
Then.

It was a time before Rick Jones assembled a band of heroes to thwart the mad Norse god Loki; a time before Peter Parker attended that fateful science exhibition; a time before Reed Richards and his crew was exposed to cosmic rays; a time before Charles Xavier decided to train young mutants to preserve a healthy relationship with humanity. Regardless, events fell into place eventually...but certain pieces had more complex origins. In a time before heroes reigned supreme over the forces of evil, those wicked forces worked behind the scenes...waiting.

"Lord Apocalypse?" Nathaniel Essex said as he knelt before a set of deteriorating stone stairs which led up to a Celestial-based rejuvenation chamber. The chamber itself was molded after an Egyptian sarcophagus, however its inner workings were far more advanced than anyone on Earth could imagine.

After awhile, the white-skinned man with pitch black hair and red eyes with a red diamond marking between his furrowed eyebrows looked up to see the being who transformed him into something beyond human all those years ago in Victorian England. En Sabah Nur, as he was named, stood shakily outside of his sarcophagus in utter shock.

His voice still had the demanding echo it always had, "I have been awakened...ahead of schedule." Apocalypse, still covered in rotting rolls of cloth, stroked his chin, "How?"

Sinister rose finally and crossed his arms, "It is unclear, but there have been some strange electro-magnetic pulses as of late...akin to time-travel phenomena. A science beyond my knowledge, but I believe that it has rejuvenated you a full century early."

Apocalypse smirked with his gray skin and deformed blue lips, "Time-travelers. Hmph. Nothing new. Probably trying to prevent my eventual global-scale takeover. Do we know who yet?"

"While I know you have plans for the twelve mutants and this, uh...crystal, as well as a vessel to contain your unstable connection to the...*Fifth Dimension*," Sinister paused. He reached into his scalloped cloak and pulled out a stock photo which was stolen from MI-6. He handed the photo to Apocalypse, "Here."

In the photo was a man with long white hair, a metallic-looking left arm, alien-looking body armor, and various firearms which seemed to be constructed of metals and plastics...almost having an organic appearance—nothing like the weapons of the 20th century.

"They say he appeared on Muir Island, and then he wiped their memories of the encounter," Sinister explained. "Now...his parents haven't even reached puberty yet, and here he is...a full-grown adult. He's just an alpha-level now, but it could change. Considering his mother's omega-status."

"...parents?" Apocalypse wondered aloud as he stared at the photo. He smiled at the sight of the metallic arm, "He's infected with the techno-organic virus...by me? Did I...? *Will* I infect him with my own techno-organic hide?"

"Possibly...which would explain why his power hasn't eaten away at his body yet...ingenious, really. The same material that keeps you from aging considerably keeps him alive as well," Sinister smiled with a twisted sense of glee. "My experimentation with the Summers and Grey lineage have led to the prediction that a male child produced by a Summers and a Grey will sustain a limited, but relatively stable connection to the Fifth Dimension, M'Lord."

"Still...how are you so certain this is the result of over one-hundred years of research and planning?" Apocalypse wondered as he flimsily shook the photo between his index finger and thumb.

Sinister raised his eyebrows, playfully rolling his eyes, "Please, give me some credit...he's got the Summers hairline and eyes and the Grey cranial structure. I know it when I see it. Trust me."

Apocalypse smiled once again, "I knew it was wise to empower you and prolong your lifespan. Your expertise has served me well, Essex." Apocalypse took his first steps in over a hundred years down the stone staircase as he handed the photo back to Sinister, "Now...we must make sure our plans come to fruition. The appearance of this man means nothing unless we make it happen in the here and now. Will you join me for a feast? I am quite starved...literally after hibernating for so long."

"Yes...," Sinister said as he intentionally withheld his secret agenda to destroy his master by using the Summers-Grey offspring...as well as regrettably keeping the secret of the second EMP which brought another similar psi-pattern into existence in the present time period. Either way, to any scientist, knowing full-well that your experiment is a success before it is even finished, as well that it can be replicated...creates quite a lot of confidence in that scientist.

Nathaniel Essex is no different.

"...sounds lovely, M'Lord."

MARVEL 2000 PRESENTS...



#1

Nov. 2006

KIDS WITH GUNS

Part I: "Deliver Me"

Now.

A middle-aged blonde woman clutched a clipboard closely to her chest while a black leather strapped bag was slung over her shoulder. Walking down a long white hallway, she eventually reached the end. Two fully-armed soldiers stood guard at the doors. Surveillance and robotic defense systems were all over this end of the base. Diana flashed her identification and subsequently underwent a retinal scan. The two soldiers then stood aside, where the woman then entered a fifteen digit code and placed her hand on a scanning device. The door to the office finally opened and she entered the darkened office of a man with a growing hatred.

"Dr. Diana Russell," the man said, "so good to see you."

"It has been a long time, Malcolm," Diana said as she set her belongings down on the floor. She sighed as she looked around, squinting her eyes, "Can we turn on a light?"

"No," Dr. Malcolm Colcord said sternly. He cleared his throat, "Sorry, Diana...I hate to say it, but I'm still a little self-conscious, even after all these years. At least until I can get those final surgeries."

Diana nodded, "It's okay. I suppose you want my full report?"

Malcolm folded his hands and rested them under his chin, "Yes. I want to know if he's capable of carrying out this mission."

Diana handed Malcolm the clipboard and declared matter-of-factly, "He's completely unstable. More so than he ever was...whatever was done to him at Department K has taken its toll over the years without proper treatment."

"You have to understand that he was considered to be a failed experiment at first," Malcolm said. "We didn't know...I suppose we should have seen it coming, after the first Weapon X incident. Back when we operated out of Canada."

"Nevertheless," Diana said, "he believes he sees a personification of Death itself, that she gave him immortality, and that he once befriended a cosmic entity named George. He thinks he's a comic book character, narrating to the readers...breaking the fourth wall. Not to mention his unhealthy obsession with Bea Arthur. I haven't found any evidence that any of this is true. Probing his mind is...difficult. He thinks it's all real."

"So he's psychotic...," Malcolm grunted. "Well, so is his intended target. Besides, these two have history."

Diana shifted her weight, "I still don't think that would be a good idea. T-Ray once convinced Deadpool that he wasn't Wade Wilson, but T-Ray was. Absurd, yes...but still, that sense of insecurity could push Deadpool over the edge and make him impossible to control."

"We need him, Diana. I don't know of anyone else that can bring us T-Ray. All of our agents

have tried and failed," Malcolm said.

"Have you tried to bribe T-Ray directly?" Dr. Russell asked.

Malcolm shook his head, "If he knew what we needed him for, he'd kill us all. We just need him incapacitated for the lab to get him prepped for the...conduit."

Diana suddenly gasped as her telepathy kicked in with the utterance of that word, "...conduit? You're not seriously considering using T-Ray to bring back—?"

Malcolm raised his head so that the faint light that was in the office reflected off of his glasses, making it appear that he had large, alien eyes, "T-Ray is the only one with the mystical connections that can bring his essence back down to our reality. Our clairvoyants can sense his presence everywhere at once...just not on the mortal plane."

"You can't...," Diana said, with tears almost in her eyes. "He'll be even worse to control. I've dealt with him, too. He has a conscience, but you DON'T want to be on his bad side."

"There is no other FUCKING way to do it! No blood samples for cloning, nothing! Even if we did clone him, he wouldn't have the knowledge or training!" Dr. Colcord said coldly. "We are going to bring him back. It all rests on Deadpool now."

Neither Now nor Then.

The last feeling Nathan Christopher Summers felt before he slipped away after killing Apocalypse in the Fifth Dimension was his entire body bursting into psionic flame. As the mutant warrior, Cable, he was raised two-thousand years in the future only to be brought back to the present in order to help his parents and their closest allies to defeat the ageless tyrant. Now he was here...an endless cavern filled with a multitude of sentient beings, wearing Phoenix uniforms of every color combination imaginable. Only the phoenix emblem over the chest was consistent among them.

It was the White Hot Room, the Valhalla of Phoenix avatars, which resided in the M'Kraan Crystal (the Nexus of Realities) itself. Cable only heard rumors of its existence.

Cable looked down and saw that he too, now wore a Phoenix uniform, blue and gold. He sighed, "Ugh, this looks kind of girly on me." He looked up at the literal army of Phoenixes, who simply stared...saying nothing. "Um, hello? I better be dead..."

YOU NEVER EVEN DIED, NATHAN // THE FIFTH DIMENSION AND NEXUS OF REALITIES ARE BUT TWO NAMES OF THE SAME SOURCE

Cable winced as the entire collective voice of the Phoenix flooded his mind, his soul, "What...okay, don't shout!"

YOU ARE NOT A TRUE AVATAR OF THE PHOENIX, YET YOU

COMPLETED OUR MISSION FOR US//

"*What mission?*" Cable asked telepathically.

TO FIX WHAT DOES NOT WORK, THE FIRST///

"Apocalypse?!"

///YES

"So are you looking for a 'you're welcome,' or what?" Cable wondered aloud as he shrugged.

**NO, IT IS NOT YOUR DESTINY TO BE HERE WITH US//
HOWEVER WE NEED YOU TO ESTABLISH A CONNECTION
BETWEEN US AND JEAN GREY AGAIN///THEREFORE, WE
WILL GRANT YOU REBIRTH**

"Wait, wait..." Cable said as he held up his arms, "is Apocalypse really gone? Did I fix what he did to reality?"

**THIS REBIRTH WILL NOT COME WITHOUT A PRICE, YOUR
CONNECTION WITH THE FIFTH DIMENSION WILL CEASE,
YOU WILL NEED TO BE TESTED// THEREFORE WE WILL ALSO
RELEASE YOUR DOPPLEGANGER, STRYFE, FROM THE
TIMESTREAM**

"STRYFE? He's still alive?!"

NOTHING IN THIS ///VERSE IS IMPOSSIBLE

"Why would you do that?! Haven't I been through enough?!" Cable pleaded. "He'll kill a lot of people...I don't know if I can stop him without my extra power."

**THE CONNECTION TO YOUR MOTHER AND THE PHOENIX
MUST BE RE-ESTABLISHED FOR THE UNIVERSE TO
SURVIVE// AP//LYON MUST BE STOPPED// WE ARE
WILLING TO DO THAT BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY**

"Wait..." Cable sighed, "I can sense everything all at once. I can see the absolute truth. Oath...I know the truth about me. About the Askani...everything. It's..."

YOU WILL NOT REMEMBER THIS, PREPARE TO BE REBORN...

"...it's all a lie!"

Now.

"It's gotta be a lie," Wade Wilson, also known as the mercenary (the "Merc With a Mouth"), Deadpool, said as he stood behind the bars made of vibranium. "Tell me it's a lie!"

Normally, the enigmatic and eccentric Deadpool wore his trademark red and black combat suit along with his mask and various other accessories. However, after being apprehended by SHIELD after trying to kill the X-Men for the Byron Agency, he has been reduced to wearing a common blue prison uniform. He has since been turned over to the remnants of Department K, now known as Department X, also now based somewhere in the United States.

The prison guard outside his cell, a black man with a large M-16, simply sighed, "No...Bea Arthur did not make Maxim's Top 100 this year."

Deadpool grabbed hold of the bars and tried to shake them in a rage, but only ended up banging his head against them, "Rip! Off!!!! REEEIIIIIP! OFFFFFFFFF!!! Rip off, rip off, rip off!!!"

The creaking ambiance of a metallic door opening headed Deadpool's manic episode. Dr. Colcord walked into the cell, wearing a dark gray striped suit with a modern cut and a blue shirt and black tie. His face was horribly scarred. Three distinct scars still remained across his face amidst various others, was missing his left cheek which made his teeth visible, and had a glass eye in the socket where his right eye had been.

"Mr. Wilson," Malcolm said sternly.

"Rip off!" Deadpool screamed one last time.

Malcolm nodded to the guard who personally guarded the cell, who walked away, out of the holding area. He ended up passing by Dr. Russell, who had just arrived.

Deadpool's eyes widened, "Doc! Those meds you gave me rocked! Where can I get some more? I know the required dose is like...stupid, but I was just wondering."

Dr. Russell smiled slightly, "Hello, Wade."

"Back for some more mental fuck fest action?" Wade inquired with a curled brow.

Diana looked down and shielded her face, muttering, "Please never make me probe his mind again...I was in a hot tub, naked with Doris Roberts."

Malcolm sighed, unnerved, "We don't have time for you to play sexual mind games with our detainees anyway, Doctor." He turned to face Deadpool, "Do you remember me, Wilson?"

Wade winced as he slowly backed away from the bars, "Aw, man...what happened to your

face?”

Malcolm cleared his throat, “You’re not exactly Tom Cruise yourself.”

Deadpool rolled his eyes, “Well, there was this one time Loki cursed me and—”

“*You* were the one who did this to me, Wilson,” Malcolm growled. “Don’t you remember?! All those years ago when you escaped from the Hospice...”

Wade bit his lip and rubbed his temple, shutting his eyes tightly, “The Dead Pool, right? That’s what they nicknamed it?” He opened his eyes in a flash, snapping his fingers, “That’s where I got my cool-ass nickname, too! What’re the odds?”

“I was one of the doctors that gave you your healing factor,” Malcolm said, “when you contracted a terminal form of cancer.”

Wade became serious for a moment, an after-effect of the medication Dr. Russell administered to him, related to a kind of ridilin. He sighed, “When they put me in that place...for failed experiments, my entire life came crashing down. Then I started seeing that skeleton chick in the robe...Death. She was kinda skinny and pale...but I didn’t have to worry about her not shaving her armpits or anything...”

“It wasn’t real,” Malcolm said. “The tissue splicing we did with Wolverine’s DNA interacted with your cancer cells, creating a perpetual and unnatural cell regeneration...which unfortunately affected your brain’s functions for memory and perception. Dr. Killebrew was a sadistic bastard who mistreated you, causing you to go insane. I was trying to help before you broke free and...did this to me.”

“Aw, man...,” Wade sighed as he shamefully bit his lower lip. Usually, survivors of Deadpool’s wrath were few and far between. Seeing one of his victims still alive somehow tugged at his heart strings harder than he’d like to admit. “I fucked you up pretty bad, huh? You’re like that one dude from Hannibal back for revenge!”

“You’re a killer, no doubt about that,” Malcolm said brusquely, “but you weren’t always a sociopath. You always had a certain...grace to your line of work. That’s the only reason why I’m going to forgive—”

“Stop right there, twinkle-toes,” Wade muttered. “I could care less what I was before. Wolverine had to deal with this shit, too...faulty memories. He spent almost his entire life searching for the truth. Me? I’m too fucking impatient; quite frankly, I don’t need closure.”

“What do you want, then, Wade?” Diana asked soothingly.

Wade shook his head and laughed, pacing around his cell—a defense mechanism to keep him from bursting into tears, “I don’t know...ha...purpose?” He stopped and crossed his arms, pinching his bottom lip as his eyes became moist, “I don’t know who to trust. Not even my...God, I don’t even have friends, just accomplices. I can’t even trust myself. I don’t even know if Wade Wilson is my real name or not...”

Malcolm smiled, or at least tried to, given his facial circumstances, “We can give you

purpose, Wade. For Department X."

"Just like Landau, Luckman, and Lake tried? *Fuck* that!" Wade looked away, towards the mess of sheets and blankets which made up his bed, and held out his hand, "I don't want to play this game anymore...unless you give me my mask."

"Deadpool, one of the world's deadliest men, but strip him down and put him in the spotlight and he's a withering pansy!" Dr. Colcord shouted. "Don't get me started on your reliability. We have records of at least forty instances where you turned on your initial employers while on a job. And that was before your healing factor."

Deadpool pressed his head against the gap between two bars, "I'm not talking to you anymore unless you give me my mask..."

Malcolm sighed furiously, but he calmed down when Diana placed a hand on his shoulder and whispered, "Malcolm, please...he's insecure."

"Hey! I can hear you!" Deadpool screamed. "Just...fuck off, all of you! I'm just gonna wait for all of you to die off...then I'll rot in this cell forever because you'll forget where you put the keys because you'd all be so damn old..."

Malcolm scowled at Diana, "Damn you, the entire program is riding on this mission!"

"Mission? What mission? I'm a prisoner!" Deadpool exclaimed. "What kind of mission is that? Watch me sit on the toilet and pound one off without any stalls?"

Diana held out her hands and tried to release some endorphins into Deadpool's blood stream with her telepathy, which ironically, should constantly occur anyway, "Tell him, Malcolm."

Malcolm sighed as he straightened his glasses, "We need you to bring us the mercenary T-Ray."

Deadpool became uncharacteristically silent as his naked and scarred brow crinkled up in unimaginable rage, "The same fucker who toyed with me, made me think I (accidentally) killed his wife, who...was like...really mine?" His eyes shifted from side to side as if his system was on cocaine, "Er...right? Can't...think straight!" He sighed and buried his face into his hands, "I'm not working with him on a team if that's what you want."

Malcolm smiled, "We want you to *apprehend* him, my friend."

"In exchange for...?" Wade wondered aloud with an inquisitive smirk on his suddenly upbeat visage. He shifted his weight and casually leaned against the vibranium bars, crossing one leg over the other and playfully cupped one of his hands around his ear.

Malcolm smiled as he exchanged a glance with Diana, "Well, I suppose that's up to you. Non-conductive and psi-resistant adamantium skeleton, complete epidermis overhaul, money...the sky's the limit. All we want is T-Ray."

"Do you need his...arms?" Deadpool asked sadistically as he rubbed his hands together.

"Does his head have to be attached at all? What're we talkin' here? A traditional apprehension or what?"

"Let's shoot for relatively intact," Dr. Colcord said.

"Tits!" Deadpool smiled, "You can put all the electrodes you want in me if it'll make you feel safer with me not being restrained. I just want this job. Hate to say it, but...it's personal. The dude takes jobs that involve killing kids. That's not cool."

Diana smiled to herself assuredly. The fact that Deadpool admitted that he might need to be restrained showed that maybe he wasn't completely insane after all. He was on the road to recovery. And taking on T-Ray might actually be healthy for his psyche...

"We'll get you equipped ASAP," Malcolm said as he turned out of the cell. Diana followed him as the guard returned to his post.

"You sure you know what you're doing?" Dr. Russell asked.

"He'll succeed in the mission," Dr. Colcord said with a smirk. "Jack has never let me down."

Diana stopped walking for a moment, her thoughts seemed to 'gasp,' and asked, "I hope you don't intend to call him that anytime soon. Just that name alone would act like a subconscious trigger, making him snap."

Malcolm turned around and removed his glasses, "That's what I'm counting on. When T-Ray calls him that name, Wade might bypass all the fart jokes and Radiohead songs and become the Weapon X he was supposed to be. Just the way I ordered Dr. Killebrew to make him insane."

Diana glared at Malcolm, "You lied about trying to help him?"

"Deception is the nature of the business," Dr. Colcord said with a belated smile. "How else was I to get to Deadpool? I needed you to circumvent his defensive 'Merc-With-A-Mouth' personality with all your telepathic therapy sessions before I hit him with the image of my Darth Vader face."

"You are...," Diana sighed, "a manipulative bastard. If I didn't know any better, I'd say you learned a thing or two from Dr. Essex."

Then.

Sinister sat across the darkened room where the infant Nathan Summers sat peacefully in a transparent plastic crib. His Marauders captured the baby after the attempted eradication of Madelyne Pryor. After learning Jean Grey was indeed alive, he had no use for her clone, regardless if she was the biological mother of the weapon against Apocalypse. He rubbed his chin as he patiently waited for the blood sample he took to register with the computer.

[[Results confirmed. Healthy cellular activity. Mutant: alpha class with high potential.

Possible omega status at the risk of complete bodily breakdown.]]

"That's alright, he doesn't need to be alive that long. Analyze second inquiry," Sinister muttered as he leaned forward in his chair, his heart racing in anticipation. "Cross-reference blood sample taken from the Six Pack incident in Afghanistan."

[[Results match. Blood samples identical, except for slight inorganic irregularity in adult sample. Probability for omega status higher in adult sample.]]

Sinister smiled, "Ironic..."

"Are you going to pay me for giving you my boss's blood sample or what?" Garrison Kane asked as he walked out of the shadows, closing a panel on his metallic cybernetic arms.

"I thought Weapon X paid you," Sinister smirked. "They gave you new arms."

Kane held up his arms, "These are just temps. They're coming up with this new project where they have access to all this futuristic technology. Or something...I don't know." Kane's eyebrows furrowed as he noticed the toddler bouncing up and down inside a plastic crib, "What's with the kid?"

Sinister's red eyes briefly glowed as he telepathically delved into Kane's mind, learning everything he could about this new Weapon X project. When he had the information he needed, he simply commanded, "You will not remember any of this. Go."

Kane blinked a few times and walked out of the darkened lab, "Pft. Fuck this!"

Sinister walked over to the crib and picked up Nathan, cradling him in his arms. Being reminded of his dead son, Adam, Sinister suddenly found it difficult to go through with his plans. But he had waited over one-hundred years to finally be rid of Apocalypse. En Sabah Nur was nothing but a destructive force of nature that would not allow Essex to properly study the genetic potential of all mutants.

Sinister whispered into Nathan's ear as the toddler began to doze off, "You are my greatest work. I foresee great things to come...my son." He kissed Nathan's forehead and gently laid him back into his crib.

Deadpool flung through the air and landed abruptly against the cold concrete floor, crushing the back of his skull. Within the confines of the aptly-named Hell-House, where mercenaries of all kinds in the New York metropolitan area received their assignments, Wade cried out, "Ow, my cerebellum! My fuckin' heart won't beat, damnit!"

After he blinked a few times, an image of an upside-down man wearing blue and white armor along with a white skull mask and glowing yellow eyes appeared in Wade's periph' . Taskmaster crossed his arms and sighed as he leaned up against a bar stool, "You know the rules, Wilson. Fights are outside."

Wade shrugged while still laying on his back on the floor, "I've never been much for rules."

They just **MAKE** me want to break them. Like 'no urinating' signs at the community pool center..."

"Funny...it was all the fights you two had that they decided to make the rule," Taskmaster muttered to himself in-between trying to drink his bottle of Rolling Rock through his mask.

Unholy breathing came from a muscle-bound albino-skinned man with long hair pulled into a ponytail as he armed his Beretta M-12S submachine gun, "I'm gonna fucking kill you, Deadpool!"

"Speaking of which, where is the bathroom?" Deadpool inquired, despite the barrel of T-Ray's gun being jabbed into his temple.

CLICK

"...damn guns!" T-Ray bellowed as he violently broke the Italian-made gun in half using only his hands.

Deadpool snickered, "You forgot the other two safeties, you weirdo! You immobilized your trigger! Your trigger PWNED the shit out of you! HAHA!"

T-Ray growled and drove his massive fist through Deadpool's chest, creating a miniature geyser of blood, "Laugh now, you wife-killing bastard!"

Deadpool clenched his teeth as thick syrup filled his lungs, "*GGggggggGGGGG!!!*"

"What'd you say?!?!" T-Ray growled as he ripped his fist out, containing what appeared to be a lung.

Deadpool did a backwards somersault and drew a strange weapon from his chest holster. After a brief moment of healing and respiratory regeneration, Deadpool smirked, "...I said 'eat napalm, zombie!'"

T-Ray appeared amused, "You can't kill me with that!"

But before Deadpool could offer a rebuttal, the gasoline chemical mixture poured out of the barrel of the gun like a fire whip and doused the large white man with an inferno from the hell in which spawned his undead life.

T-Ray screeched in pain as he ran around like a chicken with its head cut off, running into tables, knocking over chairs, before finally being knocked out with the butt of a shotgun by Taskmaster.

Taskmaster cocked his weapon as he pointed it at the smoldering mass, "Want me to cap this brain-eater? Or do you want the honors? Know this one makes me look like a Care Bear in comparison what he's done to you."

Deadpool gripped his chest as his ribcage continued to reform, "Fuck you, cameo bitch! Didn't ask for help! I need him alive...er...not all the way dead."

"You took an assignment involving your arch-enemy *not* to kill him?" Tasky wondered as he withdrew his gun.

"Will you shut up?!" Deadpool screamed as he slapped vibranium-reinforced restraints around T-Ray's wrists. "God! This isn't even your title and my screentime is being eaten up by these cryptic flashbacks from Cable's past and your incessant babbling!"

"...*incessant babbling?*" Taskmaster said as if his own tongue were sour. "Have you been hanging around Baron Zemo again? Secondly, what the fuck are you talking about? Cable hasn't been on anyone's radar for months. Well, I should say he hasn't been into mercenary work for the last couple years."

"Yah-blah-blah-blah-blooney!" Deadpool yammered as he struggled to drag T-Ray's smoldering carcass out the door. "Fucking pain in the—"

"Come on!" Taskmaster yelled. "I helped you take out T-Ray!"

"I'll send you a fruit basket!" Deadpool yelled from outside as T-Ray's head smacked against each of the stairs as he was dragged down. "I don't think this assignment is exactly commission!"

"So when do I get paid?" Deadpool asked with his arms crossed as he looked down at Dr. Colcord through a monitor via satellite phone.

{ {"Once the procedure is over,"} } Malcolm said.

Deadpool looked out through the observation deck's reinforced bulletproof glass and down towards the laboratory below. Dozens of men and women had donned green radiation suits as they tinkered with the machinery which seemed almost alien in nature...or at least the pinnacle of human science thus far. Spires of metal and machinery stuck out of the machine which seemed to surround a glass egg of sorts.

Above it all was the unconscious T-Ray, his hands and feet restrained by the same machinery. He was sprawled out, like an undead Vitruvian man. His head had been shaven clean of the long red locks he usually had in order for a metallic bowl to fit over his cranium.

"Are you giving him the electrical chair?" Deadpool smirked.

The image of Dr. Malcolm Colcord was bathed in shadows. His clenched fist suddenly positioned itself under his chin as he answered, { {"Something like that. I doubt he'll survive."} }

Deadpool looked into the lab once more, almost feeling a sense of regret. He'll never again get the chance to stick it to T-Ray for the years of abuse and mental anguish. "Doc?" he asked.

{ {"Yes, Wade."} }

Deadpool scratched the back of his head, almost nervous to ask, "Uh...I dunno. Nevermind. Heh."

{{"No, it's okay,"}} the self-proclaimed Director replied with a shadowy grin, {"I know you've got something on your mind you've been meaning to ask—"}}

"—Am I Wade Wilson...or is he?" Deadpool blurted out as he pointed a thumb towards the machinery which entangled T-Ray. "And...if so...was Mercedes...y'know...Did I kill her...or did he?"

[[BEGIN PROCEDURE]]

A low-pitched hum signified some kind of power re-routing. In the process, however, the power in the outlying wings of the Department X facility...went out.

"Doc?!" Deadpool wailed as he grabbed the monitor by two hands, shaking it as if by some primitive form of magic it would appear again. Suddenly, however, amidst the darkness, the machine in which T-Ray was hooked up to sprung to life, emitting a brilliant white light in the process.

[[FIFTH DIMENSIONAL APERTURE ACTIVATED]]

T-Ray's lifeless form convulsed as electricity and chronotrons poured through his body and into the empty egg-shaped cocoon—the light growing brighter and brighter by the moment.

[[CRITICAL MASS APPROACHING]]

"That's never a good sign," Deadpool chuckled to himself. "Like Rosie O'Donnell's PMS interfering with Oprah's!"

Deadpool shielded his eyes for but a moment before he saw the various men and women in radiation suits literally dissolve as if their atoms lost the will to stay together. But it seemed as if the atomic wave was contained inside the lab. Soon, T-Ray's body seemed to ignite, his atoms burning off of his husk like embers.

"Fuckin' A, dude!" Deadpool swore as he tried to peer through the window. All he could see was light of the purest form...and a dark, muscular silhouette in direct contrast to it. It sounded like a hurricane or earthquake had erupted in the middle of an electrical storm indoors. The walls themselves rumbled and shook...they even seemed to bend as if they were malleable.

And suddenly, the light and thunder vanished.

Deadpool peaked over the edge to see what remained. It was dark, but Wade could see the faintest of movement inside the lab. The dark, muscular figure that was in the epicenter of the light punched its way out of the egg cocoon—the sound of heavy glass cracking and falling on the floor.

"Fuck...I knew it was a bad idea to work with these chumps," Deadpool sighed.

"...I said do we have confirmation?" Malcolm shouted through his office phone. "I know we lost men. That was supposed to happen! I want to know if it worked! Did we bring Cable back?"

There was a pause on the other end before the line was disconnected. There was always a price for trying to dethrone a god, always a price for messing with cosmic forces. And part of Malcolm knew that, but the rewards outweighed the risks.

He hung up the phone and waited, wondering if his vengeance was worth it.

"I've waited...years...," a voice came from below. "Finally...back."

"Hell-o?!" Deadpool yelled as he jumped down from the observation deck and into the darkened lab. He loaded and cocked his uzi and unsheathed one of his katanas as he landed on his feet. Upon catching first glance of the mysterious figure in partial light, Deadpool's shoulders slumped, "Oh...damn. This is going to upset some people. Why would Weapon X want to bring you back...? Hmm."

"I'm weakened," the man said as he struggled to stay upright.

Deadpool withdrew his weapons and wondered aloud, "Well, I suppose we could stop for some Taco Bell if you want some of that fourth meal action...with a Mountain Dew beverage of course." Wade suddenly shook his head rapidly, "Waitaminute! Give me one good reason why I shouldn't waste you right here, right now, LeRoy?"

"Haven't you heard?" the man asked as his lips curled into an unholy smile. It was with Deadpool's dumbfounded response when the man known as En Sabah Nur—**APOCALYPSE**—laughed.

"I **always** come back!"

NEXT ISSUE: *WTF?!?!?! After swearing never to bring Apocalypse back EVER EVER EVER, Brad Horton has some serious explaining to do!*

CABLE / DEADPOOL BIBLIO/GRAPHY

- The first and third flashbacks of this issue took place outside the events depicted in *Cable* #-1 and the *Inferno* storyline, respectively.
- The flashback involving Cable and the "Phoenix Corps" took place in-between M2K's *Apocalypse 2000* #6 and *Cable* #33.
- Dr. Diana Russell once treated Cable with his form of post traumatic stress disorder in

