

INTERVIEW WITH DEADPOOL'S FIRST WRITER, FABIAN NICIEZA

BACKLASH!

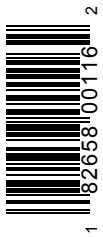
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MERCS & ANTI-HEROES ISSUE!

Deathstroke • Vigilante • Taskmaster • Wild Dog • Cable • and Archie Meets the Punisher! Featuring Beatty, Claremont, Collins, Lash, Michelinie, and a Liefeld cover!



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Originally crafted as a foil for the Teen Titans, Slade Wilson, a.k.a. *Deathstroke the Terminator*, has transcended that initial role, expanding to take on the entire DC Universe, even claiming his own solo title—four times—in the process.

IN THE BEGINNING

A worldwide recognizable brand in his own regard, Deathstroke the Terminator had a less grandiose stage to cross first. In his mercenary identity of the Terminator, Slade Wilson made his debut with his back to the readers on the opening splash page of the Marv Wolfman-written, George Pérez-drawn *New Teen Titans* #2 (Dec. 1980).

His origins wouldn't be revealed until three-and-a-half years after his debut, in *Tales of the Teen Titans* #44 (July 1984), but the man introduced to readers as Deathstroke the Terminator's story stretched back to the Suez Crisis in 1956, where he met his aide, confidant, and friend, William Randolph Wintergreen. Their friendship forged in the fires of war, the two men would meet again in the Vietnam War. In *Deathstroke* #16 (May 2017) of the *Rebirth*-era series, Wintergreen defines their relationship thusly: "Slade is not my boss. He's my friend... Imagine how dangerous he'd be without friends."

In between the Suez Crisis and Vietnam, Slade Wilson became the human weapon known as Deathstroke the Terminator. Stronger and more agile than any normal man and capable of utilizing 90% of his brain capacity, this amplified Wilson's ability to plot and plan. Following his military service, Wilson became a for-hire big-game hunter and eventually a mercenary, learning mastery of a vast arsenal of weaponry and fighting styles in the process.

In *New Teen Titans* #2, Deathstroke is listening to an offer from the H.I.V.E. (Hierarchy of International Vengeance and Eliminations). Deftly, writer Marv Wolfman builds Wilson's reputation through the conversation as this new character decides to walk out of the contract the H.I.V.E. is offering, making his first appearance more powerful than any text, *Who's Who*, or recap ever could. After all, H.I.V.E. wouldn't meet the Terminator's demands of payment, in full, before taking on the contract. That contract was to destroy the Teen Titans.

The directors of H.I.V.E. did not take "no" for an answer from Deathstroke, so they found the next best thing to the Terminator: his son, unbeknownst to anyone save, perhaps, Wolfman and Pérez. Grant Wilson made his debut as an apparently innocent bystander in *The New Teen Titans* #1 (Nov. 1980). Harboring Starfire in his apartment after "She fell out'a the sky!," Grant has to explain the gold-skinned alien's presence to his estranged girlfriend. In and of itself, that plot would fill many modern-day comics, but Gordanians and two

Stroke of Luck

Who knew, when Deathstroke first appeared as a villain in *The New Teen Titans* #2 (Dec. 1980), that this "Terminator" would later become a solo star? Cover by George Pérez.

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Deathstroke THE TERMINATOR™

by Doug Zawisza



GEORGE PÉREZ

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia.



separate waves of Titans bust through the apartment with almost comedic timing, save for the destruction they leave behind. As a result, Grant Wilson decides to blame the Titans for finalizing his breakup with Carol.

As a result, *New Teen Titans* #2 contains a supervillain origin, a family reunion, a Teen Titans pool party, and a grisly death, all in the span of 25 pages.

In a 1987 discussion with Andy Mangels for *Comics Interview* #50 (1987), Pérez said, "The Terminator, my favorite of the Titans' villains, because I really liked the idea of the strong, massive-yet-debonair older man. The fact that he's definitely a man in his [50s], but he's strong as an ox, very handsome, very polished—you can understand, again, a sexual appeal. I'm very big on the sexual appeal of characters—particularly males. Since all the men are big and muscular, to show a bit of sexuality in them, that's a tough thing to do. The fact that the Titans have developed... I've gotten mail from women who think that Terminator is sexy as all hell. And that's great. That's the feeling I wanted."

Three characters—Deathstroke, Ravager, and William Randolph Wintergreen—made their appearance in *New Teen Titans* #2. While Deathstroke is the only one who would go on to establish a comic-book series (repeatedly!), the other two characters are as inseparable from Deathstroke's journey as Alfred Pennyworth and Jason Todd would be for Batman...

...except Grant Wilson accounts for the aforementioned grisly death. Fueled by his rage against the Titans, he is all too willing and shortsighted when H.I.V.E. comes calling. They seemingly know about his childhood fixation with Deathstroke the Terminator and prey upon that, offering to boost his abilities so he would be able to utilize 100% of his brain, while Deathstroke can only claim mastery of 90% of his own gray matter. Donning a suit of armor not unlike the infamous attire Deathstroke wears and assuming the name Ravager, Grant takes on the contract and sets out to slay the Titans.

The experimental process burns out Grant, physically draining him every time he uses his powers. In the course of *New Teen Titans* #2, before his literal burnout, however, Grant is able to leverage his newfound abilities to near-singlehandedly shellac the Titans, until Starfire nails him with one of her starbolts. The bolt is not enough to kill Ravager, but it is enough to stop him in his tracks long enough for his body to catch up to him.

The Terminator was quick to blame the Titans for Ravager's demise, doing so as he scoops up the deceased form of the would-be assassin. He blurts out, "And he died... because of you!"

The issue ends with Slade Wilson and Wintergreen observing Carol Sladky at her one-time boyfriend's gravesite. Slade declares he has assumed the contract of the Ravager, after all, "Like father, like son!" Through this exchange and the subsequent eavesdropping of the H.I.V.E., readers are left to do the math that Ravager is Deathstroke the Terminator's son.



MARV WOLFMAN

Noel Wolfman.

According to Wolfman, from the onset, "Ravager was going to die. He was the catalyst for bringing in Deathstroke." In picking up the contract his son failed to fulfill, Slade Wilson—Deathstroke—would become the most recognizable foe to ever face the teen team.

It would be a few months before Slade Wilson's return. According to Wolfman's own recollection at the 2017 FanX Con in Salt Lake City, Utah (and captured in the March 22, 2017 episode of *Word Balloon*), "Every single new [DC] book died by issue #6. Because of that, we [Wolfman and Pérez] would do what we always wanted to do," which included



putting Robin in charge, dusting off some other teenaged heroes, creating a new set of friends, and crafting foes that could threaten DC heroes (and sometimes villains), regardless of their age.

"The first issue sold enormously high, as first issues always do," Wolfman said, indicating sales would slump a bit thereafter.

"You didn't get sales figures for six to nine months," which, when paired with a monthly book, means feedback and performance wouldn't even be known for nearly half a year after the comic hit

the newsstand. "They were ordering issue #3 without seeing issue #1." Once images met eyeballs, the title would eventually go on a stellar ascent, becoming one of DC's best and most consistent performers in the early 1980s.

As sales feedback was missing, the creators didn't have a deep read on Deathstroke's reception. Once they cleared the six-month hurdle, however, it was only natural that Slade Wilson would return, as the creative team was given a bit more latitude—and seized even more—to move forward and tell stories that made the Titans a beloved franchise.

Taken for Granted

Grant Wilson has a beef with the TTs on page 19 of *New Teen Titans* #1.

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Deadpool TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.



Deathstroke found bit spots in the "Panic in the Sky" storyline in the early-1992 Superman titles. Of greater significance, Deathstroke faced off with the Man of Steel in *Superman* #68 (June 1992), parallel in release date (but not necessarily story time) to the *Wonder Woman* appearances. Although he dodges a shot fired by the Metropolis Special Crimes Unit, Deathstroke picks up a significant amount of guilt when he realizes the civilian caught in the crossfire (and hit by the shot) is Lucy Lane—the daughter of Slade Wilson's wartime pal, Sam Lane.

Written and drawn by Dan Jurgens, *Superman* #68 makes Deathstroke out to be a master planner that can hoodwink the World's Greatest Superhero. There are a few moments where Jurgens stretches Deathstroke's ability to avoid the Man of Steel more than a little bit, but he does so to elevate Deathstroke. He also draws upon the mercenary's code of ethics. Deathstroke leverages that same code to follow-through with Lucy Lane before turning himself in to the M.S.C.U.

From there the story returns to the pages of *Deathstroke the Terminator* in #13 (Aug. 1992), where Wilson makes a break for freedom (using the "Are you sure I'm the right guy?" ploy he used in *Tales of the Teen Titans* #54). This leads to a fight with a ragtag bunch of throwaway characters and even a fight with a few members of the Justice League of the time—Green Lantern, Aquaman, and the Flash.

Slade Wilson wasn't quick to leave the pages of *The New Titans* once he had his own solo series. *Deathstroke the Terminator* #14 (Sept. 1992) through *Deathstroke the Terminator* #16 (Nov 1992) tied in with the "Total Chaos" event that introduced the *Team Titans* title.

Deathstroke the Terminator #15 (Oct. 1992) gave more backstory for Slade, including an affair with a character named Sweet Lili, which led to the introduction of Rose Wilson, who would eventually assume the Ravager identity.

Deathstroke appears to die in *Deathstroke the Terminator* #16, and in *Deathstroke the Terminator* #17 (Dec. 1992), he's brought back from death's grip to serve longtime Titans villain Cheshire, who nukes the nation of Qurac in *Deathstroke the Terminator* #19 (Feb. 1993). In attempting to stop Cheshire, Deathstroke would become more of an antihero, but his methods would still remain decisive and violent, even if he had a hip new uniform.

Around this time, *Showcase* '93 #6–11 gave Wilson a chance to shine alongside some of the deadlier denizens of the DC Universe, including Deadshot, Katana, and Peacemaker as they fought against Kobra.

Deathstroke the Terminator #22 (May 1993) kicked off a biweekly publishing schedule for the series that would last for six Steven Grant-written issues before Marv Wolfman's returned to the writer's chair for *Deathstroke the Terminator* #27 (Aug. 1993). The "World Tour" storyline kicked off in England, France, Hong Kong, China, India, Paris, Dallas, and, finally, Egypt in *Deathstroke the Terminator* #34 (March 1994). The story was driven by Slade's search for his ex-wife, Adeline, who would herself be transformed before the end of the tour. Along the way, Vigilante (Pat Trayce) shows up, rejoining Deathstroke's adventures.

In an interview with *Comics in the 80s* (Nov. 2016), inaugural *Deathstroke the Terminator* artist Steve Erwin said, "What I liked best about working on those books [*Deathstroke* and *Checkmate* before that] was that we went everywhere. Globally. We weren't stuck in any one location, like Gotham City or Metropolis. If I were to write and draw either title, that would remain the same. As far as a direction for story purposes, I don't know that I would write *Deathstroke the Terminator* any differently than Marv Wolfman did (just not as well). He wrote great stories and gave me a free hand with the action. As far as I'm concerned, he had the hard part of putting Slade into interesting situations to build the stories around."

Following the "World Tour," *Deathstroke the Terminator* would have a series of smaller adventures, the most notable of which is *Deathstroke the Terminator* #39 (Apr. 1994), where Deathstroke and Green Arrow first cross paths. It is also a bit of a catchall, with Vigilante (Trayce) in tow and Baron Winters (of *Night Force* fame) showing up.

Deadly Drop-In

Birds of Prey writer Chuck Dixon brought Deathstroke into that title for several issues beginning with #43 (July 2002). Original art page from that issue by Dave Ross and Andrew Pepoy. (inset) Phil Noto's Deathstroke cover for *Birds of Prey* #45.

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TASKMASTER

The Best There is at EVERYTHING He Does!



"When I first started working for Marvel after writing exclusively for DC for five years," states writer David Michelinie, "two questions about the Marvel Universe stood out immediately: (1) Where did villains who almost always failed in their robbery attempts get the money to finance their super-science gadgets and weapons?, and (2) Where the Hell did all those second-string bad guys and faceless goons learn how to be second-string bad guys and faceless goons?"

"A MYSTERY THAT STRETCHES TO THE VERY FOUNDATIONS OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE!"

As recounted in *BACK ISSUE* #72 (May 2014), writer David Michelinie left DC for Marvel in 1978. He became the scripter on *Iron Man* (soon introducing criminal financier Justin Hammer) and *The Avengers*. *Avengers* #194 (Apr. 1980) featured an asylum patient turning up at Avengers Mansion and begging the team for help. Acting alone, the Wasp decided to investigate. Her husband, Yellowjacket, and the new Ant-Man, Scott Lang, followed.

In *Avengers* #195, the tiny trio discover that the Solomon Institute for the Criminally Insane is actually a training center for second-string bad guys and faceless goons. The final page introduced the mastermind of the operation: the Taskmaster.

Avengers #196 explained that the Taskmaster possessed "photographic reflexes." He could perform any non-superpowered action simply by watching it. He couldn't fly, or cling to walls, but he could throw a shield exactly like Captain America, shoot as precisely as Hawkeye, and fight as effectively as any master combatant. He saw no money in becoming a crimefighter, and saw risk in becoming a criminal, so he decided to use his abilities to train others—for a substantial fee.

The Avengers arrived. However, because Taskmaster was so familiar with the fighting styles of many heroes (and villains), he could anticipate and counter their attacks. He briefly held off the Avengers until he encountered Jocasta. Having never seen her before, he didn't know how to fight her, and so decided that discretion was the better part of valor.

Rarely has there been such a perfect confluence of name, costume, abilities, and motivation. *BACK ISSUE* asked Michelinie about his creation. Did he build a villain around a name, or vice-versa? "In this case the cart came before the horse (if I'm getting my Olde Sayings correct). The idea for someone to train lackeys and wannabes was the first consideration, and I then came up with the name 'Taskmaster' to fit the character I was developing."

Did Michelinie contribute to Taskmaster's look or did it come from penciler George Pérez? "Love what George did!" Michelinie beams. "I'm sure I must have mentioned



He's Looking for a Few Bad Men

The Taskmaster's first cover appearance, *Avengers* #196 (June 1980). Cover signed by its penciler, George Pérez; inked by Joe Rubenstein. From the collection of Jarrod Buttery, who kindly provided all art scans for this article.

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Ko adds, "The idea of the series was to put this old, skull-faced character in a modern setting and make him cool. He is a merc for hire, so to us, having him going around in bright white and orange colors with a clunky cape and sword and shield made no sense. He should be more like a stealthy ninja-type, which is what inspired our outfit design. The shield is an iconic part of his gear, though, so we gave him a tactile holo shield that could appear or disappear as needed."

The use of *Iron Man* antagonist Sunset Bain was a welcome change to the oft-used Kingpin. "Funny you should say that," laughs Siu-Chong, "because in the original pitch, we did have Kingpin being the underworld boss that Taskmaster was feuding with. But he was a little overexposed and tied up with other storylines at the time. I think it was Ralph [Macchio] who suggested Sunset Bain as a substitute, and it all ended up better because of it. It was interesting having the extra spin of having a female main baddie in our series."

The story demonstrates not only Taskmaster's formidable fighting abilities but his casino skills, culinary expertise, and voice mimicry. We also discover that Taskmaster can be quite the gentleman as he meets and quickly charms the vivacious Sandi. His concern for her as she becomes accidentally caught up in the crosshairs of his profession demonstrates that he is not just a heartless thug, and contributes towards his motivation for what follows. However, before his final showdown with Sunset Bain's forces, Taskmaster pulls another trick with his photographic reflexes.... "That is from the great mind of our writer, Ken Siu-Chong!" beams Ko.

"It really just came naturally, thinking about some new stabs we could take on Taskmaster's powers, and how far we could push his limits," recalls Siu-Chong. "I wondered, if he watched something that was obviously superhuman, like someone moving in fast-forward, how would his body respond? I realized the image of Taskmaster just chilling on his couch watching kung-fu movies in fast-forward to 'train' was a little humorous, but just couldn't resist!"



KEN SIU-CHONG



Never a one-hit wonder, Taskmaster immediately continued with his new look elsewhere. "After our miniseries, we were lucky enough to be able to integrate Taskmaster and Sandi into our *Deadpool* and *Agent X* runs, so we could keep working with these characters for a bit longer," shares Ko. "I am very grateful and have to thank our good friend Gail Simone for accepting my suggestion to put Taskmaster and Sandi into her stories. *Taskmaster* was actually our very first big Marvel job, and was a very special series for us to work on!"

Returning to his original costume, Taskmaster features prominently in the Marvel events *Civil War*, *Dark Reign*, and *Siege*. It's during this time that the government again enlists his training skills, in *Avengers: The Initiative* #8 (Feb. 2008). Christos Gage, who was co-writing the series with Dan Slott, explains: "Taskmaster being the drill instructor at the Initiative was Dan Slott's idea, shortly before I came aboard, and I don't know what sparked it... but it wouldn't surprise me if the Gruenwald story had some influence. But I was super-happy because I have always loved Taskmaster, from his very first appearance. When *Dark Reign* came along, it seemed like a natural for Norman Osborn to put Taskmaster in charge of the whole Initiative program."

WHAT HE DOESN'T KNOW WILL KILL HIM

We are told in *Age of Heroes* #3 (Sept. 2010), "One hundred costumed criminals were arrested at the Siege of Asgard," but not Taskmaster.

Subsequently believing that he's turned State's evidence, the Org—the top-secret "villain underground"—places a billion-dollar bounty on Taskmaster's head. This leads directly into Taskmaster's second miniseries.

Taskmaster #1 (Nov. 2010), written by Fred Van Lente, finds our protagonist in a diner, searching his memories. He tells a waitress named Mercedes that he can't remember anything about his life. His implicit memories—abstract knowledge—that he absorbs via his photographic reflexes overwrite his explicit memories—specific experiences. He knows how to do things but not how he learned them. However, the diner is the first stop in a memory map that he has constructed for himself.

Van Lente describes the project's genesis: "I was out with my editor Lauren Sankovitch at a bar and she pitched me the idea of doing a *Taskmaster* miniseries. My first impulse was 'Whatever,' it didn't really appeal to me. But as I was laying my head down on the pillow to go to sleep that same night the idea just entered into my brain fully formed that it would be interesting if Taskmaster's own personal memories would be 'overwritten' like a computer running out of storage space by all the different skills he absorbed. So it wasn't so much, 'Let's tell his origin,' it was, 'This guy has a super-memory; what if his own past is a mystery he has to explore?'"

With no disguises—holographic or otherwise—Taskmaster's true face is revealed by artist Jefté Palo. "I always liked the very Ditko moment in *Spider-Man* when he defeats Electro for the first time and pulls off his mask and is like, 'I have no idea who this is,'" laughs Van Lente. "There are so rarely dramatic connections in life. So I told Jefté, 'Just make him look like some guy.' We didn't have a lot of back and forth. I did it all through Lauren and Jefté's agent, which is pretty common for overseas artists. I wasn't aware of the earlier *Daredevil* comic."

With Mercedes mistakenly implicated in the bounty, the next stop in Taskmaster's "Memory Palace" is Michoacán, West Mexico. He meets the skull-masked drug-lord Don of the Dead and remembers his first assignment retraining the Don's men. "From that time, Taskmaster too decided to wear

Masters, Tony Masters

A holo-disguised Taskmaster hands out a "T. Master" business card in *Taskmaster* #1 (Apr. 2002). In later years, Marvel adopted Tony Masters as the character's real name, surprising UDON Studio's Ken Siu-Chong, who tells *BI*, "Honestly, it was a bit of a joke—like, what would be the most obvious alias he could come up with...?"

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Who Were Those Masked Men?

The VIGILANTE Story

by Brian Martin



"Maybe I no longer care about the law? Maybe I just care about what's right." With those words, spoken in *The New Teen Titans* #26 (Dec. 1982), district attorney Adrian Chase set out what was to come, not only for himself, but maybe for every character who would take on the mantle of the Vigilante.

Introduced not long before in issue #23, Adrian Chase was a civil servant who had just about had enough of criminals skirting the law and using legal gray areas to their advantage. Over the next year or so he made frequent appearances in the title, and his frustrations grew.

When druglord Anthony Scarapelli walks free after being apprehended red-handed by the D.A. and the Titans, Chase reaches his breaking point. Enlisting Robin's aid, the duo stage a barely legal raid on Scarapelli's home and bring the villain in on a minor charge. But the crime kingpin would not take this affront lying down.

In issue #34 of *Titans*, Scarapelli gains his revenge by blowing up Chase's apartment, killing Chase's wife and children and leaving the D.A. in critical condition.

The story continues into *New Teen Titans Annual* #2, where the Titans do their best to hound Scarapelli as they attempt to find incriminating evidence. As the battle escalates between the Titans and the mobster's forces, the young heroes receive help from a figure that remains in the shadows, a figure whose methodology involves killing his enemies with a rifle. As the story reaches its climax, the figure is shown to be a new character, the Vigilante. He confronts Scarapelli and reveals his identity—Adrian Chase. Killing the mobster in a gunfight that leaves Robin unconscious, Chase vanishes.

It took a while after his introduction for the transition to take place, but co-creator Marv Wolfman tells *BACK ISSUE*, "Adrian was created to become the Vigilante down the road. I already had Vigilante in mind, but wanted to set the character up."

BEGINNING WITH BAXTER

The Vigilante series debuted with a first issue cover-dated November 1983. Marv Wolfman began as writer and Keith Pollard was given penciling duties. *Vigilante* was tied with *Thriller* (a series that was examined in *BI* #98 just last year) as DC's second regular series to be printed on "Baxter" paper, the high-quality white paper that was a top-end product at the time. Both appeared with the same cover date after *Omega Men* had claimed the honor of the first regular series in the format when it debuted, cover-dated April 1983.

When a character is given his or her own series, it necessitates the introduction of a supporting cast, if for no other reason than to give the lead someone to talk to. In the case of *Vigilante*, the cast consists of a research assistant named Theresa Gomez and computer whiz J. J. Davis. Near-future issues would reveal that both of them had recently been through harrowing experiences that had culminated in travesties of justice, and they were now joining Adrian in his proclaimed mission

Taking Aim

Adrian Chase's debut as the Vigilante, *New Teen Titans Annual* #2 (1983). Cover by George Pérez.

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Vengeance is Mine

Robin encounters the Vigilante on this gripping page from *New Teen Titans Annual #2*. By Marv Wolfman, George Pérez, and Pablo Marcos. Original art courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

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to right wrongs by going after criminals freed due to various legal technicalities.

Adrian's first solo mission appears to go against this credo when Theresa asks him to help a friend whose husband has been murdered while protecting his family. Things change when Adrian is informed that a man named Quilt is behind the killing. Quilt is a prominent businessman with a long history of skirting the law whom Adrian had many times run afoul of in his days as D.A.

The case leads Vigilante into conflict with Quilt's enforcer, Brand, a man who literally likes to burn his victims with a branding iron. Suffice to say we are given glimpses into the way the Vigilante will operate and the number of bodies he will leave behind before this first case is complete.

QUICK-CHANGE ARTIST

With only the second issue, Adrian and company undergo a major change in modus operandi. A man is released from prison after the courts overturn the verdict in his case. The man had been found guilty of raping a nun in a case tried by D.A. Adrian Chase two years before.

Vigilante tracks him down and almost beats him to death before J. J. intervenes, revealing that evidence has been found that exonerates the man. As Chase stares back at the carnage he has just wrought, he experiences a major crisis of faith.

Chase turns his back on his Vigilante persona faster than he adopted it and is convinced to join his father's law firm, defending the guilty with the same loopholes he had so recently fought against. However, a short time doing this quickly reminds him why he was doing what he was as Vigilante. Convinced that a change in methods, not a change in goals, is what's needed, he quickly "gets the band back together" and resurrects the Vigilante.

If it seems that the second issue was awfully soon to be altering your lead character's *raison d'être*, Wolfman comments that this was actually meant to be the norm for the star attraction: "Adrian was a character who was constantly having to make decisions about what he was and would constantly change."

The change is made apparent in the very next issue. Cyborg guest-stars in issue #3 (Feb. 1984) as the bodyguard for one William Stryker. Stryker is being transferred to prison to spend a one-year sentence. The problem is, he is known to be guilty of crimes deserving of a much stiffer penalty, but technicalities have greatly reduced his time. Complicating matters is the fact that Stryker is responsible for the beating and rape of J. J.'s fiancée, making this a much more personal vendetta for Vigilante.

In the end, after sidestepping Cyborg, Vigilante corners Stryker but finds himself unable to kill him. Luckily the ordeal has unhinged the villain's mind slightly and he begins spouting information that should lead to a much stiffer penalty. Both Adrian and J. J. come to the realization that killing him was not the answer, thereby reinforcing the Vigilante's new stance. Further to that, a couple of issues later we discover Adrian was having his gun modified to be able to fire sleep darts as well as bullets.

Issue #4 (Mar. 1984) is an artistic fill-in by penciler Don Newton that showcases a Hollywood trial and scandal. Vigilante becomes involved when a masked assassin begins killing witnesses in the trial. Significantly for the series we are introduced to the Controller, a man whose body is about 90% machine, and who will have a major effect on our cast very shortly.

The series' fifth issue features the debut of a character who would play a major role as the series progressed. Marcia King is an old assistant of Adrian's from his D.A. days who has herself just been promoted to assistant D.A. Adrian attends the party thrown to celebrate this, and the two subsequently begin a romance.

Also debuting are a pair of villains who would become recurring foes of the Vigilante. Sporting the names Cannon and Sabre, one specializes in guns, the other, knives (I'll leave it to you to figure out which was which). In this tale they are taking out rival gang heads and come up with the idea of taking over the gangs themselves.

Vigilante tracks down the pair but loses the battle and ends up lying stabbed and shot at his foe's mercy. Police show up not long afterwards to find all three men unconscious. Though never actually stated in the comics, we are given clues that lead to the conclusion that the pair were taken out by the Electrocutioner, another character who hated released lawbreakers; he was introduced in *Batman* #331 (Jan. 1981). This shocking villain would be a thorn in Adrian's side for a little while to come.

As all three are being prepared to be taken to the hospital, J. J. manages to steal the ambulance Adrian has been loaded into and spirits his boss away.



by Marc Buxton

A DECADE OF VIOLENCE

Do you smell it, my fellow comic-book historians? Can you smell the acrid, burning stench of cordite and spent shotgun shells? Can you smell the fresh viscera spilled from the bowels of the unjust and corrupt?

Well, in the late '80s you could smell it all, because violent anti-heroes were everywhere. From Marvel to DC and everywhere in between, comic companies were cashing in on these *Death Wish*- and *Dirty Harry*-inspired anti-heroes.

But not all of these dark vigilantes were trend-chasing psychopaths. On the contrary, some of these death-obsessed vigilantes of the decade of Ronald Reagan and "I Want my MTV" were well-thought-out characters that require a second historical look to find the hidden gems of the gore-filled battlefield that was the late '80s. Enter: Wild Dog.

DC Comics' Wild Dog was indeed one of those anti-heroes, but a look back at the character's history proves the hockey-masked terror-smasher to be so much more.

WHO IS WILD DOG?: THE BEGINNING

When *Wild Dog* was first announced in DC house ads, fans were more than familiar with the creative team pegged to bring this latest crime buster to life. Fans of quality crime fiction were more than aware of writer Max Allan Collins. By 1987, Collins was the writer of a number of bestselling mystery novels, he had recently reintroduced Jason Todd (Robin II) in the pages of the post-Crisis *Batman*, and he was garnering critical love with his noir throwback comic series *Ms. Tree*. Along with Collins, this new *Wild Dog* series was to feature *Ms. Tree* artist Terry Beatty. Collins and Beatty were forging their legends with *Ms. Tree*, so anything the creative duo embarked upon would raise an eyebrow.

On the surface with *Wild Dog*, Collins and Beatty were presenting a Punisher clone. But when *Wild Dog* #1 (Sept. 1987) hit the stands, it was clear that this new vigilante was something very different. Before we delve into the blood-soaked world of Wild Dog, we must mention Mike Gold, a brilliant editor who was instrumental in getting Collins and Beatty aboard the project.

As for the book's beginnings, Max Allan Collins tells *BACK ISSUE*, "Editor Mike Gold was, and is, a good friend of mine. I don't recall whether he approached us or not. I would certainly have been in a position to approach him. But it would not have been with *Wild Dog*, just an interest, a willingness to do something with DC. Terry and I were still doing *Ms. Tree* and the income was just okay. I do know that I was adamant about doing a costumed hero, in the *Batman* or *Zorro* mode, and not a superhero. My interest in that genre is minimal."

Terry Beatty also recalls that Gold was the catalyst for the project that would become *Wild Dog*, and reveals that Wild Dog almost had an all-together different moniker. "Max and I were not making much money from our detective comic, *Ms. Tree*, and were looking to do something to supplement our income (well, more mine,



MAX ALLAN COLLINS



First Blood

The Terry Beatty/Dick Giordano cover to *Wild Dog* #1 (Sept. 1987), the character's premiere. Note how the logo obstructs Wild Dog's eyes, heightening the mystery of his identity.

TM & © DC Comics.



Crime-Crushers

(left) Prior to *Wild Dog*, Collins and Beatty's gritty *Ms. Tree* was an indie favorite. (right) Who dat? Red Dog, one of Sgt. Slaughter's Marauders from the G.I. Joe universe.

Ms. Tree TM & © Max Allan Collins and Terry Beatty.
Red Dog © Hasbro.

really). Our friend Mike Gold had landed at DC as an editor, and we pitched *Wild Dog* (originally called *Machine*) to him."

So with *Wild Dog* named and ready to go and Gold steering the ship, the two creators got to work. Collins forever had his toe in the wonderful waters of the past while presenting modern genre tales, and *Wild Dog* was no different. "I wasn't paying any attention to trends," Collins says. "I didn't read much of the competition—my interest was, and is, in the classic comic strips and in ECs and other comic books of that era. The vigilante aspect had everything to do with *Zorro* and nothing to do with *The Punisher* or even the pulp novels of that genre, like *The Executioner*. As with *Ms. Tree*, Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, the first modern vigilante hero, was an inspiration." So while others were pulling their dark-vigilante fantasies from modern comic-book masters like Frank Miller and Alan Moore (and often crafting pale imitations of the same), Collins was pulling from Spillane and *Dick Tracy* creator Chester Gould to create a comic book inspired by the past but rooted in the present.

Terry Beatty agrees with Collins' assessment of *Wild Dog* being an amalgam of then-modern-day comic vigilantes and pulp-inspired classical heroes. "The comic vigilante thing had something to do with it, Beatty recalls. "But we were also riffing off Chuck Norris movies and 'men's adventure' paperback heroes. With a little Lone Ranger thrown in the mix for good measure."

Wild Dog may have been inspired by writers of realistic crime fiction, but the new vigilante was entrenched in the DC Universe. Yet this gun-happy killer was not fighting crime and terror in such iconic locales as Gotham City or Metropolis... no, *Wild Dog* operated somewhere much smaller. Both Collins and Beatty have roots in Iowa, and this unlikely piece of mid-America was chosen as the setting for *Wild Dog*.

As to why *Wild Dog* was set in such an unlikely place as the mid-American Quad Cities, Max Allan Collins tells *BACK ISSUE*, "I believe we did it as a sort of stunt—because it was our home area and we figured it was both an unusual setting for a comic book of this kind and that it would likely attract local media attention. It sure did! Lots of media, and we did an outdoor signing at a comic-book shop that was swarming with fans. Closest thing to Beatlemania I'm likely to experience." Terry Beatty remembers that surreal local success as well and adds, "I will note that

the comic sold *huge* numbers in the Quad Cities area where the series' action was set. We did store signings there with lines wrapped 'round the block. It was crazy."

So *Wild Dog* was a hit in the Quad Cities in Iowa and Illinois, the unlikely location where the book was set. *Wild Dog*, the character, looked like something that Larry Hama forgot to create for *G.I. Joe*. It was clear that visually, Collins and Beatty wanted something modern and action-figure-like, looking but juxtaposed with the pulp and noir sensibilities of the proto-comics world. In fact, *Wild Dog*'s G.I. Joe roots go even deeper. "The character was [earlier] called Red Dog,"

Collins recalls. "After the football practice of rushing the line—I played football in high school—and that's where Terry's great 'red dog' logo came from." Collins and Beatty changed the name to *Wild Dog* because Red Dog was a name already being used by a member of G.I. Joe. Red Dog was a member of Sgt. Slaughter's Marauders and wore a—wait for it!—football jersey into battle, so to avoid confusion, Collins and Beatty changed their new vigilante's name to *Wild Dog*.

As for *Wild Dog*'s design esthetic, Collins informs *BACK ISSUE*, "The elements were collaborative. The concept was a real-world costumed hero—what would his costume be like? Specifically, how would he disguise himself and arm himself for battle? What would his tools be? The idea of a football jersey

having a resemblance to a costumed hero's shirt made a lot of sense. The hockey mask was both protective and a wink toward *Friday the 13th*... The elements were collaborative; the design, entirely Terry."

Beatty agrees: "The look of the costume was my doing—but the concepts were a mix of Max and me. This really was a collaboration, and the co-creator description is accurate in this case." As for *Wild Dog*'s uncharacteristic, sports-inspired appearance, Beatty says that the jersey and hockey-mask look "came out of Max's notion that he'd be an ex-football player—and the shirt was a jersey with the team's mascot on it. The entire costume was meant to be 'off the rack'—stuff anyone could have thrown together. We were trying for something that could be DC's *Punisher* (in the sense that *Daredevil* was Marvel's *Batman*)... and there was some Chuck Norris movie with him driving a truck around and fighting terrorists that played into it. The hockey mask comes from Jason in the *Friday the 13th* movies—but it's white as a nod to the Lone Ranger's white hat."



TERRY BEATTY

JON SABLE FREELANCE

by MIKE GRELL



captions by
Michael Eury

MERCS AND ANTI-HEROES IN GRAPHITE

Children's book author B. B. Flemm by day, mercenary Jon Sable by night... writer/artist Mike Grell's *Jon Sable Freelance* was an indie hit starting with its 1983 premiere from First Comics. The series has returned to print in the years since. Here's Grell's hard-hitting hero in an undated pencil illo from the archives of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

Jon Sable Freelance TM & © Mike Grell.

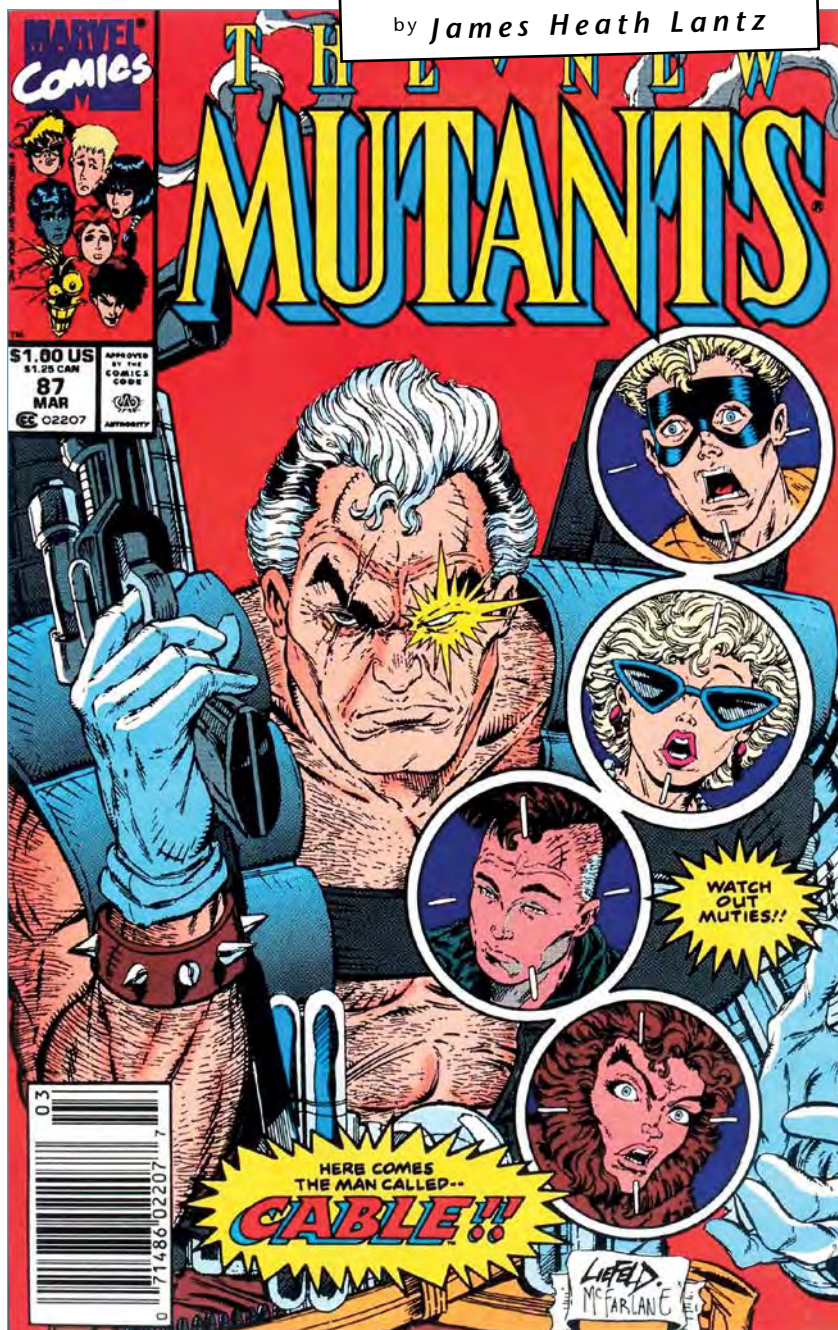


CABLE™

Guide

A LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF MARVEL'S TIME-TRAVELING MUTANT

by James Heath Lantz



FlashBack!

He's been a soldier, a mercenary, a father, a son, and, if you believe Deadpool in the post-credits scene of his first film, he could be played by Mel Gibson or Dolph Lundgren or Keira Knightley (hey, she's got range) in *Deadpool 2*. Yes, *BACK ISSUE* fans, we know Josh Brolin got the role, but don't tell Wade Wilson.

Anyhow, to celebrate the coming of Cable to the big screen, we will be looking at the character's rich history in the Bronze Age and beyond while a certain Merc with a Mouth holds a *huge* gun to this writer's head. "Make sure you spell his name right, ya hack," he says under his red mask. That's C A B L... uh... click E. Phew!

SUMMERS TIME

When the 10th Doctor described time as "wibbly wobbly" in *Doctor Who*, he may have had Cable in mind. Cable is one of the few characters with two first appearances. Hold on to your time machines—all shall be explained. Spoilers are up ahead. If you haven't read the comics discussed, you'll be placed on Mother Askani's naughty list.

On October 8, 1985, the January 1986 cover-dated *Uncanny X-Men* #201, written by Chris Claremont and drawn by Rick Leonardi, was on spinner racks and shelves. Not only did it have Storm and Cyclops fighting for leadership of the mutant heroes, it marked the debut of Nathan Christopher Charles Summers, newborn son of Scott Summers/Cyclops and Madelyne Pryor, who was later revealed to be a clone of Jean Grey.

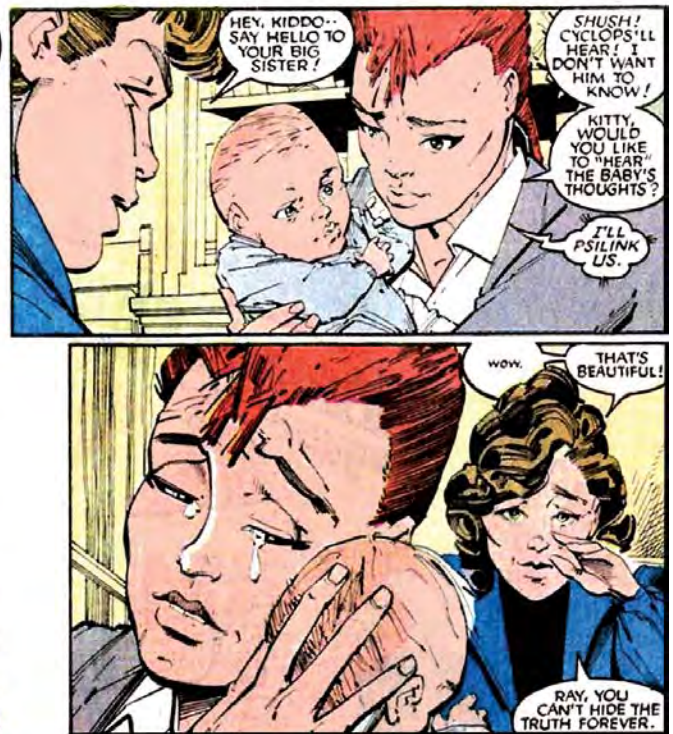
We now time-jump to 1990. That year, Arnold Schwarzenegger suffered from *Total Recall*. The mystery of who killed Laura Palmer was on the minds of the citizens of *Twin Peaks*. Sinead O'Connor told music fans "Nothing Compares 2 U," while the song's composer, Prince, released *Graffiti Bridge*, the sequel to *Purple Rain*, and its soundtrack featuring future members of his band the New Power Generation. In the Marvel Universe, *New Mutants* #86 gave readers the cameo appearance of the enigmatic Cable, whose first full story would be published in the next issue.

Cable's creation has stirred up some debates over credit to this very day. While Louise Simonson and Rob Liefeld are listed as co-creators, how much merits go to whom seems to cause controversy. Brian Cronin, writer of the *Comic Book Resources* regular column "Comic Book Legends Revealed," doesn't believe Simonson had anything to do with Cable's conception, stating, "The genesis of the character came generally from editor Bob Harras determining that *New Mutants* needed to shake things up. What Harras wanted was a new leader for the group, someone a lot different than Professor X." *Thor* writer and artist Walter Simonson, Louise's husband, feels his wife deserves credit for her contribution to Cable's genesis, even though he recounted similar events in his letter to *Comic Buyer's Guide*, which later resurfaced on his official Facebook page. "Mostly, the creation of Cable began indirectly," Simonson wrote. "Weezie was the writer of *New Mutants*, Mr. Liefeld was the penciler, Bob Harras was the editor. Bob had told Weezie that he wanted the *New Mutants* to have a new adult leader now that Professor X was no longer in the book."

Cable Installation

Marvel readers first met Cable (and Stryfe) in *New Mutants* #87 (Mar. 1990). Cover by Rob Liefeld and Todd McFarlane.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.



The Other First Appearance

(above) In *Uncanny X-Men* #201 (Jan. 1986), baby Nathan Summers shows he's something special. Art by Rick Leonardi and Whilce Portacio.

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TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Now, Bob Harras, according to Cronin's "Comic Book Legends Revealed" and Sean Howe in his book *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*, had also gone to Rob Liefeld about the change to the New Mutants' status quo. Liefeld sent Harras numerous pages of character designs with a note that read, "Bob—some future friends and/or foes for the Muties! If ya don't like 'em, trash 'em! 's okay with me—but if you're interested—give me a call!"

One thing Walter Simonson pointed out in his CBG letter is that Bob Harras had wanted a robot from his run on *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* to command the teenage band of mutants. Louise Simonson didn't think that or an adult head of the New Mutants was a good idea. She compromised on the latter and thought a military leader who was a sharp contrast to the more cerebral Charles Xavier would work for her pitch of the character. The time-traveler element was also introduced by both Simonson and Rob Liefeld. Liefeld's were visually possibly influenced by *The Terminator*. One can see similarities to Cable and Arnold Schwarzenegger's cyborg of celluloid in such images as the covers of *X-Force* #9 (left) and 13.

Bob Harras, while discussing *New Mutants* with Louise Simonson, had met separately with Rob Liefeld about what he wanted to do with the comic. The Simonsons had seen some of Liefeld's artwork in Louise's office and approved these sketches, and the character of Cable was to be added to the book. Walter told *Comic Buyer's Guide* that while they were perusing Liefeld's drawings, Bob Harras also wanted a nemesis for Cable who would eventually become Stryfe. (More on him in a few moments.)

Perhaps one of the most iconic things about a character when he or she is created is his or her moniker. During his initial conception, Cable went through a number of name changes like David Bowie or Prince. Notes on the man of mystery with the cybernetic eye stated that his name should be Cybrid or Cable. Harras had suggested Quentin. Quinn was also another possibility. Liefeld himself said of

Cable's creation and name options in *Comics Bulletin's* "Rob Liefeld: Any More Questions?," as quoted from Cable's Wikipedia page: "I was given a directive to create a new leader for the New Mutants. There was no name, no description besides a 'man of action,' the opposite of Xavier. I created the look, the name, much of the history of the character. After I named him Cable, Bob suggested Quinn and Louise had Commander X."

Sean Howe's *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story* quoted the following from Liefeld: "Bob said, 'Let's call him Quentin,' I said, 'Yuck!' I had already put 'Cable' down as his name on the sketches. Then, in Louise's plot, after being told his name was Cable, he was called Commander X throughout. I said, 'If this guy is called Commander X, I want nothing to do with it.' That seemed ridiculous to me."

According to Walter Simonson's letter to CBG, Louise's Commander X was merely meant as a placeholder until a name was decided upon. Harras, as Sean Howe wrote, had given Liefeld what he had wanted and green-lit Cable.

Cable was not originally intended for *New Mutants*. He had been meant for another *X-Men* spin-off, *Alpha Flight*, as Rob Liefeld told interviewer Rich

Johnston: "Cable was in fact first introduced as a character in an *Alpha Flight* proposal that I gave to Danny Fingeroth that was green-lit and moving forward until an *Alpha Flight* relaunch was ultimately ruled out, a condition necessary for me to jump over from the X-office. Cable walked in the doors with me when I arrived at Marvel, he eventually turned up in *New Mutants*."

Fabian Nicieza, who followed Louise Simonson as *New Mutants'* writer, shares some anecdotes about Cable with *BACK ISSUE*: "Rob had a really fully realized vision for the character, and how he wanted to develop him from the beginning, but so much of that was in his mind and not on paper, that when he left, we didn't have defining guidelines to follow. That was totally his prerogative, no issues, but having 'inherited' the



LOUISE SIMONSON

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responsibility, I would have loved to have been better able to use his plans as the framework.

"I get asked questions about those books all the time, and I am honest that my memory isn't ironclad regarding the details," Nicieza admits. "People tend to forget I was writing several other books besides the X-titles and I also had a full-time job as an editor, so my attentions were understandably divided. I remember the 'Cable is baby Nathan' thing as something that was grafted on to the character because Jim Lee and Whilce Portacio suggested it and Bob liked it enough to convince Rob to go with it. I don't even remember if that's accurate or not, but it's how I recall that continuity tangle having been initiated.

"I think Rob figured he could make it work or tweak it as needed as he went along. It wasn't necessarily a bad idea from an X-continuity standpoint, but I always felt it was a bad idea from Cable's standpoint. It bogged him down way too much and ultimately, it bogged down Scott and Jean, too. A year later I was not a very happy camper when I found out about the 'Scott and Jean Honeymoon' miniseries. It was actually well underway before I even knew about it, and that one really rubbed me raw. Not only did it take the idea of a wedding, a positive thing, and weigh it down with tremendous story burdens—but it also allowed a writer who had no experience and no real vested interest in Cable to define way too much about his past."

Yes, Cable is Scott Summers and Madelyne Pryor's son Nathan. However, according to Brian Cronin in "Comic Book Legends Revealed" #387, Rob Liefeld originally intended for Cable to be an older version of the New Mutant Cannonball. Cable's reaction to Sam (Cannonball) Guthrie's apparent death in *X-Force* #7 and his resurrection in #8 could lead some to believe this. Liefeld himself said to Cronin, "A character like Wolverine has had multiple false origins, mysteries. I felt the same could be done with Cable."

But how did Nathan Christopher Charles Summers become the Cable we see throughout his time in the various Marvel comics?, you ask. Well, Mister Sinister intended to use Nathan Summers as a weapon against Apocalypse. After the child was freed from Sinister's laboratory, Apocalypse infected young Nathan with a techno-organic virus. Cyclops sent the infant into the future with a woman named Askani to save his life.

As stated by Fabian Nicieza before, X-Book editor Bob Harras and artists Whilce Portacio and Jim Lee felt that making Cable Nathan Summers was a good idea for the character's origin. The *New Mutants/X-Force* team of Liefeld and Nicieza had other plans for Cable that got sidelined. Liefeld didn't like this, but he went along with Harras and the others. What he and Nicieza had in mind could still work for their stories.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY AND KNOW YOURSELF

Sun Tzu said in *The Art of War*, "If you know the enemy and know yourself..." Those words could apply to Cable, for his enemy was himself.

Throughout the *New Mutants* comic books featuring Cable and Stryfe, both were men of mystery. It isn't until *New Mutants* #100 (Apr. 1991), the first series' final issue, that the revelation about Stryfe is shown on the last page. He looks exactly like Cable. In fact, it was the original intention of Rob Liefeld and Fabian Nicieza that Stryfe be Cable. Liefeld and Nicieza initially wanted Stryfe to be Cable from another point in time, much like Ethan Hawke and Sarah Snook's characters in the indie sci-fi film *Predestination*. Directions got changed in the X-Books, but Stryfe turned out to be Cable, in a sense. Mother Askani had cloned him in case he could not be saved from the techno-organic virus. This duplicate's aging process was accelerated until he was the same age as Nathan. While the Askani tribe was able to halt the spread

of the virus in Nathan, Apocalypse's forces take the clone. Apocalypse himself raises the boy and calls him Stryfe.

While Stryfe and Cable have clashed on numerous occasions—and one figure was often thought to be the other, particularly throughout later issues of *New Mutants* and early *X-Force* comics—the conflict and confusion between them is extremely evident in the two-issue miniseries *Cable: Blood and Metal* and the *X-Men* crossover event "The X-Cutioner's Song."

Blood and Metal gave readers a look into the pasts of both Cable and Stryfe. Garrison Kane seeks revenge on Cable, believing him to be Stryfe. Meanwhile, Stryfe is unmasked in front of Nathan Summers, leaving him with more questions than answers.

"I do recall the nightmare of knowing a *Cable* limited series was already in the publishing program budget plans when the Image artist exodus was happening," Fabian Nicieza says of *Blood and Metal*. "We didn't know how long the guys would still be working on the titles, etc. So when decisions were finally made, and we knew Rob Liefeld wouldn't be involved in plotting or drawing the book, we had a very short turn-around to try and figure out what the story would be. [Artist] John Romita Jr.'s schedule was always going to be tight, but Bob Harras wanted a 'heavy hitter' on the project. There were aspects of *Blood and Metal* which, when I



ROB LIEFELD

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Work in Progress

Rob Liefeld's original sketches for the character we now know as Cable. Scan courtesy of James Heath Lantz.

Cable TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. Art © 1989 Rob Liefeld.

THE EVOLUTION OF DEADPOOL™

An Interview with Fabian Nicieza

by Michael Eury



FABIAN NICIEZA

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On December 11, 1990, the world as we know it changed. No, I'm not referring to the touchdown of the space shuttle Columbia (that was the 69th US manned space mission, which by this point was even beginning to bore NASA techies) or the divorce of Donald and Ivana Trump, both of which occurred on that fateful day.

December 11th was the release date for the latest issue of a white-hot Marvel comic—The New Mutants #98 (cover-dated Feb. 1991)—plotted and illustrated by a white-hot superstar artist—Rob Liefeld, who, beginning with this issue, was now partnered with super-scripiter Fabian Nicieza. New Mutants #98 featured the book's new star, Cable, being targeted by a fast-talking mercenary who would one day become the fourth-wall-breaking, franchise-flourishing, box-office-busting *Deadpool*.

By late 1990, New Mutants was barely recognizable to those readers who had signed on to the series started by Chris Claremont and Bob McLeod in 1982's Marvel Graphic Novel #4. Gone was the original concept of young protégés of Professor Charles Xavier... in its place had evolved a task force headed up by a heavily armored time-traveler (see separate Cable article) and composed of a mix of "old" New Mutants, one-time X-Terminators (from the pages of X-Factor), and newly created characters. The talented Louise Simonson had scripted the title for several years, but once the prolific young Liefeld began driving its plots and visuals, New Mutants skyrocketed to the House of Ideas' bestseller list. Liefeld's feverish covers and interiors (inked by Todd McFarlane, Scott Williams, Hilary Barta, Art Thibert, and others) grabbed for the reader's jugular and refused to let go, and Nicieza's dialogue anchored that raw energy and made New Mutants' larger-than-life characters believable. New players like Domino, Feral, Shatterstar, and Warpath revitalized the book, but no character from the series captivated the attention of fans more than Deadpool.

It didn't take Deadpool long to ascend to a much greater profile than his original guest-villain status, and while Liefeld vacated the House of Ideas in 1992 as one of the founders of Image Comics, Nicieza remained on board—for a while, at least—charting emerging star Deadpool's course (and eventually returning to the character).

With Deadpool's second movie, a new animated series, and 28th birthday occurring this year, ye ed (I love saying "ye ed") called upon fan-favorite comics scribe Fabian Nicieza for this lively chat about the Merc with a Mouth's early days.

— Michael Eury

MICHAEL EURY: While you had previously scripted one of Louise Simonson's plots (issue #91), New Mutants #98 began your run on the title. How were you hired to work on this series?

FABIAN NICIEZA: Rob Liefeld and editor Bob Harras had discussed various people they thought could do the assignment and ultimately either decided on me or ran out of better options, so they offered me the gig. I thought everything Rob was doing was really fun and full of energy, but I was already writing two monthly titles at that time (*New Warriors* and *Alpha Flight*) on top of

Meet Deadpool

Cover to New Mutants #98 (Feb. 1991), by Rob Liefeld, which also debuted Rob's Gideon and Domino characters.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

WOOOOO-HOOOOO!!!!
NOW, THIS IS WHAT I'M TALKIN' 'BOUT,
BABY! BRING IT ON!

"And you talk too much."

Deadpool vs. Cable, from *New Mutants* #98. Plotted and illustrated by Rob Liefeld, scripted by Fabian Nicieza. Note Deadpool's "hollow" word balloons.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

a full-time job at Marvel, so the greedy pig part of me was thinking this would be an easier paycheck than having to also plot the book. I was certainly right about the paycheck part, since it succeeded beyond even our confident expectations!

EURY: You defined Deadpool's talkative personality. Did you and Rob discuss Deadpool's voice before you dialogued *New Mutants* #98?

NICIEZA: I remember we had a long phone conversation when I got the layouts or just as I got them. Rob's plot notes were actually incorporated into the layout faxes, if memory serves. We just talked through the beats of the stories and his general thoughts on each of the new characters that Rob was introducing (Domino, Gideon, and Deadpool). He gave me very broad strokes on each of them, but told me to handle their dialogue as I thought would work best.

EURY: How did the character's voice come to you?

NICIEZA: I remember three distinct things crossing my mind:

1) By the time Deadpool appears on camera—I think it's around page 13 or so—I had already been scripting

lots of very serious, very testosterone-y characters and I wanted a change of pace just to entertain myself.

2) Rob had described him in our conversation as "Spider-Man meets Punisher," in regard to the visual approach. A merc with guns and weapons, but he moved real fast and fought more like Spider-Man. So I took the Spider-Man part of that into account and decided to make him an annoying loudmouth.

3) The book was Cable's book. The scene where Deadpool first appears had to be about Cable, not about Deadpool, because Deadpool was "just" a villain showing up for seven pages, and who knew for certain if he'd ever appear again?

So Cable endures Deadpool's banter and personality, which are really counter to Cable's.

After Cable defeated Deadpool, Rob drew Deadpool tied up, but then he wasn't shown or mentioned in the plot again over the last couple pages. Was he delivered to the police? Did Cable kill him? Was there a jail at the mansion we didn't know about?

In dialogue I decided to have Cable say he had "Fed-Exed" Deadpool back to his boss, Tolliver. I figured it was a unique thing to do to a defeated villain, sent a clear message from Cable to both Tolliver and Deadpool, and—most of all—turned it into a Cable bit by showing that Cable had a sense of humor (so Deadpool was rubbing off on him even from his first appearance!).

EURY: Was Deadpool's voice based upon someone you knew, or a celebrity?

NICIEZA: Not really. I gave him "hollow" word balloons in my lettering placement—at that time the color border around the balloons, to connote there was something off about his voice, but at that time I hadn't even thought what, I just wanted a differentiator. Later, *X-Force* letterer Chris Eliopoulos asked to change that because double-border balloons were a real pain in the ass to hand-letter.

From Sketch to Screen

Rob Liefeld in 2016, with an autographed copy of Deadpool's first appearance.

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Fear and Punishment in Riverdale



Archie MEETS THE PUNISHER

by Steven Thompson



A mysterious man dressed all in black with a stylized skull motif on his chest arrives in Riverdale in a van loaded down with automatic weapons and surveillance equipment, and he's bent on making a killing. Sounds like it could easily be a scene from the dark, *Twin Peaks*-like *Riverdale* TV series that premiered on the CW in 2017, doesn't it? Only this happened in 1994 when Archie met the Punisher, and the collective jaw of comics fandom dropped! One incredulous syndicated newspaper article asked, "What's next? Richie Rich meets the Hulk?"

Intercompany crossovers became all the rage in the 1990s, with Marvel characters regularly meeting DC heroes for a few years, and Batman even getting to play with Spawn and Judge Dredd! But... Archie?

Here, some two decades and more later, it wouldn't have seemed that unusual. In recent years, we've seen Archie Andrews and his proverbial pals 'n' gals meet up with KISS, the Ramones, and the characters from *Glee*. We've seen them zombified in *Afterlife with Archie* and many of them eviscerated quite explicitly in gory encounters with Sharknado and Predator. But back in 1994, the closest Archie had ever had to a crossover of any kind was a 1965 one-shot starring comedian and kids-show host Soupy Sales.

Co-produced by Archie's Victor Gorelick and Marvel's Tom DeFalco, the bizarre Punisher/Archie crossover was one of the earliest indications of the company's modern willingness to think outside the box.

Frank Castle (or Francis Castiglione, per a later retcon) is the Punisher. Inspired by Don Pendleton's *Executioner* novels, he is a violent, mentally questionable, gun-obsessed good/bad guy on a one-man crusade against the mob. He had debuted as a Spider-Man villain but eventually was given a violent backstory of loss and redemption that made the ex-Marine character one of Marvel's most popular anti-heroes as the medium of comics went through its grim-and-gritty phase.

From the beginning, in *Amazing Spider-Man* #129 (Feb. 1974), it's his cool outfit—black with that great white skull on its chest, offset with white boots and gloves—that grabs you. We didn't realize it at the time, but this was also a case of the real world intruding just a little too much on our fantasy world of comics. Recently, Spidey had fought dinosaurs, robots, sorcerers, a guy in a monkey suit, and a werewolf. The Punisher, though, when it came right down to it, was a man with a gun. A gun that shoots bullets, not rays or plasma. One single hit, and Spidey could be dead. The cover proclaimed about the Punisher: "He's different! He's deadly!" It was typical hype, but I don't think they realized just how accurate it would prove to be. [Editor's note: See BACK ISSUE #4 for a Punisher history.]

On the inside of that issue, though, the Punisher uses a concussion rifle and a weapon that wraps up our hero in titanium alloy wire. He tells Spidey that he is "an expert at many things." It never occurs to him that the guy who's paying him to kill Spider-Man, the Jackal—a loon in a much crazier outfit than his—might be a tad wacko. He does say to Peter, "Sometimes I wonder if that evil's rubbed off on me." He doesn't seem to care, mind you, but he does say it! In fact, he says a number of contradictory things and seems more than a little off-balance. At the end of the issue, he walks off proclaiming, "I'm just a warrior... fighting a lonely war."

When Worlds Collide

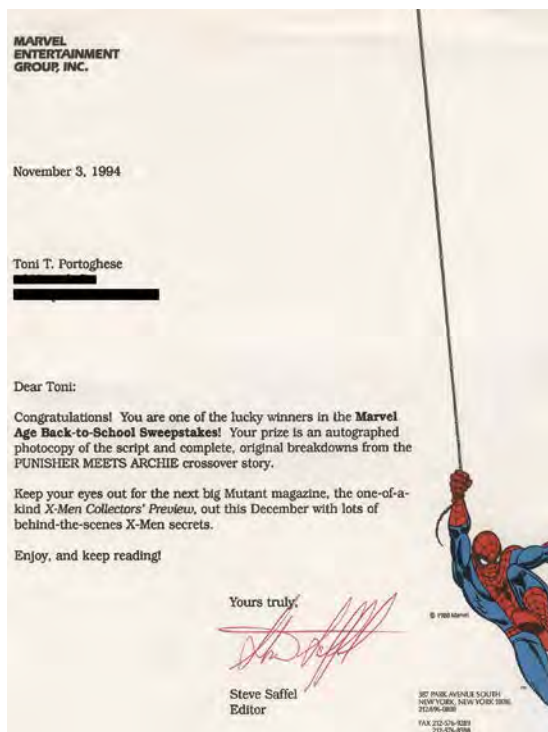
The Archie version of the *Archie Meets the Punisher* 1994 one-shot, featuring cover art by Stan Goldberg and Henry Scarpelli.

Archie and related characters © Archie Comic Publications, Inc.
Punisher © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Marvel Giveaway

Photocopies of a Marvel letter, a title sheet with a Batton Lash illustration, and hand-written plot-related notes from Lash, provided by the contest winner to Shaun Clancy, who shared them with us. Thanks, Shaun!

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ONE MORE NOTE FROM BATTON LASH:

WHEW! OKAY, BY THIS TIME I REALIZED I HAD TO PULL BACK AND TRIM THE FAT... I MUST SAY I WAS PRETTY GRATIFIED THAT MY EDITORS GAVE ME THE TIME-AND FREEDOM-TO CUT, CHANGE, REARRANGE THE STORY. THE FIRST THING THAT HAD TO GO WERE THE 'IN' JOKES. I LIKE A INSIDER'S GAG AS MUCH AS THE NEXT COMICS FAN, BUT NOT AT THE SAKE OF THE STORY. PLUS, I FELT THE STORY WAS GOING OFF IN TOO MANY DIRECTIONS-HOPEFULLY, THE 'FINAL CUT' WAS A TIGHTER STORY.

ONE THING YOU'LL NOTICE-ON THE FINAL DRAFT, PAGE 32, I HAD CASTLE BLOWING AWAY A HITMAN ABOUT TO PLUG ARCH. THE EDITORS CHANGED THIS TO CASTLE SLUGGING THE GUNMAN. IN RETROSPECT, I THINK THEIR DECISION WAS THE RIGHT ONE. I ALWAYS INTENDED THE STORY TO BE LIGHHEARTED, A LITTLE THRILLER, BUT NOTHING "DARK." HOPE YOU AGREE!

I SKETCHED OUT THE SCRIPT BECAUSE IT'S A COMPLEX STORY-AND TO GIVE THE ARTISTS AN IDEA WHAT WAS GOING ON! LUCKILY, STAN GOLDBERG AND JOHN BUSCEMA DIDN'T MIND-AND WENT TO TOWN WITH IT! (THE UNSUNG HERO IN THIS PROJECT WAS TOM PALMER, WHO DID AN INCREDIBLE JOB MESHING THE TWO WILDLY DIFFERENT STYLES TOGETHER!)

AND SO, THE NEXT VERSION YOU SEE WILL BE THE ONE THAT WAS SENT TO DON, VIC, STAN AND JOHN-WHILE I WAS BITING MY NAILS WAITING TO SEE THE RESULTS!

Batton recalls that same event: "It was one those casual lunches—mostly shop-talk and plenty of gossip! Crossovers were pretty big in 1993, so we were pitching ideas, as it were. I remember bringing up an Archie/Jimmy Olsen crossover (why this didn't happen, I don't know!). For various reasons, an Archie/Spider-Man was also shot down. But Victor said he was talking to Marvel's editor-in-chief Tom DeFalco and jokingly pitched an Archie/Punisher crossover. I piped in with a study in contrast—keep the characters true to themselves. You could see Victor's wheels turning! 'Write it up,' he said. Of course, with my savvy business sense, I didn't take him seriously! Around a month later, Victor called me and asked where his proposal for Archie/Punisher was. I guess he was serious!"

In his 2015 interview in *Comic Book Creator*, Batton modestly credited Victor, Tom DeFalco, and the late Marvel editor Mark Gruenwald for the final go-ahead. Victor had taken the initial concept to Tom at Marvel. "I thought it was a joke," DeFalco wrote in the original comic. "It consisted of a quick note from Victor, a synopsis, and two cover sketches."

Batton adds, "I found out much later that Tom had shown the pitch to Mark Gruenwald and said to Mark, 'If you like this, look over it. If you don't like it, we'll forget about it.' And Mark liked it!"

As widely familiar with various other aspects of pop culture as he is with comics minutiae, Batton looked to the movies for inspiration as to what overall style to use. "I modeled Archie/Punisher, believe it or not, on *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. Bud and Lou have their usual antics, but the Frankenstein Monster, the Wolf Man, and especially Dracula are really scary. From one extreme to another!"

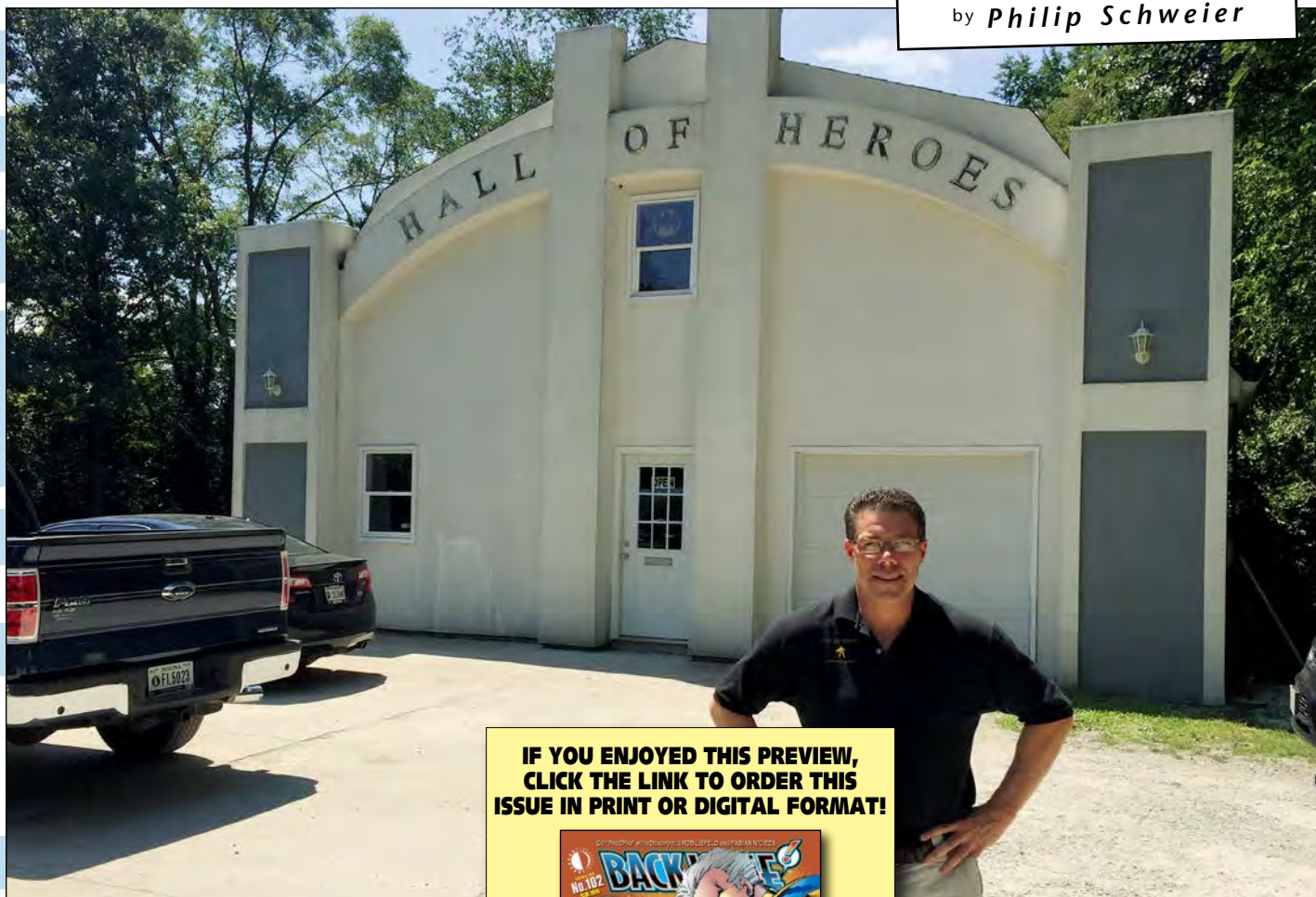
And that's pretty much the way this story goes. Initially, we find ourselves in the Punisher's dark, urban-street world for three pages as two men with guns fire real, potentially lethal bullets at one another before the one being pursued manages to get to Union Station where he buys a one-way ticket to Riverdale to escape his pursuer.

With a quick turn of the page, the reader is in the more comfortable world of Archie Andrews, resplendent in his



HALL OF HEROES MUSEUM

by Philip Schweier



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BACK ISSUE #102

MERCS AND ANTIHEROES! Deadpool's ROB FABIAN NICIEZA interviewed! Histories of Cable, Taskmaster, Deathstroke the Terminator, the Vigilante, and Wild Dog, plus... Archie meets the Punisher?? Featuring TERRY BEATTY, MAX ALLAN COLLINS, PAUL KUPPERBERG, BATTON LASH, JEPH LOEB, DAVID MICHELINIE, MARV WOLFMAN, KEITH POLLARD, and others! Deadpool vs. Cable cover by LIEFFELD!

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"Created from the Cosmic Legends of the Universe"

The Hall of Justice-styled Hall of Heroes Museum in Elkhart, Indiana, and its owner/curator/champion, Allen Stewart. All photos in this article are courtesy of Philip Schweier.

I grew up in northern Indiana on occasions when I go back to establish itself, and when I lived here?" Last to visit the Hall of Heroes superhero museum," and just east of South Bend.

With degrees in history, Allen Stewart saw the comic-book culture. When the Museum in Metropolis, Museum in Baltimore, the Hall of Heroes Museum memorabilia collection is valued at approximately \$3.5 million. The superhero comic book collection has more than 65,000 copies.

Among the major highlights is a restored *Captain America* comic featuring the first appearance of Wonder Woman.

started in comic books as a kid in the mid-late 1960s, Allen says. "I was probably seven, eight years old. The *Batman* series [with Adam West] was rerunning then, and those a lot, [and] the *Super Friends* cartoon. Those were probably my biggest influences, and my dad got me into comics."

Allen is a fan of both DC and Marvel. "I really read everything without focusing on any one particular character," he says. "I'd go to the local drugstore and buy three or four comic books. You know, it was the same books all the time. It wasn't like I always bought *Spider-Man* or always bought *Batman*. I was kind of reading anything and everything."

Allen's interest in World War II, Allen mostly passed up war comics, as well as the horror titles such as *House of Mystery*. "Occasionally, the *Tarzan* series, and some of those, but mainly the superhero titles I stuck with."

Allen stopped collecting for a couple of years while he was a fitness instructor in the Army. Around 1992, he resumed. "I just went full-on gangbusters, buying