND CHANDRA. SO WHO'S THE FOURTH --

THAT WOULD BE ME.

I THOUGHT ABOUT IT AND PRAYED ABOUT IT AND GOT WORD TO RANDY THAT IF THERE WAS SOME WAY I COULD HELP --



YOU SON OF A BITCH!

JOHN!  
NO!



YOU SOLD US OUT!  
GAVE US UP TO THE  
GOVERNMENT!

JOHN,  
LET HIM  
GO--

I--

YOU  
THINK I'M  
GONNA  
TRUST YOU  
NOW?



I SAID  
LET HIM  
GO!

DON'T  
YOU SEE?  
HE'S HERE  
TO --

HE'S HERE  
BECAUSE I  
ASKED HIM  
TO BE HERE.

GO ON,  
JOSH. TELL  
THEM.



YEAH,  
JOSH, TELL  
US.



TELL US  
WHY WE  
SHOULDN'T  
KILL YOU  
RIGHT NOW  
FOR SELLING  
US OUT.



I KNOW THAT I DID... THAT MY FATHER AND I DID SOME... TERRIBLE THINGS. I DID THEM BECAUSE I WAS MORE AFRAID OF HIM... THAN I WAS OF THE TRUTH. I'VE SUFFERED THIS BURDEN FOR TEN YEARS. I CAN'T... BEAR THAT BURDEN ANYMORE.



I NEED... TO ATONE. I NEED TO TRY AND FIX THIS, SOMEHOW. I'VE PRAYED ON IT, AND THIS IS THE ONLY WAY FOR ME TO SET THINGS RIGHT.

I CAN'T ASK FOR YOU TO FORGIVE ME NOW. ALL I CAN DO IS TRY TO EARN YOUR FORGIVENESS AT THE END OF THIS.



YOU'RE KIDDING ME. THAT'S IT?  
I BELIEVE HIM.

HE'S NOT GOING.  
YES HE IS.



NOT A CHANCE IN --

I... CAN'T FORGIVE YOU EITHER, JOSH. BUT I GUESS I CAN GIVE YOU THE CHANCE TO TRY.



YOU PAID HER TO DO THAT.



NOPE. HEY, SHE'S YOUR FRIEND.

IT'S NOT FAIR.

WHAT IS?



LOOK, IN ALL THIS TIME, I'VE NEVER LET YOU DOWN. MOST OF YOU ARE ALIVE RIGHT NOW BECAUSE OF ME. I KNOW HOW SOME OF YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS. I FELT THE SAME WAY. BUT WE DON'T HAVE A LOT OF TIME. WE HAVE TO GO NOW.



WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'LL HAPPEN ONCE WE GO IN THERE. WE'LL NEED A WITNESS, SOMEBODY THE FEDS HAVE ALREADY CERTIFIED AS SUFFICIENTLY CREDIBLE TO GET US ALL INDICTED IN THE FIRST PLACE.

ANYBODY ELSE HERE FIT THE BILL?



THEN IT'S DECIDED. HE'S GOING.

I DON'T LIKE IT.



YOU DON'T HAVE TO.

I WON'T BE RESPONSIBLE FOR HIM.



HE GETS IN TROUBLE, YOU SAVE HIM.

SOMEBODY'LL HAVE TO.

WHAT'S THAT MEAN?

HE MISSED GETTING PHYSICALLY ENHANCED. HE'S STILL AS VULNERABLE NOW AS HE WAS BEFORE THE SURGE.

HOW'S THAT POSSIBLE?



I DON'T KNOW. ALL I KNOW IS THAT SOMETIMES THE WAY WE FEEL ABOUT OURSELVES AFFECTS THE POWER.

I DON'T THINK JOSH BELIEVES HE'S WORTHY OF BEING PROTECTED. I DON'T KNOW WHETHER IT'S GUILT OR ATONEMENT, BUT HE'S ALWAYS GOING TO BE VULNERABLE.



ALL RIGHT. LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH.





...JESUS...  
I'D SEEN THE SATELLITE PICTURES, BUT UP CLOSE...I HAD NO IDEA...

WHERE DO WE LAND?



HERE.



THIS IS AS FAR AS MOST OF THE PEOPLE TRYING TO ESCAPE EVER GOT. I WANT TO KNOW WHY. I MEAN, EVEN COUNTING THOSE OF US WHO JOINED UP WITH STEPHANIE LATER, THEY CAN'T BE EVERYWHERE AT ONCE.



SO WHAT'S OUT HERE STOPPING PEOPLE FROM ESCAPING?



REMEMBER:  
WE SIZE THINGS UP  
FIGURE OUT WHERE  
STEPHANIE AND HER  
FOLLOWERS ARE HIDING  
OUT, THEN CALL IN THE  
REST. NO HEROICS.



THAT'S  
KIND OF FUNNY  
COMING FROM YOU,  
RANDY. I MEAN, AS THE  
FIRST ONE OF US TO PUT  
ON A COSTUME AND  
DECIDE HE WAS A SUPER  
HERO, DON'T YOU  
THINK IT'S --



DO YOU HEAR  
SOMETHING? I  
THOUGHT I HEARD  
SOMETHING.



WHAT  
DID YOU --

HOLY --



The bottom panel shows a chaotic battle scene. In the foreground, a woman with a shocked expression looks towards the viewer. Behind her, several large, green, dinosaur-like creatures with glowing red eyes are attacking. In the center, a group of people, including a man in a futuristic suit, are engaged in a fight. Bright blue lightning bolts are striking the ground around them. The background shows a ruined city street with debris and damaged buildings.





GET BEHIND ME!

RANDY --



JUST A SEC!

THE NAME'S RAVENSHADOW. GLAD TO MEET YOU.



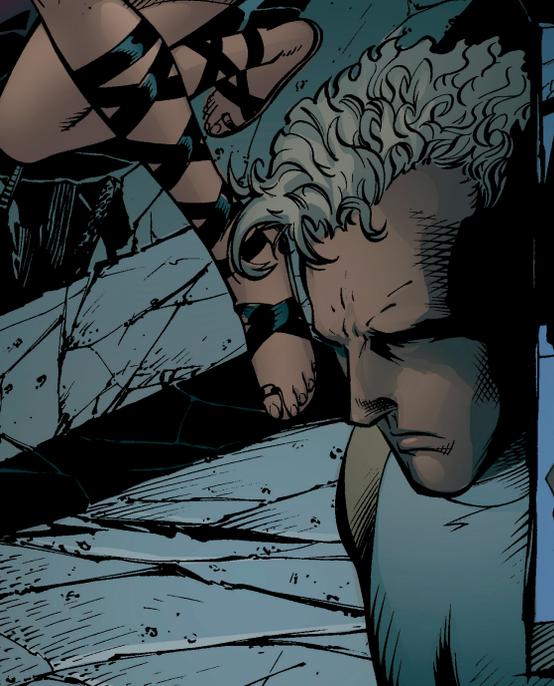
SPEAKING AS AN ARTIST, YOU'RE AN INTERESTING DESIGN...SORT OF PICASSO MEETS A PATCHWORK QUILT --

QUARRRR!

WONDER IF THE ARTIST SIGNED HIS OR HER NAME ANYWHERE ON OR IN YOU.

LET'S FIND OUT.

Yiiiiiii!



I THINK IT'S VERY PRETTY, DON'T YOU?

I CALL IT A RAT-BAT-CAT-CPA-DOG THINGIE, WITH BITS OF RABBIT AND PARTS OF A HYENA WE GOT OUT OF THE ZOO. I'M SAVING THE LIONS AND TIGERS AND BEARS --

-- OH MY --

-- FOR A RAINY DAY. NOW TOUCH IT.

YEAH, I'D HEARD YOU WERE PULLING A WORK STOPPAGE. BET YOU'D LIKE TO SMASH MY FACE IN RIGHT NOW, WOULDN'T YOU? TOO BAD THE ONLY POWER YOU GOT WAS BRINGING DEAD STUFF BACK TO LIFE.

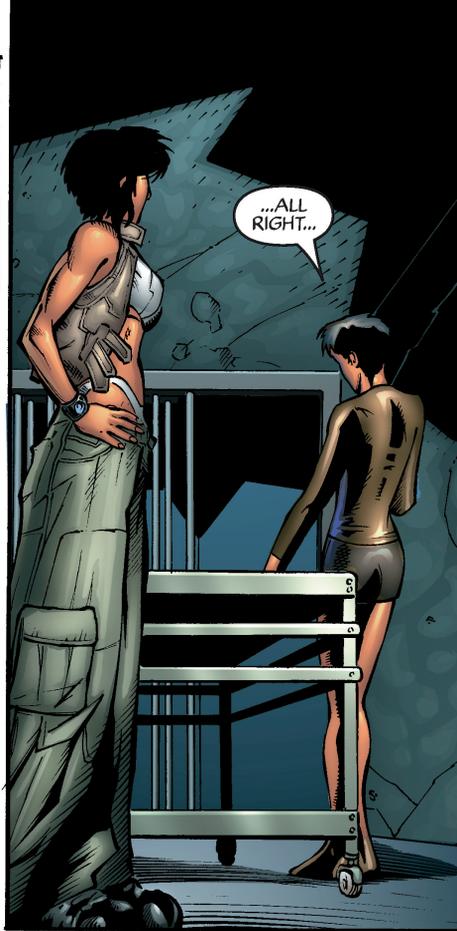
BUT YOUR LIFE'S BEEN JUST ONE BIG IRONY AFTER ANOTHER, HASN'T IT? I MEAN, FOR MOST OF YOUR LIFE YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW YOU HAD THIS POWER. CAN YOU IMAGINE THE MONEY YOU COULD'VE MADE USING THIS ENERGY TO BRING RICH DEAD FOLKS BACK TO LIFE?

STEPHANIE... PLEASE --

**I'M NOT STEPHANIE!**

I'M NOT THAT... THAT... FRIGHTENED, HELPLESS LITTLE MOUSE WHO COULDN'T KEEP HER OWN FATHER'S HANDS OFF HER! I'M THE ONE SHE HID BEHIND WHEN SHE COULDN'T TAKE THE PAIN ANYMORE!

MOUSE. THAT'S FUNNY. STEPHANIE MAAS. STEPHANIE MOUSE. MAAS AND MOUSE AND MAAS AND ROUND AND ROUND IT'S JUST DOWNRIGHT FUNNY, YOU KNOW?





...ANY ONE OF THOSE CREATURES COULD HAVE WARNED THE OTHERS THAT WE WERE HERE.

NOT A CHANCE, I DIDN'T SEE ANY SIGN OF REAL INTELLIGENCE IN ANY OF THEM. THEY'RE INTENDED FOR INTIMIDATION, TO HUNT DOWN ANYONE TRYING TO LEAVE, NOT --

SOMEONE'S COMING!



THIS COULD BE OUR BREAK...



ONE OF THOSE GROUPS HAS TO BE HEADING BACK TO THEIR BASE. WE FOLLOW THEM, FIND THE BASE, AND CALL IN THE REST. I'LL TAKE THE ONE ON THE RIGHT. JOHN?

I'M ON IT. BETTER STAY LOW TO THE GROUND IN CASE THEY'VE GOT SPOTTERS.

WHAT ABOUT US?

WAIT HERE. WE'LL NEED BACKUP IN CASE SOMETHING GOES WRONG.



I HOPE THEY'LL BE ALL RIGHT. WE SHOULD FIND SOMEPLACE CLOSE TO WAIT.

YES...



YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THIS OTHER PERSONALITY STEPHANIE'S GOT, THIS CRITICAL MAAS?

JOSH?



JOSH?



THEY AREN'T HARD TO FOLLOW. ONE OF THE RESULTS OF OVERCONFIDENCE WHEN YOU THINK THERE'S NO ONE ELSE IN TOWN WHO CAN DO WHAT YOU CAN DO.



SOME KIND OF INDUSTRIAL FACTORY. A GOOD PROSPECT FOR THEIR BASE OF OPERATIONS. EASILY FORTIFIED, ROCK SOLID.

WELL, MOSTLY, THERE'S ALWAYS A SOFT SPOT.

I CAN HEAR CONVERSATION FROM DOWN THE HALL. SO FAR, SO GOOD. JUST GET THE INFORMATION WE NEED, HEAD BACK THE WAY I CAME AND --

**BANG!**

OH CRAP --  
GAS!

...COUGH...  
COUGH...

REINFORCED STEEL...THICK AS A BANK VAULT...DAMN...STUPID, STUPID, STUPID...

I'M DAMN NEAR INVULNERABLE...BUT I STILL NEED TO BREATHE LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE...

**BLAMMM!**

...COUGH...

...COME ON...!



# CRASH!

...MADE IT...  
MADE IT...

...COUGH...  
COUGH...

WELCOME TO CHICAGO, RANDY. NOW YOU HAVE A GOOD SLEEP HEAR? THIS'LL ALL BE A LOT MORE INTERESTING WHEN YOU WAKE UP



NOT A CH...

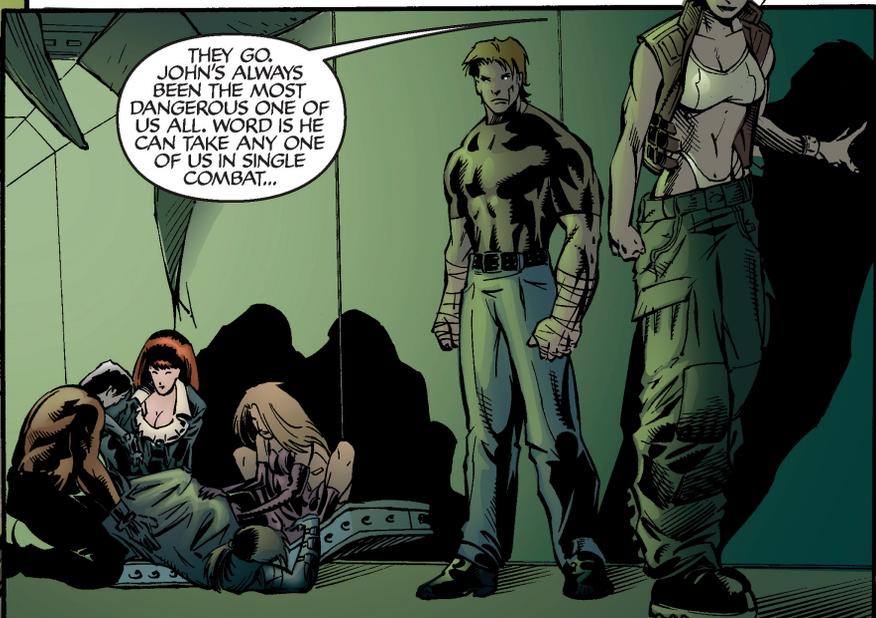


HE'S ALWAYS BEEN GADGET MAN, SO HE'S PROBABLY GOT SOME WAY OF SIGNALLING THE REST. FIND IT.

THE OTHERS ARE IN PLACE. DO THEY GO?



THEY GO. JOHN'S ALWAYS BEEN THE MOST DANGEROUS ONE OF US ALL. WORD IS HE CAN TAKE ANY ONE OF US IN SINGLE COMBAT...





...MAYBE EVEN TWO OR THREE AT ONCE.



YEAH, HE'S A REAL TOUGH GUY.



SO WE CAN'T TAKE ANY CHANCES.



URK!  
WHAT THE --



KILL HIM.



I TRY TO TAKE OFF.  
GET THE HELL OUT.

TOO LATE.

THERE'S  
TOO MANY...



...TOO DAMNED MANY...



...CHANDRA... I'M SORRY...

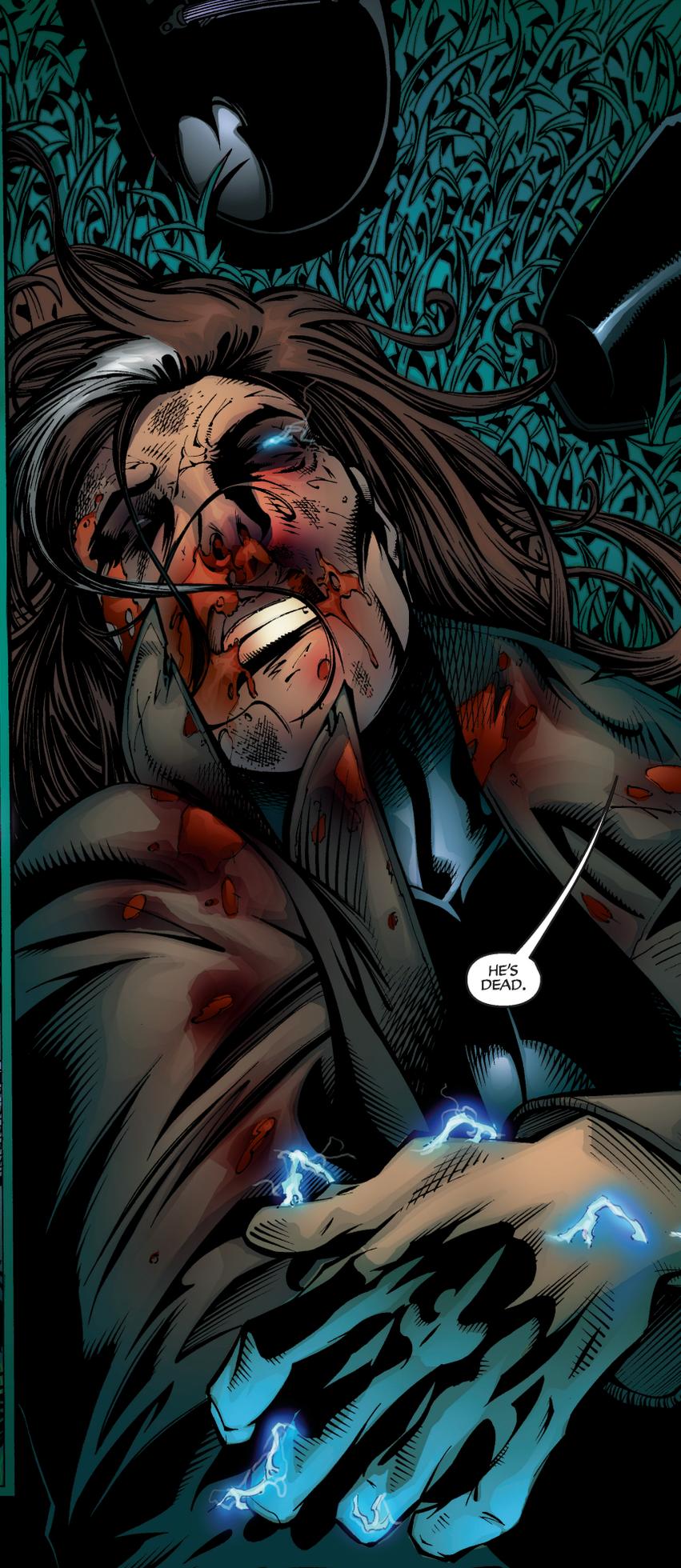


...I'M SO SORRY...



CHECK HIM.

IT'S OKAY.



HE'S DEAD.