

# *Everything X-Men*

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*Everything X-Men ist wohl eines meiner ambitioniertesten Projekte. Angefangen bei Stan Lee und Jack Kirbys, über Chris Claremonts 17 Jahre umfassenden Epos, bis hin zu den aktuellsten Reihen - ich wollte alles von den X-Men in mich aufsaugen. Everything X-Men sollte mein Kanal dafür sein die Geschichten der Mutanten zu analysieren und über meine Reise zu berichten. Das Ganze sollte abgerundet werden durch Essays, die einen bestimmten Aspekt der Comics aufgreifen und erläutern. Angefangen von der Comics Code Authority, über die Mutant Metaphor und die verschiedenen Comic Book Ages. Alles sollte in dieser Kolumne Platz finden.*

*Zusätzlich zu den Comics gibt es schließlich noch die berühmte Animationsserie. Ich habe diese noch nie gesehen und so schien es eine gute Möglichkeit sich diese endlich anzueignen. Ich muss wohl nicht noch extra betonen wie lange dieses Unterfangen gedauert hätte. Man hätte leicht eine Vollzeitstelle mit all diesen Aufgaben füllen können.*

*Aufgrund des Umfangs war es mir möglich die Reihe an der Uni als Projektstudium angerechnet zu bekommen. So wurden die ersten Artikel umfassender und wissenschaftlicher als erwartet. Außerdem hatte ich so einen Puffer aufgebaut. Doch nach dem ersten halben Jahr musste ich aus Zeitgründen eine Pause einlegen. Es verging einige Zeit und ich versuchte einen Reboot der Reihe. Doch irgendwann war die Luft raus. Kolumnen müssen mit einer gewissen Regelmäßigkeit geschrieben und betreut werden, dass ist die Erkenntnis die ich mir auf jeden Fall für die Zukunft mitnehme. Doch so ambitioniert Everything X-Men auch war, so viel Spaß hat es gemacht sie auf die Beine zu stellen.*

*Etwas anderes hat mir die Reihe außerdem beschert: eine tiefgreifene Anerkennung und Liebe für die X-Men. Lesen will ich die alten Geschichten auf jeden Fall. Ob ich darüber berichte, in welcher Form auch immer, will und kann ich nicht sagen. Everything X-Men bleibt aber erhalten.*

# An Introduction

*"I'm sitting here in a boring room  
it's just another rainy Sunday afternoon  
I'm wasting my time, I got nothing to do  
I'm hanging around, I'm waiting for you  
but nothing ever happens, and I wonder"  
(Fool's Garden)*

The idea for this column was born back at the beginning of 2017. I was studying media science and philosophy in my third semester, and in my major - media science - every student needs to do a so-called "project study." This project is meant to be a scientific and practical project, where you create something on your own. You focus on one aspect or one topic, but always keep the scientific side in mind. I consider myself a blogger and writer and I, therefore, was eager to do a series of blog articles.

The following months, after I had the idea, I talked to Prof. Dr. Tanja Thomas, a professor in the media science department, and asked her if she would be interested in overseeing the project. After a rich discussion of how to realize my idea, I did a lot of research and began to read some X-Men comics. The results of my research and readings you can see right now or better, you will see them, once the main articles are being released. I hope you enjoy the articles. I sure had a lot of fun writing them (and still have). You could say, that this journey was an incredible Xperience. An Xcellent idea, you might say.

## Where to begin?

I love comics, and I consider myself a big fan of the X-Men. Unfortunately, my experience with them was somewhat limited. My first real encounter with any X-Men was the first film by Bryan Singer back in 2000. I was eleven years old at that time and was instantly fascinated. Since then I watched every movie and read some comics of these wonderful characters. Still, they stayed in the background, and I never dedicated myself to read them as a whole - mostly because I didn't know where to begin. If you look at this graph from the doctoral dissertation "Reading The Uncanny X-Men: Gender, Race and the mutant metaphor in a popular narrative" by Joseph Darowski, you can see just how many series there were, and still are.

Granted since 2011 there were like 50 events, ten all-new all-different restarts and a bunch of mini-series, as well as specials, that had the potential to "break the internet" as Marvel stated mid-2017. However, all this is now, and what we want to do is go back in time, to the good-old-times. You know, when comics cost just a few cents, and Stan Lee and Jack Kirby created more than half of our heroes we know and love to this day. That is where our journey begins.

I always wanted to read the X-Men from the very beginning and Xperience the stories as a whole. Where did they start, what happened along the way and finally understand all the references that can still be found in today's issues and movies. Unfortunately, as I discovered this great reading list from comicvine, I realized, there are a lot of X-Men comics. You could read hundreds, and hundreds of issues and still be behind because new ones are release month after month after month. That's discouraging. But I don't give up, and so I made some cuts. I mean, I have to begin somewhere, right?

## The Plan

The project has to have an end - at least the counseled part related to the media science study has. And it should be done before my sixth semester so that I can focus on my bachelor thesis then. I decided to do a series of about 15 articles (this introduction included). Of course, I will continue with the series, if I want to and if you want to read more about the X-Men. To make it a bit more interesting, I took different creator runs from the past five decades and this is the list that finally made it into my series:

1. Stan Lee / Jack Kirby (1963-1966)
2. Roy Thomas / Neal Adams (1969/70)

3. X-Men First Class v1 (2007)
4. Chris Claremont Part I
5. Chris Claremont Part II
6. Chris Claremont Part III
7. Avengers Disassembled (2004/2005)
8. House of M
9. X-Men Legacy: Legion (2-part review)

I don't want to talk about the X-Men solely, that would just be a couple of in-depth reviews of some comics, and I already wrote a lot of reviews for the past x years. Instead, I wanted to take it a bit further. I came up with the idea, to take something from those runs - a topic, theme or idea - and talk about it in more detail in a separate article. Those subjects could be anything from the Comic Book Authority to comic book studies in general, about terminology, interesting debates, philosophies that are mentioned, or explanations of sexual orientations and gender-concepts. That means that every review/analysis is followed by a more theoretical based article - an essay. These are the topics I chose so far:

- Comic Book Authority
- What is a mutant?
- the ages comic books
- the mutant metaphor
- Philosophies within the X-Men
- A broken back in the refrigerator
- comic book events
- Who am I?

The thing about the X-Men and their very long history is that they are often viewed as this conglomerate of ideas, and themes. Therefore creators are themselves often seen as an agglutinated mass. But they are not. Every creator has to be read separately and therefore be analyzed as a constituent component of the big picture, that is the X-Men. It is a mistake to create a universal image of the x-universe.

Another important thing is that every individual, with his or her cultural background, interprets things differently. With my research, I tried to cope with that limitation. Please keep in mind: my articles are just one way to see it, one way to interpret things, inspired by the books and articles I will mention. If you think I forgot something, please feel free to comment, and we can hopefully have a vibrant discussion about it.

### **What's Left to Say**

Bear in mind, that Chris Claremont is mentioned more often because he wrote the X-Men for nearly 20 years in many different team- and solo-series'. Therefore he shaped the X-Men like no one before or after. At first, I thought I would pick just some story-arcs here and there. But that seemed impossible. How could I, as an outsider, choose the "right" ones? I mean, his stories are the best stories of the X-Men, like The Dark Phoenix Saga, Days of Future Past, Trial of Magneto or The Fall of the Mutants. And I don't want to read those stories without any background information or no knowledge of what happened so far. What I want to say is: We will go through his run chronologically, based on the reading order I mentioned above.

I think that's enough for now. As for the release schedule: I am going to release two articles per month. So every month has a theme and this way you will have enough time to read the issues as well. Marvel Unlimited is a good place to start, but if you are a collector, there are beautiful but expensive Omnibus and Collectors Editions as well. Currently, I am reading them digitally, but once there is more money in my bank account I want some of the collections as well. Along the way, I also might have some surprises for you: additional articles and reviews about certain aspects or incarnations of the X-Men. But for now:

See you in February. Then we will talk about the Kirby and Lee run (X-Men #1 to #19)

# Kirby and Lee (1963-1966)

*"He say I know you, you know me  
One thing I can tell you is  
You got to be free  
Come together, right now"  
("Come Together", The Beatles)*

## Introduction

In this article, I want to talk about the beginning of the X-Men. We will look at the first 19 issues. They were written by Stan Lee and drawn by Jack Kirby and later on, Werner Roth. How were they published and what are the stories about? Then we will focus on the characters. Who were the original X-Men? How were they portrayed? It is fascinating to look at those over 50-year-old stories. Joseph Darowski talks about an important topic at the beginning of his doctoral dissertation, which I also want to mention briefly: Everything is perceived differently by different groups. And maybe most importantly: No product has one fixed meaning. It can change over time (at least the primary reading) and is a very subjective thing. In addition to that, we have to analyze those comics as what they are: a product of a different time. Don't let us use this against them, instead take it as a time capsule and see how the world looked at certain things at that time. These comics are artifacts and reveal social attitudes. Because "society's entertainment reflects and influences that society" (Darowski, 2011, p. 11).

## Beginnings

An interesting thing I discovered during my research is that Marvel could publish only a limited amount of comics per month. Before 1961 Marvel was known as Atlas. At that time they lost their distributor and were forced to join Independent News which owned and distributed National Allied Publications. This company was founded 1934 and would later be known as DC Comics. Marvel's comics were not that good a seller as the 1950s ended. This may be the reason why their new distributor could easily limit the number of comics Marvel was allowed to publish. This number was initially at eight comics per month. But as the quality of the stories increased, so did the number of comics sold. With that in mind, Marvel was allowed to publish more and more issues. After the contract ended, they joined forces with another distributor and could finally release the amount they wanted.

In a two year period, they only released thirteen issues of The X-Men. Beginning with The X-Men #14, because of the new distributor, they could release the series monthly.

Another thing is that Stan Lee wanted to name the book "the mutants." Unfortunately, he was declined the name by his publisher Martin Goodman, because nobody would know what a mutant was. Brian Hiatt tells the origin of the X-Men in a Rolling Stone article: After being declined the title "the mutants," Lee settled with X-Men, because he "figured, they have extra powers, and their leader is Professor Xavier." In addition to that, he gave them the powers by birth, which meant he didn't need any fancy origin stories for each character.

Brad Ricca points out in his article Origin of the Species that "the word 'mutant' actually was in fairly widespread use at that time, appearing not only in popular science magazines, but in the New York Times, largely in articles concerning atomic age radiation fears [Ricca, 2014, p. 6]." For anyone who is interested in this topic, I can recommend reading the article of Ricca. She paints a compelling picture of the 1950s and 60s, what some scientists wanted to accomplish, and points out, that the idea of a Homo Superior, as Magneto puts it, is not that far-fetched as it may seem. Especially the concepts of Hermann J. Muller are described in detail there.

One last thing about the publication before we move on to the artwork. In the beginning, I was not aware of this, but it makes sense: There is a difference between the cover date and the actual release date. Maybe because I read so many

comics in retrospect (be it collected in TPB or a bunch of single issues) and rarely when they are actually released. Nevertheless, I think it is an important thing to mention:

*“Throughout this work the cover date on comic book issues will be used to refer to when the comic book was released, though the cover date does not exactly match the month a comic book was published. According to Brian Cronin, in the early 1960s, there was usually a four-month gap between the official cover date and the ship date. In the 1990s two months was made the official gap between cover date and ship date by Marvel and DC Comics. However, there have almost always been variations in the exact difference between the two dates, even within those general guidelines. Because of this difficulty the cover date will be cited as the date a comic was published throughout this entire dissertation [Joseph Darowski, 2014, p44].”*

## **Artwork**

The X-Men were not solely created by Stan Lee. A significant contribution came from Jack Kirby and his incredible talent. Today one artist is mainly dedicated to doing one series, drawing one issue per month. “The King” managed to do up to five pages a day and designed the character on the fly, as he drew the stories, Lee gave him [Hiatt].

I like the drawings of this time very much. During the training sessions of the X-Men (I will talk about them a bit later on) you get a sense of movement within the panels. The focus is clearly on the characters and Kirby gave them room to act. The background is not that important. Sometimes it doesn't even exist: just a background color to fill the white space. However, it can also be very detailed if necessary. Each character comes with his or her unique look, gestures and facial expressions. To come up with all of those things while drawing the story is remarkable. Plus the design for the clothing, the rooms and the features of the surrounding areas are simple but effective.

Throughout all of Jack Kirby's issues (and his successor), you never think of inconsistency or major disruptions.

Though sometimes the narration gets in the way of the artwork. In those days, the characters often stated the obvious or - put another way - the artwork and the dialogue/narrator were repetitive. When something is shown in one panel, it is also explained or pointed out by the characters or the narrator. But that is also the charm of those issues.

If you compare it with today's comics, you get a lot out of these comics. What they say, what they think and how the narrator talks about the characters in combination with the artwork, tells a rich and meaningful story.

## **But who were the original X-Men?**

### **The X-Men**

Scott Summers aka Cyclops, Warren Worthington III aka The Angel, Hank McCoy aka The Beast, and Bobby Drake aka Iceman are the first students of Professor X. In the first issue, after a short introduction of their abilities and who they are, they are joined by Jean Grey aka Marvel Girl.

An unusual aspect of this roster is that they are not a family like the Fantastic Four. This sets them apart from other teams from the 1960s. Although, as Andrew Wheeler points out in his three-part article-series *Mutant and Proud*, one could assume they were at least cousins because all of them are white, heterosexual, privileged kids. This goes against everything one would expect from a comic book series that is said to be famous for representing women, LGBTQ+ characters as well as black people, and other minorities through a so-called mutant metaphor. The origin of this little group must be read differently than their second genesis in 1975 when Chris Claremont restarts the series.

When we look at the mutant metaphor, we have to look into the very lives of the character and how they represent queerness. Because typically mutants (like queer people) don't usually come from mutant/queer families [Wheeler].

*“Like LGBT people, mutants are not necessarily born of mutants. Their siblings are not necessarily mutants. Their children are not necessarily mutants. They are not born into mutant communities. They are not born into a mutant culture. They are anomalous even within their own families. Like LGBT people, mutants face a heightened fear of being hated by the people who ought to love them the most [Wheeler, 2014].”*

But the similarities go further. As drag people, the X-Men take on new names and dress differently when accompanied by fellow mutants [Wheeler]. Sometimes someone has to state the obvious for you, and from that point forward you cannot not see it - as it was the case for me, regarding those similarities of these communities. Big fans, especially when

there is a community as big as the X-Men's fandom surrounding such a medium, we tend to analyze things over. In my opinion, that is often the case, but it is interesting to take those parallels and lay it onto the first X-Men series. I don't think it was intended by the creators - it is just a coincidence. That is the beauty of stories, and I mentioned it above: different people, take a different meaning from them.

But let's get back to the original X-Men. Another thing is that at the beginning the characters were mostly white and their mutations were hidden features and not that visible (Beast and Angel both could hide their mutations with gear and clothes) [Darius]. With minimal effort, they all can pass as ordinary human beings and walk around public places, without being detected. Another thing they have in common with queer people. I will talk more detailed about the mutant metaphor and how it changed in the past decades, in a separate article.

## The Characters

A recurring theme of Stan Lee's X-Men run are the training sessions they have at the beginning of nearly every issue. Scott, Bobby, Hank, and Warren are even introduced through one of such sessions. This way we get to see their abilities and determine their camaraderie. How they interact with each other and what their relationship is. It also seems like a very militaristic approach to the story, because Professor X gives them time and again precise timeframes they have to meet. He would say things like "you have three seconds," "you have exactly 15 seconds" or something like that.

The abilities of the kids get clear very early on. In contrast to them, the Professors capabilities seem to grow or fade - always to suit the story. First, it appears like he just has mental abilities to read minds. But they are sometimes expanded to the point, where he can erase memories. Can he control people like in the movies? This question is unfortunately not answered in those early issues. However, he has another ability that is concerning: astral projection.

The first time I encountered this ability in another way was during the first seasons of the TV series Charmed, where Prue develops this skill. When she does it, she can deactivate her projection at any time, which seems plausible, because it is a mental enhancement of the mind and not fixated on any physical object. The professor's astral projection, however, must return to his owner, before it can be deactivated. It is also interesting that Magneto seems to have mental abilities as well - at least to a certain degree.

This would suggest that they are somehow related, which would have been a twist, I would not have seen coming. But the professor is related to another mutant: The Juggernaut. He is his stepbrother, and his name is Cain Marko (Cain; as in Cain and Abel - get it?). Cain got his powers from a temple of dark magic and the magical item of Cyttorak. He is an unstoppable force. The two-part story (#12 and #13) are one of my favorite issues from that period. Especially #12 is orchestrated like a horror movie and reminds me a bit of alien. The professor knows what is coming and lets his students make preparations as the Juggernaut approaches. But we never see him directly; he is just hinted at. Jack Kirby did an incredible job. Very suspenseful storytelling and it is a bit frightening as well, although everything happens in broad daylight.

The X-Men #12 is also a great example of the teamwork of the children. They have trained very hard and can now profit from their vigorous efforts.

Unfortunately, Jean Grey is not treated well in the first couple issues. And by a couple, I mean about 14 of them. It starts in the first three issues and from that point on just gets creepier and creepier. Her supposed friends call her gorgeous, beautiful, and have the obsession to touch her vigorously. When she is not around (and sometimes even if she is), they fight each other to figure out should be her boyfriend. It is very frustrating to see her treated that way - like she has nothing to say in that matter. But the most awkward moment of them all happens during a dialogue in the third issue when the professor thinks: "As though I could help worrying about the one I love! But I can never tell her! I have no right! Not while I'm the leader of the X-Men, and confined to this wheelchair!" [Issue #3]

As John Darowski writes in his essay "Evil mutants will stop at nothing to gain control of mankind!", Marvel Girl has to fulfill different kinds of roles. Be it mother, sister, or girlfriend - she is what the story needs her to be [Darowski]. This is even displayed during the training sessions. While the others do dangerous and physically exhausting exercises (jump around in the room and avoiding flames and pits), she has to handle books (letting them levitate) or works on the



precision of her ability (using needle and thread). In case the exercises get too exhausting, she faints or has to be saved by Cyclops. All this in spite of her excellent introduction. The first few pages she manages to handle herself against the boys and is capable of using her powers. She is a confident young girl. This image of her is rendered useless very quickly, as the quote mentioned above of Professor X proves. It is not until the fourteenth issue or so when she is back in control and develops a real personality. In the end, she is equal to the others.

Bobby, Warren, and Hank don't have such a development during these issues. They train, they handle themselves pretty well during their missions but other than that they don't have that kind of struggle. Although they each get a personal problem.

Hank, for example, saves a child at one point of the story. But he doesn't get to be the hero. Out of nowhere a mob literally, attacks him. Before this incident, it is never established, that the general society hates or even knows about the X-Men. Via a direct link to the FBI, the Professor also handles missions for the government. It is not clear, if the world hates or loves the X-Men or if they just decided to ignore them.

Warren, on the other hand, has a more personalized problem. His parents visit the school and are quickly taken prisoners by Magneto. It is another parallel between the queer community and the X-Men. His parents don't know about his "condition," so they try to keep it a secret. It is a very emotional issue and the only development he makes, during the first 19 issues.

Bobby can develop his powers a bit. In the beginning, he can transform himself literally into a snowman - covering his whole body with fluffy snow. Because of the training sessions, the snow becomes denser, and he can form a more crystallized "skin" around his body.

Scott is the one with the most development, I think. At the beginning and during the whole run to be exact, he struggles with his abilities. The destruction his laser-eyes can cause is a real threat. The Professor makes him nevertheless his successor and Scott can handle himself well in situations when his mentor is not around. It would have been great if Kirby and Lee focused the love story on Scott and Jean. They seem to be a perfect couple. But the comments, fights, and behaviors mentioned above make it weird. They could have supported each other.

### **Friend or Foe**

With every issue there comes a new mutant. And with every mutant, recruitment plays a significant role. The introduction of Cerebro, a device that can detect other mutants, was very unsatisfying. In the movies, Professor X has to be connected to it, for Cerebro to work. But in the comics, it's an independent device. And built into a desk, a wooden desk. There is nothing majestic or impressive about the machine. But you have to begin somewhere, right?

With the question of recruitment and finding other mutants, one cannot ignore some discrimination. They are very rigorous about their new members. A topic that disturbs me is this: We have the X-Men on one side and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants on the other side. Magneto founded the group, and the initial members are The Toad, Pietro aka Quicksilver, Wanda aka Scarlet Witch, and Mastermind. Again and again, the two teams fight for recruits. The problematic thing about this is that there seems to be no alternative to those two.

Mutants either join them or - well - what exactly? I don't know what will happen if they don't want to join the teams, but it always sounds like an ultimatum. Take the Blob for example. The X-Men approach him so carelessly, no wonder he doesn't want to join either team. After their initial failure, they attack him, and, of course, he fights back. In this situation, the actual threat were the X-Men themselves. And the biggest mistake of their approach is to give him their real names immediately. No secret identities, no costumes or something like that - just their real names and casual clothes.

Here are some examples of characters, Charles and Magneto (we never learn his real name during these 19 issues) fight over: Prince Namor/Sub-Mariner (who bends the laws of physics and not in a good way), Unun (who is defeated by his own powers), Ka-Zar aka Lord of the Jungle (who lives in a secret land underneath Antarktika) and some others. Two of the most intriguing villains of this era (besides the Juggernaut and the Brotherhood as mentioned above) are The Stranger and Lucifer.

Yes, you heard right, they even fight Lucifer himself. Or at least Charles Xavier does. He is the one who put the Professor into the Wheelchair (I like the movie version better; *X-Men: First Class*) and now he has returned for revenge. In this issue, the X-Men also have to fight the Avengers, because if they defeat Lucifer too soon, a bomb will go off. It is a great issue, and I don't think that Lucifer is a mutant. But a mere man with a lot of time and resources. Is he Batman? Just kidding.

The Stranger is also very intriguing. And, interestingly, not even a mutant but an alien.

This eleventh issue is also the source of an exceptionally excellent quote (Attention! Sarcasm!) by a civilian: "Someone get a doctor! Women are faintin' like flies around here!!" - Beware the two (!) exclamation marks at the end, which are needed for such a great statement. Besides that, the issue is a good read. The Stranger is from another planet who recruits mutational creatures to study them - he takes Magneto and The Toad with him and leaves Mastermind in stasis. This ending was very surprising, and either side cannot really fight The Stranger. He is just that powerful. I could be wrong, but I think this might also be the first issue which ends with a teaser at the end! Or at least it felt more like a cliffhanger/teaser than in the previous issues.

## Conclusion

Once you start looking for sources you can use for articles such as this, it can quickly seem like a bottomless pit. One thing leads to another, and you have dozens of essays, books, and articles to read and summarise, so you don't forget to mention this topic or that clue. I am a perfectionist, and especially the first article in this series should be intriguing. I wanted to give you an overview of the X-Men's origin as well as the way they were portrayed. To do that, I focused on a handful of sources and my interpretations of the material. One thing I want to mention though is this: I did not talk about the Cold War references because others already did that way better than I ever could. I didn't feel like I could bring something new to the table. Instead, it was necessary for me to talk in-depth about the original run from another perspective and provide, hopefully, some inspiration for you as a reader to go back and read these early issues as well. The next article will focus on the Comic Book Authority, and then we will continue our journey with Neal Adams and Roy Thomas (issues #55 to #66).

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## Comic Book Authority

*"Put your tiny hand in mine  
I will be your preacher teacher  
Be your daddy  
Anything you have in mind"  
("Father Figure", George Michael)*

Did you ever notice the stamp-like figure on the right top corner of your comic books? To be honest, the first time I consciously saw them was while reading the Jack Kirby & Stan Lee run of the X-Men. Now that I am aware of them, I see them each time I read older comics - for example, the Batman storyline No man's land. Even there, very tiny and barely visible, is the logo of the CBA. First, I thought, "nice, a quality sign for comics." You know, like meat or vegetables or eggs sometimes get those stamps to prove they are worth your money?

Then I started to read about this Comics Code Authority and began to understand that this is the worst thing to have happened to comic books, ever. This little organization, which was deliberately founded by the publishers themselves, ruined some of them, censored the rest, and restricted the writers and artists. From 1954 until 2011 (yes, you read right) the Comics Code Authority approved comics of various publishers.

### **Milestones?**

I don't want to summarize the whole history of the Comics Book Authority because Dr. Amy Kiste Nyberg did a great job covering this incredible story on the website of the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund ([cblidf.org](http://cblidf.org)). It is a quick read, and I recommend it, if you are interested in this topic. However, here are some cornerstones of the CBA's history:

- The first version of a regulatory code was released in October of 1954.
- "Only comics that passed the pre-publication review carried the seal" (Nyberg, n.d.).
- The Authority was founded because comic book critics (churches, parents, and others) feared that they might have a bad influence on their kids.
- Dr. Frederic Wertham, a psychiatrist, campaigned to ban comics from children and even wrote a book about it: *Seduction of the Innocent*.
- Crime comics were especially said to be responsible for Juvenile Delinquency (putting bad ideas into children's heads).
- William Gaines, a publisher of EC Comics, was "disgusted with the direction events had taken" (Nyberg, n.d.) and he refused to let the CMAA (Comics Magazine Association of America) approve his comics. Consequently, he was forced to end his comic business and started MAD magazine.
- With the release of a three-part Spider-Man story, which Stan Lee did not let the CMAA approve, the code was revised in February 1971.
- In the 1980s, the comic book distribution changed to a direct market distribution, which meant that more publishers bypassed the code.
- 1982 was the last revision of the code.
- DC Comics and Archie Comics were the last publishers to drop the Seal of Approval--mind you, this was in 2011 (!)

### **Behind the Curtain**

Just to get an idea of how the Seal of Approval and the code behind it impacted a whole industry, check out the website [seductionoftheinnocent.org](http://seductionoftheinnocent.org). It is a very resourceful site. They try to collect every comic book Wertham used as "proof" that comics were a bad influence on children. Furthermore, they have a lot of interesting articles linked, which discuss the topic in more depth. The full code of 1954 can be found here [lostsofi.org](http://lostsofi.org). But, as before, here are some examples of what was in the original version:

- "No comic magazine shall use the word horror or terror in its title."
- "The treatment of live-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage."
- "Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden."
- "If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity."
- "Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals."
- And so on and so forth...

In my opinion, the code was like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Mind you that comics were a somewhat new medium at that time--at least in the format we recognize. The first comic strips were published by Switzerland's Rudolphe Töpffer back in 1827. This was followed by a few graphic novels, but the first modern American comic book was published in the early 1930's. *Famous Funnies: A Carnival of Comics* was released in 1933 and *Famous Funnies #1* was released in 1934.

At the time when crime and horror comics were a big thing, critics came along with it: concerned for their children and what effect the comics might have on them. So, first, comics were attacked by people who did not understand the medium. Then, instead of talking to the audience and telling them that not every comic book is necessarily for children, the publishers founded the authority.

### **Establishing Something New**

I have the luxury of taking a modern perspective on the topic, and today the audience of comics seems to be very diverse. No matter how old you are, skinny or fat, black or white, straight or queer, comics are for everyone. You have the major publishers, as well as indie comics, webcomics and a lot of niché markets. They are like TV shows or films: a medium, not a single format or a restricted way to tell stories. This might seem like something quite obvious, but I feel like that it is important to state it time and again: comics are not just one single format.

To get to this point takes time, patience and money. Especially money from the publishers. But if you introduce a new medium to the world, you cannot just censor it because some are offended by the way you tell your stories. Give it time to evolve. Not just the medium itself (as a publisher you have to figure out, what you can do with it), but also as the audience. Maybe without the Authority, we would have never got the superheroes we love and cherish. We would have something different, perhaps. Diving into this topic would be exciting. Asking questions like, what comics and stories were most popular at the time the critics came around? What content and tales could not be told because of the Authority? And then, speculating.

But we cannot change time. And a lot of stories and characters that were created during these decades are brilliant, intriguing and I would miss them a lot. They even spawned entire cinematic universes, inspired a whole new genre of films, and a new generation of writers, artists, and more. The truth is that the CBA censored the creators, and some stories may not be as suspenseful or original as they would have been. Was this the reason sales dropped? I don't know; maybe we can talk more about that when we get to the ages of comic books.

### **Conclusion**

To this day, I am surprised that all the major publishers supposedly agreed on the CBA. We are talking about a whole industry. How is that possible?

During my research, I stumbled upon sentences like the following: "In 1954 the Comics Code Authority was implemented due to an apparent link between the rising popularity of comic books and a rise in juvenile crime." (comicvine.gamespot.com) It makes me angry to read something like this because what is this "apparent link" everyone talks about, but the only one who is quoted time and again is Wertham (if at all). There is a difference between correlation and causation. Is there any real scientific evidence, that statements like the one above is true? I am asking! If so, please let me know. It reminds me of a discussion we have today (an unnecessary one, I might add): can violent games be held responsible for killing sprees and such?

Fortunately, though, the code is no longer in use. But, it did some damage. Some publishers couldn't sell their comics anymore, which resulted in their bankruptcy. For over 60 years, the comic book industry just gave up--at least in my opinion. As I said, comics were somewhat new at that time. Logically, there were concerns about them; there always are. But, you cannot blindly listen to critics, even when the sales drop. Just keep telling good, intriguing stories and people will find their way back. I believe in that.

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# X-Men TAS Episode 1

- X-Men: The Animated Series
- Season 1 Episode 1: Night of the Sentinels I
- Writer: Mark Edward Edens
- Story Editor: Eric Lewald
- Supervising Producer: Will Meugniot
- Line Producer: Larry Houston
- Original Air Date: 31 October 1992

*Synopsis(from IMDB): A young teenager has been rejecting her mutant powers ever since she discovered them. But when giant robots track her down, it's up to the X-Men to save her.*

Revisiting a show from the 90s is very interesting in many ways: First of all the show is presented in a 4:3 ratio, but I grew up with that format, so its nothing I have to get used to. Second, there is no HD version out there, so we have to watch it as it were back then. Third, the typical 90s style animation, which can be a double-edged sword: On the one hand they look good, are detailed and have charm (plus they get the nostalgic bonus), on the other hand, the action sequences and behavior of the characters can be edgy and abrupt.

The story begins with riots and chaos on the streets. Mutants are furious, and it is not a happy place. This is a very positive thing for a TV show because we are thrown right into the action - no origin story, no explanation, nothing. What is happening? What is going on? Where are why? Why is there chaos? Valid questions, and every single one of them intriguing.

Next, we see the parents of Jubilee. They are arguing about the things currently happening. They discuss if they should register their daughter at the Mutant Control Agency. But I guess it is just a small step from registering her to bring her to a facility where she is "safe." In the context of the conversation, one can also assume that it is not a training facility. Mutant Control Agency sounds like some conversion therapy for mutants. Later in the episode, Professor Xavier discusses this topic with some of his students, and it turns out to be a private organization. The government seemingly has nothing to do with it. Now the question is: Why are they so powerful? Who are they? I hope we get to know more about them later.

Afraid of her parents Jubilee runs away. To blow off some steam she plays some video games in the mall. There she is confronted with a Sentinel. It is the first villain we get to see - if you want to call them that. The Sentinel is big and clumsy, also slow, and it destroys everything in its way. Nevertheless, the motto of them is: "serve and protect." It first tried to capture Jubilee out of her bedroom by destroying the wall and nearly tearing the house down, but she is already gone, as we know. Though funded by the government, the Sentinels are not very serve-and-protect-like.

Back at the mall, we get to see the first big fight. Again, the Sentinel destroys almost the entire ceiling of the mall to get to its target. Fortunately, Storm and Rogue are also there and help Jubilee. Shortly after, Gambit joins the fight.

Interestingly the Sentinel ignores them at first because they are neither his target nor does he recognize them. Why is that? Maybe we find out later in the season. The three X-Men cannot defeat the foe, and Jubilee is fleeing the scene, running to the parking lot outside. There Cyclops beheads the giant robot with one blast.

This short scene shows the audience two things: First, and maybe most important, that Storm, Rogue, and Gambit are not strong enough to fight a Sentinel or lack the strategy to do so. At this point, I am not sure if this is a good thing or a bad thing - depends on their experience and how long they have been X-Men. Second, it establishes Scott as a strong leader. He calmly defeats the Sentinel without breaking a sweat. Then he catches the unconscious Jubilee (the Sentinel managed to hit her with his last move).

Cut to mansion: Jubilee wakes up alone in a room without windows. Everything looks clean, sterile even, and covered with stainless steel paneling. This part of the X-Mansion seems dark, gritty and like hostile territory. Her luck continues, because she enters the Danger room, by accident of course, where Gambit and Wolverine fight each other in

a training session. Jubilee intervenes, not knowing the circumstances. Shortly after, we get to see all the X-Men in one place for the first time.

This scene is very essential, because it establishes the dynamic between the members of the X-Men. There is a certain rivalry between them, mainly because of Wolverine. Nevertheless, they are there for each other. A community where being an X-Men is safe. The following conversation between Jubilee and Storm (on the roof of the mansion) reinforces that impression. She tells her new student what a mutant is and why society hates them.

Every vital topic is touched on in this short conversation. Be it that others hate what they don't understand, that mutancy manifests in puberty, or that the X-Men are a safe haven for "the gifted" (even if they have outgrown the status of student like Storm). You have to keep in mind, that Jubilee is still young and this was her first experience with the X-Men. We might forget that when we watch or read a new story about characters, who have to learn all of that. So it is not that surprising when Jubilee is running away from the mansion to make sure her parents are safe as well. Shortly after she leaves, a Sentinel captures her - with their creators not far away.

In the meantime, the X-Men want to infiltrate or better: break into the headquarter of the Mutant Control Agency. This organization has gathered a lot of information about citizens and possess a long list of names. Names of mutants. Professor Xavier sends his X-Men to apprehend those files, but as they learn about the absence of Jubilee, Wolverine is looking for her. He seems to like and care about her. Combined with the conversation she previously had with Storm, those two could be her mutant-foster-parents. Unfortunately, Wolverine loses her tracks and joins the others by infiltrating the MCA facility.

They break in, and right before they get to the good stuff, the screen fades to black. To be honest, this is a very cheap trick. You don't open the door and end the episode. Show what is on the other side and then cut away. Trust that the revelation is suspenseful enough to keep us watching. If you ever consumed anything about how to write a story (like the brilliant podcast *Writing Excuses*), you are aware that you should show what is behind the door. Very disappointing.

Still, the first episode of *X-Men: The Animated Series* was better than I anticipated. Jubilee as our guide is an excellent choice. She is relatable and seems to have a good mindset. Regarding the characters, there was one surprise: Morph. I didn't know this mutant until now. He is very similar to Mystique regarding his powers. I am interested to see him more often and find out who he is and where he came from. Also: Next time we have to talk about Professor Xavier's wheelchair. It is very fancy and nothing we have seen before.

## Thomas & Adams (1969/70)

*"Time has stopped before us  
The sky cannot ignore us  
No one can separate us  
For we are all that is left  
The echo bounces off me  
The shadow lost beside me  
There's no more need to pretend  
Cause now I can begin again"  
(*"The beginning is the end is the beginning"*, *Smashing Pumpkins*)*

### **Did we miss something?**

The last time we saw the X-Men, they were fighting against the Mimic and jointly defeated him. But a lot seems to have happened while we jumped forward to the 55th issue. Scott hunts down a Pharaoh, who has kidnapped his brother Alex Summers. Also, the X-Men have a new member: Lorna Dane. She has magnetic powers and is the girlfriend of Bobby? At some point in the future, we might have to go back and read the other issues as well. But I didn't tell you the most shocking part yet.



Are sitting down? Good. Because apparently, the Professor died. We don't know how or why or what exactly happened during the first couple of issues of this storyline, but it must have occurred just recently.

Last but not least, the first issue of the so-called "Roy Thomas and Neal Adams run" - as the reading-order-guide I use calls this couple of issues - Neal Adams is not the artist, but Werner Roth. Adams starts to draw the comic beginning with #56.

Those seem to be the most critical three details we have to consider when getting into the next storylines. However, they are just the tip of the iceberg. There are a lot more confusing, questionable and intriguing story elements to discuss. Let's decipher as much as we can:

### **Storytelling and artwork**

A lot of repercussions of previous storylines can be found throughout these issues. Don't get me wrong, there are new elements and villains as well, lots of them, but it is refreshing to see some consequences. The original issues were mostly single-story-issues (with a few exceptions) and didn't have any lasting effects. But now we are not just introduced to Trask junior (his father was responsible for the Sentinel Program), we also meet Ka-Zar again.

Regarding world building, we can see some improvement as well. In issue #58, for example, we get a little scene of Magneto and his new comrade Mesmero. This couple of panels gives us the impression of a bigger, rich universe because we can see, that time is moving forward with other characters as well. We do not just look at their actions and preparations in retrospect, but as they happen. That is what you call "set up." Still, it is not just things like that, which enriches the story. Sometimes we get information from a television newscast, and it just feels naturally implemented into the narrative.

The panel structure is different as well - compared to the original run. There are panels within panels, and the 2x3 structure from before is more or less not existent anymore. They vary in size and shape, which makes for a dynamic read, especially during the fight scenes. These changes were long overdue and can be seen in perfection when Scott takes on the main villain in issue #55.

One thing I love about modern-day comic books are two-page spreads. These are drawings of a single panel or a cumulation of panels throughout two pages. Though I read my comics on an iPad Pro, these artworks get me excited every time - if done right. Recently I read a lot of DC Comics comics. The two-page spreads of Green Arrow, Green Lantern or Titans work perfectly and enrich the story. The same is true for some of the issues of this X-Men run. They present us the first two-page spread of the series (as far as I can tell - maybe there were some in the previous issues) and it's gorgeous. Neal Adams is a great artist. He can do anything. Be it action scenes with pages filled with fights or emotional discussions between Trask's son and a judge - everything is engaging and beautiful to look at.

Before I talk about more specific things I like or disliked, I wanted to mention the finale. In issue #65, we can see that Roy Thomas has prepared this story for a while now. On the other hand, it is a shame to see it fulfilled in just one issue. But as the X-Men complete their first run, it doesn't seem logical to start another epic story arc. These are the last issues of the X-Men. At least for a while. After #66 Marvel just published reprints of older stories and you might have guessed it already - they came back five years later with Giant-Sized X-Men #1.

For the final story, the Professor comes back! Yeah??! Did anyone believe, that Xavier was dead? Well, I wasn't exactly sure, to be honest, but now we have the proof that he faked his death to prepare a strategy for the invasion of the Z'Nox. Alien invaders, with a Deathstar-like ship. Sounds awesome right? Unfortunately, as I said, it is all finished in one issue. It feels rushed. And in addition to that, we have to deal with some weird psychic reboot machine so that the Professor can function normally again. A crazy way to end things.

Be that as it may, issue #66 feels like the old issues again. Back to the basics. They even have a short training session. We've come full circle.

## **The Good, The Bad and The Ugly**

Do you know what backstories are? They are additional pages at the end of a comic (not more than two or three), which tell another story of the characters within the book. One example (I am not sure if it is a good one, to be honest) is All-Star Batman by Scott Snyder. I was astonished to see something like this in an X-Men comic. As I read further into this, I discovered the following table in the dissertation Reading The Uncanny X-Men by Joseph Darowski:

As you can see they were part of the comic since issue 38 and I am quite interested in reading the other stories as well; mainly because the ones we get to see in #55 through #57 are very mixed regarding their quality. However, it is nice to see the stories have evolved and moved forward since Stan Lee. They refer to old events, the storylines go across multiple issues, and they just try new things. Backup stories are only one part of the process, and Roy Thomas was an excellent choice for Lee's successor.

So, what were the backup stories about? The first one tells the origin of Angel aka Warren Worthington or, as he calls himself before joining the X-Men: The Avenging Angel! He stops burglars and thieves on his own. Soon the X-Men take notice of him and appear in his apartment. Another excellent example of How to NOT win someone for your cause (but we discussed this topic already in the second article of this series). Believe it or not, this is not the worst part of the story yet. No, there are short conspicuous fights between Warren and the X-Men, even a nuclear bomb is part of it all. It's ridiculous, but a fun read, I guess.

The embarrassing part starts when Jean gets her backup story. You know, to show some respect for the character, develop a good story with depth and overcome the past. Just kidding. She gets one backup story (as in it's done in one issue) - and the last one for crying out loud (!) - and the first things she gets to do are cleaning her apartment and baking an apple pie with the aid of her powers. Yeah! Woohoo! Feminism! That's how you introduce an X-Woman.

I am obviously sarcastic. To be honest, it is just stupid, and the weirdest thing is, that the story was written by a woman. My expectations were high, as I saw a female writer (Linda Fite) on the list. Write a badass story. Let her do something. But what we get is not even a real story. It's like an entry in a diary and Jean is reading it to the audience. There is no theme or plot. I cannot wait to read Chris Claremont, so let's continue to some good stuff.

## **Friends and Foes (continued)**

The main stories, however, which span over the course of multiple issues are excellent. The first arc with Scott's brother and the pharaoh turns out to be a vast, rich story and I am sure if I read it again I would find more symbolism and meaning within it. You can see and feel, that the storytelling changed massively between the last issues of Stan Lee's run and the one we discuss now. It is one long tale about the sentinels, Scott's Brother, Bobby's girlfriend, a derailed son, a Yin-Yang-Symbolism between the Pharaoh and Alex and so much more. Roy Thomas doesn't rush through the plot points. Instead, he gives it space to breathe. This way the reader can process and appreciate every sequence.

Most issues prominently feature Alex, and in the end, it turns out, that this is the origin story of Havok. I didn't see that coming and was pleasantly surprised. There should be a lot more such origin stories.

One of the coolest, weirdest and funniest moments was during the final battle between the Sentinels and Scott - he is one of the last X-Men standing. He makes an Asimov-ish move and defeats these horrific machines with logic. After that, they fly into the sun and destroy themselves. I am not sure I understood how he did it, but I was reminded of the first couple of short stories by Isaac Asimov in the collection *\_I, Robot\_* (which everyone should read).

For the next villain, I want to talk about; you need to know something: Lord of the Rings and the whole mythology of J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth is an integral part of me. Unfortunately, I have to admit that I am just beginning to dive deeper into this world by reading *The History of Middle-Earth* books, *The Silmarillion* and so on and so forth.

However, I watch the Lord of the Rings movies by Peter Jackson on a regular basis (which means once a year) and every time I cry and have a deep emotional experience. Don't get me started on *The Hobbit* movies - I just talking about Lord of the Rings. They are treasures. I love them.

That said, we can now talk about Dr. Klaus Lykos - he plays a crucial role in the issues #60 through #62. He is a mutant and can drain the life energy of other living things, even animals. As The X-Men deliver Scott's brother to him - Lykos



is supposed to be a friend of Xavier - he finally gets enough energy to transform himself into a Pteranodon. Years ago the same creatures attacked him and gave him his power in the first place. So far so good. But, of course, he is a fan of Lord of the Rings and calls himself Sauron.

Sigh.

Why?! Just ... why? You don't do things like that. Never, ever, name anyone after one of the greatest villains of all time. Never. If Lykos would have been a big wicked evil genius with a plan and abilities to defeat the X-Men - maybe then. But the way the story is executed, I don't buy it for a second. Sauron is like a second personality within him. He has more resemblance with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, than with anyone of Lord of the Rings. Furthermore, the X-Men don't have to act. They are like an audience, watching the separate elements unfolding. In the end, it is all about love and forgiveness. Horrible.

OK. Now I feel better.

### **The coming of Sunfire**

...is also the title of the 64th issue. It is a tragic story of a young boy, manipulated by an old man to fight a war, that has ended a long time ago. This story takes on a complex topic. It deals with the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Mind that the comic was released in the 1970s.

The boy's name is Shiro. His mother was a victim of Hiroshima, and as a result of the nuclear fallout, Shiro got his powers. Within his body, he can contain the power of the sun itself and release it in powerful blasts. Unknown to his father, his uncle told him, since Shiro was a baby, about Hiroshima and what happened to his mother. How he hated the United States for it and that he wants revenge. It should be their right and duty to avenge those who died and those who still suffer. Therefore, when Shiro's powers manifest, his uncle commands him to attack Washington D.C. and destroy it.

Shiro, believing in the course laid out by his uncle is ready for everything. But in Washington, a terrible accident happens, and his uncle kills Shiro's father. When he learned of the doings of Shiro, his father sacrifices himself to save the people of the city and convince Shiro, that what he does is wrong.

As you may have noticed, this story doesn't indeed feature the X-Men. In this case, it's a good thing. The coming of Sunfire is an intimate, one-issue story which deals with a topic you might not expect. It's just about Shiro and the pain of his past. It is about a young man easily manipulated by someone he should be able to trust. On the other hand: can you blame the uncle for his hatred? Then there is the father, standing in between them. A touching story, which is now as important and relevant as it was then.

### **Conclusion**

Roy Thomas and Neal Adams didn't just create a couple of X-Men stories, but an entire roller coaster of emotions. I may have praised the developments that occurred between issue #19 and #55 a bit too much. However, I wanted to point out just how much has changed in the few years in between. It is great to witness the evolution of storytelling within the medium, and I think the X-Men are the perfect example of it.

In the next article we will talk about the question "What is a mutant?" and after that, we take a look at a newer interpretation of the X-Men's origin. A series written by Jeff Parker. We are going to talk about X-Men First Class v1 (2007).

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# What is a mutant?

*“So maybe I’m an angel and maybe I’m a thief  
Maybe I’m a beggar that you walk by on the street  
Alright, you cut off both my wings  
Sell me for a nickel. The devil’s gotta earn  
I don’t need no banker to tell me what I’m wort  
It’s alright. Some folks they never learn  
You’re eating fire and you’re praying I get burnt”  
(“The devil’s gotta’ earn,” Brett Detar)*

Mutation is everywhere: “Every single human trait — blue eyes, red hair, cystic fibrosis, a second toe longer than the big toe, and so on — is the result of some genetic mutation somewhere back down the line.” These are the first words of an article discussing different mutations on the website ScienceClarified. This website provides comprehensive definitions of scientific vocabulary, as well as real-life examples of biological phenomenon’s, like mutations. So mutation is not just something abstract and exotic, but an everyday occurrence.

## mutation

But before we can discuss the different forms of mutation, one has to have an idea of evolution.

The first one to describe a theory of evolution was the French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. He explained a deterministic point of view. For example, the giraffe has a long neck, because it reached for higher leaves, unavailable to other animals. As a result, the neck got longer and longer. This theory was later abandoned, and nearly fifty years later Charles Darwin published his famous book “The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection.” With this book, he provided not just a different perspective. His “concept of evolutionary adaptation through natural selection became central to modern evolutionary theory, and it has now become the unifying concept of the life sciences.” (Wikipedia). The concept of natural selection or survival of the fittest is based on the idea, that one species is more able to survive in an environment and against its competitors, than others. These survivors than mate, and reproduce - they pass their genes to the next generation. Though Darwin did not yet know of the concept of genes, which he acknowledged in his work, he described the idea behind it. Each following generation of a species would be better equipped or able to survive in its environment. If you want to know more about the mechanisms behind natural selection, I highly recommend this article on ScienceClarified: Evolution

But what does this have to do with mutation? Well, because of mutation a species can evolve from one generation to the next. To give you a better understanding of what this concept can mean, I present three different definitions of the word “mutation”:

- Cambridge Dictionary: “an organism that is different from others of its type because of a permanent change in its genes.”
- Wikipedia: “an organism or a new genetic character arising or resulting from an instance of mutation, which is an alteration of the DNA sequence of a gene or chromosome of an organism.”
- Urban dictionary: “A relatively permanent change in hereditary material involving either a physical change in chromosome relations or a biochemical change in the codons that make up genes”

Mutations can occur naturally or can be induced artificially. Natural mutations can be caused when a cell creates an error while duplicating itself, which leads to diseases. Artificial mutations, on the other hand, can be deliberately caused by mutagens – “chemical or physical factors that increase the rate of mutation.” (ScienceClarified, n.d.) Most of those mutagens are human-made, such as drugs, tobacco, or alcohol as well as the exposure to radiation from hydrogen and atomic bombs. But viruses can also be mutagens because they insert parts of their own DNA into host DNA.

As mentioned, mutations can be a cause of natural evolution, create diseases or physical changes of an individual or its offspring. Regarding the human being (but not limited to it), such physical changes can be albinism, the aforementioned red hair, or can cause an altered physical appearance, for example, little persons. This kind of mutation can occur in

different forms: one is a very short human but is normal proportioned, another has disproportionate body parts.

Another, extreme example is the so-called Elephant-Man: Joseph Merrick.

Mutation is everywhere. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together - sorry - got distracted. As I said, mutation is not something abstract and exotic. Besides some extreme radical changes, mostly seen in diseases, mutation and therefore evolution is a slow process. So it seems reasonable to ask a question like the character Charles Xavier did, at the beginning of the second X-Men movie. He asks if the mutants are just “the next link in the evolutionary chain or simply a new species of humanity fighting for their share of the world?” (Arad & Singer, 2003)

### **the origin of an idea**

Either way, the X-Men have extraordinary abilities and are feared because of them. But where did they come from?

When did mutants first appear in popular culture? Let's take a look at their literary origins. There are certain books out there - mostly released at the beginning of the 1950s - which are very similar to the X-Men. Not just regarding their abilities, but also their position in society. “Whether Lee and or Kirby read these works is impossible to tell, but the similarities are significant.” (Darowski, 2011)

I have three examples, which are mentioned time and again if you read something about the origin of the X-Men. I have to say, that unfortunately, I didn't read the books - yet, at least. So I will just give you a quick overview. To be honest, I didn't read much comments or reviews about them, because I didn't want to be spoiled. And yes, I am aware that those books are over 60 years old.

The first book, released in 1953, is *Mutant* by Henry Kuttner & C.L. Moore. Before the book's release, the magazine *Astounding Science Fiction* published first chapters of it. This is also true for *Children of the Atom*. The book contains five chapters: *The Piper's Son*, *Beggars in Velvet*, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, *Three Blind Mice*, and *Humpty Dumpty*. Those chapters tell different stories of the same characters, in various stages of their adventures. The descriptions of the content sound very familiar and could easily be drawn from an X-Men comic. For example, some of the mutants in the stories want to live peacefully, whereas others want to destroy the human race. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? As I understand it, most of the mutants can read minds, and the authors are “using italicized type and bracketed paragraphs, [to] effectively convey telepathic conversations amongst several people; one of the book's major strengths.” (Ferber, 2013) If this last statement doesn't hook you, I don't know what else to do.

*Children of the Atom* by Wilmar Shiras was also published in 1953. Wikipedia states the book as one of “The Most Significant SF & Fantasy Books of the Last 50 Years, 1953-2002.” Unfortunately, the source of this is no longer available, but the statement does its job. The best summary is provided by Arthur Bangs. He also mentions the familiarity of the story with the X-Men - which had their first adventure, just ten years later. Bangs (2005) writes: “This is not a superhero story, but one about gifted children learning to understand and embrace their abilities, and overcoming their sense of isolation by joining together into a community.”

*Slan* by A.E. van Vogt is the oldest of the three novels - released in 1946. “Slans are evolved humans, named after their alleged creator, Samuel Lann. They have the psychic abilities to read minds and are super-intelligent. They possess near limitless stamina, ‘nerves of steel,’ and superior strength and speed. When Slans are ill or seriously injured, they go into a healing trance automatically.” (Slan, n.d.) The mentioned features could be directly linked to some of the X-Men.

It seems like psychic abilities were very popular in the 40s and 50s. The human being was not enough anymore. There was a need for something more. A need for an idea of the next step. For thousands of years, humans have been the same, and some authors wanted to think about the next steps. Though they are not very likely to occur in real life, some of the abilities like strength or speed, could be achieved by mechanic support systems. Maybe this is also the reason why we build robots or at least try to: to create something better than ourselves.

### **conclusion**

There are many stories, especially from the 1940s and 50s which deal in one way or another with mutations. They deal with the fear of atomic bombs and how they could affect other people. I don't remember where I read this, but someone

said about those books, that most critics don't like them now because they didn't predict the right or correct future. But that is an unfair, even strange statement. The primary goal of Science-Fiction is not to tell their audience the future and what will happen in the next ten, twenty or a thousand years. They provide a possibility. How it could be. They are warnings, or bearers of hope, or deal with fears and anxieties. However, first and foremost they entertain. What you make of it, what you read into it or how you interpret those stories is up to you. That is the power of storytelling.

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## **X-Men TAS Episode 2**

- X-Men: The Animated Series
- Season 1 Episode 2: Night of the Sentinels II
- Writer: Mark Edward Edens
- Story Editor: Eric Lewald
- Story Consultant: Bob Harras
- Supervising Producer: Will Meugniot
- Line Producer: Larry Houston
- Original Air Date: 7 November 1992

*Synopsis (from IMDB): After breaking into the headquarters of the newly discovered government branch called The Mutant Control Agency, the X-men lose two of their own members in a battle with the Sentinels.*

Do you remember the last scene from the previous episode? Some members of the X-Men broke into the Mutant Control Agency. There they stood in front of a door, which Storm opened. Unfortunately, before we got to see what's behind it, the screen faded to black. I called that a cheap trick. And guess what: I was right! The big revelation is: there is no significant revelation! Wolverine just shuts the door before Storm can open it entirely because he smells guards on the other side. That is very frustrating. Why couldn't it be something more significant? Or just show us that there are guards on the other side and then fade to black. But no, they close the door, sneak up on the guards (thanks to Morph's shape-shifting abilities) and fight them. That is it.

While Storm, Wolverine, Morph, and Beast do their thing and destroy the files, Cyclops, Rogue, and Gambit catch up to them and hold off approaching threats. Those threats include highly trained guards, tank-like vehicles, and High-Tech weapons. This Agency, which is not funded by the government, is pretty well equipped.

Jubilee, in the meantime, is being held by a guy called Gyrich. He was the one kidnapping her in the last episode - not Trask himself as I assumed. Bolivar Trusk wanted to wait for their attack until they had 100 Sentinels built. Combined with their arsenal of weapons, vehicles, and troops, their operation gets quickly very frightening. The fact is, they are

making Sentinels to catch mutants. To lock them up. And god knows what to do with them. By this point, I am convinced they want genocide.

The conversation between Jubilee and Gyrich is pretty revealing. For example, Gyrich does not know who the X-Men are. He knows of their existence, but who or what behind this idea is, is a mystery to this man. I wonder what he would have done to her if Trusk hadn't shown up. Gyrich is the violent one of them. This conversation also indicates that the X-Men are new in business. However, this is contradicting the fact that Storm already "graduated" the school of Charles Xavier, but decided to stay anyway - as we have learned in the last episode. Or are Trusk and Gyrich the ones who are new to the idea of mutants?

Back to the story: The X-Men manage to free Jubilee and leave the building. From that point on, the storytelling gets a bit weird, so stay with him on this:

First, there is a fight between a bunch of Sentinels and the team. They work together and manage to destroy some of them. But ultimately there are too many. Morph apparently gets shot. Then the episode cuts, and we see Jean connected to Cerebro, monitoring the fight. She cries out in pain and agony, the Professor checks up on her, attaches himself to Cerebro instead of Jean, and is devastated, because he cannot find Morph.

Just in case you don't know: Cerebro is a machine which amplifies mental abilities to detect mutants. You can also find human beings with it, but Xavier mostly uses it to identify or search for a lost fellow mutant or detect mutant activity in general. He supposedly can do this on the entire planet.

Anyhow, instead of cutting back to the fight or Morph or a body, we see the Blackbird (the X-Men's very own jet) landing beside the mansion. Wolverine is angry, hitting Scott for making a wrong decision (a decision we don't know of) and then walks into the garage. There he destroys Scott's car and drives off with another. We didn't see what happened, so that makes it difficult to understand Wolverine. He just hints at what might have happened, which is frustrating, because when he is sitting in the car and driving, we get a flashback.

In this flashback we see Morph getting hit. Then the fight continues. Beast is also beaten and in addition to that thrown into an electric fence. More Sentinels are coming, and Scott gives the order to leave them behind and regroup.

Wolverine doesn't want to go, but Rogue forces him to. She does that by absorbing a bit of his life energy (one of Rogue's powers). Just enough of it so the team can carry him to the jet. Now I, as the viewer, understand what has happened and can comprehend how Wolverine is feeling.

This structure of the story is weird and, as I said, frustrating. Why didn't they tell the story in chronological order in the first place? It doesn't make the situation more suspenseful if you make me wait a couple of minutes and then reveal just parts of what happened anyway. Because in the end, when the episode ends, Morph's and Beast's fate is not conclusive. We don't know if they are dead or alive. Just hints here and there.

After this unfortunate part, we get to see something I didn't expect: The president of the United States is a woman. Yes, you heard right. Isn't that awesome?! And in addition to that, she officially declines any further support for anything The Mutant Control Agency does. She does that because she interprets the incident at the facility in the right way: The X-Men were not the aggressors. Very cool move.

Cyclops finally catches up with Wolverine (he is in a bar, of course), they are friends again and go back to Jubilee's parents. They talk to them and hope her father calls the Agency - which he does - to damage the Sentinel they sent and follow it home. This strategy is a risk but smart.

The last thing we see is a sign of hope: Jubilee says goodbye to her foster parents and leaves them for the X-Men. For some reason, she has to take a cap and has just one suitcase (when I went to university I had a car full of stuff with me). Anyhow, as the door of the mansion opens, and she walks in, the screen fades to black. Granted, it is another use of a door without showing what is behind it. But in this case, it does not matter. Behind this door is a new family for Jubilee. A new hope.

# X-Men First Class Volume 1

*"I have hours, only lonely  
My love is vengeance  
That's never free."  
("Behind Blue Eyes", The Who)*

I dedicated the last articles to the early years of the X-Men. How they started, and how they ended, before reprints occurred. Before we start with Chris Claremont and his incredible, nearly 20-year run on different titles, tie-ins, and spin-offs, we take a look at another interpretation of the X-Men's origin.

## The Creators

X-Men First Class of 2007 was the first volume of this run and contained eight issues. Jeff Parker wrote them, and Roger Cruz is responsible for the fantastic art. For Jeff Parker, First Class was one of his first Marvel assignments. Before he started this limited series, he wrote Agents of Atlas. Another superhero team, which is composed of characters first introduced in the 50s and 60s. The name Atlas is referring to Marvel's predecessor Atlas Comics. (Wikipedia, 2017)

Roger Cruz did a lot of work for Marvel Comics. He also has a DeviantArt page which is worth checking out. The impressive artwork Cruz provides does not just come from the pages of comic books. They are creative, and he has a great sense of body language. I also like the different facial expression he posted on this page. DeviantArt is something one should visit more often. It is a great place for inspiration. And you can download the images to work on your inking skills, for example.

But let's get back to the topic at hand: X-Men First Class:

## The Characters

As I said, I read the first volume which consists of eight issues. As the comicvine post about the reading order of the X-Men states: "This series is particularly good to give to younger kids who want to read X-Men." (TEC2030, 2017).

This time the characters are introduced by Bobby Drake aka Iceman. He writes a letter to his parents and tells them about his last adventure. We get to know what he thinks about his classmates and what they can do. In the original X-Men by Jack Kirby and Stan Lee, the parents did not realize that their children are mutants. This way the kids cannot openly talk about their school and their experiences. This is prominently featured in the original run, as Angel's parents come by for a visit. Bobby seems to have had his coming out a while ago, and it is nice to see, how he talks about the things going on.

Throughout the whole first volume, the feeling of an actual school and the fact that we have to deal with young adults is powerful. It starts with the introduction page of every issue. There, every character gets a little introduction. Just a picture of their faces, and a description of their abilities. These pages are used by the characters themselves to draw on and to make comments. Each issue a different person, of course. What do they think about them? Who do they like? It's a cute addition to having this kind of insight. You can get a lot out of these little comments regarding relationships and friendships.

Besides Bobby, we are presented with the original roster of X-Men. Warren aka The Angel, Scott aka Cyclops, Jean aka Marvel Girl, Hank aka The Beast, and the Professor, of course. Cerebro did get an upgrade and is now able to teach the students. This aspect of "school" was utterly ignored in the original run, which always bothered me a bit. There were no real classes, just training sessions and such. But now, as we saw in the first three X-Men movies as well, the students have classes with homework, tests, etc.

## The Stories

The team has mostly to deal with new villains. The first one, for example, is a bush. Yes, you heard right. They have to fight a bush. An Azalea bush, to be exact. From this point on I knew I read a book, dedicated to children. This is not a



complaint; it's nice to have some issues you can give to your children as an introductory to those great characters. Not that I have any children, but still. But something is missing. Usually, you have a grander scheme or topic behind the story, where the authors and artists implement timely discussions. I didn't get this feeling with this issues. At first, I couldn't put my finger on it. It was like a bland salad. You know there is a taste missing, but you don't know what else to put in. It was the same with this story until I read a review on *The Literary Omnivore* (McBride, 2013): "In this case, it's a series of straightforward adventures what doesn't particularly explore any deeper themes." And that's precisely it. Jeff Parker doesn't go more in-depth. Most stories start with everyday life situations of the team. They go on vacation, are thrown into an adventure that takes place in the Professor's head, or they go out. They accidentally stumble upon an adventure and therefore their villains, and that's it. The issues are fun to read but don't expect great character moments or even an improvement from Stan Lee's Jean Grey problem. I wrote in an earlier article that even the Professor had a crush on Jean, which was one of the creepiest moments in those early issues. Unfortunately, it is not getting better now:

*"But in one story, Professor X orders Cyclops and Jean to rest at a rented house in Florida. Cyclops mopes, but Professor X winks at him telepathically and tells him he arranged for Cyclops to have alone time with Jean. Out of context, it's a fine, if a little teen comedy, moment, but we don't get into Jean's head much in this collection, making her feel like a prize more than a member of the team. This improves—there is a story about Angel dating Scarlet Witch where Jean tells Pietro, her brother, off for trying to control her behavior—but it still doesn't sit well." (McBride, 2013)*

## The End

One thing I appreciated was the crossovers with other Marvel characters. This way you get a real sense of a vast Universe. I understand that at the beginning Stan Lee and Jack Kirby couldn't do as many crossovers because the relevant characters had to be introduced first. Now we have stories with Doctor Strange, Curt Connors, and a Skrull. Even the old villains get to have a cameo in the third issue.

There is not much left to say about this series. It's a great introduction to the characters, especially for children. But to be honest, I am looking forward to the Chris Claremont run and how he reinvented the X-Men - gave them impactful stories and a diverse roster of characters. Next month we will talk about X-Men issues #94 to #110.

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# The Ages of Comic Books

*"Don't let no one get you down  
Keep movin' on higher ground  
Keep flying until  
You are the king of the hill  
No force of nature can break  
Your will to self motivate  
She say this face that you see  
Is destined for history"  
(“History”, Michael Jackson)*

I never really looked up the different ages of comic books we had or have. I was interested but somehow needed a reason to get into it. Now that I opened this Box of Pandora I cannot close it anymore. It is fascinating how different websites and opinions are in naming the different ages. And it's not just the names that vary. Even the years do. I

collected information from various sites, read their descriptions and arguments for their system. To be honest, that didn't satisfy me, so I came up with my naming system (mostly borrowed from the various sites - you can find them, as always, in the source section of this article). So here it is - the ultimate, maybe the final list of comic book ages you will ever need (eventually):

- Proto-Superhero
- Golden Age
- Atomic Age
- Silver Age
- Bronze Age
- Dark Age (Copper Age)
- Extreme Age
- Diamond Age

Now let's talk about the how and why? Come with me into this rabbit hole, leaving Kansas behind - good luck getting out.

### **The Age of the Proto-Superhero**

This idea I got from a very popular and vital website called tvtropes.org. In my opinion, this is a very suitable name for everything that happened before comic books emerged, but at the same time a very arrogant one, because it lumps everything together. Thousands of years of culture put into one big messy drawer. But these are the ages of comic books, and as you are going to see later, not everyone focuses on the comic books, when naming the different eras of such.

It is, of course, essential to recognize what was before, because not every character from those early days is remembered and honored by us:

*"Only a lucky handful (Zorro, Tarzan, The Shadow, The Phantom, The Lone Ranger, Golden Bat) have remained popularly-recognized since their inception. But superpowered or not, widely-remembered or not, it's these Proto Superheroes to which later Golden, Silver, Bronze, Dark and Modern Age comic superheroes owe their success, as inspiration for their archetype and the industry that birthed them." (Proto-Superhero, n.d.)*

Scott McCloud talks in his book *Understanding Comics* at length about the history of comics. The definition sequential art by Will Eisner is, after McCloud's analysis, the perfect description for most comics. But there were similar things before 1842 - the year of the first comic strip. Over 2000 years ago the Egyptians had an entire writing system based on symbols.

Other cultures had similar things as well and told stories of their heroes, legends, and myths. Enter a church, and you can see the suffering of Jesus frame by frame. Granted, they don't have any dialogue or speech bubbles, but they tell a story. There are entire graphic novels without a single word in them. So the word "comic" can be a rather broad definition.

Maybe we will talk about the medium itself in another article. For now, in this context, we want to focus on the modern day comic books - mainly American comics. You could also make such an article about mangas or other region/culture based ways of telling stories via a culmination of text and pictures.

### **Golden Age**

The Golden Age of comic books were simple times. The good old times, if you will. The supposedly good guys wear capes and won. The bad guys lost. There were no grey areas.

*"[N]o mercy! The moral of this story ladies and gentleman is... Good guys win, bad guys lose, and as always England prevails!" (V for Vendetta, 2006)*

I think the birth of Superman in June 1938 is the perfect date to start the Golden Age of comic books. Superman - the first Superhero. He was and is the embodiment of justice, truth, and the American Way. He is not only good but



infallible. Strong, fast, incorruptible. Ready to sacrifice himself for the greater good. The perfect man - but not human. An ideal. Never to be reached. By the way, he talks, moves and behaves he might fool you. Nevertheless, he is an alien. But his strength is not limitless. The Hulk gets stronger and stronger the angrier he gets; this is a genuinely infinite strength. Superman does not have this luxury. He is as strong and capable as the story needs him to be. I read a sentence like that in an article about Superman - unfortunately, I didn't note where I found it - but it is a valid description of the character.

In his newest adventures, he has a family, even a dog and handles that great as well. But why do I talk about Superman in such lengths? To be honest, it started out as a sarcastic list of everything Superman is and can be - you might have picked up on that. But as I thought about it, it is a logical step, to start with the ultimate superhero. An alien who has lost everything, overcame his grief, was raised by good people and now gives back as much as he can.

The only one better as Superman (no, I am not talking about Batman) is Wonder Woman. In my favorite origin story of this character, she was molded by clay and brought to life by Zeus. No suffering. Then, as Steve Trevor came along, she decided to go with him and do good. No sign of guilt. She chose to do so. Not something tragic from her past that forced her into this.

As we look back at the history of those great characters, let's not forget, that we take a 1930s point of view. And as I said, Superman was not the first Superhero. James Henry (2016) wrote:

*"Heck, Superman wasn't even the first superhero by DC comics, that would appear to be "Doctor Occult"[3] published in 1935 by DC comics in New Fun Comics #6. He was a private investigator specializing in cases involving the supernatural. He used his magical abilities (like astral projection & telekinesis) to solve his cases."*

Still, he wasn't alone for long. The Golden Age also witnessed the rise of Batman, Wonder Woman, Captain Marvel, The Flash, Captain America, as well as the Justice Society of America in 1940, and many many more. Some writers point out, that the characters behind the masks and under the capes, were not that interesting. Though I think that is a bold statement, I get where they are coming from.

The heroes were the focus; not their alter egos. At some point, I want to go back and read the first adventures of Batman and the others so that I can join the discussion about this particular topic. Be that as it may, the age of the Superheroes faded away as fast as it came to life. After World War II they were replaced by non-superhero stories. Sometimes this meant for the heroes to phase out of their own titles slowly.

*"Although Batman and Superman would continue to exist through this time, Captain America did not fare so well. His book was renamed into Captain America's Weird Tales and was completely phased out of the comic in the same year as the human torch and replaced with horror genre material." (Grant, 2016)*

This development occurred around 1950. If you want to read more about the Golden Age, you can find articles on [tvtropes.org](http://tvtropes.org) and, of course, Wikipedia.

## **Atomic Age**

Most people don't write about the Atomic Age and instead make a direct transition from the Golden Age into the Silver Age. But in my opinion, it is important to point out, that Superheroes had some years, where they were not as popular as one might think, and took a hiatus.

During these years, "Horror comics became very popular, and the most successful publisher producing those books was EC Comics' Bill Gaines. These stories visually depicted beheadings of women, murders, and other crimes..." (Grant, 2016). Because of those very detailed descriptions of how crimes went down, and the gruesome visuals, concerns arose. I talked at length about those concerns in a previous article (I also mentioned what Bill Gaines accomplished after he closed down EC Comics). The era of horror and crime comics ended basically with the foundation of the Comics Magazine Association of America and the Comics Code Authority (I wrote about them here).

## Silver Age

With the guidelines in place - how to make comics without manipulating children to become murderers, thieves, and villains - superheroes awoke to new life. Others might date the start of the Silver Age a few years later:

*“Over at DC Comics, Carmine Infantino applied his art to various genre of comic books, and one that struck a cord with the mainstream and did well under the comics code authority was Showcase 4, 1956 which introduced the modern Barry Allen Flash and started off the Silver Age (1956-1969)” (Grand, 2016)*

Or:

*“The Silver Age lasted from 1956note to about 1972 (although some people count everything up until 1985 as part of it, folding in The Bronze Age of Comic Books).” (tvtropes, n.d.)*

Though I like the idea, that DC plays a significant role in starting new eras of comic books, the start of the Comics Code Authority seems to fit better. But as you will see in the next couple of ages, this area of comic studies, needs more research. Especially after the Bronze Age, the differences between author's opinions on how to define the periods are vast. Therefore I wanted to provide a full list, so you can decide for yourself, how to divide the eras.

I asked myself: Why is Barry Allen's appearance in DC Showcase #4 in Oct. 1956 supposed to be the beginning of a new age? Martian Manhunter, for example, first appeared in Detective Comics #225 in Nov. 1955 and Captain Comet had his debut in Strange Adventures #9 (1951). What is so special about Barry Allen?

We have to look at the storytelling of this comic. It is interesting to see that a #4 comic of an ongoing series started the Silver Age and not a #1. Showcase #4 was the first comic to focus on a Science-Fiction approach. Make the heroes more realistic. Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman (the remaining three ongoing comics still published by DC at the time) and others followed. So maybe, if you take this point of view, Showcase #4 is the beginning of the Silver Age.

If we look at Marvel, we can see that they introduced their major characters during the Silver Age: Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Hulk, Iron-Man, X-Men, Daredevil, Tales of Suspense, Tales to Astonish, and so on and so forth.

The end of the Silver Age is often connected to Green Lantern and the following quote from 1972:

*“Those days are gone – gone forever – the days I was confident, certain ... I was so young ... so sure I couldn't make a mistake! Young and cocky, that was Green Lantern. Well, I've changed. I'm older now ... maybe wiser, too ... and a lot less happy.”*

## Bronze Age

The 1960s ended, the Comics Code Authority lost its grip and superheroes became vulnerable. Society had to deal with some setbacks, but before I go into some details, an abstract-ish overview:

*“When many loved ones perished or people got emotionally distressed, heroes and villains became poor and depressed which had resulted in them being addicted to drugs and alcohol. With codes of authority being broken, the supernatural came to take over. Heroes had darker villains, and they had to work together to survive these darker times. Minority characters chose to fight for crime and become heroes whether it was for money, survival, or to bring justice.” (Spider10, 2016)*

Massacres, the Vietnam War and NASA losing a significant part of their funding, are just three things, that occurred at that time. Also, the comic book industry was changing. In 1971 the CMAA released a new guideline, in 1970 Jack Kirby moved from Marvel to DC, and Spider-Man's girlfriend Gwen Stacy died in 1973. But there is some agreement, that the Bronze Age started with the first issue of Conan the Barbarian.

Again: Why? Created by writer Robert E. Howard in 1932, Conan had his comic debut in 1970. The looser guidelines of the comics code, fired up the creators urge for experiments. To let a guy run around basically naked, was a logical move, I guess. So, like Superman, Conan represents more, than just the beginning of a new comic book series. He represents an idea.

Finally, to come around full circle on our main topic, the X-Men were reborn in 1975. Marvel released Giant Sized X-Men #1, and Chris Claremont began his 17 years of reign in all X-Men related titles.

## **Dark Age (Copper Age)**

The Dark Age or sometimes referred to as the Copper Age began in 1985. Why I don't want to call this age the supposedly "modern age" is further described in the Diamond Age section.

As with our real Dark Ages, this term is not meant literally but figuratively. Characters such as Barry Alan as the Flash, Clark Kent as Superman, Wonder Woman and many more were replaced by darker, grittier and psychologically complex aspects. As a starting point, we can once again, glance at DC and their Crisis on Infinite Earths event. After 50 years of publication, they needed to simplify their rich and complex mythos. The solution was a 12-issue mini-series that would change the DC Universe forever.

If you want a detailed discussion of Crisis on Infinite Earths I suggest you read the article "'Crisis on Infinite Earths' 30 Years On" by Gregory L. Reece. First, he talks about the history of DC and the idea of a multiverse. Then he continues to point out why and how Crisis on Infinite Earths was such a hit.

DC also released one of their all-time favorite, best-selling graphic novels Batman: Year One by Frank Miller and artist David Mazzucchelli. Frank Miller also wrote The Dark Knight Returns. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons created The Watchmen (I don't think I have to describe the impact of this comic).

But "Marvel also had their fair share of Dark, psychologically complex stories like the Morlock Massacre, Scourge murdering villains, and the Punisher being a hero compared to dirtbags like Nuke or Sabretooth." (Grand, 2016)

## **Extreme Age**

For some, the Extreme Age began in 1991 with the release of X-Force #1 by Rob Liefeld. But in my opinion 1992 would be a better fit, because that is the year Todd McFarlane, Jim Lee, Whilce Portacio, Marc Silvestri, Erik Larsen, Jim Valentino, and Rob Liefeld founded Image Comics - former employees of the Big Two. It was a little revolution and the beginning of indie comics.

In 1993 a coalition of African-American artists and writers, consisting of Dwayne McDuffie, Denys Cowan, Michael Davis, and Derek T. Dingle founded Milestone Media. They gave minorities a platform.

The Extreme Age took the Bronze Age further. Darker anti-heroes were born. For example, one of my all-time favorites: Spawn. "While a strange assailant stalks the city, ripping out human hearts, another otherworldly being arrives. As his mind reels, our tortured hero remembers that he struck a deal with the devil in order to return to his beloved wife - five years after his death." (imagecomics; n.d.)

It is important to point out such developments and give them their own age, no matter how short it may be. But Image still plays a huge role as a comic book publisher, and Milestone Media inspired a lot of people (you can read their story in detail in the book Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and Their Fans by Jeffrey A. Brown).

This was also the time, trade paperbacks became popular and DC started their \_Death of Superman\_ story-arc. But the word "extreme" also refers to the artwork, which was not always anatomically correct (especially when it comes to certain features of the female body or the muscles of men). Also, we were given a lot of gimmicks in the storylines, as you can see in the early comics published by Image.

## **Diamond Age (1997-now)**

Some call it modern age or movie age, but both are neither suitable nor appropriate. The modern age is a very subjective term. If we would be in the 80s we also could name the age "the modern age of comic books," but that would do nothing good. Or as the user Spider10 (July 17, 2016) from the website playbuzz puts it: "We can't call anything 'The Modern Age' because let's face it: 'The Modern Age' you have now will not be called that in the near future."

Movie age is also inappropriate because it shifts the focus away from comic books. But the name Diamond Age is a good compromise to hint at the millions of dollars movies based on comic books make. And I am not just talking about the Marvel Cinematic Universe or the DCEU. We also have to remember the early films. Spawn from 1997, Blade from 1998, the first X-Men movie from 2000, etc. And don't let us forget movies like Atomic Blond or Valerian. In my opinion, the real age of comic book movies started with Spawn and Blade.

Of course, there were some attempts to bring superhero movies to life before those two, but the technology was not ready for such projects. I think it was also an issue, that movies didn't get that much money to be produced. One of the first mega-projects of such a kind was The Lord of the Rings.

Twenty years seems to be like a huge time span. Maybe we need to make a cut at some point and start a new phase. It is too early for such a drastic move, because who knows what happens in the future. Maybe, from a DC Comics point of view, we could use 2011 or 2016 for a new beginning. 2011 was the new52 initiative and 2016's Rebirth (but this is connected to the new52, so it would have to be 2011). Or we could start with one of the many, many, many events Marvel had over the last couple of years. Or, and this is my favorite, we take a step back from the Big Two and take an indie comic to be the beginning of a new era. It doesn't have to be Image. We could look at Boom! for example, who did a great job at creating original, exciting comics. Valiant could also be a possible alternative. As you can see, there are a lot of options and only time will tell, in which direction we will have had been moved on to (does this make any sense?!).

### **sources**

Before we get to the usual bibliography-section, I want to provide a detailed list of everything that happened beginning with 1933, up until now. You can find the list at [bipcomics.com](http://bipcomics.com), and though they did not divide the eras as I did, for example, their Golden Age began in 1933, it is an interesting list with a lot of information.

If you are specifically interested in the history of DC Comics, I can recommend the books by Paul Levitz. He wrote an XL hardcover book series about the various ages of DC. I have not read them yet, but the reviews are promising. There is also a visual history guide of DC Comics (although from another author). And finally, you can read the limited comic book series *The Comic Book History of Comics* published at IDW. The resource on various topics are vast, and you could fill libraries with them. Pick the topic you are interested in most, and get started.

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## **X-Men TAS Episode 3**

- *X-Men: The Animated Series* | Season 1 Episode 3: Enter Magneto
- Writer: Jim Carlson, Terrence McDonnell
- Story Editor: Eric Lewald
- Story Consultant: Bob Harras
- Supervising Producer: Will Meugniot
- Line Producer: Larry Houston
- Original Air Date: 27 November 1992

*Synopsis (from IMDB): As the Beast waits for his arraignment in court in front of an anti-mutant public, Magneto tries to break Beast out of jail, only to receive resistance from Beast. An old enemy of Wolverine's pops up, and the X-Men take him in. Magneto then attacks a military base, trying to bring mutants together against the oppression brought upon.*

After watching this episode, I am more confused than ever regarding where we are on the timeline. In the first two episodes Storm told Jubilee that she graduated Xavier's school already but decided to stay, because the X-Men are an excellent institution for mutants and a haven. However, apparently the X-Men never had any foes in those days because none of them know Magneto (except Charles, of course). So they lived peacefully(?), and now all of a sudden threats rise left and right of them? All of this seems very strange. It's like they needed an excuse for the original X-Men to be older and had no better idea of how to do it.

But let's talk about the story. Last time, Hank got abducted by the Mutant Control Agency. We speculated what the goal of this organization might be. One of their modus operandi seems to include imprisoning mutants and putting them in front of a judge. In prison, Hank reads a lot (e.g., *Animal Farm*) and gets bullied by the guards. They say things like: "oh, it tries to read" (I am paraphrasing), suggesting that mutants are unintelligent. Phrases like these remind you of things racists would say in our world. They serve a multitude of purposes: on the one hand, they suggest that Mutants are not equal to homo sapiens or deserve the same rights; on the other hand, they also refuse to acknowledge them as a person. But Hank, the mutant he is, trusts in the system and even after Magneto shows up and offers him to break him out, he stays. The two mutants briefly discuss the two philosophies of how to fight for mutant rights. Magneto even uses the phrase "sense of brotherhood." There is a sense of community. But Hank wants to change the system peacefully and not by force. You have to admire him for that.

In court, the judge shows him how the system really works. Though he did not break out of prison and it clearly was Magneto's fault, the judge denies bail. Hank makes some excellent points, but this court does not listen to reason. As he is escorted back to his cell, Sabertooth shows up. We saw him once before, in a news broadcast in the first two episodes. He was the broadcast's example of a rampaging mutant. Why Sabertooth shows up is not entirely clear, though, in the way Wolverine talks about him and the adventures they had.

I am not even sure what this scene adds to the episode. Why Sabertooth? Why in court? Maybe this is the creator's way to establish a character over time and give him the role of the antagonist later on. In my opinion, it would have been better to keep him in the background.

However, the other X-Men want to know who this Magneto is, so they confront the Professor and he remembers some things from his past. He hadn't thought about them in a long time it seems. Weirdly enough Charles worked in a hospital to help people. Magnus also worked there as a doctor. One day they are forced to reveal their powers to each other. This incident reinforces their friendship. I don't understand why Charles did not know that Magnus is a mutant. He has mental abilities and should be able to tell if someone has extraordinary capabilities as well. I mean, his one big goal in life is to bring mutants together. This is the reason why he built Cerebro. Or did all of this happen after the incident? As I said, the timeline of this show is very confusing and memories like those add to it.

The finale of this episode takes place on a military base, which is a subtle nod to the first X-Men comic. Magneto wants to use their missiles against them. With his powers, he can destroy tanks and deflect bullets, which, at the very least, establishes him as one of the most powerful mutants. Storm, Cyclops, and Wolverine barely manage to fight him off, and, in the end, he is able to launch the rockets.

At this point, I am confused again. Rockets. In the air. Why don't you destroy them before they can hit the ground? Cyclops could disable them with his laser beams; Storm could redirect them with her powers; there are a few options. Instead, Storm decides to make it more suspenseful by short-circuiting them. To do this with three rockets at once is a close call and very risky to all the people involved.

The last image we get to see is Magneto, watching them. He asks himself why Charles has decided to turn against his own kind.

At this point, I am not so sure of the reasons why this show was or is so famous. Maybe I am too deeply invested in the comics right now to appreciate the TV show. What do you think? Does it get better? One can only hope.

# Avengers Disassembled

*"It's never too late to start all over again  
To love the people you caused the pain  
And help them learn your name  
Oh, no, not too late  
It's never too late to start all over again"  
("It's never too late", Steppenwolf)*

## Introduction

As you might know, I am writing these articles way ahead of releasing them. They are part of my media science degree. In November 2017 Brian Michael Bendis announced that he would leave Marvel (after 17 years) and work exclusively for DC Comics. I don't think I have to tell you that this is huge. Ultimate Spider-Man was one of his first projects for Marvel and is one of my favorite incarnations of Spider-Man.

Bendis also created Miles Morales, Peter Parker's successor and in 2004 he started writing Avengers. He did for the Avengers, what Claremont did for the X-Men. Some even compare Bendis' influence with Kirby or Lee. This is the reason I wanted to take a closer look at the stories he wrote and how he reinvented the team. To do that I follow the podcast Bendis Assembled - if you want to take a journey through everything Bendis did with the characters involving the Avengers, this is where you should start. You can also check out the Legendary Runs Podcast (e.g., episode 45, where they talk about Alias)

So I began reading Avengers Disassembled. This storyline starts with issue #500, ends with #503, and fades off in Avengers Finale #1 before Bendis starts from square one with New Avengers #1. I learned, that one particular X-Men, who was introduced way back in the 60's played a vital part in the upcoming adventures of the Avengers. So I decided to integrate this stories into my project, and here we are, talking about the Avengers in a column dedicated to the X-Men (we might do it again for AvX).

## Storytelling and Artwork

How do you take apart one of the best superhero teams in the Marvel Universe? As we see at the end of issue #501, there are a lot of characters who were at one point in Marvel's history part of the Avengers.

The story focuses on Hawkeye, Scott Lang aka Ant-Man, Janet aka Wasp, She-Hulk, Jarvis, and Captain Britain. They are at the Avenger's mansion. Hawkeye and Ant-Man discuss who there "can't have"'s are: "the one girl you know you can't have." Out of a sudden, a shrill alarm goes off and warns them of an intruder. Was it disrespectful to talk about colleagues or villains like that? Either way, the signal disrupts the discussion as to say enough of that. The one punishing them is Jack of Hearts.

Don't you know who that is? Welcome to the club! Due to vigorous research (reading the first couple of paragraphs on Wikipedia) I can say, that he is not just a mighty being, but also a miserable one. He has to wear a customized suit, so he does not explode and spends a lot of time every day in a contamination cell, also to preventing him from a spontaneous explosion. He should be dead - and the way he looks he still is - and walks calmly onto the lawn of the mansion. Scott walks up to Zombie-Jack and tries to talk to him. But he explodes in a colossal fire-blast, pulverizing Scott.

Parts of the mansion are destroyed as well, so the others are buried under the rumble. Captain America and Falcon arrive at the scene, as a Quinjet, flown by the Vision crash-lands on the remaining parts of the mansion. Vision walks a couple of steps, dissolves, melts to be exact, and pours out five metal balls which transform into Ultron robots. They can miraculously contain this threat just at the moment as She-Hulk goes rogue - unable to process all that is happening. The anger takes over, and she rips Vision's dead body apart. Not horizontally (at the waist) as you might expect, but vertically - exposing the "organs" of Vision. And that is just the beginning.



A few hours later, as Wasp is taken care of in the hospital (still shrunk and in critical condition) Cap and Hawkeye go back to the mansion, to find every Avenger ever ready to investigate the situation. However, the day is not over yet. A fleet of Kree ships attacks the mourning group. The interesting thing is that SHIELD's Helicarrier cannot detect the fleet - the first clue something is not right here.

During the huge battle, Hawkeye is severely injured and as I understand it, hit with an explosive arrow or something similar. Before the thing can explode, he takes a Kree and with the aid of his Jetpack flies into the mothership. His sacrifice does not go unnoticed, as the Kree are connected beings and if you take out one of their motherships they all are defeated (please let me know if I am wrong since I am not a Kree-Expert).

After the battle, Doctor Strange appears and tells them that all of this is some kind of chaos-magic interference. Not a trick - it all happened - but magic is involved.

Before we get to the big bad guy, let's talk about what exactly happened.

The Avengers are no more. In the Avengers Finale #1 special one-shot, the core Avengers, at least those still alive, assemble one last time at the ruined mansion. Everyone gets to tell his or her favorite part of their rich history. Each contained within one two-page-spread and briefly summarized. Even if you have not read most of those stories (as I have), it is a very emotional situation. Saying goodbye and knowing, it's over. At least in this constellation. Scott is dead. Hawkeye is dead. Jack of Hearts is dead. Wasp is injured and in the hospital.

Also, this magic trick made Tony Stark (who is the Secretary of Defense at that time) seem drunk, though he had not one drink in weeks or even months and is now discredited. He loses a lot of his money (he is no longer able to finance the Avengers), and some of his friends don't trust him anymore.

Bendis managed to not only destroy the Avengers and their home physically, but he also does it on an emotional level. Trust that the person next to you has your back is one of the most fundamental things of a team. Especially a team like the Avengers. With this trust gone, what else can you do than hit the pause button?

## **Remnants of the Past**

As I said before, I know Bendis mostly from his Ultimate Spider-Man run. One of the best things about him as a writer are his dialogues. They feel natural, authentic and it seems supernatural how he implements complex, heavy topics into conversations. Even the way characters talk, tells you a lot about them. I think you can pick any speech bubble and can name the character who said it.

This is important because the character responsible for all of the destruction and chaos is, as I said, from the 60s. And though we have met her in previous stories and talked about her, a lot has happened in the last 30 years to her. I am talking about **\*\*Scarlet Witch aka Wanda Maximoff\*\***.

As the others are talking about her, they reveal her tragic past. She is apparently one of the most powerful magical beings in the Marvel Universe, able to reshape reality itself. The reason SHIELD could not detect the Kree with their sensors is that she created them. She thought them into existence. Out of thin air, she can create everything she can imagine, and it becomes a reality. This might also be the reason why Jack of Hearts, who should be dead, appeared at the beginning of the story.

It is essential to understand this concept: she can manipulate reality. She did this before. Mind, that I did no research on this topic, mainly because I want to be at least surprised a little bit when we get to this story later. However, as I understand it, Wanda wanted to have children and created a pregnancy out of pure will - with her magic abilities. She had two children and even gave birth to them. Still, they were not "real" children. We are not discussing the concept of what is "real" in this context. After the birth, a woman, whose name I don't know, repaired this mistake and so Wanda's children were gone.

Cut to the current situation and Wanda has fled into a world of imagination. Recreated her children in her mind to play house. She has lost control over her powers and, as Doctor Strange points out, imagination is the enemy. Everything can happen. With the Eye of Agamotto Strange can restrain Wanda, and she becomes unconscious.

The last image we see with her is as Magneto comes out of nowhere, spreading his hands left and right, floating in the air - looking like Jesus himself (in purple, with cape and helmet). In surprise and disbelief (Magneto should be dead as well, but faked it) none of the Avengers does anything. They give Magneto his daughter, and together they fly away. This was one of the best-crafted scenes I have read in comics. Everything that happened leads up to this moment. You didn't have to read all of the previous stories, because the characters reactions are enough to draw you in. It is remarkable. The artistic skill, which is able to pull off all those emotional scenes is magnificent as well. Every word, every panel, every facial expression hit. Beat after beat after beat. And then it ends.

## Conclusion

One thing that intrigued me the most in these few issues is the way Bendis took the Avengers apart. They take hit after hit after hit. First, an explosion, then a crash, attacked by Ultron-Robots and the Kree - all major opponents of the Avengers and Wanda uses them all to destroy the team. Bendis didn't just take the Avengers apart, he ruptured their very core. Then he used what was left, to pick up the pieces and reinstate a new team.

Next week we will take a close look at another X-Men-related storyline, written by Brian Michael Bendis: House of M.

# Everything X-Men: House of M

*"And I find it kind of funny  
I find it kind of sad  
The dreams in which I'm dying are the best I've ever had  
I find it hard to tell you,  
I find it hard to take  
When people run in circles it's a very, very  
Mad world, mad world"  
("Mad World", Gary Jules)*

## Introduction

Say what? Two big reviews in a row? It's crazy town! And there is only one person responsible for that...

Let's talk about House of M!

In 2005, when the first issue of this event hit the shelves, events meant something. Or at least I think they did. More than they do nowadays, anyway. It feels like the only thing Marvel did in the last couple of years was releasing event after event after event. And every single one of them was supposed to change the Marvel universe forever. To be honest, I like events - as long as they are self-contained, in the sense that they don't take up every single series for months. And most importantly: They have consequences! Remember Battleworld? Is that a thing now? I lost track, to be honest, and did not read it. But we will talk about comic events in another article. For now, we want to focus on House of M.

What is House of M? As we discussed in our last in-depth review, Wanda has reality altering abilities. They are also called chaos magic abilities. As the Avengers and the X-Men are coming together to decide her fate, she saves herself by recreating the world.

The reality Wanda created is different. We don't know it. I think it is good that there are several limited series, one-shots, and tie-ins alongside the main event. And yes, I know this is contradicting something I said before, but if you create a whole new world, you need to be able to understand it. According to Marvel Unlimited, the whole storyline includes 51 issues. The main storyline consists of eight issues, and this review will be focused on those. I am going to read some of the tie-ins, and mention them if necessary.

## Road to Nowhere

The covers of these main issues are just beautiful. At first glance they seem simple, just the rough shapes of the characters but the closer you look, the more details they reveal. My favorite might be the cover of #4. To see Hawkeye



on the cover, though he died in Avengers Disassemble, shooting arrow after arrow into Wolverine, while Wolverine lies on the ground - intriguing.

The first thing we get to see in the first issue is a dream or alternate reality Wanda wants to live in. Her brother Quicksilver aka Pietro Maximoff, her husband The Vision, and her fellow X-Men by her side. She is giving birth to her kids. It is a happy moment, and one can understand that she wants to live in this dream. Hold on to it as tight as she can. But then Xavier talks to her. Tells her that this is a lie. She has no kids. This is not a happy place. This is Genosha. Erik, Charles, and Wanda have chosen this place as their sanctuary. To hide from the world and try to make Wanda better. But does she want to get better? She is one of the most powerful mutants and magicians in the universe. I wonder if she is aware of this or just going with her fantasy?

As Erik and Charles are talking about Wanda, we see Erik without his Magneto outfit. This might be a first since we started our journey. It highlights the importance of the conversation. At this moment he is not Magneto or a villain. He is a father concerned for his daughter's life. He makes himself responsible for what happened to her. Also: The fight against humankind, the battles against the X-Men, Avengers, and others have taken a toll on him. He looks tired. Weary even.

Jumping to the new Avengers headquarters. After the team broke up, Cap has formed a new one: Spider-Man, Spider-Woman, Captain America, Wolverine, and Luke Cage are the New Avengers and already had their first missions, as Charles Xavier summons them, some X-Men and former members of the Avengers are also there. He summoned them, because he needs help in making a decision: Whether or not to kill Wanda Maximoff.

Who do you think agrees to take her down? Erik, who stayed with Wanda on Genosha is having the same conversation with his son, Pietro. Surprisingly, he kind of agrees. Killing her might be the only solution in stopping her. Emma Frost (who looks exactly like she does in the Astonishing X-Men run is the one who argues for killing Wanda. Wolverine agrees with her and asks Cap, how many more have to die until they put an end to her?

It is a discussion as old as comics themselves. Should the heroes kill villains if they keep coming back or if they are a major threat to the whole population? Should Batman kill Joker? When have enough people died to justify one more deliberate death? The discussion in Stark's apartment is one of the most intense arguments I have read in comics. Not just because of the excellent writing, but also because of the artwork. It is a vast topic. Some of the panels seem to be too small for what is put into them. This style creates a dense atmosphere. One could get claustrophobic, because of it. Cap considers Wanda an Avenger, so it should be for them to decide, and besides Wolverine, everyone is against killing her. The way Cap rebukes Wolverine is one of the best moments of the series. In the panel we see Wolverine and Cap casting a big shadow over him. It looks intimidating. You don't want to f\* with Cap. In the end, they decide to visit her on Genosha. So that they can see her and get a better picture of what is going on.

Jump to Genosha: We experience the following scene from Spider-Man's point of view. Wanda is gone, as well as Erik. The others are suddenly gone now, also. No one is there. He is alone. He sees the light. The world goes white. And he and wakes up in his bed. A baby is crying in another room. Peter gets up and looks after her, while Gwen Stacy, his wife, stays in bed.

### **Brave new world?**

Wanda did it. She created a whole new reality. Steve Rogers is not Captain America, Ms. Marvel is one of the last Superheroes who are not a mutant (and kills people?), Luke Cage is some underground boss, Sam Wilson a detective, Strange not the Sorcerer Supreme, Colossus still in Russia, and so on and so forth. The only one who seems to know what is going on is Wolverine. The last, two-page spread of the second issue shows a Helicarrier, surrounded by planes and Sentinel-like robots. All of them with the M-Logo. For Magneto? Or Mutant?

Usually, mutants are the minority on the planet. Hated. Feared. Hunted. Not anymore. Homo Superior is the dominating race. Homo Sapiens are the minority, and they will be extinct in a few more years. Wiped from the face of the earth.

Laws forbid to extract the mutant gene. Schools teach the history of mutants (Though I don't think Namor is the first one!) It is a haven for mutants. Is it, though? It should be a better version of the world, but you can feel something is wrong. Just hints here and there. For example, as Ororo is trying on a dress, she nearly destroys the shop, to test, if it would withstand her powers. Mutants are free, are the dominating species and thrive, but now they are the oppressors. Hank says in another scene to Pym:

*"When it happened to the dinosaurs- - they didn't see it coming. They didn't have the intellect or capacity to understand it. But you do. You're watching it happen and it stings like a bitch. [...] It's not fair that you have to sit here, with full awareness and watch it slowly happen."*

In a newspaper called "The Pulse," we get to know a bit more of this world and what happened to it. One article tells the story of Eric Magnus (Magneto) who is responsible for exposing the government's secret attacks on the mutants, a few years ago. Since then he has rebuilt the world and set Homo Superior free. You get the feeling that governments do not matter anymore. It is House of Magnus which rules this side of the globe. The royal family of mutants. House of M is like an organization which keeps everyone in line. Remember the Sentinels? They have been reprogrammed, so they terminate Sapien lifeforms if they are not following the rules. Rules like: no gatherings or to always wear their GPS chip cards. Superheroes who are not a mutant are forbidden. Hunted, even. In the Spider-Man tie-in storyline, for example, J. Jonah Jameson exposes Spider-Man as not being a mutant - he was just bitten by a spider.

Some of those storylines also deal with vague memories or ideas, that this is not the world as it should be. It is a pretty scary thing, being aware that everything feels wrong. What if you would "remember" your old life? Not knowingly, but subconsciously. What would you do? If you are more aware of the situation there are two ways to behave in a new world you don't know: try to blend in, figure out what is going on and then try to reverse it. Or you do it like Wolverine and do whatever the f\* you want until you figure out a way to unscrew things up.

As we have established, Wolverine seems to be the only one who is aware of the changes. He jumps off a Helicarrier to get away from SHIELD and a blue mutant, who, I assume, is Mystique. He does not know what is going on, steals a bike, and tries to find Charles Xavier. No one has heard from him. Has Eric removed him from history or is he not a part of Wanda's new world. I mean, mutants are everywhere, so there is no need for a school for gifted youngsters, right? It also seems like Wolverine is the boss of a team within SHIELD and because of his little stunt earlier, they hunt him down. But an underground group is helping him. Luke Cage "invites" him and Hawkeye (!) shows up as well. Logan tells Luke Cage and his friends everything. But not before Hawkeye shoots him in the head - with one of his arrows. But, being Wolverine, he stands up a few seconds later. Those seconds would have been an excellent time to escape because Wolverine has a tracker in his neck and now his former team has arrived. Cloak teleports everyone away (Cloak is one of my favorite characters in this storyline, although this is the first time I read something with him). As Logan tells them everything that happened, they surprisingly believe him. Before Logan, a girl came to them, looking for Daredevil. Instead, she found Cage. Somehow she is aware of this alternate reality and told them what she knows. As she talks with Wolverine, she discovers to be a mutant herself - with mental abilities. Her name is Layla.

I am not sure if we are supposed to know her, but she makes a great addition to the team. Especially, as they go to Emma Frost's apartment. Layla can "unlock" people. Show them the real world. As Emma is unlocked, she quickly gets a hold of herself and takes on the mantle of the leader. It is the beginning of resistance. But they need a team. First, they unlock Scott Summers as well, because he shows up in the apartment (Emma and Scott seem to be married). We also find out, that the Avengers and the X-Men never existed in this world. And it's time someone fixes this error.

## **Escape my mind**

They unlock Peter Parker, Kitty Pride, Stephen Strange, Carol Danvers, Tony Stark, Matt Murdock, and Jennifer Walters. They leave Captain America alone since he is about one hundred years old. As I first read these pages, I had the feeling he is coming back and plays a vital role in the finale - unfortunately, that is not the case. Still, it was an exciting idea. Last but not least, they unlock Logan's "new" team: Kurt Wagner, Rogue, Raven, and Doc Ock (?). In the finale of this issue, we get to see what happened to Charles Xavier, as Magneto stands in front of a tombstone.

Before we move on, I want to talk about Peter Parker. The reality Wanda created should give everyone what they ever wanted. Make dreams come true. Wolverine subconsciously wants to be Nick Fury, Captain America not being Captain America, and so on. Peter wants his uncle back and be married to Gwen Stacy. Understandable. He lives a happy life, made Spider-Man an icon - a role he plays. Not a hero. But as they unlock him, he is aware of all of the tragedy. All the pain. After the first shock, he wants to be alone. Wolverine is the one walking up to him - talking to him. What follows is one of the best scenes of this event. With everything that is going on around them, they have this intimate moment. Just those two characters.

Later, the Unlocked discuss the plan of how to attack House of M and put the world back together. And the question is: Should they put the world back together? As Jessica says:

*“When something of this magnitude happens... you have to step back for a second and say: maybe this was time for this to happen. Who are we to decide how the world’s supposed to be? [...] Maybe this is how mutants become the next dominant species. [...] You don’t know if I’m right or wrong and it scares the crap out of you. And it should.”*

They take hit after hit after hit. Not physically but psychologically. For Peter, it means losing Gwen and Ben again. And he says he might not be able to hold back. He might kill Magneto for this. And the scary thought is: everyone agrees. This world is wrong. No matter what, they have put the world back. Everything depends on them, and they cannot hold back. So the final battle begins.

Since I read Astonishing X-Men Emma Frost is one of my favorite X-Men characters. She is devoted to the task at hand and is very capable of using her powers. She is the reason the team can infiltrate a Helicarrier, steal it and let the men and women commanding it fly to Genosha. There, the House of Magnus has some guests. King T’Challa, Victor Von Doom, Princess Ororo, King Namor, and Genis-Vell of the Kree Empire. It is a very impressive list of guests, and one can just hope they don’t all fight in the name of Magnus.

In the meantime, while the others make a deception by attacking the party, Emma, Layla, and Cloak are searching for Xavier. As they find the tombstone, Emma cannot take it anymore. As she is falling to her knees, the only thing she wants to do is give up. Again: a powerful, intimate moment. But as Cloak checks out the grave, he finds nothing. No coffin, no body, nothing. What happened?

In a third setting, we follow Doctor Strange as he finds Wanda playing with her kids. She is not aware what is happening, and she does not care. But not in an angry way. She just wanted the world to be better. Manipulated by the one who pretended to love her, she created this new world. But it was not her father. It was her brother, Pietro. He wanted to save her from the Avengers and the X-Men. But as Magneto walked away from them, giving up, letting the Avengers and X-Men kill her (or not), Pietro talked Wanda into this. And she gave everyone what they ever wanted. As the fight reaches its climax, Layla unlocks Magneto. And as he realizes what his children did, what Pietro did in Magneto’s name, he loses it completely. First, he restrains everyone with his powers (using every metal around them). Then, he kills his son. It is violent. Brutal. And not fun to watch. As Wanda follows the scene, she asks herself, why should they rule? What puts mutants above Homo Sapiens than mere luck? And she decides:

*“No more mutants.”*

## **Conclusion**

So this is how it ends? Well, nearly. As Wanda resets the earth to its original state, she takes away the mutant gene. Not killing all the mutants, but taking their powers away. However, Emma can shield some of her fellow mutants with her abilities. Still, before there were thousands of mutants, now there are a few hundred left. Decimated.

But, as Hank explains in the closing lines of the last issue: One does not destroy energy. And he is wondering, where all the power, all the energy, went. The last panel shows a red and yellow glowing force approaching earth.

House of M is a great event. Brian Michael Bendis did an excellent job by creating something with magnitude, with consequences, but also something personal and intimate. We will take a break from this time of the X-Men, but we will come back to see what the future holds for our heroes.

## X-Men TAS Episode 4

- X-Men: The Animated Series
- Season 1 Episode 4: Deadly Reunions
- Writer: Don Glutt
- Story Editor: Eric Lewald
- Story Consultant: Bob Harras
- Supervising Producer: Will Meugniot
- Line Producer: Larry Houston
- Original Air Date: 23 January 1993

*Synopsis (from IMDB): Professor Xavier and Magneto confront each other for the first time in years, meanwhile, Wolverine and Sabretooth come face to face. Professor Xavier tries to examine Sabretooth's mind to figure out his rage problem. After his last terrorist action failed, Magneto plots a new one to bring Professor Xavier out into the open. Sabretooth and Wolverine confront each other in the mansion's war room.*

Do you know what I like about the X-Men comics? It is well established, which kind of powers everyone on the team has. Though sometimes it seems like they could do more. For example, Kurt could dominate almost every single fight with his teleportation powers. Still, you get an idea of their capabilities and how they can use them. This, unfortunately, seems not to be the case for the TV show. Granted, Cyclops, Jubilee, Rogue, Storm, Wolverine, and Sabretooth are pretty well established. You know what they can do. However, I am not that sure about Magneto and the Professor. In addition to that, it sometimes seems that the story controls the characters and not the other way around. This takes away the natural development and occurrences in some situations. Take the first scene for example. The Professor tries to infiltrate Sabretooth's mind, figuring out the reasons for his anger. This psychic link is shown in a weird, but fun way. You get an idea of what is going on in Sabretooth's mind, through vague ideas and images.

The only thing you can be sure about is the involvement of Wolverine. Then comes a moment, where Sabretooth is able to ban the Professor out of his mind. The Professor is beaten, mentally, by Sabretooth. Think about that. Isn't Xavier supposed to be the most powerful psychic? It just seems odd. Later in the episode, in the faceoff with Magneto, Xavier appears to be too powerful. But we will get to that in a moment.

First, we see Magneto scheming his next attack. He wants to strike at someplace with a lot of Homo Sapiens. A place, the Professor might not expect. For some devious reason, he chooses Metro Chemicals. I guess the major cities of the world, where buildings are partially made out of steel and metal was not an option. Maybe it was vacation time. Anyway, he attacks the plant and Cerebro immediately informs the X-Men of the attack. Cerebro is also a digital assistant now. Similar, when you tell Siri that you want to be notified as soon as someone changes his or her location. This time the Professor accompanies his former students (they look too old to be his students), which is a logical move at this point, given the fact that the last time, they barely could fight Magneto off. Though the fight is fascinating to watch, and we get a glimpse of Storm's past, it also raises a lot of questions. One of them is: Why can Magneto deflect Cyclops laser beams? It just seems far-fetched.

What I like about this scene, though, is the fact that Rogue has to save Cyclops for a change. He was beaten quite fast, and she has to perform CPR. This gives her the powers of Cyclops and therefore starts shooting laser beams out of her eyes. For some reason, she does not come up with the idea to close her eyes. Cyclops has to tell her that. You see - Cyclops was saved by a woman before. So naturally, he now has to save the said woman in return to not lose his masculinity. Because, you know, we can't have that. He is Cyclops. Bug enough sarcasm...

The "duel" between Magneto and Xavier does not get any better than that. Somehow Xavier is able to penetrate Magneto's mind. Why is that a problem? Because Magneto wears his helmet. Why wear this ridiculous looking thing in the first place, if it does not help you at all? Granted, with the rest of the costume this iconic look remains cool, but you know what I mean. So, Magneto again is defeated, because the plot demanded it, and everyone goes home and drinks coffee. No really, they get to their headquarters and drink coffee.

Why check up on Jubilee? She is just guarding Sabretooth. They are fine. And Wolverine? Why look for him - silly Wolverine. Perhaps he is just hunting some deer in Canada. He is fine. Of course, nothing is fine. Sabretooth tricked Jubilee into helping him, Wolverine waited for that to happen, and now they fight. The others hear the chaos, enter the war room, where the fight is happening, and for some reason blame Wolverine for all of it.

Teammates. Trust. The benefit of the doubt. They are all overrated concepts. In the end, Sabretooth escapes, Wolverine is badly hurt (I guess they forgot about his healing factor), Magneto is standing at the edge of a cliff scheming, again, and the Professor proofed himself a fool.

To be honest, I am not sure what to think of this series. I mean it's fun to rant about it once a month, but I wanted to really like this show. The comics are great, most of the movies are great, and I hoped to see a TV show, which takes the idea of the X-Men further. But so far it has been a trashy show with characters whose abilities and appearance remind me of characters in a comic book, but there the resemblance ends.

Anyway, I am looking forward to next months episode.

## Comic Book Events

*“Everybody knows that the boat is leaking  
Everybody knows that the captain lied  
Everybody got this broken feeling  
Like their father or their dog just died  
Everybody talking to their pockets  
Everybody wants a box of chocolates  
And a long-stem rose  
Everybody knows”  
 (“Everybody Knows,” Leonard Cohen)*

Why do we have events in the world of comics? Well, profit, mainly. But there has to be something else, right? Today we take a look at some of them and try to find out what makes them unique and lasting.

### The Search for Meaning

I may sound like a grumpy old man, but nowadays events arise from every corner. At least regarding the big two of the industry (Marvel and DC). I feel like Marvel does a big, universe shattering event every other month and if possible, multiple events at the same time. DC handles them it a bit better (?), but that is a very subjective feeling. This is one of the reasons why I like reading stories from Image, Boom, and other publishers so much. They just tell good stories. They don't renumber their runs every three years. And that what it's all about: good stories. To be honest, I read events, but mostly not during the time they are happening. Collected editions are a great way to read them in an afternoon and still get the same experience.

I combined my experience with the research I did on some events because I wanted to figure out which events were more successful. But before we get to that, let's talk about their purpose, besides making a shit load of money for their publisher.

As we discussed in my “The Ages of Comic Books” article, superheroes as we know and love them have existed since 1938 and the birth of Superman. To have superheroes fight for justice is fine, but the real fun begins when you put some of them together: fighting a threat they could not defeat alone; standing together at the edge, staring in the abyss, but fighting on nevertheless; making sacrifices for the greater good, for a better tomorrow, so the human race can survive, creating a better world. At least that is the dream. But there are threats and antagonists you cannot just defeat: antagonists controlling the abyss, embracing it. And in order to win the day, you, as the hero, have to embrace it as well. Walking a knife-edge. Those are personal threats to overcome like we saw in 2017 with the DC event “Metal.” Other events change entire universes or even multiverses. The antagonist does not challenge one mere hero. She threatens every living being. He hungers for planets and star-systems, destroying reality as we know it and reshaping it



in her own will. Those events don't just need a team of superheroes but every single superhero and maybe even the villains out there.

In my understanding, the first event was DC Comic's "Crisis on Infinite Earths." Or, at least it was the first event to deserve the name and which is still considered one of the best-executed events there is. As of writing this article, I haven't read the event (yet), but I certainly will. Take Goldstein's review, for example. He does not spoil anything that is happening in the event, and after reading the review, you want to experience it yourself.

## The Gold Standard

*"Crisis on Infinite Earths wasn't the first Crisis in the DCU, but it became the single defining event in the long history of the publishing giant. Crisis took 50 years of continuity, nearly a half-dozen different universes and hundreds of characters, squeezed them all together and came out with one shiny new playground that has existed for the past two decades"*  
(Goldstein, 2006).

Every single event needs a reason to exist. Without this reason, you just have a bloated story: something familiar made into an eight or even twelve-issue limited series with a bunch of tie-ins nobody wants and an ending nobody needs. At the end of the event, there should be something different. It does not have to be something big. It can be as small as a change of heart in a character. The adventure he or she had throughout the event changed his or her perspective. Or, it can be as big as a new status quo of the entire multiverse.

DC Comic's "Crisis on Infinite Earths" was the latter. Marv Wolfman took on an impossible task: taking 50+ years of DC's history, with all the baggage and stuff, tearing it apart just so he can put it back together. He created a world new readers could understand and old readers could appreciate. The keyword for something like this is continuity. Marvel and DC (as well as Valiant) have a shared universe, which means every adventure takes place in the same world or at least in the same multiverse. Writers, editors, and artists have to keep this in mind when characters die or places are destroyed. Or, as Friedenthal (2011) puts it in his very detailed essay:

*"Continuity in a comic book superhero universe is the meta-narrative created out of the sum total of meetings, relationships, battles, births, deaths, and other twists of plot and characterization that have taken place within that universe."*

## What Does a Good Event Need?

The following list, by all means, does not intend to be a complete list of requirements every single event needs to have to be successful. Every event is different from the other. However, meeting at least some of these requirements guarantee a more effective event, otherwise the event has no reason to exist or just feels wrong and out of place.

*Do not drag other titles into this mess.*

This is my personal #1 rule regarding events. No matter how bad or good your event might be, do not drag other titles into it (at least not for an extended period of time). Marvel definitely broke this rule with their Secret Wars event and their Civil War II event a couple of moons ago.

I use Marvel Unlimited to read the X-Men titles for this series, and I like to go through the new additions each week. I feel like for months almost all the new titles had something to do with the events mentioned above. It was frustrating. Why should I read any of those titles when they seemingly have something to do with an event I don't care about? A good example is the Convergence event by DC from a couple of years ago. For two months this event took over every single DC book. After that they were done with it (another reason for the event was that DC moved from one coast to the other, but that's another story).

*Keep it simple.*

By this, I mean the general approach towards the story itself. You can tell a complex, world-shattering, or intimate story all you want. However, if someone reads the event years later or does not has a 25-year relationship with the characters, they should be able to understand the premise and consequences, nevertheless. House of M is a good example of that. I didn't really read any Avengers comics before and just recently started with the X-Men, but the emotional weight of the

story was there regardless. Annihilation by Marvel is also a good example. It is a great limited series involving exciting characters, and, though it is cosmic, the struggles and punches of the story hit every time.

*Don't miss the shipping dates.*

Marvel missed some of the shipping dates of previous events by months. This is a no-brainer no-no. Granted, artists can get sick or something else can come up, but if you don't have a bit of a buffer, that's on you. A great example is the 52 event by DC. It was a year-long event with new issues every week. That's 52 issues! And they didn't miss a single week. That is awesome. On the other hand, DC changed the release schedule for "Doomsday Clock," and I feel like this event will be done when I retire.

*Don't do the "WILL THIS EVENT CHANGE THE COMIC BOOK UNIVERSE FOREVER?" tease.*

Sometimes it feels like Marvel and DC do not know the meaning of the word "forever." It does not mean for the next two months and then we are back at the status quo. What intrigued me the most about the "Crisis on Infinite Earths" event was the fact that almost every review wrote something like: the effects of the event were long-lasting or can still be felt today. This is the utilization of "forever."

Take Marvel's Battleworld as another example. I read some reviews and listen to podcasts regularly, but I cannot tell you what happened to Battleworld. With a new earth reimagined by Doom, I thought this was supposed to be the new status quo, or at least exist for a couple of months or trigger a new event, maybe. What happened? I am asking! Please tell me in the comments below...

*Be true to the characters, and let them make sacrifices.*

Stay true to the characters themselves and also their motivations. Why are they doing what they are doing? If a character like Captain America faces an antagonist he cannot defeat (which he would do without a second thought, just so his friends can come up with something else in the meantime or to save one civilian), then let him die heroically.

Apparently "Green Lantern: Sinestro Corps War" and "Infinity Gauntlet" are great examples for that.

The thing is, if you want to tell a story of a hero gone rogue, then commit to it. Don't quit on the story when it is already being published, as Marvel did with "Shadowland." The main character of the story was supposed to be bad all of a sudden. They had reasons behind his actions so it would be believable. But at the last minute they decided to come up with another solution and pretend he was possessed. Why? Just so the character would be more easily redeemable?

## **Changing the Past**

*"Retconning, in fact, is the key way in which comic creators are able to combat the "oneiric" problems of serial storytelling pointed out by Eco, as it allows creators to rewrite the past of characters so that they pulled back from the death that each action moves them inevitably toward. Retconning is revision of the comic book universe to make that universe fresh and exciting for contemporary readers, but it also involves the influence of the past, as it directly inscribes itself upon that past" (Friedenthal, 2011).*

Telling stories of a particular magnitude time and time again can be challenging. So, if you don't have any original ideas at the moment, don't force an event into existence, just so you make a bit more money. You have to earn the event on many different levels.

On the one hand, you have to commit to the story and everything in it. On the other hand, you have to earn the trust of the readers. You might have a lot of loyal readers who have been buying your stories for decades now, but there are also a lot of new readers out there as well. And maybe the event you are currently telling is their first one. They deserve the very best you can offer. Once you have lost this trust, it is tough to get it back.

Often times I think: just tell great stories. Events are not everything. Tell great stories of the characters we love; bring in new ones, and create unexpected team-ups. There can be something going on in the background if you'd like (e.g., DC's attempt to bring in the Watchmen into their universe) but focus on the monthly stories first. Those are the ones creating a relationship between creator and reader. The events are just the topping.

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## Chris Claremont I

*"Come mothers and fathers  
Throughout the land  
And don't criticize  
What you can't understand  
Your sons and your daughters  
Are beyond your command  
Your old road is  
Rapidly agin."  
("The Times They Are A-Changin,'" Bob Dylan)*

### Introduction

In this article, we are going to take a closer look at the first couple of issues of Chris Claremont's run on the X-Men. We start with the giant-sized X-Men #1 and then continue with X-Men #94 to #110. I think #110 is a good point to end the discussion because it is a so-called inventory issue. It is a fill-in issue by guest artist Tony DeZuniga. After that issue, John Byrne takes over as the artist until #143.

According to Joseph Darowski (2011), the reason for a relaunch of the X-Men was not as pure-hearted as one might hope. They merely wanted to sell more comics internationally, and Roy Thomas (editor-in-chief of Marvel) suggested that they use the X-Men. As you know, the X-Men were in reprints at that time, and they could relaunch it easily. Len Wein and Dave Cockrum became the writer and artist of the new incarnation of the team. But, as Thomas puts it, the idea of an international team got a bit lost in the process. The new members were, among other things, from Kenya and Russia, "hardly markets where Marvel was selling lots of comics in 1975."

You may hear or read different versions of this story - depending on whom you ask, but it is very likely that the people at Marvel were interested in a more ethical reason for relaunching the X-Men, than just making more money.

Regardless, the X-Men were reborn. And beginning with issue #94, Chris Claremont started his seventeen-year reign of the X-Men. During this period he wrote almost every script of the X-Men, launched spin-offs, limited-, and maxi-series, and created characters and wrote stories, whose impact can still be felt today. At first, the comic series was published bi-monthly, beginning its monthly run with issue #112.

### A New Beginning: Giant-Sized X-Men #1

*"Which brings us to our next little problem... what are we going to do with thirteen X-Men?" - Angel*

Though Chris Claremont is not credited as being a part of the team, it is said that he was part of the relaunch. But who are those new X-Men, and how were they assembled?



Conveniently, the original mutants all disappeared during a mission on the mysterious island of Krakoa (a name which should ring some readers' bells). They were investigating some strange signs and just vanished, only Scott survived to bring the horrible news to the Professor. In response, Xavier starts a journey around the world to gather a new team of mutants. They should not only save the original X-Men but also become part of them.

*"This new team members were Nightcrawler (a German teleporter named Kurt Wagner), Storm (Ororo Munroe, a weather controller from Kenya), Colossus (the Russian Peter Rasputin who could turn his flesh to steel), Banshee (the Irishman Sean Cassidy who had a sonic scream), Warpath (John Proudstar, a Native American with super-strength), Sunfire (a fire-wielder from Japan named Shiro Yoshida), and Wolverine (the Canadian with claws and a healing factor known only as Logan). Not all of these characters would remain X-Men for long, but this relaunch firmly established the X-Men as a team that embraced international characters in a way that other Marvel superhero teams, such as the Avengers or the Fantastic Four, rarely have" (Darowski, 2011, p. 123).*

As the new team lands on the island, it turns out to be a mutant in itself, created by accident via an atomic explosion, of course (a remnant of the atomic age of comic books?). They defeat their enemy with the combined strength of Storm and Lorna Dane. And, the Professor helps to distract the mutant island while they prepare their attack. It is the first sign that this new iteration does some things differently. Two women save them all. In past issues, this would not have been possible. At this point, Jean does not play a very active role in the story, something that will be corrected in upcoming storylines.

I want to point out two things that bothered me a bit. First, Ororo is a god to the indigenous people where she lives. They pray to her and count on her aid if need be. To control every part of the weather and make it rain in a matter of seconds can be a powerful weapon and seem very god-like. The narrator says that "her liquid eyes grow dark" when she uses her powers, which is a powerful image in itself. Unfortunately, in the artwork, her eyes are shown as being plain white (they become white in the movies as well).

My second issue is the recruitment of Colossus. The story of his first encounter with the Professor is a bit far-fetched. His sister is in danger of being run over by a tractor in an open field. Tractors can be very loud; how can you be driven over by them? She just sits in the field and does nothing. Then, when Peter has her in his hands, he just stands there and destroys the vehicle. He could have just jumped out of the way. The author could not come up with a better story to introduce us to Peter's powers?

Either way, the new team is assembled and...

*"There was not a single white American among the new members of the team, and many of the minority groups represented had been the subject of widespread prejudice in the United States, much of it institutionalized by the government. Germans were mistrusted after World War II and the well-publicized horrors of the Holocaust. Africans have a long history of suffering from prejudice in America beginning with the slave trade. The general feelings toward Russians during the Cold War were far from friendly, and having an Eastern European accent could lead to accusations of Communism. Anti-Irish sentiment was strongest in the mid-1800s in the United States when discrimination in the workplace included the posting of NINA signs in want ads (No Irish Need Apply). Native Americans have been mistreated within the United States since settlers first reached the country's shores, and the forced movement onto reservations is only one of a long list of grievances. During World War II the federal Government forced Japanese Americans to live in internment camps because of mistrust" (Darowski, 2011, p.125-126).*

Before we leave the Giant-Sized relaunch, here are some irrefutable facts:

- The school of Xavier is placed in Westchester, New York.
- We already get a sense of a bigger universe as the Professor tells his new students about their new costumes: "I obtained them from a man named Reed Richards."
- Hank apparently graduated from the X-Men and now works with the Avengers (and he finally is blue and furry).

## Storytelling and Artwork

In looking at the first seventeen issues of Chris Claremont's run, it already feels more like a continuous story than the previous incarnations. Kirby and Lee's run reminded me of your typical crime TV show, with case-of-the-week-style storytelling. While the Thomas-Adams run already had this continuous story idea, Claremont perfects it. At first, we get smaller storylines, but they are so nicely connected with vacations, goodbyes, and other things, that it feels like one big act.

The story in every issue also feels more natural, because the narrator, the conversations and the things shown in the panels themselves are not repetitive. Everything adds to a grander scheme. We get more information on these separate levels, be it thoughts, context or personal background. It is very little that's said and/or shown twice. This is especially true in later issues.

The narration is used to describe things you cannot explain in a picture or at least not quite as well. The Phoenix power (we will talk about this in detail later) is a complicated matter on many different levels. So you have to take the images and then use the text to add some sort of meta-level to it. I was looking forward to seeing the Phoenix power in action for the first time, and I didn't think it would be possible to have such a complete experience of it.

Without repetitions, lot more happens in one issue than ever before. Just to give you a brief summary of the most important cornerstones:

We begin our journey at a military base, where the X-Men face Count Nefaria and his Ani-Men (they apparently fought them before in issues number 22 and 23). Back at the mansion they encounter a mythical creature released by accident by Scott. After that some X-Men leave, but their departure at the airport is interrupted at the airport by Eric the Red (another recurring villain; they fought him in issues number 51 and 52). The X-Men want to celebrate Christmas, but the only presents they get are some Sentinels. They attack the X-Men at the Christmas Market.

For the 100th issue, we get a fight we did not anticipate: X-Men vs. X-Men in a space station. During the reentry Jean tries to save everyone from dying. In the process, she kills herself, is reborn, and discovers her Phoenix power. After all that, the team deserves a vacation, right? Well, in Ireland (where, of course, leprechauns live) at Banshee's home castle they encounter his brother and Juggernaut. Back at home, Jean, her parents, her new roommate, and the Professor are being attacked by Firelord. They are taken to another planet, fight a part of the Shi'ar empire, meet the Starjammers, fight some guardians, and save the universe.

Back on earth, Wolverine is being hunted by his former employer and last, but not least a new more significant threat is introduced through Warhawk in the inventory issue (#110).

## The New X-Men

*"I'm an X-Man, pure and simple. This is my home, my life. This is where I... belong." - Scott*

In addition to all those great stories, we get to learn a lot about our new heroes: their struggles, fears, where they are from and what they have endured so far. We get new relationships (Banshee and Moira), as well as some tragic deaths (John Proudstar) and X-Men leaving the team (Bobby, Lorna, Alex, Sunfire).

This leaves us with one important questions: what does Chris Claremont tell us about the new X-Men and is it always consistent within the story?

- Nightcrawler: He plays time and time again a vital part in the stories, especially in his interesting relationship with Scott. At one point, as they return from their space trip, he confronts Scott and wants him to open up. Scott misinterprets Nightcrawler's invariably good mood as having a good and comfortable life. But he is blue, furry, and has a tail. Scott seemingly does not perceive those features as strange or unusual. They are part of Nightcrawler, as the visor is part of Scott. In reaction to this misinterpretation Kurt talks back very harshly, but, before they can have a real conversation, Banshee comes into the room. I am curious where this relationship goes in the next issues. Regarding his powers (e.g. teleportation), he says, that he keeps his momentum. However, we don't really see this very often, especially during fights. This is something I miss most. The first time I saw this character was in the second movie with the brilliant fight scene in the White

House. When used correctly, he is one of the deadliest fighters. Maybe he is still learning. Also, he has apparently never teleported two people before. So, we have to be patient with him.

- Ororo: During a fight between Colossus and the Juggernaut, Ororo just lies in a dark corner, paralyzed by her fear (claustrophobia). In a flashback we see how she was raised or at least some highlights of it. Her parents moved to Cairo when she was six months old. There she grew up like an average kid, but, at the age of five, her parents were killed. This happened in 1956, the year of the Suez War. A damaged aircraft is hit and falls from the sky, striking the area where Ororo's family lives. She barely survived and lived on the streets until a man named Achmed El Gibàr took her in. He showed her how to survive. One day she left and walked to the Serengeti Plain, her natural home. She learned to forget her past, but the claustrophobia brought everything back.
- Colossus: The most tragic thing we learn from him is that his brother Mikhail, a Russian cosmonaut, was killed by an accident. His rocket exploded.
- Wolverine: One time he briefly mentions his troubled past, but nothing specific. In this issue (#98) he uses his claw for the first time without the uniform. His comrades thought they were in the costume and not part of him (a reminder that you, as a reader, can get used to something but have to keep an open mind when reading something like this for the first time).

One thing I don't want to talk about (mainly because I am not sure I understand it all correctly) is the thing about the Shi'ar empire. The Professor has Visions of Princess Lilandra, who is being hunted by her own brother, the emperor. She seems to have psychic powers as well and connects with him. The X-Men are drawn into this conflict by issue #105. I highly recommend reading this issue and the storyline. Personally, I find it to be the first real strong point of Claremont's storytelling. I like it because of its complexity. The story shows what comics are able to accomplish, when done right.

### **Friend or Foe**

At first, the X-Men have to deal with villains they encountered before. New ones are introduced later in the series.

Dr. Steve Lang may be one of the most terrifying antagonists of this first couple of issues: "My goal has always been not the investigation of mutantkind--but its total, complete extermination!"

His inspiration comes from Bolivar Trask, the man behind the Sentinel program. He plans genocide, plain and simple. There is no nice way to say this: genocide, every mutant. Every woman, every child, and every man with mutant abilities should be destroyed by his Sentinels. We already talked about this topic, and we will talk about it again in upcoming articles, but I wanted to mention it here as well, just to give you an idea, of how rooted this kind of mindset is in this universe. There will always be people who want to destroy not only the X-Men but the entire mutant race. Another vital villain in these issues is Eric the Red. He orchestrates a lot of the plots against the X-Men and plays a crucial part in Lilandra's mission. The first time we meet him (issue #97), the X-Men (Jean, Scott, Kurt, Ororo, and Colossus) say their goodbyes to the Professor at the airport. They are attacked by Havoc and Polaris, who have been manipulated by Eric the Red. The Professor can escape with the plane, but the others stay and fight their foe. In an editor's note, we get the information that the team had encountered Eric the Red before (in issues #51 and #52). The weird part, at least for me, was to find out that Scott formerly portrayed the character (encouraging us to read the issues we skipped as well).

Eric is able to escape with his new team members Havoc and Polaris (can he control their minds?), and he appears alone later in issues #104 and #105. Eric infiltrates the mansion, works with Magneto, and manipulates Firelord to help him as well. Firelord does not know the relationship the X-Men have with Eric, so it is easy for him to play the victim and manipulate the former herald of Galactus.

Of course, the X-Men attack Eric immediately, reinforcing his point that the X-Men want to conquer the world. This shows the premonition of Eric the Red to be correct. He knows the weaknesses of his opponents and manipulates others to help him. His real name is Shakari, and he works for Lilandra's brother, the emperor. Shakari builds a Star-

Gate (the inspiration for another magnificent sci-fi show?) to take her back to her brother, where she is to be killed. The X-Men fight their opponents bravely but Shakari and Lilandra escape. Jean fights off Firelord and is then able to activate the Star-Gate again, so the team can follow them.

## Conclusion

*"There was no need for worry, Scott. I have total control over my abilities--nothing was harmed save the Sentinel" - Ororo.*

"The Times They Are A-Changin'" indeed. Jean has done more in these few issues than in the entire 60+ issues before. Ororo is a god among her people, and Moira is a great new character with depth, and a lot of secrets are to be uncovered. Even female side-characters get awesome, badass moments. Take Jean's new roommate for example. When Firelord attacks them in their apartment, Misty draws a gun and threatens him.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. Jean fights against Firelord as the Phoenix and discovers that her new powers are so extraordinary that she will fall into a rage if she is not careful enough. The Phoenix within her wants to kill Firelord and not listen to Xavier when he talks to her about her fellow X-Men. But she can control it, for now at least.

Every story, every character, and every panel of Chris Claremont's first run screams "new era." However, it is not perfect, nothing is, as there are some really ridiculous parts as well. Take the leprechauns in Ireland, for example, or the fact that we get to know that Magneto, in a side-story in Defenders #16, was turned into a baby and saved by Eric the Red. It's the 70's/80's era of comic books, and some parts had to be weird, crazy and a bit over the top. But, that doesn't make it any less exciting.

Next month we take a closer look at issues #111 to #124, as well as the first, king-size annual. And next week we talk about the mutant metaphor.

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- Darowski, J. (2011). Reading The Uncanny X-Men: Gender, Race and the mutant metaphor in a popular narrativen (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://etd.lib.msu.edu/islandora/object/etd%3A1030>

# The Mutant Metaphor

*"Furious, fat, fabulous, fantastic  
Flurries of funk felt, feeding the fanatics  
Gift got great, global goods gone glorious  
Gettin' godly in this game with the goriest  
Hit em high, hella height, historical  
Hey holocaust hints, hear 'em holler at your homeboy  
Imitators idolize, I intimidate  
In an instant, I'll rise in an irate state."  
("Alphabet Aerobics," Blackalicious)*

## Introduction

Maybe it is a bit too early to talk about the mutant metaphor at this stage of our journey through the X-Men comics. However, the idea behind this expression is such a fundamental part of the stories to come, and we have to cover the basics at least before we go any further. Why can white, heterosexual males (plus one woman) stand-in for everyone? The answer to that question may seem simple at first, but the answer has multiple layers and aspects to it, which we will talk about in this article.

## Someone to Identify With

The simple answer would be, that the term mutant does not equal one specific social prejudice, but can be replaced by all or none of them. So it is not that significant if the characters themselves are black, white, man, woman, gay, or disabled. What matters is that the mutant part of them. Or at least that's an excuse one could use. Of course, mutant is

interchangeable with gay, as we have seen in past reviews. Still, their appearance matters as well. The first thing we see on the cover is not that they have powers or that they are mutants. The first thing we notice is that the white man is wielding those powers and because we live in a world where one has to declare openly, that he or she is LGBTQ or whatever in between--otherwise we consider them to be heterosexual. It is the norm.

As Dussere writes in his 2017 article *The queer world of the X-Men*, "The point is not that the X-Men are themselves gay. [...] allows the adolescent reader to see his or her own alienation in the experiences of these characters"

One thing that makes the X-Men such relatable characters, at least in my opinion, is their sheer number. There are dozens of characters who have, had, or will have their own series. Every major X-Men title features a team, be it the regular one, the X-Force, or another subgroup. You can pick the one you identify most with and follow them around with different titles. The chances are pretty good that the character you have chosen has at some point in their existence become part of a bigger storyline, or at least featured in numerous titles.

With other superheroes, it is rather binary: either you like them or not. Either you read Batman or Captain America or Superman or Vision or whoever, or not. It is simple. However, the X-Men are and always will be a team. Granted, the latest incarnation of Detective Comics and Superman also feature a lot of different characters, but that is beside the point right now.

The X-Men are much more than just a team. They are a community which sticks together: "All for one, and one for all." They have more or less matching clothes, take on other names and live among their people. As we discussed earlier, they behave like drag people.

Another thing that makes the X-Men relatable to the LGBTQ community is their mutancy itself. It is a hidden difference. Of course, there are some exceptions like Mystique, Nightcrawler, or, later on, Hank (when he is blue and furry). However, most of them pass as ordinary human beings. This feature is especially true for the first iteration of the X-Men. Later on, their mutations, as the three examples above show, became more and more visible.

### **Something to Fight For**

Question: What do women, the LGBTQ community, as well as black people and other minorities have in common?

Answer: Their continuous fight for equal rights. At some point in history, they formed a civil rights movement, with a considerable number of subgroups. They fight for their rights and tell you exactly what they want.

As Darius writes in his article *X-Men is Not an allegory of racial tolerance*, the X-Men do not fight for anything. Again, at this point, it might be too soon to talk about it, but until I have gathered some more information on my own (by that I mean read a couple more issues), I take Darius' opinion seriously. He has an intriguing point when he says: "They do not demand representation or an end to discrimination. They do not demand anything." Up until now, the only time I saw them fight for their rights in politics or similar channels happened during the movies (most prominently in the first one). So far the comics say the public fears them, but the X-Men fight for themselves nevertheless. What do they do to end those allegations?

Granted they fight for the humans and respect authority, but most of the mutants seem to be evil. Moreover, as we saw especially in the first iteration of the team, the mutant community is mostly split "between 'good' and 'bad' factions" (Darius, 2002). The fact is, that "mutants almost never support mutant civil rights; there is no such noticeable peaceful movement in the comic books even today" (Darius, 2002). What is the reason for that? Darius suggests:

*"But it's hard to implement this in a line of 20 books a month, generating massive profit for the company. Also, the fans of X-Men would probably rather not see Cyclops in Birmingham jail for twenty issues, or X-Men take on more the tone of Stuck Rubber Baby than the easier dichotomy between "good" and "bad," told with a copious dose of spandex fetishism."*

Another part of this discussion would be the cure for the mutant gene (as it is called in later issues) and the Holocaust references especially during the storyline "Days of Future Past." But those are such huge topics; I want to discuss them in-depth in a separate article.

For now, we keep in mind that mutant can mean anything that is not right in our society and symbolize any reason for feeling alienated from it. As Darowski puts it: "racism, sexism, or homophobia are forms or prejudice which alienate

groups of people, there are many people who still feel alienated from society without being a target of those kinds of prejudice” (2011, p.48).

### **Somebody to Reinvent**

One of the best articles I read regarding Chris Claremont's run on the X-Men was written by Andrew Wheeler. In his text *How Chris Claremont reinvented the female Superhero*, he talks about Jubilee, Kitty Pryde, Psylocke, Rachel Grey, Rogue, and Storm: “What these characters have in common is no mystery; they were all written by Chris Claremont, the man whose name is synonymous with strong female characters.”

As of writing this article, I have just begun to read the Chris Claremont run, but there is something different about the way he handles his female characters already. Ororo, on the one hand, is not called any ridiculous names and MacTaggart, who is hired by Xavier as a “housekeeper,” is not objectified. OK, Banshee is flirting with her, but he is the only one which makes it look like a genuine effort.

Of course, I have to mention Jean as well. In the last couple of issues, up to #103 (where I am currently at), she got to do much more than in the Kirby/Lee or Thomas/Adams runs combined. It is incredible to see the character thrive under the direction of Chris Claremont already. I am curious to see where we go from here and how the characters mentioned above will be introduced to the title.

*“The X-Men launched during the golden age of the superteam. Between 1958 and 1964, DC Comics and Marvel launched the Legion of Super-Heroes, the Justice League, the Fantastic Four, the Avengers, the Doom Patrol, the X-Men and the Teen Titans. One thing these teams had in common was that they each debuted with only one woman on the roster. Even that was a step-up from teams like the original Justice Society of America and the Seven Soldiers of Victory, which didn't have any” (Wheeler, 2013).*

The important thing is that Claremont puts women at the center of various stories and “each woman had a different story to tell, and none of them could have stood in place of any of the others” (Wheeler, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

My goal for this article was to talk about the mutant metaphor and how deep the meaning of this expression can be. We are not only talking about the LGBTQ community, which may identify most with the X-Men (that's just a feeling) but also how the metaphor can mean different things to different people. Lastly, I wanted to give you a little glimpse of what may come next by mentioning upcoming characters and what other people think retrospectively of Chris Claremont's run. I am sure we will be coming back to this topic in the future and talk about more specific aspects as I mentioned above.

### **Sources**

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# Inhumans vs X-Men

- Inhumans vs. X-Men #1-7
- Writers: Charles Soule, Jeff Lemire
- Artists: Leinil Francis Yu (#1-2; 6), Javier Garron (#3-5)
- Inker: Gerry Alanguilan
- Colorists: David Curiel (#1-2; 4-6), Andres Mossa and Jay David Ramos (#3)
- Letterer: VC's Clayton Cowles
- Publication Dates: November 2016 – March 2017
- Publisher: Marvel

## Prologue: A new beginning?

What defines a comics completist? For me, it comes down to one thing: the urge to know everything there is about a particular series or character. How did things end up like this? What stories lie behind those references that are mentioned by the characters? And it means that I cannot start reading a book in the middle of the series. I have to start at the beginning. For a while now, I wanted to take a closer look at X-Men Gold, Blue, Red, and Black -- including some of the mini-series and spin-offs that also came out at that time.

So, while everyone else has moved on and enjoys the adventures of the all-new all-retained Uncanny X-Men (Scott is back from wherever he was), I am going back to previous storylines.

I like that quite a bit because it means that I can read through an entire series (in this case various series) in a short amount of time -- dive wholeheartedly into the world unfolding before me. Hopefully, it also allows me to see a bigger picture developing. And with a little distance, everything looks different.

Also, on a more personal note, I hope I can revive my Everything X-Men column and talk about more X-Men books in the future. I am not going to make any promises, but I think the key is not to take everything as seriously as I used to. I am going to focus on having fun, reading good comicbooks and writing about them.

## Inhumans vs. X-Men

After Death of X, which I did not read, because I thought everything I needed to know was in this mini-series/event, the X-Men went to war against the Inhumans. Their goal was destroying the last Terrigen Cloud on Earth, before it spreads all over the world and kills every single person with the X-gene. I learned about Death of X while researching for this article and read the summary of it. Knowing the story of Death of X, everything that happens in Inhumans vs. X-Men makes a lot more sense.

So, Cyclops got killed by the Terrigen Mist, Emma Frost covered it up and made it look like he died heroically -- in a battle with Black Bolt. As we now know Emma did the X-Men no favor by letting Scott die a martyr. If the others knew he got killed by the Terrigen Mist and not in a battle, it might have been just as tragic. Furthermore, mutants and Inhumans alike would have mourned him and maybe worked together to find a solution, not war.

With that in mind, it cannot be as simple as "why didn't they talk to each other." This statement was my first thought after finishing the main issues of the event. It cannot be that simple for two reasons:

First, Scott allegedly died by an Inhuman. Why the hell would the mutants think that they might help them avoid extinction? All the grief, anger, and hopelessness comes together, and there doesn't seem to be a solution.

Second, for us readers, it always looks so clear what to do, because we know all the pieces and viewpoints. We know what every single character thinks and does. That fact usually adds up to a suspenseful tale, but sometimes it means we lose touch with the viewpoints of the individual characters at play - especially when there are so many of them.

The artists and writers involved manage to set up a very dystopian atmosphere throughout the series. We know it indeed marks not the end of an era (that of the X-Men), but at times it feels like it. Especially when seeing the drastic actions they are willing to take against the Inhumans -- neutralizing Black Bolt in an inhumane box attached to tubes

and sci-fi-looking modules. They also put Lockjaw in a box attached to infusions which put him to sleep. And finally, they put every other Inhuman on a sealed-off platform in Limbo.

Everything that is going on shows us the dark side of the characters we know and love and how Magneto and Emma can easily manipulate them if the circumstances are just right. But we soon learn that everyone has his or her own agenda. Emma has only revenge in mind. For Scott's death, which she staged in the first place. The conflict itself becomes a farce. Or the end of a tragic love story.

Whichever you choose, there is also a bright side to everything: the NuHumans. They are Inhumans who did not join the Royal Family and live life on their own. It is terrific to see Moon Girl doing the right thing (listening instead of fighting), and the other NuHumans supporting her. There is no need for a fight. Just a desperate need for a solution. Because Inhumans might not get their powers without the Terrigen Mist, but mutants are about to be whipped off earth forever.

And who knows, the next scientific breakthrough might only be a mini-series away, and Inhumans, once again, can activate their hidden talents.

Now, there is one downside which bugs me about this event: why is this not a 12-issue maxi-series? Having everything that happens in *Death of X*, *Inhumans vs. X-Men*, and *Uncanny X-Men* (2016) #19 in one series? I learned of the prequel after reading the main event. In addition to that, I did not realize I was supposed to have read *Uncanny X-Men* #19 as well -- the reveal at the end of the first issue of *X-Men Blue* would have been quite more astounding. Though the main event was a good read, now I feel frustrated, because I could have had a more wholesome experience.

## Everything X-Men Prime #1

- X-Men Prime #1
- Writers: Marc Guggenheim, Greg Pak, Cullen Bunn
- Artists: Ken Lashley, Ibraim Roberson, Leonard Kirk
- Colorists: Morry Hollowell, Frank D'Armata, Michael Garland
- Letterer: VC's Joe Caramagna

After *Inhumans vs. X-Men* ended, a new status quo exists for mutants on this planet. Once again they are feared and more or less responsible for a lot of destruction. The next leader of the X-Men must act as an ambassador of hope, and also reshape the image of mutants once again. But there are not just the X-Men out there. A lot of other mutants, including former X-Men, are searching for their purpose or the next adventure.

*X-Men Prime* #1 has a complex task to accomplish. On the one hand, it serves as a new beginning — an introduction for new and old readers alike. On the other hand, after setting up the new status quo, it shows the things that might come next: new chapters await every mutant on this planet. At its core, the issue is precisely that: a meditation on the road so far as it guides us into a new era of comic books with the big X on them.

The first two pages capture the core concept perfectly. The story starts with a new day, as the sun rises, covering Chicago in a bright yellow and orange light. The vibrant, flashy colors seem to jump off the page and create a feeling of warmth -- like coming home on a Friday afternoon, the stress of the past days falls, and you can enjoy the weekend, relax, and maybe meet up with some friends.

And who would be better suited for the task, then Kitty Pride? The dance-sequence already seems iconic, capturing the essence of the character. While dancing, she thinks about the coming times and how she wants to enjoy a more normal life. But this would not be an X-Men book if she could have a normal day. Instead, Ororo shows up. She flies in through the window, dressed in white, the sun on her back -- continuing the idea of a new beginning.

Then everything is dialed back a bit. The colors look more natural, the surroundings resembling those of a real city (no fighting mutants or hate crimes against them), as we watch Kitty and Ororo talk. Ororo wants to leave the X-Men and for Kitty to take over as their new leader. In the end, they both rise to the occasion and serve as X-Men once more. But first, Kitty has some things to do.

As Kitty walks through the mansion, which is still set up in Limbo, she ruminates about the things that have happened so far. It brings new readers up to speed, and fans get to enjoy the images and great written dialogue. Kitty also meets Jubilee's kid, watches new students as they play basketball, and talks to Illyana Nikolieva Rasputin (aka Magik) about a little favor.

The most memorable scene though is between her and Peter. He greets her with a simple "Hello, Katya." This page contains everything you need to know about those two. Either you come in with their whole history, or meet them for the first time -- everything lies within those two words and the look they share. You can feel the weight that comes with those two characters meeting here and now. But it also serves as a little foreshadowing. I love those little things and how they are used time and time again in the X-Men books.

After that, Kitty continues to stroll around the house and finds a message. The original, time-displaced five X-Men left an engaging note in the Danger Room. They seek their own adventures, their own purpose in a world they do not belong.

The third and last setup dedicates the creative team to the new Weapon X series. Though very different in tone and style than the rest of the book, the scene serves its purpose. The government abducted various former Weapon X mutants. We don't know why, but obviously they need a team for nasty, brutal, suicide missions. They need Marvel's version of Task Force X.

X-Men Prime #1 restarts the X-Men books. A lot of #1's came out after that, and I am glad to take a look at some of those series with a bit of distance. For one it is cheaper, and I like reading comics on my own pace. But distance in time also allows us to take a look at a series on its own and not in the context it was released in -- which can be problematic as well (as we will see in X-Men Blue). Though I will not read every X-series that came out at the time, I will at least take a look at the main ones and even some spin-offs.