

**THE HELLFIRE CLUB.
NEW YORK CITY.**

NOW.

"TIME AND AGAIN..."

"...THESE PEOPLE HAVE PROVEN THEMSELVES THE ENEMIES OF THE X-MEN."

HOW CAN YOU THROW IN WITH THEM...

...WHEN THEY HAVE SO OFTEN TRIED TO OUT-AND-OUT KILL US?

TIMES HAVE CHANGED, ELIZABETH.

THE WORLD HAS CHANGED.

THE X-MEN AND THE HELLFIRE CLUB CAN BE ALLIES.

HEAR! HEAR!

LET'S DRINK TO THE NOTION OF LETTING BYGONES BE BYGONES.

FIRST OF ALL, SHAW, I WOULD NEVER SO MUCH AS SIP ANYTHING YOU OFFERED ME FOR FEAR OF WHATEVER A SKEEVEY LITTLE MAN LIKE YOURSELF MIGHT DROP INTO A LADY'S DRINK.

SECOND OF ALL, IF YOU DON'T GET THAT GLASS OUT OF MY FACE, I'M GOING TO JAM IT SIDWAYS STRAIGHT UP YOUR BUM.

EXPLAIN THIS TO ME, ERIK.

I AM UNSURE HOW MUCH EXPLANATION IS REQUIRED.

THE THREATS WE FACE...THE DOOM THAT CONSUMES OUR PEOPLE...IS A BURDEN I CANNOT BEAR ALONE.

THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE THE X-MEN.

AND EVEN THEY ARE NOT ENOUGH.



IN ORDER TO SAVE OUR KIND, I WILL FORGE ALLIANCES WITH AS MANY OTHERS AS I CAN.

FRIENDS... RIVALRY... ENEMIES.

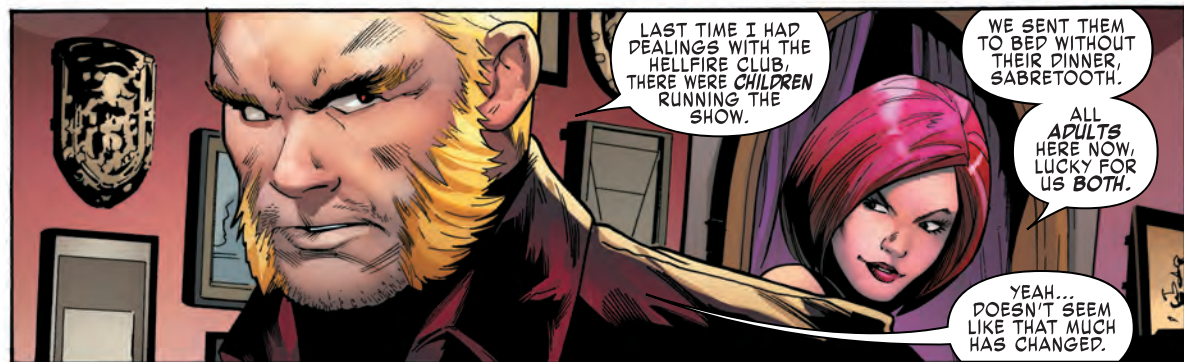
MUTANTS CANNOT AFFORD FOR ME TO LEAVE ANY STONE UNTURNED.



I HAD INTENDED TO TELL YOU, OF COURSE...

...IN MY OWN TIME.

SHE DESERVED TO KNOW.



LAST TIME I HAD DEALINGS WITH THE HELLFIRE CLUB, THERE WERE CHILDREN RUNNING THE SHOW.

WE SENT THEM TO BED WITHOUT THEIR DINNER, SABRETOOTH.

ALL ADULTS HERE NOW, LUCKY FOR US BOTH.

YEAH... DOESN'T SEEM LIKE THAT MUCH HAS CHANGED.



WHAT ELSE HAVE YOU BEEN HIDING FROM ME?

IF I TOLD YOU THAT ALL MY SECRETS HAD BEEN REVEALED, WOULD YOU BELIEVE ME?

OF COURSE NOT.

AND YOU SHOULD NOT.

THERE ARE MANY PIECES IN PLAY, ELIZABETH.

SOME, BY THEIR VERY NATURE, CANNOT BE DIVULGED.



YOU SHOULD HAVE TOLD ME.

YOU.

I SHOULDN'T HAVE HEARD ABOUT THIS FROM ANYONE ELSE.

TSK TSK.

YOU'RE RIGHT, OF COURSE, LASS. BUT NOW THAT THE CAT'S OUT OF THE BAG, WE SHOULD TEND TO THE INTRODUCTIONS, YES?



YOU KNOW ME, OF COURSE. **BLACK TOM CASSIDY**, RIGHTFUL HEIR TO CASSIDY KEEP, **DASHING NE'ER-DO-WELL**.

AND PERHAPS I'M PLAYIN' AGAINST MY **NOM DE GUERRE**, BUT I'M THE **INNER CIRCLE'S WHITE BISHOP**.

AT YOUR SERVICE.

IF I MAY BE SO BOLD AS TO INTRODUCE MY COUNTERPART, THE **BLACK BISHOP**.

THE ONLY NON-MUTANT WITHIN THE **INNER CIRCLE**...

...ALTHOUGH, THANKS TO THEIR RECENT ESCAPADES TOGETHER, **MAGNETO** VOUCHES FOR THE LOVELY **MS. RALEIGH**.

YOU CAN CALL ME **BRIAR**.



I GUESS THAT MAKES ME THE **WHITE QUEEN**.

AND LET'S BE HONEST...

...IT'S ABOUT TIME.



I COULDN'T AGREE MORE, **MS. ST. CROIX**.

THE CLUB IS LUCKY TO HAVE YOU IN SUCH A ROLE.

JUST AS IT IS FORTUNATE TO HAVE THE NAME **SEBASTIAN SHAW** ONCE MORE SYNONYMOUS WITH THE TITLE OF THE **BLACK KING**.



AND **MAGNETO** HAS ONCE AGAIN ASSUMED HIS RIGHTFUL POSITION AS OUR **WHITE KING**.

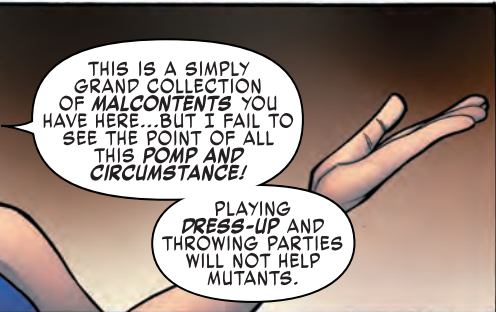


ALL THE **POWDERED WIGS** IN THIS LITTLE CLUBHOUSE OF YERS ARE MAKING MY **NOSTRILS TWITCH**.



ARE YOU ALL **DAFT**?

CAN YOU BE BOTHERED TO LISTEN TO YOURSELVES?



THIS IS A SIMPLY GRAND COLLECTION OF **MALCONTENTS** YOU HAVE HERE... BUT I FAIL TO SEE THE POINT OF ALL THIS **POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE!**

PLAYING **DRESS-UP** AND THROWING PARTIES WILL NOT HELP **MUTANTS**.