

Introduction

"Ladies, Gentlemen, and assorted cosmic beings that defy gender conventions," the loudspeaker announced, "Welcome to the... Myx Dome. I am your host, Mr. Mxyzptlk. Along with my partner, the Hunter of Time, we invite you to observe and gamble on the most exciting contest since... well, ever."

"In the red corner," the imp continued, "in the blue tights, with the red external underwear and cape, I give you the Last Son of Krypton and leading member of the JLA, SUPERMAN!"

"And in the blue corner," the purple suited prankster pointed to the other side of the 'ring', "in the black armor with the grey X and blue cape, I give you the Last Son of Krypton and leading member of the X-Men, SUPERMAN!"

"Now I know what you're thinking, 'how exciting can Superman vs. Superman be?'. But despite having the same genetics, these two are far from the same. The Justice League's Superman, or J-Superman for short, is from an Earth that is slightly larger, with a sun that is slightly brighter. As a result his powers are a shade greater. 10% stronger, 5% faster, 7% more invulnerable, etc, etc. And thanks to the special properties of the Myx Dome, he will keep that edge in power."

"But before you go placing all your bets on J-Superman, X-Superman has his own advantages. He's a full time superhero, more trained in how to fight and how to use his powers. He's a skilled martial artist, and expert heat-vision marksman. And his 'utility belt' has some spiffy tricks built in."

"We will be taking bets for 5 minutes, and then, the main event begins."

"What makes you think I'll fight him?" both Supermans asked in unison.

"Because, if one of you doesn't die, both of your universes die. And this seems like a fair way to determine who bites it."

A Reason to Battle

X-Superman looked worried, but J-Superman was just incredulous.

"You expect me to believe that?" Kent asked, "After everything you've put me through."

Xavier looked at his counterpart, then back at the imp with more suspicion.

"You know I don't lie to you, Supes," Myx frowned, "But since you don't trust me..."

The purple-clad being waved his hand. Floating in mid-air was projection of a solar system. 180 million miles from each of the red giant stars, some sort spatial anomaly floated amidst the ruins of the fourth planet. A purple-blue tear in reality, they seemed to bleed into normal space. The rips were spreading outward, away from the suns, each on the same course.

"I'm not sure if you recognize the remains of your home worlds," Mr. Mxyzptlk explained smugly, "But that cosmic wound in each system is a quantum echo fissure. It is caused when two same person or event occurs in two different universes. It has to be a person or event of major significance. And even then these things tend to collapse in a matter of seconds. These two have been growing in the Krypton system for almost a year."

The projection changed to where the fissures were spreading.

"And now they are starting to follow the hyperspace trail you two took on you way to Earth," the 5th dimensional being continued, "It will take a couple of years to reach your new home. And by then it will be too big to reverse. Chaos will continue to flood into these two universes until they collapse."

"The only way to reverse an echo fissure is to remove the source," a hollow voice said from behind Myx, "That means one of you must die. Then the fissures will collapse."

"And before you ask," Myx raised a finger as X-Superman opened his mouth, "We consulted scientists and more then a few of our god-like spectators. None of them had any other way reverse or even slow the rip. Even those most positively inclined towards you two agreed with my conclusion."

"We know both of you would offer to sacrifice yourself, making that pointless. So, if you prefer, we could just wipe you both from existence. But this seemed to be more entertaining, and this way one of you can survive."

"Now," Myx smirked, "Any other objections? Do you want a chance to live or do

I just disintegrate you both?"

The two heroes looked at each other. Finally, with matched expressions of resignation, they both nodded.

"Excellent," the imp directed his attention back to the crowd of cosmic beings, "3 more minutes until the betting windows close."

Round 1

Both Clarks charged across the field. Despite Myx's use of boxing vernacular, the 'ring' was an artificial landscape. It a grassy meadow, with a few trees and rocks. After they had closed half the distance, X-Superman stopped. His face crinkled as his hand dropped towards his belt. None of his 'tricks', as the little big head man had called them, would have much of an effect on his alternate. But in this battle, even a few nanoseconds could prove critical. He reached for a pouch containing handcuffs, and the other Kryptonian slowed.

Kent reduced his speed when his opponent reached his waist. The lead lining prevented him from seeing what the other Superman was planning to use. He doubted the X-Man would be carrying anything like Kryptonite, or a magical weapon, but in this fight even a moment's distraction could prove dangerous.

Xavier dropped the idea of using the 'cuffs. He should get a better feel for his opponent before using items. Instead he decided to with the best defense, and again flew rapidly towards his opponent. The other Superman blinked in surprise. The Leaguer sidestepped his fist, but X-Superman's other hand grabbed his costume. Clark X used the handhold as a point of rotation, trying to drive his knee into the Clark K's head. But the blue-clad hero brought up his arm, stopping the attack. J-Superman then reached out with his other hand and pried X-Superman's hand off his clothing. He then brought his own knee up, punting the X-Man away.

J-Superman was surprised when the other warrior recovered, rotating in mid air. X-Superman hammered both his fists down on J-Superman's shoulders. J-Superman took both hits with a shudder, then deflected the kick aimed for his face. Kent jumped so he was floating on the same level as Xavier, then launched a trio of punches at his opponent's head and neck. The black armored Kryptonian tried to block, but the blue clad Kryptonian's greater speed and strength allowed him to connect with two clipping blows. He tried to press his combo with a kick to the ribs, but the other hero caught his calf between an elbow and knee

X-Superman rolled his limbs out, throwing J-Superman's leg back. He swung his fist out into a quick body blow, then pushed the Leaguer back so he could land a side-kick at full extension. But J-Superman used the momentum to spin back along the X-Man's leg, aiming a backfist at X-Superman's head. Xavier ducked away, at the same time planting his other heel into Kent's stomach.

J-Superman used the force of the kick to retreat. He looked hard at his opponent, then assumed the first stance of Torquasm-Rao. X-Superman frowned, and matched his opposite. Clark Kent careful masked his disappointment and assumed a boxing posture. He had been hoping the X-Man would not know the mental discipline. But X-Superman did, and J-Superman didn't doubt Charles Xavier had also trained his student. Together, that would give the other Superman an advantage in the multi-dimensional fighting style. Instead he went with the standard upper-body combo of crosses, jabs, and the occasional

uppercut.

X-Superman was pushed back by his opponent's furious barrage. But the attacks were lacking in practiced precision, and he was able to block or deflect most of the punches. Finally he caught J-Superman arm, and flipped over the blue Leaguer. He grabbed Superman's leg with his free hand, and cuffed Kent's wrist and ankle together. In the awkward position, it took J-Superman 2 nanoseconds longer to break the restraints. During the interval, Xavier landed three hard blows to his opponent's back, neck, and head. After J-Superman was free, he quickly darted away, and turned back to face X-Superman.

"Can you please stop that?" X-Superman suddenly asked, "You're giving me a sore neck, vibrating your head like that. I don't think you need to worry about your secret identity here. If anyone here doesn't already know what you look like, they can look at me."

"How did you know?" J-Superman asked, still shaking his head rapidly.

"Blurred face, talking in a deep voice, and your wedding ring is tucked into your belt. And I know some other heroes who guard their real names and faces."

"Alright," Clark Kent said in his normal voice, stopping his obscuring movement, "I must say I envy you, being able to wear your ring in the open."

"Who is she?" Clark Xavier asked.

Wives

"What can I do for you, Ms. Lane?" J'onn J'onzz answered the call, reading the communicator ID off the computer screen.

"J'onn," Lois said his name in confusion, and then her voice grew worried, "You're at the Watchtower?"

"Yes, I'm on monitor duty. You sound as if you expected someone else."

"Well... I guess I thought... I thought you'd be busy."

"Lois," the Martian felt his own worry growing at both her tone and her hesitation, "What's wrong?"

"Clark is gone," she exhaled, "So is his costume..."

"And?" the Leaguer prompted after a second.

"He didn't leave any kind of note," the reporter was on the verge of tears.

"That's not without precedence," J'onn tried to sound reassuring.

"Right. But usually that's for Justice League, alien invasion/extinction level asteroid situations. I woke up 6 hours ago, and he was gone, and the newswires have been strangely silent."

The green alien blinked. Those who knew J'onzz would have known that was a significant, emotional reaction for the reserved hero.

"I am accessing the Watchtower systems... There have been no major incidents reported for the last 7 hours, 14 minutes. That is unusual, but not unheard-of."

"If there is nothing wrong, then where is my husband?" Lane sounded on the verge of hysterics.

"I will run the pattern search for Superman's communicator," the Martian Manhunter entered the command. Then his eyes widened when he saw the result.

"Lois, I have a call coming in. I will have to get back to you."

"J'onn? J'o..." Lois was shouting as the Martian disconnected.

"Batman, Zatanna, Atom," J'onzz redirected the target of the central communicator, "I need you at the Watchtower right now."

Jean Xavier tripped and fell to her knees. The students of Biology 102 all turned to look at her in concern. None of them had ever seen the poised telekinetic even stumble before. She stood, a harried look on her face.

"Class dismissed," she announced.

"Mrs. Xavier?" Artie asked.

"Something has come up," she told them, "Unless announced otherwise, you should attend substitute classes for the remainder of the day."

As the class shuffled quickly out, Phoenix spoke again, "Mr. Allen, could you stay a second?"

The young man complied, and after the other teens were gone, "Bart, I need you to deliver a message to the other X-Men. Including Beast, who is at the Baxter Building in New York, and Wolverine in Juneau, Alaska. Tell them 'Last Train'."

"Last Train'?" the speedster parroted, "What does that mean?"

"It's part of a song title," she said quietly. He just kept staring at her, until her gaze became a glare.

"Last Train'," he said, "Got it."

And then her was gone.

"Seven hours and nineteen minutes ago, the passive signal from Superman's communicator vanished," Batman commented out loud, "At the same time, worldwide criminal and super-villain activity dropped by thirty-seven percent."

"Why am I here?" the spellcaster asked, nervously tugging at her fishnets.

"When Batman says vanished, he means it in the literal sense," Jonn explained, "There is no movement registered. Nor are there any of the tell-tale signals of the device being destroyed. We detected no transporter signals, nor any anomalous energy readings."

"So you're thinking magic," the sorceress nodded.

"That is one avenue we are pursuing," Batman said noncommittally.

"And what do we tell Lois?" the Atom asked.

"Nothing, yet," Batman answered forcefully.

"Clark is gone," Jean announced to the assembled X-Men.

"So it is a mission?" Kurt Wagner sounded relieved.

"Where we goin', chere?" Remy Lebeau asked.

"No, he didn't leave, he's just gone," she sobbed.

"Clark's dead?" Kitty Pryde was shocked. Scott Summers grabbed her hand.

"I don't know. One second I could sense him like normal. He was getting ready for his next class. And then he just wasn't there anymore."

"Someone could be blocking your telepathic bond," Charles Xavier suggested. The X-Men all looked at the monitor, which was transmitting the images of Professor X and Lilandra from the other side of the galaxy.

"But who? And why?" Tears ran down Jean's face.

"That is what we must determine." Superman's father answered.

'Jean', a voice echoed quietly in her mind, 'Can you hear me?'

"Phoenix?" she asked aloud. The other X-Men looked at her.

'Jean,' the telepathic could see the outline of the fiery swan over the conference table. And so could the X-Men. 'Are you aware of what is happening with your husband?'

"No." her voice hardened.

'Superman is being forced to fight for his life...!' the spirit began.

Round 2

"That will be enough," the hollow voice said again. The being behind Mxyzptlk stepped forward into the light. Though he appeared humanoid, his face was featureless, even more so than the mask the Question wore. There was no ears or even a lump where the nose should have been. He wore a vest of blackened and bloodied chain mail over a charcoal dragon scale jerkin and pants. Befitting his name, the 'Hunter of Time' had a dark steel longbow slung over his shoulder.

"You are here to determine who is strong enough to survive," the creepy voice also carried the hint of smug superiority, "Not to meet and greet. Despite Mxyzptlk's words, we do not have 'a couple of years'. And time flows more slowly in this pocket of Order. If you cannot or will not conclude this within one hour of this place's chronology, then I will."

"Now, now," Myx floated in front of his partner, nervous, "No need for that. I'm sure X-Superman is just trying to psyche out J-Superman."

The Hunter of Time may have scowled, it was difficult to tell with no mouth or lips. Regardless he nodded and stepped back into the shadows.

J-Superman shot into the sky, then angled back down. As he dove at X-Superman, he started to spin. Xavier was confused by his opponent's action. It was flashy, but would not add to the impact. And more, it would be harder for the Leaguer to adjust. Still, his pause to consider that and his opponent's greater speed only gave him a split second to react. As he floated to the side, the X-Man suddenly felt his movement impeded. The teacher looked up as his opponent's ankle crashed into shoulder, sending him sprawling. He realized his opponent's plan; the pull created by the cyclone was like the effect of Might/Hulk's Vacuum Draw. He resolved not to underestimate his other self again.

Clark Kent grimaced as he watched his opponent fall. He didn't want to hurt the black-clad hero, but he didn't have a choice. If he didn't give it his all neither would X-Superman, and then they would both die. He pulled back the other way, ignoring the vertigo as he tried to halt his spin. He slowed, but not of his own volition. Cold enveloped him, as the X-Man's breath streamed forth. He understood Xavier had used his attack against him, using the vortex to focus the freezing cloud. As he broke out of the thick ice, the other Superman was already landing a fist on his jaw.

J-Superman fired his heat vision, targeting his opponent's X-shaped belt buckle, then sweeping left. 5 pouches were destroyed in an instant, and Kent took note of their contents. A communicator, handcuffs, and high-test wire melted into slag, while a fire-suppression tab and solar flash grenade exploded. He started to sweep his attack back to the right, but the X-Man was already reacting. Xavier exhaled again, and when the ice-cold breath struck the heat beams, a dense cloud of steam erupted between them. Instinctively, the Leaguer covered his face. It took him an instant to realize how stupid

the reaction was, but when he opened his eyes and switch to X-Ray to peer through the vapor, the X-Man was gone. J-Superman heard and felt X-Superman attacking his back left quadrant, and swung his arm to block the fist or foot that was leading.

"Oh, that was a lucky block," Myx commentated, "X is following up the jab with a right cross, but J has his position. That was a sloppy dodge, and yes, X made him pay for it with a punishing kick to the back of the knee. He'd be limping if he couldn't fly."

Clark Xavier grimaced, both because Clark Kent struck a nerve in his left shoulder, and because of the Imp's blow-by-blow. He shut out the wannabe announcer, and launched a roundhouse kick and heat vision bolt at the same time. J-Superman avoided both, and buried his fist deep in X-Superman's stomach. The X-Man was unable to evade the hammer fist to his temple. His head ringing, and out of breath, Xavier tried to retreat. But the reporter pressed mercilessly, and the teacher started to black out. In desperation, he fire both his heat vision and cold breath, and lashed out wildly with both hands. He hit something, and the onslaught ceased. The black-armored hero fled to a safe distance, eyeing his opponent as he took a deep breath.

J-Superman reached up to where his left eyebrow had been. Already the blisters were smoothing out, but he new the hair would take longer to grow back. He wondered how Lois would react. Then he touched the rib his enemy had just cracked, but that was already healed too. But he knew now that the other Superman was just like he was, unconsciously holding back until he felt threatened. He was still trying to overcome the self-taught limit, and so must be the X-Man.

Xavier's mind was racing. He must have hurt the other Superman to drive him back, but he knew his adversary had done more damage in that exchange. He started to take another breath, but the blue costumed hero was returning to combat range.

"I'm sorry," J-Superman said, as he grabbed X-Superman by the hair and ear, and slammed his knee into the injured warrior's nose. He let go, and the X-Man fell back, blood flowing freely. He tried to follow it up with a finger jab to the neck, but the other Superman caught his hand, and brought his elbow up into Kent's underarm. The Leaguer felt his shoulder shift out of joint.

"Don't apologize yet," Xavier rasped, wiping off his face. Both Supermans launched attacks, but they were interrupted by a burst of air in the arena.

BAMF!

X-Men

"Le' me get dis straight," Gambit raised an eyebrow, "Dis machine, dat Forge built in jus' over an hour, it gonna combine Nightcrawler, Shadowcat, and Phoenix's powers, to teleport us to some artificial universe, where Superman is fighting himself 'fore a audience of gods? And der's a good chance we can't get back."

"If you don't want to come, you shouldn't," Jean said quietly, looking down, "Clark wouldn't want us to put ourselves at risk."

"No one is saying that," Cyclops asserted, "Superman would do the same for any of us without hesitation, and we all owe him at least that much."

"Not that that's why we're doing this," Kitty punched her boyfriend in the arm.

"Of course not," Storm put her hand on Phoenix's shoulder in a comforting gesture. Jean forced a smile and nodded.

"OK," Forge walked into the room, "We have the power supply."

Behind Forge followed Hulk, carrying a device of orange and black metal, roughly the size and weight of an SUV engine. The two technical experts attached the giant battery to loop of wire and crystal the maker had constructed in the corner of the War Room.

"Shadowcat, you're at position 1, Nightcrawler, position 2," Forge said, "Jean, you will need to help Kitty set up the correct vibrational wavelength. The machine will let you phase everyone else. Then Kurt, you have to teleport everyone to where the Phoenix indicates. The machine should make that easier too."

"How we gettin' back, bub?" Wolverine asked Forge pointedly, "This hunk'a junk?"

Forge grimaced, and Hulk spoke.

"No," Banner answered firmly, "the device has only a small chance of surviving the teleportation. If it doesn't explode, it will likely disintegrate. Forge will remain behind and try to build a more stable version. But we might have better luck convincing the imp in charge to send us home."

"I can handle that," Logan grinned nastily.

Nightcrawler and Shadowcat took their positions, and the rest of the X-Men gathered inside the perimeter. A light hum filled the room, and to Forge, the rest of his teammates began to look indistinct.

"we have it," Phoenix's voice sounded far away. The shaman blinked, and remembered he was standing next to a machine that would likely explode. He quickly stepped out.

"i can see him," Nightcrawler said.

BAMF

On the other side of the field, X-Superman was inches from landing a right cross on J-Superman's jaw; while the blue clad Superman was an instant away from planting both fists in the black garbed Superman's stomach. Both Kryptonians stopped and turned to look at the new arrivals. The X-Men immediately noticed their teammate's blackened eyes and blood down the front of his costume.

Cyclops dropped to one knee, and fired an optic blast at J-Superman. The surprised hero didn't even attempt to dodge, and was hurtled back by the impact. With a gesture, Storm put a lance of lightning through their opponent. Nightcrawler intercepted him as he started to drop, and teleported the Leaguer back to where Hulk and Wolverine waited.

"Stop," Clark Xavier shouted. Banner's fist froze, an inch from Kent's nose.

"What you doing here?" he asked, "How did you get here?"

"That is a good question," the Hunter's voice hissed out again, "How did you find this place? And how did you get here?"

"My husband and I share a psychic bond," Phoenix glared up at the head box, "And I have a shard of the cosmic in me. You could not prevent me from finding him."

"You should not be here," the co-host growled, "But I can change that..."

The Hunter took his bow from his shoulder, but Myx jumped in the way again.

"Too hasty!" the 5th dimensional being shouted, "I'm sure the X-Men can be convinced not to interfere."

"Like he..." Jean started.

"Jean, you have to," X-Superman gently touched his wife's face, "You don't know what's at stake here. This needs to be a fair fight."

"We do know," Cyclops told him.

"How?" Xavier sounded surprised.

"Telepathy?" Gambit asked incredulously.

"Right," he paused, digesting this "Then you can understand why I have to do this alone. Superman versus Superman. Not just to be fair to him, but because I need it."

"No..." Jean shook her head, "I can't let you die."

"It's not a forgone conclusion," Clark sounded hurt.

"Alright Clark," Beast fixed him with a canny gaze, "If you must have equitable battle, we can understand that. We'll bear witness."

"No," Jean sad again.

"Jean, please." He embraced his wife. She shook in his arms. He stroked her hair gently.

"I won't leave you," he reassured. Finally she pulled free, nodding. She joined the X-Men as they moved to the other side of the 'ring'.

"Get on with it!" someone in the crowd shouted.

"I quite agree," the Hunter said, "FIGHT!"

Round 3

"I owe you a free shot," Xavier said, helping Kent to stand. J-Superman frowned, narrowing his eyes.

"Let's just get on with this," he responded in a resigned tone. Then, he launched a series of hard punches at his opponent. X-Superman was already blocking, knocking all three fists away, before planting his foot against his opponent's solar plexus. The X-Man placed his hands against ground, and flipped the Leaguer skyward. X-Superman finished his flip, and leapt up, firing his heat vision. J-Superman countered with his cold breath, then took a page from his opponent's book and escaped in the steam.

The two Kryptonians collided again, sending shockwaves through the arena. Each pushed the other back, and in turn, each bounced off the floor, meeting again in the air.

X-Superman placed his fists together and punched out. J-Superman put his palms in the way, but the X-Man folded his hands and drove his fingertips into the blue Superman's wrists. Kent looked shocked as his hands went limp, but Xavier didn't even pause, and drove a knife hand into J-Superman's neck. The other hero's spine twisted oddly, but he lean forward and rammed his shoulder into X-Superman's chest. Xavier used the momentum to flip forward again; kicking Kent's chin, but also snapping his neck back into proper alignment. As he completed the rotation, he grabbed the blue clad Superman's leg, and threw him hard into the ground.

Clark fired his heat vision the prone Clark's chest, even as he flew into the fallen hero, striking with his right elbow and left knee. Kent felt his defenses weakening, and knew his opponent was fighting harder. He spun on the loose dirt, digging a small furrow as he dislodged X-Superman. J kipped up, and landed facing X. But X was already moving, and J just barely avoided another kick.

'He's fighting harder,' Kent thought, 'because his wife is here. If I were Batman, I would use the X-Men as a distraction. But I'm not Bruce; and anyway, I don't want to give them any excuse to get involved.'

'Not the time for introspection,' he scolded himself, as another blow sent him sprawling. The X-Man placed a damaging blow in his kidney, and continued with a knuckle strike to the off-balance Kryptonian's cheek.

Xavier watched the welt he had just raised on Kent, and observed that it did not fade as quickly as the others had. He was getting to the other Superman, and the Leaguer knew it too. X stepped in again, landing an elbow/backfist combo. J was launched back, and X clapped his hands to push his opponent further. As the hero in tights tried to right himself, the hero in armor charged in again. Then he tripped.

Clark Xavier fell forward, clutching his leg.

Clark Kent recovered, ready to take advantage of his opponent's slip.

Cyclops and Gambit both leapt forward, shouting.

J-Superman reaches X-Superman, his fist cocked.

Nightcrawler grabs Hulk and Phoenix, and teleports.

Hulk grabs J-Superman, pinning his arms.

Phoenix wraps Kent in a telekinetic field.

"What is going on?" the Leaguer demands, "I thought you agreed to a fair, one-on-one fight."

"We did," Cyclops counters, "That's why we stepped in."

"What?"

"Cyke and me, we saw somethin' from outside de arena hit our Superman," Gambit explained, "Or you think he really trip and hurt himself."

"I didn't see anything," Clark Kent said, sounding unsure.

"Look again," Cyclops ordered, "Gambit naturally sees in a red shift, and my visor causes the same. That could be why we saw it."

J's eyes glow blue, as he examines X-Superman's leg.

"There is an infrared energy shard in his leg," the reporter noted, "His body is already breaking it down and healing, but the damage was not minor. Based on the rate of recovery, it did strike when you said it did."

He relaxed slightly in the Hulk's grip, then looked up in at the owner's box, his face livid.

"What's going on here, Myx?" he shouted. But before their host could answer...

BOOM!!!!!!

"Take your hands from him, monster," another voice shouted, as a pair of linked fists hammered Hulk's temple.

Justice League

"How were you able to find Superman if he isn't in the universe?" Flash asked.

"Do you remember 5 months back, when the X-Men kidnapped me?" Batman asked, "They took me to another universe. Since then, we have been trying to find a way for the communicators to work across quantum barriers."

"But I thought the system wasn't working," Kyle commented.

"It isn't," Steel replied, "But with a little tweaking and some magic, we have been able to track Superman. Though we still can't communicate."

"Then we must get Access," Wonder Woman proclaims.

"Access can only take us to the universe of the Avengers," Batman answered, "Clark isn't in that space/time."

"And anyway, we can't find Access," Atom admitted sheepishly.

"Then how we gonna get there?" Plastic Man stretched right into Batman's face.

Ignoring him, Batman stood. He walked over to the table, and reached into his belt. He placed a small, circuit covered cube on the table. An identical device was already sitting there, encompassed by a nimbus of energy from Zatanna and Dr. Fate, both in a deep trance.

"Since when do you have a Mother Box?" J'onn asked, suspicious.

"We will also need the League's Mother Box," the Dark Knight explained, not answering, "Zatanna and Fate can enhance them with a spell, so they can create a trans-universe Boom Tube. But doing so will drain their power, they will need at least a week to recharge."

"So we use the League's Mother Box to get to Superman, and Batman's to get back?" What's the catch?" Wally fixed Bruce with a canny eye.

"The Tube will be open for just over a second, and will only have enough power for 7 people," Steel told him, "Which means only 6 of us can go, and you have to be sure everyone is ready to go before you return."

"So, who will be going?" Green Lantern asked.

"Myself, Wonder Woman, Martian Manhunter, Green Lantern, Flash, and Plastic Man."

"Me, Bats?" Plastic Man's face stretch into giant question mark, "Why me?"

"In case we need someone to leave behind," Batman answered.

"Very funny," Plas frowned, "You are joking, right Bruce? Batman?"

"Is everyone ready?" the Martian asked, "Every second we delay, is another second Superman is in danger."

"Batman?"

"We are ready," Wonder Woman answered. The other Leaguers nodded, and even Plastic Man looked serious. Batman reclaimed his Mother Box, and Steel picked up the League's. The 6 heroes gathered where the armored scientist indicated. John Henry activated the New Genesis computer.

BOOM!

The League emerged to see Superman, held by the Hulk, and surrounded by the X-Men.

"Take your hands from him, monster," Wonder Woman shouted, charging the green behemoth. She laced her fingers, and slammed her hands into Hulk's jaw. Hulk went flying, dropping Superman.

"X-Men, Plan Delta," Cyclops ordered, firing into the midst of the Justice League.

X-Men vs. Justice League

Wolverine assessed the targets. The woman in the armored swimsuit was pounding on Hulk. The two flying green guys were out of reach. And the guy in red was as fast as Impulse or Quicksilver, which meant he was better left to someone with range. That left the one dressed like the bat, or the stretchy guy. And the bat guy was the most skilled fighter amongst their opponents. With a grin, he started towards the tall, dark warrior.

J'onn tried to telepathically scan the X-Men, but a psychic wall of fire blocked his mental path.

'Ms. Grey,' the Martian addressed her, carefully masking his unease.

'That's Mrs. Xavier,' she frowned at him, and tightened her own defenses, 'But how do you know my maiden name?'

'We have met before.'

'I would remember a telepathic version of the Hulk.'

'Actually, I am a Martian,' he said, shifting his astral projection into his true shape.

Storm watched as the green and black clad man gritted his teeth slightly, and a pack of green lions poured forth from his ring. She considered the floating felines, then put a bolt of lightning through each one. The constructs popped like balloons.

"Weather control," Kyle reminded himself, creating a large umbrella over his head.

Flash raced around the arena, taking stock of the situation. Then he saw something that made him slow, and then change direction and purpose.

"hey," he whispered in ear of each of his teammates, "there's two Supermans here. and one is dressed like an x-man."

"Superman," the voice of the Hunter surrounded both of them, "Your teams' conflict does not grant you a reprieve. Indeed, all of your friends and allies will pay if you cannot finish this."

With matched looks of determination, the two Clarks readied themselves and flew together again.

"Batman," Wally told their de facto leader, "My connection to the Speed Force is weak here. I can't go faster than mach 3."

"It's still faster than the X-Men."

"Not if one of them is Superman," Flash countered.

"It looks like ours is handling theirs," the Dark Knight pointed out. With a nod, the speedster ran straight towards Cyclops. Before he reached the X-Men's commander, Nightcrawler appeared in front Flash. Wagner grabbed the Leaguer's wrist, and teleported them both around the arena one hundred times. 'Crawler stopped, and looked at Flash with a grin. But the smile was erased when a red fist impacted his jaw.

"I guess that would disorient most people," Wally commented, "But when you're used to running at larger fractions of light speed..."

He shrugged with a slight smirk of his own. Then he struck out at the demonic X-Man again, however the mutant had already vanished in a puff of smoke and stench.

Hulk grabbed Wonder Woman's wrists, so he wouldn't fall and she could not distance herself. He tried to close his fists, hoping to crush her bracers slightly and make her lose control of her hands. Instead both his ire and blood pressure rose, as the force he applied went nowhere.

"These things are stronger than Adamantium," he grunted to himself. Wonder Woman kicked up, but he forced her right and his left arm into the path of the attack. He then released her left arm to level his own punch at her face.

Batman noticed Wolverine stalking him. He considered the shorter mutant with interest. They were matched in skills, enough that they had been combined during the amalgamation. Wayne was slightly curious as to how the battle would play out. But there was more going on here, and Wolverine wouldn't be the best source.

"Plastic Man," Bruce triggered his communicator, "intercept Wolverine. I'm going after Beast first."

"Righty-oh, Bats," the stretching hero extended an arm, grabbing the feral mutant and shouting, "Get over here!"

"Let..." Wolverine stabbed his claws through Plastic Man's arm.

"Hey that tickles," the rubbery Leaguer joked.

"GO!" Logan twisted his claws, severing the arm.

"Ow," Plastic Man said, sounding more confused than actually hurt. The end of his severed arm reached down, and as it touched each of the three pieces, they reattached.

"Richards can't do that," Wolverine looked surprised, as Plas' arm grabbed him again and resume pulling, "What are you?"

The rubbery hero hauled the X-Man within an inch of his face, and growled, "I'm Batman."

Wolverine sliced upward, and Plastic Man stretched away to avoid getting tagged in the chin.

"Not that you would have seen that movie," the comedian commented, swing an expanded fist at the mutant.

"I liked it," he said, dodging another claw, "But Bat's hated it."

Wolverine just growled, leaping forward with both claws. They buried deep in Plastic Man's stomach, which then flexed, trapping Wolverine's hands up to the wrist.

"I guess that's because the movie version killed people," he mused, constricting the X-Man, "And the Joker, he tried to kill Jack Nicholson three times."

Then an explosion hit Plastic Man, throwing Logan clear.

"Ya talk too much," Gambit commented, fanning another hand.

Kyle created a green power suit to protect himself, as he was being assaulted from all sides. The proximity alarm he thought into the armor went off, and the camera revealed a tornado bearing down on him from behind. In response, a giant emerald Chinese fan appeared. It started to beat quickly, and the whirlwind dissipated. Storm continued, launching a barrage of lightning straight for Green Lantern's chest. He sketched a light bulb, which shone brightly as it absorbed the electricity. The weather controller next pounded him with gale force winds and freezing rain.

"I better finish this before it gets out of hand," Kyle told no-one in particular, "If we're fighting the X-Men, maybe it's time to bring out the Avengers."

The artist began to draw Captain America, Iron Man, and Thor. Storm started to float backwards in obvious worry, but before the green energy finished forming the heroes, it stopped, and then began to dissipate.

"What's going on?" Kyle asked, pouring all his will and creativity into the most powerful weapon in the universe. Despite his efforts, the constructs disappeared.

[color=green][Primary power at 0.1%. Engaging back-up.][color]

"What?" Kyle shouted, "I just recharged this morning. How can the primary be empty?"

[color=green][This space-time has an adverse effect on power consumption.][color]

"Back-up?"

[color=green][Back-up is functioning normally. Calculated standard 10% unlimited back-up will function at 5% here.][color]

Kyle gritted his teeth slightly, and dismissed all the constructs he was maintaining.

"I guess I'll be more efficient..."

'I have confidence in you,' another voice sounded in his head. His gaze was drawn into the audience where a small blue man, with white hair and a red robe watched. Ganthet nodded. GL looked back to Storm, and barely stopped the blast of super hot air. He then created an oversized Super-Soaker™, and sprayed Ororo with a sticky, lime-colored goop.

Storm tried to freeze the ooze, but it resisted the cold, and enveloped her. She hit it with thunder as it began to spread over her body. But the slime didn't slow, and she began to panic.

A ruby beam hit Kyle, sending him careening.

"Storm, hold still," Cyclops fired quick focused pulses, dislodged the now stationary substance from his comrade.

Not waiting for Nightcrawler to reappear, Flash was already running towards the other end of the battlefield. One of the X-Men was just standing there, a young woman of medium height and slender build. She looked unassuming, but, he reminded himself, so did he out of uniform. She could easily be preparing some giant energy blast, or waiting to heal her allies. Best to take her out now. Wally crossed the field in a quarter of a second, and gently chopped at the girl's neck at twice the speed of sound.

The Scarlet Speedster nearly stumbled when his hand passed right through her. He recovered, and circled for a second pass.

'OK,' Wally considered, 'If she is phased, this is no problem. If she is truly intangible, I'm out of luck.'

As he reached her again, he sent a subtle vibration through his hand as he tried to sap her. Though he passed through her again, this time it felt different. The mutant shuddered this time.

'Right,' Flash thought, 'I remember a female phaser from Batman's files. She had

an animal name... Bunny? No Kitty. Shadowcat.'

He was charging at her again. One or two more passes at he should have her frequency. But about 12 feet from her, he put his left foot down, and it kept going. He tripped and instead of hitting the ground, he fell into it. He pushed himself back up, but as soon as his head was above ground, the earth and rock solidified around him.

"Sorry," Kitty shrugged.

Wonder Woman punched the Hulk square in the nose, and though he reeled back in pain, she had to shake out her hand. Hitting the green behemoth was like hitting Superman, or even Doomsday. She struck again, but this time clipped him with her bracer instead of her fist. The mystic metal did what her flesh could not, it drew blood.

Banner reached up and touched his temple, then looked at the red substance on his fingertips.

"That hurt," he growled. He grabbed her, two massive hands easily encircling her waist. And then he began to squeeze. Unlike her bracers, her god-forged armor was not designed to be rigid, so he was able to crush the life from her.

Diana tried to pry his fingers away, but could not break his grip. She boxed Hulk's ears with her arm guards. He grunted, and his grip loosened, but did not let go. Desperately gasping for breath, Wonder Woman swung the point of her boot into his groin. Bruce Banner let out a strangled gasp. His eyes crossed, and then rolled back into his head. The Amazon was freed, as the X-Man's hands moved to his injury.

"I am sorry," Diana said, "I prefer not to exploit a man's weakness. But..."

"Shut the #@ up!" Hulk shouted. His eyes had recovered and they were glowing green. And the veins in his neck and arms were popping out.

"I WILL CRUSH YOU!" the gamma titan roared, swinging again.

Phoenix frowned. Hulk was close to losing control, which could be dangerous for all of them. She wanted to help Banner, but she had her hands full. J'onn squirmed out of Jean's telekinetic grip, and fired his heat vision at her. She deflected the energy rays, sending them upwards into the dome.

Meanwhile, on the astral plane, a Martian dragon floated back away from the spear of the angel with the flaming wings. Jean's mental form flew after the alien creature, until he turned and breathed lightning at her. She caught the strike on her El crest shield. The lightning sparks gathered in front of the aegis, and then ignited the ether. She gestured, and the flames flew at the purple reptile. The Leaguer dodged unsteadily, and then flew at her, his talons extended.

On the material plane, the mutant wrapped the alien in a solid sphere of

telekinetic energy. He fired his eye beams again, but the bubble held, and even began to compress him. J'onzz seemed to fold in on himself, and then his physical form expanded. Phoenix began to grimace as he increased in size, forcing the mental globe outwards. Finally it shattered, and the Martian grew to match his astral projection. He appeared as a giant purple snake, with six legs, and two sets of quadruple wings. His three yellow eyes tracked Phoenix, and both of his forms descended on her with fangs extended.

"If that's how you want it." Jean tucked and rolled away. As she passed under the wyrm, her hands seemed to meld into the earth. She pulled her limbs free as she regained her feet, and in her grasp were a spear and shield that matched her astral weapons. She stabbed upward with the pike, driving into the dragon's underbelly. J'onn pulled back in pain, dripping yellow ichor.

The League's Superman spared a glance at the psion's shield.

"A red head?" Kent said with a knowing smirk.

"You too?" Xavier asked, stopping Superman's punch with a quick shot of heat vision.

"No," the blue clad Kryptonian smiled wider, "but almost."

"The woman in the stars and stripes, then?" the X-Man suggested, sending a kick at the Leaguer's chest.

"Why does everyone say that?" Superman's face turned cold, and he drove the edge of his hand into Superman's knee.

"Doctor McCoy," Batman inclined his head even as he threw a soft punch at the scientist's nose.

"Have we met?" Beast asked, flipping over Batman. He landed behind the Dark Knight, then flipped forward again, planting his feet against his opponent's back.

"I think I would remember a six-foot tall bat..." the mutant mused aloud as he flexed past a kick.

"Or were you out of costume?" Beast asked, throwing a punch the Bat easily dodged.

"No," Wayne answered slowly, "But I believe the Dr Henry McCoy, a.k.a. Beast I have previously encountered was not you. Tell me, how long have Superman and the Hulk been members of the X-Men?"

The doctor frowned at that, as he rolled under a punch and then over a kick.

"Well, the Hulk has been with us... Let's see, not quite four years?" he pondered out loud as he tumbled into the Leaguer, "But Superman is one of the original X-Men."

"That would seem to confirm that your team is from a different universe, from the team we encountered before," Batman grabbed his blue adversary, landed a solid axe kick to the mutant's chest, and then tossed him away, "Or at least a different reality in the same universe."

The detective dodged another leaping kick as he pondered the battles around him, "Why were you attacking our Superman?"

"We weren't," Hank shot back, hotly, "If that glamazon hadn't blindsided the Hulk, you might have discovered that we were merely restraining your ally to keep the fight equal."

Batman allowed his confusion to cloud his face. This took away Beast's ire.

"You really don't know what's going on here?"

Wayne shook his head no.

"Well, the short version is that the existence of our two Supermen has created a Quantum Echo Fissure in both our universes. And unlike normal echo fissures (whatever those are), these have been around for a few years and are continuing to grow. Our [i]esteemed[/i] hosts and the experts they consulted decided the only way to keep the fissures from destroying both universes was to kill one of the two Kryptonians indirectly responsible. But to make it fair, they decided to let the two fight to see who lives. Clark forced us to agree to stay out of this, but when someone outside the arena attack our Superman, we stopped your from taking advantage."

With each sentence Batman's frown grew.

"And who are these 'hosts'," the Dark Knight asked with a scowl. Beast indicated the owner's box and answered.

"The Hunter of Time, and... let's see if I can pronounce this right... Mr. Mix-yez-pit-lick."

Batman's eyes widened and his head jerked up to look at the recently silent announcer. All he caught was a fleeting glimpse of a purple bowler, but it was enough to set his teeth grinding.

"Oh, barnacles. I think he saw me," Myx said, hiding.

The Truth of Battle

Green Lantern floated sideways to avoid Cyclops' next blast. But he extended his hand, letting the scanner he had created clip the scarlet beam.

"Red frequency light, and highly dense gravitons," he noted, putting up a quick shield to stop a lightning bolt, "I should be able to..."

The next beam hit a pale green parabolic dish. The gravity mirror reflected the ray, and it struck Cyclops square in the chest. The X-Men's field commander grinned as he fired again.

"If I wasn't immune to my own powers, I wouldn't have any eyelids," Summers smirked, as Rayner sent another optic blast back at him, only to get pounded by Ororo's hail.

"Really," GL smirked back, and this time deflected the graviton beam perilously close to Storm's face, "What about the rest of your team?"

Cyclops gritted his teeth. But Storm took advantage of their distraction to renew her assault on Green Lantern with angry vigor.

Shadowcat jumped back as the ground around Flash began to rumble violently. The dirt exploded upwards, and the speedster surged to his feet. But before he had taken 156 steps towards the phaser, he felt an air burst and smelled brimstone as Nightcrawler landed on his back.

"Remember me?" Kurt Wagner asked. Wally reached up to dislodge the agile mutant, but it was too late. Nightcrawler teleported 500 feet straight up, and released Flash before teleporting back to the ground.

"Oh crap," Flash said as he began to drop. The Guardian of the Speed Force pointed his arms down, and spun them. Two whirlwinds extended down, slowing him.

"Ha!" he shouted in triumph as he slowed to a safe speed. 'Crawler raised an eyebrow, and then re-appeared in front of the Leaguer. He grabbed Flash, and then in another burst of light and smoke, the mutant was gone. West was confused to find himself moving upwards at an accelerated rate. Then his equilibrium set in, and he realized he had been turned over, and his cyclones were pushing him down. He tried to stop, but too late. The fastest man alive crashed into the dirt with a dull thud.

Kitty ran over, and pulled his hood off. She checked his breathing and pulse.

"He's alive," she said with relief.

"Then we better watch him," Nightcrawler cautioned, "He will probably recover as

fast as Impulse or Quicksilver."

Shadowcat nodded, and phased Flash's hands and feet into the ground.

Plastic Man giggled as a series of explosions deformed his body.

"That really does tickle," he snorted, wriggling past Wolverine's claws.

"How we supposed to fight dis guy?" Gambit asked, "You cut him apart and he pull himself back togetha. I blast him, and he laugh it off."

"I got an idea," Logan snarled. He clipped O'Brian's hand and then tossed a pinky to Gambit.

"See if you can put a charge on that," the feral mutant grinned.

"Hey, I need that!"

"Really? Dat' too bad." LeBeau tightened his grip on the squirming digit. But nothing happened.

"It still alive. My powers don' work."

"I'll be taking that back," Plastic Man's arm snaked out towards Gambit.

"Perhaps we should play keepaway?" Nightcrawler appeared next to Gambit, took the finger, and vanished.

"How quick can you pull yourself back together when your in a hundred pieces, bub?" Wolverine asked with a vicious grin. Plastic Man's mirth drained, but not in the desired manner. Instead of fear or trepidation, Eel O'Brian's face emoted angry determination.

"Never again," he growled. With surprising speed, he grabbed the feral X-Man. His arms extended further, and he bludgeoned Gambit with Wolverine. Wolverine tried to cut into Plas again, but the mutable hero's arm divided in two, and then reformed, trapping Logan's wrist. The Leaguer slammed the X-Men together again.

"Do you have any idea what it's like to be broken into a thousand pieces?" Plastic Man's voice was furiously cold. Blood was running down Gambit's face, where Wolverine knee had clipped his nose. The Cajun tried to pull another card, but another human clubbing knocked it away before he could charge it. Nightcrawler 'ported back with a worried look, and removed Gambit. With his other target gone, Eel converged on Logan.

The rubbery reformed robber pinned the berserker's arms to his side, and got in

Logan's face again.

"I hear you can't be killed," he hissed, "Maybe if I rip you apart, you'll think again before suggesting doing that to another."

"You need a timeout," Nightcrawler appeared on Plastic Man's shoulder, and then quickly teleported him to the far side of the arena.

"Are you all fight?" Wagner reappeared and helped Logan to his feet.

"Just a little crushed, and a dislocated shoulder," Wolverine grimaced, "But we underestimated that guy."

Wonder Woman caught Hulk's fist, and kicked the heel of her boot into his shoulder. The green X-Man's arm went limp for an instant, then he flexed, breaking her grip. Before she could escape, he caught her elbow and pulled her into a clothesline. She managed to get her wrists up just in time to avoid having her windpipe crushed. Diana pushed off, putting distance between herself and Banner.

Wonder Woman plucked her tiara from her head, and it magically flattened. She flicked her wrist, and the enchanted boomerang flew at the Hulk. It struck him dead in the chest, but to her surprise only sank in about three inches and remained stuck. She gestured, calling it back to her when it did not return automatically. The weapon started to wiggle, but the X-Man grabbed it tightly and tore it free. Red blood seeped out of his chest, and from the newly forming cuts on his hand, as he kept the boomerang from flying back to its mistress.

"You don't seem to learn," he growled. Even as the wound in his chest began to close, he threw the tiara straight down. He then stamped the ground over the hole.

'I cannot compete physically,' she thought to herself, 'And my skill is not enough to tip the balance. But there might be another way.'

She slipped the Golden Perfect off its loop. While the Hulk was still focused on the ground, she threw the lasso around him. As he looked up in surprise, she looped it around him again.

"You think you can hold me with a piece of rope?" he asked. His ire was fading, replaced by amusement.

"The Golden Perfect is forged of Truth," she explained, "and like Truth, it is absolute, unbreakable. And while wrapped within it you can speak only the Truth."

"Truth isn't absolute," Hulk countered, flexing, "It can also be subjective. I can say my wife is much more attractive than you, and that is true, but it is my opinion, and might not be true for another."

"Who are you?" she asked, frowning.

"I am Dr. Bruce Banner, also known as the Incredible Hulk."

She stared at him expectantly, but nothing happened.

"Banner and the Hulk are supposed to be two separate people," she insisted.

"Except when Apocalypse controlled me, I have been one mind for many years."

This stopped her.

"So you know about us, but your information is outdated," he considered.

"Why were you attacking Superman?" she demanded suddenly, trying to regain control.

"I wasn't. I was restraining him, to keep the fight between them equal."

"What?" she let the rope go slack in her surprise. He struggled again, but unfortunately, it was still wrapped tight enough to hold Banner.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

"Our Superman asked that we stay out of it, leave it a fair fight. But someone outside the arena attacked our Superman, but your Superman didn't see it at first. So we gently stopped him from taking advantage. Something you might have noticed if you had assessed the situation before attacking. Like now..."

"What?"

"Your little rope may be indestructible, but a lasso is only as strong as its knot." He flexed again, and the binding holding the Golden Perfect around him unraveled. He grabbed the rope and pulled her in. His hand impacted the side of her head, and she went limp.

"Sorry," he said, dropping the magic cord on her.

Both Supermen simultaneously landed a right cross on each other's jaw. Intricate burn patterns crisscrossed their uniforms. The remnants of their capes beat a rhythm on their backs and necks, with the red and blue cloths fluttering in the breeze of space bending strikes. All compassion, all self-sacrifice, all reservation were gone. Both Clarks were fighting to live and to protect their teams. Each fought with everything they had, and the pocket universe shook from their efforts.

Superman kicked out again, but Superman grabbed for his foot. But Superman was expecting this, and jerked the limb away. Clark turned the momentum into an off-balance punch. Clark was knocked back, but blew a cloud of ice into Clark's face. Superman was also expecting that, and fired his heat vision through the frost, keeping his vision clear and face free. Superman was prepared for the gambit, and fired his own blast towards where the first beams originated. The Kryptonian's head jerked back, as the attack burned two pinpoint holes into his left eye. His cornea was bleached, although his eye was already healing.

The two heroes took to the air. Superman grabbed his opponent's collar, and rotated him around. As Superman's head came down, Clark's knee came up, splitting open his eardrum. The Kryptonian countered by punching out, striking Kal-El in the stomach and a sensitive point somewhat lower. Against his judgment and will, Superman curled up into a ball. Shaking his head to recover his hearing and balance, Superman pressed his advantage, snaring Superman's leg and whipping him into the ground at super-sonic speed.

As Clark landed, Clark recovered and swept his opponent's legs. Superman started to fly back, but Superman was too fast. He caught the Kryptonian's ankle, and pulled him back. An instant later, each was throttling the other. Superman managed to roll over. He pulled his head back and slammed him forehead into the bridge of Clark's nose, focusing on Clark's damaged left eye. The hero blinked, and loosed his grip. Superman pressed his advantage, letting go with one of his hands, and firing two quick jabs at Superman's throat and jaw. With Superman on the edge of consciousness, Clark drew back his hand for the finishing blow...

"Myx!" Batman growled dodging Beast's claw, "Are you sure?"

Beast shrugged, "Never met him before."

"About 4 feet tall, white hair, purple bowler, probably wearing either a purple suit or an orange jump-suit," Batman missed with an elbow as he explained.

"You know him?" Beast slowed his assault, finally understanding his opponent wasn't trying.

"Mxyzptlk is a 5th dimensional imp," Batman explained, faking a kick, "He possesses god-like powers, and uses them primarily to torment Superman."

"Why not jut kill your Superman, if this creature hates him and has the power?"

"That wouldn't be 'fun'," the Batman sneered, "And there are rules he must follow in our dimension. Some he cannot break, and others he will be punished if he breaks. This must be another of his games."

"And if it isn't," Beast swung hard again, not convinced.

"It has to be," Batman struck Beast gently in the neck, "It doesn't make sense for Myx to act this way if the danger is real."

"Then how can we prove it?" the scientist asked

"Can you have Ms Grey contact me? I will disable my psi-blocker." Batman jumped back. McCoy nodded, and closed his eyes.

'Jean,' Hank extended his mind. He felt Phoenix connect to him, and suddenly, he was witness to their Astral battle. The Martian dragon and mutant Knight darted around each other. Unlike their physical battle, their mental match had become a series of cautious jabs, he trying to find the other's weakness.

'What do you need, Henry?' Mrs. Xavier asked, not taking her eyes from the shape-shifter.

'The bat-man wants you to contact him.'

'Why?' she asked. Both telepaths had paused to look at the blue scientist.

'I will bring him here,' J'onn said, suddenly landing and reverting to his usual appearance. A second later, the form of Batman appeared.

'What is it Batman?' the Martian asked.

'J'onn, Myx is here,' Bruce explained, 'He's running this game.'

The Martian raised an 'eyebrow', 'This seems outside his normal behavior. Are you certain?'

'Dr. McCoy describe him, and I caught a glimpse of him.'

'Then why do you wish to talk to Mrs. Xavier?'

'We should not be fighting, and their telepath is best suited to convince the X-Men of this. But more importantly, this [i]is[i] out of character for Mxyzptlk. Something else is happening here, and we need to discover what.'

'I cannot scan the imp's mind,' J'onn reminded him.

'Not alone,' Batman agreed, then he focused on Jean, 'You are using the name Phoenix, aren't you?'

She nodded, watching him warily.

'Are you still bonded to the spirit of fire?'

Her eyes narrowed, but she forced herself to relax with a shrug.

'Not anymore, but the Phoenix has gifted me with a fragment of her power.'

'Not alone,' Beast echoed nodding.

'J'onn you told the League you could not scan Myx because his mind was too powerful, and too chaotic. I think the power of the Phoenix could help you break through. And the two of you together can better sift through the imp's bizarre thoughts.'

'can we trust them?' Beast whispered to Phoenix.

'I'm not sure,' she responded quietly, 'I have only touched the fringes of the alien's mind, and even with his inhibitor off, I can barely read Batman. In the end, we just have to believe that their Superman is enough like ours to choose honorable allies.'

'I take that to mean you will work with me?' Manhunter interjected.

'Yes,' Jean answered with a slight grin and nod.

'I must warn you, Mxyzptlk's mind is immense, fragmented, and turbulent,' the Martian counseled her.

'I understand,' Jean readied herself, 'We should begin. Before something happens we cannot undo.'

Phoenix extended her hands, and J'onn took them. They both kneeled in the ether. Without their support, Batman and Beast faded back into the real world.

The Astral Plane seemed to shift around them. The mutant and the Martian found themselves on a tropical beach, and suddenly clad in swimwear. Try though they might, they could return to their normal attire. At the edge of the sand, was a dense deciduous forest, blanketed in a thick fog.

As the telepaths exchanged looks at each other in concerned confusion, Mxyzptlk stepped from the warm haze wafting from the sand. He was wearing a white suit, and carrying a serving tray.

'J'onn, Jean,' he greeted them with sincere pleasure, bowing slightly, 'What a pleasure. Can I get you something? A margarita? Sun-screen?'

'Myx, what is this?' the Manhunter demanded. The imp looked around.

'Hawaii,' he answered without a hint of sarcasm.

"Something is odd here," J'onn whispered to her.

"You seem to be acting under the impression that I am Lord Mxyzptlk," the creature informed him, "I am just an isolated construct to minister the border."

"We are wasting time here. This is obvious a barrier meant to distract and tempt us. We should head 'inland'," Jean said, turning away from the fake Myx.

"No, you don't want to go in there," the self-proclaimed caretaker hurried between them and the forest, "There are invisible dinosaurs, cannibals, kids without parental guidance, and Tom Hanks," he shuddered, "you should definitely stay here."

"Sorry, but we need to know what Myx knows," Jean smiled sadly. They stepped past the guardian, and into the forest.

The telepaths found themselves floating in a vacuum, devoid of matter, but filled with an infinite cacophony. Both tried to cover their ears, but to no avail. The sound rattled their bodies and stabbed at their thoughts. Behind them, the beach beckoned.

'This defense, it is incredible,' Jean thought to J'onn.

'This is... not a psychic defense,' his 'voice' was hoarse, 'this is another dimension he has visited. But he... uses the memory as a barrier.'

'We need to get out of here.'

'The only way... is back,' the Martian sounded weaker.

'This is worse on you,' she noted, 'just protect yourself.' Then for good measure she added a barrier of her own around his mind. Phoenix scanned the space around them, until she found another 'fold' in the emptiness.

'There,' she pointed, 'Can you make it?'

He nodded, and she led him out of the noise.

They stood at the base of a waterfall. Except the water was a shimmering, multi-colored oil which flowed up instead of down, and the stones were crystals that hurt to look at too hard.

"Where now?" the mutant asked the alien.

"At the top of the waterfall."

Jean tried to step towards the waterfall, but found she could not. In surprise, she

tried to step back and found she was stuck. She looked at her new ally who was struggling as she was. She stepped towards the Martian, and was able to do so.

"We cannot approach," he noted.

"More than that," she said, "We can't move away either. What is this? We can only move back towards the entrance."

"No, we can also go to the left of the waterfall. Just not towards it."

Suddenly, her face lit up.

"We are in a two-dimensional world." she exclaimed, then just as quickly her face fell, "So how do we leave this memory?"

He considered the problem.

"Time," he said after a moment's thought.

"Time?"

"Time is the non spatial continuum in which events occur linearly, usually in the direction of increased entropy. In our three-dimensional worlds, the fourth dimension is time."

"And in a two-dimensional world, the third dimension is time," she concedes, "But that doesn't help us. I've tried rewinding and fast-forwarding, and the waterfall is effected, but I'm not."

"But that is because we are still 3D," he explained, "If you are trying to advance time, it would be time as we perceive it. And trying to move 'forward' through a third spatial dimension is different enough that it will not let you move through the third dimension as time. In order for it to work..."

He trailed off, even as his form flattened. He grew thinner and thinner, until finally the Martian had no depth. But she could still see him. Then he began to move towards the waterfall.

"Come on," his voice sounded odd. Jean's face screwed up in concentration, and her form grew thinner, but also expanded, as if she were being crushed. Then she returned to normal.

"That won't work," he explained, floating back to her, "You cannot flatten yourself. No matter how thin you become, you will still be three-dimensional. You must lose your depth."

"Do not try and bend the spoon. That's impossible," she quoted. He nodded. Her brow eased, and she became flat. They both advanced to the the top of the waterfall, and

passed to the next part of Myx's mind.

The two telepaths stood on the floor of a giant arena. All of the seats were filled with human-sized, pyramidal clusters of eyes. On the floor stood a rickety card table. On one side of the table sat Mxyzptk, in an orange jumpsuit and his customary purple bowler. Across from him kneeled a horrible humanoid creature, with an octopus for a head, spiky black, yellow, and purple hair, and wearing a stereotypical Japanese school uniform. The horror made a noise that tore at their sanity, and placed a green border card with a picture of a lightning bolt on the field in front of him. Myx wagged a finger, rotated two of the card in front of him, and placed a blue-bordered card with a picture of a confused/scared man.

"My turn," Myx proclaimed loudly, "I sacrifice Cyclops, Stern Tactician and Shadowcat, Out of Phase, to summon Jean Grey, Hidden Phoenix, in attack mode. And when I summon Jean..."

"Let us continue," J'onn said, "This is a dead end."

"Hang on," Phoenix touched his shoulder, "Those cards are us..."

She picked up the imp's discard pile.

"Hey, hands off," Myx interrupted his extended exposition and glared at her.

"Player's graveyards are fair game to look at," she pointed out.

"Put you're not part of the game."

"I'm not?" she asked, pointing at the card he had just played. He gritted his teeth, but didn't respond. She quickly browsed the cards, and presented one in triumph. It was a "plot twist" proclaiming "Doom of Superman". As the two telepaths studied the picture of the echo fissure, they fell into the imp's memory.

Batman's head jerked up as the mentalists awakened. Jean pressed her fingers to her forehead as if in pain. J'onn's knees weakened, but he caught himself.

"What did you learn?" he pressed them.

"A moment please," the Martian Manhunter said, "Only a third of what we experienced in there is capable of description. But in short, Myx is telling the truth. They studied the fissure and consulted with multiple cosmic beings. There is no other way to save our universes."

Batman and Beast both tensed, but Jean held up her hand.

"Wait," she wheezed slightly, "You forgot something. One more thing we should check. Mxyzptk didn't find the anomaly. The Hunter of Time brought the imp to Krypton, and asked Myx to kill Superman. I think we need to scan the Hunter."

"Why?" Batman asked.

"You said this was out of character for Mxyzptlk. So maybe this Hunter of Time found a way to trick or coerce the imp."

"It is possible," Jonn agreed, "Myx has been manipulated before."

"But you are both exhausted," Beast interjected, "And if the Hunter is anywhere near as powerful as Myx, you might not make it back out of his mind."

"I have to try," Jean countered, "For Clark."

"I agree," the Martian nodded, "I owe Superman at least this much."

Without waiting for further objections, the telepaths joined hands again, and sought out the mind of their other host. The Hunter's defenses were nothing like those of the 5th dimensional traveler. Before them was minefield; millions, even billions of mental explosives in a variety of configurations. Some were stationary, while others flew rapidly around his mind.

"This is a simplistic defense," Manhunter noted.

"But in its own way, more dangerous," Phoenix agreed.

"There is a pattern."

"I've seen something like this before. There is a way in for those he wants to let in, but for the rest of us, it is a nearly impossible puzzle."

"I can see the pattern. I know the way through." He began to move towards the minefield, drifting upwards toward a slight gap.

"Wait," she grabbed his cape, "That pattern? Up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right? It's a trap." She pointed, creating an aura around one of the mines.

"Some of the mines are illusions, while other are invisible."

"Then how do we get through?" he asked, studying the obstacle more closely.

"I think..." she stared into the field, then frowned, "it couldn't be that simple."

She pantomimed drawing a bow, and firing it.

"It looks like our 'Hunter', is living up to his name."

He followed her gaze, and nodded. The psions flew through the minefield along the arcing path. They passed through more than one fake mine, but arrived unharmed.

"There, you see," the Hunter of Time gestured at the Echo Fissure floating in space before himself and the trickster, "Two anomalies, two Kryptons, two universes. Are you satisfied that Superman must die?"

"I don't know," Mxyzptlk sounded dubious, "There might be another way."

"If you must," the Hunter waved his hand lazily, then proceeded to pay no attention as Myx paraded Darkseid, Uatu, Ganthet, and other cosmic beings past the Echo Fissure. Each studied the tear in reality, and with varying reactions, indicated the negative.

"I told you," the Hunter said, with only a hint of smugness in his voice, "Will you kill one of the Supermen... Supermans now?"

"I can't just kill Superman..." Myx frowned, "There are rules... And that's not my style. I gotta give the blue dolt some kind of chance."

"One of the two must die!"

"Then why don't you do it?" Myx snapped, fixing a suspicious eye on his new acquaintance.

"I can't," the Hunter snarled, "some [i]source[/i] of power protects him from my abilities. That's why I need you to do it. You are the bane of his existence."

"That's sweet," Myx blushed, then frowned, and poked the Hunter in the chest, "But I still can't kill him."

Then the imp smiled again.

"Wait a minute. You can't kill him, and I can't kill him," the imp's grin grew disturbingly large, "But he can kill himself."

"What?" the Hunter was confused and annoyed, "What does that mean?"

"We make the two doofuses fight. That way it's fair, and each one has a chance to stay alive. We can make a game out of it."

"No, that..." the Hunter started to object, then he paused in consideration, "...just might work. But how can we keep Superman's allies from interfering?"

"We'll figure out something," Myx grinned, "But even if they do, that just makes it more interesting."

'This could work out better,' the Hunter's remembered thoughts echoed around them, 'One of the Supermans will die, and I will be able to destroy the weakened victor.'

Unbidden, his memories shifted. They had moved to Krypton's remains, before the fissure had formed. Their target was floating in space, observing the asteroids. Then he appeared to settle on one of the large stones, and took his bow from his shoulder. He drew it slowly, then quickly released 5 arrows. They impacted the asteroid, glowing brightly, forming a perfect pentagon. He put the weapon away, and began chanting as he 'spoke' into the vacuum. When he finished, the five arrows changed into a pentagram. And in the center of the mystic seal, the now familiar anomaly formed.

'That should fool them,' the Hunter smugly thought. Shocked, and angry, the telepaths tore out of the Hunter's mind, oblivious to their own danger or his recognition.

"STOP FIGHTING!" Phoenix shouted, telekinetically amplifying her voice. The X-Men and Justice League all stopped and stared at her, as did all the spectators. The Hunter of Time had jumped to his feet, radiating anger.

"This is a lie," the Martian Manhunter announced, "The Hunter of Time wanted Mxyzptlk to kill Superman for him, so he created artificial Quantum Echo Fissures to convince Myx to do his dirty work."

"And he agreed to this fight so he could kill whichever Superman won, while he was still weakened," Jean Xavier explained.

"Sso what?" The Hunter yelled back, "None of them care. They turned out in droves to see the battle. They all hate and fear the potential of the Kryptonians. All fear they will be usurped. Though the imp was unwilling to violate the laws of his people, he was quick enough to find an alternate solution."

Myx appeared behind the Hunter, seeming to tower over his partner.

"I. DON'T. LIKE. BEING. FOOLED." Myx bit off every word. Then he shoved the Hunter of Time hard. The archer tumbled out of the owner's box, and landed on his feet inside the arena.

As the X-Men and League converged on their adversary, Myx, his face shining with sadistic glee, announced, "FINAL ROUND, FIGHT!"

The Hunter and the Hunted

The Hunter tumbled roughly at first, but twisted into position, and unshouldered his bow as he landed. Storm, Cyclops, and Green Lantern fired at the being in unison. The archer calmly fired one arrow into each energy attack. As the arrows struck, each erupted into a mystic seal, stopping the hero's attacks. The energies splintered, scattering across the arena. The freed and awakened Flash grabbed Shadowcat and dodged around shards of red and green energy. Hulk turned his body to absorb a piece of lightning heading for the still unconscious Wonder Woman. The heroes were so distracted by the deflection of their attacks, they almost did not notice the next trio of arrows, passing through the arcane barriers. Cyclops and Green Lantern dodged, but Storm was too slow and was struck in her right elbow. The arrow burst, and Storm's body was wrapped in electricity, and she dropped as if pulled down. Kyle caught Ororo in a giant baseball glove just before she hit the ground.

Hulk tore into the ground, and began pelting the Hunter with giant clumps of dirt. The cosmic villain knocked away the earth with a simple flick of his metallic bow. He then launched another missile at the Hulk, too fast for the green X-Man to dodge. Before the arrow struck, the Flash casually walked over and plucked the arrow out of the air. But the Hunter grinned cruelly and shook his head 'no'. The Flash was surprised to see his hand turn to quartz. Unable to release the arrow, the change continued to spread. The League and X-Men could only watch as the scarlet speedster became a crystalline statue.

"Who's next?" he asked, nocking another arrow. Then his 'eyes' settled on Phoenix and Martian Manhunter, and his 'face' contorted in fury.

"!@#% telepaths, you ruined my plan." The Hunter of Time fired at Phoenix, but missed by a decent margin, even without her dodging. The heroes seemed confused, until the villain planted another arrow in front of Jean, and a sphere of energy sprung up around her. Before anyone could react, he shot two more, and J'onn was similarly trapped. Both psions tried to break free, but could not.

"Your prize for figuring out the truth is to watch the fates of your teams."

"We can't let him shoot anymore," Cyclops directed, "Beast, Wolverine, Hulk, tie him up in melee."

His will to fight broken and his energy spent, Superman collapsed next to Clark. Both Kryptonians were barely able to move, just shifting their heads slightly to look at Myx as he appeared next to them. The imp's face looked embarrassed and regretful.

"Listen, guys, since this is partly my fault, I feel like I should do something to make up for it," the fifth dimensional being reached, then extended a small cup towards them, "Here's a fat-free frozen yogurt."

Both Clarks looked at him like he was insane. Myx sighed and rolled his eyes,

then took out another cup.

“Fine, here’s one for each of you. But you better eat it quick.” Placing the desserts next to them, the imp vanished. Clark Xavier rolled over and dipped one finger in the yogurt.

“You’re not going to eat that, are you?” J-Superman asked.

“I don’t think he was trying to hurt us. He is trying in his own way to make amends.” Saying this, he brought his finger to his mouth. He rolled the treat around his mouth. Then he sat up slowly, and picked up the cup. Even as he took a full bite, the scrapes on his face faded.

“It’s like eating pure sunlight…”

The Hunter’s wrought Iron bow stopped Wolverine’s Adamantium claws without so much as a scratch. The villain kicked Plastic Man hard enough to bounce the elastic hero off the dome.

“We have never met you before,” Beast pointed out as he failed to sweep the Hunter’s legs, “What is your grudge against Superman?”

“Is it time for the villainous exposition already?” the Hunter’s raised cheek bone seemed to indicate a smirk.

“Fine, for all the good it will do you,” the archer caught Batman’s punch, and easily tossed him into the Hulk. He sent another arrow after Cyclops. Scott dodged the missile, but the weapon exploded, and hurtled Summers into the ground.

“Know that before I had ever heard of Superman, I had conquered seventy-eight distinct universes, and ruled over them with absolute impunity,” he blocked Gambit’s staff, and dodged both Green Lantern’s beam.

“Then I came to a universe guarded by a god-like version of your Superman,” he side-stepped Batman, and hammered Wolverine with his bow, “He was almost my equal in power, but for some reason I still do not know, most of my powers cannot touch Superman. Any Superman. So the ascended Kryptonian was triumphant, and I was forced to make a strategic retreat.”

He drew out an arrow, and stabbed it into the Hulk’s forearm. The green X-Men continued his punch, unconcerned, but his now translucent arm passed right through the Hunter. He swung again, but to now effect. Banner pulled the arrow out of his limb, but he remained incorporeal.

“But Superman did not leave it at that,” the self-proclaimed ruler growled, “He followed me past the universal divide, and liberated that domain. I left again, and he pursued. After I had lost a dozen kingdoms, I fled to a random world,” he pushed his bow into Plastic Man’s torso and the O’Brian begin to rapidly shrink.

“This time Superman did not meet me, and I began to plan my conquest of that universe, to regain what I had lost, or more. But then I learned why Superman had not followed. My newest kingdom to be already had a Superman. And though this one was no more powerful than either of your Supermen, he was just as resistant to my powers. When he learned of my plans, he raised a legion of superheroes to fight me, and again I was driven out.”

A quick blow to the side of the head knocked Gambit out cold, or worse; and the Hunter continued, “And so it was. Any universe I entered, some version of Superman was waiting to spoil my plans,” he chuckled ironically, “In one universe, I was able to kill Superman, only to be set up and driven out by the totality of his rogue’s gallery.”

Pushing back Wolverine and Batman again, Hunter put an arrow through Shadowcat’s phased torso. Though unharmed, she was also stuck in place, unable to move any part of her body more than an inch.

“Then I came to the Justice League’s world, and observed Myx having fun with Superman. Though the imp is no more powerful than I am, his powers can affect the Kryptonian where mine cannot. I created a situation under which I hoped Mxyzptlk would kill his opponent. Instead he came up with this scenario. At first I resisted, but then I realized I could use this to kill two ‘it’s a bird, it’s a plane’s with one arrow.”

He looked at Green Lantern, Batman, Wolverine, and Nightcrawler with righteous arrogance.

“Too bad. I spend 5 minutes spilling my history and plans; and despite that, the heroes are in a worse position now...”

“It must be time to change that,” two identical voices said in unison. Four Kryptonian fists slammed into his back, pitching the Hunter forward.

“You two?!?!” he shouted incredulously, “You should be as weak as kittens now!”

“Oops,” Myx announced with obviously fake dismay, “That’s another part of the plan I wasn’t in on...”

The archer began to rapidly loose arrows on the two Clarks. Clark Kent floated nimbly around them, while Clark Xavier incinerated each one with a blast of his heat vision. The Leaguer went high, aiming a kick at the Hunter’s nonexistent nose. The X-Man went low, hitting the villain to the ground in a classic football tackle.

As he fell, the Hunter plunged an arrow into X-Superman’s shoulder blade. But to his obvious chagrin, whatever he was expecting did not occur. Instead, the archer swung his bow out and pushed both Supermen back.

J-Superman removed the missile from his counterpart’s flesh, which immediately scabbed over. He snapped the weapon and glared at the villain, saying, “You’re right, your powers don’t work on us.”

“I wonder if the reverse applies,” X-Superman added, standing. Nodding both Supermen began to circle the Hunter while breathing out, creating a column of cold around the conqueror. The heroes broke off, observing the cylinder of ice. But their break only lasted a second, as the ice exploded outward. A dome of fire surrounded the Hunter, expanding slowly.

“That old trick?” the Hunter mocked as his shield dissipated. He drew a bead on J-Superman and launched 3 arrows in unison. Kent was caught off guard by the speed and accuracy of the missiles, but a green targe sprung up at the last instant, saving Superman.

“Stupid ring bearers, you are almost as much trouble as the Kryptonian,” the archer sent a cloud of arrows after Kyle for his interference, “Too bad we designed this world to hamper your toy.”

Green Lantern drew a large robot to stop the attack, but with his power limited, he was unable to prevent one of the arrows from punching through. Reacting quickly, an emerald razor sliced off the layers of skin that had been grazed. Even as the flesh floated to the ground, it burst into violet flames. Rayner grimaced even as he created a green bandage over the wound.

While the Hunter was focused on Green Lantern, both Kryptonians circled around, and maneuvered into close formation. In unison, they body-slammed the Archer from behind. X-Superman’s right shoulder hit their opponent’s neck, while J-Superman planted his left shoulder in the small of the villain’s back. The Hunter landed in front of Wolverine and Batman, but before either hero could react, he planted an arrow into the ground, and a wind burst sent them flying.

The two Clarks exchanged a look, and then nodded. As the cosmic evil stood, they flew into position in front of the enemy.

“Now what?” he asked, pulling a single arrow to its full length. Without a word, the heroes began to stare at his weapon. Energy erupted from their eyes, and struck the bow. The arrow caught fire instantly, and the Hunter fixed his own gaze on them. As the bow began to glow red, the archer rotated, trying to hide the weapon behind his body. But Kent was followed his turn, keeping the heat on, and half a second later, Xavier was back in position helping. After another attempt to dodge, the weapon was too hot and the Hunter dropped it. Both Supermen continued their assault for another 5 seconds, until the weapon was a formless lump of slug, melting slowly into the dirt.

“You frelling bastiches,” the conqueror roared, “That bow belonged to mother! I soaked in her blood after I sacrificed her to the Elder Evils. I will...”

“What?” X-Superman interrupted, “Throw your arrows at us?”

A look of pure hatred twisted the non-face of the Hunter. But he forced himself back to calmness as the spheres holding Phoenix and Manhunter popped, the Hulk faded back to solidity, and Flash melted back to flesh.

‘Fine,’ he conceded bitterly, ‘You win. Again.’

With that, he disappeared.

Post Game Show

An unnerving hush settled over the arena. Both Supermen dropped to the ground, and glared at the owner's box. The rest of their teammates quickly followed suit.

"Umm," Myx stammered, then quickly took control, "The Myx Dome sure knows how to deliver an event, doesn't it. None of you saw that coming, and you were all on the edge of your seats. What more could you ask for?"

"How about a trip home?" Plastic Man shouted. There were a few twitters of laughter in the audience, but Myx faltered again.

"Of course," Myx said, smiling a strained smile, "Why don't you take a minute to say goodbye, and then I'll send you all home."

"And to our audience, I thank you for your attendance, and this pocket will continue to exist for another 2 hours, so you can finish your refreshments."

"I wish I could say it was nice to meet you," Clark Xavier said, extending his hand to Clark Kent. J-Superman shook his hand with an ironic grin.

"I know just what you mean."

"I thought you would."

"So what does this mean?" the revived Wonder Woman whispered into Batman's ear, "I thought the X-Men's universe was separate from our own, not a parallel."

"I'm not sure yet."

"I do not think we should turn this into a Minnesota long goodbye," J'onn interjected, "Our respective teammates at home are likely growing more worried by the minute."

"Minnesota long goodbye?" Flash looked at the Martian, confused.

"Look it up online," the green telepath said with a hint of a grin.

"Myx, we're ready to go," J-Superman announced.

"Alright," the trickster smiled. Then his smile twisted, "I'll be seeing one of you in 90 days."

He winked and both teams of heroes disappeared.

"Imp," two rough voices behind him announced in unison. The fifth-dimensional being blanched, and turned around slowly.

"Darkseid...s" Myx looked up at the two gods with barely masked dismay.

"Our wager." the two rulers stated firmly.

“Right, right,” Myx looked annoyed now, “You two would be the only ones to bet that both Supermen would somehow survive. Almost like you were in on it...”

Both Darkseids’ frowns deepened, and their eyes began to glow red

“Not that you were,” Myx quickly continued, “And let no one say I don’t honor my bargains.”

Each Darkseid extended a hand. In one, Myx placed an ancient scroll, and in the other, a small leather bag. The two tyrants each sized the other up briefly,

With a sigh, Myx floated out of the owner’s box, and into his private room in the back. When he opened the door, standing there, waiting for him, was the Hunter of Time. Without a moment’s hesitation, Mr. Mxyzptlk pounced on his former partner.

“WELL?” the imp grabbed the Hunter’s chainmail.

“It worked,” the entity said, gently prying Myx’s hand off his armor, “The fissures are finally collapsing. The seals we placed around them are accelerating the process. The universes are safe.”

Mxyzptlk collapsed back into an overstuffed chair with a weary groan. He looked up at his partner, rubbing his temples.

“Can you please stop that?” he asked, “Looking at you like that gives me a headache.”

The Hunter appeared to consider it for a second, and then he stepped to the right, to the left, and stayed where he was all at once. Where there had been one being there were now three young men. The one on the right wore jeans and a jean jacket, with a grey t-shirt underneath. On his right shoulder was a patch bearing a team insignia. He had brown hair with a shock of white in the middle, and his left eye pulsed with a perpetual yellow energy. The youth on the left wore a suit of white armor, with a long red cape, and his family’s emblem on his chest. His black hair was cropped short, and his bright blue eyes regarded the imp with suspicion. The one in the center wore a deep grey jumpsuit, with blue pin striping down the sides and his father’s emblem in the same blue on his chest, and the buckle of his belt was his mother’s symbol. His hair was also black, but his eyes were green.

“I gotta hand it to you boys,” the Imp said, “I didn’t think we could pull it off. I had already picked out a nice apartment in universe of the other side of the Omniverse.”

“It was risky,” the man with the glowing eye agreed, “But waiting until the fissure reached critical mass before enacting the collapse created a backlash that will help you prevent a recurrence.”

“What I don’t understand,” the youth in white said, “is why you helped us. You always hated... Superman.”

“I’ll let you in on a little secret, kids,” Myx leaned forward, placing his chin on

his hands, "but if you every repeat this, I'll deny it, and make you pay."

"I don't hate Superman," Myx said, "I may have gone a bit too far once or twice; and that twins disease was almost a tragedy. But I admire and respect Clark Kent more than 99.9% of the people I've encountered in the second through sixth dimensions. He is a genuinely good person, and puts his life on the line every day. But big blue has 2 crippling weakness; and I ain't talkin' about Kryptonite and magic."

"First, is that Superman forgets to think. He's a prize-winning journalist and son of 2 super geniuses from a race far smarter than humans. Despite that, he tends to fly in, fists swinging, and heat vision shooting. Second is that he tends to get too serious, probably because of all the bad stuff he sees."

"And that's where I come in. I have no sinister agenda, and I make him laugh in spite of himself. But to overcome my challenges, he has to outsmart me."

"Well, you have our thanks," the young man in the middle said, "But we have to keep an eye out, unless they drift back into harmonic dissonance, and the fissure reappears."

"Oh, don't worry about that," the 5th dimensional being smirked, "I took an extra step to prevent that."

"What?" the middle and left parts of the Hunter exclaimed in unison.

"What did you do, Myx?" the man on the right seem less concerned than his partners.

"Thanks, boys, it's been a blast; and I even got a new plaything out of the deal."

Mr. Mxyzptlk faded out, even as the youth in the middle demanded "What did you do?"

"Clark, thank god," Lois leapt forward, wrapping her arms around his neck, "They wouldn't tell me where you were. I had to harangue them for a half-hour before they would teleport me up here. Clark, what's wrong?"

The Kryptonian carefully set the woman down, then looked back at his wife in apology. Jean shrugged.

"I'm sorry miss, I'm not who you think I am." Clark Xavier looked past her at a tall man in silver armor, and a young woman in a tuxedo leotard and fishnet stockings.

"We appear to have gotten our paths crossed," Beast said.

"Professor Xavier, a pleasure to meet this version of you." Clark Kent extended his hand to the crippled telepath.

“And you are not my son, are you?” Charles Xavier shook Superman’s hand.

“Myx?” Green Lantern whispered to Batman.

“Myx.” The detective growled.