



The Drink Tank

Pryde of the X-Men

by Juan Sanmiguel

It was the early 1980s. I was on and off comics then. I had a friend who told me all about the X-Men. My local library had gotten comics, and some X-Men comics got mixed in. I had a good idea of what was happening in the post-Phoenix era of *The Uncanny X-Men*. My favorite X-Man was the youngest member of the team, Katherine “Kitty” Pryde (created by Chris Claremont and John Byrne).

When she joined, most of the X-Men were in their late teens or early 20s. Kitty was 13 when she was recruited to the team. She did not have the challenges of being a mutant like Nightcrawler and Storm had. Kitty was a typical teenager with top-notch computer skills and the ability to go through solid objects, or “phasing.”

Kitty was the second Jewish superhero (at the time, it was not declared that Ben Grimm was Jewish). From day one, Kitty wore a Star of David Necklace and talked about Jewish holidays. This was rare then since most superheroes did not display religious beliefs.

She bonded quickly with the rest of the team. Kitty had a brother-and-sister relationship with Storm and Wolverine and was a close friend to Nightcrawler. She would have an on-off again romantic relationship with Colossus.

Kitty was also a fan girl. She could be seen reading Marvel's *Star Wars* comic in one issue or wearing an *Elfquest* shirt in another. She was living the fan's dream of having a pet dragon. Kitty had an active imagination (as illustrated in a story I will cover later).

Despite her young age, Kitty was at the heart of the action. She would face off with some of the X-Men's deadliest foes. Emma Frost, the White Queen of the Hellfire Club, would try to recruit Kitty to the Hellions (a mutant team she mentored) willingly or not. Her powers and wits made her a formidable fighter.

Here are some of my favorite Kitty-centric stories from this time (all from *Uncanny X-Men* Volume 1):

- “God Save the Child,” “Dazzler,” and “Run for Your Life” (*Uncanny X-Men* 129-131): In Chicago, Kitty's emerging powers had brought her to the attention of Charles Xavier and Emma Frost. Members of the X-Men and Frost talk to Kitty to get her to join their respective schools. The Hellfire Club attacks the team in both Chicago and New York. Kitty evades capture, contacts the X-Men in New York, and keeps tabs on the X-Men

captured in Chicago. This three-part story is an excellent start to her X-Men career.

- “Kitty’s Fairy Tale” (*Uncanny X-Men* 153): Kitty decides to tell Colossus’s little sister Illyana a bedtime story. It retells the Dark Phoenix story set in a pirate world. The heroine is Pirate Kitty with her first mate, Colossus. She helps the Wizard (Xavier) and the Noble Prince (Cyclops) rescue the



Phoenix from the dark influence controlling her. All the X-Men get roles in this story. This story shows the power of Kitty’s imagination.

- “Professor Xavier Is a Jerk” (*Uncanny X-Men* 168): Kitty is angry that Xavier wants to reassign her to the New Mutants rather than let her stay with the primary team. Most New Mutants are younger and not expected to go on the same level of missions as the X-Men. Kitty sees this as a demotion. She has faced Magneto, the Hellfire Club,



and been on a prominent deep space mission. Kitty tries to use reason to convince Professor X to change his mind. At the same time, she discovers that something has infiltrated the X-Mansion. This issue is the debut of Lockheed, Kitty's alien dragon companion. In this story, we see her teen anger at being frustrated by adults who try to limit her ambitions.

- “Whatever Happened to Kitty” (*Uncanny X-Men* 179): A few issues earlier, the X-Men discovered a group of mutants living in tunnels underneath New York. They called themselves the Morlocks, after the creatures from H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*. During the adventure, a deliriously sick Kitty promises the Morlock Caliban that she would stay with him if he would help the X-Men. The former Morlock leader, Callisto, kidnaps Kitty, fakes her death, and forces her to keep her word to Caliban. At first, Kitty tries to escape, and in doing so, she questions the ethics of the situation. She decides to honor her word and stay with Caliban despite the X-Men coming to rescue her.



More stories featured Kitty, but I would tend to read comics by my favorite writers rather than follow specific books or characters. All the stories above are on the Marvel.com website (sadly, the *Kitty Pryde and Wolverine* mini-series is not).

After researching for this article, I will be reading more of Kitty's later exploits. She and Nightcrawler will join the British team Excalibur led by Captain Britain in the late 1980s. I read *Astonishing X-Men*, which reunites Kitty with the X-Men, now with her former enemy Emma Frost as a teammate. She features prominently in the first 24 issues of that series. The writers have done exciting things with Kitty, including making her openly bisexual, which was always her creator's intention.

She is the spiritual ancestor of Kamala Khan, Ms. Marvel. They both come from working families. They have fannish interests. Their culture influences them, and have to deal with their newly discovered powers with their friends and family.

Kitty did not have much to do in the films. She would have some great action sequences but nothing exploring her character. I hope this changes in the Disney version of the X-Men, and I hope future teens get to fall in love with her the same way I did.

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THE UNCANNY

X-MEN



UNCANNY X-MEN #168

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The Dark Phoenix Saga -or- I was a Comics Fan in the 1980s

by Christopher J. Garcia

I've said it many times: I am a DC guy. I have been since I was a kid. It's always been the Justice League over the Avengers, Teen Titans over the X-Men, and Flash over whoever the Marvel equivalent of The Flash is in the comic book hierarchy (maybe Daredevil? The Hulk? I don't know)

Anyhow, I grew up in the 1980s, so I knew about the X-Men. I had a few issues, but they tended to be read a couple of times (remember, I read almost all my other comics to absolute shreds) and set them aside. The *JLAs*, and especially the *All-Star Squadrons* would pile on top of them.

But I knew about *The Dark Phoenix Saga*.

So, it was January 1980, and it was time for the new decade to come for comics . . . and just in time! Claremont and Byrne had been doing some great stuff, but it was obvious this was where it was going. This had been built thoroughly, and I half-wonder today if this had been Claremont's plan from the beginning of his run. Jean Grey gets hit with cosmic radiation and taps into peak performance! She becomes a being of pure thought, something that the EST movement (not to mention Theosophy!) had been striving for all along! She repairs the M'Kraan Crystal, saving



reality, and then goes back to Earth as Phoenix, keeping her power in check with the help of Cyclops, her one true love.

This was meant to be the moment when we knew she was on the edge.

Now, here's where it gets complicated and cool – Mastermind and Emma Frost, along with the rest of the Hellfire Club, basically target her and put her in the role of the Black Queen of the

Hellfire Club, which poisons her with a very good time. After Cyclops loses a psychic duel, Phoenix becomes Dark Phoenix, and that's where it gets incredible.

She has incredible power, beyond nearly any hero ever, and her destructive impulses are right at the top, but she's conflicted, and thus that gives the opening needed for Xavier and there's a massive series of back-and-forth "She's Phoenix, She's Dark Phoenix" that ends up with her sacrificing herself to save the universe from, well, herself.

It's WAY more complicated, but that should let you know enough that the rest will make at least some sense.

In a way, this is a collapsing of the 1970s in popular culture into a single storyline, and perhaps it's the final evidence that EVERYONE read Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and decided it sounded like the right idea. That is, largely, why I'm not usually fond of 1980s adventure stuff; Campbellian approaches bore me.

The first thing you can see is the influence of Tolkien. There's no question, or at least not a REASONABLE question, that Phoenix/Dark Phoenix and the transformation have roots in *Lord of the Rings* and Gandalf. It's handled much less lazily (don't get me started!) and goes into the idea that Tolkien didn't, that the transformation leaves them far more vulnerable to



the vice of power than they had been.

Of course, that's the major theme of *The Dark Phoenix Saga*, I think. It's not just "absolute power corrupts absolutely" but that it's the world we see as real that determines whether we use our powers for actual good or personal good.

And that's why this arc is still relevant today.

The Hellfire Club is absolutely a corrupting influence, and the illusions that they force on Jean tie completely to modern media ideas and let's be clear -- the same thing was happening in 1980, just in a different form and format. The illusions of Mastermind make Jean realize that there is power not in evil, but in power itself. That's a huge difference from traditional comic storytelling, which tended to be more about good and evil. Here, it's about unlimited power and human power . . . even if those humans are super-powered mutants. The idea that once you are granted power you must allow yourself to be restrained is obvious, but the way that Claremont attaches that to the idea of socioemotional pressures being the regulator sets this entire thing apart.

I think I read the saga again about 2016, maybe 2017. It hit hard how deeply it seemed to get the world we were living in. Then again, a lot of 1980s stuff did, but not quite to this level.



**A's for Apocalypse:
An X-Men Alphabet
By Helena Nash**



A's for Apocalypse

En Sabah Nur

Harrows the gene pool to keep mutants pure

B is for Banshee

Or Sean to his team

Leading the way with a deafening scream

C is for Cyclops

And his ruby quartz visor

Briefly a villain but now older and wiser

D is for Destiny

Predicting the future

Partner to Mystique her shape-changing suitor

E is for Erik

Clad in red Shi'ar armour

Source of much scheming and alien drama

F is Future

Dystopian days

The last of the X-Men go out in a blaze



G is for Gambit
Or Remy LeBeau
Makes a big bang with the cards that he throws

H is for Hellfire
Queens, bishops and kings
Seducing Jean Grey among other things

I is for Iceman
Controls frost and snow
The subzero hero who let it all go

J is for Juggernaut
And Jubilee by turns
Dressing like Robin in The Dark Knight Returns

K is for Kitty

Or Katherine or Kate

Phasing through objects her uncanny trait

L is for Logan

He's everyone's fave

Unbreakable claws and ever so brave

M's for Magneto

Homo Superior

OG inciter of mutant hysteria

N is for Nightcrawler

He bamfs without fail

Somersaults, teleports, fights with his tail

O's for Ororo

The goddess of weather

Upgrades her look with a mohawk and leather

P is for Phoenix

Who dies on the Moon

Leaving Jean Grey in a cosmic cocoon

Q is for Quicksilver

Superfast gene

Played by both Aaron and Evan on screen



R is for Rogue

With her powers diverse

If you try to resist it makes everything worse

S is for Sentinels

Built to hunt mutants

Nimrod's the ultimate one of these beauties

T is for Thunderbird

Of New X-Men fame

Took down Nefaria by punching a plane

U's for Uncanny

The strangest of teens

Hated and feared for their mutated genes

V is for Vanisher

Hangs in the air

Caught in mid 'port he is only half there

W's for Worthington

Warren is the third

Angel, Death or Archangel soaring like a bird

X is for Xavier

But how is it said?

Pronounced with an ecks or a zee or a zed?

Y's for Yashida

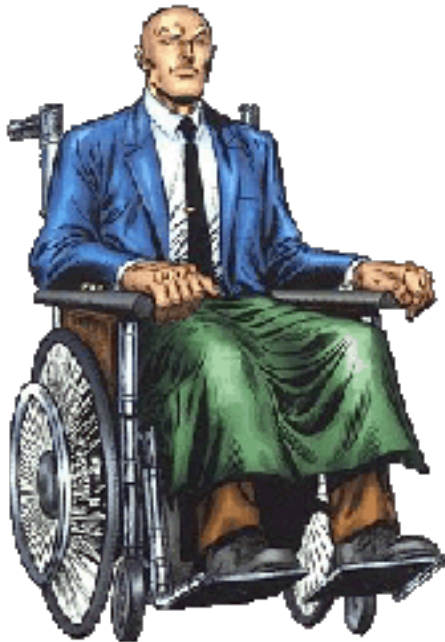
They're Mariko's clan

Wolverine battled these cats from Japan

Z's for Z'Nox

Those alien bad'uns

Originally drawn by the legend Neal Adams



The Best Mutant Power by Chuck Serface



On Nola Pfau's website, *X-Men Book Club*, Kayleigh, and Claire were discussing Doug Ramsey, also known as Cypher, deeming him the worst X-Man ever. I offer a taste of their exchange:

Kayleigh: Cypher, frequently cited by fanboys as one of the worst X-Men of all time! But why? Does he deserve it?

Claire: No, but he's also not interesting. He's like the junior version of what Rosie [Knight] sees as the use for Cyclops—just mister normal, there for comparison. Useful, but dull.

To be fair, I also first/mostly encountered him in retrospect, post-mortem. He was the X-Men's first teenage death, right? I can't remember if the Phalanx Covenant was before or after he died, but what I mean is that he's a definitive plus one! Doug ... and Kitty. Doug ... and Warlock. Doug ... and Rahne. Doug ... and Betsy. He is a supporting character, a piece of the furniture.

Ouch. Not even Aquaman has been considered furniture, and even Ultra the Multi-Alien has never been called useful but dull. In fairness, Kayleigh later steps back from her harsh tone ... a little bit:

Kayleigh: Doug's passive mutant power to understand languages made him pretty unique next to the characters who had adamantium claws or could shoot force beams from their eyes, and his presence among the New Mutants was a potent reminder that they were supposed to be students first, not warriors. (Of course, we know how well that worked out.) He was a little milquetoast, yeah, but underrated as the normie on the team and possible audience POV character.

Underrated, indeed. Doug never will play either role in the legendary fastball special, and if walking into a questionable alley I'd want Wolverine or Colossus with me rather than Doug. When asking anyone about powers many would say, "Claws," or "Metallic skin," but no way. I want Doug Ramsey's power, the best mutant power imaginable – omni-linguistics.

Doug can speak, write, read, and comprehend any language he encounters, living or dead, human or alien, including codes and computer languages. This ability operates intuitively, meaning that he absorbs languages subconsciously, not consciously as with non-mutant linguists, and this process can occur within minutes. Doug's powers aren't much against Magneto or Apocalypse, but I dwell in the real world, not an imaginary one with Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters. In the real world, omni-linguistic powers would rock.

Salaries for UN interpreters run from \$71, 990 to \$210, 000 annually depending on source and most likely an interpreter's classification level. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, those working for private concerns earned a \$53,640 median salary per year. However, salary ranges varied depending on employer, location, industry, and other factors, of course. These numbers aside, Doug could write his ticket especially since his range includes computer languages. Talk about human capital. Doug would be the LeBron James of linguists. I might get used to that.



Beyond material gain resides my real dream – reading untranslated literature. Never again would I feel trapped behind layers of translation. I could read anything ever written! I could understand idioms, idiosyncrasies, and metaphors as they were crafted originally. I wonder, though, how unconscious prejudices I may harbor would muddy this process. I'd never know until obtaining this blessing, but still – reading *Gilgamesh* untranslated, even thinking about it, sends shivers all through me. Related to this is a drive to revive dying languages to support cultural survival if possible. Yes, shivers abound.

Watch me throw a dart at a map and visit wherever it landed without worrying about communication barriers. No

phrase books or apps are needed because I would be a living app. Once while sharing a train ride with a Swedish gentleman, an Italian woman, and a German middle-aged couple, I sat amazed witnessing the Swede translate for all of us. I complimented him on his skill, noting he must be quite gifted. He shrugged and replied, "Swedish students start learning languages from the cradle. That young, it's more about acquisition than anything. This fades with age, of course." Don't I know it. Decades later I struggled with Ukrainian while with the Peace Corps. Sign me up for omni-linguistics now.

Finally, how meaningful would it be to handle disagreements without physical conflict but through the power of words? Here's where I'd gather the most satisfaction, knowing my skills could handle disputes from academic squabbles to international wars. I couldn't solve age-old differences or even sudden flare-ups single-handedly, but I'd strive to do my part because Mutant omni-linguists don't tire like non-mutant interpreters. As long as I was needed, I'd be there without a god complex or delusions of grandeur.

Laugh if you will at my evaluation, fanboys. I'm sticking with my judgment and my wish to feel the joys inherent to possessing such wonderful gifts. Omni-linguistics for the win. Just remember to point those claws away from me, please.

