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All they want to do is change the world.

They are a band of young heroes drawn together by a knowledge of what's right, and a willingness to take on the battles their adult counterparts won't.

Welcome to the battlefield...



#1

“THE BIG ORANGE ROCK-HAND THAT CRUSHES THE CRADLE”

Written by Mike Exner III (plot) & Russ Anderson (script)

The Databank. Not many of the countless races of beings throughout the universe had cast their eyes upon this place. The information stored within its depths staggered the mind of the lone figure bowed upon one knee before the being that had summoned him. The entire history of the Skrull race, from the texts on the Kree/Skrull War, to the smallest schematics on a Skrull battle cruiser were contained within the Databank. Still, as awed as he was to be amidst all the glory of his empire, the Super Skrull was not pleased.

The Empress S'byl had ordered the Super Skrull here. He knew nothing of the details. All he knew was that it would be foolish not to follow orders, no matter how ridiculous. He had long been loyal to the empire and he wasn't about to change his suit now. Still, the Super Skrull was a man of action. His recent failure at the hands of the Fantastic Four still burned within him.* Tales of his battles with that infernal team were whispered in shameful voices throughout the Skrull Emperium... to think that the finest warrior of the Skrulls, blessed with all the powers of the Fantastic Four in one mighty body, could be continually humbled by that same band of Terran adventurers...

The Super Skrull wanted his revenge. This was simply a delay in his plans.

(* See upcoming issues of M2K's *Fantastic Four* -- Will)

"Ah, the Super Skrull," said a voice from all around him and he darted his head quickly around, scanning the room with his eyes, trying to place where specifically the sound had come from. It was a feminine voice and one the Super Skrull recognized well enough. He frowned deeply, the creases in his jaw line becoming more defined. The Super Skrull had hoped to meet with a high-ranking official with orders for his next mission. Not with *her*.

"The Empress S'byl has given me leave to grant you your next mission Captain Kl'rt. I feared that perhaps you would not be up to the task after your recent failure, but S'byl still blindly holds confidence that you are worthy of matters that require the utmost skill and dedication," said the voice, and Kl'rt began to fume within his body. This was ridiculous. He was of the highest order

of the Skrull military. There was no creature throughout the cosmos that did not feel a prick of apprehension upon hearing his name. How dare this creature speak to him in such a way?

"I do my duty to the best of my ability," the Super Skrull started, but he was immediately cut off by the sharp tone of the voice ringing out from the high walls of the Databank.

"Silence. Super Skrull, your mission is to return to Earth and claim a being that is of Kree descent. The Kree is a young woman. We have located her and the transport for your departure is prepared," said the voice as the Super Skrull rose from his knee. He was not pleased with being interrupted and he was not pleased at having to go back to the mud-ball that was the planet Earth.

"What is the purpose of this mission? Why is one such as I being sent to claim some simple Kree girl?" asked the Super Skrull as a light cast itself towards the Super Skrull. It was coming from a far corner of the Databank and the Super Skrull recognized it as a transport beam.

"It is not for you to know the specifics of this mission Captain. It is enough that you know what you must do and that you do it post haste. The Skrull Emperium is relying on you. Do not fail it yet again." The Super Skrull scowled at the voice, anger seeping into every pore of his body.

"I am used to having the highest level of clearance in the Skrull military. It is ridiculous to send me on a mission where no information is to be had," growled the Super Skrull as he stepped into the brilliant light of the transport and crossed his arms, preparing his body for the jump.

"I will be with you Super Skrull, every step of the way," said the voice and the Super Skrull grimaced even more heavily. "If there is a need, I will update you with any information I feel is required as we progress through the mission."

The light became even brighter now and the Super Skrull closed his eyes. He could feel his body beginning to lightly tingle as the transport diffused the molecules of his powerful frame.

"Of course, being the guardian and most powerful physical specimen in the Skrull Emperium, I'm certain there will not be a problem," said the voice as the transport device began to sift the Super Skrull's body into the chamber that would send him rocketing to Earth. Was there sarcasm evident in her voice? The Super Skrull thought so, but he couldn't reply with anything but an annoyed grunt as his body was thrust away. With a flash of light, he was gone.

"You know I love you Bobby, but there's just so many things going on in my life. It's hard to put them on hold when all I hear all day from everyone I know is how hard I've got to work just to keep my head above water," said the young blond woman as she leaned against the wall of the *Empire Club*, a diner across campus from Empire State University.

"Chloe, this is ridiculous. Before you started college, you said we'd be together forever, and now you're just calling it off? Just like that?" pleaded the young man in front of her and Chloe looked away with a hurt expression etched on her face.

"I'm sorry Bobby, I guess things just got more comatose than I thought they would," said Chloe and immediately she winced. Bobby looked at her strangely and then started laughing as Chloe raised her hands to her face and an angry voice echoed through her head with one word that sent chills up and down her spine.

"*CUT*," yelled the director as he hopped up quickly from the chair where he'd been watching his two actors speak to each other in front of the Empire Club. He ambled over to where they were and immediately pointed towards his male actor.

"Shut the hell up Thomas. We've been here for about an hour over our scheduled time and I'm really not in the mood to play around with you anymore," yelled the director. 'Bobby' cringed and turned, walking away from the angry eyes of the director. He didn't want to be anywhere near the guy when he finally focused his attention on the real reason he was pissed.

The real reason was standing with slumped shoulders and hands still pressed to her face. The director turned towards her and frowned. She'd been doing so well up until the line about the break-up. The girl was beautiful. Perhaps she'd never been through a tough break-up before. Nevertheless, the director wasn't about to stay here all day. They really needed to get this shot.

"Suzy, look at me ok?" asked the director as he grabbed the hands of the actress who had been playing Chloe and pulled them from her face. Suzy Sherman looked up at the director and flashed a meek smile that the director tried really hard not to return. He had to remain firm or they'd be here all day.

"Now, I know that you know the lines Suzy. We've been over them hundreds of times. All I'm asking is that you let the character of Chloe take over here. Suzy Sherman can't do this. You have to become Chloe right now. Half of our trade of soap acting is improv anyway. If it helps you to keep your mind on your lines, try doing something with your body that keeps you in character ok?" The director spoke smoothly and evenly, but firmly. Suzy kept her eyes on him the entire time and nodded her head slightly, so he continued. "Good, then we're going to set-up for another go at this. Go ahead and get comfortable while I go fetch Thomas."

Suzy nodded her head again and the director turned and stalked away, heading in the direction Thomas had fled. Suzy blew out her breath in a sigh of frustration. She'd never believed acting would be such a pain in the butt. It was definitely a lot tougher than modeling. She'd been in Los Angeles up until three weeks ago. Her agent had called out of the blue and told her she'd landed a part on the soap opera, *Secret Hospital*. Suzy had been excited, who wouldn't be? Television was a big time break for her. She could really see her career taking off as she sat on the plane traveling from LA to New York.

But things weren't going as well as she'd hoped. She messed up her lines a lot in the beginning. She had to think that if it wasn't for her looks and her camera presence, that she'd have been scrapped a long time ago. Still, she wasn't about to give up. She'd known it wouldn't be ideal, she'd just hoped that it would be. Suzy wasn't about to quit. She leaned back against the wall of the Empire Club and ran her hands over her neck, trying to smooth away the chills that had hit

her when the director had wiggled out. She closed her eyes and leaned her head back. When she opened them and looked out towards the Empire State campus, she saw someone looking at her.

The guy was pretty young, probably a college freshman or something. He and a bunch of others were milling past the cameras, checking out what was going on and probably wishing they were the ones doing the acting. Suzy kept her eyes on the guy for a few long moments. She didn't normally stare at people, but the guy was fairly cute, and his hair was white. Not gray, but the purest white she'd ever seen. In the sun it was a bit blinding to look at. Suzy smiled and the guy smiled back and then she turned to get back to work. The director had found Thomas and was coming back. It was almost time to do her thing.

Johnny Gallo smiled even wider when the blond chick turned away from him to do whatever it was she had to do. An actress on a movie set was actually interested in him. Johnny had caught quite a few eyes from the girls on campus at ESU, but this was the crowning achievement. He couldn't wait to catch up to Eddie and tell him all about it.

Suddenly all the breath was knocked from Johnny as he ran smack into another of the students rushing along the walkway. Johnny hadn't been carrying any books, but the student he slammed into had and they went flying all over the place, one hitting Johnny right on his forehead before it flipped away and hit the ground.

"Smooth one," came a voice from behind him and Johnny turned and looked directly toward where the girl he'd been looking at was standing earlier. She was still there, but beside her was another of the actors. He looked to be about Johnny's age and he was laughing at him. The girl had a grin on her face too, but at least she wasn't laughing at him. Johnny heard a groan and whipped back around, reaching for the person he'd knocked down.

"I'm so sorry, I totally wasn't looking where I was going," said Johnny as he reached down and took the hand of the Asian girl splayed out on the walkway. She took the hand and Johnny lifted her to his feet. She immediately went to get her books and Johnny helped her, gathering them up quickly. The girl wasn't smiling, if anything, she seemed annoyed and Johnny quickly handed her the books and moved on his way, hoping he wouldn't have anything like that happen to him again today. He looked back once at the girl he'd knocked over and she was walking away quickly as well. He admired her from behind for a few seconds before continuing on.

Suddenly a piercing screech erupted from above and Johnny was forced to press his hands to his ears to stifle it. He cast his eyes into the sky and saw what looked like a comet streaking out of the sky, directly for the ESU campus. The comet quickly descended and hit the ground with an earth-shaking tremor of sound. There was a flash of brilliant light and then Johnny could see just fine. What he saw, was not a good thing.

"I have come for the Kree-girl!" yelled the abomination in front of Johnny Gallo and Johnny immediately turned and began to run. There were some trees to his right where he could make the change. He wasn't sure if he'd be able to make a difference, but he had to try.

After a few months of inactivity -- ever since the Slingers had broken up, in fact* -- it looked like Ricochet was going to see some action.

(* See Marvel's *Slingers* #12 for the break-up -- Will)

"Something I can help you with son?" asked the police officer standing directly behind the young man. He stood there for a few seconds measuring the boy in the dirty trenchcoat that stunk of age, hoping he wasn't some drugged out punk, looking for trouble. When the kid didn't answer, the cop shrugged his shoulders and moved to enter the precinct. Kids these days had no respect for the law.

Chris Bradley had barely heard the voice of the police officer that had addressed him. He barely saw the officer walk around him and then slip into the police station. He wasn't really seeing or hearing things all that clearly lately. His only reason for standing outside of the police station right now was because he was seriously considering turning himself in.

He'd done things that he wasn't proud of -- hell, that he was ashamed and horrified of -- while under the thrall of Apocalypse. He'd been one of the dark master's Pale Riders. He and the other Riders had killed a lot of people.* The rest of the Pale Riders seemed to have moved on from what their part had been in all that bloodshed, but he just couldn't ignore what had happened like them. He couldn't even picture it in his mind without breaking down and crying.

(* See M2K's *Apocalypse: Ageless Fury* maxi-series for all the gory details -- Will)

He was only sixteen years old. Life wasn't supposed to be this hard when you were sixteen years old. He hadn't seen his family or Maverick in months. Maverick had been his mentor for a while and they'd grown close. Maverick wasn't here now though. Chris needed a way to ease the running, ease the hunger, ease the pain. He wasn't sure if walking through the doors of this police precinct and admitting what he did would stop the pain, but it could be a start towards that. He needed that more than anything right now.

He put his foot on the steps leading towards the police station and started to climb when he paused. There was some kind of whistling in the air, as if something was coming at high velocity towards the area. Suddenly there was a deafening crash as a blond girl came hurtling through the air and crashed directly into the wall of a nearby building. She burst through and was out of sight immediately. Chris wasn't even sure what had happened, but suddenly he heard the deafening roar of something in the distance and the sound of something else. He knew the sound by now better than most, it was the sound of battle. Chris glanced once more at the police station, where the cop who had passed him by earlier was peering out of one of the windows. He turned then, and began running towards the sounds of the fight, the dirty trenchcoat that was his only possession flapping as he ran.

Moments before Chris saw her hurtle through the air and into the side of a building, Suzy Sherman had been standing next to her acting partner, Thomas Reynolds, when a comet came crashing into the ground not a hundred feet from her. When the blinding flash of light cleared and the creature within bellowed for the *Kree-girl*, Suzy knew she was in trouble. The entire film crew and cast were looking at the creature, so Suzy slipped away, quickly making the change to the tight-fitting outfit of Ultra-Girl.

She took to the air and flew quickly to separate the creature from the civilians who were gawking stupidly at it. When she landed, the creature's eyes immediately went to her and Suzy shivered as it seemed to measure her.

"You are the Kree-girl I have been sent to acquire," the creature said and Suzy shuddered. The creature was huge and looked powerful. She wasn't sure if she should just tackle it outright, especially since it seemed to know her when she didn't know a thing about it. Still, Ultra-Girl clenched her fists and tensed her body. The creature seemed to notice and chuckled deep within its throat.

"Pathetic fighting stance. You will be easily bested," said the creature and then suddenly it was on top of her, grabbing her by the throat with one massive, green hand. Suzy was lifted into the air and the creature began to squeeze. Ultra-Girl knew she'd pass out from the strain if the creature was allowed to keep it up, so she reared back her fist and aimed for the creature's rippled chin.

The shot was solid and the creature's head rocked back violently. It let Ultra-Girl go and staggered back. Ultra-Girl smiled and blew on her knuckles, but then the creature's head rose and it let loose a cry of rage. It was all Ultra-Girl could do to keep from wetting herself as the creature turned its hateful gaze upon her.

"That was a foolish mistake girl," said the creature as its hand began to morph right before Suzy's eyes. She watched as the hand grew in size and took on a rocky exterior. The creature reared back the tremendous fist and swung at Suzy, connecting with the side of her head and sending her hurtling into the air. The last thing she saw before she was out of sight was two other figures rushing at the creature from behind.

"Hey Ugly, chill out," said a voice from behind the Super Skrull as he watched the Kree-girl sail through the air. He turned towards the voice just as a projectile flying through the air struck him in the face. The Super Skrull grunted as the man who had thrown the disk rammed into him full force and then bounced away. The blow didn't hurt much, but the Super Skrull was not used to being struck, and he'd been struck three times in the space of a minute.

"Away, little rabbit," boomed the Super Skrull in a thunderous voice as he shot jets of fire from his hands. The man in front of him easily dodged out of the way and hurtled another disk at the Super Skrull, connecting with the side of his head.

"Rabbit? I know there's a big **R** on my chest buddy, but do you actually think I'd go out in public with a name like the Rabbit?" The man bounded and jumped through the air, trying to get close enough for another strike at the Super Skrull. The Super Skrull kept firing blasts of fire, and the man kept dodging easily. The Super Skrull was becoming very frustrated, very fast.

"Now so we're all friends here, my name is Ricochet. Even though you look like a reject monster from a Sesame Street episode, I'm not going to insult you by calling you Oscar or anything. Even though your personality seems to fit. What's your name?" said Ricochet as he finally found an opening where he could leap directly at the Super Skrull and lay into his pug ugly face. Ricochet reared back his fist, but suddenly, he hit something he couldn't see, something that not only stopped his progress, but slammed and pinned him to the ground as well. The Super Skrull's fist morphed into a rocky mass and raised over Ricochet's head.

"I am the Super Skrull, champion of the Skrull Emperium, and the bringer of your death," said the Super Skrull as he tensed his fist to come down on Ricochet's head. Johnny Gallo saw his life flash before his eyes in that instant, and wondered what his body would look like without a head.

"Stop this now," said a voice from behind the two combatants and the Super Skrull turned, shocked that anyone would dare tell him to stop. There in front of him was a demure woman with some sort of silver battle armor surrounding a black body suit, hugging her body. Her hair was long and of the deepest black, her fists were tensed and she seemed to be trembling slightly with obvious fear.

"Foolish Earth-girl. Do not attempt to show a sense of bravado with one such as I. I can see that you tremble in fear before me. Perhaps you are aware of my reputation throughout the universe," said the Super Skrull and the girl before him just smirked. Mickey Muashi wasn't in the best of moods. Bad enough some weirdo with white hair had run her down on the sidewalk minutes ago, now she was being forced to fight some freak who looked like a bad Hulk impersonator.

"Honestly, I have no clue who you are, I'm just wondering if interstellar travel really makes you that sick. You look a little *green* around the gills," said Mickey and the Super Skrull looked at her with a puzzled expression. Sharp laughter rang out from beneath the Super Skrull and he looked back down at Ricochet.

"She got you with that one *Greeny*. If I was you, I wouldn't take that one lying down," Ricochet said and the Super Skrull's brow etched into one of the purest fury as he raised his fist again. Mickey groaned. She'd hoped she would have been able to bait the Super Skrull into attacking her, but the punk beneath the alien had to open his big mouth.

Mickey was about to blast the alien from behind with her wind-jets, when suddenly a blast of electricity shot through the air and connected with the Super Skrull instead. The Super Skrull was tossed clear of Ricochet who was automatically on his feet. Both he and Mickey looked over to see a kid in an old dirty trenchcoat standing a few feet away, his fists crackling with electricity.

"Since when did the bums of New York get super-powers?" asked Ricochet as he stood looking at Chris Bradley in amazement.

"My name is Bolt, and I'm here to help," said the kid in the trenchcoat and Ricochet grinned and slapped his knee.

"Well if that's not the sweetest thing in the whole wide world. You're my new best friend, man. Eddie won't be happy, but give us a kiss," said Ricochet as Bolt eyed him warily.

"Maybe I should have waited until the green machine over there crushed you," said Bolt and Ricochet was about to reply when suddenly Bolt's expression turned to one of shock and horror. A giant shadow passed over Ricochet and he knew the Super Skrull was attacking. He turned around and saw a giant rock fist hurtling towards him. There was no time to move, Ricochet was done for.

Suddenly a thunderclap of sound went off and the Super Skrull wasn't there anymore. Ricochet watched as the Super Skrull went flying through the air and saw the chick with the long, dark hair standing in front of him. The turbines on her battle armor were humming with power and Ricochet smiled.

"Nice shot. What's your name, *Blow-Girl*?" he said and the girl turned towards him. Her look alone gave Ricochet a moment of pause and he suddenly wished he was facing off against the Super Skrull again.

"It's Turbo," said the girl but it was all she could get out as a bellow of purest rage rang out from the direction the Super Skrull had flown. The Skrull flew back into view, one of his fists blazing with fire and the other a mass of orange rock. The three figures below tensed their muscles and prepared to fight.

"You're all going to die for your impudence," roared the Super Skrull as he barreled down upon them.

Mattie Franklin, dressed in the attire of Spider-Woman saw the blond girl go hurtling through the office building just as well as Chris Bradley did. While he rushed off to the battle with the Super Skrull, she was more concerned with the recipient of the knockout blow. She dropped into the hole Ultra-Girl had flown into and looked at the wasted office within.

"Somebody must not have gotten that promotion at work," she said as she surveyed the wreckage. The blond girl was getting to her feet and Spider-Woman rushed over to help her up. The blond girl shook her head momentarily and then peered up at Mattie with annoyance on her face.

"Hero or villain?" Ultra-Girl snapped and Mattie looked at her, perplexed.

"Excuse me?"

"Are you a hero or a villain? You know, do I team up with you, or do I punch your lights out?" asked Ultra-Girl and Mattie took a step back and scowled.

"I'm a *hero!*" she said, anger starting to creep into her voice.

"Good, come on then," said Ultra-Girl as she grabbed Spider-Woman's arm with a grip like iron and flew into the air. The two streamed out of the hole in the office building and sped on their way back to the battle.

"I can't lay a hand on this guy," yelled Bolt at the top of his lungs. Every attack he used on the Super Skrull was being deflected right back at him. Not that he had much of a chance to fire anyway. The Super Skrull had so many powers, it was tough not to be knocked around by an invisible barrier, or scorched to death by a flame jet. Bolt glanced over at Turbo who was having about the same luck as he was. Every blast of wind she sent towards the Skrull was blocked towards either her, or the campus they were fighting on. They were doing a lot more damage to the surrounding area than they were to the Super Skrull.

"I got this," said Ricochet as he flipped, ducked and dodged his way to within range and cracked the Super Skrull with another of his weighted disks. Ricochet was the only one getting through the Skrull's defenses, but the attacks weren't even fazing the alien. If the three were going to beat him, they'd have to think of something fast.

"Damn, you are one ugly mother," said a voice from behind the Super Skrull, and both he and the three heroes he was fighting against turned to look. Spider-Woman came darting down from the sky and put both of her feet directly in the Super Skrull's face. The Skrull dropped to one knee and shook his head.

"Ewwwww, he's squishy," said Spider-Woman as she flipped out of the way.

"Really? Let *me* see," said Ultra-Girl as she came rocketing down out of the air from the same spot Spider-Woman had come. She reared back her fist and connected with an incredible blow to the Super Skrull. He was driven hard into the ground and lay there, dazed.

Turbo wasn't sure who the new combatants were exactly, but she was glad they were there. Still, even though the Super Skrull was dazed, he was far from out. They had to take the opportunity now to finish him off.

"Listen to me all of you. We have to beat the Super Skrull now. Hit him hard. Hit him with everything you've got," yelled Turbo as she began blasting the Super Skrull with tremendous amounts of wind from the turbines on her arms.

"What the heck is a Super Skrull?" asked Spider-Woman as she watched Turbo, and then Bolt and Ultra-Girl begin pounding on the Skrull with their respective powers.

"I'll explain it later babe. Just do whatever it is that you do to that big green guy," said Ricochet as he began flinging disks at the Super Skrull. The first one he threw caught the wind from Turbo's blasts and came rocketing back at him. Ricochet was barely able to move out of the way.

"Maybe you should sit this one out tough guy," said Spider-Woman with a chuckle as she stepped forward and began firing her venom blasts at the Super Skrull, adding to the force of the attack. The Super Skrull sagged to the ground and all the heroes could taste the victory.

Suddenly, a bellowing roar issued forth from the Super Skrull once more and he rose shakily to his feet. The heroes kept blasting him, but the alien gritted his teeth and withstood the tremendous attack. The Super Skrull's vision went red with rage as he vented his anger and frustration.

"I'll destroy all of you! None of you shall survive this encounter! This I swear by the Skrull Emperium!" The Super Skrull tensed his body and once again fire erupted from his hands as he prepared to roast the heroes. A shimmering face materialized before him just before he could fire his flame and the Super Skrull angrily cursed under his breath.

"Captain Kl'rt you will stand down now. I've let you turn what should have been a simple extraction into a farce. Prepare for immediate recall," said the psychic voice within the Super Skrull's mind and he glowered with even more rage at not having the opportunity to crush his enemies. A blinding light encompassed the Super Skrull and the heroes stopped their attack. The light spread to surround all the combatants, and the campus students and film crew looked away as the light intensified. When the light faded enough for them to look again, the heroes and the Super Skrull were gone.

The Super Skrull was furious as he rematerialized back in the Databank. All of the heroes he'd been fighting were caught in the transport beam and had been whisked away with him. These insects were not worthy to look upon the Databank, and the Super Skrull was not pleased that he had been summoned back before he'd accomplished his mission.

"There was no need for recall. I was firmly in control of the situation," yelled the Super Skrull in his booming voice at the walls of the Databank.

"Silence," echoed an equally powerful voice and the Super Skrull became even more enraged, but remained quiet. The heroes were looking around with puzzled expressions, but at the sound of the foreign voice, they all became alert.

A massive wall before the grouping went first opaque and then transparent. Coming into view behind it was a massive green head, similar to the Super Skrull's, but feminine. Two massive coils streamed out of each of its eyes, wrapping down around her cheekbones and extending out

to four eyeballs that popped out of recesses in the wall and began searching the air around them. There was a strange bubbling effect behind the disembodied head, but it was impossible to tell whether they were looking at a liquid-filled tank containing this monstrosity, or simply a video projection of the same. Within the thing's four eyes was a vast intelligence that regarded the six figures before her with distaste.

"Man, we are so not in Kansas anymore," Ricochet breathed.

"Nor did you originate there, Terran. This is the Databank, and you are in the presence of the collective will and intellect of the Skrull people. You may call me... Intelligensia," said the apparition and they all looked up at her in wonder.

"Hold up, hold up. First of all, Intelli-what? And what's a Terran?" Ricochet asked and Turbo clasped a hand over his mouth.

"Shut up, Ricochet. What is it that you want with us?" Turbo said as Ricochet struggled to break free of her hold on him.

"How brazen of you. I want nothing with you girl. You were transported merely because you were within the transmat radius. No, the only one among you I wish to speak with is the Kree-human hybrid, the one who will provide the Skrull people with the means to reclaim their rightful status," said Intelligensia as she looked down upon the assemblage of young heroes. The kids looked around at each other with puzzled expressions, all except Ultra-Girl, who was standing a bit behind everyone, with a concerned look on her face.

"Who... me?"

Next Issue: The kids are captives of the Skrull Empire. What dire plans does the Intelligensia have for Ultra-Girl, and how can this ragtag assemblage stop them? Will this incarnation of the Warriors croak before they even start using the name?

DISPATCHES FROM THE WAR

I could use this space to bore you with details of this series' inception, or perhaps tell you what a class act Mike Exner is, how he made my plot sing and dance in script and how he's made my first time as strictly a plotter a joyous event (all those things should be evident after finishing the above issue). Or maybe I could try to justify why in the world I'd want to write *anything* starring the third Spider-Woman. But Instead, I think I'll just explain some of my thoughts on the New Warriors as a concept, and give you some hints as to where Mike and I might be going with this title. That's simple, after all. It can pretty much be summed up in one sentence:

"All they want to do is change the world."

This was one of the taglines Marvel used in advertisements for the first New Warriors series (yes, I remember that far back... shut up). I think the book started to stray when they lost sight of this goal. Somewhere after the trial of Marvel Boy and the death of Tai, the book became less about a bunch of kids wanting to change the world, and more about a bunch of kids. Period. And the fact that Marvel still ran that tagline on the cover of the book couldn't change that loss of focus.

Don't get me wrong... there were some good stories from #26 (when Justice went to the Vault) to #53 (Fabian Nicieza's last issue, after which I only read one or two issues... all horrid). Hell, the kids even did the "change the world" routine when they invaded Trans-Sabal around issue #30, but the feel of those early issues was gone, and that's when the book started to slide downhill.

So keep the tagline in mind when reading this title. "All they want to do is change the world." They're young. They're invincible. They know how things SHOULD be done. They are NOT, however, the Authority. They'll make mistakes and they'll pay for them, and eventually they'll find a middle ground between how the world is and how they want to make it.

But hopefully not for a good long while. :-)

I should also explain why Mike and I are avoiding using the original Warriors. If you're a fan of the old series, I'm sure you clicked on the link for this issue expecting to get a new dose of Justice, Thrash, Nova, and the like, but... in my opinion, Nicieza did so much with the original cast, made the characters grow in so many ways, that they evolved right out of the book. Most of these guys -- Nova, Namorita, Justice, and Thrash in particular -- are generally agreed to be in their early twenties (or very, very late teens I guess, since 'early 20's' is where Spider-Man's supposed to be). I don't want people that old on this team. Let 'em join the Avengers if they want to be on a super-team, they're too old to be Warriors.

Except Turbo, I'll make an exception for her. :-) And, truth to tell, Night Thrasher will be around for a little bit, tho with a much different look. I think it is important to create some kind of connection between the old book and the new, otherwise why bother calling it New Warriors? Thrash was the guts of the old team, and Turbo was probably the least explored, so they'll definitely do for now. Mike and I also aren't ruling out further appearances by the rest of the gang somewhere down the line.

But for now, this is what you're gonna get. Stick with us and hopefully we'll make it worth your while. We may not get the masks right, but we hope to get to the heart of what made the old team great. Let us know how we're doing.

**- Russ Anderson
15 July 2001**

All they want to do is change the world.

They are a band of young heroes drawn together by a knowledge of what's right, and a willingness to take on the battles their adult counterparts won't.

Welcome to the battlefield...



#2

“ALIEN AUTOPSY”

Written by Mike Exner III (script) & Russ Anderson (plot)

In Case You're Just Joining Us: Suzy Sherman, aka Ultra Girl, was attacked on the set of the soap opera Secret Hospital by an enraged Super Skrull. Their battle attracted the attention of a bunch of other young NYC heroes, and just as this ragtag band was starting to come together in their efforts against the Skrull, the lot of them were teleported to a place called "The Databank", where a Skrull super-computer named Intelligentsia informed them that Ultra Girl, as a Kree/human hybrid, was the key to reclaiming the Skrull's rightful place in the cosmos.

A mass of New York City police officers and members of the city work crews were scattered all along the Empire State University campus. Yellow police tape held concerned bystanders and the occasional bothersome reporter out of the area. Earlier there had been a film crew here taping an episode of the soap opera Secret Hospital, but they were long gone now. Still, they had drawn quite a crowd. Now the crowd had found a new focus.

Eddie McDonough listened to the buzz of the people around him and gathered enough information to figure out what had happened. Apparently some sort of *monster* from the sky had come down and started attacking the campus. Some heroes had gotten involved and from the descriptions, Eddie could tell that Ricochet had been one of them.* When Eddie and Johnny Gallo had shared space on the Slingers as the heroes Hornet and Ricochet, Johnny had always been prone to trouble. It seemed as if things hadn't changed since those days at all.

[* A somewhat skewed perception of what actually happened last issue - Dino]

"Oh man, Johnny," Eddie whispered under his breath. "What have you gotten yourself into this time?"

"Oh man. What did I get myself into this time?" said Johnny Gallo to himself as he regarded the scene before him. In front of him was a big bowl of Jello with a wrinkly green face in it that had too many eyes. It was really the only way Johnny could describe it. It called itself the Intelligent-She, or something like that. Ricochet wasn't honestly sure about that part. All he knew was that somehow it was connected with the alien race known as the Skrull.

The big nut-job next to the bowl of Jello was called the Super Skrull. He had a real name that the bowl of Jello had called him by, but Rico wasn't about to try and pronounce it. Maybe Mr. Fantastic could do it. But those types of names weren't meant for human tongues.

Basically what had happened was the good guys had fought the bad guy and the good guys had been doing a darn fine job. Then suddenly the bad guy had got an even badder bowl of Jello to cheat for him. Now they were stuck in some place that looked like the set for a cheap *Outer Limits* episode, and the bowl of Jello said she had done it all for the blond cutie that was standing behind them. * Ricochet glanced over at the blond cutie in question and noticed that she wasn't looking very steady. Not that he would either, if the roles were reversed.

[* Another somewhat skewed perspective of the events last issue - Dino]

"Intelligensia," Turbo said, trying to get the attention of the large presence in the tank before her. Mickey Muashi had seen some strange things in her time as a New Warrior. But this was certainly the strangest. "You've got to understand our position here. We can't allow you to just attack the Earth and then take Ultra Girl here without..."

Turbo would have continued, but she was knocked to the ground as Ultra Girl forced herself past both Turbo and Bolt and rocketed towards the tank holding Intelligensia within. She reared back her fist to strike the tank, hoping to smash it and send the Intelligensia to whatever afterlife the Skrull race had.

In a flash of movement that Ultra Girl could barely register, the Super Skrull was hovering in front of her. His large, rock-covered hand caught her fist and then with his other hand he slapped Ultra Girl roughly to the floor.

"Hey now, that's not very nice," said Ricochet as he plucked a throwing disc from his jacket and threw it directly towards the Super Skrull's head. The Super Skrull raised his hand and fired a burning jet of flame that incinerated the disc before it got to him. The flame continued down on its path and struck the floor. Ricochet was just barely able to dodge in time.

"Ok, potato-chip chin. I've had just about enough from you," Ricochet said and jumped on Spider-Woman's back. Mattie Franklin's knees buckled momentarily under the pressure and she wavered slightly before regaining her balance.

"What are you doing, Rico-moron!" Spider-Woman screeched.

"Give me a boost, Spider-Girl," said Ricochet and Mattie scowled.

"My name is Spider-Woman!" she hollered, and threw Ricochet towards the Super Skrull. The force with which Ricochet hurtled through the air disoriented him for a split second, but his super reflexes adjusted him just in time. He reared back a fist to strike the Super Skrull and then felt all the breath rush out of him as something tackled him from behind.

Turbo rushed towards the ceiling with Ricochet and then raced back to the floor. She let him fall from her arms and the young hero turned towards her in anger.

"What did you do that for?" Ricochet complained as Turbo looked at him with an expression of equal irritation.

"You could have gotten yourself killed. The Super Skrull is a serious threat," Turbo said and then Ricochet was in motion, kicking her in the chest and back-flipping in the opposite direction. A jet of flame crashed into the floor where Turbo had been standing.

"You ain't kidding," said Ricochet.

"Enough of this," said Intelligensia calmly and all of the figures gathered before her clutched their heads as pain ripped through them. The waves of agony soon pushed the heroes into unconsciousness. The Super Skrull rose shakily from his knees.

"That's the second time you've failed to warn me before you acted, Intelligensia. I will *not* be treated thus!" the Super Skrull said, his eyes glowing with anger.

"Once again, a necessary means to an end, my good Captain Kl'rt. Take the prisoners to the specially crafted cells. All but the Kree girl, of course. I will take care of her myself," said Intelligensia and the Super Skrull clenched his fists, the pads of his fingers going aflame and biting into his flesh to still the maddened response that rose to his lips.

"Why did the Kree girl attack so suddenly? It was as if she was provoked in some manner," asked Kl'rt and the Intelligensia smiled as she examined the unconscious Ultra Girl lying on the floor of the Databank.

"She is Kree. And being so, she has an engrained terror of the Skrull. My presence along with yours magnified the effect until it was irresistible. She attacked because she felt no other option was available to her," said the Intelligensia and the Super Skrull nodded. The Kree were a puzzling race. He didn't like having one of them in the Databank. But, as he was continually being reminded, it wasn't up to him to decide. He gathered the other young heroes and began to carry them to the cells.

"Wait. There was another one here with the rest," stated the Super Skrull with fury in his tone.

"Yes. The one called Spider-Woman has apparently slipped from your clutches, my dear Captain," replied the Intelligensia. Super Skrull glanced up at her only briefly before he looked back to the door leading to other parts of the complex.

"Summon some of the Skrull soldiers to take these ones to the cells. I must find this... *Spider-Woman*," roared the Super Skrull and took to the air. Intelligensia watched him leave and then summoned some of the personal guard of the Databank to carry the heroes away.

"Now, child," said the Intelligensia as she commanded medical androids to sprout from the wall and pick up Ultra Girl. "Let us begin."

Mattie Franklin was in trouble. The mental assault that Intelligensia had performed had hurt, but it hadn't put her down for the count. She had managed to slip away while the Super Skrull was arguing about his own headache. She had found some sort of ventilation tube running throughout the complex and had jumped inside without thinking. But now she was stuck. The Super Skrull wasn't a pushover. She'd actually hesitated to jump into the battle with him inside the Databank for specifically that reason.

Plus, Ricochet was a hothead. Jumping the Super Skrull like that was suicide. In her anger, Mattie had thrown the loudmouth right at the Super Skrull and if it hadn't been for Turbo, he'd probably have been pasted.

Not exactly the sort of thing Spidey would do, thought Mattie as she sat in the ventilation ducts and bit her fingernails. The duct she was in smelled awful and there was some sort of film on the sides that made the going slippery. Even with her ability to cling to walls, moving through this mess would be tough.

I have to free the others, Mattie thought to herself and popped the door to the ventilation tube she'd been sitting in. She dropped down and crept silently along the corridors of the Databank, hoping she wouldn't run into any opposition. Finally, she came upon a corridor with a window.

"Oh my lord," said Mattie as she peered through the reinforced glass. The stars looked back at her, and nothing else. They were in space. The Intelligensia had transported them all the way from Earth to some random spot in space. How in the heck were they supposed to get home?

Calm down, Mattie. Calm down. Just think for a second. Think about good old Spidey. What would Spidey do? thought Mattie and her rapidly beating heartbeat slowed and she began to smile as it did. Spidey would find help of course. Spidey would try to free the other heroes and make a big stand against the bad guy.

"If Spidey can do it. So can I," said Mattie and scrambled back into the ventilation tube. She didn't see the Super Skrull watching her silently from the shadows. And she didn't see him begin to follow her.

Ricochet bounced one of his discs off the wall of the cell the young heroes were being held in. It bounded off the wall, then the ceiling, and returned to his hand.

"See? Like magic," he said and Bolt groaned.

"If I'm stuck with you in this cage for another ten minutes I'm going to kill myself," said Bolt as he played with a small charge of electricity between his fingers.

"That's not a bad trick either," said Ricochet and sighed. He again thought back to how he had gotten stuck in this mess. He didn't even know the blond cutie. If the Intelligensia wanted to stick a probe up *her* butt, why did it have to involve everybody else? Or more accurately, why him?

"*Why me!?*" Ricochet suddenly shouted and the others jumped. Ricochet burst out laughing and Turbo activated a gust from the turbine on her wrist. Ricochet fell on the ground and the others laughed at him.

"Quiet! All of you!" said the guard and then turned back to face the corridor. There was only one guard, and Turbo thought if they could figure some way to get out of the cell, they could easily take him.

Turbo was a bit more used to being kept in a cage by super-villains, but even she was beginning to wonder why she was here. All she really wanted to do was continue classes at Empire State University and don the Turbo armor when it was needed. This motley band of amateurs she was with now wasn't a team. They were a bunch of goofballs. Not that the Warriors had been seasoned veterans or anything. Hell, *she* wasn't even a seasoned veteran compared to most.

"Penny for your thoughts," said Bolt. Turbo smiled at him and shook her head.

"I'm just thinking that as a team, we wouldn't cut it too well," replied Turbo and Bolt chuckled.

"You can say that again," said Ricochet and nudged Bolt with his elbow. Bolt pointed his finger at Ricochet and a bit of electricity leapt from it and hit the ground near Ricochet's feet. Ricochet danced away and smiled. Bolt just glared.

"Ok, I can take a hint. Punk," said Ricochet and then crept a little closer anyway. If they were going to get out of here, they were going to have to work together.

Bolt watched Ricochet creep closer and decided to leave him alone. The guy wasn't that bad after all, Chris was just pissed. He had been caught up in this situation at a time when he needed to get caught up in something, but he was still thinking about the police station he had nearly walked into.* Was that still something he wanted to do now? He didn't know, and that was probably most distressing to him out of everything.

[* Last issue -- Dino]

"Man, this is so *boring*," groaned Ricochet. "I wonder what happened to Spider-Girl. That chick knows how to party."

"That's Spider-Woman, you jerk," said a voice from above and the three incapacitated heroes watched as Spider-Woman jumped from the shadows of the ceiling and attacked the guard. She crouched low as the guard leveled his blaster at her and the shot went high. Spider-Woman grabbed him by the collar of his suit and picked him up over her head. The guard tried to level his weapon again, but Mattie flung him into the opposite wall, where he was knocked unconscious.

"Nice going, Spider-Shakes. Now get us out of here," said Ricochet and Spider-Woman scowled at him.

"I should just leave you here with the lizard heads," said Mattie as she reached for the panel that activated the cell door.

"Since you're so kind as to offer your friend a place to stay, perhaps you would enjoy an extended vacation with the *lizard heads* as well," said a voice from behind Mattie and the look on the faces of the three in the cell made it apparent who she would see when she turned around.

"Quick, Spider-Girl. The door!" yelled Ricochet and Mattie went for it, but then she was struck from behind by something the others couldn't see. It sent her flying across the corridor and she landed heavily on the ground.

"Never mind," muttered Ricochet as the Super Skrull advanced towards Spider-Woman. "Just kick this guy's butt so we can go home."

"Unlikely," stated the Super Skrull flatly as Spider-Woman launched herself at him. She rammed into an invisible barrier before she got ten feet. A jet of flame nearly collided with her as she tried to clear her head from the blow. Quickness was all that saved her.

"No fair. You're cheating you big lima bean," yelled Ricochet from his cell but the Super Skrull paid him no mind. Spider-Woman went for the panel to the cell door again, but the Super Skrull stretched his body and blocked her path. His arms wrapped around her body and flung her into the wall next to the fallen Skrull guard.

"No chance for you, human. Concede," said the Super Skrull and Mattie clenched her fists. There was no way she was losing to this guy. Spidey could wipe the floor with him. If Spidey could do it, so could she.

She leveled her arms at the Super Skrull and concentrated. Jets of psionic webbing shot from her hands and wrapped around him. The stuff had been the stock-in-trade of Julia Carpenter,* and although they weren't quite as strong as Spidey's webbing, Mattie was sure they'd hold the Super Skrull.

[* The second woman to hold the Spider-Woman title - Dino]

The Super Skrull ignited his arms, burning the webbing slightly, and then flexed his massive frame. The strands snapped from the heat and the pressure within seconds and Mattie cursed

under her breath, trying to clear her vision as the psionic feedback lashed across her brain. She'd need something else to beat this guy.

What would Spidey do? What would Spidey do?

"I got it," said Mattie and jumped into the air. She used her spider-like speed and focused her instincts and reflexes to the max of her ability. She didn't allow herself to think, she just moved as quickly as she could, dodging blasts of flame, invisible constructs and rock-like, orange fists. When she was battered down, she got back up and continued on.

"It seems as though you don't *have it* after all, child," said the Super Skrull as he regarded the slightly winded Spider-Woman standing across from him. Mattie wiped a trickle of blood from her lip and narrowed her eyes. The Super Skrull chuckled without humor. "You haven't laid a hand on me. Soon you'll be too exhausted to move. Easy prey."

"Just bring it on, ugly," said Mattie and the Super Skrull frowned. He fired a jet of flame directly at Spider-Woman and she dodged the strike with amazing speed. The flame shot past her... and incinerated the control panel of the cell holding the three heroes. Mattie had managed to move the Super Skrull to the other side of the hallway, and the blast shattered the control panel in an intensely bright explosion.

The Super Skrull was momentarily blinded and turned his face away from the blast, cursing his own overconfidence. He had committed a rookie mistake in allowing the girl to maneuver him in such a manner. When his vision came back to him and his senses cleared he turned to the cell once more. Standing side-by-side were four young heroes, all with determination and anger fitted onto their features.

"Now," Spider-Woman said as she cracked her knuckles. "Let's try this again."

"You resist me, girl. But it is pointless. You are mine to do with as I wish," Intelligensia stated as she regarded the struggling Ultra Girl on the table before her. Clamps were holding Ultra Girl's arms and legs in a firm grip. Even her fantastic strength couldn't sever the bonds.

"What do you want with me?" asked Ultra Girl weakly. She had never been more frightened in her life. But she was also frustrated with herself. Attacking the Intelligensia and losing control had put the others in danger. She knew that attacking blindly had been a mistake. But as she looked at the Intelligensia now, all she wanted to do was rip from the bonds that held her and attack again.

"I can sense your thoughts, child," said the Intelligensia as the clamps that were holding Ultra Girl were suddenly released. Ultra Girl tried to move, but the Intelligensia was still in control. Suzy was raised into the air away from the examination table and left hovering before the Intelligensia.

"Do not struggle, Suzy Sherman. It is foolish of you to believe that I will not acquire the information I seek," said the Intelligensia, and Ultra Girl stiffened as tendrils of energy sprouted from the Intelligensia's eyes and slithered through the air towards her.

"How do you know my name?" Ultra Girl asked as she continued to struggle against the hold Intelligensia had over her.

"As I said. I can read your thoughts. The energy that you are so frightened of is simply a tool to gather genetic information, my dear. It is a necessary tool and not at all painful," Intelligensia said as the tendrils of energy wrapped themselves around Ultra Girl.

"You see. For many generations the Skrull have been the mortal enemies of the Kree race from which you were born. But even though the Kree are far inferior to us in terms of evolutionary potential, they have somehow managed to splice their genes with those of the human race on occasion." The Intelligensia spoke as the tendrils of energy did their work. Ultra Girl noticed flashes of light that illuminated the tendrils of energy to an even brighter state at times. When the flashes occurred, text appeared to be relayed on the glass-like container the Intelligensia was within.

"So who cares about that? What does it have to do with me?" Ultra Girl snapped. She was losing it again and she struggled as hard as she could against the mental control the Intelligensia seemed to have over her. The Intelligensia looked away from the text for a brief moment. Then she smiled and continued to examine it.

"You are human in part, my child. Humans have always had the potential to wield the Destiny Force. Access to such power is one of the reasons your race has survived for so long against those as powerful as the Skrull and the Kree. Still, in order for the Skrull to continue to be superior in all ways to the Kree, we must have the potential to access the Destiny Force by learning how to bond with Humans, as they have. Therefore this examination of you is..." but then the Intelligensia paused and a look of pure shock overcame her features.

"Can it be?" the Intelligensia stated. But she wasn't talking to Ultra Girl, simply to herself.

"Can what be? What do you see?" yelled Ultra Girl at the top of her lungs, but the Intelligensia did not respond. Didn't even seem to hear Ultra Girl. Whatever was on the screens in front of her had so engrossed her that Ultra Girl could even feel the strange power that was holding her up begin to weaken as the Intelligensia examined it.

Suddenly a huge crash sounded throughout the room and both Suzy and the Intelligensia looked in the direction of the sound. Spider-Woman was lying on the ground and the metal door leading into the Intelligensia's chambers was lying in shards. Ricochet came bounding in after her.

"Get up, Spider-Baby. This isn't nap-time," said Ricochet as he bounded over Spider-Woman's head. Spider-Woman got to her feet just as the Super Skrull came sailing into the room and she was barely able to avoid him.

Turbo flew into the room followed closely by Bolt. Turbo was blasting the Super Skrull with the full force of air from her turbines and the Super Skrull was being blown back heavily. Hordes of Skrull soldiers spilled into the room after the heroes and Bolt turned towards them, igniting the electrical powers that were his namesake and blasting their weapons.

"Hey, cutie. Remember me?" said a voice from underneath Ultra Girl, and then she felt the air rush from her lungs as Ricochet collided with her in mid-air. The added weight pulled her from the hold the Intelligensia had over her, and they both crashed to the ground.

"Nice one," said Ultra Girl as she took to the air, hoping to help Turbo and Spider-Woman with the Super Skrull.

"I do my best," muttered Ricochet as he dodged a blast from one of the Skrull soldiers and cracked a throwing disc off of the soldiers' head.

"Enough!" ordered a presence from within the room and everyone turned towards the speaker. Weapons dropped from the hands of the Skrull soldiers, and the hands of hero and villain alike were dropped as the Intelligensia took control of their minds.

"This battle is over," stated the Intelligensia and the heroes blinked, unsure they were hearing correctly.

"My examination of Ultra Girl is complete. The Kree have shielded their process for bonding Human and Kree together well. I have no need for her or any of the rest of you Terrans within the Databank. This conflict is over," Intelligensia stated and then with a flash of energy, the Skrull soldiers were transported out of the Databank, to someplace else.

"Are you insane, Intelligensia? We can not allow these children to dishonor the Skrull Empire in such a manner and then simply let them depart!" roared the Super Skrull. The fire surrounding his forearms blazed with an intense light that mirrored the rage on his face.

"Yeah, we wanna give old, chin-flap here another good beating," stated Ricochet and Spider-Woman took a few steps toward the Super Skrull as if she intended to do just that.

"I think not, human," replied the Intelligensia, and then with a simple focusing of her mind, the heroes were transported away as well, leaving only the Super Skrull and Intelligensia herself still within the walls of the Databank.

"You should not have let them go. That is *not* the way of the Skrull," stated the Super Skrull in rising anger.

"My dear, Captain Kl'rt. You have no idea what it was we held in our hands, do you?" said the Intelligensia and the Super Skrull seemed to calm, just a bit. Though his eyes narrowed in suspicion.

"What are you talking about?"

"Our little Kree-Terran hybrid was in actuality the Kree Tsu-Zana, the light-bringer, prophesized savior of the entire Kree race,"

"A tale for children!" the Super Skrull spat in disgust. The Tsu-Zana was a myth, a story that the Kree told their young to soothe the pain of losing their empire. It was foolishness. How could one female child lead the Kree out from under the subjugation of the Shi'ar? There were even tales of the Tsu-Zana leading the Kree to rule over the entire Universe. It was absurd.

"Perhaps, Captain. But truly it matters not what you and I think, only what the Kree think. If the Kree were to welcome her with open arms and hearts, Kl'rt, tell me how much damage might such a children's tale do were it secretly in thrall to the Skrull?"

"You did not?" asked the Super Skrull, the hint of a smile breaching the confused pallor of his face.

"Only time will tell, Captain Kl'rt."

"Man, what a rush!" said Ricochet as he, and the other heroes were transported back to the spot from which they were taken. The campus of Empire State University was darkened now, as night had fallen. But though there was still yellow police tape blocking off the area from curious onlookers, the place was devoid of police.

"Speak for yourself," said Ultra Girl as she faltered in her step. The others seemed to be fine, but Suzy had gone through the most out of any of them, and the disorientation of the Intelligensia's instantaneous transport had taken its toll.

"Whoa there. I got you," said Ricochet as he caught Ultra Girl before she hit the ground. Ultra Girl looked up at Johnny Gallo and he found himself forced to look away from her piercing green eyes. "Er, are you alright now?"

"I'm fine. Thanks," said Ultra Girl as she regained her feet. She turned to the other heroes and they watched as her face visibly reddened. "I'm sorry about what happened up there. If it hadn't been for me, none of you would have got caught up in that."

"It's not a problem, Ultra Girl. You were in trouble and we came to help. We could do no less," said Turbo and Ricochet groaned.

"Oh, c'mon. That is so corny. I'm leaving before Turbo forces us to sit around a fire and sing"

"Wait a minute, Ricochet. You *can't* leave," Spider-Woman said as she placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Um... I can't?"

"Don't you guys get it? We were brought together for a reason. And we fought well together too, if I do say so myself. We took on the Super Skrull and we're all here to talk about it. I mean, isn't this the part where we all make like the Avengers and form a team?" Mattie asked. The other heroes looked at her for a long moment and then Ricochet burst out laughing.

"C'mon, Spider-Woman. We're just a bunch of kids that got caught up," Bolt said and Spider-Woman nodded.

"Exactly. And isn't it about time the young heroes got represented out there? I mean, Turbo. You were a New Warrior weren't you? Whatever happened to them?"

"We were disbanded," stated Turbo with a hint of bitterness in her voice.

"Well, then why can't we be the *new* New Warriors? It could totally happen. We work well together. It would be *great!*"

Ricochet looked at Spider-Woman and shook his head. He opened his mouth to laugh and tell her to start a Spider-Man fan club or something if she wanted to join a group, but Ultra Girl beat him to it.

"I think it would be great," Ultra Girl said and Ricochet looked at her, dumbfounded. He gazed at the long blond hair, the green eyes, and the butt that begged to be fondled. They were all calling out to him. He couldn't resist. He opened his mouth to speak again.

"Yeah. Count me in too," said Bolt, beating Rico to the punch. Bolt looked around at the others and the look was one of gratitude. He had been searching for something like this ever since Apocalypse had manipulated him. Maybe joining a team would atone for some of the sins he committed while he was in that monster's thrall. It was certainly better than sleeping in alleys and eating out of dumpsters.

Spider-Woman looked over at Ricochet and raised her eyebrows. Ricochet shook his head and laughed to himself. Ultra Girl was looking at him too.

"Ah, what the hell," Ricochet said and Mattie beamed a smile at him. Then she looked in the direction of Turbo.

"What about it, Turbo. Are we a team?" Mattie asked and Turbo looked hard at the young super-hero. Then she looked hard into herself. Did she really want to be a super-hero anymore? Sure, she had helped out Ultra Girl when the time came, but doing the hero thing had always been her friend Michael's thing, not hers. When he died, things had changed. Things were just different now. Turbo looked up at the other kids in front of her and opened her mouth to turn them down.

But then she saw them. Their faces were filled with hope. Filled with youth and exuberance and that same *devil-may-care-but-I-sure-don't* attitude that Michael had always had. It was a trap, she realized. Somehow they knew what she was thinking and had looked that way just so she'd join. She opened her mouth to tell them that it wouldn't work.

"We're a team," Turbo said and wasn't surprised in the slightest. It was time to move on. Not to forget, just to move on. She smiled as Spider-Woman hollered her delight up towards the night sky.

"Maybe we can get Spider-Man to join too!" Spider-Woman screeched.

"Oh, for crying out loud," Ricochet said and they all laughed then. Together.

Next Issue: *The team settles into their new digs, Bolt gets a costume, Spider-Woman learns about some nasty goings-on at Roxxon Oil, and Rico brings in his buddy Hornet to fix up the team's new ride! The next Warriors story arc begins here.*

DISPATCHES FROM THE WAR

Just one letter this time: a HotDamn review from Adnan Khan:

New Warriors #1

By Russ Anderson and Mike Exner III

I liked this issue, fast paced and quick gathering of the heroes. None of them know each other and that causes some problems in the fight. They still manage to hold their own, until the Big Head Skrull grabs them and brings them up to space. I want to see why they want Ultra Girl.. interesting start to this series. I like it.

WarmDamn

I'm seriously thinking of renaming Intelligentsia "Big Head Skrull" when/if she makes her next appearance...

Thanks for the review, Adnan.

We also received a very nice letter from Jason Trenner that I, unfortunately, don't have with me as I write this. That will be posted with the next issue.

Until then, send Mike Exner lots of letters and tell him what a brilliant scripter he is.

**- Russ Anderson
27 September 2001**

All they want to do is change the world.

They are a band of young heroes drawn together by a knowledge of what's right, and a willingness to take on the battles their adult counterparts won't.

Welcome to the battlefield...



#3

“Heart of the Earth, Heart of the Son”

Part 1: Getting Started

Written by Mike Exner III (script) & Russ Anderson (plot)

In Case You're Just Joining Us: *A group of teenage heroes were drawn into a battle between the Super Skrull and Ultra Girl at the campus of ESU. After being teleported to a Skrull intelligence center in deep space, the kids managed to win a partial victory against the Super Skrull and to free Ultra Girl. Upon their return, Spider-Woman talked them into remaining together as the 'new' New Warriors.*

"Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Now please... try to enjoy the remainder of your show."

The patrons at the New York City movie premiere gazed upon the poised form of the man clad in purple and dark blue with expressions ranging from fear and anxiety to wonder and befuddled amusement. A sparking mass of electricity crackled and sizzled from the dark gloves of the man and the witnesses had watched as it leapt from his hands just moments before and struck the armed security guard watching over the assorted stars, producers, and directors that had been invited to the gala.

The Eel smiled underneath his mask as the people turned in their seats and gaped at him. He recognized quite a few of them. His favorite model - Mary Jane Watson-Parker - wasn't here. She had passed away in a plane crash a few months ago.* But there were quite a few hot ladies in the audience he did recognize. It was a shame he had to rob all of them. If he had shown up as Edward Lavell he might have even been able to land a date with one of them. After all, he wasn't a bad looking guy. And J-Lo had proven to everyone that the hot chicks wanted down-to-earth guys.

[* It happened in M2K's *Amazing Spider-Man #2* - Dino]

Not that being the *Eel* was down-to-earth. But he had a way of keeping that particular secret safe from most of the women he'd dated. By the time they found out he was a super-criminal... he'd already managed to hop in the sack with them. And what good were chicks after that?

"Um, excuse me?" said a voice at the Eel's back and he immediately whipped his body around and fired a double shot of electricity from his hands. A kid stood in the doorway leading to the lobby of the theater with a black leather jumpsuit fitted snugly to his skinny frame. The electricity struck the kid standing in the doorway of the theater with enough force to fry his eyeballs out of his sockets and the Eel pulled back. Smoke rose from the charred doorway but when it cleared the kid was standing there as if nothing had happened.

Smoke rose from the kid's hair and he smiled. "Hmm... tickles."

It was then that the Eel noticed the stylized yellow lightning bolt slicing through the white **B** centered on the kid's chest, and the lightning-shaped lines traveling up the kid's arms and legs. It was then that the Eel noticed the white belt with the yellow lightning bolt for a buckle. It was then that the Eel groaned and leapt to the side as the kid splayed his hand and an arc of electricity leapt from his gloveless fingers. The Eel barely dodged the first strike but the second came just as quickly. The Eel had nowhere to go and the blast struck him full in the chest. The insulation in his outfit saved his life but the blast was too much for even his suit to take. The Eel collapsed to the ground and twitched as he fell into unconsciousness.

Bolt clapped his hands together sharply three times as if dusting himself off and then looked up from the unconscious form of the Eel. The people who were attending the big-budget premiere were all staring at him with wide-eyed wonder. Then they began to applaud, and Bolt grinned sheepishly as - one after the other - the movie stars, producers and studio executives all got to their feet. He backed away from them and out the door as the crowd cheered and pleaded for an encore. Once he was out, he turned on his heels and pushed through the double doors of the nearest exit.

Sirens leapt up at him through the still night air and Chris Bradley ducked into the alley and out of sight, snatching up the trenchcoat he'd left on top of a dumpster. He felt bad about covering up the new costume Spider-Woman had given him with the dingy coat. Of course, as quick as the girl got the outfit for him, she had to be financially well off. He doubted a spot of dirt would be much of a problem. The costume was a lot like the one he had worn while hanging with Maverick. The sleeves were longer and the logo was different, but Chris liked it a lot.

He emerged from the alley just as the police were pulling up to the front entrance of the building. Some of the people who had been in the theater were milling around outside - obviously searching for Bolt - but none of them paid any attention to the kid in the ratty trenchcoat slipping away through the crowd.

Bolt glanced up to the billboard displaying the title of the movie premiere the assorted stars and movie bigwigs had been attending.

"*Blade II - Enter Buffy...* yuck. I should have just let the Eel shut that thing down," said Bolt as he began to walk down the street in the direction of downtown. The night sky was crisp and clear and Bolt couldn't help but smile. As much as the whole idea of a team-up had seemed silly to him the other day, it felt really good having a place in the world again. He still needed a place to live. But Ricochet and Turbo had said they were working on that right now.

"Are you sure this is legal?" muttered Ricochet as he peered over the shoulder of Mickey Muashi.

The armor of Turbo glittered in the moonlight as Mickey turned to regard Ricochet with an annoyed expression. "Just lift when I tell you... and stop asking so many questions."

"Fine... fine. But if we get busted by Nova or something, I'm blaming you," said Ricochet as he hunched down beside Turbo. Turbo flicked her fingers over a keypad built into the skylight on the roof of the warehouse that had once served as the New Warriors' base of operations. The lock popped with an audible click.

"Ok. Lift it up," said Turbo and Ricochet heaved the skylight back on its hinges. A sharp squealing filled the air and both Turbo and Ricochet winced.

"We are *so* gonna get busted," said Ricochet as he pushed the skylight window into a resting position against the roof.

Turbo activated the turbines on her legs and lifted into the air. "Just follow me, Rico. I used to be a New Warrior... so it's cool if we use this place. Trust me."

"Whatever you say," he replied, dropping into the darkness after Turbo. She watched the young man land with cat-like grace on the ground. She found herself in awe of his agility and speed. When battling the Super-Skrull,* it was often Ricochet that had been able to get in the shot that distracted the Skrull and allowed the others to make their moves.

[*See the last 2 issues -- Dino]

Turbo flicked the switches lining the far wall of the complex and the light fixtures sprang to life. Light flooded the room and Ricochet audibly exhaled.

"Wow, I can't believe it," said Ricochet as he and Turbo looked on the dingy, dust-covered room sitting in front of them. Turbo opened her mouth to defend the place when Ricochet cut her off.

"This place rocks!" said Ricochet as he danced from one corner of the room to another.

"Are you kidding? Look at how dusty the place is? Half of the furniture is covered up with drop-cloths and most of the high-tech equipment has been removed," muttered Turbo as she made her own examination of the space.

"Yeah, but who cares? It's ours now! We can throw whatever we want in here. This place is going to be the bomb when we're through with it!" said Ricochet as he started lifting sheets from the furniture.

"What are you doing? Stop that," said Turbo and Ricochet looked up at her with a puzzled expression.

"What? I thought you said this place was ours."

Turbo clasped her hands behind her back and wrung her fingers together. "It is. But we should explore the rest of the place before we start messing with anything."

Ricochet let go of the sheet and narrowed his eyes. "Are you sure it's cool if the team stays here, Turbo?"

"I'm sure. Let's just look at what the rest of the base has to offer." She began moving towards the other areas of the complex. After a moment, she looked to see if Ricochet was following and breathed a sigh of relief when she saw he was. Despite all her confidence, she wasn't exactly sure how the old Warriors would feel about her team staying here. But for now... what harm could a little exploring do?

"Do you have any idea how Jameson might react to our proposal, Dearborn?" asked one of the two men sitting across from Arthur Dearborn in the Roxxon company limousine as it maneuvered its way through downtown New York.

They had both been sweating bullets since the limousine had picked them up after the company meeting. Dearborn and his associates had been chosen to convince the Daily Bugle to cover the debut of Roxxon Oil's new energy source. It was their objective to get the best press they could out of Jameson... a front-page exclusive if possible.

The two associates planted in leather across from Dearborn knew the success of their objective might decide their continued employment. The cool demeanor of Arthur Dearborn was only unnerving them more than they already were.

Dearborn at least knew that his job wasn't dependent on the success of this latest endeavor. He knew he was only placed here because of his exemplary work in the public relations field of Roxxon Industries in the past. Roxxon couldn't afford to lose Dearborn for any reason. His loyalties to the company were too strong.

"Mr. Ferguson... Derrick. Try to relax. Jameson has agreed to hear us out. All we've got to do is go in there and calmly explain the reasoning behind our request. I'm sure Mr. Jameson is a fairly amicable fellow. He'll see that his paper can only benefit from having Roxxon on the cover," said Dearborn in a soothing tone of voice. It struck him as fairly ironic that he would be in this position. In the past Arthur Dearborn would have crumbled in a pressure situation. It wasn't often that he was needed to help others through a difficult trial. He had come a long way over the years.

"I suppose you're right, Arthur. But..." started Ferguson, but suddenly the car took a wild lurch to the right and all three men were pressed into a corner of the car.

The car jolted up an inclined ramp and Dearborn peered outside the tinted window. "We appear to be entering a parking garage."

"A parking garage? But we can't be at the Daily Bugle yet... can we?" said Ferguson.

Dearborn regarded him with an icy cool stare. "No, Mr. Ferguson. I'm afraid not."

"Then what...?" started Ferguson but he was interrupted by the sudden halt of the vehicle. The driver opened the driver side door and lumbered out. Dearborn watched him glance towards the back of the vehicle and then scuttle off into the dark.

Dearborn frowned and cautiously opened the door leading out into the parking garage. "Well, I suppose this is where we get out."

He stepped out into the dimly lit parking garage and the two associates followed. They looked around at the empty lot and then back to their car. Dearborn was just about to suggest that one of them drive the rest of the way to the Bugle when suddenly a ringing chord issued through the garage.

Six men emerged from the darkness and slowly approached the three businessmen standing by the idling limo. The two associates near Dearborn gasped as they saw the crowbar clutched in the hand of the thug leading the pack. The other members of the group held bats or knives. The lead thug clanged his crowbar on the ground and the sound emanated through the parking lot again.

"I take it you gentlemen are from Armor Oil?" said Dearborn in a calm and relaxed tone of voice. The thugs said nothing in reply and continued to approach. "I see that your employer is willing to stoop to assault and battery to stop the progress on the Molten Heart III."

The two associates watched from behind Dearborn as the thugs continued to soundlessly approach. The lead thug was focused on Dearborn, but the other five were grinning and stalking towards the two men behind him. They knew easy pickings when they saw them. So it wasn't a surprise that only the lead thug saw the eyes of Arthur Dearborn begin to glow.

The lead thug paused in mid-step, and was about to cry out to his buddies when a shadow passed over his vision.

"Now you boys play nice," said a feminine voice from above as Spider-Woman crashed into the lead thug and sent him sprawling to the ground. She bounded back up into the air as the next two punks in line took swings at her with their bats.

Spider-Woman shot a strand of psi-webbing, bonding the bats together in mid-swing. Then she descended amidst the two men as they struggled to pull the bats apart.

"Not too swift on the uptake, eh boys?" said Spider-Woman and then swung her leg around in a powerful roundhouse that sent the two men flying.

She glanced behind her as the fourth man tried to stab her from behind. She leapt up onto one hand and lifted her legs into the air to avoid the swipe, firing a venom-blast into the chest of the thug.

"Four down... two to go!"

The last two punks jumped for her at the same time. Spider-Woman jumped into the air and the thugs crashed into the ground together. Twisting her body in mid-leap, she webbed the two remaining thugs firmly to the ground.

"Done and done," she said, landing gracefully on the concrete floor of the parking lot. She turned her attention to Dearborn and the other two men who were scuttling off.

"Hey, where are they going?" said Spider-Woman as she approached Dearborn with her hands on her hips.

Dearborn smiled and she immediately felt a firm sense of distrust creep through her. This was a man adept at using a big fake smile and telling people what they wanted to hear to get what he wanted.

"Just looking for service so they can call the police. You know how cell-phones are."

"Riiiiight... well, I saw your limo here pull into the parking garage and since it's been deserted for weeks I figured something shady was probably going down," said Spider-Woman as she passed her eyes briefly over the limo.

Dearborn shuffled his feet but continued to smile. "I really appreciate the help...?"

"Spider-Woman," she finished, and then poked a thumb in the direction of the unconscious men splayed on the ground behind her. "What was all this about, anyway?"

The smile on Dearborn's face grew wider and Spider-Woman had to resist the urge to roll her eyes. "I'm afraid I couldn't be of much help to you, Spider-Woman. Anything I know is privileged information reserved for employees within the company I work for. But I do appreciate the help. Perhaps if you give me your address we could arrange some sort of compensation?"

"Oh, give me a break!" she said, turning and stomping off into the darkness.

Dearborn turned to observe his associates, who now seemed to have found a signal for their cellular phones. A shifting of motion behind him caused him to look back to the unconscious thugs and he frowned.

There had been six men poised to attack Dearborn and the other company men when they had exited the limousine. Dearborn was as sure of it as anything he had ever been sure of in his life. But there were only five men lying webbed to the concrete ground of the parking lot now. One of them was missing. Dearborn narrowed his eyes and the strange light shimmered from them once more.

When Manny Kowalski opened his eyes a shooting pain tore through his head and slammed down his upper back. But the pain didn't affect him nearly as much as the world around him. It made him want to vomit. Manny clenched his teeth together and closed his eyes. He counted to ten and then opened them again. The scene was the same. The entire world was upside down.

"Hiya, Manny!" said a chipper voice from below and Manny finally understood where he was. He and his crew had been ready to beat on some high-society types because they'd been paid real nice to do so. It had looked like an easy job until Spider-Woman dropped down and started pounding on everybody. The broad had busted him once before on a payroll job. Manny was not pleased to see her again.

Spider-Woman dropped from a thread of psi-web and dangled right in front of the tied up and hanging form of Manny Kowalski. She was certain there was a lot more to this than met the eye and she was determined to find out. Manny was a big-time squealer. She'd get it out of him eventually.

"Maaaannnyyyy... why don't you tell me about this job. Beating up on innocent suits doesn't seem your style. I'm dying to hear who hired you and why," said Spider-Woman as she spun Manny around and around on the psi-web. Manny clamped his teeth together and struggled not to lose his supper. Soon he was singing like a bird.

"A helicopter! You never told me you had a freakin' helicopter!" screeched Ricochet.

"I honestly can't believe it's still here. The Warriors removed most of the high-tech equipment in the complex," replied Turbo as Rico clambered into the pilot seat.

He pushed a few buttons on the panel in front of him but nothing happened. "Well, *we're* the New Warriors now. If we can get this sucker running, we are in business... the world is our oyster! Um, I don't suppose you know anything about fixing these things?"

Turbo shrugged her shoulders. "Nope."

Ricochet crossed his arms and peered at the controls thoughtfully. "Well, I'm pretty handy. But for something like this we're gonna need a Mr. Wizard. Fortunately, I know just the guy..."

"Not at all, sir... I just feel I should be handling the Molten Heart project, not babysitting some junior executives on a public relations jaunt..." said Arthur Dearborn into the cellular phone pressed tightly to his ear. The limousine - equipped with a new driver - had just pulled out of the parking lot of the Daily Bugle building and Arthur Dearborn was not in a friendly mood.

"What? No, Jameson was not interested in the *exclusive* we had for him. I believe his words, minus expletives, were - *I don't hand out free advertising and call it news!* - Yes, that's right." Dearborn's associates sat quietly across from him and didn't say a word. "Again, I feel my talents would be better utilized on the Molten Heart... that's all. I've done a lot of the development work, and you know I could protect it better than anyone... Yes?" Dearborn sighed. "Yes sir! Good evening to you too."

He flicked the cellular phone closed with as much force as he could muster. His face was beet-red and his eyes smoldered. Derrick Ferguson cleared his throat audibly and Dearborn's head snapped up and regarded him with mounting vehemence.

"Um... Mr. Dearborn? I thought you said Jameson would be happy to print the article for Roxxon if we just presented our case to him. He didn't seem cooperative at all," said Ferguson.

Dearborn slumped in his seat and pressed a hand to his face. "Oh, shut up, Ferguson."

Eddie McDonough leaned against a lamppost and watched as Johnny Gallo fiddled with the lock to the waterfront warehouse Johnny claimed was the former headquarters of the New Warriors. He had picked Eddie up from class and filled him in on what had been going down on their way to the complex that Ricochet had called "the Crash Pad". It seemed like Johnny was caught up in yet another super-hero jaunt with a bunch of super-powered goofballs, and wanted to drag Eddie into the middle of it one more time.

"You're gonna love this, man. The 'Pad is tight," said Johnny and Eddie rolled his eyes. He had noticed that Johnny had brought along his bookbag and he could see the rumpled mess of the Ricochet costume within. Eddie rubbed his bent, palsied arm uncertainly. He was hesitant about all this. It wasn't like he regretted his time as a Slinger, wearing the Hornet armor. But he definitely wasn't anxious to jump back into the hardships of being a costumed adventurer.

The lock finally popped and Ricochet opened the front door. Eddie peered inside and immediately noticed the Asian woman with the tight bodysuit and strange silver armor rising from one of the covered couches.

"Eddie, this is Turbo. Turbo... Eddie," said Ricochet and Eddie nodded in the direction of the Asian girl.

Turbo returned the nod and Eddie immediately sensed the unease she felt at having him there. Seemed like he wasn't the only one apprehensive about the whole thing. Not that he could blame her. He wouldn't want non-team members or strangers invading his space like this either. But

Johnny always did things his own way. No matter how rash or even stupid. Eddie could hardly believe Johnny had already unmasked in front of this chick.

"C'mon, Eddie. It's this way," said Johnny and Eddie cautiously followed his friend toward one walled-off portion of the warehouse. Johnny pushed through the door and a chill wind hit Eddie in the face. He blinked momentarily and then his vision cleared. He dropped his bookbag.

"Ta-Da!" said Johnny and spread his arms out like an Olympic gymnast who had just finished a perfect dismount.

Eddie scratched at his eyebrow. "You've *got* to be kidding me, Rico."

"Hey, would I kid?"

"You really want me to answer that?"

"Serious as a heart attack, man. This sucker is going to be like our Batmobile... and I know that only *you* got the kung-fu to get it moving again," said Johnny as he clapped a hand on Eddie's back and began moving toward a cluttered workbench in the corner. "What do you say, Eddie?"

"I don't know anything about helicopters!"

"Details, Eddie... details. You know high-tech. I know combustion engines." He walked back towards Eddie with a large book in his hands. "Together we'll have the War-chopper running as smooth as silk."

"War-chopper?"

"War-chopper," repeated Johnny and then slammed the heavy book down on the ground between them. A cloud of dust rose from the floor at the impact. "Besides... we got the manual."

Bolt had received the call from Turbo early that morning saying the new headquarters was open for business. He had already been downtown -- he'd crashed in a halfway house last night, though he wouldn't tell his teammates that -- and it took him less than an hour to arrive in front of the base. The Crash Pad looked more beautiful to him than any waterfront warehouse had business looking. It looked uncared for, to tell the truth -- boards were still clamped onto the windows and the place probably needed a fresh coat of paint or something. But for a guy who'd been living on the streets for months now... it looked great.

"Halt, evildoer!" said a voice from above and Bolt immediately whirled, electricity charging through his body. He had been dreading this. The time when some self-righteous hero would recognize that he had been one of Apocalypse's Pale Riders and come gunning for him.

Spider-Woman dropped into his field of vision and Bolt nearly screamed.

"Kidding... kidding. Try to unclench sometime, Bolt. You got a guilty conscious or something?"

Bolt regarded Mattie Franklin with an annoyed expression as she climbed the steps leading to the Crash Pad and stopped beside him. "Sneaking up on somebody with my powers is a good way to get fried."

Spider-Woman smiled and stuck her tongue out at Bolt. "I'll take my chances. Hey, is the rest of the gang in there?"

Bolt shrugged. "Don't know... I just got here myself."

She clapped her hands and then grabbed Bolt by the arm. "Let's hope they are, 'cause I think I've just nailed down our very first mission."

"And what would that be?" said Bolt as he was dragged into the building.

Spider-Woman grinned mischievously and Bolt didn't like the look of it at all. "You ever heard of Roxxon Oil?"

Next Issue: The Warriors throw themselves into a situation that's way over their heads and discover the secret behind Arthur Dearborn's freaky eye condition. All this, plus Ricochet's impression of pop legend Sting. Be here.

DISPATCHES FROM THE WAR

First letter this issue is from the question man, Jason Trenner.

Amazing issue. I wonder where Intelligensia has appeared before. If she's anywhere near as old as Supreme Intelligence... how did she avoid getting eaten along with the rest of the Skrull Homeworld. I also wonder how she could hide anything she'd done from the Supreme Intelligence. On the Questions...

The Intelligensia was first introduced in Marvel's latest *Captain Marvel* series. I decided to retroactively introduce her, just cause she's cool.

I don't want to step on the toes of anyone who might want to come along and detail the secret origin of the Intelligensia, but I would guess that she just wasn't on the Skrull Homeworld when Galactus consumed it. I would also guess she hides what she does from the Supreme Intelligence the same way the SI hides what he's doing from everybody else... she's smart and careful.

1) Since the Turbo armor can detect Dire Wraiths... can it detect Skrulls (they have the same genetic background)?

I'm quickly learning that the Turbo armor comes with a bundle of plot bombs. Going out on a limb, however, I'm going to say 'no'. There's enough genetic drift between Skrulls and Wraiths to make them separate species to the armor's sensors.

2) When will a member of the team tell Spiderwoman to shut up about Spiderman?

LOL. Hopefully never. I like Mattie just like she is...

3) Will the team fight the Warwear War Machine armor?

No plans for such a match-up. And I'm pretty sure the Warwear armor is lost in the timestream or some such anyway.

4) Can you please have the team fight Dracula?

Nah, there are other heroes out there that are better suited to fight the Count.

5) Is there any chance of Slapstick joining the team?

Now *there's* an idea... maybe a guest-appearance at least...

6) Is there any chance of the team trying to stop a Scourge from making a super villain massacre?

That sounds like a plot more suited to Mike's *Thunderbolts*. We'll hopefully be dealing with more 'real world' problems in this book.

Besides, it's already been done.

7) What exactly are the New Warriors going to do that no one else will?

Change the world, of course.

8) Will Iceman make a guest appearance?

No plans just now. Look for Bobby in his own series, though, and some recent issues of *Defenders*.

9) Will Rage be part of the team?

Not on my watch. At least one more member of the old guard will play an important role in this book by issue #6, though.

10) Will that one ratman (did he have a name?) that tried to kill Hornet try again?

I don't remember the ratman's name either (though I know who you're talking about). That's something that should be addressed in the future -- particularly since, with this issue, Eddie McDonough's a part of the book's cast -- but Mike and I don't have any plans for it just yet.

11) Is Spider-Man going to show up? And how fast will he leave after dealing with an obsessed fan-girl?

No Spider-Man before #6, for sure. After that... who can tell, especially with ASM-scribe Mike Exner scripting this series. I sure wouldn't mind seeing it.

12) Will the team battle the Omnivore?

Not likely, since I don't know who the Omnivore is. :-)

It Never ends!

One day it will, if we are patient and pure of heart.

Thanks for the letter, Jason.

Next letter is from our co-EiC and cult leader, Dino Pollard. Dino writes all sorts of stuff here at M2K. He also just picked up the writing duties on *Scarlet Spider* at the granddaddy of Marvel fanfic sites, MV1.

Nothing against Russ and Mike, but I couldn't get into this story-arc. It's not because it was bad, far from it. It's because I'm just not that big a fan of the space stuff. But, that's just my pet peeve. This was a pretty good issue - regardless of if you like the space stuff or not. The best thing about this series is the character interactions - although some of the dialogue seemed a little clichéd to me. Again, I'm reaching here. I'm enjoying this book, and the fact that it's a new take on the Warriors helps since I never read anything New Warriors in the past. I'm hoping that Hornet will be returning to the superhero game, though. He and Ricochet are what made Slingers great.

All the cliched dialogue is Mike's fault. Everything you liked was all me. :-)

Nah, actually I'm the big sappy guy, so any dialogue you didn't like was probably me.

As for Hornet, he's back in this issue -- if out of costume. Stay tuned for more Eddie as the series progresses.

Thanks for reading Dino.

Next and last letter is from Derrick Ferguson. Derrick writes nothing for M2K (a situation that continues to boggle me), but he does write *Justice Squadron* for DC Legends, and the kick-ass Dillon & the Voice of Odin for Frontier Publications. Check 'em out.

I've been catching up on some stories and/or series I've been meaning to read for AGES now and I was wondering what happened to that NEW WARRIORS you and [Mike] were doing at MARVEL2000? I'm not a NEW WARRIORS fan by any means (Gary Dreslinski over at AVENGERS2000 asked me if I wanted to take over writing that series there and I ran away from my keyboard screaming) and I never really liked any of the characters with the exception of Nova, but you guys really seemed to have something going there with the first two issues. Dumping the old team and putting together a whole new one was a good idea and the members you picked were an odd group, to say the least, but they DID catch my attention (especially Super Skrull... I'll read just about anything that has Super Skrull in it) and that's the main thing. So what happened to the rest of the story?

As you can see, the story didn't go anywhere. This series just fell victim to the increasingly hectic schedules of its plotter and scripter.

Glad you liked the Super Skrull's appearance. He's a favorite of mine too, though if I remember right, it was Mike's idea to use him for the opening arc.

As for the new team... well, I was a huge fan of the early Nicieza run on New Warriors. The thing is, because Nicieza and Bagley did so much and developed the characters so well, no one's ever been able to recapture that flavor and energy with a similar grouping. It's the same thing that, IMO, happened to DC's *New Teen Titans* series after George Perez left. So what we're trying to do here is recreate the feel of those early NW issues, with all new characters. Hopefully we're doing all right so far...

Thanks for writing Derrick. Now how about putting together a *Master of Kung-Fu* prop for M2K? :-)

**- Russ Anderson
4 February 2002**

All they want to do is change the world.

They are a band of young heroes drawn together by a knowledge of what's right, and a willingness to take on the battles their adult counterparts won't.

Welcome to the battlefield...



#4

“Heart of the Earth, Heart of the Son”

Part 2: Corporate Warfare

Written by Mike Exner III (script) & Russ Anderson (plot)

In Case You're Just Joining Us: *As the rest of the Warriors get settled into the previous team's headquarters, Spider-Woman saves a group of Roxxon employees -- including Arthur Dearborn, the man known as Sunturion -- from a band of thugs.*

Roxxon Oil, Cairo Research and Development Plant - Upstate New York

"Mr. Dearborn?" the receptionist at the large oak desk pressed a button on the intercom in front of her and removed the headset from her ears. "Mr. Hale will see you now."

"Thank you, Kelly," Arthur Dearborn said as he got up from the plush leather waiting-room chair and ran his fingers through his hair. Arthur crossed the waiting area and opened the door to his employer's office.

"Arthur. Good to see you," the man sitting behind the massive desk beamed at Dearborn as he entered the office and closed the door behind him. "I had a feeling you'd be paying me a visit."

"Mr. Hale," Arthur said with a nod. Jonas Hale got up from his desk as Dearborn crossed the room towards him. Arthur stuck out his hand and Hale shook it firmly. Dearborn winced at the firm, greasy grip of Hale. Hale seemed not to notice. Dearborn was once again struck by the casual attire and attitude of Hale... the jeans and black t-shirt, the dark sunglasses, leather flight jacket, slicked-back brown hair and handlebar mustache.

"Kelly tells me you've been waiting outside my office for well over an hour now, Arthur," Hale said with a tight-lipped smile. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"Well, sir..." Arthur said as he took a step backwards and plunked himself down into one of the chairs in front of Hale's desk. "With all due respect. I'm a little vexed as to what's been happening around here recently. The trip into the city to see Jameson..."

"Stop right there, Arthur," Hale said. "That trip was necessary and you know that. I really don't see why we're discussing this."

"Sir, I'm just trying to explain..."

"I know, Arthur," Hale said. "I understand completely where you're coming from. But you of all people know what Roxxon is about. What we're capable of accomplishing..."

"But, sir. Ferguson, Jenkins and I were attacked," Dearborn said. "We were assaulted in that parking garage by men who wanted information about the Molten Heart project. I would have had to reveal my abilities if that Spider-Woman person hadn't shown up. But we're not even pressing charges. I just don't understand why..."

"Dearborn," Jonas Hale crossed around the front of his desk and placed his hands on the sides of Dearborn's chair. "I need you to compose yourself here. You're the best man I have. I need you, Arthur. Roxxon needs you. Don't sweat this, ok?"

Arthur opened his mouth to respond, but the sound of the intercom on Jonas' desk interrupted him before he could.

"Excuse me, Arthur," Hale said as he moved to his desk and pressed one of the numerous buttons on his phone. "What is it, Kelly?"

"Mr. Hale, there's a call from a Mr. Limieux for you on line two."

"Ah, I've been waiting for this call all day," Hale said and then looked up at Arthur. "We'll discuss this in-depth later on all right, Arthur?"

"Mr. Hale..." Arthur got up from his chair and followed his boss to the door.

"Just trust me, Arthur," Hale said as he opened the door and hustled Dearborn out, "this'll all make sense by the unveiling tomorrow."

"I suppose," Arthur said as Hale closed the door behind him. Dearborn grudgingly turned towards the hallway and stomped in the direction of his own office.

Moments later he was sitting at his own desk in front of his company computer. Arthur was a Roxxon man. There was no doubt of that. But Arthur wasn't a foolish man by any means. He knew that more often than not, Roxxon was involved in things that weren't exactly on the up and up. More than that, he knew that Roxxon was sometimes involved in things that weren't even legal. But what could he do? What should he do? He wasn't the type of man to make waves...

Arthur closed his eyes and placed his face in his hands. When he opened his eyes again his hands were glowing with a brilliant golden light. Dearborn took a deep breath and then placed his hand into the keyboard of his laptop computer. The computer immediately turned on and booted up. Dearborn had the company intranet connection enabled within moments.

"I must be out of my mind," he said as the personal files of Jonas Hale came up on his screen. He had pulled this trick before... but it seemed even more wrong this time around. If he stopped now he might be able to apologize to Mr. Hale and...

"My god..." Dearborn said as a certain file opened in front of him and spilled its contents across his computer screen. Dearborn narrowed his eyes and continued to scan the files... all thought of getting out or apology gone.

Not far down the hall, Jonas Hale shifted his eyes to his own computer as a warning message popped up on the screen. Hale smiled as he watched the connection between his laptop and the one in Dearborn's office being made, and as Dearborn began to filter through his files.

"Ah, Arthur... predictable as ever."

The Crash Pad

"Roxanne!"

"Um... Rico?"

"You don't have to put on the red light!"

"Rico..."

"Those days are over."

Riiico..."

"You don't have to *SELL* your body to the night!"

"Rico!"

"*R-R-R-ROXANNE!*"

"Rico!"

"What, Spider-Girl? What?"

"It's not Roxanne, you idiot!" Spider-Woman insisted. "It's Roxxon! Roxxon Oil! And if you call me Spider-Girl one more time..."

"Enough, you two," Turbo said. "Spider-Woman, why don't you just start from the beginning and tell us what you know."

"Yeah, Spider-snacks... bring the knowledge," Rico said.

"Whatever..." Spider-Woman crossed the hangar where Rico and the rest of the team were gathered around the War-Chopper, "all I know is I take this guy Manny and his posse out. And he's all too willing to share some info with me on why he and his crew were trying to punk these Roxxon guys."*

[* Happened last issue -- Dino]

"So why was he doing it then?" Rico said and Spider-Woman shot him an annoyed look.

"Because some big time Roxxon project - an energy source of some sort called the Molten Heart - is supposed to be hit by a competitor. Now..."

"The Molten Heart," a new voice said from behind Rico, "I've heard of that."

"Um, excuse me," Spider-Woman said. "But who are you?"

"This is Eddie, Spider-chica," Rico said, hooking a thumb at the young goateed man currently pulling his one good arm out of the guts of the Warriors' helicopter.. "You should listen to him. He knows what he's talking about."

"Uh... thanks, Rico," Eddie said. The entire team was looking at him now and it was making him really uncomfortable. "The Molten Heart was designed by Roxxon to be a sort of mobile, geothermal energy plant. It's supposed to convert geotherm energy into electricity a lot more cheaply than anything else being used right now. It's a really big deal. If somebody's out to destroy it..."

Spider-Woman stepped in front of Eddie and cut him off abruptly. "We should head over to wherever they're debuting this Molten Heart thing and protect it!"

"No, we should call the police," Turbo said. "Who knows if this Manny guy was even telling you the truth, Spider-Woman?"

Spider-Woman glared over at Turbo. "Trust me. Manny is a worm and a coward. He's also a snitch. But I've used him for info before. He was definitely telling the truth."

"Look. We should just do both," Bolt said. "We can call the cops and let them know what we know and then we can meet back here tomorrow morning and head over there. Check it out ourselves."

"Hell yeah, Boltster," Rico said. "Eddie and I will even have the War-Chopper running by then. This'll be the perfect opportunity to test it. We can roll in style for our first mission."

"Right," Turbo said. "We meet back here tomorrow morning. Until then I suggest everybody go... wherever and, uh, just get some rest."

Channel Four Studios - Downtown New York

"Cut! Perfect! Everybody take five while we get set up for the next shot. Thomas! Thomas, get over to soundstage six to shoot your bullet wound scene."

Suzy Sherman stepped away from the set as the director continued to shout instructions to the rest of the cast and crew of *Secret Hospital*. The stagehands ran up onto the set and immediately began to change the scenery with props taken from the studio storage facility. Soon a hospital waiting room would become the interior of a Manhattan penthouse.

Suzy moved directly to the coffee pot. The cast was working late again... as usual. Suzy could barely keep her eyes open and her lines were getting more and more muddled in her head. Her thoughts kept running back to the New Warriors and her part in the battle with the Super-Skrull. She hadn't talked with any of them since the team had returned from their strange battle with the Intelligensia.* Almost an entire week had passed and she wondered if maybe the whole thing had fizzled out from a lack of interest.

[* The Warriors battled the Super Skrull and the Intelligensia in issues #1-2 -- Dino]

It probably hadn't been the greatest of ideas to give Turbo her cell-phone number either. She'd probably compromised her secret identity. If only she had a better handle on this super-hero crap. But she had to admit that she was grossly inexperienced when it came to fighting crime and interacting with other super-types.

"Thomas!" Sid, the director, shouted from across the set, "I thought I told you to go to soundstage six!"

"All taken care of, boss," Thomas said as he crossed the set and stopped in front of the coffee machine with Suzy. Suzy glanced up at him and then back over her shoulder at Sid. Even if the New Warriors were still on, she doubted she'd even have time to be a part of the team with all the work she was doing lately.

"...think of my shirt," Thomas said and Suzy looked up at him in confusion.

"What?"

"I see I'm still as adept at conversation as ever," Thomas said. Suzy smiled and fingered the rim of her coffee cup.

"I'm sorry, Thomas. My mind was elsewhere."

"It's cool, Suzy," Thomas said. "It's late. Sid is on the warpath and he has us all on edge."

"Yeah..."

"I was just wondering what you thought of my shirt?" Thomas held up a bloodstained rag and Suzy grimaced.

"Pretty nasty," Suzy said. "They're really going to make you go through that whole gunshot scene?"

"Looks like it. Damn writers took forever to decide though."

"You don't seem very worried about whether or not your character survives," Suzy said.

Thomas started laughing. "It's all a façade. I'm actually scared as hell I'm going to be out of work in a month. But there's no way I'm letting Sid or what he laughingly refers to as his writers see that."

"Well, the way I'm going, you can save me a spot in the unemployment lines."

"I seriously doubt that, Suzy," Thomas said. "You haven't flubbed a line in days, and you really seem to be getting a handle on your character."

"Right... like playing a west coast cheerleader transplanted to New England is a huge acting stretch. But thanks for the compliment."

"Anytime," Thomas said. "And look, don't sweat it. Sid and the producers love your look. I have a feeling you'll be working on this show as long as you want to be."

"Thomas!" Sid screamed from across the set. "Why aren't you bleeding all over soundstage six yet?"

Thomas smiled. "Gotta run."

"Later," Suzy watched as Thomas turned and sprinted over to the soundstage. A faint vibration shuddered through her hip and Suzy reached for her cell-phone. The small text screen displayed the number Turbo had given to Ultra Girl in case of emergency. Suzy put her thumb to flip the phone open when Sid began to yell again. Suzy paused, and then hesitantly placed the phone back into her back pocket.

"Voicemail can get it."

Empire State University Campus, Co-Ed Dormitory

Mickey flipped her cell-phone closed and leaned back onto her bed. Ultra Girl wasn't answering her phone. Mickey had hoped to tell her about tomorrow's mission. But if Suzy wasn't even going to pick up the phone there was no way she was going to leave a message that might compromise the girl's identity... or Turbo's for that matter.

Ultra Girl had seemed well-meaning to Michiko. A little air-headed maybe, but definitely the kind of person the new New Warriors could use as a member. Maybe Suzy wasn't interested in the team anymore. It had been nearly a week since anybody on the team had spoken to her. Hell, Mickey wasn't sure she wanted to remain on the team herself.

The Warriors seemed to be doing well enough with Ricochet and Spider-Woman's enthusiasm pushing things along. If only Turbo could shake the bad feeling she had about the team taking up residence in the old New Warriors' headquarters. Mickey had hoped to ask Night Thrasher about it before they even set foot inside. But Night Thrasher had gone off to intern for Stark-Fujikawa.* He had been gone since the first incarnation of the Warriors had split up. Turbo had absolutely no idea how to get in touch with him. Vance and Angel had no idea either. Turbo had contacted them at Avengers Mansion but they hadn't been much help. Her only real option was to just continue to do whatever she could for the team and hope for the best.

[* As established in Marvel's *Nova* #1 -- Dino]

Michiko sat up in bed and her eyes settled on the backpack she used to carry her Turbo armor around. She was restless and her roommates were gone for the night. Both girls had left her a message explaining that they'd gone out to drink. She had nothing to do. Nothing at all...

Mickey got up and began to slip on the Turbo armor. Maybe she wasn't sure about sticking with the New Warriors. But they were about the closest thing she had to friends right now.

About twenty minutes later Turbo landed on top of the Crash Pad and then dropped down through the skylight she and Rico had used earlier that day to get inside. Bolt jumped up from the couch with a start when she dropped down and his hands flared with electric light. But as Turbo smiled and began to approach, Chris relaxed and slumped back into his seat.

"I see you've started to make yourself at home," Turbo said as she surveyed the room. A TV, couch and plush chair were set up around the room.

"Figured somebody had to decorate this mother, and the last team was nice enough to leave most of the furniture," Chris replied. "This place was way too drab."

"Can't argue with you on that one. Now all we need is some pretty drapes for the..." Turbo paused as she heard a shout from the hangar area. "They're still at it?"

"Non-stop since you guys left this afternoon." Chris got up from the couch and thumbed the power button on the remote control. The television switched off and Chris began moving towards the hangar.

Mickey followed Chris as he entered the hangar, and saw Rico and Eddie still working on the War-Chopper. Turbo peered over at Eddie as he sat hunched over the engine compartment of the copter, his palsied right arm clutched to his chest. Suddenly a spark of electricity shot into the air from the helicopter engine and Ricochet jumped straight up to the top of the helicopter.

"I told you not to mess with that before I got over there, Rico," Eddie said. "You all right?"

"Yeah, yeah..." Rico replied and Eddie laughed.

"Dumbass. Now get down here and hand me a torque wrench."

"Ricochet still insists they can have it done by tomorrow morning," Bolt said and Turbo turned to him and laughed.

"I'll believe it when I see it."

"Any luck getting a hold of Ultra Girl?"

Turbo frowned. "No. I'm beginning to wonder if she even wants to be on the team anymore."

"How about you?"

"Um... what about me?"

"You still sure *you* want to be on this team?"

Turbo looked away. "Sure. I mean... I kind of owe it to a friend of mine that died, you know?" Turbo looked back to Bolt and smiled hesitantly. "You?"

This time it was Bolt's turn to look away. His thoughts immediately ran to his time with the Pale Riders.* None of the team knew anything about his past and they all seemed to trust him completely. But there was no way he was going to tell Turbo what he was thinking. "Hey... who wouldn't want to be a super-hero, given the chance?"

[* Bolt was a brainwashed member of Apocalypse's Pale Riders in the *Apocalypse: Ageless Fury* maxi-series -- Dino]

Turbo leaned against the doorway and sighed. "Right. Who wouldn't want to be a super-hero?"

The Crash Pad - the next morning

The entire team had gathered in the living area of the Crash Pad and Turbo watched each of them as they readied themselves. Eddie and Ricochet were wiped out on the couch in the mini-living room. Bolt was up and moving around the headquarters. He had been talking about setting up a mini-kitchen to go with the living room, but so far had only made a run to McDonalds to pick up some breakfast.

Ultra Girl wasn't there, but Turbo hadn't really expected her to be. Spider-Woman was perched on top of the armchair and seemed ready to pounce on top of both Eddie and Rico.

"Ricochet!" Spider-Woman said. "Get up, Rico. It's time to go."

"Just five more minutes, Ma," Ricochet said and promptly kicked Eddie in the face.

"Hey! What the hell!" Eddie said. He opened his eyes and then frowned deeply at Rico, who was still sleeping. "Stupid bastard." Eddie kicked out a foot and pushed on Rico's back, sending him heavily to the floor, arms flapping all the way.

"Take that, Super-Skrull!" Rico yelled and the entire team burst into laughter. Ricochet flushed a deep crimson.

"What are we messing around for? Is it time to go or what?"

"You sure you're ready, Rico?" Eddie hopped over Rico's head and started to move towards the hangar... laughing all the way. "Or do you need more alone time with the Super-Skrull?"

"Ok, guys," Turbo said as she followed Eddie into the hangar and the rest of the team followed her. "Let's get going."

"Everybody into the chopper!" Ricochet bounded over everyone's heads and jumped into the passenger area of the War-Chopper. The rest of the team followed behind and Eddie watched as Ricochet squeezed past everyone and hopped back out into the hangar with a pack slung over his shoulder.

Rico threw the pack at Eddie's feet and smiled. Eddie looked down with a sinking feeling and, sure enough, saw a glimmer of his Hornet armor as it peeked out of the open flaps of the pack.

"What the...? I don't do this anymore, Johnny."

"C'mon, Eddie," Ricochet said. "What's a super-team without the science guy? You know you're dying to get back in that suit! And how can I be expected to ride off into battle without my trusty sidekick?"

Eddie knew that Johnny was joking, but a sidekick was what he had always felt like around Ricochet... especially after that bizarre time with the Slingers and the love triangle between the two of them and Dusk. Eddie looked away from the bag and back up to Ricochet, but he made no effort to pick up the pack.

"Eddie, you're killing me here!" Ricochet said. "Turbo, tell him he's gotta come!"

Spider-Woman stuck her head out of the cockpit. "If he doesn't want to come, he doesn't have to, Rico. God, what are you... twelve?"

"Nobody asked you, Spider-baby."

"She's right, Rico," Turbo said. "Besides, we don't know exactly what we're flying into here. We can't guarantee his safety..."

"My *safety*?" Eddie said as he glared at Turbo, simultaneously hating himself for being so easily manipulated and trying to stifle the unmistakable urge to get the suit back on. "Move over, Rico."

"Oh, yeah," Rico said as Eddie picked up the pack and began pulling on the familiar purple-and-black armor. Bolt and Turbo moved to the cockpit as Hornet pressed a button to open the hangar's skylight.

"Here's goes nothing," Turbo said breathlessly as she cranked the engines. The New Warriors all held their breath as the turbines whined and the engines shuddered to life. For a few brief moments the War-Chopper remained planted to the ground and then, miraculously, it climbed into the air.

"WA-HOO!" Ricochet hung out of the side of the helicopter and whooped and hollered into the open air. The War-Chopper lifted higher and higher until it breached the opening of the skylight and turned to the north...

It wasn't until the War-Chopper was far out of sight that the man who had been watching the team stepped from the shadows of the roof. He crossed to the skylight and confidently punched a code on the keypad. The locks immediately disengaged and the man dropped down into the living area of the headquarters. He frowned as he observed the television and couch and armchair sitting in the Crash Pad. He crossed to the couch and swept his hand across the McDonalds wrappers scattered all over it, then plunked himself down in their place. When the team returned... they would be dealing with him.

Roxxon Oil, Cairo Research and Development Plant - Upstate New York

A huge gathering of press, stockholders and government officials stood in the huge parking area in front of the Roxxon building. A large stage platform had been raised with a podium sitting in the middle. Arthur Dearborn stood behind the podium with a bank of microphones in front of him.

"Roxxon Oil has always been a standard-bearer in the struggle to supply clean energy to the world cheaply. I can say with absolutely no reservations that today marks a milestone in that struggle..."

In the audience, Cristal Limieux yawned. The bore on the stage was really putting a downer on her day. She had no real desire to be in Upstate New York at a Roxxon facility. Honestly, no one she knew would want to be here either... except for her father.

She was only here because she'd received an early acceptance to Julliard. When her arrival in New York City from her native Paris coincided with Francois Limieux's planned business trip, her father hadn't hesitated to swoop her up and whisk her away to this demonstration.

Her father glared down at her as she yawned again and gave her a nudge. Papa was displeased as usual. Cristal straightened her posture a bit and struggled to resist the third yawn that was creeping up on her in as many minutes, as the dull suit behind the podium continued.

"We are rapidly depleting this planet's stores of fossil fuels. Solar energy is still decades away from being a viable energy source for all but the most specialized applications. Wind and water energy are both unpredictable, and the associated equipment is expensive to maintain."

"That leaves us with geothermal energy, and it's that source, the virtually limitless energy of this planet's molten heart, from which we plan to draw the fuel for the future."

Dearborn stepped away from the podium as the crowd gave him polite applause. He scanned the crowd and found the eyes of Jonas Hale. Hale smiled and nodded and Dearborn crossed the stage to a control panel. He pressed a button on the panel and a mechanized strut whirred. The panels shielding the Molten Heart fell away and it was revealed to the crowd of onlookers.

The Molten Heart sat on the stage motionless and the audience peered at it skeptically. The device was about ten feet tall and shaped like the nose of a rocket. The pod was colored completely black and had four turbines at its base. Dearborn pressed a few more buttons on the panel before him and the pod lifted into the air.

"Constructed of a vibranium/titanium alloy and utilizing specially-designed photovoltaic cells, similar to those used in solar energy converters, the Molten Heart will plunge ten miles through the crust and mantle of the planet and convert the heat and light to usable energy on the spot. This energy will then be transported back to the surface via hard-line connection, and supplied to the world from Roxxon plants everywhere. What you see before you is a prototype, but the plan is to have half a dozen Molten Heart units on every continent by 2007."

Dearborn smiled as the applause began to sound again from the crowd of onlookers but then paused as a helicopter rose from behind one of the many buildings and hovered over the stage where Dearborn and the Molten Heart stood.

The propeller from the helicopter sent a flurry of wind rushing at the onlookers and Dearborn himself. Dearborn reached for the microphone and was about to raise it to his lips to call for the

helicopter to move along when a sudden explosion rocked the entire facility. Dearborn dove for the ground and then raised his head, sweeping his panicked eyes quickly across the Roxxon company grounds.

The explosion had damaged one of the hangars across the airfield, and it was well on its way to burning to the ground. Dearborn knew that if the blaze wasn't controlled that it would catch the rest of the hangars and destroy the equipment inside. Dearborn set his eyes to the air and saw that the helicopter was descending. The crowd had panicked and was evacuating with help from the security force Roxxon had on location.

Dearborn got up to follow the crowd and his eyes flashed angrily with an inner light. This was his show and it was becoming a circus before his eyes. There was no way that he was giving up the Molten Heart without a fight. And there was no way he was letting a Roxxon hangar burn to the ground on his watch.

"That hangar is going to burn to the ground if we don't do something fast," Ricochet said. The War-Chopper had set down, and he was already bolting for the burning hangar.

"Ricochet, stand down!" Turbo said as she swooped out of the helicopter and landed in front of Rico. "The burning building is just a distraction. We still have to keep the Molten Heart safe!"

"So what do we do then?"

"We split our resources and tackle both of the problems," Turbo said, "like a team."

"Yeah... I can dig it," Ricochet said.

"Spider-Woman, Hornet and I will head to the hangar," Turbo said. "You and Bolt protect the Molten Heart at all costs. Let's move, Warriors!"

Turbo lifted into the air and together with Spider-Woman and Hornet, raced towards the burning hangar. Bolt climbed from the cockpit of the War-Chopper and joined Ricochet. Together they began to approach the stage with the Molten Heart but Ricochet paused when he saw Bolt stop moving.

"What is it?"

"The guards," Bolt said as he stooped down and examined an unconscious guard at his feet.

"Guess the muscle was too much for them," Rico said. "Let's keep moving."

The two heroes jumped up onto the stage and paused again as they spotted the saboteur. A figure in a yellow and blue jumpsuit was hunched over the Molten Heart - which had stopped hovering over the stage - and appeared to be setting some sort of device underneath it.

"Ten to one, that's a bomb," Bolt said and then began to run across the platform towards the hunched figure.

"Yeah, like I'm taking that bet," Rico replied and then leapt after Bolt. The figure in blue and yellow turned and Ricochet's danger-sense went off like a shot in his head.

"Bolt, look out!" Ricochet shouted, but it was too late. The saboteur whipped a gun from his belt and fired. Bolt tried to fire a shot of electricity at the villain, but the gun was faster. A strange sticky mixture spurted from the gun and covered Bolt from head to toe. Rico could see Bolt gasp for air and knew the kid was beginning to suffocate.

"Didn't Miss Manners ever teach you to fight fair?" Ricochet said and sent one of his throwing discs hurtling at the villain's head. The figure in yellow and blue snatched the disc out of the air and then pulled another gun from his belt.

Rico's eyes widened in shock as the gun fired, and he was caught in the neck by a dart. "How... how did you do that?"

"Piece of cake, kid," the figure said, "for the man they call the Spymaster." Ricochet's world began to wobble, and the last thing he saw before the tranquilizer in the dart dropped him was the Spymaster's back as he turned back to finish his work on the Molten Heart.

Turbo, Spider-Woman and Hornet landed in front of the hangar and paused. None of them were used to putting out fires. People were struggling to evacuate the building as the fire continued to spread over the roof of the hangar and down the curved walls.

"Our first priority is the people inside," Turbo said. "Spider-Woman, that falls to you and Hornet. Once you have everybody clear maybe I can use my turbines to blow this puppy out."

"That'll never work, Turbo," Hornet said. "You'll just make things worse if you go up there blowing the fire around."

"If you have a better idea, Hornet, I'd love to hear it."

"You terrorists just made the biggest mistake of your lives!" a voice shouted from behind them, and the New Warriors turned. Standing behind was a man glowing with all the intensity of the sun--Spider-Woman and Turbo were forced to shield their eyes and Hornet had to tint the glass eye-slit on his helmet. The man was covered in golden armor that blazed as bright as the fire. Energy crackled around his fists and he took a threatening step forward. Arthur Dearborn, in his full Sunturion form for the first time in months, was nearly out of his mind with rage.

Spider-Woman took her hand from her face and groaned. "I think we're in trouble."

Next Issue: *Sunturion! Spymaster! Crux!* The Warriors face their greatest failure as "*Heart of the Earth, Heart of the Sun*" concludes.

DISPATCHES FROM THE WAR

New issue, new letters. Go Dino Pollard, writer of *Ultimate X-Men*, *Bishop*, *Gambit*, and even some non-mutie titles!

These guys are GOOD!

Me and Mike, or the characters?

I'm loving the characters in this book. (Ah, that answers that...) Ricochet and Hornet have always been favorites, and I'm really starting to like Spider-Woman, Turbo, and Bolt despite my earlier reservations. The jury's still out on Ultra-Girl, however.

Yeah well, the way Ultra Girl's been acting, you're not the only one who's undecided on her. Stay tuned. (Glad you like the rest of them though.)

This series is a real winner, and the direction Russ and Mike are taking it in promises to be a load of fun. The concept is a great one.

I'm wondering how the old Warriors will feel about these new guys horning in on their territory, though.

Stay tuned. The answer to that is coming up sooner than you think.

Next thought is from Brad Horton, he of *Captain Marvel*, *Deadpool*, *Cable*, and *X-Men Omega* fame.

I'll admit, I'm not too keen on the characters starring in NW, but I decided to try this issue out, and I was thoroughly interested. I'm gonna do some online research to delve into the characters' histories a bit more so I can get what's going on when I go to read the back issues. I'll be back for next issue as well. :)

Here it is. And hey, let me and Mike know anything you might find online on the characters. Not like we did any actual research or anything...

Lastly, we have this title's first Editor's Choice Award, decided by and penned by co-EiC (not to mention *X-Force*, *Excalibur*, and *Wolverine* writer and all-around Shadow King pimp) David Wheatley.

New Warriors #3 By Russ Anderson and Mike Exner III.

I just like this issue from start to finish. The fight between Bolt and the Eel, the taking over of the old New Warriors place (yeah lousy grammar, but hey), Spider-Woman's foray in to Roxxon and all written with a nice tongue in cheek edge.

Yeah, Mike's great at tongue-in-cheek. Just ask Rachel Leigh Cook...

It doesn't take itself too seriously, without going the parody-esque route of Captain Marvel or the caricature path of Deadpool. It's light and frothy - the strawberry milkshake of M2K. And it works for them, because although these people are heroes they are also kids and they're having fun.

I have no idea how to take that strawberry milkshake comment... but I love it anyway! So much so, that it's now the title's pull-quote.

There's also a chemistry between Russ and Mike as well, because you can feel it the story and the words. I enjoyed it.

Yeah, Mike and I hang out a lot. He even lets me wear his sister's hat.

(No, don't try to figure out what that means, Mike's the only one who's going to get it.)

Congrats, guys, you are this week's Editor's Choice.

Thank yew, thank yew... Now if only I could figure out a way to fit the Shadow King into this title...

Letters concerning this issue can be sent directly to me at RussLee74@comcast.net, posted to the Marvel 2000 mailing list (you can join at [Yahoogroups](#)), or on the M2K message board, accessible from the [M2K main page](#).

All they want to do is change the world.

They are a band of young heroes drawn together by a knowledge of what's right, and a willingness to take on the battles their adult counterparts won't.

Welcome to the battlefield...



#5

“Heart of the Earth, Heart of the Son”

Part 3: Disillusionment

Written by Russ Anderson

In Case You're Just Joining Us: *The Warriors, in an attempt to prevent industrial sabotage at Roxxon's Cairo R&D facility, instead wound up with their forces split, battling Spymaster and a very angry Sunturion. Meanwhile, a mysterious visitor is waiting for them back at the Crash Pad.*

Roxxon Oil, Cairo R&D Plant, Upstate New York

Francois Lemieux shoved through the press of bodies, his bulk giving him an edge in the race to get through the panicking crowd of Roxxon investors and their families, and off the airfield. He dragged his teenaged daughter, Cristal, behind him. She wasn't making it easy though, as she was craning her neck to see what was going on back at the stage they were all running from.

"Cristal, hâte, damnez-vous!" Lemieux paused, his eye catching a familiar face, and he turned suddenly, cutting across the crowd at a right angle.

"Hale! What is the meaning of this! You assured me security was airtight for this event!"

Jonas Hale, member of the executive board of Roxxon, shook his head. He seemed...Lemieux thought "annoyed" was probably the best way to describe it. Not furious or angry or even surprised about what was happening here, just annoyed. And most of that feeling was directed at Lemieux.

"There's only so much we can do to keep helicopters away without breaking out the anti-air artillery, Francois."

"But what of the Molten Heart? Who will protect it from those hooligans?" Lemieux looked around, then leaned in closer to avoid being heard. "If they should discover..."

Hale was looking back through the crowd, his reflective sunglasses flashing in the morning sunlight while he calmly worked a toothpick around in his mouth. He was looking for Dearborn, the man who could put an end to this--and probably was doing so while Hale stood here and talked to this sweaty, unpleasant man. Hale didn't see him, and that was good. That meant he was out getting the job done.

"I wouldn't worry on that score, Francois. Roxxon has an ace-in-the-hole that should be making an appearance any minute now."

"What are you--?" Lemieux paused and looked around. Somewhere between spotting Hale and confronting him, Francois had lost his grip on his daughter, and now, as his eyes scanned over the crowd, he couldn't see Cristal anywhere.

Cristal Lemieux peered around the stage at the man in the blue uniform and trenchcoat who'd called himself Spymaster. He had taken down two of the costumed people who'd arrived in the helicopter minutes ago with ease, and now he was doing something to the black nosecone-shape of the Molten Heart. Cristal was fifteen years old, and an expert in nothing save for dance, but fifteen years of action movies and television told her that device Spymaster was fixing to the side of the Molten Heart looked a lot like a bomb.

She wondered. She'd known she was a mutant for nearly two years, ever since she'd accidentally iced the ballet floor under her feet during a performance. But she'd never actively used her power over thermal energy, outside of the occasional and minor revenge against a school rival. Her disposition didn't allow her to care terribly much about the fate of Roxxon's raw energy mill.... But on the other hand, her family had major holdings in Roxxon, and she'd paid just enough attention during the presentation to know the Molten Heart was a major initiative for the company. If it were destroyed, her father's coffers would take a major hit.

Decisively, Cristal leaned around the side of the stage, pointed a finger at Spymaster, and aimed a thin tendril of ice at the bomb. Her aim was impeccable, and the bomb froze solid in his hands. Cursing, the saboteur whirled around, and he spotted her immediately. A gun had appeared from inside his trenchcoat, and he popped off three shots in her direction. Cristal just managed to duck back behind the stage before the rounds chewed through the wood where she'd been standing.

<"He...he *shot* at me!"> Cristal said in disbelief. <"He can't do that!">*

[* Translated from French - Mono-lingual David]

Keeping his gun at the ready, Spymaster began to move toward the stage. He'd been prepared for the other two, but this girl was an unknown quantity. She was obviously a meta, so he had no intention of leaving her free to interfere further. He had a job to do, after all.

The blow came from behind, an elbow to the back of his neck that sent him stumbling forward. He turned...and just managed to duck under a swinging fist.

"Wanna...wanna try this again?" Ricochet asked. He had his fists up like a prize boxer, but he wobbled visibly on his feet. His throat dribbled blood from where Spymaster's tranq dart had landed a minute earlier.

Spymaster rubbed the back of his neck, then holstered his handgun. "I'm impressed. That dart should have put you out for hours."

"I'm full o' s'prises."

"I doubt that. I doubt you've got much left at all."

Rico lunged at him, but Spymaster sidestepped and drove a fist straight up into the young man's diaphragm. The air exploded from Rico's lungs, and he collapsed to the tarmac, gasping.

"Stupid kid. I was ready for you. I was ready for all of you." He gave Ricochet a solid kick in the ribs, knocking him over onto his side, and then turned and started moving back toward the Molten Heart.

He hadn't gone three steps before the tarmac in front of him burst into flames.

"You shot at me!" the tiny black-haired girl shouted. She was showing herself without fear now, striding angrily toward the saboteur, her eyes glowing a bright red. Flame generation as well as ice, then. Instead of engaging her--she was still too much of an unknown quantity--Spymaster pulled his trenchcoat up over his ski-masked face and dove through the wall of fire. He came out the other side sprinting for the Molten Heart.

"*Non*," Cristal insisted, and iced the pavement in front of the man. He fell onto his back hard.

Satisfied that her job was done--surely these so-called heroes could finish her light work--she looked around at the second young hero Spymaster had taken down. Dressed in stylized blue and white, he'd seemed to have some sort of electrical powers, so Spymaster had coated his face with some sort of non-conductive goop. He was currently writhing on the ground, suffocating.

Well, that was easily sorted. Cristal extended a hand toward him and froze the mask solid. The kid stopped writhing, seemed to gather himself, and then fired a bolt of lightning out of his mouth. The mask shattered, and he sucked in air gratefully.

She looked back toward Spymaster, and was flabbergasted to see that he was on his feet again and still moving toward the Molten Heart. And neither of these "heroes" were going to recover in time to stop him. While her mind was still racing, trying to decide whether to just set the jerk on fire, she saw him turn his sprint into a homerun slide, slipping neatly beneath the undercarriage of the pod. A heartbeat later, he had emerged on the other side, and was running full-tilt toward the admin buildings on the far edge of the airfield.

<"You don't get away that easily,"> she said, and raised a hand in his direction.

"Get down!"

Ricochet tackled her from the side, knocking her down just before the Molten Heart erupted in a geyser of flaming metal and plastic.

"Oh, we are in such deep doggie-doo."

While a hangar burned at their backs, and a flood of humanity fled all around them, the remainder of the New Warriors--Hornet, Turbo, and Spider-Woman--faced a very angry, very powerful man in orange and gold armor on the other side of the airfield.

"Who is this guy?" Hornet asked, his turbines humming softly as he hovered.

"Sunturion," Spider-Woman replied. "He's completely made up of microwaves, got all sorts of powers. He fought Iron Man."

"Iron Man?" Turbo demanded. *"The Iron Man?"*

"How are we supposed to fight a guy who can hold his own against Iron Man?"

Spider-Woman looked at him. "Did I say he held his own? He kicked Iron Man's ass!"

"Hey, where did he go?"

The other two looked around at Turbo's question. Sunturion had vanished.

"Uh oh..."

"Turbo! Watch it!"

Hornet's cry came too late. Sunturion had become visible again directly behind her and, before she could face him, blasted her across the airfield with such force that her hurtling form punched right through the wall of one of the burning hangars.

"You're all lucky I don't cook you where you stand," Sunturion said, striding slowly toward the remaining two Warriors, like he had all the time in the world. "But that's too easy...you're going to pay for the damage you've done to Roxxon today. You're going to jail, and you're going there for a good long time."

"Listen to me!" Hornet said, putting out his hands palm up to show he meant no harm. "We're here to help, not--!"

"Liar!"

Sunturion became a visible beam of microwaves, and flashed straight into Hornet's power armor. There was a massive *KRA-KOW* of released electricity, and the man inside the armor went rigid, sparks and fluids spraying out of the armor from seemingly every joint and crevice, until finally his turbines died and he toppled out of the air.

Spider-Woman moved to catch him...but in the moment before she would have, she saw Sunturion materialize right beside her.

Crap.

Deciding the armor would probably protect Eddie from the worst of the impact, she let him drop and instead somersaulted over the barrage of microwave energy that flashed past her. She cast a net of psi-webbing over Sunturion, knowing it would have absolutely no effect on a guy who could go intangible, then hurdled a stack of crates as two more blasts tore by on either side of her, close enough to singe her bare arms.

She landed on the other side of the crates...and found Sunturion standing directly in front of her.

"Damnit!" she shouted, and swung a punch at the creep's orange face. When her fist made contact, it was met with a burst of power that slammed her backward, smashing the crates to splinters as she skidded to a halt on her backside. She was barely conscious as Sunturion moved toward her, his feet not touching the ground.

"Trying...to...help..."

"Save it," Sunturion said, and raised his palm, ready to blast her into unconsciousness.

"Help! Oh god, the computers! It's destroying the files--!"

Sunturion paused, his hand relaxing and his fingers curling into a fist as an aging man in a white labcoat came running by. He was another one of the people fleeing the burning hangar, and Sunturion hadn't paid attention to any of the others before now. But none of the others had been screaming about files being destroyed.

Sunturion vanished, and reappeared in front of the scientist. As Arthur Dearborn, Sunturion was head of the Molten Heart project, and he knew every tech and engineer on his staff. He seized the man by the arms. "What did you say, O'Neal? *What did you say?*"

"You--you--I don't--"

It was obvious the man was too frightened of the armored face to speak. Sighing, Sunturion shifted back into handsome, well-dressed, familiar Arthur Dearborn. "O'Neal, it's me. Now what is this about files being destroyed?"

The engineer stammered for a moment in obvious surprise--no one besides Hale knew Dearborn was anything other than a high-placed scientist--but then he gathered himself and seemed to realize this wasn't the time to worry about such things.

"There's a worm virus, Mr. Dearborn," O'Neal said. "It's been introduced into the share systems, and it's eating everything that has to do with the Molten Heart. It's insidious and fast-moving, and--and I couldn't do anything about it with the building burning down around me. It's even torn down the firewall and it's spreading to the Internet!"

"No..."

Dearborn's face had gone slack. All his work, two years of his life...

He shifted back into Sunturion, and then he was gone, leaving O'Neal to continue his flight, and the three heroes to slowly regain their senses. All the while, the hangars continued to burn.

"Are you okay?" Ricochet asked.

"I...would be better if...you kindly...got *off* of me!"

"Oh, like this is the first time I've heard *that*. Love the accent, by the way."

Ricochet lifted himself off of the French girl (cute, but a little too young for him, by the looks of her), and looked around at the Molten Heart. There wasn't much left of it, but what was there was still burning. Good thing he'd recovered enough from that dart to pay attention to his danger sense, otherwise Miss French and Snotty here would probably be missing her face right now.

He caught a glimpse of the blue guy, Spymaster, dashing toward the cluster of storage buildings on the side of the airfield opposite from the hangars.

"No way, Thighmaster. I'm not 100%, but I'm still good enough to catch you."

He looked over toward Bolt. The guy was on his hands and knees, still sucking in air as he worked to peel the rest of that goop off of his face. He wasn't going to be much help in a footrace. Rico, on the other hand, was feeling better by the second. Whatever Spymaster had shot him with, he'd seriously misjudged the dosage.

He started running, feeling better and better the more his legs pumped. The bad guy reached the buildings half a minute before he did, but Rico had no intention of following him into those narrow walkways and maybe getting bushwhacked for his trouble. Instead, he leapt onto the tongs of a forklift parked conveniently by a loading door. From there, he bounded to the bars laced over the forklift's cab, and then he was high enough to make it to the roof of the nearest building. He sprinted across it and looked over the side, and there was Spymaster, rounding a corner two buildings away.

Rico leapt to the next roof and sprinted until he'd reached the walkway Spymaster had turned down. The saboteur had paused in front of the personnel door to one of the buildings, and was looking around to make sure no one was about. Ricochet plucked a stun disk from his jacket, ready to put the guy's lights out and not feeling particularly ashamed about sucker-punching the jerk...but then Spymaster pulled open the door of the building and slipped inside.

"Oh-ho! The plot thinnens..."

Rico stuck the disk back on his jacket, then leapt down from the roof to follow.

"Spider-Woman! Grab that beam!"

"I'm on it!" Mattie Franklin bounded over the heads of some technicians who, until a few moments ago, had been trapped between two walls of open flame inside one of the burning hangars. She landed on the fuselage of what looked like an experimental aircraft, minus the wings, and looked up.

A badly scorched I-beam that had been threatening to fall from the scaffolding near the ceiling chose that moment to finally let go. Mattie cast a blanket of psi-webbing over it as it fell, to protect herself from the heat. And then she caught it. The impact barely phased her, but it did demolish the thin metal stands the fuselage was supported on, upsetting Mattie's balance and almost forcing her to drop it on the fleeing scientists anyway.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the only structurally shaky part of the scaffolding, and a great chunk of it broke loose and came down with a roaring *boom* right in front of the bay doors. Hornet barely managed to fire a guide wire around one of the civilians and yank her out of the way. Half of his systems were fried after Sunturion's attack, including his flight motor, but he took a moment to be silently grateful that the wire wasn't one of them.

"Turbo! We need another way out!"

Mickey got some altitude, turned her hyperpunches on the curved wall of the hangar, and blasted a hole through it. Standing on the tarmac directly outside the new opening, was Bolt.

"Cripes, you wanna aim a little higher next time? You almost gave me a buzzcut!"

Spider-Woman bent the steel back, making a wider passage, and the team hurried to get the rest of the civilians out.

"Where's Ricochet?" Turbo asked as she deposited the last of them on the tarmac.

Bolt shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine."

Sunturion phased through the window of his office and dropped to the plush carpet behind his desk. He flipped open his laptop, concentrated for a moment, and then plunged his intangible hand through the keyboard and into the processor.

There was a disorienting moment of transition as his too-human mind raced to translate what he was perceiving inside the processor, and then he found himself floating in the center of a massive silver tunnel, billions of ones and zeros racing down the inside surface. The numbers traveled relative miles away from him, and then they were consumed by a great, burning whiteness at the very end of his vision.

The whiteness. The emptiness the worm virus left behind as it passed. That was what he needed to fight.

He began pumping code into the system, working at speeds almost as fast as the computer's own processor, hoping to kill the virus or divert it or, at the very least, build a rough firewall for it to smash itself into its binary components against. His human mind translated this as racing down the silver tunnel toward the killing white, and casting a glowing curtain of energy over it.

But the whiteness actually seemed to *feed* on his power, and it flashed outward suddenly in a virtual nuclear explosion.

"NO!"

The white burned everything else away, leaving him floating in a void.

Well, almost a void. Letters miles and miles tall hovered before him, giant black avatars of his failure. They spelled:

FILE NOT FOUND

"no..."

Sunturion blinked and he was in his office again, his hand still plunged into the keyboard. He looked at that connection for a moment until, snarling, he flexed his fingers, and the laptop and the desk it was sitting on were blown to dust. Then he roared out of the office again, shattering the glass this time, and most of the wall it was attached to on his way out.

The room was lined with desks, packed together so tightly it brought to mind easy analogies about sardine tins. And it was hot. And Jonas Hale, standing there in the midst of this crisis with a tiny smile, like all the cards were still his, was an annoying bastard. All of this added up to make Francois Lemieux a very unhappy man.

"What are we doing here?" he demanded. "We should be out there, on the tarmac, trying to contain the damage!"

"And what exactly would we do 'out there', Francois? The fire department and the police will be here shortly. Those metas in the helicopter will see to saving the people in the hangars--"

"But I thought you said they were--"

"Just be still, Francois. Five more minutes, and I promise all your questions will be answered."

Francois called Hale something rude in French, but Jonas just kept smiling. It was all coming together. The board had been sure this was one scam even Hale couldn't pull off, but here they were, and all the major players were behaving exactly as he'd predicted. The thing with those super-kids had been a stroke of luck--keeping Dearborn distracted long enough to take care of the Molten Heart had been the only part he was really worried about, but the kids had seen to that after the faked attack by the Armor Oil goons drew that Spider-Woman chippie into it. From here on out, it should be clear sailing.

The door creaked open, and Spymaster stepped into the room. "It's done," he said, nodding at Hale. "The prototype's destroyed and the virus has been introduced. The fires are taking care of the rest of the physical evidence."

"Who is this?" Lemieux barked. Hale sighed and rolled his eyes behind his mirrored sunglasses, reminding himself that the fat Frenchman was a valued member of Roxxon's board of directors. Then he flipped out his cellphone, hit a button and put it to his ear.

"Do it," he said, then snapped the phone closed again and looked toward Spymaster. "The money's been transferred into the account you specified. I--and Roxxon--thank you for a job well done."

"You should know by now, Hale. You hire Spymaster, that's the only kinda job you get."

"I. Don't. Believe. You."

All three men looked in different directions, and all of them found themselves looking at the blank mask of Sunturion. The man's face had appeared in the screens of every PC on every desktop throughout the room. Beams of coherent energy fired out of each of the monitors and converged on a single spot right next to Hale, coalescing into the full physical form of Sunturion. Almost faster than the eye could follow, Spymaster's hand disappeared into his trenchcoat, and reappeared with a handgun. He fired, and the explosive tip bullet passed right through Sunturion and exploded against the opposite wall of the room. Sunturion flicked his eyes in Spymaster's direction, and the gun melted in the saboteur's hand. He started to cry out in pain and surprise, but was cut short when Sunturion blasted him backwards through a row of desks.

"Two years of work, Mr. Hale. Two years of my life! I knew you were up to something when I hacked into your files, but this! Why?"

Lemieux was hiding behind Hale, but the focus of Sunturion's ire was just giving with an easy grin, as if this was all a simple misunderstanding, and any minute now Dearborn would see that.

"Why, Arthur? For the simple reason that 'your work'...didn't."

"What are you talking about?"

"The photovoltaic cells, Arthur. They never worked."

"No, you're lying. I checked that work myself."

"But you haven't been directly involved in that aspect of the development for over a year, and there's a reason for that. We realized a while ago that there was just no way to make the collector cells efficient enough to collect the energy, but durable enough to push into the planet's mantle. So the board and I slowly pulled you back, put you to work as a manager rather than a scientist. So you never knew. In fact, I believe Mr. Lemieux here was in on that decision."

Sunturion gave Lemieux a look. The fat man gulped.

"But why go to all this trouble?" Sunturion was pacing now, gesticulating wildly. "Why not just admit failure and move on? Why waste an entire year building up to this fiasco?"

"Do you know how many tax dollars the government gave us when we started showing results in the first year? Let me give you a hint, Arthur: lots. Roxxon can't afford to lose that much face, or that much money. And so...this. Our friend there--the one you just knocked silly--has planted evidence that will implicate our competitor, Armor Oil, in all of this. We lose the project, and maybe a little bit of faith from our benefactors in Congress, but Armor Oil is in for a hell of a storm when this gets out."

As he talked, Hale stole a glance over Sunturion's shoulder and saw that Spymaster was getting to his feet. The saboteur steadied himself against a wall, then reached back into his trenchcoat and drew out yet another gun. This one was sleek and utterly black, like something out of *Star Wars*. It was a rad-eater, a handheld weapon designed to disperse energy beings in general, and Sunturion in particular. Hale had given it to Spymaster on the very real chance that Dearborn wouldn't go for all this, despite his history of being a toe-the-line company-man. Apparently Spymaster had decided the freak wasn't going for it.

Hale agreed, so he kept talking, returning his eyes to Sunturion's faceplate.

There was a *BANG*, and for just a heartbeat, Hale thought Spymaster had fired, but then he saw the cover go flying off of a vent overhead, followed by a bright yellow disk that arrowed out of the shaft and bounced off of the back of Spymaster's skull. The saboteur was unconscious before he struck the floor.

A pair of silver boots poked out of the vent shaft, attached to a teenage boy in a blue-and-white uniform and dark blue jacket. He dropped to the floor and marched indignantly toward Spymaster to retrieve his disk.

"You guys got some problems! I mean it, man. Everybody in this room except him." He jabbed a finger at Suntuion as he used the other hand to hang the disk back on his jacket. "The rest of you are going to jail...and I hope you get some psychiatric help, 'cause the lights are on, but nobody's been home for ages, and all the bulbs are about to burn out. You dig?"

"Who are you?" Hale asked, looking flustered for the first time this morning. Then his face cleared, and the confident smile returned. "You're one of those kids, aren't you? The superheroes. What do you call yourselves again?"

"The New Warriors, spanky. Don't bother writing it down, because I don't think you're gonna forget us any time soon." He picked up the rad-eater, looked at it for a moment, then tossed it to Suntuion. "He was going to shoot you with this. Think maybe he got it from your boss?"

"You're out of your depth here, kid," Hale pressed, while Suntuion studied the gun. "What're you going to do, testify to what you heard? You really think any court in America is going to accept the testimony of a kid in a mask?"

"That's for shooting me in the neck, you trigger-happy dork," Rico said, kicking Spymaster in the ribs. Then to Hale, "You're forgetting something Magnum P.I. I got the saboteur."

"No," Suntuion said suddenly. "You don't."

Blistering torrents of microwaves cascaded over Ricochet, and he would have screamed in pain if he'd had time. He lasted three seconds under the barrage, and then collapsed over Spymaster's back.

"Arthur!" Hale cried, pumping a fist in the air. "I knew we could count on you, old man! You always were a bit of a straight edge, but you've come to your senses!"

Suntuion strode over to where the two costumed men had fallen, stooped down, and picked Ricochet up. "I've worked for Roxxon for too long to let someone threaten it, Mr. Hale," he said. "But that was my last act as a Roxxon employee. You can consider this my resignation."

Suntuion looked at the wall, and it erupted outward in a shower of plaster and wood. And then he simply walked out, carrying Ricochet and leaving Hale and Lemieux to pick up the pieces.

The fire trucks had arrived minutes ago, and were working valiantly to keep the blaze in check. But it was obvious to everyone there--including the New Warriors Hornet, Bolt, Turbo, and Spider-Woman--that it was a lost cause. The hangars were gone, and whatever they'd contained was lost.

"Man," Bolt breathed. "Helluva way to start a new superhero team, huh?"

"At least we got everybody out," Spider-Woman said, but even to her own ears it sounded like reaching.

"Oh crap. Get ready guys, here comes trouble."

At Turbo's warning, they all turned and watched as Sunturion dropped to the tarmac before them. They started to fall into battle stances...but then they saw who the man was carrying.

"Rico!" Hornet said.

"Let him go, you thick-headed asshole!" Spider-Woman railed, moving forward, waving her fist. "He didn't do anything to you!"

"On the contrary, he saved my life." Sunturion knelt and gently set Ricochet on the ground. And then he took a step back, giving Hornet and Turbo room to rush forward and check on their teammate. "You may want to get him some water...he's suffering from dehydration."

Hornet looked up sharply at that, his teeth grinding together in frustration. "Dehydration. Funny...that's what microwaves do, isn't it?"

"I apologize for attacking you. I know now that you had nothing to do with all this, that you were only trying to help. I have been...horribly misguided in my actions for many, many years." He looked off toward the blackened wrecks where the hangars used to be. All the hardware, all the files both local and remote, all gone.

"But I believe it's time to change that."

And then he flashed away, leaving a sparkling trail through the smoke-filled sky.

<"Cristal! There you are, my darling!">

Cristal Lemieux stopped three steps inside the doorway and met her father's charge, allowing him to scoop her up in his arms and fawn over her. The room was wrecked--half the desks that had filled it an hour ago were smashed to splinters, and there was an enormous hole in the west wall, facing out onto the airfield. Police swarmed over the place. Jonas Hale was on the other side of the room, giving a statement.

"No one was more shocked than I was to find out Mr. Dearborn would do something like this. Obviously the process that turned him into this energy being has had a slow but dramatic effect on his mind..."

<"Are you hurt?"> her father was asking. She started and looked around at him, as if she was surprised to find him there. Then she shook her head. <"Why did you wander away like that? You could have been killed!">

Cristal didn't answer. She looked at Hale again, and thought of what she'd seen when she'd followed that costumed boy with the jacket--Ricochet, she believed his name was--when she'd followed him into this building. He'd taken to the air ducts, and she couldn't have followed without alerting him to her presence, but by that time, she'd been far enough inside that she'd heard her father and Hale speaking with the saboteur, with Spymaster. So she'd crept closer, positioned herself right outside the door. And she'd heard everything.

<"Cristal, are you sure you're alright?">

She looked at her father again, and she nodded. But deep down, she wondered if she might not have to rethink her feelings toward him before too much longer.

No one had talked much since they'd left Cairo, the deadpan *whup-whup-whup* of the War-Chopper's rotors were the only sound as they made their way back toward New York City. Ricochet in particular had flatly ignored even the most obvious attempts at getting him to talk. He simply sat on the edge of the helicopter's open side door, sipping on a bottle of water the firefighters had given him and letting his feet dangle out over the New York state countryside.

Nobody needed to point out that they had failed today. Sure they'd saved a lot of people in those hangars, but they couldn't do a damn thing about the nasty bit of corporate warfare Roxxon was preparing to unleash on Armor Oil. Nobody had died, true, but the bad guy still got exactly what he wanted. And that was almost as bad.

"Well...look at it this way," Bolt said, turning from the co-pilot seat to look back at his teammates. "If we *had* found some way to implicate Roxxon in all of this, it might have put a lot of people out of work, right?"

Rico ignored this, and Turbo--who was piloting--kept her eyes on the sky, but Spider-Woman and Hornet gave him scathing looks. Bolt raised his eyebrows, said "Ooo-kay," and turned back toward the controls.

The rest of the trip passed in silence, and soon, Turbo was pressing the remote access switch for the Crash Pad's skylight--there was a Post-It note labeled GARAGE DOOR next to it--and guiding the helicopter down into the hangar.

They were filing out of the helicopter when the striking blonde girl in a skintight orange bodysuit dropped through the open skylight after them.

"Oh my gosh," Ultra Girl said. "Are you guys alright? I saw what happened in Cairo on TV, and I got here as soon as I could from the *Secret Hospital* set--"

"Hectic shooting schedule, huh?" Spider-Woman spat. No one else paid much attention to the new arrival.

"What--what's that supposed to mean?"

"I've got a better question for you," a new voice said from the shadows in one corner of the hangar. That got everyone's attention, and they all turned as the intruder stepped into view.

He was wearing a bulky suit of high-tech armor, mostly black with red piping. The first thought that flashed through most of their heads was *Iron Man*, but only two of the Warriors present-- Turbo and Spider-Woman--managed to piece together who the guy was, despite his new look. Turbo gasped.

"Just where the hell do you people get off calling yourselves the New Warriors?" the new Night Thrasher demanded.

Next Issue: *Just where the hell do they get off calling themselves the New Warriors? Get ready for some changes, boys and girls.*

DISPATCHES FROM THE WAR

Sharp-eyed readers who even remember what happened last issue (it's been about 5 months, after all), may have noticed that a name is missing from the credits at the top of this issue. Scripter and all-around great guy Mike Exner III has decided, for personal reasons, to step back from fanfic altogether. Mike is a pal, and I'm going to miss getting scripts back from him, seeing what crazy thing he had Ricochet saying or doing that wasn't in my plot but, damnit, fit *so well*. I wish Mike the best of luck in whatever it is he's doing now, and wish he'd drop me a line now and again.

I had the plots for #5 and #6 done before Mike decided to step back, so I'll be finishing up those scripts, at which point the team will be at a place where I'll feel comfortable leaving the book to other hands. It's been a hoot while it lasted, and stepping away from the Warriors is probably one of the hardest departures I've made in fanfic, but it just ain't the same without X3 around.

Anyway, let's get to the review. I had to dig *deep* in the mail bags to find this one. It's from our dear-departed founder Dino Pollard. Dino doesn't write anything anymore, so you can just forget the plugs, buddy!

This would be one of my favorite books at M2K if only it came out on a regular basis!! Sheesh guys, get on the ball already...

Probably my fault. Mike finished issue #4 in, like, an hour. And if he'd had another plot to work from then, he probably would have dove straight into #5 (thereby saving me the trouble of writing it months later). But he didn't, so he didn't.

Anyway, #6 is already scripted, just has to be proofread, so it should be out soon. Not that you're around to read it anymore. Loser.

Russ's plots are amazing. And Mike's scripting is dead-on. He's a natural with the teen banter going on in this book. The best part is, naturally, the interactions between Hornet and Ricochet (glad to see that Hornet is on the team, BTW). And despite my earlier reservations, I'm interested in seeing how Russ and Mike weave Crux into the group.

Well, Crux was intended to be a full member by the end of #9, preceded of course by her guest-appearance in this story arc (did you see her?). It'll be up to the next writer to determine if that ever happens now, though.

Letters concerning this issue can be sent directly to me at RussLee74@comcast.net, posted to the Marvel 2000 mailing list (you can join at [Yahoogroups](#)), or on the M2K message board, accessible from the [M2K main page](#).

**- Russ Anderson
21 September 2002**

All they want to do is change the world.

They are a band of young heroes drawn together by a knowledge of what's right, and a willingness to take on the battles their adult counterparts won't.

Welcome to the battlefield...



#6

“Reflections”

Written by Russ Anderson

In Case You're Just Joining Us: *The Warriors failed in their attempt to prevent oil giant Roxxon's sabotage on one of its own devices. Roxxon escaped unscathed, as did their contracted saboteur, Spymaster. Out of sorts, and disillusioned, the team returned to the Crash Pad, only to be confronted by the all-new, very angry Night Thrasher.*

The Crash Pad.

The New Warriors--Turbo, Bolt, Ultra Girl, Ricochet, and Spider-Woman--and Hornet (who was really just along for the ride) stared in astonishment at the heavily-armored man who had infiltrated their adopted headquarters, and who had just questioned their right to call themselves the New Warriors.

Bolt was the first to react. He stepped forward, fists clenched, little bolts of lightning zigzagging over his curled fingers. "Who are you? And what are you doing in our headquarters?"

"Your headquarters?" the armored man demanded. "I'm the founder of the New Warriors, Bolt. The *real* New Warriors. This is *my* headquarters."

Bolt's eyes narrowed. Whoever the guy was he knew his codename, and that meant he probably knew what he could do. Still, the guy was wearing armor, and no matter how well-insulated it was, a sufficiently strong lightning bolt would probably short out something. He took another step forward.

But then Spider-Woman was standing in his way. She gave Bolt a look, an *I'll handle this* look, and turned toward the other guy.

"Night Thrasher, right? That's a different look, more Iron Man than Batman, but it's gotta be you under there. Look, maybe you didn't get the memo or something, but Turbo over there cleared our staying here and using the name with the last team."

Spider-Woman looked over her shoulder, waiting for Turbo to verify this. But Turbo was looking away, not quite able to meet any of their eyes. Slowly, everybody in the room realized exactly what that meant.

"You *did* actually clear it with the old guys, didn't you?" Spider-Woman asked.

"I couldn't find any of them," Turbo sighed, pushing a lock of hair out of her face.

"Couldn't find any--" Bolt straightened, looking around the hangar. "You mean we've been trespassing all this time?"

"I talked to Justice and Firestar, but they didn't know how to get ahold of any of the others." She looked across the room. "Including you, Thrash. I was sure you wouldn't mind, once I actually got in touch with you."

"Except he apparently does mind, Turbo!" Spider-Woman said. "What the hell!"

"I'm sorry."

There was a beat of silence as everyone in the room took this in, and then Night Thrasher said, "You can't just waltz in here and call yourselves the Warriors. I don't even know any of you people except Turbo, and I'm not going to let you tarnish our na--"

"*Tarnish?*" Ricochet demanded. He'd been quiet up until this point, still dealing with what had happened at the Roxxon plant in Cairo, but now he exploded. "Who the hell are you to--?" He stopped, and waved a hand dismissively in Thrasher's direction. "Man, forget this. And forget you. You want the name all to yourself? Fine. I don't need this garbage."

He turned and leapt onto a nearby packing crate. From there, it was another impressive leap to one of the rotors of the War-Chopper. Springboarding off of that, he managed to snag the edge of the skylight, and a moment later he'd scrambled onto the roof.

"Rico!" Hornet cried. He willed his armor to take to the air, to follow his friend, but nothing happened, and he remembered his flight apparatus had been fried back in Cairo, courtesy of Surturion.

"He's got the right idea," Spider-Woman said at Hornet's elbow. Then, to Night Thrasher, "You're a jerk."

She turned and leapt, following Ricochet's path---crate, helicopter rotors, skylight--and then she was gone too.

There was a beat of silence, and then Night Thrasher spoke again. "Turbo, I think we should talk alone."

Turbo nodded, but Bolt was shaking his head, slicing a hand palm-down through the air. "No way. It doesn't matter whether we're the Warriors or the Young Allies or freakin' Power Pack...we're still a team. And we're not going to let you get one of us all alone without knowing what your deal--"

A black-gloved hand fell on his shoulder, and he turned to follow its line up to Turbo's face. "It's okay, Bolt. I can handle this."

Bolt's mouth tightened into a line, and for a moment Turbo thought he was going to disregard her. But then he nodded stiffly, shot a scathing look at Night Thrasher, and then turned on his heels and moved toward the door. Shrugging, Hornet followed after him.

"Uh..." Ultra Girl said, realizing she was alone in the room with Turbo and the black armored skater guy, and further that she was standing directly in-between them. She raised a hand toward the departing backs of Bolt and Hornet, shouted, "Hey, wait up!" and hurried away across the hangar floor.

When they were alone, Turbo reached up and lifted her silver helmet off her head. As she was shaking her long black hair out, Night Thrasher did the same, opening his armor with a hiss of pressurized air.

Dwayne Taylor looked down at her from the Night Thrasher suit and sighed. "Mickey. What the hell did you think you were doing?"

"Rico! Hey Rico, wait up!"

Johnny Gallo paused in his headlong plunge down 7th Avenue and looked back. The man whose car he happened to be standing on immediately began blaring his horn, but Johnny gave him the hand. Spider-Woman was swinging toward him on a strand of psi-webbing. He frowned and turned away, leaping to the next car.

"Go away! I don't want to talk!"

"Yes you do! I can tell!"

Ricochet bounded off the hood of a conveniently-placed Honda, and just made the roof of a city bus as it blasted through a yellow light. He turned, watching with satisfaction as Spider-Woman lost ground in her pursuit. "If I wanted to talk to you, I would have brought up Spider-Man. Now buzz off!"

Scowling, Spider-Woman released her webline, letting it dissolve behind her as she touched down on the brick facade of a nearby building. She ran along the side of the building for a moment, picking up speed, then launched herself toward the traffic light Ricochet's bus had just passed, grabbing it and flipping gracefully over until her feet were braced on the aluminum arm

of the light. Then she snapped her legs straight, sending her body rocketing out over the mid-afternoon traffic. She twisted once, and with a soft thump, landed on the bus' roof directly in front of her teammate.

"What the--? But you..." Rico looked back over his shoulder to where she'd been a moment before. "How did you *do* that?"

"Are you quitting?" she demanded.

"What?"

"You heard me. Are you quitting the team?"

"You heard Darth Vader back there. We can't be the New Warriors, hence there isn't a New Warriors to quit. Watch it. Low bridge."

Spider-Woman leapt straight up, and Rico did the same as a low-hanging traffic light swept over the top of the bus. They landed without incident, and Spider-Woman didn't miss a beat.

"You're going to listen to him?"

"You know what, Spider-Girl? I'm really not in the mood for this right now, and--"

She clenched her fists and shook them up by her face. "*God!* Why do you *do* that? Why do you call me anything but Spider-Woman?"

"To get reactions like that out of you, of course."

Ricochet suddenly leapt from the top of the bus. As Spider-Woman watched, he caught a lamppost and twirled halfway down it before launching himself towards a nearby building. He needed to bounce off an awning, but he managed to reach the fire escape he was aiming for without touching the ground. He began to scramble upward, toward the roof.

"Hey! Come back here!"

"What did I think I was doing? I thought I was keeping the Warriors alive."

Turbo pushed through the doors into the Crash Pad's main living quarters, flinging her helmet onto the kitchenette counter and moving toward her duffel bag. Night Thrasher followed, the bulk of his armor forcing him to duck through the doorway. The two of them were the only ones left in the building, it seemed--Bolt, Hornet, and Ultra Girl had already left.

"That isn't the issue," he said. "If you'd brought Vance or Robbie or Rich back, that would have been fine. I would have known the name and team was in good hands. Instead you've got this...motley assortment. I mean, do you even know anything about them?"

"I know they stood with me against the Super Skrull. I know what they lack in experience they make up for in heart. Turn around, Dwayne."

She was shucking the top of her uniform and, with another sigh, Night Thrasher put his back to her. As he listened to her changing behind him, he began disengaging the hermetic seals and clamps that kept his own armor securely fastened about him.

"You know," she said--and even though he couldn't see her, he could tell by the rough sounds she was making that she was really starting to get mad--"the original Warriors weren't always the honed, well-oiled team they eventually became. How can you sit in judgment on this group when they've been together barely a week?"

"The difference is that I handpicked all the originals. Nova, Marvel Boy, Firestar. I knew everything it was possible to know about them before I even approached them. And even when Speedball and Namorita came along, I made sure I found out all I could about them before giving them the key to the executive washroom. Has it occurred to you that maybe you don't know everything you might need to know about these people?"

"Stop beating around the damn bush, Dwayne. Do you know something I don't?"

Dwayne gave no reply, the soft sounds of his disengaging armor the only indications he was still there. With a sigh, Turbo zipped her capris up and turned.

Dwayne Taylor was standing next to the Night Thrasher armor, wearing a polo shirt and a pair of Dockers. He must have been wearing all that inside the suit, but everything looked like it had just stepped off the ironing board. He slapped a flat panel on the side of the armor, and it slid aside to reveal a pair of brown loafers. The size and the shape of the compartment suggested that this was exactly what it had been built to carry. He leaned over and slipped them on.

"Let's go for a walk."

The Coffee Bean.

"Uh...should you really have that out?" Suzy Sherman, aka Ultra Girl, asked. "What about your...you know..."

"My what?" Eddie asked, looking up from his work.

Suzy leaned over the table, cupping a hand to the side of her mouth. "Your secret identity."

Eddie looked down at the tabletop they were seated around--he and Bolt on one side of the booth, Ultra Girl on the other--and regarded the flight component he was currently in the process of peeling apart with a tiny Philips screwdriver. The component, which had been fried by Sunturion up in Cairo several hours earlier, was about the size and shape of a Palm Pilot, but it was the bright purple of the Hornet armor. The rest of the suit was in the duffel bag at his feet. Eddie shrugged unconcernedly and went back to work.

"I don't think it's much of a problem," Bolt said, making sure to keep his voice low. "Nobody's likely to see that thing and go, 'Oh my god, that guy must really be the intrepid hero known as Hornet!'"

"Never been called intrepid before," Eddie said.

Ultra Girl looked around them, unconvinced. The Coffee Bean was a social hub for nearby Empire State University, and the place was packed with late afternoon study sessions and social gatherings. A couple people had seemed to recognize her from her day job already, despite the totally unflattering overcoat Bolt had scrounged up to cover her costume. It was always possible some superhero groupie was hanging about. Those people freaked her out.

She wasn't entirely sure what the three of them were doing here, or why they were even sticking together after that bombshell they'd had dropped on them back at the Crash Pad. Bolt seemed a little shellshocked by it all, and she supposed she was too, but the guy with the palsied arm, the guy working on his Hornet suit even now, wasn't even really a member of the team. They all seemed to be hanging together, more than anything else, out of a lack of anything better to do.

Her thoughts were interrupted when the cute kid she knew only as Bolt stuck his hand across the table at her. "I'm Chris Bradley, by the way."

Ultra Girl blinked in surprise. She waited two or three beats, wondering what the proper etiquette was when someone just revealed their identity to you like that, then she went ahead and took his hand.

"And you're...Eddie?" she said, pointing to the handicapped guy.

He gave a distracted smile, still bent over his equipment. "That's what they tell me."

"Wow." She straightened. "Well, I guess teammates are supposed to know who each other really are. My name's Suzy."

"Did I mention I'm not really a part of the team?" Hornet asked.

"Suzy Sherman," Chris said, ignoring Eddie and grinning across the table at the beautiful blonde girl.

Suzy's brow furrowed. "What? How did you know--?"

Chris cleared his throat and looked straight down into his drink, finding whatever was there fascinating enough to hold his attention while he swirled it around. It took Suzy a moment to realize he was embarrassed. "Well...I've, uh, kind of seen you on *Secret Hospital*."

"Oh, you're *that* Suzy Sherman?" Eddie asked, looking up sharply and pushing his glasses up with his good hand so he could get a better look at her.

Suzy just gaped at them for a moment, and then burst into musical laughter. Eddie and Chris couldn't quite bring themselves to look at each other, so each of them patiently waited until she was done.

"Boy," she said, wiping her eyes, "the people who guess the target demographic for the show are *all* wrong, aren't they?"

Chris cleared his throat. "Yeah, well uh...do you, y'know...with you being on the show and all, do you plan to stick with the team?"

She shrugged, taking a sip of her coffee. "Sure, why wouldn't I?"

"Well...you haven't really made much of an effort to keep in touch, after all. And with what Night Thrasher said..."

She leaned back, crossing her arms in front of her ample chest. A small--very small--smile touched her lips. "I've got a horrendous shooting schedule. You know that, right?"

Chris put both hands up. "Nobody's calling you a slacker, Suzy. Especially not with the way you hit. I'm just wondering if you really have time with all your other commitments."

Suzy let her eyes drift away from them and settle on the kids crowded at the coffee shop's counter. "It's up to you guys. If there's a team to be a part of, I guess I'll be there, regardless of what we call ourselves." She looked around at Eddie, ignoring Chris' obvious discomfort. "What about you? Are you sticking around, or is this a one-time team-up deal?"

Eddie paused in what he was doing, but kept his eyes fixed on the gutted technology on the table. He thought about how relieved he'd been after that business with Mephisto, when he realized he'd never have to put on this armor again.* And yet...he'd rebuilt the lost components in the time since, so there had to be some part of him that still wanted to do this kind of thing. And, really, it had been good today. Good to help people again.

[* See Marvel's *Slingers* #12 - David]

That was what he told himself anyway. And all along, the image of Turbo flitted teasingly across his memory. Strong, lithe, and beautiful. Like somebody else he'd had a crush on not so long ago--and he really should have learned his lesson about pining for super-women after what happened with Cassie, but he couldn't deny this new attraction anymore than he could deny he'd been waiting to put the Hornet suit on again.

"I guess..." he said, finally looking up from his work, "as long as the team will have me, I'm in."

Ricochet picked up speed, darting across and over the rooftops as fast as he could without breaking something. And still--*still*--he could hear her voice coming from close behind him. Pacing him, not letting him gain even an inch of ground.

"Like you're one to talk about Spidey!" Spider-Woman shouted. "You're *such* a closet Spidey groupie."

That finally got a reaction out of him. "*What?*"

"I mean it. Look at that costume. At least I'm honest about my influences."

"Somebody *gave* this to me!"

Ricochet came to the edge of this latest roof, and paused at the mad drop below and the vast open space between this building and the next. For just a moment, his confidence faltered.

"Wait up!" Spider-Woman cried again, and that decided him.

He launched himself out into space. His mutant powers supposedly included only his danger sense, but some days he thought there was more to it because, brother, he had a helluva long-jump. But it wasn't going to be enough today. He only made it about three-quarters of the way across the gap before gravity told him to sit down and he began to drop below the level of the next roof.

"Oh no! Is this the end of Ricochet?" he asked. Since it was a rhetorical question anyway, he didn't sweat the lack of a response. Instead, he reached out and snagged a makeshift clothesline. It held his weight, and he used it to whip himself at a nearby window ledge. With his nimble fingers hooked on that, it only took a couple of quick hops to reach the roof in question. Turning, he saw his pursuer stop at the opposite ledge.

"Ah ha! Try that, Spider-chippie!"

Spider-Woman scowled, then jumped. She arced downward at the same angle that Rico had, snagged the same clothesline, hooked the same window ledge, and gained the roof in a series of similar hops and jumps. A moment later, she was standing in front of him, arms spread like an Olympic gymnast who just completed a textbook dismount. Rico could only stare.

"Okay, Miss Proportionate Speed of a Spider. Fine. But can you do this?"

He leapt up onto a nearby cylindrical smokestack. Balanced on the domed metal top of it, he leapt straight up, flipped forward, and landed on the stack again. Without pausing, he leapt up

again, flipped backward this time, and landed again, this time on one hand. He balanced there for a moment, then leapt down, bowed, and crossed his arms, waiting for her retort.

Spider-Woman leapt onto the same smokestack, and repeated his movements perfectly, only instead of flipping once, she flipped twice, both forward and back. And once she was balanced on one hand, she slowly drew her fingers in until she was balanced on just one finger. Then, with her free hand, she twirled herself gently on that finger, like a top.

She leapt down. Ricochet was tapping his foot.

"Fine. But how strong are ya?"

"I know about what happened in Cairo," Dwayne said as he and Mickey Muashi strolled south down 7th Avenue together.

"Big surprise there," she replied, looking in shop windows as they passed. When she ran out of shop windows, she began watching her feet, and when that became too much, she looked at the sky. Anything to keep from looking Dwayne in the face. "I don't suppose it matters to you that we were set up. That apparently Roxxon intended for us to be there, to keep Sunturion busy while they sabotaged his--"

"Mickey." Dwayne sighed. "Look, I know I came off as a hardass back there, but remember who you're talking to. I'm not your enemy. I'd just feel more comfortable about this if you had some of the old guard onboard to back you up. You weren't even a Warrior yourself for very--"

"Wait." Mickey had stopped, and Dwayne had taken a couple extra steps before he realized it and turned back. She had her head cocked, listening.

"What is it?"

She put a hand up to silence him, and then she heard what she'd been listening for. They both did. A soft cry of pain drifting out from the next alleyway.

The two Warriors shared a look. Then, without discussing it, they started to run.

With the groan of stressed metal, the huge, fully-loaded green dumpster, coated with slicks of grease and oil and other less identifiable fluids, rose into the air, casting a bouquet of rancid meat down the length of the alley. On one end, supporting this entire mess in her thin arms, was Spider-Woman.

"In case you're wondering...this doesn't smell any better up close." She gagged and slowly, careful not to spill anything out of the dumpster and onto her head, she set the weight back down again. Then she turned to look at Ricochet, cocking her head back toward the garbage bin.

"Your turn."

Standing nearby, Ricochet cleared his throat uncomfortably, then turned and looked up toward a nearby roof.

"Okay, fine. But how's your aim?"

It didn't take Mickey and Dwayne long to find the source of the cries. Once they'd descended into the twilight murk of the alley, they nearly tripped over a trio of teenage boys. Each of these three was wielding some kind of weapon--one had a knife, but the others were carrying lengths of iron piping--and they were standing over a fourth teenager, a boy curled up on his knees on the pavement, covering his head with both arms.

They didn't bother to ask whose side they should be on. Dwayne put his shoulder down and drove it straight into the knife-wielder's left kidney, disarming and dropping him before his friends had even realized they weren't under attack. One of them turned and took a backhanded swipe at Dwayne with his length of pipe, but in his haste he missed, and Mickey had planted her foot in his sternum before he could swing again. He went flailing backward into his friend, and the two of them fell over each other.

"Stay down," Dwayne said, yanking the pipes out of both their hands. One of them went for him anyway, so he chopped a hand across the kid's throat. He didn't want to seriously hurt the guy--not until he knew exactly what was going on here--but he still hit him plenty hard enough to drop him.

"You," Dwayne said, pointing one of the pipes he'd appropriated at the only kid who hadn't really been roughed up yet. "You can stand. Come on, up."

Nearby, Mickey was kneeling next to the kid who'd been beaten. She guessed him as the same age as the other kids, but not as powerfully built. There was blood on his fingers and in his hair. Mickey put a hand on his shoulder and said, "Are you alright? What happened he--?"

The kid had turned his head cautiously, peering out at her from beneath his quavering arm. He looked like nothing so much as a very nervous turtle at that moment, but Mickey didn't find the comparison funny at all. She noted the color of his skin, the direction of his lineage, immediately. The kid was middle-eastern, or maybe Indian.

Mickey's face darkened, her eyes narrowing and her lips drawing together tightly. She stood suddenly and whirled on the one thug who remained standing.

"Why did you do this? Huh? Why?"

Dwayne, taken aback by her ferocity--he was supposed to be the bad cop, after all--took an instinctive step between her and the boy. "Mickey..."

"Was it because he's Arabic? Did you beat him and knock him down in this filthy alley because of who his parents are?"

The kid hesitated, eyes flicking nervously from Mickey to his victim to Dwayne and back again. "This is none of your business," he said finally. "You *or* your boyfriend."

"The *hell* it's not my business! You racist pieces of--"

"Hey, those ragheads killed my dad, lady!" This from the thug Dwayne had hit in the kidneys. He was still grimacing every time he drew breath, and holding his side in pain, but he was able to speak again, and he was slowly getting to his feet. "He worked in the towers..."

Mickey stepped forward, and by the time the punk had regained his feet, she was standing there, staring him down. "And my people killed more white Americans than any lunatic with a plane ever has or ever will. It was called World War II. Pearl Harbor? Any of this ringing a bell? You want to punch and knife me now?"

"Mickey," Dwayne said. "That's enough."

She ignored him. "Think you're man enough? C'mon, little boy! I'm just a helpless girl. And I deserve to be held accountable for the actions of everyone who's Japanese, right? Even though I was born in this country?"

The kid didn't reply, just stared at her stonily, wincing every couple seconds as his expanding lungs jarred his bruised kidneys.

"Coward," Mickey decided, and put her back to him without a second look.

She moved toward the wounded boy and crouched down next to him again, reaching out a hand to gently shake his shoulder.

"It's okay now, they're not going to hurt you. What's your name?"

The kid peeked out from under his arm again, saw that the coast really was clear, and slowly began to straighten. He knuckled some blood and grime out of his eye and said, "Arman. My name is Arman."

"Are you okay, Arman? Did they break any bones?"

"I--I don't think so."

Mickey pulled out her cellphone and dialed 911. "We're going to get you some help. Just sit tight." She looked around at Dwayne as she waited for the emergency operator to pick up. He was still holding the two standing thugs at bay, making sure they didn't try to run for it, but the rest of his attention was now focused on her. He was looking at her like that, thoughtfully, when Mickey asked the woman on the other end of the line to please send an ambulance and cruiser.

The Coffee Bean.

"So we're in agreement?" Suzy demanded, slamming a fist on the tabletop. Across the booth from her, Chris grimaced as a noticeable crack appeared in the surface of the table. "We go back there and tell that jerk he can't take the name from us. We're the New Warriors now, damnit--it's not like he's got a legal patent on the name or anything--and if he doesn't like it, he can take a big, fat hike!"

"That's right!" Chris agreed, amused and honestly jazzed at the idea all at once. Funny that Suzy hadn't made much of an effort at all to be part of this team before today, and now she was acting even more the cheerleader than Spider-Woman. Chris aimed a finger at the door. "You go, girl!"

"Pack up your gear, Hor--Eddie," Ultra Girl said, rising to her feet. "I'll get the check."

Eddie looked up from his work and watched Suzy stomp off. Then he turned a puzzled look on Chris.

"You heard the girl, man!" Chris roared, really getting into it now. He sprang to his feet and moved off after Suzy with a purpose. After a moment, Eddie sighed and began stuffing his gear back into the duffel bag.

"Like hanging out with a team full of Ricochets," he muttered. Then he zipped the bag up and got up to follow.

The incident in the alley had been dealt with. Both Dwayne and Mickey had given their statements to the police, and both had suffered through the requisite lectures about calling the police before involving themselves in a street brawl next time. Mickey wanted to tell them that, after fighting Dire Wraiths and Super Skrulls, a couple of punks in an alley were literally nothing, but somehow she managed to restrain herself. Arman was put in an ambulance, his attackers were put in squad cars, and all was well that ended well. Mickey and Dwayne continued their walk in silence.

Not surprisingly, their path had then taken them to where the World Trade Center had stood not so long ago. They stood there for a while, looking across the street at the fledgling reconstruction that was underway. Mickey put a hand out and swiped a finger across the brick facade of the

building they were standing next to. It came back black with soot, and she rubbed it between her thumb and forefinger thoughtfully.

"Were you here when--?"

"I was in California," Dwayne replied. "With Stark-Fujikawa. I had to watch it happen on the news."

"I put on the armor and came out to help when it happened. It was the first time I'd worn it since the Warriors broke up, but I only got to help for a few hours before the mayor asked all metahumans to stay away. He was afraid we were doing more harm than good." She paused, as if waiting for Dwayne to comment on this. When it became apparent he wasn't going to, she sighed and said,

"The Warriors have never been about being a superhero and fighting Dr. Doom or Ultron for me, Dwayne. At first I thought it was just because Michael seemed to expect it of me. And then he died, and I thought that I was doing it to honor his memory. But I just realized recently--today in fact, and it took Spider-Woman to show me when she dragged us into that Roxxon business up in Cairo--that it's about this." She waved at the construction, and both of them saw the wreckage that had been piled stories high there not so long ago. "Preventing things like this. Fighting the fights that the Avengers can't or won't. And if you don't want us to be the Warriors, that's fine. It's your call. But we'll just go do what we're doing now under another name." She grinned suddenly, pushing a lock of hair back over her ear and looking around at Dwayne from below it. "Somebody's got to try to change the world."

They both knew she was quoting a tagline, but Dwayne didn't immediately comment on this. Instead he just looked at the place where two proud towers had stood for almost another full minute. When he did finally turn to look at her, she was surprised to see him wearing a grin that matched her own.

"And that's all I wanted to hear, Mickey," Dwayne Taylor said.

"C'mon, concentrate!"

Spider-Woman squinted, unconsciously poking her tongue out as she took careful aim at the row of empty beer bottles lined up on the edge of the next roof. After a moment, she held her breath, and a burst of bioelectric power flashed from her extended hand. The venom blast sliced across the gap between the buildings...and passed at least a foot above the row of bottles. She slapped her hand down on her thigh in exasperation. "*Damnit!*"

Standing next to her, Ricochet was grinning--she couldn't see his mouth with that stupid mask covering it, but she *knew* he was grinning. He nodded once, then plucked one of the weighted metal disks off the sleeve of his leather jacket.

"Now watch the master," he said, and flung the disk at the next building without looking. The projectile moved so fast it almost disappeared from sight, the *crash* of an exploding bottle from the roof opposite the only sign of its passing.

"Voila."

Spider-Woman crossed her arms, trying not to sulk and failing utterly. "I'll be impressed when you can make them come back to you, Captain America-style."

"Oh, I can. But I figured we'd better start you off with the baby stuff first."

He was gloating now, apparently forgetting how badly she'd beat him in the agility and strength portions of their impromptu competition. Sighing, Spider-Woman ran both hands through her hair and looked across the city toward the northeast. Toward Uncle Jonah's apartment.

"So...you're probably gonna head home now, huh?" she said.

"Nah...well, I don't know." Rico rubbed the back of his neck, and seemed to be wondering if he should say anymore. Eventually he must have decided that doing so was better than letting the silence stretch out, and he said, "Nothing really at home except my dad. And we don't get along well since mom died."

"Oh...sorry." Pause. "My mom died too, and my dad and I don't get along that well either. In fact, I kinda ran away a while ago."

"Huh. Whattayaknow. *We do* have something in common."

Spider-Woman brightened. "Weeelllll...if neither of us are going home, we could head back to the Crash Pad and tell skateboard boy to stick where the sun don't shine!"

Ricochet looked at her blankly for a moment, then slowly began to nod his head. "Yeah. Yeah, that sounds like a great idea. Race ya!"

He took off for the opposite side of the roof and, without a moment's hesitation, leaped off. Spider-Woman let him go, and when he was out of sight, she turned, raised her arm, and proceeded to pick each of the remaining beer bottles off the far ledge with her venom blast. When they were all gone she smiled and, figuring Rico had enough of a headstart now, turned to follow him.

The Crash Pad.

Dwayne had the exterior engine compartment of the War-Chopper open, and was poking around inside while Mickey watched from inside the cockpit, idly flipping through the helicopter's hefty maintenance manual.

"So you guys got this thing running again all by yourselves?" he shouted, his voice muffled by the metal between them.

"Ricochet's friend Eddie did. The guy in the purple armor?"

"He's called Hornet."

Mickey stuck her head out of the cockpit, all she could see was his backside and dangling legs hanging out of the engine. "Boy, you really did your homework, didn't you?"

The doors on the other side of the hangar, the ones that led to the Crash Pad's living quarters, boomed open suddenly, and Eddie and Chris came striding through, led by an angry Suzy Sherman.

"Night Thrasher, Turbo! We have to talk!"

Dwayne pulled himself out of the engine compartment and dove for the other side of the copter at the same moment Mickey was crawling through to that side as well. The two of them regrouped, out of sight, while Suzy continued to yell at them.

"Apparently," Mickey said, "the others have unmasked in front of each other."

"I'm not quite ready to do that," Dwayne replied, reaching for the Night Thrasher armor.

"Yeah, me neither."

"This isn't going to wait!" Suzy cried. "C'mon out, don't make me fly over there."

"Ultr--Suzy," Eddie said. "Maybe we should come back later. The way they ducked out of sight--"

"You think we're interrupting something?" Chris asked.

Eddie shrugged, trying to hide the disappointment he felt.

This gave Suzy pause. For a heartbeat, she lost her momentum, then she shook her head decisively. "I don't care. This is important, and we need to discuss it now. There's plenty of time for...that later."

"Plenty of time for what?"

The three of them turned back towards the War-Chopper, and saw that Turbo and Night Thrasher had both emerged from behind it. They were fully dressed in civilian clothes, but their faces were covered with the masks from their respective armors.

"There you are!" Suzy said. "Look, Mr. Dark and Mean, we decided. We're the New Warriors buddy, and if you don't like it, you can--"

Suzy paused, and turned to look at her backup. Both Chris and Eddie were bent over nearly double with the giggles. Suzy's eyes bulged in exasperation.

"Guys..."

"They--they look ridiculous!" Eddie gasped between chortles.

"Do you mind keeping it to yourselves? I'm trying to make a point here!"

That pushed them over the edge. Both Chris and Eddie roared laughter, Chris having to put an arm out to steady himself against Eddie's good shoulder. Suzy gave up on them and turned back toward Night Thrasher and Turbo.

"We're pissed and we're not going to take anymore," she said, sending Bolt and Hornet into fresh paroxysms. "We--"

At that moment, there was a *thump* from above, and all eyes went toward the open skylight. In a matching ballet of movement, Ricochet leapt down from the portal, followed by Spider-Woman, touched off one of the War-Chopper's rotors, flipped and rebounded off the crate they'd used earlier, and landed on the concrete again. Spider-Woman was talking almost before they'd touched down.

"Night Thrasher, Turbo! We have to ta--" She stopped in mid-spiel, gaping at the two people wearing their contextually ridiculous masks over civilian clothes.

Eddie and Chris continued to gasp for breath between guffaws. Ultra Girl rolled her eyes toward the ceiling and threw her hands up in surrender.

"Guys," Turbo said, adjusting her mask. It didn't fit quite right without the rest of the armor to fasten to it. "Calm down for a minute."

"What, they forgot to put their costumes on?" Ricochet demanded. "That's worse than walking around with your fly open."

Night Thrasher looked at Turbo. His helmet had fallen backwards, exposing his chin. He tilted it forward so she'd be able to hear him through the mouthpiece. "I'm pretty sure Nova and Speedball never laughed at me."

"Did you--did you go the full monty in front of *them*?" Bolt asked, and he and Eddie were done after that. They collapsed to their knees, Eddie clutching at his stomach and begging them to stop.

"Guys...look, just stop for a minute, okay?" Turbo pinched the bridge of her nose between her thumb and forefinger, took a breath and said, "Me and Thrash have settled our problems."

"*Your* problems?" Ricochet demanded. "You mean *his* problems."

"Okay, his problems." This earned her a sharp look from Night Thrasher, but Mickey just pressed on. "We're still the Warriors, guys. If we still want to be."

Suzy smiled, crossing her arms. "Well...okay then."

"Wait a minute," Ricochet said. "I don't know if I want to be a New Warrior any--" Spider-Woman elbowed him and he shut up.

"And best of all," Turbo continued, having to raise her voice over Eddie's and Chris' slowly declining laughter, "we've got a new leader. Night Thrasher founded the team and he's got loads more experience than I do, so maybe we won't have our butts handed to us next time we fight somebody."

This announcement brought the mood down considerably, and everyone eyed Night Thrasher suspiciously.

"We'll also have some actual funding through Night Thrasher's contacts. We won't have to rely on Eddie and Rico to fix the 'Chopper."

"I don't like this," Spider-Woman said. "You were doing a great job, Turbo. There's no reason he should come in here and--"

Turbo waved her down. "Spider-Woman...thanks. Really, thanks. But this is a relief to me. I never really wanted to be the lead guy, it just kinda fell to me by default. This way we'll have someone with actual credentials telling us what to do. It's for the best, trust me."

"Fill me in," Chris said, letting Ultra Girl help him to his feet as he knuckled tears out of his eyes. "I was a little distracted. So we're still the New Warriors, right?"

"I guess so," Suzy said, and she smiled when she said it.

"That'll do," Rico said. He reached over and tousled Spider-Woman's hair and she good-naturedly slapped his hand away. "Evil better watch out, 'cause we're gonna kick its ass."

"Hell yeah," Eddie agreed.

Everyone laughed at Eddie's unexpected outburst, everybody but Night Thrasher. And as Turbo moved over to join the others in a general congratulations, he hung back, too much the new guy to feel welcome in the gathering of soon-to-be friends. He wouldn't have wanted to join in anyway, because if he had, it might have meant turning his back on Bolt.

Dwayne eyed the mutant kid now through his visor, watching for any sign of instability. Turbo was right in one respect--he had absolutely done his homework before coming here, and the most disturbing thing he had deduced was that Bolt had, not so long ago, worked for the mutant highlord named Apocalypse. He had killed dozens of people as one of the madman's Dark Riders, had helped level Seattle.* Dwayne suspected he'd been under some sort of mind control at the time, but that didn't change matters much. It was still something he--Night Thrasher--was going to have to deal with sooner or later.

[* See *Apocalypse: Ageless Fury* - David]

But not today. Today, for all his misgivings, it just felt good to be part of the team he had founded again. To feel like he really could help change the world.

One way or another, the New Warriors were back in business.

DISPATCHES FROM THE WAR

My goal, way back when I pitched this book to my buddy Mike Exner III, was to recreate that feeling of "New" in New Warriors. To bring in an all-new group of characters and try to work some of the magic that Fabian Nicieza and Mark Bagley did with the old crew in Marvel's New Warriors series.

Whether Mike and I actually succeeded is for the readers (I know there's one or two of ya!) to decide, but I'm more than satisfied with our work here. I've learned to love characters I started out knowing next to nothing about (Ultra Girl and Turbo), as well as at least one character I knew just enough about to dislike (Spider-Woman). That's good enough for me.

It'll have to be, because this is my final issue of this title. Doubtless, there are still stories to tell here. I never got around to explaining how in the world Crux (Cristal Lemieux) is alive after her fatal stint with Cerebro's All-New X-Men. I never explained where Night Thrasher's new armor came from, and what he had to do to get it. And Ultra Girl...oh, man, you woulda loved the "Return to Hala" storyline I was planning for our little Tsu-Zana.

Maybe I'll come back to those stories, and maybe I'll even get Mike to come back with me, but for now there aren't enough hours in the day. Hopefully you've enjoyed the issues we actually finished (despite the massive lag-time between them), and you'll be sure to keep an eye out for the David Wheatley-penned switch month special that'll be hitting the cyberracks any time now.

Thanks for reading.

Letters concerning this issue can be sent directly to me at RussLee74@comcast.net, posted to the Marvel 2000 mailing list (you can join at [Yahogroups](#)), or on the M2K message board, accessible from the [M2K main page](#).

- Russ Anderson
7 October 2002