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X-MEN[®]

novelization by Kristine Kathryn Rusch and Dean Wesley Smith
Based on the story by Tom DeSanto & Bryan Singer
Screenplay by David Hayter

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Prolog

Poland—1944

The hard, cold rain pounded out of the sky, soaking clothes, changing the dirt to slippery mud, beating the life out of everyone it touched.

Eric Lehnsherr stood in the mud beside his parents, his coat wet clear through to his shirt, his small hand grasping the back of his father's wool pants just above the knee. His child's eyes were wide at what was happening around him. His mother and father, both strong and sturdy people, held him close, tried to comfort him, shelter him, but the events of that hour were like the rain: impossible to avoid.

The mass of people scared him, making him want to run away. The guards made him want to cry. But he did neither. Instead he focused on the twisting spirals of barbed wire that covered the tops of the fences in front of and around them. Through the rain the points of the wire seemed to sparkle, calling to him.

Suddenly the German guards shoved everyone forward, making them walk between two tall wire fences

with more twisting barbed wire lining the top. Eric didn't want to stare at all the faces watching them from the other side of the fences. Those people were all terribly sad and tired, and many were crying as they watched. Some clutched their arms, as if trying to cover the numbers that had been tattooed there.

Instead he traced the curved barbed wire and its shining points as he and his parents continued, slowly moving forward. It was as if that wire were his only friend.

At one point he slipped in the mud, but his father held him up. His mother clutched both him and his father. Together they moved almost as one, following the wet rows of people in front of them, trying to not look at the guards.

Eric told himself he would be strong, for his parents. Strong like the wire.

Ahead of them people were screaming now, and Eric didn't want to get any closer, but his father and the guards moved them along, without saying a word. The people behind them crowded in tight, sometimes bumping him.

A woman behind Eric was crying softly.

The barbed wire on the top of the fence seemed to spin along with them, twisting and sparkling in the hard rain. There had always been something about metal that he loved. The fence and the sharp points of the wire didn't seem dangerous to him. He wished instead that he could climb up there and touch them.

Suddenly, ahead of them, the people moved out of the way, and from where he stood Eric could see that the path turned into two paths, both of which were lined with tall weaved-wire fences. The guards

were opening and closing the gates as people went through.

A big guard in a German uniform shoved into them, poking at Eric's mother with a rifle, speaking much too fast for Eric to understand.

His father understood, though, and shook his head. "No." His mother held on to Eric even tighter. So tight it hurt.

The guard poked at them with the rifle and began shouting.

Eric clung to his father, not knowing what was happening.

Then his mother screamed.

"No!" his father said again.

Suddenly two more German guards appeared and yanked Eric away from his parents. With a quick turn they shoved him along after the other children who were being pushed and carried down one of the paths between rows of fences. Many of the children were screaming and shouting and crying. Others were strangely quiet.

The guards then turned their attention to Eric's parents and shoved them down the other path.

Eric started back to them, crying now. He wasn't going to leave them.

He wasn't!

They couldn't make him!

But the two guards picked him up and carried him back along the fenced path. Their hands were rough and hurt his skin through his wet coat.

He kicked at them, screamed at them, but they ignored him. They took him through the weaved barbed-wire gate and closed it.

He could still see his parents through the gate, his mother reaching out for him despite the restraint of a guard, screaming his name. His father just stood there, a guard's rifle pointed squarely at his chest.

Eric tried to fight his way back to them, but the guards wouldn't let him down.

He glanced at the fence. A thought flashed across his mind. He needed to be like metal, heavier. He needed to be much heavier, so the guards couldn't carry him anymore!

His feet touched the ground, and he planted them hard in the mud, focused on stopping. He wasn't going anywhere without his parents.

He was going to rip down the fence between them, so they could go with him.

He focused all his anger and fear on the wire gate—and it started to shake.

The guards pulled at him, but now they couldn't move him. He was like the heaviest of metals, too heavy for the guards to budge. They yanked on his arms, hurting him even more, but he didn't care. He wouldn't go with them, not without his mother and father.

He took a step back toward his parents, dragging the guards in the mud with him.

The metal gate twisted and bent in front of him. Some of the strands of barbed wire began breaking, like weak string. Eric knew that gate couldn't stop him.

One guard tried to pick him up and failed, swearing so fast that Eric didn't understand.

All Eric wanted was to tear down the fence and let

his parents come with him. If the Germans wanted him, then his parents would have to come too.

Another guard came up, swearing angrily at the other two.

Eric just focused on the fence, ripping it apart, making it go away. The coiled strands of sparkling barbed wire along the top started to uncurl, whipping about in the air like angry serpents.

The entire compound suddenly got very silent. Only the sound of the rain remained, pounding down in the mud, accented by the snaps of the breaking wire.

More strands broke, and the entire weaved-wire gate bowed toward Eric. It was as if something massive pushed from the other side.

Suddenly the rain stopped hitting Eric as the third guard loomed over him. The other two still were pulling on Eric's arms, futilely, hurting him, making him madder and madder.

And the angrier Eric got, the more the gate and the fences shook and broke apart.

The new guard swore again, then raised his rifle.

Eric could hear his mother's scream cut through the silence and the rain.

His father took a step toward him, wide eyed, only to be stopped.

Then the butt of the guard's rifle came down hard.

For an instant—just an instant—the wonderful feeling of metal closed in around him as he slumped into the mud.

The last thing he saw was the gate falling, his parents on the other side, trying to get to him, held back by guards.

It was an image he took down into blackness.
It was the last time he would ever see them.

Southern California—1986

The rough, water-colored mural of the blue sky, white clouds, and distant horizons hung on hooks from the ceiling of the gym, just behind the basketball backboard, vibrating to the loud music. The bottom third of the large painting was a crude drawing of a city skyline, with silhouettes of buildings in gray paint and black outline. The most recognizable shape was of the Statue of Liberty. Someone had even cut a hole where her torch would be and had put a light bulb there.

In front of the painting, high school kids danced, ate at tables, and shouted over the music at the annual "Rhapsody in Blue" prom. The tablecloths were blue, the napkins were blue, and most of the girls had on far too much blue eye shadow. Over half the boys' tuxes were powder blue, though under the blue lights that filled the air and lit the background of the gym, the tuxes looked dark and faded.

Scott Summers stood facing Selena Ki, his date, just to the right of the dance floor. He was thin and lanky, with thick brown hair. His smile and friendly personality made him popular among most of the kids. So far, in all the years of high school, he'd made every official dance. At seventeen, this was his second "Rhapsody in Blue" prom.

Selena was considered one of the best-looking girls in the school. One of the school's cheerleaders, she pretty

much could have gone out with anyone she wanted. Scott felt lucky she had said yes when he asked her the first time.

He and Selena had been going out for at least a month. Scott liked her, but he was having trouble with her jealousy. Two of his friends had warned him about that problem, but he hadn't listened. Now he wished he had. If he even looked at another girl she got angry. And right now she was really, really mad.

"I don't ever want to talk to you again!" Selena shouted at Scott over the music.

"But—" Scott tried to say. Too late. She had already turned and stormed away through the crowd, her full, blue-and-white dress skirt brushing dancers out of the way.

He went after her, ignoring a few friends who stood to the side, shaking their heads.

Scott couldn't believe this was happening, not during the prom. So what if he'd talked to Bonnie yesterday after class? He was here with Selena, wasn't he? He didn't even like Bonnie. She'd just come up to him, said "Hi." But then, worst of all, she had given him a hug, right in front of Selena.

Was it his fault that Bonnie was a hugging kind of person?

It seemed Selena thought it was. She wasn't even allowing him the opportunity to explain. Or talk to her at all. And the night was still young. They still had dancing to do, plus two other parties.

This was so stupid. And it was beginning to make him mad.

She stormed out into the hall and stopped, with

Scott right behind her. At least out here the music level was almost bearable. Maybe out here she would let him explain that nothing was going to come between them.

He had almost reached her when she spun off and slipped into the girls' room.

He stared after her and set his jaw grimly. That wasn't going to stop him. Not this time.

He started for the door.

"Scott?" a voice said, bringing him up just before he was about to enter.

He glanced around and found Mr. Daniels, his math teacher from third period.

Daniels pointed to the men's room, just a few steps away. "Don't you think you'd be more comfortable in there?"

"Yeah," Scott said. "But I have to talk to her."

Daniels nodded. "I understand that. But just not in there. Trust me, eventually they all come out."

Despite the logic of what Daniels was saying, Scott was so mad he didn't know what to do.

And he was frustrated. Why was she doing this to him? What had he done to deserve having his night ruined, all because of her irrational fit of jealousy?

Suddenly, a jabbing pain shot through the back of his head and into his eyes.

"Ahhhh," he said, bending over, covering his eyes as they started to water.

"You all right, Summers?" Daniels asked.

Scott managed to nod, then quickly headed for the men's room. The pain was intense. So intense that his eyes felt as if they were trying to explode out of his head.

Inside the men's room about half a dozen others were smoking and laughing. The room was filled with the gray smoke. Scott bumped against a wall near the sink. The agony seemed to echo around inside his head.

Stan Hensey moved over and stood beside him as Scott pressed his eyes, trying to will the pain away. Stan and Scott had been friends for years, even though Stan hung out most of the time with the druggies.

"Selena, huh?" Stan asked. "You need to lighten up, dude. She's just a girl."

Scott shook his head. "Not her. My head. My eyes!"

"What's wrong with your eyes?" Stan asked, putting a hand on Scott's shoulder. "I got some contact lotion. Might help."

"Thanks." Scott stood and carefully opened his eyes.

"Holy—" Stan said, stumbling back. The look on his face was one of complete terror.

Scott wiped the tears away as the pain got worse and worse. "What's wrong?" He could still see Stan, but everything seemed strange, as if he were peering through a red haze.

"Your eyes, man," Stan said, still backing away. "They're red. *Really* red. Pupils and all."

Two other guys in the room glanced over at Scott, then jerked back.

Suddenly Scott could feel the pain come together at a point above the bridge of his nose. And then it vanished, as if it hadn't been there at all. Instead there was energy, flowing in his head. Energy he could feel like water running through his fingers.

Energy that wanted out.

For an instant it felt as if the entire inside of his head

was flowing out his eyes. The energy burst out through them, smashing into the wall in front of him in a bright red beam of light.

The wall exploded.

And then a massive hole appeared. Scott could see inside the girls' rest room. Selena and three other girls screamed and jumped away from the mirror.

The wall on the other side of the girls' rest room exploded outward.

At that moment Scott realized he was the one who was doing the damage. His eyes were.

He closed them, jamming his hands over them, and dropped to the ground.

Once again the energy seemed to flow around and around inside his head, calm now, but waiting to be released again when he opened his eyes.

Well, he wasn't going to open them.

Around him the screams and shouts and yelling started. Shortly after that there were sirens. He never did get the chance to tell Selena he was sorry.

Kenya—1988

The deep blue of the sky made the sun look almost white. The heat came off the ground in waves, so even the scant shade under the thin trees seemed useless as shelter.

The tribal village filled an open area along the edge of the sparse forest; the dirt around the tents was baked dry and hard. A dozen children of different ages played a game of tag, touching each other with sticks, then running to avoid the one who was "it."

Ororo, a young girl of twelve with a white streak running through her dark hair, played with them. Ororo was proud of herself because so far she had been able to keep from getting tagged. Sweat was streaming off her head and arms, but she didn't care. She was having fun.

And Ororo loved the warm air, the slight breeze that dried her sweat, the bright sun. She just loved being outside and had for as long as she could remember. To her the sun, the rain, the winds had always been things of joy and pleasure. This game with the other children just provided another chance to play in the sun.

The game continued until suddenly she was in the wrong place at the wrong time. The tap of the stick on her arm was like an insect sting, and the laughter of the others told her she was it.

Ororo could feel fear grabbing at her stomach. The last time she had been tapped when they played this game, she hadn't been able to tag anyone else and had ended up being laughed at for days. She was used to being laughed at. She was different from the others, and they all knew it somehow. Though except for the white streak in her hair, she didn't know how she was different. But she too knew it.

Usually she didn't mind not playing with the others, staying apart and alone. But this time, since she was playing, she was going to make sure the laughing didn't happen again. She would tag someone else.

Two younger boys and a girl her age were standing a short distance away, taunting her to get them. She knew that all three of them were faster, far faster than she was. It would be a waste of time to chase them.

So she turned and headed the other way, running around one tent as fast as she could go, hoping to surprise someone.

The idea didn't work. The other kids there saw her coming and ran, faster than her.

All the kids in the village were faster than her, and they all knew it.

But she could still tag one of them if she got lucky.

For the longest time she kept trying, chasing, not giving up. The heat was making her pant. She knew she should stop and drink, but if she did the game would end and she would be laughed at again.

They were already starting to laugh, and to call her names. And the more they laughed, the harder she tried.

Then things got worse. As she lunged to try to catch one younger boy, she tripped.

Ororo put her hands under her to catch herself. The sound of her stick snapping was like a slap from a tribal elder against her cheek.

Ororo pushed herself back to her feet, the brown dirt sticking to her sweating arms and legs. Her stick was broken in half. Now there was no way she could win. No way at all.

One of the kids saw what had happened, and in a moment, before she could even look up from her broken stick, they had all surrounded her, laughing, poking at her with their sticks.

"Stop!" she shouted, but that just made them laugh even harder, taunting her that she was too slow to make them stop, that she had broken her stick. And with her stick broken, how could she tag them?

Ororo was getting angrier and angrier as the others kept poking at her. Then one of them hit her.

The hit stung like a bee.

It sounded like someone had snapped their fingers. She could feel the pain of it coming off her shoulder.

She tried to move away, but they wouldn't let her, keeping her surrounded, hitting her more and more.

Snap! Snap!

Each hit hurt really bad. "Stop!" she shouted. "Stop it now!"

They laughed and hit her again and again.

And each hit hurt her more and more, until it became one big stinging pain on her back and shoulders and arms.

They were all hitting her with their sticks, telling her to run. They wanted to see her run.

But Ororo knew she couldn't outrun them, so she just stood there, turning to avoid the hits as best she could, as she would avoid the stings of swarming insects.

They laughed and yelled at her to run. It had become a new game of sorts, and she had become the object of the game.

Snap! Snap! Snap! The sticks whipped at her skin, drawing blood in places, raising welts in others.

Her voice was getting louder and louder. "Stop it! Stop it!"

But that, too, just made them hit her harder and harder.

Why were they doing this to her?

All Ororo wanted them to do was stop.

Why couldn't they just leave her alone? She could feel her face getting hot from the anger.

All she wanted to do was hit them all back, show them how it felt.

How it hurt.

But they kept on, and it seemed to go on forever.

As Ororo got angrier and angrier, she could feel the air around her clutching at her, pulling her.

Snap! Snap-snap-snap! The hits were coming even faster now, the laughter less and less.

She spun and moved, trying to get out of the way of each hit, usually failing.

She cried, and the nightmare continued.

Between sobs, she yelled at them to stop.

They kept going.

She wished for something to stop them.

Then everything changed. The hitting slowed, then stopped, as the other children looked up in awe at what was happening around them. The sky was falling, in big white flakes.

White, cold flakes in the heat of the afternoon, out of the blue, cloudless sky.

They fell slowly at first. Then faster, harder.

But none of the snow was falling on her. She was so angry, so racked with sobs, that she didn't notice, didn't care what was happening. Her shoulders and arms still stung where the other kids had hit her, and she wanted the sky to keep falling on them all, to hurt them all.

Gradually the white flakes falling from the clear, blue, cloudless heavens turned heavier, then became small chunks of ice.

The kids picked up the ice, looked at it. They laughed, staring upward as it pounded down.

It was still fun for them.