



Paperback edition. Extrait Washington, DC--One Year Later The cold of the winter day was long forgotten inside the Senate Hearing Room, as the packed bodies in the gallery and the heat from the television lights forced the temperature in the room up far above normal. Several of the senators, despite the intense media scrutiny of these hearings, had taken off their jackets. Many viewers in the balcony were fanning themselves with notebooks or loose paper. Professor Charles Xavier sat in his wheelchair near the center of the room, watching patiently. He could tell that the crowd was a very hostile one. He didn't need to read their minds to sense that. Their hostility clearly emerged with every action of the hearings' chairman, the flamboyant senator Robert Kelly. Kelly was a white-faced, white-haired man who was clearly using the hearings on mutant registration to propel his own career closer to the White House. And it seemed as though he had other demons that were driving him, though it wasn't quite clear to Professor Xavier what those demons were. At least not yet. In front of the hot room, at the witness table, sat Dr. Jean Grey. Even alone at the long wooden table, she had a commanding presence. A strong, good-looking woman in her early thirties, she had been called upon to explain to the Senate Hearing the basic science behind the emergence of mutants. Professor Xavier had helped her extensively with the drafting of her presentation. They had gone over it time and again so that it would be clear not only to the senators, but to the audience on the other side of the television cameras. And considering the hot-button interest the public had taken in the mutant registration law, there was no doubt her presentation would make the news. To many, mutants had proved ripe for persecution based on the long-standing tradition of fearing anything unknown. So the best defense, Jean and the professor had determined, was to help the regular people from middle America understand mutants and what they really were. The bigots like Senator Kelly would fold like wet tissue if public opinion shifted against them. But for the moment, the public was squarely against mutants. And the public was scared to death. Senator Kelly was a master of playing that to the hilt. "Lights, please?" Jean said. A few people murmured something about that help-ing the heat, at least. As the lights dimmed around him, the professor didn't need to shift in his wheelchair to watch the show. Instead he focused his gaze straight ahead and opened his mind, to let the feelings of those around him flow in, but only a little. Not enough to read their thoughts--just enough to gauge how reaction to the presentation was going. He could feel boredom and hostility. Jean had a very deep hole to climb out of, it seemed. They all did, if they were ever going to be accepted by society and defeat this registration law. "DNA," Jean said, spacing each letter as she started her presentation. "It is the basic building block of evolution. Changes in our DNA are the reason we have evolved from single-celled organisms to Homo sapiens." Figures on the screen showed the various stages of evolution, along with a graph displaying a diagonal line that indicated the ascent of the human animal: the evolution of man. One image took over the screen, focusing attention on the lowest order of humanoid: Homo habilis, a primitive apelike humanoid covered in thick hair. Around him, Professor Xavier could feel the crowd's interest increase, ever so slightly. And some revulsion emerged, as men and women confronted images of what they were descended from. "Within our DNA," Jean said, explaining what was happening on the screen, "are the genes that decide our physical characteristics. When these active genes mutate, we see changes in the body." The image on the screen began to mutate, and the apelike humanoid slowly started looking more and more human. The professor could tell many of the people around him were becoming fascinated. Perfect. It was just what he and Jean had hoped would be their reaction at this point. "These evolutionary changes are subtle, and normally take thousands of years." The image of the now-human man on the screen froze, and his body went transparent. Twenty percent of it was marked in blue, representing moving, active genes. The remainder of the image of the man was marked in red, showing static, dormant genes. Now the people around the professor were really caught up. The room fell silent, except for a few whispers coming from a couple of the senators who clearly were not paying any attention and didn't want to. One of them was the chairman, Senator Kelly. "Within each of us," Jean said, "lie not only the millions of genes which dictate our physical makeup, but millions upon millions more whose purpose has been completely unknown to us." She paused for a breath, then went on. "These unused genes have traditionally been referred to as 'junk DNA.' In fact, over eighty percent of our genetic structure is made up of this so-called junk DNA." The words present day appeared on the screen, as a number of the red, dormant genes began to move, slowly at first, then faster and faster. "In recent years," Jean said, "and for reasons which are still a mystery, we have seen this latent DNA in our bodies mutating. These mutations manifest at puberty, and are often triggered by periods of heightened emotional stress." With a glow of pride, the professor knew that--at this moment--with the exception of a few of the closed-minded senators, Jean had her audience. Despite the heat, they were paying rapt attention. "The new DNA strands caused by the mutations are

producing some admittedly startling results. In other words, this previously unused DNA is not 'junk' DNA at all, but rather a vast storehouse which contains the almost limitless potential for human advancement." Suddenly the graphic on the screen showed the man performing amazing feats. First he grew in size; then he moved an object with his mind; then he changed the color of his skin. "Ladies and gentlemen, we are now seeing the beginnings of another stage of human evolution. Not a new race of creatures to be feared, but rather the opportunity to find advancement within us all." The lights slowly brightened. Scanning the room once again, the professor could tell that Jean and the presentation had accomplished what they had hoped. With understanding, the perception of mutants seemed to have begun to shift ever so subtly. The professor began to pick up feelings of uncertainty, of people rethinking their positions. And the level of hostility was clearly lower. But now came the hard part. Jean had to hold this hard-won ground against Senator Kelly. Kelly turned from the man he'd been talking to and smiled at Jean, like a father might smile at a small child who had just done something cute. "Thank you for the wonderful cartoon, Ms. Grey," he said in a vaguely patronizing tone. "It was quite--how should I say it?--educational." Some of the crowd snickered. "However," Kelly went on, "it failed to address the larger issue which, I might add, is the focus of this hearing. Three words: Are mutants dangerous?" There was a low rumbling among the crowd, and the professor could feel new and increased uncertainty flowing among the people. "Well, Senator Kelly," Jean responded, "don't you think that's an unfair question? The wrong person behind the wheel of a car can be dangerous." "Well," Kelly countered, "we do license people to drive." The professor listened carefully to the murmurs of the crowd as Senator Kelly's aide, Henry Guyrich, moved behind the panel and handed Kelly a black folder filled with documents. "But we don't license people to live, Senator," Jean said. Kelly said nothing. "It is fact, Senator," Jean said, pressing her point, "that mutants who have revealed themselves publicly have been met with fear, hostility, and even violence." The professor could feel that things were again turning against Jean. This time, though, as he scanned the crowd with his mind, he felt a new presence, a powerful and familiar one. He turned around in his wheelchair and studied the back of the room, which rose above him. There, by the door, in the shadows where he couldn't be seen, stood a dark figure wearing a very expensive suit. It was his old friend Eric. What was he doing here? The professor nodded, and Eric did the same. The professor turned back to face the front, his attention again on the crowd. "It is because of that ever-present hostility," Jean said, "that I am urging the Senate to vote against mutant registration. To force mutants to expose themselves will only further subject them to unnecessary prejudice." Senator Kelly smiled and wiped a drop of sweat from the side of his head. The professor could tell he was going to attack Jean, and attack her hard--as they had expected. "Expose themselves?" Kelly asked, his voice calm and strong over the silent crowd as he played to the television cameras. "What is it that the mutant community has to hide?" "I didn't say they had anything to hide," Jean said. "What I did say--" "Let me show you what's being hidden," Senator Kelly said, talking over Jean without hesitation. He raised a blown-up photo of a car on a freeway. The car appeared to have been melted. "This was taken by a state police officer in Secaucus, New Jersey. A man in a minor altercation literally melted the car in front of him." Professor Xavier set his jaw. The crowd was again turning fearful, and hostile. More and more fans were back at work trying to cool the heat. "May I see that photo, Senator?" Jean asked calmly. He ignored her question and spoke to the cameras and crowd. "This is not an isolated incident, Ms. Grey." Kelly picked up the folder filled with documents and held it up for the crowd to see. "I have a list of names here. Identified mutants, living right here in the United States." "Senator Kelly!" Jean said, her voice becoming more forceful. But he just ignored her. "A girl in Illinois who can walk through walls. What is to stop her from walking into a bank vault? Or even the White House?" Senator Kelly, an intense look of concern pasted on his face, pointed out at the crowd and the cameras. "Or your house?" Professor Xavier knew, right at that moment, that they had lost. The crowd's anger and hostility were back in full force. Heated discussions and scattered debates erupted throughout the chamber. Senator Kelly was getting them to ignore the facts and focus on their own fears of the unknown. Jean tried to shout over the noise, to engage the senator. "You are not being--" "And there are even rumors, Ms. Grey," Kelly said, turning to stare directly at her, "of mutants so powerful that they can enter our minds and control our thoughts, taking away our God-given free will." A number of people actually gasped at that statement. "Ms. Grey, Americans deserve the right to decide whether they want their children to be in school with mutants. To be taught by mutants." Kelly leaned forward. "You're a schoolteacher. I would think that the rights of parents and students alike should be of paramount importance to you." "They are," Jean said firmly. "But this is not the way to help them. I would like to see that folder." "Why?" Kelly asked, pounding the folder, then waving it in front of the crowd. "All I'm saying is that parents have the right

to know the dangers to their children. That's the purpose of registration." "It is not the purpose," Jean shouted, clearly angry now. "Your purpose is to discriminate and torture a group of citizens, just because you are afraid of them. Now I would like to see your so-called list and evidence." She held her hand out. Suddenly the folder flew from Kelly's grasp toward Jean's open hand. Realization swept across her face, and Jean instantly closed her hand and let her arm fall to her side. But the professor knew the damage had been done. The folder dropped to the floor, photos and papers spilling out. Around him, the professor could tell that everyone was uncertain what had happened. And they were very afraid at the same time. It was clear to all of them that something unseen had come into play in this hearing, though none of them knew what it might be. The professor sighed and closed down his mind, shutting out the sensations of the people around him. They had lost this battle, that much was clear. "Ladies and gentlemen," Senator Kelly said, now more than ever playing for the cameras. "The truth is that mutants are very real and that they are among us. We must know who they are, and above all, we must know what they can do." The crowd broke into cheering around the professor as he turned and moved his wheelchair up the ramp toward the exit. It had been a long shot, and he knew it. From the almost-empty hallway outside the Hearing Room, the professor could hear the debate continuing as a few friendly senators tried to jump in to help Jean. But they were quickly overwhelmed. It was clear that this bill would leave this hearing and make its way to the main floor of the Senate. That would be the next point at which it might be stopped. But he was going to have to do better, if that was to happen. In front of the professor, a man walked toward the main entrance. Eric Lehnsherr. "What are you doing here?" the professor asked, just loud enough for Eric to hear. Lehnsherr stopped and half turned, smiling. "Why do you ask questions when you already know the answer?" Lehnsherr asked. The professor moved up closer, until they faced each other there in the high-ceilinged, tiled hallway. "Don't give up on them, Eric." "What would you have me do, Charles?" he asked. "I've heard all these arguments before. Used very well, if I remember." "That was a long time ago," the professor said. "Mankind has evolved since then." "Yes," Eric said. "Into us." The professor paused a moment, musing, then decided to seek out what he wanted to know. Slowly and carefully, he reached out. Eric put a palm against the side of his head, then smiled. "Are you sneaking around in here, Charles?" Eric clenched his fist, and the professor's chair pressed inward, as if it had suddenly been gripped by a giant hand. Then the chair seemed to lift ever so slightly off the ground, as if in a subtle warning. "Whatever are you looking for?" Eric asked, still smiling, but adding an edge to his words. "Hope, Eric," the professor said calmly. "I'm look-ing for hope." The chair settled back to the tile floor, as if the hand had released it. "I will bring you hope," Eric said. "And I only ask one thing in return: Don't get in my way." Eric Lehnsherr turned and walked away. Without looking back, he said, "We are the future, Charles. Not them. They no longer matter." Behind him the professor could hear the debate continuing as his former ally pushed open the door and left. He hadn't responded to that last comment, because there was nothing left to be said. He didn't agree, and Eric knew it. Regular people did matter. Now more than ever. Presentation de l'diteur It's the movie event of the year--and the action-packed book you've been waiting for. Outcasts from society, the X-MEN are genetic mutants, born with superhuman powers, who harness their special abilities for the greater good. But the human race they fight to protect rejects and fears--even hates--them. Not all mutants seek to protect mankind. One terrorist group--led by the supremely powerful Magneto--seeks to strike first. Battling against prejudice and agents of intolerance, the X-MEN must establish a peaceful coexistence between mutant and mankind or they will surely perish . . . From the Paperback edition.