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**Radioactive Kryptonite:
The Industrial Factors Behind the Use of Origin Tales in Comics-Based Films
by
Brian Fried, B.A.**

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment
the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

**Department of Film Studies
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
9 April 2001**

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**The undersigned recommend to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of the thesis**

**“Radioactive Kryptonite: The Industrial Factors Behind the
Use of Origin Tales in Comics-Based Films”**

**Submitted by Brian Fried, B.A., Honours (Carleton)
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.**

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April 2001

Abstract

Comics-based films are now a major part of Hollywood's annual offerings. This study examines the influence of the use of origin tales in all but one of the 44 live action adaptations from 1978 to 2001. Origin tales satisfy the needs of both Hollywood and the comicbook publishers. Hollywood's renewed interest in comics comes from organizational developments. Today's multinational entertainment conglomerates want comics because of their family-adventure narratives, nostalgic power, brand identification and applicability to the marketing strategies of synergy, high concept and saturation. Comicbook publishers, in turn, see their market shrinking and view adaptation as the best advertisement for attracting new and lapsed readers. Origin tales communicate all the basic information about a hero. There are four types of origin tales. *The X-Men* (2000) acts as a case study to prove the validity of these conclusions even despite veering from a classical model.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Not since the decade leading up to 1946 have feature films based on comicbooks and comic strips had such a strong presence in Hollywood's offerings. Beginning with 1978's *Superman*, there have been fifty-one adaptations. These are not the serials of yesteryear. Instead, they are big budget blockbusters utilising the latest in visual effects techniques. Important as this difference between adaptations of the past and present is, it must pale in significance by comparison to another of the present cycle's important characteristics. Adaptations have graced theatre screens for every year of the present cycle except four — 1979, 1983, 1985 and 1988. During the previous thirty-two years, just ~~six~~ were made.

Why this sudden return to comics-based adaptations? Is it renewed demand, renewed profitability, or are there are other factors which have led to this renaissance? These are important questions which Film Studies has not asked. Studies of adaptation congregate around texts with much higher cultural capital than comicbooks (such as Austin or Shakespeare), yet the presence of comics-based films has become harder to ignore — and becomes increasingly so as this cycle shows no signs of stopping in the near future.

Film Studies has not ignored comics-based films entirely. There is a small body of literature devoted to the adaptation of comic to film — or, correctly stated, the adaptation of *a* comic to film. All of the literature to date has devoted itself to *Batman* (1989) and its sequels — *Batman Returns* (1992), *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman and Robin* (1997).

I have little interest in The Batman (as the character is properly called, though from here on I will use the more common Batman). The icon of my childhood was Spider-Man. My preferences then and now are Marvel's heroes, not their distinguished competition's. Nor

one of the Marvel character-based adaptations has been examined by the discipline. If there is to be any scholarly literature on comics-based film it must be applicable to *all* examples, not just one or two.

The Thesis & The Study Sample

This investigation is the first to look beyond the *Batman* cycle. It explains Hollywood's renewed interest in comics-based adaptations after years of ignoring them,¹ and so it is with the first of this new cycle that my study must begin.

The task of identifying every comics-based adaptation which followed *Superman* is, however, not as easy as one might assume. It is impossible to identify these films simply by subject matter.² Dick Tracy is not a superhero, nor is Casper the Friendly Ghost, Richie Rich or Dennis the Menace. Conversely, *Darkman* (1990), *The Meteor Man* (1993) and *Blankman* (1994) all feature superheroes with no basis in the comics. The only catalogues of comics-based films using source material as their sole criteria are found on the Internet. These websites are fan-built, relying on personal recollection and visitor suggestions rather than detailed scholarly research, and so the possibility of error is much higher. Direct-to-video features are usually absent because of their relatively small amount of release-associated fanfare. None distinguish between telefilms and theatrical releases.

This study makes that distinction. The listings from each site were compiled into one large list. Every title was cross-referenced against comprehensive filmographies to verify actual release and (if released) their correct date. Then detailed film and home video guides were consulted to determine whether each feature was made for theatres or television. Finally, the veracity that each feature was, in fact, based on a comicbook was proven by consulting the comicbook collector's bible, better known as *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*.

Overstreet is the only guide to list *every* North American comic ever made.³ A complete list of all theatrical releases based on a comicbook or comic strip from 1978 to 2001 is found in Appendix I.

Those which met the criteria for inclusion in the study sample are also found in Appendix II. The rules were simple. This investigation explores *Hollywood's* renewed interest in comics-based adaptations, so France, Germany and Italy's co-production of *Astérix et Obélix contre César* (1999) had to be excluded.⁴ Production on animated features did not feel the meteoric decline in production that comics-based film production did, with Disney also maintaining the presence of its characters with comics until the late 1990s. For that reason the animated features *Heavy Metal* (1981), *Heavy Metal 2: F.A.K.K.* (2000) and *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm* (1993) are ineligible for inclusion. Finally, the characters need not have originated in the comics or be exclusive to the comics, but there must be a significant mediation between the comics and film. This excludes both *Tarzan, The Ape Man* (1981) and *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* (1984) which look more to the Edgar Rice Burroughs stories and other *Tarzan* films than any comics. Also excluded is *Annie* (1982), which adapts the Broadway musical to the screen rather than the strips that musical is based on (unless, of course, there *are* strips in which Annie breaks into song to express her emotions on the situation, but this is a case I have yet to encounter in my research). This last criterion does not exclude *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) or its sequel *Conan the Destroyer* (1984) because a significant case can be made that the *mise en scène* of both looks to the Marvel *Conan* comics of 1970 onwards as much as they do the Robert E. Howard stories. Similarly, *The Shadow* (1994) and *The Phantom* (1996) are included because both derive their images from the comics despite better known associations with other media. Even with such criteria, the study sample is both large — forty-four features in total — and diverse.

That diversity is this examination's advantage. The sample demonstrates that Hollywood's renewed interest in comics-based adaptations cannot be likened to the renewed interest in any other genre because there aren't enough motifs common amongst the sample to define them as a genre. Another explanation — a group-specific explanation — must be found. The key to finding it lies in the one commonality between these films other than their source medium: their use of an origin tale.

Only one of the forty-four feature films in the sample does *not* use an origin tale, a ratio too high to ignore. Retention of the origin tale in such a diverse group means that it *must* have a significant connection to the source. Since comics are as generically diverse as the adaptations which they inspire, that connection is likely to lie not with the content but with the medium. And since that medium is published by a number of companies, the connection between origin and medium must extend throughout the industry because the industry as a whole supports it.

Live action feature films using those origin tales aren't made by the comics industry, they're made by Hollywood. Since Hollywood isn't the one producing the comics, it hasn't the same motive to support that connection. Studios must be supporting the connection between origin tale and source medium for another reason — one that explains what Hollywood gains *now* from the adaptation of comics which it didn't in the decades before. Something significant must have happened to effect a change in Hollywood's wants and desires. Something significant must have happened in Hollywood to make comicbook properties valuable again - valuable enough to match the support given by the comicbook industry.

It is the thesis of this investigation that the use of an origin tale in the present cycle of comics-based adaptations comes directly from the origin being the answer to both the

needs of Hollywood and the needs of the comicbook industry. Multinational entertainment conglomerates place a greater importance on properties which are both widely recognised and widely marketable than ever before. Comicbook characters are both. The industry which created and supports those characters has come to see the licensing of its properties for adaptation into film as its only hope against obsolescence.

The Chapters That Follow

The greatest attraction comicbook properties can offer to Hollywood is their nostalgic power. Audiences in America and abroad recognize these characters, mostly from their childhoods. Attending a showing of the comicbook characters' screen adaptation is a way for audiences to reconnect with those characters, reexperiencing — if only for a fleeting moment — the pleasure those characters brought before.

The comicbook publishers want this. More importantly, they *need* this. Readership has been in constant decline since the fifties, when Dr. Fredrick Wertham and others accused comics of being a prime catalyst for juvenile delinquency. Direct distribution was introduced in the seventies when that decline increased sharply. The solution proved temporary. Direct distribution removed comics from the reach of the casual consumer. Now at the beginning of the twenty-first century the comicbook industry finds itself in an usual predicament. Its market continues to shrink because no new consumers are there to replace departing ones. Publishers must find new ways to attract new readers, and no advertisement has the range and excitement that Hollywood provides.

How urgently that advertisement is needed is difficult to determine. As Patrick Parsons wrote in 1991:

“Accurate, detailed historical data on circulation and readership in the comic book industry are difficult to locate and verify. Circulation figures

for individual comic books are not generally reported in any uniform, national manner. The... major comic companies, DC and Marvel, are reluctant to report most information pertaining to readership. A handful of distribution companies around the country do have such information but it's scattered by region and goes back only a few years.... The varying mix of monthly, bi-monthly and quarterly issues and the failure of the majority of the hundreds of smaller presses to report to these services, however, render this information imprecise."⁵

Parsons' ultimate goal is to track Batman's audience demographics by assuming it is a strong portion of the audience demographics for superheroes in general. He begins with the forties because that's when Batman begins (the character premiered in 1939).⁶ His research and conclusions are extremely valuable for that period. To understand market trends beyond the period Parsons identified, I must go past his boundaries to the very beginning.

Books written on the history of the comics are often celebratory. Few survey the medium. The majority devote themselves to the examination of one character or company. Most of the writing on *Batman* must be included in that bracket since the authors place the film as the next stage in the hero's development. That literature is irrelevant to me. What I want to know is how comics developed the way they did — and more importantly *why*.

A history of the comics is found in Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Though intended to further the understanding of the form's mechanics begun by Will Eisner in *Comics And Sequential Art*,⁷ McCloud goes much farther than his mentor. McCloud posits that the language of comics extends backwards through art history, and proves his hypothesis with illustrations of Egyptian hieroglyphs, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (c. 1073-83), *The Tortures of Saint Erasmus* (c. 1460), Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* (1731) and the photograph sequences of Eadweard Muybridge. His overall message is clear: centuries of exposure to sequential illustration in the visual arts prepared Western audiences for the comic form.⁸

McCloud does not discuss the development of the comic's physical form or industry in *Understanding Comics*. That must be found elsewhere. The body of literature on the history of comics, both illustrated and non-illustrated, is dominated by works which present milestones out of context. A reader can easily grasp the connection between comic strip and comicbook in narrative form and style, but not the connection between the popular reception of the comic strip and the comicbook. Nor will a reader of these histories be able to grasp the importance of each innovation to the development of the medium because most studies leave out their influence on non-innovating writers and artists. There is the exception of Jim Steranko, who begins *The Steranko History of Comics* with two chapters placing the early development of the comics in context with social trends and developments in contemporary media. Steranko's work is relevant to this investigation because it establishes the place of comics within the hierarchy of cultural capital. '9

Comics have low cultural capital. They are a popular art. Despite earlier precedents, the modern comic industry really began at the end of the nineteenth century, a period of tremendous immigration to America. Literature on the popular arts during this influx of immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century — as well as the works themselves — reveal just how popular art forms had to change in order to include these new Americans into their audiences. The audiences of early silent cinema, vaudeville and the pulps were the same as the comics'. Research on these other art forms was valuable because it revealed the influence each had on early comic development. More importantly, research on these audiences was consulted because it completes comicdom's first audience model.

That model underwent a drastic revision in the 1950s. A history of the comics would be incomplete if it did not make mention of Fredrick Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*

and the Senate hearings into the causes of juvenile delinquency. Nor would any history of the comics be considered complete if it made no mention of the Comic Code Authority, a Hays-like restriction on content that assured worried parents all within would be compliant with agreed-upon moral values. Yet few of these comic histories bother to place the “Werthamite Crisis” or “Werthamite Assault” (as it is commonly called) in context with fifties society.

Andy Medhurst’s contribution to the literature on *Batman* is a perfect example. Medhurst criticises Wertham for being homophobic. As a gay man, Medhurst feels betrayed by DC’s overt attempts to emphasize Batman’s heterosexuality.¹⁰ Fellow “Bat-phile” Will Brooker, in *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing A Cultural Icon*, denounces Medhurst and all those who stand beside him with the first contextual reading of Wertham’s writings. The fifties was a period of moral crisis, when communists lurked behind every tree and homosexuals threatened society as deviants. Brooker is the first to propose that Wertham was actually progressive for his time. Brooker’s assertion warrants mention in the chapter ahead because it plays an important role in understanding the real concern of that chapter’s section on the change — the impact Wertham and the hearings had on the medium as a whole.¹¹

William W. Savage Jr. would like us to believe that the introduction of the Comic Code halted the comics’ use of socially progressive themes. While a well researched text concerning those themes in comics before the Code’s 1954 arrival, *Comic Books and America 1945-1954*¹² will not be used because that conclusion contradicts evidence at the source. Comicdom after the Comic Code did as Hollywood did after the Hays Code — it codified themes to get them past the censors. More importantly, it was the industry’s dedication to social concerns (such as suicide and heroin addiction) which caused the Code to be modified less than two decades later.¹³

Savage demonstrates the conflicting ideas over the Code's impact. The Code only bandaged the already wounded. Parsons' positioning of the drop in comicbook readership against the rise in television consumption among children is supported by the literature on television's arrival. Much of this literature examines the impact of television on the movies, an impact which Douglas Gomery contradicts in the aptly named "The Movies and TV: A Revisionist History." Whether television affected the movies is less relevant than the fact that TV arrived, and in doing so brought strong competition to the marketplace.

Today, the competition for that audience is much fiercer. Comicbooks must compete against personal computers, Gameboys, the Pokémon phenomenon, Play Stations and more. Their ability to compete against these other children's entertainments is hindered by their separation from the marketplace. The final section of Chapter Two presents the state of the comicbook industry within the period contemporary to the study sample. Parsons' model of the industry is unusable because it describes the state of the industry at the end of the eighties — when a key motivation of this exercise is to comprehend the motivations of the industry up to the present. The desperation of the industry has only increased through the nineties as speculator interest (ironically initiated by the intended subject of Parsons' article) collapsed. A new model of the industry today must be constructed. Part of the model will be built from the resources offered above. The rest comes from relevant articles in comics-related trade and fan periodicals like *Comics International* and *Wizard: The Guide To Comics*.

All of this history — the influences at the turn of the century, the audience model, the Werthamite Assault and its challenge to the audience model, the decline of the readership, the state of the market today — works to establish the publisher's need to license its characters for adaptation. Modern comicdom's age and history, from the late nineteenth

century to the beginning of the twenty-first, suggests the size of readership past and present but not the hold nostalgia has on them.

Literature on the nostalgic power of comics is sparse. Wiley Lee Umphlett's "The Nostalgic Vision in Comic-Strip Art" in *Mythmakers of the American Dream: The Nostalgic Vision in Popular Culture* attempts to place the comic strip's duplication of social trends as an avenue for nostalgia and fails.¹⁴ Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins' article on the two *Batmans* (1989 and 1966) maintains that the nostalgic power of the comic lies in its ability to connect consumption in the present with emotions of the past.¹⁵ Spigel and Jenkins' contribution can be extended to the nostalgic power of all children's products. Their conclusions are matched by those of others looking at the products of Walt Disney. Nostalgia in Disney products is relevant because Disney seeks the same audience that comics do — and did so even *in* the comics! Disney produces adaptations of children's literature, and so the associative marketing of a Disney film can be compared against the marketing of a comics-based adaptation.

Comparison can be made between the messages Disney films transmit to a child and the messages superheroes transmit. I have already stated that the sample is not comprised exclusively of superheroes, but to ignore the presence of the superhero completely would be negligent. Superheroes place heavy emphasis on origin tales. In his *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology*, Richard Reynolds identifies the superhero's mythology, demonstrates that superheroes have absorbed other mythologies, and celebrates great comics.¹⁶ This third section does not match the goals of the first two and must be ignored. Most importantly, Reynolds pinpoints the creation of the superhero mythology in Superman. Superman's status as both the first superhero and the archetype is central to every history of the character and the medium at large. Yet not even Les Daniels' seminal work *Superman - A Complete History*¹⁷ is as insightful and as useful to this study as is Reynolds'

analysis. Through the first thirteen pages of *Action Comics* '1, Reynolds proposes seven basic principles of the superhero.¹⁸ These tenets establish who the character is and his primary motivation. It is this information which Hollywood and the comicbook publisher want most to communicate. It prevents confusion in the audience members and lets them enjoy the film — perhaps enjoy it enough to follow the character into other products including comics and sequels. Many of Reynolds' ideas are applicable to other comic heroes. Consequently, I will return to them.

Sequels are not the only adaptation-associated product made by Hollywood. Blockbusters are accompanied by a plethora of products, ranging from fast food chain premiums to soundtrack albums to bubble bath. The greater the number of products, the smaller the percentage of total revenue each product — feature included — has in the project. It is an evolution in Hollywood's understanding of market forces and strategy, and one that comes at a very important price. No longer is Hollywood comprised of individual studios. Now it is comprised of multinational entertainment conglomerates.

The evolution of Hollywood's institutional organization from studio to multinational entertainment conglomerate is a subject of many opinions. Scholars of the American cinema have presented a number of theoretical models, most stemming from David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson's *Classical Hollywood Cinema*. I am interested primarily in those aspects of Hollywood's evolution which explain its increased market awareness. It is not enough to simply state which model accomplishes this best. For that model to come forward, it must be evaluated against the others with reason given for the others' dismissal.

For example: there are models which look to the evolution of style instead of industry. These models are valid as post-Classical models because Bordwell, Staiger and

Thompson's definition of Classical Hollywood is so broad that it encompasses style. The sample here is not uniform in style; therefore it is not style which has encouraged Hollywood to license comicbook properties.

The models left are minor variations of each other. By combining them into one, the model for this study will be complete. Just as there are minor variations in model characteristics which can be combined to form the most appropriate composite model, so too are there minor variations in nomenclature to be dealt with. There are "New Hollywood"s and "Corporate Hollywood"s galore. The model deemed most applicable for this study is one with an intermediary step. Between the studio and the multinational conglomerate came corporate ownership. Corporate ownership differs from the conglomerate because it did not place the studio at the centre of its endeavours. To that end, I have named this intermediary step Corporate Hollywood, and the era of the conglomerates which followed as Conglomerate Hollywood. The use of an intermediary step is anchored in the literature on Hollywood, and the contributions of each author will be clearly identified.

Selection of the most appropriate theoretical model for a post-Classical Hollywood cinema is important. While Chapter Two identifies the comicbook industry's motivations behind the creation of new adaptations, Chapter Three identifies the film industry's. Those motivations are inextricably linked to Hollywood's modern (or recent) development. Communicating the steps taken from Classical to Corporate to Conglomerate Hollywood makes it easier to understand how the marketing strategies became connected.

There are three marketing strategies of post-Classical Hollywood — synergy, high concept and saturation. Exemplified by Steven J. Ross of Warner Communications Inc. (WCI),

the contraction for “synchronous energy” taught the entertainment conglomerate to unite its product lines to both cut costs (licensing fees are eliminated within house) and increase market presence.¹⁹ Introduced to Hollywood by television, high concept taught the entertainment conglomerate to make visible the connection between the products of those various lines — and the licenses which accompanied them — through common imagery and iconography. Introduced to Hollywood by example, saturation taught the entertainment conglomerate that costs could be recovered quicker than the traditional road showing if all energy was directed at immediate awareness and availability. Synergy, high concept and saturation are crucial to the understanding of how Corporate, and later Conglomerate, Hollywood handles its blockbusters.

The literature on these strategies is a small component of the literature on post-Classical Hollywood. Justin Wyatt’s “From Roadshowing to Saturation Release: Majors, Independents, and Marketing/Distributing Innovations” details the development of saturation booking²⁰ while his *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* details the origins and mechanics of high concept.²¹ Kristin Thompson among others (including myself) finds fault in Wyatt’s assumptions about high concept.²² Despite these reservations, Wyatt’s contributions to the discipline warrant mention here. Those contributions are sustained by the research of others, including Eileen Meehan.

Meehan’s “Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!': The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext” is a crucial component of the research into comics-based adaptation because it is the first — and to the date of writing this, the *only* — article on the adaptation of comics to film which looks to the industrial behaviour behind a release. Meehan’s identification of the connections between *Batman* and its merchandise, particularly the soundtrack album by Prince, is undeniable proof that synergy and high concept were both used in WCI’s marketing strategy for the film.²³ By introducing examples from films in the sample other

than *Batman*, I not only support Meehan's research but my own conclusion as well that the comicbook property is greatly desired by the conglomerate because it already responds to the strategies listed above.

The evolution of Hollywood from Classical to Corporate to Conglomerate is also necessary because it affects the comicbook industry. In 1971, WCI bought National Periodicals, publisher of Detective Comics (DC). From that point onwards, DC has shared in the conglomerate image of WCI. DC's main competition, Marvel Comics, attempted to build a conglomerate of its own. The attempt failed for reasons which will be given later. For now it is enough to note that the American comicbook industry both reflects and takes part in the development of the American film industry. It is a logical conclusion that the comicbook publishers would also place importance on synergy, high concept and saturation during the release of the adaptation to match Hollywood.

Finally, it is not just market strategies that attract Conglomerate Hollywood to the comics as source material — it is also the comics' applicability to demographic research. The use of demographics allows the conglomerate to bypass the heterogeneity of the marketplace and perceive *portions* of the audience as a homogeneous grouping. Blockbusters are scheduled for the periods of greatest movie attendance, the summer and holiday months, when two groups dominate attendance. The first is composed of family units, the other of men between 18 and 25. The desires of each group are compatible, suggests Peter Krämer in "Would you take your child to see this film? The cultural and social work of the family-adventure movie."²⁴ As the title suggests, the family-adventure film is an adventure film, full of action and special effects guaranteed to attract young males, but with familial overtones to attract families. Krämer does not single out comics-based adaptations yet one is there amongst his examples. *Batman* is the only example included because it is the only adaptation to have been on *Variety*'s 1996 "Top Twenty Ticket Sales" list. Nevertheless,

Krämer's conclusion is clearly applicable to more than just one example in this study's sample. Comics already use the family-adventure narrative. Therefore his conclusions are quite relevant.

Chapter Four explains how the origin tale satisfies the needs of both the American comicbook and film industries (outlined in Chapters Two and Three). It is here that the greatest amount of scholarly research was necessary.

As I mentioned previously, only four comics-based films have captured the attention of film scholars — *Batman* and its three sequels, *Batman Returns*, *Batman Forever* and *Batman and Robin*. Few academics actually deal with the process of adaptation. In fact, Meehan and K.J. Donnelly²⁵ aside, the literature surrounding *Batman* is more about the phenomenon than the film itself. Even Will Brooker's *Batman Unmasked*, a detailed account of the character's relationship to comicbook history and general popular culture, falls flat when it comes to the modern cycle, devoting itself instead to supporting Brooker's dislike for them.

Brooker would be easy to dismiss if his disdain did not raise an important challenge at the same time. In his essay "Batman: One Life, Many Faces" in *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (with a qualification made later in *Batman Unmasked*)²⁶ Brooker charged that, origin tale or not, the comics-based film should not be classified as an adaptation because there is no specific source text against which to compare. I disagree. Comics are a serial medium, and as such have developed a different form of text which is not bound between two covers. To prove that Brooker's perception of the comic text is misconceived, I must return to the literature on comics and seek out material on the comic narrative. Reynolds' analysis of the comics medium also includes a definition of continuity.²⁷ Continuity is what binds all individual comicbooks together to form the

metanarrative, a technique learned from the pulps. That definition will be the foundation from which I will build my rebuttal. The remainder of the evidence comes from the works themselves, published interviews with those who have done both, and a look at subjects of similar narrative construction which have undergone better examination than comics. One such subject is *Star Trek*. Research into the narrative construction of *Star Trek* as it applies to the adaptation process — as well as research into the common narrative structure of the American TV drama — is useful as a comparative model.

The television model cannot be used to identify the challenges in adapting an already visual medium because the level of image quality for television is clearly lower than film. Literature on adaptations has shied away from the adaptation of visual media like television and comicbooks because they are popular arts, and therefore have less cultural capital to validate academic interest. What little literature exists on the adaptation of visual media has been helpful in understanding the different relationship between adaptation and source, but the majority of my analysis is based on the well publicised economics of using new visual effects.

My investigation responds to this lack of published research. If industrial models can be built using what little literature exists, a model of how the origin tale responds to the needs of these industries must also be made available. My conclusions are based on evidence of origin tales responding to the needs which I have identified. That evidence comes from the films themselves.

The films are also a resource for identifying the manners in which an origin tale can be used. For all of the literature that exists on comics, comic writing, character creation and even Reynolds' own analysis of the origin's establishment of identity, not one text has created a detailed explanation, using examples from the study sample, of how origins

manifest themselves in the adaptation. The final section of this thesis does. The manner in which origin is delivered comes directly from the property being adapted.

The motivations behind adaptation are presented in Chapters Two through Four. Models of each industry are built to understand their needs and desires. The comic medium is analysed to recognize how it responds to those needs and desires. The resulting union of comics and movies is defended as an adaptation, and categorised according to origin use. All that remains to be done is to apply this knowledge by using it as a case study of an adaptation. The following chapter examines *The X-Men* (2000). Its origin tale does not conform to one of the four categories identified at the end of Chapter Four. The origin tale in *The X-Men* is an aberration, and part of the case study will be an explanation of why it is an aberration.

The other purpose of this case study is to verify that even when the origin tale is presented in an aberrant manner its existence as response to the needs and desires of both industries still holds true. To accomplish this goal, I will examine the relationship that the conglomerate and the publisher had with the film. Articles abound in film and comic periodicals about the production of *The X-Men*, but none of these accounts look back to previous interactions between Fox and Marvel. In keeping with the framework of relationships between conglomerates and publishers, I have turned to articles in journals and the works they highlight to track that relationship as a foundation for the film. This explains why *The X-Men* got made by those who made it. Similarly, changes in the marketing strategy for the home video release as a result of success or failure at the box office must be gleaned from relevant periodical articles — not to mention press releases from Fox and Marvel where available.

Any descriptions of the film — including transcriptions of dialogue — come from the

film itself. The novel adaptation is full of errors, including a baffling inability to keep straight the number of claws Wolverine has (on some pages it is three, others four).²⁸ The official comicbook adaptation of the movie was based on a draft of the script, not the completed scenes, and so it too has noticeable discrepancies.²⁹

The X-Men is too recent a film for there to be much literature on it outside of periodicals. The X-Men comics, on the other hand, have been around since 1963. Just as in the case of *Batman*, much of what has been published about The X-Men is celebratory. This is the principle problem with Peter Sanderson's *Ultimate X-Men*. Published to help promote the film, the book fails to offer any depth to its decade-by-decade history of the property beyond important events. Whole pages are devoted to some characters, while others are grouped together for lack of space.³⁰ *The Official Marvel Index To The X-Men* is a far better resource, for it at least gives a synopsis for each issue as well as noting the major trends across the series. Unfortunately, that index is now over a hundred issues out of date. More importantly, the value of the index is not great because it refused to follow the characters into The X-Men's spin-off titles.³¹ Similarly, Marvel's character index, *The Official Handbook Of The Marvel Universe (Deluxe Edition)*, was published in 1985 and updated only once — in 1989. It is the 85 edition which has been used for Marvel's company website, and its distance from the present makes it inaccurate as well.³²

The best sources for information on The X-Men are, ironically, the same sources many of the writers now turn to: their own personal collections of X-Men comics, and the assistance of those in dedicated Internet discussion forums. Proof of the power of these forums is found at the end of *X-Men Forever*, as Fabian Nicieza acknowledges all those assistants he had contacted through the Internet for the history-laden series.³³ My intention is not to use these resources as Nicieza and other writers have done but rather to use them for any relevant comparison of character identity on film and in print.

The X-Men is being used to demonstrate the validity of this investigation's thesis. Whether it does so or not, the case study concludes the examination of comics-based adaptations, and so the final chapter — Chapter Six — can only summarise the contributions of each chapter as a conclusion. By that point, of course, it will have been determined whether or not the origin tale's prominence in the study sample occurs because it is the union of response to the needs of both Hollywood *and* the comicbook industry.

Chapter Two: The Heroes of Our Lives

Hollywood and the rest of the world celebrated 1995 as the centennial anniversary of film's first paying audience. At the same time, another popular art form had its centennial anniversary. For that art form there was no celebration. In fact, the centennial of the American comicbook got barely a footnote within its own press.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to rectify that situation. That time has passed and, to be honest, an appreciation of comicbook history would take much more space than this study has to offer. But this period of survival — one hundred years and still going — cannot be ignored. Survival has transformed the American comicbook form and its characters (superheroes in particular) into American icons. The American film industry is greatly attracted to properties with such wide recognition. The purpose of this chapter is to identify and explain the characteristics of the comics which fuel Hollywood's desire for exploitation.

I open this chapter with three historical sections. The first establishes the influence of vaudeville, silent cinema and the pulps on narrative presentation. Historical context explains comicdom's need to communicate beyond words in order to reach its maximum audience. The subject of the second section is how that changed as a result of Fredrick Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* and subsequent testimony before the U.S. Senate, which forced the comic industry to redefine its audience model in a significant way. The final historical section focuses on Superman. Superman is the archetype of the superhero. Richard Reynolds' key aspects of the superhero are integral to this investigation. They communicate directly what the hero is all about. The reasons why audiences accepted Superman and the superheroes which followed will be given.

The remainder of this chapter connects comic history to Hollywood attraction. The fourth section explains and gives examples of nostalgia for the superheroes. Hollywood's use of nostalgia to sell films (and in particular the adaptation of comics to film) will be demonstrated. Finally, the comic industry's dependence on nostalgia will be placed into context with the state of the industry at the close of the twentieth century. Publishers use that nostalgia to drive readers back to a shrinking market and even try to return to the glory days of the past.

Influence for Audience

No history of the comics is complete without mention of its influences. Vaudeville, silent cinema and the pulps were contemporaries seeking the same audience. Comics duplicated these competitors' most effective means of increasing audience size. Their integration helped comics reach the pinnacle of circulation in the early forties — with an audience model much different than later years.

The model first formed in Victorian times. Although Egyptian hieroglyphs prove sequential art narratives predate the written alphabet,³⁴ the Victorians, notes Steranko, were the first modern European society to privilege the written word over illustration. Illustration required less imagination and was therefore reserved for "commoners."³⁵ The lower class could not afford higher education, many books or entrance into the galleries of 'more sophisticated' art.

But the commoner was not totally without resources. The industrial revolution had increased wages and leisure time for the skilled worker.³⁶ With money and time on their hands, commoners would find affordable entertainment elsewhere.

They found it in the popular arts. The popular arts (including comics) were produced cheaply for mass audiences. The lower the cost, the more consumers were able to afford the product; the greater the consumption, the higher the revenue and therefore the profit.

America's situation was unique. Potential audience numbers were swelling with each boatload of new immigrants. The popular arts were something they could afford. More over, the popular arts were something they could *understand*.

Vaudeville responded to heterogeneous audiences with heterogeneous programmes. Playbills juxtaposed dramatic actors against singers, dancers, comedians and performers of amazing feats. Some performers even used film. Vaudeville's variety appears in many Hollywood films. *The Jazz Singer* (1927) is one example: singer Jakie eventually shares top billing with a dancer in a revue musical composed of disconnected acts.

The response was ingenious; the use of non-English language specific performances ensured that every member of the audience would enjoy at least some part of the programme. Immigrants who did not understand English appreciated the music, the quality of the singer's voice, the amazing feats and the dancing prowess.

The lesson for comics was clear: *emphasize your non-language-based aspects*. This meant emphasize the visual. Text was language specific. Illustration was universal. Comics had to mimic vaudeville's non-verbal forms of communication if they wanted to reach the immigrant audience. Expressions of emotion were exaggerated. Physical humour was prominent (Figure 1). These techniques were not exclusive to the comic strip. Exaggerated expression and physical humour were part of the vaudeville comedian's act and the silent film.

Figure 1. *Dot & Dash* (part of *Polly and Her Pals*) by Cliff Sterrett, 1927.
 From: *The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics*, ed. Bill Blackbeard and Martin Williams
 (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press and New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977), plate 133.

Not all strips used physical humour. Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* was a journey through the fantastic. Expression and movement could still communicate basic situation, but the specific adventure of each strip was lost to the reader without dialogue (Figure 2). Dialogue-centred strips did not take the majority of print space until later, when a majority of the audience was educated in English.³⁷

Comic strips had a clear advantage over vaudeville and the silent cinema — cost. Admission prices did not increase with audience size. There was no charge for repeated viewings. The total cost was the cost of the publication. In many cases, that was a newspaper. Newspapers were also produced cheaply for mass audiences. Labourers and immigrants could afford the price. This proved to be an even greater advantage for the comic strip because they would be circulated to an even greater number of people than the number of copies sold.

Comickdom's first audience model was a mass audience. Age was not a factor. The percentage of adults unable to read and write English was large enough that strips aimed to be comprehended without accompanying text. Comprehension of English would only enhance the pleasure. Since young children had the same level of English language skill as new immigrants (and vice versa) the strips were something they too could understand. It was entertainment everyone could understand and — most importantly — afford.³⁸

Four colour printing processes only made comic strips more attractive. Now they truly stood out on the page.

“The big city dailies, especially those in New York, perennially in cutthroat competition with each other to increase their circulations, devised highly original ways to make use of this new selling point. An important development in both newspaper sales and the reception of the comic strip was the assignment by warring papers of special artists to produce a picturized narrative series that in time came to be recognised [*sic*] by various names, the most popular being the ‘funnies’ or ‘comics.’”³⁹

Wiley Lee Umphlett omits the most important development. Hearst publications' 1897 collection of *The Yellow Kid* strips bound under a cardboard cover became the first American comicbook.⁴⁰

The advertisement of specific artists signed to exclusive contracts created the first star structure in comic history. Consumers buying newspapers for the comics would now, for the first time, choose by the presence of a creator. Consumers chose to follow that creator because they had expectations of similar pleasure gained from previous works. Audience expectations were answered with one more crucial element mimicked from the contemporaries: repetition.

Mark Langer's "Polyphony and Heterogeneity in Early Fleischer Films" describes the situation. Audiences returned to vaudeville theatres time and time again to see performers repeat specific acts. It became a social ritual to witness once more favourite acts. The entertainers in turn used this to their advantage. They maintained excitement by occasionally altering different aspects of the performance. The original became a framework for later modifications. The most conspicuous framework was the two-act. The first character ridiculed the responses of the second. One modification was an accommodation for a third player if necessary. More importantly, while the basic interaction never changed, the jokes were always malleable. Changing jokes meant the act could never grow stale; it would always reflect the socio-political situation around the performance.⁴¹

Little Nemo in Slumberland offers irrefutable evidence comics used the repetition principle. Each strip is another step in Nemo's journey through Slumberland. It opens with a statement of mission. When the next mission is revealed, the following — and final — panel shows Nemo waking from his slumber. The missions change from strip to strip but

the structure never varies.

Comics' structure was repeated as often as the publications in which they appeared. Daily newspapers transformed the act of reading favourite strips into a daily ritual. It was a ritual performed alone, but one circulation numbers reveal millions of people were performing all across the nation. The daily consumption of comic heroes integrated them into the national conscience. Titles and characters became immediately recognizable. Specific characteristics associated with each character (such as narrative structure) were less known. As will be demonstrated later, Hollywood wants to exploit that recognition factor and its power of nostalgia described below.

Hollywood is also attracted to comics by one other aspect of the medium: generic diversity. Generic diversity was taken from the pulps, for whom diversity was a major attraction.

"Variety was infinite. There were detective pulps, western pulps, science fiction pulps, sports pulps, romance pulps, gang war pulps, horror pulps, spicy mystery pulps, jungle and desert adventure pulps, and *The Shadow*.... From railroad yarns to pirate stories, from the center [*sic*] of the earth [*sic*] to the farthest reaches of the universe, the gaudy, gory, glorious pulp magazines delivered on their promise: something for everyone."⁴²

Comics didn't have "something for everyone." Most strips were out for a quick laugh and nothing more.

The pulps differed from comics' other contemporaries because they emphasised text over illustration. Pulp illustrations showed only key scenes and lead characters. The reader had to imagine the rest. As a result, pulp fiction had a literate-only audience. The method for reaching that audience was still the same: the pulps were priced cheaply and made available in great quantities.

New genres had a dramatic effect. Comic strip artists had treated each strip as an individual entity. Pulp narratives could not be told in self enclosed strips of three to four panels daily (more on Sunday). There was a larger story to be told. Pulp fiction taught comics to conceive narrative in its entirety first. Then that narrative would be broken down into episodes. Each episode must leave the reader craving for the next. This was done by a “cliff-hanger” strategy — leaving the hero in some predicament which could only be overcome at the beginning of the next chapter. No longer was it necessary for Nemo to wake at the end of each strip to create a sense of closure. Now the stages of Nemo’s dream flowed as one. By removing the barrier of strip length and perpetuating suspense across the narrative, artists ensured greater satisfaction at the end because readers had more plot to support the resolution.⁴³

Popular pulp heroes ran into the same demand for repetition popular vaudeville performers did. They also responded in the same way. The pulps never let a good hero die. An adventure hero’s ultimate goal is social utopia. So long as there is opposition to utopia, his job is never done. Each new threat means another adventure. Each new adventure in turn required new predicaments to be overcome while following the same basic structure.

Comics adopted many pulp heroes. The first “pulp-style” strip was *Tarzan*. Edgar Rice Burrough’s hero made a 100 word per panel/five day/ten week trial run at the beginning of 1929.⁴⁴ It adhered to the same visual emphasis that other strips did (Figure 3). To Steranko, this was a timely move. Black Tuesday and the Great Depression which followed drained much of America’s need to laugh. Americans wanted to escape the situation around them even for a moment. Adventure stories gave them that escape.⁴⁵ It would not be the last time comics altered content to fit society’s demands. In the fifties, the response to charges of moral corruption had a devastating effect.

The Werthamite Assault

Comics were not the only medium to be charged with moral corruption. Earlier, Hollywood was charged with the same and responded by instituting the Hays Code. Nor were comics the first medium to be charged specifically with the moral corruption of children. A Connecticut school teacher wrote to the editor of *The New York Times* to complain about 'the thrillers' that ninety percent of her students read. "The matter of pulps constitutes a menace to pupil's morals, English and mind."⁴⁶

The central figure in this assault was Dr. Fredrick Wertham. Wertham had written a number of articles condemning comicbooks. But it was his book *Seduction of the Innocent* which crystallised these charges for the general public. They were "...a debasement of the old institution of printing, the corruption of the art of drawing and almost an abolition of literary writing."⁴⁷ Such charges forced the comic industry to redefine its audience model. This section leads to that second audience model and a comparison with the first. It leads to the impact of that move. How the audience model was redefined can only be answered after placing Wertham and his accusations into context.

Wertham's prime target was horror comics. Yet perversely it was four pages of *Seduction of the Innocent* dealing with another subject which has captivated comic scholars. Wertham asserted that Batman and Robin presented an unhealthy relationship between men. Wertham clearly meant 'unhealthy' to equal homosexual.⁴⁸ The Dynamic Duo were not the only ones given a queer reading. Wonder Woman, "...lesbian counterpart of Batman...", "frightened young boys and gave young girls a morbid image to follow."⁴⁹

Andy Medhurst finds Wertham's readings to be like Richard Dyer's — "psychologically

homosexual.”⁵⁰ Will Brooker counters that such judgment comes only through the filter of time displacement. Had Medhurst (a homosexual himself) bothered to analyse other texts of that period he would have discovered a strong affinity with Wertham’s concern. Fifties America felt homosexuality, communism and delinquency were serious problems. If left unchecked, they could seriously compromise society. Senate investigations were performed on all three of these problems. Brooker asserts that instead of being regarded as a text bent on destroying comicbooks, *Seduction of the Innocent* must be regarded as an expression of its contemporary culture’s concerns.⁵¹

Comicbook shipments were returned unopened. Bill Boichel states that titles, publishers and even entire genres disappeared overnight.⁵² Patrick Parsons quantifies this: after the Senate hearings into the causes of juvenile delinquency (in which comics were labelled one) only half the publishers were left in business.⁵³ Not all went quietly. Entertaining Comics (EC) accused the Senate of a communist-style witch hunt.⁵⁴ The comics industry needed a way to reassure parents that they were not a corrupting influence on children and they needed it fast.

The solution came from National Periodicals (also called Detective Comics or simply DC). Parents groups had criticised the level of violence in Batman and Superman stories before the war (Figure 4). DC wanted to prevent audiences from leaving in disgust. In response, the publisher adopted an internal code of conduct for all its characters in 1940.⁵⁵ Now parents groups were criticising the content of all comics, DC and otherwise. In response, the comic industry implemented its first code of conduct in 1954.⁵⁶

Medhurst is justified to state that the Comic Code has “...distinct shades of the Hays Code that had been brought in to clamp down on Hollywood in the 1930s.”⁵⁷ The Hays Code attempted to ensure “moral values” in film.⁵⁸ The Comics Code attempted to

Superman—By Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster

Is Superman Late?

(Copyright, 1939.)

Figure 4. *Superman* by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, 1939.
 From: *Superman: The Dailies*, volume one: strips 1-306, 1939-1940 (New York: DC Comics and Northampton, Mass: Kitchen Sink Press, 1999), p. 24.

ensure moral values in comics. Many rules were the same. Criminals were not to be glorified. They were now punished by law. Graphic and sexual violence was reduced to its minimum. Emphasis was now placed on women finding happiness at home.⁵⁹ Only comics which fully complied with the Comic Code would carry its important Seal of Approval. The Seal was a sign to parents that the content within was suitable for children.

This is the big change in audience model. Adults were no longer part of the equation. Comics from that point onwards were now officially (in the words of Tony Bennett) a “juvenile medium.”⁶⁰ Herbert Gans asserts that American culture is really the combination of tastes found in greater frequency across its many subcultures at any one time.⁶¹ The wide dissemination of feature film places it at the centre. Comicdom’s original audience model placed comics near the centre as well. The industry’s exclusive devotion to youth subculture from 1954 onwards pushed them away from the center.

In their wake came television. Television became widely available across the Midwest in 1954 — the year of *Seduction of the Innocent*.⁶² At a time when parents feared the content of comicbooks, the watchful eye that Parent Teacher Association (PTA)’s had put on television content from the beginning was a reassurance.⁶³ TV was a shared experience, so parents could equally monitor what their children were watching. Not so with comics. Parsons provides poll results which showed a direct correlation between rising television habits and lower comicbook reading in children through the late fifties and into the sixties.⁶⁴

Comics did not lose their readership entirely. Far from it. They still had an attraction that no other medium offered: the superhero. To understand the power of the superhero, one has only to look at its archetype.

Superman

The Superman familiar to audiences worldwide was actually the second version by Jerry Siegel and Joseph Shuster. The first debuted in a 1933 fanzine. He was "...a mastermind with enhanced mental powers who manipulated ordinary mortals...."⁶⁵ It was a year later that Siegel reconsidered their failure. "Superman, he thought, should be even *more* super... able to outrun a speeding express train, to lift incredible weights and leap an eighth of a mile."⁶⁶ Within hours Siegel also came up with an explanation for those abilities, a secret identity and a female companion.⁶⁷

What follows here is not a total history of Superman. Rather, I will focus on the aspects of the comic character's creation which have influenced every superhero that followed. These seven key characteristics will play an important role in Chapter Four. This analysis concludes with an understanding of why the superhero was relevant to (and therefore successful with) its audiences.

Shuster based the character's looks on two popular film stars. The dashing, adventurous Superman was based on Douglas Fairbanks. His alter ego, the meek Clark Kent, was based on Harold Lloyd.⁶⁸ This was not the first time film and comics had looked to the other for inspiration; John Fell asserts that McCay's responses to questions of visual framing and perspective was an influence on D.W. Griffith's depth and framing.⁶⁹

Superman was proposed to DC's Harry Donenfeld and Vincent Sullivan when the publisher wanted to launch the title *Action Comics*. Donenfeld and Sullivan gambled that this new type of hero who could hold an automobile in the air single handedly would be striking enough to attract audiences. Superman was given the premiere slot of *Action Comics'* first issue — the front cover image and the first thirteen pages. They were not,

however, willing to wager the entire survival of the book solely on him. *Action Comics* '2 began replacing Superman in that slot with "...commercially safer pulp-influenced images like big-game hunters and South Seas adventurers until sales figures began to indicate what a bonanza they had in that guy with a cape."⁷⁰

Other costumed heroes decked out in tights and capes soon followed. Within five years key heroes such as Batman, 'Shazam,'⁷¹ Wonder Woman, Captain Canuck, Captain America, the Green Lantern and the Flash had all been created. What is important about Superman — what makes him not just the first superhero but the archetype of all superheroes — is that each of these subsequent heroes and all others to follow copied most (if not all) of the seven key characteristics laid out in Superman's very first appearance.

Richard Reynolds identifies all seven. They are: the loss of parents; the powers of a god; devotion to justice; contrast with ordinary people; a secret identity; loyalty to the state but not necessarily its laws; and scientific explanations for all.⁷² These establish the core concept of any superhero character.

Embellishments followed. Superman's planet of origin was given the name Krypton when the strip version debuted in newspapers on 16 January 1939.⁷³ Perry White replaced George Taylor as editor.⁷⁴ The paper also changed name from *The Daily Star* to *The Daily Planet*. The movement from page to radio required a narrator. The narrator, Superman's pal Jimmy Olsen, was then transferred into the comics.⁷⁵ His childhood identity, Krypto the superdog and Superman's cousin Supergirl did not appear until after the Second World War.⁷⁶ Had these embellishments not been added the character's identity would be the same because the seven characteristics had already outlined it.

Superheroes act as signifiers for these seven tenets. Myth is not made up of total truth.

Thus Superman is the archetype because all superheroes uphold the majority of the tenets established with his creation. Myths are empowered by belief. Reader investment in the myth of specific superheroes is necessary in order for them to remain commercially viable. Each also has its signifier. The signs of this myth are the colourful costumes worn while using uncanny abilities for daring adventures.

The superheroes first faced off against the pulps' villain types of criminal and foreign spy. These villains were popular in the pulps because they reflected current events. Organised crime was a reality with real people. Foreign spies threatened to bring America into the Second World War. Once America got involved, comicbooks embraced the war effort. Superheroes sold war bonds and helped the Allied troops win on the battlefield. The superheroes followed the example of its influences by adjusting the framework of their adventures to remain constantly relevant to their contemporary socio-political climate.

Supervillains were little different. The supervillains used the seven characteristics of the superhero with one important difference: whereas the superhero was dedicated to justice and loyalty to the state but not necessarily the law, the supervillain was dedicated to injustice and had no loyalty to the state while being clearly outside of it.⁷⁷ In being so the supervillains acted like their criminal cousins. They stood for anarchy and entropy. The conflicts of superhero v. villain and superhero v. supervillain both centred on the preservation of social order.

Simply put: it's good versus evil. The sides are clearly delineated. That clear distinction is an important source for nostalgia. How and why are explained in the following section.

Nostalgia

The first half of this chapter used comic history to bring forth important aspects of the medium. Vaudeville, silent cinema and the pulps provided comics with workable models to copy in order to be accessible to all audiences. Emulation of these systems manifested itself in the construction of basic comic narrative. Comics expressed the importance of repetition with a malleable formula. These latter lessons were not forgotten when the industry, under pressure from parents and government, shifted all its attention to children.

The second half of this chapter connects childhood to nostalgia. Nostalgia is a powerful marketing force that Hollywood and comicbook publishers want to exploit. A definition of nostalgia is essential before its marketing power can be explored. This section provides that definition and explains its power. The section which follows looks specifically at the reason why the comicbook publishers are desperate to exploit this power.

The battle between good and evil is a simple dichotomy. Stephen M. Fjellman, Bruno Bettelheim, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann find the same level of simplicity in Disney films.⁷⁸ The simplicity in Disney is in turn borrowed from the fairy tale.

Fairy tales instruct children in lessons of life. Their characters are reduced to characteristics which children recognize in people around them. Fairy tale characters are allegories for good and bad, thus representing order and chaos. Fairy tales are effective because children can absorb those lessons in simple, understandable narratives.

Disney films depend upon moral homilies. *Pinocchio* (1940) stars a puppet child who is not a real boy until he learns not to lie and realises the importance of self sacrifice. *Aladdin* (1992) teaches children to be honest about themselves. Comics depend on moral homilies

as well. Peter Parker, the Amazing Spider-Man, enters both adulthood and super heroics after the death of Uncle Ben with the knowledge that power comes with responsibility.⁷⁹ As the last son of Krypton, Superman is the ultimate refugee adopting the culture of his new home. Clark Kent is the small town boy made good with a job in the big city of Metropolis. Comic characters can effectively convey their lessons to the children in their audience because they, while exhibiting characteristics of people around the reader, act as an allegory for order in simple, understandable narratives.

Comics, like Disney films, are consumed primarily by children — but adults are not excluded. For adults, the moral homilies contained within fairy tales reinforce social values learned as children. If the lessons contained within were not learned as children, the absorption of these social values through homily narratives better integrates the newly instructed into society.

Russel Nye defines the emotion of nostalgia as: "...a common experience through childhood, maturity, and old age, intertwined with memories of sorrow and happiness, courtship, marriage, parenthood, war and peace."⁸⁰ Childhood is almost invariably associated with happiness. Fairy tales, Disney products and comics all present a simple world that contrasts the complicated world of adulthood. The consumption of commercial products allows the individual to reenter — if only temporarily — that less complicated world and reexperience some of that happiness.

The drive to reexperience past pleasures via commercial products makes nostalgia a powerful marketing force. The number of consumers driven by nostalgia to consume related products increases the longer the original is kept in circulation. It is an exponential cycle because product awareness increases through those related avenues.

Additional products have ensured that comicdom's greatest heroes have never left circulation. This is especially important to the superheroes because, for a time, they were no longer the main focus of comicbooks.⁸¹ Children who chose not to read comics may still have nostalgia for the heroes as action figures or as the stars of favourite Saturday morning cartoons.

Adults will consume more related products than children because they have greater income to spend. The power of nostalgia increases if those adults are also parents. Parents consuming products associated with childhood will want to expose their children to the same objects which gave them pleasure. Producers hope that the child may, in turn, develop nostalgia for the same product their parent did.

Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins encountered this phenomenon firsthand.

"Writing about *Batman* in the summer of 1989, it became difficult to separate the nostalgic memorabilia and TV re-runs from the television *Batman* of 1966 that we sought to explain. For us, like many of our generation, the series evoked vivid images: dime store heroes and vampish heroines, summer nights with the TV flickering pop art images, children dressed for Halloween, bat toys we never had. In short, *Batman* seemed a point of entry into childhood's culture of the 1960's, and it also provided a clue to yuppie culture of the late 1980s because these memories seemed to constitute a common heritage of a particular adult generation."⁸²

Spigel and Jenkins' phrase "common heritage" echoes Nye's "common experience." Eileen Meehan notes that Warner Communications Inc. (WCI)'s use of sixties imagery to sell the 1989 feature film was intentional.⁸³ The sixties images had nostalgic meaning for the baby boomers. Many of the boomers had become the yuppies with whom Spigel and Jenkins were coming into contact. Yuppies now had money to spend on the "bat toys [they] never had." Products of the past were being put next to products of the present to sell the feature as an extension of those products. It was an effective campaign because yuppies *did* follow the invisible line from toys to film — often with children in tow.

Camille Bacon-Smith and Tyrone Yarbrough divide *Batman* audiences into four distinct groups: “long term fans of the comic books,” “short term fans with less direct experience with the primary sources,” “fans of the television series,” and “audiences who were not fans of Batman in any sense, but who attended because the movie was touted as an event.”⁴⁴ Spigel and Jenkins’ mention of television imagery places their yuppies in the third group, although some probably were short term fans of the comicbooks as well. Their children do not fit in any of these categories. Hollywood recognises that the same nostalgia which attracts the parents to these characters can attract other important demographics. They can because that’s how the characters were designed originally. Comics continue to appeal to all audiences — including children.

Hollywood is also keenly aware that comics-based adaptations will fare poorly on long term and short term fans alone; the situation of the comicbook industry today clearly proves that.

The Comic Industry: A Situation of Desperation

Comicbooks may have survived the Werthamite Assault, but bigger enemies loomed on the horizon. As the sixties progressed, the number of mom ‘n’ pop grocery and corner drug stores across America dwindled rapidly. By the seventies they had been virtually wiped off the commercial landscape. They were replaced by national supermarket and drug store chains. The new retail outlets had to maximize all available profit. The comicbook with a cover price of ten to twelve cents was only returning a penny in profit to the vendor. It could not compete with the more profitable magazines for shelf space. The chain stores had no choice but to stop carrying comicbooks altogether.

The loss was devastating. Implementation of the Comic Code directed the medium

towards children. But children were not consumers capable of following the product from one outlet to another. Removal from chain store shelves meant comicbooks were being removed from contact with their prime audience. The market was shrinking and so readership was on the decline.

Salesman Phil Seuling tried to solve this problem with 'direct distribution.' The logic was simple. It would increase retailer profit by reducing the wholesale cost upon one condition: that the retailer would no longer be able to return the unsold copies. Too many losses had been incurred by publishers from consignment orders this way. Retailers accepting direct distribution would receive discounts set by the number of copies bought outright.

Chain stores were not the ones taking advantage of this system. Instead, it was the new comicbook specialty store. The first opened in San Francisco in 1970. By the end of the seventies, specialty stores accounted for over half of all comicbook sales.⁸⁵ Specialty stores multiplied because direct distribution had made it possible to turn a decent profit.

The system turned out to be a failure. Traditional outlets were abusing the consignment system, claiming fewer books sold than actually were. Direct distribution eliminated this abuse, and publishers shifted more and more of their product to these outlets to lessen potential losses. By the early eighties, publishers decided to cut all losses by ending indirect distribution (that is, on consignment). The sales from adult-oriented graphic novels was thought to be enough to balance the loss of what little revenue indirect sales had provided.

The move ignored demographics. Comicbooks' prime market was children. Removal of the indirect market completely meant the only way children could come in contact with comics for sale would be in specialty stores. By not offering any other product, however,

the only parents with *reason* to enter a specialty store would be readers themselves. As the present readership reassigned their disposal income based on new priorities (college, family) there were no replacements. The average US comic fan was 18 in 1990;⁸⁶ a decade later, it was 38.⁸⁷

“Kids started to garner their entertainment from other media besides comics, with television the primary source. Now with video games, the Internet, and other forms of media, comic book sales are continuing to drop. In particular, children’s comic books have become a losing proposition. That’s why we [at Harvey Entertainment] got out of it ourselves.”⁸⁸

Comics need new readers to replenish those who move on to more ‘adult’ entertainment. Specialty stores are unable to attract new readers. The industry, therefore, must look elsewhere to attract those readers. Some publishers hope to attract new readers through non-traditional retail outlets.⁸⁹ Others have experimented with new formats to get their product back on traditional shelves.⁹⁰ Both initiatives function the same. Putting comics outside the specialty store provides the necessary advertising to get readers into comics.

No greater advertisement exists than film. *Spawn* creator Todd McFarlane told Geoff Pevere that his interests in film are strictly because it has greater reach.⁹¹ Brooker provides evidence that Batman’s 1966 television debut saved the character from cancellation.⁹² For an industry desperately needing to reach a bigger audience, a receptive Hollywood eager for properties was a perfect match. Hollywood recognised the fact that many of comicdom’s best known characters had yet to be given live-action adaptations. It could give publishers all the exposure it needed. License agreements were signed because the publishers saw feature film igniting interest in those who had never read the comics with these characters. It could even reignite interest in lapsed readers. To the publishers, Hollywood’s extensive reach is a godsend.

Hollywood's motives were not, however, altruistic. Its prime interest is not in helping a fellow art survive. It has developed its own reasons for wanting to exploit comic characters. It has its own need for reaching beyond demographics. Hollywood's need to exploit comics for its own use is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Hollywood Then and Now

Stardom involves the marketing of image on a variety of products.⁹³ Hollywood uses star images as brands to sell its films. It does so under the logic that consumers are more inclined to consume products which they recognise and correlate with quality than products about which they know nothing. Comicdom uses star images as brands to sell its comics. It also uses them to sell associated products like posters, apparel, trading cards, amusement rides, video games and, of course, toys. From the mid-forties to the late seventies, fusions of Hollywood and comic image use to sell products based on North American comicbooks were rare.⁹⁴

Superman ignited a chain reaction that has lasted for twenty-three years and shows no signs of stopping. The present cycle of adaptations is, however, quite different from its decade-long predecessor forty-two years earlier. The industries have changed. There is no doubt that the comic and film industries of today are far more conscientious about market forces and marketing. The previous chapter concluded with a look at the comicbook industry at the end of the twentieth century. Comics are having difficulty reaching the market. The comic industry perceives comics-based adaptations to be the greatest advertisement possible for their wares.

But adaptation as advertisement is not Hollywood's motive. That motive belongs to the comic industry alone. Hollywood has its own reasons for making comics-based adaptations. It is the purpose of this chapter to identify the main reasons for Hollywood's exploitation of comic properties at the end of the twentieth century.

Each answer can be traced back directly to industrial development. The Hollywood of today differs from the Hollywood of the previous cycle by more than increased marketing

savvy. The Hollywood of yesteryear was the studio system; the Hollywood of today is a system of multinational entertainment conglomerates. The following section begins with an explanation of why narrative development will not be explored.

With the focus on industrial development defined, the question then becomes: what model of Hollywood shall be used for analysis? The second section identifies the theoretical models for a 'post-Classical' American cinema, along with their basic concepts. The classical model with which they are compared will be identified. Each is evaluated and the most appropriate model for the rest of the chapter will be determined.

The final sections identify and explore important developments in post-Classical film marketing. Synergy unites product lines within the conglomerate. High concept unites the products of that conglomerate. Saturation unites the market presence of those products to reach maximum audience awareness. A history for each will be given along with examples from the study sample (Appendix II) of how each interacts with the adaptations.

Finally, a pattern emerges in the study sample which can also be found in the total output of post-Classical Hollywood. This pattern is a reflection of the new Hollywood's understanding of the marketplace. The importance of this pattern in modern filmmaking can only increase the desire to exploit comicdom's various properties.

Industry Economics vs. Narrative Development

Kristin Thompson, Warren Buckland and Elizabeth Cowie offer arguments that Hollywood narratives have not developed significantly since Classical Hollywood. The validity and applicability of their arguments to comics and their adaptations require examination in order to justify this chapter's approach.

In *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*, Thompson states that Classical Hollywood's cause-effect storytelling⁹⁵ is played out within a four to five act narrative. The acts are: setup, complicating action, development, climax and epilogue. Four act narratives fuse epilogue into climax.⁹⁶ Her subjects cross the spectrum from big budget blockbusters to small budget Academy Award winners. All have four/five act narratives.⁹⁷ Classical Hollywood narrative structure, she concludes, remained long after Classical Hollywood economic structure.

Buckland's "A close encounter with *Raiders of the Lost Ark*" narrows the attention to one class of film, blockbusters, by concentrating on Steven Spielberg's 1981 film.⁹⁸ *Raiders* is more than a resuscitation of the adventure film, Buckland argues. Its narrative structure is an homage to the serial,⁹⁹ as its story can be broken down into chapters. Each "...ends in a series of rapid dramatic actions and/or in an unresolved cliff-hanging sequence...."¹⁰⁰ Cliffhanger endings remind Buckland of comicbooks.¹⁰¹ They should. Blockbusters took their episodal structure from serials. Both serials and comics took their handling of popular genres from the pulps. Both learned from the pulps how to construct episodal narratives. Blockbusters remind the viewer of comicbooks because the serials which inspired their narrative construction were also the primary format in the most prolific decade of comics-based adaptations until the nineties.

Cowie's "Storytelling: Classical Hollywood cinema and classical narrative" gives reason for the dominance of narrative by economics.

"...[A]ll films were made to make a profit but 'story' films made the most profit.... The profitability of story-films is not inherent, but the result of specific exhibition practices in relation to the creation of a market... and a product for that market."¹⁰²

In other words, blockbusters are story films because that is what the market prefers. The

comic industry functions similarly; the market consumes superhero narratives in the greatest quantity and so they dominate.¹⁰³

Practices become dominant because they are the most profitable. To achieve the maximum profit possible, industries are in a permanent state of change. The remainder of this chapter presents changes by the American film industry to maximize profit. Each change made comics-based adaptations more attractive.

The market expresses its demand for one genre over another through its consumption. The market only consumes the supply of product (be it comics or film) according to that demand. The matching of supply to demand is the central principle of economics. Comicbook publishers and Hollywood conglomerates must adhere to this central principle because they are private corporations and, as such, are driven by their desire for profit. Maximum profit can only be attained when supply most efficiently matches demand.

Hollywood 101

Demand is never static. To continue maximising profit, companies must alter their supply accordingly. The remainder of this chapter concentrates on the organizational evolution of the American film industry as Hollywood's response to both specific changes in market demand and to increased market awareness overall. But this cannot occur without first establishing the organizational structure from which Hollywood was evolving.

The central question of this chapter relates to what came after the demise of the classic Hollywood system. It is here where scholars of the American cinema run into disagreement. Different theoretical models exist for a post-Classical cinema. The establishment of Classical Hollywood cinema's final model as the base model is followed

by a presentation of each model for a post-Classical cinema and the determination of which is most appropriate for this study's contemporary Hollywood cinema. That model also applies to the comicbook industry. This section concludes with a look at how publishers have tried to mimic the Hollywood transformation. In doing so, a better understanding of the relationship between industries can be obtained.

Classical Hollywood Cinema

David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* traces developments in industry structure and film style from 1900 to 1960. In that period, film making went from a one-man cameraman system to the multi-person package unit system.¹⁰⁴ Labour was specialised by task¹⁰⁵ and organised into unions.¹⁰⁶ New technologies like sound only added further tasks and therefore more labour.¹⁰⁷ From 1900 to 1960, film making also produced a standardised, "classical" Hollywood film style.¹⁰⁸

Auteurist versions of "the New Hollywood" focus on aberrations to Classical Hollywood film style. Auteur-centric models posit that the proliferation of aberrations in the sixties led to a new style. Economics provide a different explanation. By the sixties, big budget musicals using the classical style were not turning a profit.¹⁰⁹ Small budget auteur films (also called "youth" or "art house" pictures) were. Hollywood studios shifted production slates towards these more successful styles to maximize profit. The demise of auteur-centric "New Hollywood" is also explained by economics. Youth/art house pictures did not generate great profits. Blockbusters did. Blockbusters repeat the classical style and therefore returned classical style to prominence.

Cowie notes *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*'s contradiction. "...[T]here are two distinct strategies used in the book to negotiate the relation of these two functions [business and

art], and these, I argue, are in the end in contradiction with each other.”¹¹⁰ Models of post-Classical Hollywood centred on style ignore this contradiction because they ignore economics. The “youth picture” classification uses audience only as catalyst for change.

Youth/art house pictures rose in a period of economic instability. Michael Storper and Susan Christopherson call that period of instability post-Fordism.¹¹¹ Staiger founds early Hollywood development on Fordist principles.¹¹² Post-Fordism shifts production from a limited number of products for one homogeneous audience to a large number of products which satisfy a number of smaller heterogeneous audiences.¹¹³ Youth- and African-American-aimed films demonstrate greater attention to demographics of a segmented audience. Murray Smith disqualifies the post-Fordism model. Post-Fordism does not deal with Hollywood’s maintained oligarchy. Furthermore, post-Fordism does not account for the eighties’ and nineties’ vertical *reintegration*.¹¹⁴

Auteurist New Hollywood and post-Fordism models are only made possible by the great flaw of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson provide a definition so broad that the total system continued well after the demise of its component parts. No termination point can be given without knowing exactly what stopped Hollywood from being ‘classical.’ This leads Murray Smith to conclude: “This problem — a lack of clarity about what aspect of Hollywood is being discussed — is one that has frequently afflicted debate around classical and ‘post-Classical’ Hollywood.”¹¹⁵ Adds Richard Maltby: “Among [Hollywood’s] chroniclers, there is no consensus as to when (if ever) Classical Hollywood ended.”¹¹⁶

Industrial Evolution

There is, however, a consensus as to when Classical Hollywood’s most recognisable

characteristic ended. Tino Balio, Douglas Gomery, John Izod, Jon Lewis and Justin Wyatt build their models from the aftermath of *United States v. Paramount Pictures Inc.* That landmark 1948 decision aimed to halt unfair competition practices.¹¹⁷ Independent theatres would be free to book only those films they wanted to with the decision's halting of "block booking." *United States v. Paramount Pictures Inc.* made more independent theatres by ordering studios to sell off their theatres. Without their theatres, the vertically disintegrating studios lost guaranteed exhibition.

When implementation of the court decision occurred, Hollywood had another problem. Changes in post-war tax laws made it more profitable for actors and other top talent to incorporate themselves. No longer were the top actors under salary; now they contracted themselves to the highest bidder. Costs increased. Hollywood began taking on heavy losses because there was no guarantee of exhibition for its most expensive pictures, and these translated into share prices dropping. Analysts began to feel that the shares had become undervalued, and the reason they thought so was television. Television needed product. Old films generated new revenue as television either licensed them or simply bought them straight out. Hollywood soon realised it could supply new product as well, making television a new market to replace what was lost. Companies that foresaw greater profit potential in Hollywood studios began buying them up.

This initiates the corporate "New Hollywood." I will use 'Corporate Hollywood' to avoid confusion with the auteurist New Hollywood. Corporate Hollywood models differ from auteurist New Hollywood because they view stylistic changes to be irrelevant. What matters are changes to the industrial landscape.

Takeovers changed the Hollywood landscape dramatically. Studios became subsidiaries of larger corporations. Unfortunately for those corporations, continued failure at the box

office translated into few profits from their new divisions. Most studios had already sold off their libraries to television before being bought out. Corporations had difficulty in reconciling the film companies with their other, much more similar product lines.

The exception was the Music Corporation of America (MCA). Izod credits MCA founder Jules Stein.¹¹⁸ Gomery credits Stein's Hollywood man Lew Wasserman.¹¹⁹ MCA was a music publisher. It added talent representation with the purchase of the Hayward agency in 1945. That acquisition meant MCA booked its acts to perform its songs. Packages were built to showcase MCA performers. That led to radio, then television, and then the movies. MCA assembled 'package units' for studios to produce. Paramount's film library gave MCA old stock to offer with its new product, while Universal Pictures added facilities to produce and distribute its own packages. MCA's acquisition strategy differed from other Hollywood studio-buying corporations. MCA did not just match its product lines, it concentrated them within the industry's remaining activities: production and distribution.¹²⁰

Losses for other corporations led them to sell their studios. Gomery and Izod separate the wave of corporate ownership, transforming Corporate Hollywood into an intermediate stage of the evolution into Hollywood's modern form. Gomery calls that form the second New Hollywood.¹²¹ Izod calls it: "Conglomerates and Diversification."¹²² Izod's is more accurate, and I will use a modified version of Izod's title. 'Conglomerate Hollywood' is further divided by Tino Balio into international partnerships and cable television.¹²³ Balio's model could be further enhanced by Internet expansion at the turn of the century.¹²⁴ Conglomerate Hollywood is applicable to all three phases of expansion because it follows the same philosophy throughout: horizontal integration.

Time-Warner leads Conglomerate Hollywood. Its star is Steven J. Ross. Ross' Kinney

Corp. bought Warner-Seven Arts in 1969 and renamed it Warner Communications Inc. (WCI). WCI knew it could not affect movie theatres without violating anti-trust laws. It *could* affect other markets though,¹²⁵ as MCA had done with television by transforming the telefilm into the mini-series.¹²⁶ Under Ross' guidance, WCI began acquiring companies in ancillary markets to feature film making. The most memorable move was the merger with Time-Life Inc. because it renamed the company Time-Warner Inc. The conglomerate responded that it was "simply another step in logically expanding the 'ancillary markets' for Warner's television programmes and films, furthering vertical integration, making ever more money...."¹²⁷ The merger made Time-Warner the largest producer of entertainment media in the world.

WCI/Time-Warner's most important moves were in television. The conglomerate created cable channels Home Box Office (HBO) and Cinemax. HBO combines original programming with Hollywood product no longer in theatres but not yet shown on network television. Cinemax does not have original programming. Both created a new intermediary step in the distribution of film. This includes film product by Time-Warner. To get the stations, households turn to their cable service provider. In markets across the US the primary cable provider is Warner Cable Systems. At the time, Time-Warner was forbidden to own theatres by *United States v. Paramount Pictures Inc.* Time-Warner was not forbidden from owning exhibition outlets in other media and this allowed them to horizontally integrate ancillary markets for their primary product.

Integration was assisted by the Reagan administration's relaxation of anti-trust enforcement. In 1986, Columbia became the first studio to own theatres since the early fifties. The test provoked no response from the American government. In 1987 the studios owned the same percentage of theatres that they had in 1938.¹²⁸

Horizontal expansion means more than just presence in other markets. It means conglomerates do not have to rely on other companies to handle their product. The level of interior control is increased. Should one conglomerate need to interact with another, it is by agreement for mutual benefit. Gomery points to Time-Warner and Paramount as one example. Paramount cannot exclude Warner Bros. films from its Sci-Fi Channel, lest it force Time-Warner to drop the Sci-Fi Channel from its cable offerings.¹²⁹ This happened with Disney's ABC network when Time-Warner responded to an impasse over reducing subscription costs to Disney-owned channels by blocking out the first celebrity installment of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* in major markets across the US.¹³⁰ A conglomerate has greater control over who it will interact with and for what cost.

Conglomerate Publishing

Marvel Comics Inc. attempted to make itself a conglomerate. The publisher expanded internationally in the seventies. Marvel UK, Marvel Europe and Marvel Asia offer translated reprints and modern issues, along with nationally specific books.¹³¹ A licensing department appeared in the late seventies when licensing proved more profitable than comicbook sales. Marvel Films came in the eighties. The company could not afford feature films but could produce animated series. Features had to be licensed through Marvel Studios. Marvel continued creating ancillary divisions in the nineties with Marvel Posters and Marvel Apparel.

Marvel's next step was to acquire companies handling other ancillary products. The company bought a portion of ToyBiz. The agreement gave ToyBiz exclusive rights to produce action figures of Marvel characters without licensing fees.¹³² It bought Panini, the sticker company and Fleer/Skybox, the trading card company. Fleer quickly became the producer of the first collectible card game (CCG) based on comicbook properties —

Marvel's *Over Power* game. These acquisitions gave Marvel Enterprises presence in every ancillary market beyond comicbooks.

It also gave Marvel power over its competition. Smaller publishers seeking to produce toys, posters, clothing or CCGs had the option of coming to Marvel. DC did go to Marvel, adding its characters into *Over Power*.¹³³ But then Marvel tried to flex its power even further by becoming a distributor by buying Heroes World and making it its exclusive outlet. DC responded by signing exclusively with Diamond Comics Distributors. The effect on the marketplace was adverse. Stores lost out on volume discounts because product orders were now divided. Less discount translated into lower profit margin. Profit margins shrank as the speculator craze died out. Stores unable to handle lost profits and disappearing customers closed. Marvel's customer base dwindled. Revenue decreased at a time when the company needed increased profits to pay for its acquisitions.

Marvel lacked the finances to succeed at horizontal expansion like WCI. In December 1996, the overextended company filed for protection under chapters 11 and 13.¹³⁴ Heroes World closed. Distribution of Marvel comics went to Diamond Comics Distributors, making Diamond a monopoly.¹³⁵ *Over Power* was dismantled.¹³⁶ Fleer/Skybox and then Panini were sold. Marvel Enterprises restructured and is now dominated by ToyBiz¹³⁷

DC went the other route by becoming an ancillary market presence for WCI. "When DC was acquired by WCI in 1971, it was evidently viewed by the chair of WCI's publishing division (William Sarnoff) as a source of licensing revenues and movie materials."¹³⁸ A poor decade for comic sales meant WCI only realised its three part revenue plan of publishing/licensing/other for DC in the late eighties.¹³⁹

It is vital to understand how Conglomerate Hollywood developed from Classical

Hollywood (with Corporate Hollywood as intermediate stage) because Conglomerate Hollywood best describes the industrial structure of American cinema in the period matching the study sample at the heart of this investigation (Appendix II). In other words, today's Hollywood is Conglomerate Hollywood. The scope of the entertainment conglomerate encouraged Marvel Comics to try and copy it. DC has become a part of the largest. The conglomerates are still growing, as recent mergers of Time-Warner with Internet giant America On-Line (AOL) and Seagram's (owner of MCA-Universal since 1995) with telecommunications giant Vivendi show. It is only with an understanding of Conglomerate Hollywood that I can now explore each of its major behaviour patterns: synergy, high concept and saturation booking.

Synergy

Synergy is an integral part of the entertainment conglomerate. It did not, however, originate there. Rather, it comes from corporate management principles in the business world. The principle's coming into the entertainment industry is attributed by scholars as coming via Steven J. Ross and Time-Warner.¹⁴⁰

Richard Maltby introduces synergy as "an alternative conceptualisation" of the economic logic behind conglomerate expansion.¹⁴¹ Conglomerates exist in a time when domestic box office receipts can make up as little as ten percent of total revenue from a single project.¹⁴² The remainder is filled by: foreign box office receipts, broadcasting rights for satellite, pay per view, premium cable, regular network and cable superstations, and then home video sales at rental and sell-through pricing in VHS, laserdisc and DVD formats, *plus* ancillary products like soundtrack albums, posters, calendars, trading cards, gaming cards, action figures, model kits, puzzles, novels, comicbooks, dolls, apparel, film frames and any other officially licensed product the studio and/or licensees can come up with. The number of

markets associated with film making increased rapidly from the seventies onwards. Today's film is no longer the main source of revenue but rather the ignition for a multi-product marketing onslaught.

Synergy instructs companies of any size to create products in other lines based on the primary line. This is different than horizontal expansion and horizontal integration. Horizontal expansion instructs the company to expand into other product lines. The philosophy behind horizontal expansion is that losses from one product line can be offset by profits in another. Horizontal integration instructs the company to expand into related product lines. The moral behind horizontal integration is that companies should use their knowledge in successful lines on new lines with related products. Synergy requires horizontal expansion or integration. Once other product lines exist, the company should create products in those other lines based on products in this line so that each product supports all the others. Thus the term "synergy" comes to mean the amalgamation of "synchronous energy" — all conglomerate divisions expend energy to the same project at the same time.

True interconnection reduces the costs of production and therefore the chance of financial risk. Costs are reduced because the company does not pay licensing fees to itself. Thus the record company pays nothing to the film studio it makes the soundtrack album for. This is done because ancillary products — if done properly — continually point the consumer towards the rest of the campaign.

The best example of synergy in the case of an adaptation is *Batman*. With the film's release came the pop soundtrack album with songs by Warner-Epic-Atlantic (WEA) artist Prince on WEA. Both film and soundtrack were promoted in WCI publications like *Entertainment Weekly*. *Batman*'s novel adaptation was published by Warner Books. The

comicbook adaptation was done by DC Comics. None of these divisions paid a licensing fee to Warner Bros. films (for images of the film) or to DC Comics (for the character trademark) since both were parts of the WCI family.

WCI also licensed a large number of products to other companies from which it *did* collect licensing fees. One example: McDonald's paid a licensing fee to produce *Batman* Happy Meal toys and collector glasses. This benefited both companies. Consumers seeking souvenirs to remind them of the film might seek out those only available at McDonald's. This required them to purchase one of the restaurant's regular products. In return, regular McDonald's customers might see the products and become interested in the film or another Bat-product. WCI didn't have a national fast food restaurant chain; it had to rely on those companies which did to fulfill a symbiotic relationship for promotion. Each licensing partner connected with WCI because WCI offered tremendous presence in the marketplace thanks to its horizontal expansion — and in many cases, that expansion meant WCI could afford to be choosy about those few companies it wanted to work with.

Of course, a synergetic relationship between products is only functional when consumers can identify the connection between them. Connections are reinforced by the next important action of the conglomerate: high concept.

High Concept

Television executives gave "high concept" its first meaning in the seventies. High concept telefilms had plots reducible to a single sentence of twenty-five words or less.¹⁴³ This sentence would be then used in the limited advertising space of *TV Guide* and thirty-second spots.

Justin Wyatt's *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* details how high concept has changed for the conglomerate setting. There it functions on two levels. The micro level expresses itself in film style. "More specifically, this style is based upon two major components: a simplification of character and narrative, and a strong match between image and music soundtrack throughout the film."¹⁴⁴ The macro level expresses itself in synergetic product lines. "High concept is definitely connected to two forces which have shaped the market for film powerfully in recent years: the development of new media (such as home video and cable) and the concurrent ownership changes within the film industry."¹⁴⁵ These levels of expression are not mutually exclusive.

I have already covered those forces which have "shaped the market for film." "Ownership changes within the film industry" are the transformations from Classical Hollywood studio to Corporate Hollywood division and then Conglomerate Hollywood centrepiece. Each step involved horizontal expansion. Corporations expanded with studios. Conglomerates expanded around studios. Integration is the ultimate goal of expansion. Integrated companies have only related product lines. Hollywood created its own lines with cable and home video. Products from one line support others in related lines via synergy, making the related lines ancillary markets for the initial product.

But synergy is only effective when consumers can identify the relationship between products. According to Wyatt, high concept films build the necessary audio and visual stimuli for identification right into production. This is the micro level at work. High concept manifests itself as audio and visual excess against a simplified plot.

Kristin Thompson takes issue with Wyatt's definition. Plot simplification is not unique to high concept films of the conglomerate era. Classical film, she asserts, can also be summarised in a single sentence.¹⁴⁶

Wyatt's confusion on simplification creates a superfluous connection between Conglomerate Hollywood and seventies telefilms. Simplification *does* occur in Conglomerate Hollywood's high concept productions. Indeed, it is a key component. But Conglomerate Hollywood's high concept productions have a different intention than seventies television. Television needed product familiarity. Logic borrowed from exhibition practice still dictates greater product familiarity means a greater propensity for an audience to consume that product. High concept telefilms gave viewers all they needed to know in a single sentence. High concept conglomerate projects give viewers all they need to know in a single image. The image used by conglomerate products does not always communicate plot to create product familiarity. The image often communicates a similarity to other products with that star of that genre. The rule of high concept is that the image must be repeatable across products until it becomes a familiar association to all products as a representative of the project — and the film at its core. Conglomerate high concept images are guided by the logic that greater product association creates greater product support.

High concept images cannot represent plot because they are not created by plot. They are created from excesses embedded into the film. Without those excesses, these would be ordinary films. Or, rather, these would be ordinary *genre* films, since high concept features are all modern blockbusters and the modern blockbusters (according to Buckland, above) are reincarnations of popular genres like the adventure serial. The blockbuster, paraphrasing André Bazin, is a 'supergenre' film. Bazin defines the superwestern as: "... a western that would be ashamed to be just itself, and looks for some additional interest to justify its existence... in short some quality extrinsic to the genre and which is supposed to enrich it."¹⁴ The supergenre film is a high concept production that cannot remain as is and so must look for some quality intrinsic to that genre to be exploited as excess. In other words,

the supergenre or blockbuster exploits key motifs of that genre to sell itself as a high concept film.

This is easy to understand given that the language of the genre is its motifs and icons. Motifs and icons of the western include the black and white cowboy hats, horses, wilderness and early civilization settings, shoot outs and saloon poker games. *Unforgiven* (1992) used western motifs and icons to sell itself as a high concept picture. Cover/poster artwork for the film had Clint Eastwood's full figure dominating the image, standing with his back to the viewer but keeping the pistol visible by holding it behind him. To his left are head shots of each of the stars. Below the head shots are three figures on horseback, silhouetted by the sunset. The horses, sunset, pistol, hats and other western garb all communicate 'western.' The title font was a woodcut, typical of the western's time period. Eastwood's presence hearkened back to the spaghetti westerns where he too played the quiet hero. This image was used to sell *Pale Rider* (1985), which puts Eastwood's face above a frontier town in its artwork. *Unforgiven* and *Pale Rider* are high concept westerns because they use this artwork in every associated product at the time — though there were not as many associated products as high concept films in other genres.

High concept really came into prominence with *Star Wars* (1977). The film is a western disguised as science fiction. This disguise led to visual excesses that were marketed in the artwork of the initial campaign¹⁴⁸ and beyond. These images are high concept imagery but they are not the dominant high concept imagery. That belongs to the title logo which appeared solo across the second set of campaign artwork. It is a simple image reproducible in any size. Any consumer seeking *Star Wars*-related merchandise to this day has only to look for the logo. New artwork for the final video release and subsequent launch of the Special Edition versions of the trilogy proved the power of that logo, since it was the one component never dropped.

And so this is the collision of micro and macro level high concept. The micro level creates audio and visual excesses. These excesses become images identifying genre, setting and unique characters. The macro level then reproduces the micro level's identifying images across its product lines. The consumer uses that identity to seek out other pleasurable objects with the same identification.

Comicbooks were using this system well before it came to feature film. No two cover images are ever identical. What marks them to be parts of the greater whole is shared images of title logo and star characters. In other words, it is the title logo and/or illustration of Spider-Man in the upper-left hand corner which marks each of his series to be connected.¹⁴⁹ Marvel's introduction of the shared universe (where in all characters share the same physical plane and interact with each other) transformed company logo into divisional marking. At DC, it is the "bullet" logo which marks the hero universe; DC division WildStorm's merged initials mark out its separate universe. At the macro level, associated products such as toys and apparel are easily identifiable because they carry character image, company logo and/or title logo.

More to the point, however, is that within the superhero universes of DC and Marvel each hero is reducible even further to an icon. These icons became a further divisional marker at Marvel in the early nineties as part of its five division publishing.¹⁵⁰ Spider-Man was reduced to a circle containing his red, black and white face mask. He was also represented by a black spider. The older the character, the greater the number of people who recognize what is represented by those icons.

Iconic representation only further increases Hollywood's attraction to the comics which began with their nostalgia factor. Adults consuming the comics' simplified world of this

juvenile medium are said to be attracted to the simplified world of their youth. Simpler times were happier times, the emotions of nostalgia. The longer the character has been around, the greater the audience susceptible to that nostalgia. The older the audience, the greater possibility that audience has children they wish to share the experience with. Then there is the connection of publishers to the multinational, horizontally integrated world of entertainment conglomerates.

Full integration allows for greater synergy between product lines. Resulting products are only identifiable as being part of that project by their high concept imagery. This imagery comes right from the initial product which in most cases are Hollywood films. Comics have the advantage of already offering high concept imagery that is recognised by a percentage of the potential audience. All a conglomerate has to do with comic-based imagery is modify it slightly to create a film version of the existing artwork.

Superman was the first adaptation to do so. Three images were used from the film: the Superman figure, the Superman logo and the Superman crest.

Superman's "figure" (body image) wasn't representational of the film and had to change. Comics are illustrated. *Superman* wasn't. *Superman* was a live-action feature film with Christopher Reeves in the starring role of Clark Kent/Superman. WCI needed an image that would connect both with film title and audience awareness. Clark Kent images were ignored. The studio went with an image of Reeves in Superman tights in flight position. Behind him was an image of "Metropolis" (actually New York City).¹⁵¹ The city cannot be reproduced accurately in small sized advertisements but this was not a bother to the studio. Reeves as Superman *could* be reproduced accurately. In colour the connection was obvious. Superman is the only male superhero in red, blue and yellow with red cape. In black and white the connection was still obvious. The image of Superman in positions of

flight had been disseminated for years to audiences via other Superman products like the comics, animated films, live action serials and live action television series.

Logo and icon didn't have to change at all. The feature versions still had to be drawn line art creations. Line art is designed to be reproducible at various sizes. Variation was made between the feature version and the comics by colour choice. Metallic grey was chosen instead of the comics' traditional colours. This proved advantageous to WCI. Metallic grey versions of the title logo and icon marked out those products specific to the film. At the same time, lack of difference in actual design meant that multicolour versions of title logo and icon on Superman products not connected to the film could be marketed simultaneously to feed into audience awareness. In other words, Superman products in the late 1978/early 1979 didn't need to be *Superman* products to promote the film. Audiences connected products from years of contact with the logo and icon.

WCI duplicated this system a decade later for *Batman*. The feature version was gold, not yellow. Meehan:

“...WCI license[d] two different properties: *Batman* the movie or Batman of comics and television fame. Potential licensees could opt for the film's logo or the traditional logo; for the Dark Knight or the Dynamic Duo.... This mix-or-match approach gave WCI's 100 licensed manufacturers considerable latitude in devising merchandise campaigns to cash in on WCI's ad campaign for the film and on Batman's [fiftieth] anniversary.”¹⁵²

These examples only further emphasize the connection between synergy and high concept. Conglomerates use synergy to market projects across more than one product line. Conglomerate divisions and licensees must choose one of the high concept images chosen by the conglomerate. These high concept images communicate basic film information. These high concept images communicate association with the film.

But this only covers two parts of the equation. Conglomerates still have to get these products to market — and that is the duty of the final behaviour of the conglomerate being examined this chapter.

Saturation Booking

Hollywood learned saturation by example when director Tom Laughlin filed suit against Warner Bros. and settled out of court. At issue was Warner Bros.' handling of his film *Billy Jack* (1971). Laughlin re-released the film on his own in 1973. This time he rented a handful of California theatres (four-walling the picture) himself. To fill those theatres, he advertised the film but with a difference in campaign strategy: carefully researched area demographics. *Billy Jack*'s reissue was advertised only on those radio and television stations which reached the maximum number of potential audience members in a set area around those theatres showing the film. Different advertisements were used to target the film to different audience groups. Saturated airwaves worked. The \$250,000 investment in advertisement resulted in \$1.02 million first week ticket sales.¹⁵³ Profit was increased for the film's sequel. Laughlin did not four-wall *The Trial of Billy Jack* (1974) across the US but did saturate national airwaves with advertisement for the film. The cost of negatives and advertising was recouped within a week.¹⁵⁴

MCA was the first corporation to really use saturation booking.¹⁵⁵ MCA chose not to follow road show circuit releasing with *Jaws* (1975). Instead, *Jaws* opened on as many screens as possible at once. Airwaves were saturated with advertisements. *Jaws*' campaign also involved synergetic high concept marketing. The film's poster was used on a paperback reprinting of the novel upon which the film was based. The film's logo and poster was used in print advertisements. The poster image was reproduced for the cover of the soundtrack. Released all at once, *Jaws*' presence became inescapable. It became the

highest grossing film of all time.¹⁵⁶ Saturation became standard practice after *King Kong* (1976), *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1978), *Grease* (1978), *Jaws 2* (1978), *Superman* and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979) also used the practice to take the largest shares of the box office for their respective years.¹⁵⁷

Saturation, therefore, is defined as corporate and Conglomerate Hollywood's practice of maximum advertisement for a project — with print, television and radio ads as well as associated products in associated product lines — to reach the largest percentage of potential audience members in the shortest amount of time. "The goal was to exhaust the box office within two weeks rather than allow the film to play out across several months."¹⁵⁸

Today's blockbuster cycle is packed with saturation campaigns. Skyrocketing star salaries and higher emphasis on expensive visual effects continue to raise blockbuster budgets. Larger budgets mean greater attendance is needed before the film can reach profitability. Greatest attendance occurs during the summer and Thanksgiving-through-Christmas weeks. Every blockbuster is aimed at one of these two periods because they also require large audiences to break even. More blockbusters means more competition. Saturation makes the maximum impact in little time. It encourages greatest attendance in the opening weeks while subsequent weeks are supported by ancillary product campaigns and word of mouth.

This makes advertisement crucial. It's not just advertisement for a film; conglomerates have far more at stake than that. Synergy creates the need to sell soundtracks, adaptations, apparel and many other products alongside the film. Synergetic high concept products are a marketing force measured only by cash registers taking cash from consumers demanding what was advertised. In other words, advertising catalyses sales. Saturation advertising

budgets which eclipse the base film really aren't eclipsing the total project. The project is also being advertised so consumers will recognize it later on home video.

The Fellowship of the Ring (2001), the first part of *J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings* trilogy, is a perfect example of the new saturation campaign. Saturation began in production. A teaser trailer advertising the epic quality of the trilogy was released to the Internet.¹⁵⁹ Fanfare was great but reports also circulated around the large number of hits the site took — far more than previous Internet trailer fascination *Star Wars: Episode I — The Phantom Menace* (1999). Potential audiences were made aware of the film's approach a year and a half before release. Subsequent advertisements would build on the awareness created by that first trailer, leading to total awareness of the film and its basic narrative by the time of release.

MIB: Men In Black used saturation twice. This selection from the study sample was released 4 July 1997. Columbia Pictures preceded June and early July video releases with *MIB* trailers. The advertisement trailers were put on cassettes of films which targeted similar demographics. Columbia also advertised heavily on television. Advertising was increased over the weeks up to the launch of the film. Print ads appeared in magazines reaching target demographics. Columbia wanted to inform as many potential audience members as possible about the film's release.

Joining the film's launch were associated products. These products included new *MIB* property owner Marvel's *Men in Black* mini-series.¹⁶⁰ Action figures based on characters in the film were released by Marvel division Toy Biz. Ray Ban released sunglasses like the ones provided for the film (a license agreement). *Men in Black*, however, was assisted most by the accompanying release of Will Smith's "Men in Black" single from the soundtrack.¹⁶¹ The song and its accompanying music video reached the top of the charts.¹⁶²

High placement translated into good air play for both video and song. The saturation campaign kept audiences aware of *Men in Black*'s presence at the box office.

When the single, video and film fell out of the top ten, a second campaign was launched on television. The second campaign had Smith and Tommy Lee Jones speak directly to the viewers. Those that hadn't seen the film were told to go out and see it. Those that had were told to look into the little red light. Those who had seen the film recognised Jones holding a key prop — the "neuralizer" which creates a lapse in memory. Viewers who had seen the film knew that their memory was meant to be erased by this fictional device. It's not. However, they may have recognised the underlying message: your memory needs refreshing — go see the film again. It's a message that could only be explained to those who hadn't seen the film. Those that hadn't might now be intrigued to see it. The second campaign prolonged awareness of *Men in Black*, helping it become the third highest grossing comics-based adaptation to date.¹⁶¹

The campaigns used for *MIB* and a number of other films both in and out of the study sample demonstrate perfectly the importance synergy, high concept and saturation booking have for the post-Classical American film industry. The combination of all three maximises market presence and profit potential. Today's marketplace is more competitive than ever before, and so contemporary Hollywood's adoption of these behaviour patterns *on top* of its organizational evolution reveals a more market-conscious industry ready to use any means necessary to boost demand for its products.

Comic properties fit into this system perfectly. Publishers already have synergetic relationships with the entertainment conglomerates. Their characters have existing high concept imagery that audiences everywhere can recognize. And the comicbook publishers will greatly assist the saturation campaigns with their products out of necessity, for they

are only licensing their characters for adaptation into feature film to generate interest in those primary products.

Synergy, high concept and saturation booking may have been adopted for economic efficiency but they only increase demand for *existing* product through ancillary markets and heavy advertising. The product itself must already carry aspects which will appeal to the market(s) it is going to be advertised for. As the final section of this chapter will now show, blockbusters of the entertainment conglomerate have in themselves a particular characteristic which appeals to multiple audiences — a characteristic which comics also have.

The Blockbuster & the Family-Adventure Film

Audiences are always heterogeneous, as no two consumers are alike. Homogeneity exists only to a limited extent when consumers are grouped according to characteristic. These characteristics include geographical location, household income, age and gender. Groups of consumers possessing particular characteristics are called a “market segment.” The production of youth pictures (aimed at men and women aged 18-25) and Blaxploitation (aimed at African-Americans) proved that Hollywood has been keen to market films towards particular audiences since the late sixties. The identifying characteristics of any market segment are also called “demographics.”

The logic of mainstream movie making is easy. The greatest potential for profit lies in seeking out more than one audience segment and thereby more than one profit potential.

With greater profit potential comes greater investment. This is where blockbusters get involved. Summer and Christmas blockbusters by the end of the nineties cost upwards of

\$50 million to produce. *Waterworld* (1995) and *Titanic* (1997) cost over \$200 million to make. No single market segment offers enough profit potential to cover such costs. Cost recovery can only come from a mixture of market segment revenues. Saturation campaigns make every demographic aware of the project's release. Saturation advertisements and high concept imagery follow with focus on specific demographics to ensure their attention. As a result, blockbusters are constructed with conscious attention to preferences of each audience segment.

Peter Krämer comes to the same conclusion defining "the family-adventure" category in "Would you take your child to see this film?" There are two distinct audiences most wanted by Hollywood: parent-child families and young men. Males between 18 and 25 make up the largest filmgoing demographic. Parent-child families make up the second largest group. Families attend in greater frequency during the blockbuster cycles without coincidence: summer and Christmas are periods without school.¹⁶⁴

Family-adventure films are generally focused on a male protagonist. Gender of the protagonist is, however, irrelevant. What matters more about the protagonist is the protagonist's familial surroundings. Separation from parent and the seeking of a surrogate family are circumstances understandable by parent *and* child. Krämer asserts that the interpretation by child and parent is different. Parents can rationally analyse the situation and, based on experience, predict the logical conclusion. Children respond instinctively to the familial situation because it plays on real emotions and desires that they can recognize.¹⁶⁵

The hero's quest is a specific familial situation. Fulfilment of that quest often requires overcoming great obstacles. This is the adventure component of the family-adventure film. Men aged 18 to 25 are drawn to films with a high action-adventure quotient. In the

nineties, this action-adventure quotient invariably included spectacular special effects. The largest filmgoing demographic is attracted to this effects-laden action-adventure quotient of the quest while the second largest is attracted to the interior character dynamics and goals.¹⁶⁶

The end result was that by 1996, sixteen of *Variety's* top twenty grossing films could be classified as "family-adventure" films.¹⁶⁷

Comics are attractive because they operate on similar principles. One of Reynolds' seven characteristics is separation from parents.¹⁶⁸ The ultimate goal of the protagonist is a stable family situation but that goal can never be truly achieved until the hero can also provide a protected environment for his new family. The ultimate protected environment is, of course, the social utopia. The previous chapter stated that the quest for social utopia is never-ending because the forces of chaos (ie. villains) always outnumber the hero. Each battle with a villain is an action-laden adventure. This cumulatively leads to comic heroes having not *one* quest but rather *two* quests. There is the quest for an unattainable social utopia and there is the quest for family.

Both quests appear in each of the examples above. *Batman's* Bruce Wayne becomes Batman in response to the murder of his parents. Vicky Vale creates the opportunity for construction of a new, more traditional family structure. Wayne can never commit to marriage as later films in the series communicate. Marriage would compromise his dual existence, and so the Batman can only accept into his family those that build on both aspects of his life: Alfred Pennyworth, Dick Grayson and Barbara Gordon.¹⁶⁹

Superman begins with baby Kal-El escaping the destruction of his home planet Krypton. Separation from parent occurs a second time in the film when Clark Kent loses his foster

father to a heart attack. It is this second loss which encourages him to seek out his first parent. The Kal-El and Clark Kent identities merge. Kent does not return home to Smallville, Kansas. He goes to Metropolis instead. There he joins the staff of *The Daily Planet*. Editor Perry White becomes a surrogate father. Photographer Jimmy Olsen becomes a surrogate sibling. Clark spends the remainder of the film (and its sequels) battling villains while simultaneously seeking romance and avoiding union with Lois Lane.

Men In Black does not have separation from a parent; instead it has separation from family. This is evidenced through Jones' character K. Smith's J catches K using agency equipment to spy on the love of his life. The pain of loss is so much that K cannot leave the organization without training a replacement. Once J is ready to fill K's shoes, K returns home. J is an acceptable replacement for K because he is willing to sacrifice his identity and all those around him to join the Men In Black family in protecting Earth "from the scum of the universe."

Hollywood's attraction to comics is due to comicbooks having characters suitable for family-adventure scenarios. Parents recognising the characters from their past will relish family-adventure's typical regression because there is added familiarity. These are artifacts from their childhood and so they are more inclined to take their children. This is what publishers want. If nostalgia was not enough then certainly possession of properties already suited for family-adventure scenarios and instant recognition by multiple demographics make the comic character attractive to Hollywood for adaptation.

Casper (1995) is a non-superhero film which used all of these characteristics. Although Casper first debuted in *The Friendly Ghost* (1945),¹⁷⁰ he is equally remembered for his comicbook appearances. In the sixties, Casper outsold all superhero comics combined!¹⁷¹

Adults were attracted to the adaptation by nostalgia. They recognised this character from their youth. They brought their children because of that recognition. Adults unfamiliar with Casper were attracted to the film by The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)'s PG and "suitable for children" ratings. Only adults would recognize Father Guido Sarducci (a *Saturday Night Live* regular in the 1970s) in cameo. Comic aware adults would also recognize the Harvey name as an homage to the character's publisher.

Children relate to the film through Casper and Kat Harvey. Kat's mother has died. Her father is weird. She has just moved into the neighbourhood and needs friends. Casper wants to be her friend. Casper is innocent and cannot understand why his uncles think being mean is fun. The ghosts do not appreciate the Harveys living in their home. Carrigan Crittenden does not want the ghosts to accept the Harveys. She wants the Harveys to make the ghosts leave because they prevent her from retrieving the treasure hidden in a secret chamber of the house. Carrigan's attempt to take control of the machine is the main action of the film. By the end, Carrigan is stopped and the Harveys have managed to get the ghosts to accept them.

Casper also has all of Conglomerate Hollywood's other requirements. There are special effects (Casper and his three uncles are computer generated images). The quest narrative tied to a family-adventure theme will appeal to multiple demographics. Adults will feel nostalgic towards the character. This nostalgia can be redirected, via synergy, to other products made by the conglomerate bearing the high concept images in the film. Casper is a recognizable image. There are enough potential markets to warrant a big budget, and to validate a large saturation campaign which will attract a significant audience for the first weeks.

Family-adventure narratives complete the evolution of Classical Hollywood into

Conglomerate Hollywood. Its application reveals Conglomerate Hollywood is now using a more sophisticated audience model than before.

The ultimate goal of this chapter was to uncover Conglomerate Hollywood's motivations for adapting comic to feature film. The horizontal expansion and integration of the conglomerate has created the need for synergy. Synergy can only be effective when consumers can easily associate products. High concept imagery fulfils that role. Saturation campaigns then utilise this large number of products to make such a great impression in the marketplace that sales will recover investment costs back and begin making profits quickly. Of course, the consumers will only consume those products which are attractive to them. Family-adventure is the most attractive narrative formula Conglomerate Hollywood has to offer, for it responds directly to the desires of the two largest market segments. The combination of synergy, high concept and saturation coupled with family-adventure narratives proves that Conglomerate Hollywood has evolved from Classical Hollywood with an increased awareness of market forces. There is just one catch: Conglomerate Hollywood needs to find properties which will allow a family-adventure narrative to be built *and* create synergetic, high concept products capable of being advertised with saturation. The comic industry offers a tremendous number of properties which answer all of those needs. How the comics-based adaptation responds to both the needs of Conglomerate Hollywood and the needs of the comicbook industry is answered in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: High Infidelity

Classical Hollywood film was illusionist, delivering stories with seamless transition from scene to scene, across four to five acts connected by cause and effect. The previous chapter established that story films (and by extension their illusionist style) became dominant in Hollywood because audiences responded best to them. Audiences continued to prefer story films through the evolutions of Classical to Corporate and then Conglomerate Hollywood. The continued demand for story films and their illusionist style ensures that they remain dominant in American film production to this day.

All comics-based adaptations are story films. As such, they were subjected to the rules of illusionist filmmaking. The seamless narrative flow demanded by illusionist filmmaking could not be disrupted by the comicbook publishers' and the entertainment conglomerates' responses to their industrial requirements.

This chapter identifies the manner in which the industrial requirements of both comicbook publishers and entertainment conglomerates manifest themselves in each adaptation. In all but one case, the response involves the origin tale. This chapter will prove why origin tales are the industries' preferred solution.

It has to do with the nature of comic strips and comicbooks themselves. The source text which they present for adaptation is not the same as other print media. The first section of this chapter details those characteristics which separate them from novels, short stories and plays. Comic texts are not confined by page count nor are they confined by title. They are theoretically infinite, ending only when the character ceases to appear in print. Character appearances routinely adhere to the strict rules of continuity, and so the three forms of continuity must be identified and explained in order to fully comprehend their impact on

the comic text. Comics are also a visual medium. The next section reveals that comics do not share the same budget limitations as film. Exact duplication of comicdom's special effects-heavy superhero narratives would make profit impossible. Origin tales increase the conglomerate's profit potential by eliminating many uneconomical duplications.

Will Brooker maintains that the cinematic result is not an adaptation but rather an interpretation. The purpose of my response is not only to show that the results *are*, in fact, adaptations but also to explain how the use of origin tale in fact *increases* the amount of material adapted.

With the importance of the origin established, all that remains is to identify how the origin is actually presented on film. Character situation dictates which of the four manners of origin presentation detailed at the end of this chapter will be used. Each form is presented with specific examples chosen from the study sample (Appendix II).

Continuity & The Comic Text

Chapter Two outlined the intentions of the comicbook industry. Publishers hope to increase the number of readers by using the adaptation as an advertisement for the character and their appearances in print. Those appearances can occur weekly, biweekly or monthly and in a variety of formats including the single issue (or one-shot), limited or ongoing series and graphic novel. Whichever the format, the variety on specialty store shelves around the world illustrates one important fact: comicbooks are unlike any other adaptation source.

Comicbooks and their predecessor, comic strips, differ significantly from novels, plays, short stories and other print media. The texts which these *other* sources offer for

adaptation come in finite form. The text *comics* offer for adaptation come in *infinite* form. Comicbook characters are commercial properties. Traditionally, publishers are able to keep them in print long after their individual creators have moved on because they, not the creators, own them. Creator-owned properties licensed for publication by one of the four premiere publishers¹⁷² is a phenomenon which only developed in the 1990s. Publishers will keep their owned character in print so long as sufficient demand exists.

Just as Hollywood studios continuously adjust production slates to match demand (and thereby maximize revenue to expenses), publishers continuously change their production slates for the same reason. Titles which can no longer attract enough readers to remain profitable are cancelled. After filing for chapters 11 and 13, Marvel drew this line informally at 22,000 copies per issue — leaving \$35,000 after cost of printing for each of its monthly books.¹⁷³ But the cancellation of a comicbook series does not translate into the end of the character's exploits.

Characters of cancelled comicbook titles are able to continue their journey towards quest fulfilment thanks to the concept of the “shared universe,” created by Marvel Comics. The idea was simple: all characters existed in the same world unless otherwise stated. This allowed Stan Lee and his artists¹⁷⁴ the freedom to mix heroes and villains as desired. Characters were rarely restricted to one particular book. This differed from the practice at DC. Marvel’s “distinguished competition”¹⁷⁵ often mixed properties with clearly different geographical surroundings. It was not until 1986 that DC officially made former Fawcett property Shazam’s version of New York City the same New York City home to the Justice Society of America.¹⁷⁶ Under the rule of shared universe, those characters which would not share the exact geographical and historical surroundings that the rest of the company’s properties used would be clearly identified as being outside that principle universe.¹⁷⁷

The engine which drives the shared universe effectively is continuity. Continuity enforces consistency. According to Richard Reynolds, continuity comes in three forms. Serial continuity is diachronic, occurring over time. It dictates that each appearance of a character must be consistent with all previous appearances in order for there to be logical development of that character. Hierarchal continuity is synchronous, following character interaction rather than character development. Certain opponents are easier to defeat than others. Certain obstacles are easier to defeat than others. Hierarchal continuity dictates that the challenge each obstacle and/or opponent the hero faces must be consistent with the levels of opposition previously set. Serial continuity merges with hierarchal continuity to form structural continuity. Previous encounters have taught Superman to expect trickery from Lex Luthor (serial). Luthor poses more of a challenge to Superman than gangsters (hierarchal). Structural continuity in a shared universe setting ensures a consistency of ranking amongst heroes and villains, with each interaction of personalities reflecting their shared experiences past.

Continuity's value to comicdom is enormous, particularly when the popularity of individual properties led to development of franchises. The popularity of Superman in *Action Comics* led DC to launch *Superman* a year later to meet audience demand. Continuity prevented one book from contradicting the other. The three forms of continuity now ensure consistency among the four Superman monthlies today: *Superman*, *The Adventures of Superman*, *Superman: The Man of Steel* and *Action Comics*.¹⁷⁸ Episodal narratives divided between the four (commonly called crossovers) meant that each title could not be considered a separate text even if so desired. The narrative of Superman flows through all four and more: he visits other books as part of his duties as a member of the Justice League of America (*JLA*). Shared universes guided by continuity unite the hero narrative into the sum of all appearances to date regardless of issue titles. This sum of appearances is the real text being offered for adaptation.

Popular characters in film and print can appear subsequently under different titles but there is a distinct difference between comic hero narratives and hero narratives in other media. While heroes of all media have intermediate goals which can be met (ie. the solving of a particular problem), the personal goals of the comic hero can never be met. Therefore the comic hero is kept in a perpetual state of quest fulfilment. In other words, the comic hero is dissatisfied to return to the status quo at the end of any particular adventure because it was his or her dissatisfaction with that situation which led him/her to become an adventurer in the first place. Conversely, most plays, novels and films have termination points by which the hero has to be satisfied — a base situation from which subsequent adventures build.

The best object for comparison is *Star Trek*. The principle goal of Starfleet is — like the superhero's quest for social utopia — one that is never ending. Space continuously expands and therefore Starfleet will forever have places to “boldly go where no one has gone before.” Structural continuity is necessary to maintain which races are friend or foe to the Federation at which times. And there is direct interaction between each ‘title’ of the *Star Trek* franchise. The name *Star Trek* acts as brand identifier for the series (original, animated, *Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager* and *Enterprise*) and movies. These combine to form the overall narrative of the *Star Trek* ‘universe.’

A typical episode of each *Star Trek* series begins with the crew going about their daily duties. A crisis occurs which the crew can only resolve by overcoming obstacles. Resolution of the crisis returns the crew to a similar situation to that established at the beginning of the episode. The viewer is aware that another crisis looms for the crew in the next episode, but is unsure of which crisis it will be.

A typical superhero narrative also begins with the hero 'at rest.' A crisis occurs which the hero can only resolve by overcoming obstacles. The conclusion of the crisis does not return the hero to the identical situation at the beginning of that adventure. Interludes during the story (advancing sub-plots) already place the hero of the comic at the beginning of an impending crisis.

So long as the series remains profitable, comic and television writers have an unlimited number of episodes to use as sequels. Feature films do not work that way. Each film is handled independently. Film sequels are only slated for production *if* the original had generated enough revenue for the studio to have considered them. While a production team may envision a series of features, in reality the series will only last so long as the studio is willing to produce it.

Frank Miller's assessment of filmmaking underlines the importance of being self enclosed.

"...[M]ovies are strict about length; they have to be very linear and very short. There really isn't room for that many scenes in a movie and it requires a very disciplined, focused kind of story."¹⁷⁹

Star Trek is perfect for feature production because each episode's return to general situation is self enclosure. NBC's cancellation of the original series midway through the five year mission did not leave viewers with unanswered questions. Each *Star Trek* feature film with the exception of *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1981) opens and closes with the crew as an intact unit of heroes who have overcome many obstacles protecting the Federation and its ideals. Typical story construction for comicbooks does not have this type of self enclosure.

The producers of comics-based adaptations may choose a story which is self enclosed, but doing so raises another key difference between comics and continuity-using television series. Television series aren't often adapted until after cancellation. Placing the feature

narrative as a continuation of the series after cancellation makes them extensions of continuity rather than conflicts. When an adapted continuity-conscious television series is still in production, producers prepare a specific berth for the film to fill. *X-Files: Fight the Future* (1998) used this type of framework. The events were set at the conclusion of that year's television season. The first episode in the season afterwards made references to all major events within the feature to prevent viewers who missed the film from being confused. *The X-Files* was only able to set a berth into its ongoing structural continuity because the production slate allowed it.

Comicbooks are unable to make such a place within continuity for their adaptations. High concept demands that Hollywood seek out comic properties for adaptation with existing brand identification. Publishers maintain brand identification through continued presence of the characters in print. Publishers want to encourage their existing readership to follow the characters' exploits on film because their attendance may boost ticket sales enough to encourage the studio to license other properties. But filmmaking is a long process. The final product can come years after the agreement is signed. Continuity could be badly disrupted if a creative team developed the character in a way that greatly conflicted with the final film. Restraining writers from developing the character in the comics to prevent any possible conflict with the adaptation would also be disastrous because it causes the character to stagnate. If a character becomes too stagnant, readers will cease caring about the character and refuse to consume any further products with that character.

Origin tales save continuity. Origin tales show the protagonist's transformation from ordinary person into hero. Starting at the beginning prevents any lack of fidelity to continuity because there are no previous adventures with which to be continuous; it allows filmmakers to set just how much of the comic text will be used for the adaptation.

It also increases the adaptation's ability to fulfil its primary function. Some readers will attend, but they are only one part of the audience. Publishers license their properties hoping that a film's much larger audience will bring them new and returning readers. Lapsed readers are attracted to the adaptation by the nostalgia Hollywood hopes to use to differentiate their product. (Filmgoers, after all, are more inclined to attend films they know over those they do not.) The knowledge lapsed readers bring into theatres is not current with the character's present state. Non-readers, attracted to the adaptation by its blockbuster 'event' status and heavy advertising as outlined in Chapter Three, come with neither current nor out-of-date information. Origin tales teach the non-reader the key characteristics of each hero while simultaneously correcting any misinformation the lapsed reader may have, thus ensuring *every* viewer has the same basic information from which to work.

A common understanding of the characters benefits publishers because new and returning readers enticed by the adaptations into the comics will have all the necessary information to avoid confusion no matter the comic with those same characters they choose. Establishing a common understanding of the character early in the film is beneficial for Conglomerate Hollywood because lack of confusion increases the chance of audiences being entertained, and entertained audiences will often consume the associated products of a synergetic corporation identified by its high concept imagery.

Comics as a Visual Medium

A third benefit of origin tales is that they free the adaptation from image duplication. Image duplication is a concern for many comic readers, past and present. Comics are a visual medium. They rely on the visual as much, if not more, than the verbal. Regular publication of the character's exploits have made the readership intimately familiar with

the character's illustrated appearance.

Fidelity to that illustrated appearance, though, is extremely difficult. One of Reynolds' seven tenets is that superheroes are different from regular human beings. That difference manifests itself in the real world by the lack of Hollywood actors with superhero physiques (Arnold Schwarzenegger notwithstanding). Hollywood is not quick to abandon its actors for physique-matching bodybuilders because those bodybuilders lack the star presence needed to attract non-comic audiences.

Too much star presence can ruin an adaptation. *2000 A.D.*'s "Judge Dredd" stories are set in post-apocalyptic America. Totalitarianism rules through its faceless soldiers, the Judges. *Judge Dredd* (1995) violated the series' use of the Judges as faceless forces of terror by having its star, Sylvester Stallone, operate without his helmet on numerous occasions through the film. *Judge Dredd*'s deliberate changes to the source material to suit star presence greatly decreased its value as an instructional tool for new readers since the film and comic now differed too greatly in important areas.

The importance of a correct intersection between image and star was clearly established by *Batman*. "The 29 November 1988 issue of *The Wall Street Journal* reported that there were financial jitters concerning the *Batman* franchise film because of the vociferous fan backlash to the casting of Michael Keaton."¹⁸⁰ At the time, Keaton was well associated with comedic roles in *Mr. Mom* (1983) and *Beetlejuice* (1988). Fans could not picture Keaton portraying the same dark avenger image WCI was promoting through DC's graphic novels. WCI was only able to reassure those fans that Keaton was the right actor with a hastily-assembled 90-second trailer showing Keaton in action as Batman. It was the image of Batman crashing through the art gallery's skylight which reassured fans most. The image matched the reader's comics experience-based expectations of how Batman

should appear.¹⁸¹

Batman's crashing through the skylight had a *perceived* fidelity to the comicbooks; in truth, it was not an exact duplication of any comicbook panel to date. Reynolds' separation of superhero from ordinary human lies more with the superhero's spectacular abilities. Comicbooks are free to use these abilities at whim without added cost: artists are paid set per-page fees no matter how many abilities are shown on panel. The cost of all special effects in a Hollywood movie are the sum of each individual effect rather than a "blanket" cost (that is, a cost for all effects no matter the number or scale). Many a Hollywood blockbuster adaptation has been postponed because the cost of duplicating each ability using special effects would exceed the budget.¹⁸²

Animated adaptations pay for effects differently. Unlike live action film, animated features can have an unlimited number of effects drawn in because the cost for each illustration is the same. The poor box office performance of *Titan A.E.* (2000), a wide release animated feature aimed at slightly older audiences, only reinforced Conglomerate Hollywood's belief that teen and adult audiences are not willing to consume animated features in quantities needed for decent profits. Chapter Three established that teen and adult audiences are two of the most important parts of Conglomerate Hollywood's audience model, and so their strong preference for live-action over animation has resulted in Conglomerate Hollywood's preference for live action adaptation as well.

Readers intimate with the comic text are the most critical portion of the audience. The relationship between these fans and the source text is often possessive. They will pick through every frame of the adaptation to determine how far the film has strayed from 'their' text. The futile nature of their search for fidelity — since it is obvious live action can never duplicate exactly what is illustrated — has led Conglomerate Hollywood to see the

origin tale as a way to silence many complaints.

The transformation of ordinary being to superhero requires a reconsideration of the relationships the protagonist has with those around him. Concentration on the origin tale, therefore, requires the filmmaker to spend some time with the hero, not in physical confrontation with the villain, but rather in discussion with other characters as to who they are and what is going on. It also takes some time for the hero to learn his powers fully, and so the hero's arsenal of abilities (and therefore effects) is limited by his inexperience.

Origin tales are advantageous to Conglomerate Hollywood because it allows filmmakers to reduce the number of special effect sequences needed. Action sequences are replaced by dialogue with other characters. This dialogue serves the publishers' need to establish the characters for the audience. Dialogue also allows the filmmakers to put their own interpretation of the character's personality forward. That interpretation then reflects back into the film by putting the new hero against the threat in a new way. Having the hero battle the villain in a non-comics based narrative prevents the film from having to duplicate any sequences of the comicbook exactly, therefore saving it from many charges of infidelity to the source text.

The Brooker Challenge

Will Brooker charged in "Batman: One Life, Many Faces" that the live action feature film's use of its own narrative results in the final product being an interpretation of the source text rather than an adaptation.

"In contrast to the current trend for claiming a return to the 'authentic' ur-text in literary adaptation — *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), even Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996) which, despite its play with costume and setting, boasts a fidelity to the original Folio — the recent film versions of Batman [*sic*], like those before them, must

strictly be regarded as free interpretations built around a basic framework, rather than adaptation as we currently understand the term.”¹⁸³

Later, in *Batman Unmasked*, Brooker clarified his charge to mean:

“It does not rely for its narrative structure on a specific text, its dialogue is not based on the dialogue of an ‘original’, it does not refer back to any particular comic for its characterisation, its tone or its visualisation of Batman and his surroundings.”¹⁸⁴

I disagree. Brooker’s assessment does not take into account the ontological differences between comic and novel or play mentioned above. Comicbooks’ presence on magazine racks at newsstands led to their classification as periodicals. Periodicals of fiction require new stories month after month in a cycle which ends only at cancellation.

Nowhere is Brooker’s assessment proven more faulty than in his handling of graphic novels and prestige format one-shots. Brooker’s comparative analysis of film to comic texts — plural, not singular — causes him to treat the graphic novel and prestige format as separate entities from the regular Batman comics.

“The origin of the Joker in Burton’s film is similar to that given in *The Killing Joke*, in that the character falls into a vat of acid, and the scene where Batman suspends a criminal off the ledge of a roof recalls a similar moment in *The Dark Knight Returns*.”¹⁸⁵

At the same time, his discourse on the corporate-constructed identity of Batman unites the graphic novels, prestige formats and monthly comicbooks, along with every other Batman-related DC publication, into one unified dialogue bound by the same rules set out in the editorial handbook or “Bat-bible.”

Brooker’s conclusion that *Batman* borrows from a number of individual stories within the character’s overall text cannot, however, be ignored: it is a true reflection of the adaptation process. The publishers’ need to keep its popular properties in print after the creators’ departure resulted in character texts with multiple authorship. Writers have distinct styles.

Each wants to leave his own mark on the character. That mark is created by concentrating on specific aspects of the character which most attract the writer to that character. Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* chooses to focus on Batman's brutal enforcement of order in Gotham City while Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke* chooses to focus on the Batman's continuous failure to predict the Joker's next act of chaos. Whatever the aspect(s) of the character a writer chooses to examine, serial continuity dictates that the exploration and development of those characteristics must be continuous with what has come before.

Many writers make that connection by beginning their run on a comicbook title with a retelling of the origin. As the origin is retold, the aspect(s) upon which the writer has chosen to focus as his angle into the character are brought into prominence while the remaining aspects are pushed into the background. This retelling, then, defines the new interpretation of the character within the context of the character's overall situation.

New readers need the key characteristics of the superhero in order to fully understand the hero, and so publishers encourage this repetition of origin. The alteration to suit a writer's particular tastes is equally supported, since it prevents the character from simultaneously becoming stagnant.

Hollywood recognises the important benefit of duplicating that system. There is insufficient time in a film to present all aspects of a character. Adaptations must focus on just one or two aspects, leaving the others to be examined by sequels. On *which* aspects of the character the adaptation will focus is the choice of the director.

Adopting the origin system turns the film into an adaptation of both the character concept *and* the typical narrative construction found in comicbooks starring that character. In other words: Brooker must be correct that the comics-based film is not a duplication of any one

particular story in dialogue or visualisation because the adaptation bases its narrative on the overall structure repeated time and time again in the larger character text.

A return visit to *Batman* reveals this to be true. The film follows the same formula found in Batman comics. Batman is enforcing a sense of order when chaos erupts: a new villain has arrived, and he wants to become the dominant force in Gotham. In *Batman*, it is the Joker. The police cannot stop the villain. A confrontation between Batman and the villain ensues as Batman and the Joker face off in the art gallery. There are complicating actions, during which the villain may get the upper hand. Batman refuses to let the Joker succeed in poisoning the citizens of Gotham and chases his enemy to a fatal confrontation atop the bell tower. In the end Batman always triumphs over the enemy, thus returning Gotham to the limited order which it had before that villain arrived.

The same can be said about the sequels. *Batman Returns* (1992) introduces the Penguin and the Catwoman. The Penguin is killed. Catwoman is left free but Burton makes clear that she is no longer a threat to Gotham. In *Batman Forever* (1995), the Riddler is locked up in Arkham Asylum while Two-Face has to recover from the injuries sustained in his final scene. *Batman and Robin* (1997) leaves Poison Ivy and Mister Freeze in prison, the latter being left with little reason to continue his crime spree. Though not part of the study sample because it is an animated film, *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm* (1993) uses the formula as well since the unmasked villain leaves Gotham by the end of the story.

Duplication of image and dialogue cannot be exact for reasons already stated in this chapter. The presentation of new events within the old framework would make the adaptation a welcome addition to the comics' character text were it not for one important fact: in order to protect the structural continuity of its titles, the publisher chooses to define the adaptation as being outside comic continuity. Brooker makes his devotion to

the comic text clear throughout the text (even stating proudly he has had a letter published in one issue of *JLA*),¹⁸⁶ and so it is possible to view his unwillingness to treat the recent Batman cycle as anything but legitimate adaptations — when there is good reason to state otherwise — as one more example of the source text being privileged over adaptation.¹⁸⁷

The Origins Themselves

Origin tales are not restricted to superheroes. They appear in non-superhero adaptations like *Dick Tracy* (1990) and *Casper*. Only one comics-based adaptation does not use the origin system. *Dennis the Menace* (1993) has no need of an origin presentation because there are no characteristics of Dennis Mitchell to separate him from ordinary naughty children. The commonality of Dennis' situation — the neighbourhood menace — will be easily understood by the audience.

The forty-four films of the study sample present thirty-three properties brought from comics to screen. That all but one of these thirty-three carries their origin tales clearly emphasises that they have an important role in the adaptation process. Origin tales communicate the essential characteristics of the hero or superhero to the audience. With this knowledge, audiences can follow the character in any printed adventure, thus satisfying the prime concern of the comicbook industry. With this knowledge, audiences can fully enjoy the character's exploits and, with luck, satisfy the prime concern of the entertainment conglomerate by purchasing related products. The use of seven aspects in the origin tale allows the director to vary their focus on the character, thus ensuring an original approach is being created which still prevents the dedicated fan from finding too little fidelity with a preexisting text. An original approach allows the adaptation to become separated from continuity, thus freeing the publisher to use the character through the

production process as desired. It is an adaptation because the basic framework, common activities and key character information are copied from comic to film.

But one question still remains: how exactly is origin used in the adaptation? The remainder of this chapter presents the four ways in which origin can be presented — direct, investigation, foundation and initiation. Two are for solo heroes, two are for teams. Two are for those with publicly recognised personae and two are for those who choose to stay out of the public eye. These two dichotomies intersect. The choice of origin presentation is determined by the hero's or heroes' condition.

Solo heroes working in the open use direct presentation. Working in the open means the public can recognize the hero's public persona. Audiences connect with the hero by sharing what is not public. What is not public are the events leading to creation of this public persona. Direct presentations begin with the pre-hero persona and show the moment of transition. Direct presentation shows the evolution into public hero chronologically.

Direct presentation is part of the first superhero and the first adaptation in the study sample. Krypton's greatest scientist warns of the planet's impending destruction. His warnings are ignored. As the planet enters its death throes, Jor-El sends his only son to safety in an escape pod. The infant grows as the pod hurtles to Earth. A childless couple sees the pod impact. The Kents adopt baby Kal-El and call him Clark. He lives in Smallville, Kansas until the death of his adoptive father. This sends him in search of his true origins. He wanders to the arctic where he uses a crystal to create his Fortress of Solitude. He enters as a boy and emerges as Superman. It's then off to Metropolis where Clark Kent gets a job at *The Daily Planet* newspaper. He meets Perry White, Jimmy Olsen and love interest Lois Lane. The first half of *Superman* establishes everything about the character before the first adventure.

Solo heroes who keep their presence generally unknown require investigation origins. Audiences must connect with two characters. They connect with the hero because they cheer for his protection of social order. The authorities have results but no interaction with their perpetrator. The hero's public persona is urban myth. The second character audiences connect with is the investigator. This need not be a reporter. Investigators are drawn into the action. Investigators wish to learn more about their saviour and so they learn the hero's secrets on our behalf.

Who better to demonstrate investigation origin than Superman's counterpart the Batman? *Batman* opens with a crime. Two criminals flee the scene, goods in hand. They are stopped by a mysterious figure. "Who are you?" asks a frightened criminal. "I'm Batman," the figure replies. Reporter Vicki Vale is attracted to bats. She wants to know who this mysterious Batman is. Batman saves her from the Joker. Vale makes the connection between Batman, Bruce Wayne and the flashback of a mugging. Vicki Vale investigates the hero and learns the truth on our behalf.

Teams working in the open have foundation origins. Working in the open means the public can recognize the team's public persona. Audiences connect with the heroes by sharing what is not public. What is not public are the events leading to creation of the team. Foundation origins begin before the team. A crisis brings the individual members together for the first time and they opt to remain together as a group from that point on. Team foundations show the events leading to team creation chronologically.

Mystery Men (1999) opens with a partnership instead of a team. The Red Eyes' robbery of a retirement home soirée is responded to by Mr. Furious, The Shoveller and The Blue Raja. The opening sequence clearly shows a total lack of teamwork. The Blue Raja fires his

fork into the Shoveller's buttocks. The Shoveller aims for a villain but drives the flat end of his shovel into the face of Mr. Furious. The police laugh at them. Recruitment is needed after their failed rescue of the captured Captain Amazing from his arch nemesis Casanova Frankenstein. The trio are stopped by Frankenstein's henchmen, the Disco Boys, at Frankenstein's front door. Their first recruit is the Invisible Boy.¹⁸⁴ The Invisible Boy only becomes a serious consideration once they have learned the nature and origin of his powers. One day he realised he could become invisible if nobody was looking at him. Later, at the diner, the Spleen approaches the quarter. The Spleen demonstrates his power and then explains that his power to direct flatulence came from a gypsy curse. He, too, is allowed to join. The five hold a recruitment drive at The Shoveller's home. The Bowler demonstrates her power and, after explaining that her bowling ball is propelled by the spirit of her late father whose skull lies inside, is brought into the group. Enlistment of the "terribly mysterious" Sphinx completes the group of heroes. The audience leaves the theatre knowing who these Mystery Men are and how they came together.

Teams working in secret use recruitment. Recruitment functions like an investigation. This team is already active. Members, abilities and origin are totally unknown. Knowledge can only be gained through another character. That character is rescued by the heroes from some crisis. By the end of the film, the associative character (and by extension the audience) are members of the team. Names, abilities and team origin are communicated to the audience via the new recruit as part of membership.

Two recruits join in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990). One is April O'Neil, reporter. The other is Casey Jones, hockey stick-wielding hero. Both assist the Turtles in their battle against Shredder. But it is O'Neil who has to be rescued from Shredder's henchmen. The Turtles tell her their origin. They don't tell it to Jones. Jones, in fact, tells his origin to O'Neil as well. April O'Neil learns each participant's important characteristics on our

behalf.

It was stated before that non-superheroes have origin tales. The same system of origin selection based on character situation persists. The hero of *Dick Tracy* is a police officer. The Kid (a witness) asks Tracy why he became a police officer. Tracy's investigator, the Kid helps Tracy stop the mob. *Casper's* Kit Harvey is also an investigator. She discovers the reason for Casper the Friendly Ghost's innocence is his accidental death as a happy child. Kat helps Casper stop Carrigan. *Richie Rich* (1994) is titled after a solo hero but it is not, in fact, a story of one. Richie is an only child and play mates have to be arranged. These play mates and Richie's butler help him save his parents, thus forming an effective team. Thus the creation of Richie's immediate circle gives *Richie Rich* a formation origin. Despite having no special abilities, the origin tales of these characters can still communicate to the audiences the hero's situation and motivation.

Only one of the forty-three origin tale-using adaptations in Appendix II violates these boundaries. The conclusions of this chapter could not be fully confirmed unless it can be applied to all features with the origin tale — including that aberration. To that end, the next chapter applies these conclusions to *The X-Men* (2000) and its source text's unique situation as a case study, in order to determine whether or not those conclusions are applicable to all comics-based films.

Chapter Five: Great X-Pectations

In the history of comics there is one franchise which has stood above the rest. It is The X-Men, a property whose dominance of the comic sales charts for two decades is made an even more amazing feat by the fact that, shortly after their debut, Marvel's "Strangest Teens Of All"¹⁸⁹ stood on the brink of cancellation. On 14 July 2000, The X-Men made their big screen debut — and brought with it the first aberration of the origin tale system. This chapter treats *The X-Men* as a case study in order to test the validity of the previous chapters' conclusions — that origin tales are present in comics-based adaptations because they respond to the needs and desires of the entertainment conglomerate and comicbook publisher behind them — even when an aberrant use of that system occurs.

The adaptation was co-produced by Twentieth Century Fox Films and Marvel Enterprises. The first section looks closely at the relationship between these companies. Fox learned the value of comic properties from its rival Warner Communications. The relationship between Fox and Marvel was different than that between Warners and DC, but Marvel's reason for licensing its properties remained the same. Readership was down. The publisher was suffering under heavy debt. The infusion of cash from film-related licensing agreements could certainly put Marvel closer to (if not back in) the black. A successful adaptation would kick start production on other adaptations, increasing the importance *The X-Men* had for Marvel.

Following a brief recap of the film, the focus narrows in on the film's origin presentation. Its aberrant use is explained by the unique circumstances surrounding the source text. Those circumstances and their impact on the adaptation will be identified.

The concluding sections of this chapter present the other support the producers provided

to reach their goals, beginning with Fox. *The X-Men's* trailers will be examined to determine the film's target audience. The high concept imagery will be identified along with the synergetic products offered by Fox and its licensees. Some products were produced by Marvel, but the publisher failed to capitalise on the adaptation. Finally, I end with a look at how box office performance changed the producers' approaches to the home video campaign.

The Relationship Between Marvel Enterprises & Twentieth Century Fox

The X-Men's creation was actually kicked off by the campaign of another adaptation. It took years of careful corporate planning for WCI to realise its ultimate goal from the purchase of DC Comics. *Batman* was produced and distributed by WCI, shown in theatres owned by WCI outside of North America, was available on home video by WCI, had soundtrack albums produced by WCI with WCI artists — and all of it came out of a WCI-owned property. It was the ultimate expression of synergy with just one mistake: the conglomerate had planned all along to produce additional Batman films yet forgot to design a system to maintain audience brand awareness between films. WCI's solution was *The New Adventures of Batman*, an animated series with similar style to Tim Burton's film. Nostalgia-driven parents had dragged their children in to see *Batman*, and now those same children would be so hooked on the animated series that they would demand their parents take them back to see Batman return in (what else?) *Batman Returns*. But without a television series of its own, WCI had to find someone else to show *The New Adventures of Batman*.

None of the three principal networks wanted it. ABC and CBS were developing their own animated series while NBC was devoted to its preteen sitcoms like *Saved By The Bell*. That left the fledgling network owned and operated by WCI's rival Twentieth Century

Fox. Fox had finally found hits to anchor its prime time programming, and was looking for solid anchors to make its Saturday mornings more attractive. Riding the success of *Batman*, the series drew huge audiences. Better ratings increased the advertising revenues for that time slot but Fox quickly recognised that was all it was getting. The animated series acted as an advertisement for Batman-related products that Fox didn't have — and Fox could only benefit from products it had. To make matters worse, all rebroadcast rights would revert to WCI at the end of the contract.

Fox wanted to profit from the brand recognition its television network was creating, but the studio also understood it would not be able to convince its parent company (Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.) to go on a spending spree. So it did the next best thing — it licensed the properties it wanted instead.

Marvel Enterprises understood the value of a licensing agreement. When the company had been losing money on its superhero titles, it was the *Star Wars* license that saved them.¹⁹⁰ During the eighties, Marvel profited greatly from a licensing agreement with Hasbro to produce comicbooks and animated series for its new toy lines *G.I. Joe* and *The Transformers*.¹⁹¹ *Marvel Super-Heroes* had taught Marvel the advertising power of animation as it helped boost Marvel to the top of the industry during the sixties.¹⁹² Marvel continued to use animation,¹⁹³ along with public appearances by a live action Spidey¹⁹⁴ (including visits to PBS' *Electric Company*), to sell its comicbooks. Now the company was expanding synergetically. Major positions in Fleer/SkyBox, Panini and Toy Biz meant that Marvel had to sell more than just comicbooks with its licensing agreements.

The deal with Fox gave Marvel much more than guaranteed national exposure for its properties. It gave access to companies in other industries which had already joined with Fox and were looking to form other symbiotic relationships with property holders. For

example, Pizza Hut attracted more consumers by offering videocassettes of Marvel animated series shown on Fox. Those videocassettes provided royalty revenue and potential new consumers for Fox and Marvel. Thus, license agreements brokered through Fox increased revenue all around.

Fox, in return, got access to comicdom's most popular characters. Marvel routinely outsold DC. Marvel's first offering was *The X-Men*, based on the most popular selling comic of the time. *The Uncanny X-Men* and its various spin-off titles rarely left the "top ten comics sold" list.¹⁹⁵ It was not the first time Marvel had tried to get its top franchise into animation. During the early eighties, Marvel used certain episodes of *Spider-Man & His Amazing Friends* to test market other characters for development after the series finished. The X-Men tested best and so a pilot was commissioned. Titled "Pryde of The X-Men," the animated pilot failed to entice the networks and thus Marvel's first attempt was scrapped entirely.¹⁹⁶

The failure of "Pryde of The X-Men" was unique to Marvel animation but not Marvel television. The *Spider-Man* live action television series lasted half a season before poor ratings forced it into cancellation. *Captain America* lasted only half that long, while *Dr. Strange* didn't get past the pilot.¹⁹⁷ Only *The Incredible Hulk*, with its *Fugitive*-style setting, would survive longer than a season. Theatrical releases weren't any better, though *The Punisher* (1990) fared better than *Captain America* (1990) by actually getting North American screenings.¹⁹⁸

Marvel's agreement with Fox would change those fortunes. Fox was a major studio with the resources to produce films with higher production values. Success by a major studio would increase the market value of Marvel's properties. A handful had already been licensed out for live action adaptation (including *Spider-Man*)¹⁹⁹ but Fox wasn't worried.

Marvel set deadlines into its licensing agreements. Studios which failed to produce an adaptation would lose their license, and Fox's relationship with Marvel gave them a strong advantage when those properties came up for licensing again.

Fox saw tremendous potential within The X-Men as a property and rightly so — Marvel had already built the franchise around them. Marvel's own desire to capitalise on the success of The X-Men resulted in the single title blossoming to six, each with its own distinct identity while still clearly part of the whole. Fox realised it could follow Paramount's *Star Trek* example and divide the franchise by medium. X-Men could exist on the big screen, the small screen and in animation, in simultaneous cross-promotion — and there would still be plenty of characters left over for future series.

Part of that plan was realised when Fox broadcast *Generation X* (1993), a live action telefilm based on The X-Men's newest spin-off. Advertisements identified the co-production with Marvel coming "from the pages of *X-Men*." A further connection was made by having the initiate in the *Generation X* origin tale be the same as the animated series — Jubilation "Jubilee" Lee. Fox and Marvel watched the ratings very carefully. High ratings would give *Generation X* a regular time slot in the upcoming season, while somewhat more modest ratings might warrant another telefilm. But *Generation X* fared poorly. Plans for the live action series were put on hold.

Marvel filed for protection from creditors under Chapters 11 and 13, which pushed those plans further back. The move, orchestrated by then-majority shareholder Ron Perlman, was done to protect Marvel from its creditors while it tried to restructure its debt load. In particular, Marvel had a \$200 million cash loan from the early nineties to pay off.²⁰⁰ Not all shareholders were pleased with Perlman's proposal and neither was Fox. Perlman's plan involved projected income based on large royalties from feature films Fox was expected to

produce. Also the plan expected Fox would increase its number of Marvel cartoons being broadcast on its network. Fox reacted to Perlman's restructuring plan by postponing any further involvement with the publisher.

The silent treatment ended two years later when Avi Arad and Toy Biz emerged victorious in the battle for control of Marvel. Arad was eager to get Fox working on Marvel properties once more.²⁰¹ Fox had *Nick Fury: Agent of SHIELD* (1999) still to broadcast. The telefilm was to be the first of several, but lack of advertisement for its late summer broadcast led to very poor ratings and any future films were scrapped.²⁰² Comic fans who actually saw *Fury* on television were divided²⁰³ but the critics were not. Low budgets had forced the telefilm to substitute camp for better special effects. Fox cancelled its remaining telefilm options and redirected its efforts into theatrical adaptations.

Fox had three options: The X-Men, The Fantastic Four and Silver Surfer. Marvel had tried to follow up its *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* animated successes on television with *The Silver Surfer* in 1996, but the series fared poorly in the ratings. Fox wasn't willing to consider *The Fantastic Four* until the proposed budget came within their price range. *The X-Men* was in Fox's price range. An X-Men feature would also allow Fox to add the successful animated series back into its afternoon line-up — a move that would cost Fox virtually nothing because the episodes had already been made. The animated series had helped teach new audiences about The X-Men. It was still comicdom's top selling franchise, and three of its books (*The Uncanny X-Men*, *The X-Men* and *Wolverine*) were routinely holding the top three spots. With an already successful synergetic high concept campaign behind them, Fox began production on *The X-Men*

X-Men: The Movie

The X-Men are not like any other superheroes. Their special abilities do not come from radiation, magic or being from outer space. Their abilities come from a genetic quirk — each has an extra pair of chromosomes called the X-factor (hence the name X-Men) which only reveal that individual's abilities at puberty. Carrying this extra gene makes the individual a mutant. *Homo sapiens* (ordinary humans) have come to fear what *homo superior* (the mutants) can do.

The X-Men opens up with Senator Robert Kelly addressing Congress. Kelly is proposing the Mutant Registration Act, legislation that would allow the American government to monitor all mutants in the country. Kelly's speech is applauded despite a lack of real evidence that mutants are inherently criminal.

Two men do not join in the applause. The first is Professor Charles Francis Xavier, the wheelchair-bound headmaster of Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters. The school, we are instructed later, is a haven for young mutants, a place where they can learn to control their abilities so as not to hurt others. Xavier believes that mankind's hatred for mutants is misguided by fear of the unknown, and that humanity and mutantdom can peacefully co-exist once that fear has been overcome. His opponent — the second man — is Erik Lehnsherr, better known to the world as Magneto. Having been the subject of bigoted prosecution (the very first scene shows a young Lehnsherr at Auschwitz), Magneto believes that mutants will only be able to escape from humanity's hatred by taking the dominant position. To that end, Magneto and his Brotherhood have become terrorists, their only opposition The X-Men.

Kelly's speech resonates with the viewers because they have already witnessed the mutant

threat firsthand. In the preceding scene a teenage girl nearly kills her boyfriend with a kiss. Marie is next seen in a small Alberta town, a runaway calling herself Rogue. There she meets a bar fighter named Wolverine. Wolverine is also a mutant. His gifts are heightened senses and an increased healing factor, but his signature is a metal skeleton complete with three retractable claws on each hand. Wolverine does not know who grafted the metal onto his bones. His memories have been tampered with, and the frustration with his amnesia drives him to act like a loner. When he realises Rogue has stowed away in the back of his truck, he tries to leave her on the side of the road but can't. Moments after they get back on the road, the duo are attacked by members of The Brotherhood. They are saved by The X-Men.

At first The X-Men — and therefore the audience — are led to believe that Wolverine was The Brotherhood's target, but it's Rogue who The Brotherhood kidnaps in their next encounter, not Wolverine. Rogue is the key to Magneto's plan. He has built a weapon that will rapidly accelerate the evolution of *homo sapiens*, turning them into mutants. Magneto first uses the device on Kelly to give the Senator a taste of what's to come but, as those scenes show, its use threatens Magneto's life. To survive the machine's next use — a strike against world leaders meeting for a peace summit on Ellis Island — Magneto must find a proxy. He is well aware that Rogue will absorb the life force of anyone she comes into skin contact with. By letting her absorb a portion of his life force, he can use her as the machine's battery without further threat to himself. The X-Men learn of Magneto's plan and arrive — with Wolverine amongst them — at the Statue of Liberty in time to stop The Brotherhood and save Marie.

The film ends with Xavier visiting the imprisoned Magneto. They discuss events over a game of chess. Xavier plays white, Magneto plays black. The game ends in a draw. Xavier acknowledges he will no doubt return for a rematch. The implication to the audience is

clear: Xavier's inability to take credit for stopping The Brotherhood with his X-Men means that neither is a true winner. It's a draw that will no doubt lead to rematch in the future, implying that a sequel is on the way. That implication is also made in the scene before. Logan leaves the school with a promise to Rogue that he will return.

Uncanny Origins

The producers of *The X-Men* had to assume that even with the comicbooks and animated series there was still a portion of the audience that knew nothing about The X-Men. *The X-Men* had to find a way to communicate its essential information to those audience members without knowledge of the heroes to prevent those members from being lost. Chapter Two established that publishers want the adaptation to educate the audience because doing so prepares the new and lapsed readers in that audience for any other comicbook adventure with those characters. This can only happen if the film serves as a primer on the characters and their situation. The primer function of an adaptation serves the film industry equally well, since a primer-type adaptation would also prepare audiences for further adventures on film. To communicate everything an uninformed audience member needs to know about the hero, adaptations turn to the origin tale because superheroes encode their characteristics in them.

There are four manners of origin presentation identified in Chapter Four but *The X-Men* does not use any of them. It cannot, and the reason lies in the history of the source text.

Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's Strangest Teens of All debuted in 1963's *The X-Men* but the series was "a commercial failure."²⁰⁴ Marvel tried reducing costs by shifting the book from monthly to bimonthly production but sales numbers continued to drop. Consumers were not enticed by a comic about teenaged mutants protecting a world which hates and fears

them, yet — somewhat perversely — sales numbers never dropped to the point where publication became unprofitable. After sixty-six issues, Marvel pulled its creative team from *The X-Men* and let the book continue with reprints of previous stories.

It was saved by internationalisation. Marvel expanded into Europe and Asia during the seventies to replace disappearing North American outlets. European and Asian audiences preferred European and Asian heroes over American heroes. Marvel had a distinct shortage of non-American heroes and needed to come up with some fast. Dave Cockrum and Len Wein created a batch of new heroes, but there was still the question of where to put them. The Avengers were the world's greatest superheroes but their roster was full.²⁰⁵ And then someone remembered The X-Men. Membership in The X-Men required only one thing: that the hero be a mutant. Since genetic mutation was not nationally specific, the new heroes could easily become X-Men.

These "All-New, All-Different" X-Men made their official debut in 1975's *Giant-Size X-Men* '1 and quickly replaced all but one of the original cast²⁰⁶ (Figures 5 and 6). Amongst the new X-Men was Wolverine. Artist John Byrne felt a strong affinity towards his fellow Canadian²⁰⁷ and pushed Wolverine to the front of the action. The focus on Wolverine made him a star of The X-Men²⁰⁸ — so much so, that he would be the first X-Man to do double duty with a solo series of his own. Wolverine's role as star is significant because the origin of The X-Men did not include him. Any foundation origin with Wolverine in it would automatically contradict the origin in the comics, and therefore run contrary to the intention behind the use of an origin.

Fox and Marvel faced this same difficulty with the animated series. Marvel wanted the cartoon to feature its most popular and quintessential X-Men. This meant original members Cyclops, Jean Grey and the Beast were joined by "All-New, All-Different X-

Figure 5. The first graduating class of The X-Men, illustrated by Jack Kirby, 1963.

Top row: Angel • 2nd row (l to r): Cyclops and Beast • Bottom row (l to r): Iceman, Xavier and Marvel Girl (Jean Grey)

From: Peter Sanderson, *Ultimate X-Men*. (New York: Dorling Kindersley Publishing Inc., 2000), p. 15.

Figure 7. Wizard World exclusive variant cover to *Uncanny X-Men* #385, illustrated by Salvador Larocca, 2000.

left to right: Gambit and Rogue

From: personal collection.

Figure 6. Cover to *Giant-Size X-Men* #1, premiering the "All-New, All-Different X-Men," illustrated by Dave Cockrum, 1975.

Bursting out of the page are (l to r): Nightcrawler, Thunderbird, Colossus, Cyclops, Storm (flying) and Wolverine. Comparison with the original X-Men shown in the background reveals Cyclops to be the only member on both teams.

From: Peter Sanderson, *Ultimate X-Men*, (New York: Dorling Kindersley Publishing Inc., 2000), p. 55.

Men” Storm and Wolverine along with later recruits Rogue and Gambit (Figure 7). A change of the foundation origin to include those absent members on the animated roster would contrast with the series’ goal of being an X-Men primer. The only way to explain the differences in tenures would be to have the entire history of The X-Men, or some abbreviated version of it, communicated through a mediator. “Pryde of The X-Men” used fan favourite Kitty Pryde, but Shadowcat was no longer a member of The X-Men’s main roster. From the large list of other characters (Appendix III), Jubilee was picked to be the animated series’ origin investigator.

The cast had to be reduced even further for the film to fit within under its \$75-million budget. Gambit’s mysterious past made him too much like Wolverine and so the character was put aside for a later film.²⁰⁹ (The DVD includes costume designs for the dropped Beast and villain Blob.) Director Bryan Singer was fascinated with Rogue’s mutation and wanted to emphasize her vulnerability. Jubilee was pushed into a cameo while the role of investigator went to Rogue.

“She’s not the Rogue most of you know.... She’s young, innocent, with almost no life experience. She’s run away and she just discovers all this through very innocent eyes. She is kind of a merger of these younger X-characters and I used her as a vessel, because I found her mutation so vital to telling the story and so extraordinary. To have this amazing power, but at the same time, the inability to touch or be touched.”²¹⁰

Rogue’s subject of investigation isn’t The X-Men — it’s Wolverine. Once the two arrive at Xavier’s School for Gifted Youngsters, the investigation changes direction and is instigated by Wolverine/Logan. It’s to Logan, not Marie, that Xavier explains the nature of his school. Logan, not Marie, learns the true nature of the conflict between Xavier and Magneto for the audience. It is Logan, not Marie, who knows about the secret facility beneath the mansion and when the team goes into battle against The Brotherhood of Mutants and it is Wolverine — *not* Rogue — who puts on an X-Men uniform and joins

Cyclops, Jean Grey and Storm in battle.

Thus, the origin tale in *The X-Men* is aberrant because it is not just an initiation origin — it is an initiate *and* investigation origin. Rogue breaks through Logan's personal barriers for the audience, and in return Logan breaks through the protective barriers around the school — and The X-Men. The hybrid is necessary because the initiate Wolverine is an already active hero and the audience cannot place its trust in him until Rogue the investigator has learned all that needs to be known about him.

The X-Men complicates matters further by presenting the origin not just for the team but for the conflict as well. Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr/Magneto were close friends separated by differences in ideology. Xavier believes the conflict between mutants and humans is best solved peacefully. Magneto believes the conflict between mutants and humans is best solved by the superior force taking power over the other. The X-Men and the school which launched them are expressions of Xavier's ideology in the same way that The Brotherhood are expressions of Magneto's. The film emphasises this conflict because it is the common bond uniting The X-Men and all of its spinoffs; the New Mutants, Generation X, Excalibur, X-Factor and X-Force work towards the same dream of peaceful co-existence that The X-Men does.

The X-Men uses origin for the same purposes as other comics-based adaptations. Therefore the thesis of Chapter Four is still valid. The film, however, was not successful in getting the same level of success that other adaptations had attained.

Cross-promotion at Fox

Twentieth Century Fox was confident *The X-Men* would be one of the summer's biggest

blockbusters. At least a fifth of the budget was being spent on cutting edge special effects.²¹¹ It had two family-adventure narratives, one for Marie and one for Logan. The film's use of The X-Men motif (an X enclosed by a circle) reinforced its high concept imagery. It would have synergy with the Marvel comicbooks and Fox animated series. The film's release would be saturated for maximum exposure in every market. All it needed was blockbuster-style promotion.

To advertise *The X-Men*, Fox looked to its blockbuster success the previous year: *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace*. Like *The Phantom Menace*, the first trailer for *The X-Men* emphasised elements audiences familiar with the property would expect to see. The trailer opens with Storm telling the others to "...hold on to something." Over the next sixty seconds, the screen flashes by images of super powers in action. The montage communicates action, adventure and special effects — exactly what a big budget adaptation of a comicbook-based adaptation should have. The montage ends with the trademark *snikt* of Wolverine's claws. The trailer concludes with a message to the unimpressed: "We're not what you think."²¹²

The second trailer continued with the idea. Again, like *The Phantom Menace* once more, it was released roughly a month closer to the film's release and shifted attention to actual plot of the film. The second trailer identifies each major character, shifting from blue to red as it goes from hero to villain. The identification is followed by a montage of dialogue in which the central conflict between Xavier and Magneto is brought forth. Audiences intrigued by this conflict would be further enticed by the sinister suggestion at the end of the trailer.

Xavier: "Don't give up on them. Mankind is evolving."
Magneto: "Not any more."

Fox broke with its *Star Wars* model for its third trailer. The third trailer for *The Phantom*

Menace was actually a series of trailers focusing on smaller themes in the film. *The X-Men* suppressed many of its smaller themes in favour of the ideological conflict at its centre. The result was a trailer that essentially re-presented the scenes and dialogue of the second trailer, but with the interconnecting effects sequences which were not in the second trailer because they weren't ready by the time the second trailer had to be released.

Fox continued with its *Star Wars* model with another marketing tool: the television infospical. Days before the *The X-Men* was released to theatres, the Fox network aired *X-Men: Mutant Watch*, a half hour television special which showed clips of the film along with interviews with the actors. Major plot points were not given. Instead, the special followed its predecessors by having the actors emphasize the reasons for the subject's cult status in pop culture. The infospical was beneficial to Fox because of its synergy. It advertised the Fox film and provided original content for the Fox network.

Mutant Watch was also one of the two official Internet sites for *The X-Men*. At www.mutantwatch.com, Internet users learned the identities of known mutants and how to look for others. The content corresponded with publicity stunts performed by the studio. 'Anti-mutant protesters' would be strategically placed in selected audiences around the country. Their most unmistakable appearance was on NBC's early morning program *Today*. Camera operators returned to them repeatedly during its audience shots, uncommon for the show.²¹³ Fox could not have the protesters appear on its own network because the Fox network had no early morning show (Fox showed cartoons instead). NBC played into the stunt because it needed content for its program. Fox also took out equal advertising time on each network to air mock political advertisements for Mutant Watch. It is not until the infospical or, if the audience had missed its broadcast, the film that the viewer of the advertisement would link it to Robert Kelly's fictional campaign. The commercials also carried the web address, something the 'protesters' did not.

Once at *mutantwatch.com*, Internet users could follow the link to *www.x-men-the-movie.com*. The other official site was the address given on theatre posters and print advertisements. The site carried production stills and all three trailers in downloadable formats. Tracking the number of 'hits' (visitors to the sites), Fox was able to quantify interest in the film before it opened.

Fox used its advertising budget to get audiences aware of the film before it came to theatres. It did very little to promote the film once it had arrived. New content on the websites stopped the day the film was released. Television ads were also stopped. All that remained were print ads carried in daily newspapers. The cartoons, with advertisements that only Fox had the "eXciting" and "eXplosive" series based on the hit movie, did not appear on Fox until the final weeks of August — when most of the audience had turned their attention elsewhere. The studio clearly expected that enough momentum had been built by the heavy pre-release promotion to carry the film through the summer. The strategy had worked for other blockbusters, but in this case it did not.

A pop music soundtrack would have helped the film incredibly. Soundtrack albums have singles, and singles have videos. The video would then circulate on MTV and other music video programs. Clips of the film used in the video would draw audiences back to the film. But plans for a soundtrack album which would include a number of top acts²¹⁴ fell through. Instead Fox had to rely on sales of the score album by "Michael K-Men." Scores traditionally don't have videos.²¹⁵ Without a video, casual record buyers had no encouragement to buy the score before seeing the film. With just high concept imagery, the score album did not promote the film effectively.

Fox also failed to secure any promotional deals with a fast food chain. Premiums for *Star*

Wars: The Phantom Menace had been offered at Burger King, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell, but none of the chains had great success with them. Each restaurant had too many premiums, making it impossible for the collector to get them all without having to eat fast food every breakfast, lunch and dinner for a week. Burned once, Fox's partners didn't want to jump in on this latest venture and the other chains (McDonald's, Wendy's, Subway) either had promotional deals with other studios and their films or just didn't want any at all.

Fox was only able to secure one product license out of the film. In exchange for providing Cyclops' eye wear, Oakley got the exclusive right to sell official *X-Men* eye wear. For \$400 a pair (US), fans of *The X-Men* could buy one of a limited number of "ruby joliet" sunglasses just like Cyclops wore. The price put the product out of the hands of most fans and Oakley did not advertise its relationship with the film heavily; instead, it let the banner over all *X-Men*-associated products advertise the glasses for them.

Ultimate Failure: Marvel & It's Lack of Connection

There were many *X-Men*- and X-Men-related products for specialty outlets to offer. Diamond Comics Distributing, principal supplier for specialty stores worldwide, carried a plethora of products for its clients to carry including pens, pins, rings, ties, belt buckles, Halloween costumes, posters, puzzles, calendars, watches, clocks, school supplies, coffee mugs, video games, computer games and USopoly's official X-Men Monopoly set. A collectible card game had been set up through Wizards of the Coast. Consumers willing to spend more could buy authentic replicas of Magneto's helmet and/or Cyclops' visor. Marvel's contribution to this onslaught, however, was not what the company wanted.

Marvel's original plan had been to celebrate the film's opening by giving the first five

million people a free copy of *The Ultimate X-Men* '1 — a new series which followed the continuity in the film not the comics. Subsequent issues would only be available at comic stores (where the audience member might choose to walk out with another Marvel comic instead) or from Marvel directly through subscription. It was a brilliant strategy with not enough time to implement. The series took too long to find the proper artist and when it did, Brian Michael Bendis — also tapped to write *The Ultimate X-Men*'s companion title *The Ultimate Spider-Man* — opted out of the project in favour of a planned third title: *Ultimate Marvel Team-Up*. By the time a new writer was found and signed, artist Adam Kubert had his hands full getting ahead as Alan Davis' new replacement on *The Uncanny X-Men*. The cumulative effect of Marvel's creator round table²¹⁶ was that *The Ultimate X-Men* would clearly be stuck on the drafting table when the release date came.

Its replacement in the giveaway was the *Wolverine Movie Prequel*. The issue was one of three made to enhance the movie's comicbook adaptation by showing the events leading up to the film. In a shrewd marketing manoeuvre, these prequels were packaged under the title *X-Men Beginnings* while *X-Men: The Movie — The Official Comicbook Adaptation* carried with it reprints of previous X-Men stories. Each package was priced at US \$14.95, a bargain when the individual issues, available only at specialty stores and without any bonus reprints, sold for US \$6.95 each. The individual issues were aimed at collectors since, as one on-line poster noted, the only impulse a price tag of \$8.40 Canadian gave to the casual consumer was the impulse not to buy the book.²¹⁷ The collected editions had more to offer the casual fan of *The X-Men* than the *Wolverine Movie Prequel* did. Unlike *The Ultimate X-Men*, the *Wolverine Movie Prequel* was self-enclosed. Audiences encouraged by the premium to follow the characters further from the prequel were already doing so, having come to see the film to which they had been led by the issue. The free comic left no enticements for the reader to follow the characters outside of the film and, to make matters worse, it made no mention of Marvel's other X-Men books either. The only

advertisements in the *Wolverine Movie Prequel* were for the toys and their exclusive Internet retailer: Toys 'R Us.²¹⁸

It was a *good* thing that the new readers created by the film were given little encouragement towards Marvel's regular X-product. If *Ultimate X-Men* hadn't been given enough planning time, then Marvel's X-office wasn't given any time at all. The movie prepared the reader for the idea behind The X-Men but not the content, since neither character designs nor team rosters had been altered to match. A filmgoer looking for the same characters would find Jean Grey and Storm being led by Gambit along with Cable and Beast in *The Uncanny X-Men* while Rogue led Wolverine and non-film characters Colossus, Archangel, Psylocke, Thunderbird III, Nightcrawler and Shadowcat in *The X-Men*. Cyclops, leader of The X-Men on screen, was dead.²¹⁹ Xavier was off in outer space. Instead of The Brotherhood of Mutants, The X-Men fought The Neo — a group whose motivations were so sketchy even long time readers (including myself) had a hard time understanding what was going on. The only move made by the X-office to unite *The Uncanny X-Men* and *The X-Men* with the movie was a change of title logo to film-style artwork and a star burst in the upper left-hand corner announcing "The Comics Which Inspired The Movie!"

Marvel's Internet site was no better. One of Marvel's first cost cutting measures after filing for Chapters 11 and 13 had been the firing of its librarian. The librarian had kept up to date notes on the characters. The publisher could not find those notes when it put the site together and so it used the profiles in *The Official Index to the Marvel Universe* — a 1985 index long out of date. The site contained no information about the film other than a link to the official site.

The lack of connection proved disastrous for Marvel. The projected revenues from

increased comic sales failed to materialise because the film had failed to direct new readers towards the books. Revenue from sales of the Toy Biz action figures matched expectations but poor performance by Toy Biz's other principal line — based on the World Wrestling Federation — pulled profit lines down. Even with the help of royalties and licensing fees coming in, failure to match expectations meant Marvel Enterprises had failed to use *The X-Men* effectively to reach its goals.

Box Office & Home Video: How Two Companies Learned From Their Mistakes

The X-Men did not meet its expected goals at the box office. Ticket sales continued to drop significantly after a spectacular opening weekend. It was not the only film to suffer this fate. As the summer movie season closed, critics and industry analysts came to the same conclusion — there had always been a portion of the overall audience which had to come in subsequent weeks because there were insufficient seats in theatres for everyone who wanted to see the film in its opening weeks. No longer is this true. In a bid to increase revenue, theatre chains expanded the number of theatres they had and, more importantly, multiplied the number of screens *in* those theatres. They reckoned that more screens meant more ticket sales sold, and with higher ticket prices that revenue would be even higher. The theatre market became over saturated to a point that so many screens were showing a film that it became impossible for a filmgoer *not* to see a film in its opening weekend. Sales statistics for that summer reflected that shift, particularly for event films like *The X-Men* which encouraged movie goers to see the film as quickly as possible. Fox and Marvel were equally to blame, since their lack of post-release promotion for *The X-Men* created little reason for a later or repeated attendance of the film.

Fox would not make the same mistakes when *The X-Men* came to home video. The home video was slated for a pre-Christmas release and Fox, wanting to capitalise on Christmas

shopping, passed on a rental version of the film in favour of immediate direct sales. In the week prior to its 21 November release, Fox launched a series of television advertisements which increased in air time as it counted down the days. Once the film was released, the advertisement changed. "*The X-Men*: now on video," said the ad, "Buy it today." The frequency of the final ad decreased slowly. The advertisements did not focus on the film's box office performance but instead "ten minutes of unseen footage" exclusive to the VHS and DVD. More footage meant a more complete film, and Fox hoped to entice those who had seen the film in theatres to buy this release based on this fact. The DVD also included unused character costume sketches, the second and third trailers, soundtrack advertisements and a gag outtake in which The X-Men are joined by Spider-Man.²²⁰ The campaign worked. Consumers were not able to forget *The X-Men*'s presence as easily, especially not with retailers advertising it each time there was a sale.

Marvel wasn't so lucky. Fox had first planned on a December release date for the home video, not a November release. By the time the publisher was informed of the change it was too late: *The Ultimate X-Men* had been already been solicited with a 20 December release. An earlier print run would have to be done blind — retail order numbers hadn't arrived yet. An overprint would prove costly. An underprint would undervalue the first issue, since second printings to fill initial order would not be as valuable to collectors as first printings.²²¹ The collector's market was a concern for the new regime at Marvel. Citing a failure to capitalise on *The X-Men* movie, Bob Harras was replaced by artist-turned-editor Joe Quesada as editor-in-chief just as the first Ultimate book (*Ultimate Spider-Man* '1) had hit the shelves. Avi Arad remained at Toy Biz and Marvel Studios but was replaced by Bill Jemas as President of Marvel Comics. The transition of power had come too late. Marvel had no premium to give away with the video release — *The Ultimate X-Men* would arrive too late to connect with the home video release.

All was not lost at Marvel. Jemas and Quesada told shareholders what they wanted to hear: Marvel would learn from these mistakes, so that it could take full advantage when Marvel's biggest star swung across movie screens in *Spider-Man* the following year. *Spider-Man* plan set, Jemas and Quesada turned their attention back to The X-Men. With \$157.3 million in domestic box office gross and \$134.6 million in foreign, *The X-Men*'s sixth place finish in the overall box office race of 2000²²² — and its strong video sales — convinced Twentieth Century Fox to go forward with a sequel.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Imelda Whelehan opens her introduction to *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* by acknowledging that:

“...interest in the process of adaptation from text to screen... has increased in the past two decades, but in a sense emerged with the popularity of films based on works of fiction and particularly the development of the Hollywood film industry.”²²³

That acknowledgement can be extended to this investigation as well. I set out to explain the increase in production of films based on comicbooks and comic strips in the late seventies which has grown commonplace in Hollywood’s annual offerings. That explanation was tied directly to the development of the Hollywood film industry from studio to corporate division to multinational entertainment conglomerate.

Comicbook publishers wouldn’t have as great a need to license their characters for adaptation if they were making sufficient profits from their principal wares, but they aren’t. The Werthamite Assault damaged the reputation of the medium, causing audiences to abandon the medium in disgust. Publishers and whole genres disappeared overnight. The comic industry tried to reassure its audience that it did not corrupt the moral centres of America’s youth by adopting the Comic Code. Comics adhering to the Code would be rewarded with the Seal of Approval which meant that the content was suitable for children — not general audiences. Devotion to children from the mid-fifties onwards alienated adults from comics. To make matters even worse, the abandonment of comics came at the very moment a new form of entertainment for children had come into the marketplace: television. By 1960, every household in America had a television set. The bright days of the comic had begun to dim.

Comicbooks have never been able to recover those audiences lost. The disappearance of the

corner store from America's commercial landscape reduced the number of outlets selling comics. The new national chain stores did not want comicbooks because the profit comics offered was far too low. The industry's eventual devotion to a direct distribution system completed the removal of this 'children's medium' from the places where children shopped. With no new readers to replace those leaving, the market for comicbooks shrunk drastically. The average age of a comicbook reader in the United States jumped twenty years in just a decade. The comicbook industry is extremely aware that a source of new readers must be found quickly, lest the publishing of comicbooks become such a losing proposition that the industry will collapse.

No greater advertisement for comicbook characters exists than Hollywood film. Hollywood's ability to reach the many subcultures of America with its products places it at the very centre of American popular culture. And no product of Hollywood reaches more audience sectors than the blockbuster.

Hollywood is anxious to produce blockbuster comics-based adaptations because comic properties have already demonstrated the qualities Hollywood needs most. Comicdom's most popular characters have been around for decades, meaning that they have nostalgic power in both adults and children. More importantly, having been around for decades means they have tremendous recognition power in both adults and children. Blockbusters are slated for release in the months of greatest movie attendance and the competition within those periods is fierce. The use of already recognisable properties in a blockbuster is desirable. Business logic dictates a consumer is more inclined to consume a recognised product over an unrecognised product.

The comics' power of nostalgia over audiences is not forgotten by Hollywood. The American film industry can use that power to market more than just the film. It needs to

market more than one product, since the development of the Hollywood film industry has occurred horizontally rather than vertically. Vertical expansion means a presence in all stages of filmmaking — production, distribution and exhibition. *United States v. Paramount Pictures* (1948) declared the vertical expansion of Hollywood in the first half of the twentieth century to be unfair business practice and ordered the studios to vertically disintegrate. In contrast, horizontal expansion means a presence in product lines other than film. Horizontal integration means that those other product lines are in related industries. Corporate Hollywood expanded horizontally. Integration is the central characteristic of the Conglomerate Hollywood period which followed. The largest multinational conglomerates have presence in every entertainment industry, including comics.

Warner Communications Inc. bought National Periodicals (publisher of DC Comics) in 1971. Ownership of the publisher also gave the forming conglomerate ownership of the publisher's characters. Licensing fees were eliminated between conglomerate divisions under the rule of corporate synergy. Synergy expanded the presence of the feature film. Now there was the film, the comic, the novel, the soundtrack album and so on.

To unite these various product lines, Conglomerate Hollywood added two more marketing strategies. High concept, learned from television, instructed the Conglomerate to use common imagery easily reproducible at any size to inform the market of the products' connection. In other words, high concept tells Hollywood to make sure all the products around the film — including the film itself — wear the film's particular brand. Comicbook characters are already popular brands. Their icons are already reproducible at any size. The use of a slightly modified version of that brand leaves just enough distance separating film-related product from comic-related product — but not enough distance that the comic-related product's presence alongside the film-related product will fail to create recognition of the connection. Saturation, learned from example, instructed

Conglomerate Hollywood to release the film and all of its associated products in a short time period with heavy advertisement in order to maximize product awareness in the marketplace. Greater awareness means greater attendance and that means faster recovery of investment in the film and its advertising.

Comicbook publishers have a synergetic relationship with the conglomerate (either as part of the conglomerate or as a partner in a market where the conglomerate has no presence), their products are well recognised thanks to their age and existing high concept imagery, and the release of those products will add to the saturation of the marketplace. If this weren't enough, comicbooks are also attractive to Conglomerate Hollywood as sources for blockbuster adaptation because they have family-adventure narratives. The family-adventure narrative is an effects-laden adventure with a familial-centred quest. The adventure quotient appeals to the largest audience segment (young men) and the family component appeals to the second-largest (families).

Yet comic narratives are not the same as narratives from other printed sources. Comic narratives don't end at the back cover. Comicbooks are periodicals with serial narratives running longer than the titles are in print, thanks to the concept of the shared universe. Shared universes allow characters from different titles to interact. So long as there is the possibility of the character interacting in any of the titles adhering to that universe, the character's narrative is not over. Therefore the comic text for adaptation is *the sum of all appearances to date*.

Hollywood responds to this enormous text by focusing on the origin tale. There are four types of origin tale — direct, investigation, foundation and initiation. Each serves the same purpose. Origins communicate the essential characteristics of comic characters. It defines their identity, their unique abilities (more so in the case of superheroes and supervillains)

and their motivation.

Publishers want the film to carry the origin tale because it gives film audience members who want to continue following the character after the film all of the necessary information they will need to enter those comics successfully. Conglomerate Hollywood wants the film to carry the origin tale because it brings every audience member to the same level of understanding about the character, thereby creating the possibility of universal enjoyment from the film. Audiences who enjoy the film may choose to consume related products also produced by the Conglomerate. More importantly, origin tales allow Hollywood filmmakers to place their own interpretation on the characters. This interpretation is followed by an original adventure in the same style and framework of the entire series. An origin tale avoids the lengthy discourse of continuity and high costs of exact image duplication (both of which, in turn, silence many of the criticisms by the character's most devoted followers).

The case study revealed that even when an aberration occurs, such as it did with *The X-Men*, the principle still holds true. Thus the thesis of this investigation, that the use of an origin tale in the present cycle of comics-based adaptations comes directly from the origin being the answer to both the needs of Hollywood and the needs of the comicbook industry, holds true.

This cycle shows no sign of ending. As Spider-Man, another of comicdom's most popular icons, prepares to reach screens²²⁴ Film Studies cannot ignore the presence of these films. It was necessary to validate the thesis of this investigation even with its aberration because the thesis must be applicable to *all* comics-based adaptations, not just a few. It must be applicable to those films in the present cycle which have been released — and those that are still coming.

Appendix I:
***Theatrically Released Feature Film Adaptations
of Comicbooks or Comic Strips 1978-2001***

- 1978** ***Superman: The Movie*** (d. Richard Donner)
- 1980** ***Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*** (d. Daniel Haller)
 Flash Gordon (d. Mike Hodges)
 Popeye (d. Robert Altman)
 Superman II (d. Richard Lester)
- 1981** ***Heavy Metal*** (Canada, animated, d. Gerald Potterson)
 Tarzan, The Ape Man (d. John Derek)
- 1982** ***Annie*** (d. John Huston)
 Superman III (d. Richard Lester)
 The Swamp Thing (d. Wes Craven)
- 1984** ***Supergirl*** (d. Jeannot Szwarc)
 Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes (d. Hugh Hudson)
- 1986** ***Howard the Duck*** (d. Willard Hyuck)
- 1987** ***Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*** (d. Sidney Furie)
- 1989** ***Batman*** (d. Tim Burton)
- 1990** ***Captain America [vs. Red Skull]*** (d. Albert Pyun)
 Dick Tracy (d. Warren Beatty)
 The Punisher (d. Mark Goldblatt)
 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (d. Steve Barron)
- 1991** ***The Rocketeer*** (d. Joe Johnston)
 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Secret of the Ooze (1991, Michael Pressman)
- 1992** ***Batman Returns*** (d. Tim Burton)
- 1993** ***Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*** (d. animated, Eric Radomski and Bruce Timm)
 The Crow (d. Alex Proyas)
 Dennis the Menace (d. Nick Castle)
 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 3: Turtles in Time (d. Stuart Gillard)
- 1994** ***The Mask*** (d. Charles Russell)
 Richie Rich (d. Donald Petrie)
 The Shadow (d. Russell Mulcahy)
 Tank Girl (d. Rachel Talalay)
 Timecop (d. Peter Hyams)

- 1995 *Batman Forever* (d. Joel Schumacher)
Casper (d. Bard Silberling)
Judge Dredd (d. Danny Cannon)
- 1996 *Barb Wire* (d. David Hogan)
The Crow II: City of Angels (d. Tim Pope)
The Phantom (d. Simon Wincer)
- 1997 *Batman and Robin* (d. Joel Schumacher)
MIB: Men In Black (d. Barry Sonnenfeld)
Spawn (d. Mark Dippe)
Steel (d. Kenneth Johnson)
- 1998 *Blade* (d. Stephen Norrington)
- 1999 *Astérix et Obélix contre César* (France/Germany/Italy, d. Claude Zidi)
Mystery Men (d. Kinka Usher)
Virus (d. John Bruno)
- 2000 *The Crow: Salvation* (d. Bharat Nalluri)
G-Men From Hell (d. Christopher Copolla)
Heavy Metal 2: F.A.K.K. (Canada, animated, d. Gerald Potterson)
The X-Men (d. Bryan Singer)
- 2001 *Josie & The Pussycats* (d. Harry Elfort and Deborah Kaplan)
Monkeybone (d. Henry Selick)

Appendix II:
The Study Sample

- 1978** ***Superman: The Movie*** (d. Richard Donner)
- 1980** ***Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*** (d. Daniel Haller)
Flash Gordon (d. Mike Hodges)
Popeye (d. Robert Altman)
Superman II (d. Richard Lester)
- 1982** ***Superman III*** (d. Richard Lester)
The Swamp Thing (d. Wes Craven)
- 1984** ***Supergirl*** (d. Jeannot Szwarc)
- 1986** ***Howard the Duck*** (d. Willard Hyuck)
- 1987** ***Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*** (d. Sidney Furie)
- 1989** ***Batman*** (d. Tim Burton)
- 1990** ***Captain America [vs. Red Skull]*** (d. Albert Pyun)
Dick Tracy (d. Warren Beatty)
The Punisher (d. Mark Goldblatt)
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (d. Steve Barron)
- 1991** ***The Rocketeer*** (d. Joe Johnston)
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Secret of the Ooze (1991, Michael Pressman)
- 1992** ***Batman Returns*** (d. Tim Burton)
- 1993** ***The Crow*** (d. Alex Proyas)
Dennis the Menace (d. Nick Castle)
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 3: Turtles in Time (d. Stuart Gillard)
- 1994** ***The Mask*** (d. Charles Russell)
Richie Rich (d. Donald Petrie)
The Shadow (d. Russell Mulcahy)
Tank Girl (d. Rachel Talalay)
Timecop (d. Peter Hyams)
- 1995** ***Batman Forever*** (d. Joel Schumacher)
Casper (d. Bard Silberling)
Judge Dredd (d. Danny Cannon)

- 1996 *Barb Wire* (d. David Hogan)
The Crow II: City of Angels (d. Tim Pope)
The Phantom (d. Simon Wincer)
- 1997 *Batman and Robin* (d. Joel Schumacher)
MIB: Men In Black (d. Barry Sonnenfeld)
Spawn (d. Mark Dippé)
Steel (d. Kenneth Johnson)
- 1998 *Blade* (d. Stephen Norrington)
- 1999 *Mystery Men* (d. Kinka Usher)
Virus (d. John Bruno)
- 2000 *The Crow: Salvation* (d. Bharat Nalluri)
G-Men From Hell (d. Christopher Copolla)
The X-Men (d. Bryan Singer)
- 2001 *Josie & The Pussycats* (d. Harry Elfort and Deborah Kaplan)
Monkeybone (d. Henry Selick)

Appendix III:

**X-Men Team Rosters
Past and Present (as of 1 March 2001)**

The [Uncanny/Astonishing/X-Treme] X-Men

Scott Summers <i>code name: Cyclops</i>	Jean Grey-Summers <i>code name: Marvel Girl, Phoenix [III]</i>
Warren Worthington III <i>code name: Angel, Archangel</i>	Robert "Bobby" Drake <i>code name: Iceman</i>
Henry "Hank" McCoy <i>code name: The Beast</i>	Calvin Rankin <i>code name: The Mimic</i>
Lorna Dane <i>code name: Magnetrix, Polaris</i>	Alex Summers <i>code name: Havok</i>
"Changeling" <i>no code name</i>	Kurt Wagner <i>code name: Nightcrawler</i>
"Logan" <i>code name: Wolverine</i>	Sean Cassidy <i>code name: Banshee</i>
Ororo "Windrider" Monroe <i>code name: Storm</i>	Shiro Yoshida <i>code name: Sunfire</i>
Piotr "Peter" Rasputin <i>code name: Colossus</i>	John Proudstar <i>code name: Thunderbird</i>
The Phoenix <i>no code name</i>	Katherine "Kitty" Pryde <i>code name: Ariel, Sprite, Shadowcat</i>
Alison Blaire <i>code name: The [Disco] Dazzler</i>	Carol Danvers <i>code name: Ms. Marvel, Binary, Warbird</i>
Lockheed the Dragon <i>no code name</i>	"Rogue" <i>no code name</i>
Rachel Summers <i>code name: Phoenix II</i>	Erik "Magnus" Lensherr <i>code name: Magneto</i>
Elisabeth "Betsy" Braddock <i>code name: Psylocke</i>	Longshot <i>no code name</i>
Madelyne Pryor <i>no code name</i>	"Gateway" <i>no code name</i>

Jubilation Lee
code name: Jubilee

Theresa Rourke
code name: Siryn

Amanda Sefton
code name: Daytripper

Kwannon/"Elisabeth Braddock"
code name: Psylocke [II]

"Bishop"
no code name

Victor Creed
code name: Sabretooth

"Joseph"
no code name

"Sarah"
code name: Marrow

Nathan Christopher "Askani'son" Dayspring-Summers
code name: Cable

Nate Grey
code name: X-Man

Neal Shaara
code name: Thunderbird [III]

"Forge"
no code name

Brigadier Aysande Stuart
no code name

David Haller
code name: Legion

Remy LeBeau
code name: Gambit

Elisabeth Braddock/"Kwannon"
code name: Revanche

Samuel "Sam" Guthrie
code name: Cannonball

Dr. Cecilia Reyes
no code name

"Japeth"
code name: Maggott

"Fiz"
no code name

Tessa
code name: Sage

The New Mutants/X-Force

Xian Coy Manh
code name: Karma

Danielle "Dani" Moonstar
code name: Mirage, Moonstar

Samuel "Sam" Guthrie
code name: Cannonball

Illyana Rasputin
code name: Magik

Rahne Sinclair
code name: Wolfsbane

Roberto "Bobby" DaCosta
code name: Sunspot

Amara/Alison Crestmere
code name: Magma

"Warlock"
no code name

Douglas "Doug" Ramsey
code name: Cypher

"Gosamyr"
no code name

Sally Blevins
code name: Skids

Julio Richter
code name: Rictor

Vanessa Carlysle
code name: "Domino," Copycat

Maria Callasantos
code name: Feral

Theresa Rourke
code name: Siryn

"Caliban"
no code name

Jesse Bedlam
code name: Bedlam

"Bird Brain"
no code name

Rusty Collins
no code name

Tabitha Smith
code name: Boom Boom, Boomer, Meltdown

Nathan Christopher "Askani'son"
Dayspring-Summers
code name: Cable

James Proudstar
*code name: Thunderbird [II],
Warpath, Proudstar*

Bejamin Russel
code name: Shatterstar

"Domino"
no code name

Peter "Pete" Wisdom
no code name

X-Factor/The X-Terminators

Scott Summers
code name: Cyclops

Warren Worthington III
code name: Angel, Archangel

Henry "Hank" McCoy
code name: The Beast

Rusty Collins
no code name

Sally Blevins
code name: Skids

"Caliban"
no code name

Jean Grey-Summers
code name: Marvel Girl, Phoenix [III]

Robert "Bobby" Drake
code name: Iceman

Cameron Hodge
no code name

Artie Maddicks
code name: Artie

"Leech"
no code name

Julio Richter
code name: Rictor

"Ship"
no code name

Dr. Valerie Cooper
no code name

Lorna Dane
code name: Magnetrix, Polaris

Jamie Madrox
code name: The Multiple Man

Rahne Sinclair
code name: Wolfsbane

Raven Darkholme
code name: Mystique

"Shard"
no code name

"Fixx"
no code name

Taki
no code name

Alex Summers
code name: Havok

Guido Carousella
code name: Strong Guy

Pietro Maximoff
code name: Quicksilver

"Wild Child"
no code name

Victor Creed
code name: Sabretooth

Jude Black
code name: Archer

Brian Young
code name: Greystone

Excalibur

Kurt Wagner
code name: Nightcrawler

Lockheed the Dragon
no code name

"Meggan"
no code name

Alistaire Stuart
no code name

Kylun
no code name

Feron
no code name

"Douglock"
code name: Warlock [II]

Katherine "Kitty" Pryde
code name: Ariel, Sprite, Shadowcat

Brian Braddock
code name: Captain Britain

Rachel Summers
code name: Phoenix II

Widget
no code name

Cerise
no code name

Scott Wright
code name: Micromax

Peter "Pete" Wisdom
no code name

Calvin Rankin
code name: The Mimic

Kwannon/"Elisabeth Braddock"
code name: Psylocke [II]

Dane Whitman
code name: The Black Knight [II]

Generation X

Sean Cassidy
code name: Banshee

Emma Frost
code name: The White Queen

Jubilation Lee
code name: Jubilee

Monet St. Croix
code name: M

Paige Guthrie
code name: Husk

Everett Thomas
code name: Synch

Angelo Espinoza
code name: Skin

Jonathon Starsmore
code name: Chamber

"Penance"
no code name

Artie Maddicks
code name: Artie

"Leech"
no code name

Gaia
no code name

Notes on Chapter One

- ¹ The last adaptation to hit theatres before 1978's *Superman* was 1772's *Tales From The Crypt*.
- ² For example of one failure see: "Super Heroes" under "Category Index," *VideoHound's Golden Movie Retriever 1997* (Toronto: Visible Ink Press, 1997), p. 995.
- ³ Richard M. Overstreet, *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, published annually by Gemstone Press (New York, USA).
- ⁴ An additional reason for *Astérix et Obélix contre César*'s exclusion is its poor availability. North American audiences wanting a copy on home video must choose between a PAL or SECAM format cassette (with no English language subtitles on the SECAM tape) or a Region-2, -3 or -4 DVD. NTSC-encoded videos and DVDs of the film, either dubbed or subtitled, are being withheld until the film gets release in North America outside of Québec (where it was shown in French only).
- ⁵ Patrick Parsons, "Batman and his Audience: The Dialectic of Culture," *The Many Lives Of The Batman: Critical Approaches To A Superhero And His Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 67.
- ⁶ May 1939's *Detective Comics*, number 27 (New York: DC Comics) to be exact.
- ⁷ Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Princeton, Wisconsin: Kitchen Sink Press, Inc., 1992).
- ⁸ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994).
- ⁹ James Steranko, "Coming Attractions," *The Steranko History of Comics - volume 1* (Reading, Pennsylvania: Supergraphics, 1970), pp. 3-13.
James Steranko, "The Bloody Pulp," *The Steranko History of Comics - volume 1* (Reading, Pennsylvania: Supergraphics, 1970), pp. 14-33.
- ¹⁰ Andy Medhurst, "Batman, Deviance and Camp," *The Many Lives Of The Batman: Critical Approaches To A Superhero And His Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149-163.
- ¹¹ Fredrick Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York: Reinheart, 1954).
Will Brooker, "1954: Censorship and Queer Readings," *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* (London: Continuum, 2000), pp. 101-170.
- ¹² William W. Savage Jr., *Comic Books and America 1945-1954* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).
- ¹³ Craig Shutt, "The Code War: The Comics Code Authority still exists, but does anyone care?" *Wizard: The Guide to Comics*, number 64 (December 1996), pp. 72-78.

- ¹⁴ Wiley Lee Umphlett, "The Nostalgic Vision in Comic-Strip Art," *Mythmakers of the American Dream: The Nostalgic Vision in Popular Culture* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses and Cornwall Books, 1983), pp. 74-101.
- ¹⁵ Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins, "Same Bat Channel, Different Bat Times: Mass Culture and Popular Memory," *The Many Lives Of The Batman: Critical Approaches To A Superhero And His Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 117-148.
- ¹⁶ Richard Reynolds, *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1992).
- ¹⁷ Les Daniels, *Superman - The Complete History* (New York: Chronicle Books, 1998).
- ¹⁸ Richard Reynolds, "Masked Heroes," *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1992), pp. 10-25.
- ¹⁹ Ross was not the first to use synergy. That was the Disney corporation in the fifties. Synergy generally associated with Ross because of WCI's strong presence and overt use of the practice.
- ²⁰ Justin Wyatt, "From Roadshowing to Saturation Release: Majors, Independents, and Marketing/Distribution Innovations," *The New American Cinema*, ed. Jon Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 64-86.
- ²¹ Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1994).
- ²² Kristin Thompson, "Groundhog Day," *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 153-154.
- ²³ Eileen Meehan, "'Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!': The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext," *The Many Lives Of The Batman: Critical Approaches To A Superhero And His Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 47-65.
- ²⁴ Peter Krämer, "Would you take your child to see this film? The cultural and social work of the family-adventure movie," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 294-311.
- ²⁵ K.J. Donnelly, "The classical film score forever? *Batman, Batman Returns* and post-Classical film music," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 142-155.

²⁶ Will Brooker, "Batman: One Life, Many Faces," *Adaptations: from text to screen, screen to text*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 186.

Will Brooker, "1986-1997: Fandom and Authorship," *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* (London: Continuum Books, 2000), p. 289.

²⁷ Reynolds, "Masked Heroes," pp. 25-40.

²⁸ Kristine Kathryn Rusch and Dean Wesley Smith, *X-Men*, based on the movie written by Christopher McQuarrie and Ed Solomon (New York: Del Ray, 2000). And for the record, Wolverine has *three* claws on each hand.

²⁹ *X-Men: The Official Comic Adaptation of the Movie* (New York: Marvel Comics, 2000).

³⁰ Peter Sanderson, *The Ultimate X-Men* (New York: Dorling Kindersley Publishing Inc., 2000).

³¹ *The Official Marvel Index to The X-Men*, volume two, issues one through five (New York: Marvel Comics, 1994).

³² *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, volume two ("deluxe edition"), issues one through twenty (New York: Marvel Comics, 1985-1988).

The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe '89 Update, volume one, issues one through eight (New York: Marvel Comics, 1989-1990).

<http://www.marvel.com>

³³ Fabian Nicieza, *X-Men Forever*, volume one, issue six (New York: Marvel Comics, 2001), inside of back cover.

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³⁴ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, pp. 9-15.

³⁵ Steranko, "Coming Attractions," p. 5.

³⁶ Peter Mathias, "The Human Dimension," *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 193-195.

³⁷ Both appeared simultaneously. From comparing of dates on text- vs. illustration-based strips in: *The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics*, ed. Bill Blackbeard and Martin Williams (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press and New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1977) and George Perry and Alan Aldridge, *The Penguin Book of Comics: A Slight History*, revised edition (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1971).

³⁸ Steranko, "Coming Attractions," pp. 5-13.

- ³⁹ Umphlett, "The Nostalgic Vision in Comic-Strip Art," p. 101.
- ⁴⁰ M. Thomas Inge, "A Chronology of the Development of the American Comic Book by M. Thomas Inge," *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, ed. Richard M. Overstreet, number 30 (New York: Gemstone Press, 2000), p. 879.
- ⁴¹ Mark Langer, "Polyphony and Heterogeneity in Early Fleischer Films," *Persistence of Vision*, number 14 "Humour in the Visual Arts" (1997), pp. 65-82.
- ⁴² Don Hutchison, "The Great Story Explosion," *The Great Pulp Heroes* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1998), pp. 1-2.
- ⁴³ Steranko, "The Bloody Pulps," pp. 14-33.
- ⁴⁴ Steranko, "The Bloody Pulps," p. 33.
- ⁴⁵ Steranko, "Coming Attractions," p. 7.
- ⁴⁶ Steranko, "The Bloody Pulps," p. 33.
- ⁴⁷ Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, p. 381.
- ⁴⁸ Medhurst, "Batman, Deviance and Camp," pp. 152-153.
- ⁴⁹ Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, pp. 189-193.
- ⁵⁰ Medhurst, "Batman, Deviance and Camp," pp. 152-153.
- ⁵¹ Brooker, "1954: Censorship and Queer Readings," pp. 110-142.
- ⁵² Bill Boichel, "Batman: Commodity as Myth," *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and his Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1991), p. 13.
- ⁵³ Parsons, "Batman and His Audience: The Dialectic of Culture," p. 72.
- ⁵⁴ William W. Savage Jr., "Blaming Comic Books: The Wertham Assault," *Comic Books and America, 1945-1954* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), pp. 98-99. EC was forced to drop its horror and crime titles, leaving only one which was moved to magazine format to avoid further condemnation. The magazine? *Mad*. [see Gaines' interview in *Comic Book Confidential* (1989, Canada)]
- ⁵⁵ Will Brooker, "1939-1945: Origins and Wartime," *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* (London, Continuum, 2000), pp. 60-66.
- ⁵⁶ This code was revised in 1971. See: Shutt, "The Code War: The Comics Code Authority still exists, but does anyone care?" pp. 72-78.

- ⁵⁷ Medhurst, "Batman, Deviance and Camp," p. 153.
- ⁵⁸ Frank Miller, "Immorality May Be Fun, but...", *Censored Hollywood: Sex, Sin & Violence on Screen* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, Inc., 1994), p. 52.
- ⁵⁹ Wolfgang J. Fuchs and Reinhold C. Reitberger, "Super-heroes," *Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium*, english translation (London and Harlow, UK: Shenival Press, 1972), pp. 124-126. A copy of the revised Comic Code is found in the same text on page 248.
- ⁶⁰ Tony Bennett, "Holy Shifting Signifiers: Foreward," *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and his Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1991), p. vii.
- ⁶¹ Herbert Gans, "Mass Culture, Popular Culture, and Taste Culture," *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974), p. 13.
- ⁶² Douglas Gomery, "The Movies and TV: A Revisionist History," *Media in America*, ed. Douglas Gomery (Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), p. 149.
- ⁶³ Spigel and Jenkins, "Same Bat Channel, Different Bat Times: Mass Culture and Popular Memory," pp. 127-128.
- ⁶⁴ Parsons, "Batman and His Audience," pp. 72-73.
- ⁶⁵ Roger Stern, "Introduction," *Superman: The Sunday Classics 1939-1943* (New York: DC Comics and Northampton, Massachusetts: Kitchen Sink Press, 1998), p. xiii.
- ⁶⁶ Stern, "Introduction," p. xi-xii.
- ⁶⁷ Stern, "Introduction," p. xi-xii.
- ⁶⁸ Stern, "Introduction," p. xii.
- ⁶⁹ John Fell, "Mr. Griffith, Meet Mr. McCay," *Film and the Narrative Tradition* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), pp. 89-121. Supportive illustrations are included.
- ⁷⁰ James Vance, "The Superman Bandwagon," *Superman: The Dailies* volume 2 1940-1941 (New York: DC Comics and Northampton, Massachusetts: Kitchen Sink Press, 1999), p. 7.
- ⁷¹ Formerly known as Captain Marvel until DC, after buying out Captain Marvel publisher Fawcett, let the license to the name lapse. Marvel Comics took the name for its own Captain Marvel character and so DC was forced to rename the hero after his call to power: "Shazam."

- ⁷² Reynolds, "Masked Heroes," pp. 10-16. Supportive illustrations from *Action Comics* '1 (New York: DC Comics, 1938) are included.
- ⁷³ Jerry Siegel and Joseph Shuster, "The Superman Is Born" from "Superman Comes to Earth." Strip number one in *Superman: The Dailies* volume 1 1939-1940 (New York: DC Comics and Northampton Massachusetts: Kitchen Sink Press, 1999), p. 13.
- ⁷⁴ Vance, "The Superman Bandwagon," p. 13.
- ⁷⁵ Fuchs & Reitberger, "Super-heroes," p. 106.
- ⁷⁶ In 1945, 1955 and 1959 respectively. Richard M. Overstreet, "Historic Firsts," *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, ed. Richard M. Overstreet, number 30 (New York: Gemstone Press, 2000), pp. 889, 891.
- ⁷⁷ Reynolds, "Masked Heroes," pp. 16-25.
- ⁷⁸ Stephen J. Fjellman, "Cinema, Music, Fantasy," *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1992), pp. 259-262.
- ⁷⁹ Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Bagley, *Ultimate Spider-Man* trade paperback (New York: Marvel Comics, 2001). The story updates the origin of Spider-Man first presented in: Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, *Amazing Fantasy* '15 (New York: Marvel Comics, 1963).
- ⁸⁰ Russel Nye, *The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970), p. 236.
- ⁸¹ Many of the superheroes were ill equipped to handle civilian life and ceased appearing soon after the Second World War. The superhero narrative genre was reignited in 1956 when DC revamped its heroes for modern audiences.
- ⁸² Spigel and Jenkins, "Same Bat Channel, Different Bat Times," p. 119.
- ⁸³ Meehan, "'Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!': The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext," p. 57.
- ⁸⁴ Camille Bacon-Smith with Tyrone Yarbrough, "Batman: the Ethnography," *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and his Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1991), p. 91.
- ⁸⁵ Parsons, "Batman and His Audience," pp. 75-77.
- ⁸⁶ Parsons, "Batman and His Audience," p. 78.
- ⁸⁷ Dez Skinn, "Sez Dez," *Comics International*, number 124 (September 2000), p. 3.

⁸⁸ Steve Fritz, "Comics to toons — can't argue with success," *Combo*, number 24 (January 1997), p. 122.

⁸⁹ Most notably Top Cow, who's *Tomb Raider* and other series were sold through Tower Records and Electronics Boutique.

⁹⁰ At DC, these are hardcover collections sold through book stores. At Marvel, this is a return to magazine-size format for newsstands.

⁹¹ *Home Runs and Super Heroes*, broadcast on CPAC, 4 June 2000. For more information, contact <http://www.cpac.ca>.

⁹² Will Brooker, "1961-1969: Pop and Camp," *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* (London, Continuum, 2000), pp. 179-180.

Notes on Chapter Three

⁹³ Richard Dyer, "Part Two: Stars as Stars," *Stars*, new edition (London: British Film Institute, 1998), pp. 33-86.

⁹⁴ Rarity refers to those campaigns used to sell comics-based adaptations. The principle exception to this rule is Disney, which used comics to continue selling the characters from its animated cartoons.

⁹⁵ Kristin Thompson, "Modern Classicism," *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Techniques* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 10-17.

⁹⁶ Thompson, "Modern Classicism," pp. 37-35.

⁹⁷ Thompson, "Modern Classicism," pp. 44-49.

⁹⁸ as of 1999, *Raider of the Lost Ark* has been retitled *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

⁹⁹ Warren Buckland, "A close encounter with *Raiders of the Lost Ark*: notes on narrative aspects of the New Hollywood blockbuster," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 171-172.

¹⁰⁰ Buckland, "A close encounter with *Raiders of the Lost Ark*," p. 171.

¹⁰¹ Buckland, "A close encounter with *Raiders of the Lost Ark*," p. 175.

¹⁰² Elizabeth Cowie, "Storytelling: Classical Hollywood cinema and classical narrative," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 180-181.

¹⁰³ Parsons, "Batman and His Audience: The Dialectic of Culture," p. 76.

- ¹¹ Janet Staiger, "The Hollywood mode of production: its condition of existence," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), p. 93.
- Janet Staiger, "The director system: management in the first years," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 116-120.
- Janet Staiger, "The director-unit system: management of multiple companies after 1909," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 121-127.
- Janet Staiger, "The central producer: after 1914," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 134-137.
- Janet Staiger, "The producer-unit system: management by specialisation after 1931," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 320-329.
- Janet Staiger, "The package-unit system: unit management after 1955," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 330-337.
- ¹² Janet Staiger, "The division and order of production: from the first years through the 1920s," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 142-153.
- David Bordwell and Janet Staiger, "Technology, style and mode of production," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan plc, 1985), p. 261.
- ¹³ Janet Staiger, "The labor-force, financing and the mode of production," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 311-319.
- ¹⁴ David Bordwell, "Technicolor," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 353-357.
- David Bordwell, "Widescreen processes and stereophonic sound," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 358-363.

- ¹⁵ Kristin Thompson, "From primitive to classical," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 157-173.
- Kristin Thompson, "The formulation of the classical narrative," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 174-193.
- Kristin Thompson, "The continuity system," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 194-213.
- Kristin Thompson, "Classical narrative space and the spectator's attention," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 214-230.
- Kristin Thompson, "The stability of the classical approach after 1917," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 231-238.
- ¹⁶⁹ Darryl F. Zanuck in 1968: "We've got \$50 million tied up in these three musicals, *Doctor Doolittle*, *Star!*, and *Hello, Dolly!*, and quite frankly if we hadn't had such an enormous success with *The Sound of Music*, I'd be petrified." Fox posted a loss of \$36.8 million in 1969 and \$77.4 million in 1970. [Wyatt, "From Roadshowing to Saturation Release: Majors, Independents, and Marketing/Distribution Innovations," p. 66.]
- ¹⁷ Cowie, "Storytelling," pp. 179-180.
- ¹¹¹ Murray Smith, "Theses on the philosophy of Hollywood history," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 6-7.
- ¹¹² Janet Staiger, "The Hollywood mode of production: its conditions of existence," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), pp. 89-92.
- ¹¹³ Smith, "Theses on the philosophy of Hollywood history," p. 7.
- ¹¹⁴ Smith, "Theses on the philosophy of Hollywood history," pp. 8-9.
- ¹¹⁵ Smith, "Theses on the philosophy of Hollywood history," p. 16.
- ¹¹⁶ Richard Maltby, "'Nobody Knows Everything': post-Classical historiographies and consolidated entertainment," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 21.
- ¹¹⁷ For a complete list of *United States v. Paramount Pictures Inc.*'s highlights, see: John Izod, "War, Prosperity, Divorce and Loss, 1939-48," *Hollywood and the Box Office 1895-1986* (London: The MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1988), pp. 122-123.

- ¹¹⁸ John Izod, "The New Order, 1955-68," *Hollywood and the Box Office 1895-1986* (London: The MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1988), p. 155.
- ¹¹⁹ Douglas Gomery, "Hollywood corporate business practice and periodizing contemporary film history," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 48.
- ¹²⁰ Gomery, "Hollywood corporate business practice and periodizing contemporary film history," pp. 48-51. When MCA bought Universal, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy ordered the selling off of their talent agency under threat of a conflict of interest suit.
- ¹²¹ Gomery, "Hollywood corporate business practice and periodizing contemporary film history," p. 48.
- ¹²² John Izod, "Conglomerates and Diversification, 1965-86," *Hollywood and the Box Office 1895-1986* (London: The MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1988), pp. 171-198.
- ¹²³ Tino Balio, "'A major presence in all of the world's important markets': The globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s," *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 58-71.
- ¹²⁴ I refer here, of course, to the merger of America On-Line (AOL) and Time-Warner Inc.
- ¹²⁵ Gomery, "Hollywood corporate business practice and periodizing contemporary film history," p. 52.
- ¹²⁶ Gomery, "Hollywood corporate business practice and periodizing contemporary film history," p. 48.
- ¹²⁷ Gomery, "Hollywood corporate business practice and periodizing contemporary film history," p. 53.
- ¹²⁸ Maltby, "'Nobody Knows Everything': post-Classical historiographies and consolidated entertainment," p. 39.
- ¹²⁹ Gomery, "Hollywood corporate business practice and periodizing contemporary film history," p. 53.
- ¹³⁰ "Regis Yanked," *Entertainment Weekly*, vol. 1, no. 539 (12 May 2000), p. 11.
- ¹³¹ *Transformers Magazine* from Marvel UK is one example. The tabloid-sized weekly presented 11 pages of *Transformers* content, supplemented with the exclusive *Death's Head*. Of those *Transformers* stories printed, two of every four weeks were parts of the American issues, while the other two were completely exclusive to the UK. (From a local *Transformers* fan's comicbook collection)

- ¹³² Tom Russo, "The *Wizard* Q&A: Avi Arad," *Wizard: The Guide to Comics*, no. 89 (January 1999), pp. 52-54.
- ¹³³ The sets: *Batman & Superman* and *JLA*. WildStorm, a division of Image, also had *WildStorm Overpower*. Marvel continued to dominate the game, however, with the initial set and expansions *Power Surge*, *Mission Control*, *Monumental*, *Classic Marvel* and *X-Men*.
- ¹³⁴ Patrick Daniel O'Neill (with additional reporting by Matthew Seinnich), "Wizard News Special Report: What's Next for Marvel? Marvel files for bankruptcy, fans want to know, 'Will I get my comics?'," *Wizard: The Guide to Comics*, no. 68 (April 1997), pp. 26-28.
- ¹³⁵ Information on Diamond's rise to monopoly are found in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) of the *rec.arts.comics* usenet newsgroup hierarchy, posted regularly on *rec.arts.comics.info*.
- ¹³⁶ Marvel tried to resurrect *Over Power* by selling the game, its trademarks and play structure to a new interior division, Marvel Interactive. Unfortunately, this move came over a year after Fleer's final set had been issued, and by that time *Over Power*'s consumer base had moved on to Wizard of the Coast's *Magic: The Gathering*, Decipher's *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, or Precedence's *Babylon-5*.
- ¹³⁷ Russo, "The *Wizard* Q&A: Avi Arad," pp. 50-54.
- ¹³⁸ Meehan, "Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!": The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext," p. 52.
- ¹³⁹ Meehan, "Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!": The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext," pp. 52-53.
- ¹⁴⁰ see footnote 19.
- ¹⁴¹ Maltby, "Nobody Knows Everything': post-Classical historiographies and consolidated entertainment," pp. 39-40.
- ¹⁴² Maltby, "Nobody Knows Everything': post-Classical historiographies and consolidated entertainment," p. 36.
- ¹⁴³ Justin Wyatt, "A Critical Redefinition: The Concept of High Concept," *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 8.
- ¹⁴⁴ Wyatt, "A Critical Redefinition: The Concept of High Concept," p. 16.
- ¹⁴⁵ Wyatt, "A Critical Redefinition: The Concept of High Concept," p. 19.
- ¹⁴⁶ Thompson, "Groundhog Day," pp. 153-154.

- ¹⁴⁷ André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Western," *What is Cinema? Vol. 2* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 151.
- ¹⁴⁸ To this I refer to the montage poster which also appeared on the original paperback novelisation. After the new artwork of 1997, this was re-released as a "collector's edition" commemorative poster. In the montage, we have lightsabers, spaceships, droids, etc. which are all symbols of the science fiction genre. Yet Skywalker and Organa are garbed in white while the enemy is in black, one of the motifs of the western.
- ¹⁴⁹ *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider-Man* (later just as *The Spectacular Spider-Man*), *Web of Spider-Man*, *Spider-Man* (later *Peter Parker: Spider-Man*) and *The Sensational Spider-Man* monthly, along with quarterly *Spider-Man Unlimited*, and the dominant role in monthly *Marvel Team-Up*, all make up Spider-Man's regular series since his introduction. This does not include mini-series, maxi-series, one-shots or any crossover appearances in other books. Nor does it include: *Spider-Woman* (which spun out of Spider-Man), *Spider-Girl* (a potential future for the character), *Spider-Man Universe* (reprinting three stories each month) or *The Ultimate Spider-Man* (a new Spider-Man for the nineties). For more see *The Overstreet Price Guide* or the "Price Guide" column in *Wizard: The Guide to Comics*. Information is also available on rec.arts.comics.marvel.universe.
- ¹⁵⁰ Spider-Man, X-Men, Marvel Heroes, Licenses and Marvel Reprints. These were marked by the Spider-Man mask circle, The X-Men crest, the Fantastic Four crest/Avengers logo/other icon against the letter 'M', the Marvel 'M' on a film strip, and the classic Marvel 'M' respectively.
- ¹⁵¹ City according to those on rec.arts.comics.other-media.
- ¹⁵² Meehan, "'Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!': The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext," p. 57.
- ¹⁵³ Wyatt, "From Roadshowing to Saturation Release: Majors, Independents, and Marketing/Distribution Innovations," pp. 73-75.
- ¹⁵⁴ Wyatt, "From Roadshowing to Saturation Release: Majors, Independents, and Marketing/Distribution Innovations," p. 77.
- ¹⁵⁵ Columbia used saturation advertisement for *Breakout* (1975) but not on the national scale and not with the national simultaneous release level that *Jaws* received.
- ¹⁵⁶ Wyatt, "From Roadshowing to Saturation Release: Majors, Independents, and Marketing/Distribution Innovations," pp. 78-79.
- ¹⁵⁷ Wyatt, "From Roadshowing to Saturation Release: Majors, Independents, and Marketing/Distribution Innovations," pp. 81-82.

- ¹⁵⁸ Wyatt, "From Roadshowing to Saturation Release: Majors, Independents, and Marketing/Distribution Innovations," p. 78.
- ¹⁵⁹ <http://www.lordoftherings.com>.
- ¹⁶⁰ *Men in Black's* original series was published by Malibu Comics. It has ceased publishing by the time Marvel Comics bought Malibu in the early nineties as part of its expansion policy. This gave Marvel the rights to claim *MIB* was their own property and release subsequent releases — though the poorly received mini-series was the only *Men in Black* property to be published by Marvel.
- ¹⁶¹ The single was also included on Smith's next album, *Big Willie Style* (1997).
- ¹⁶² <http://www.billboard.com>. Various charts can be accessed through the site.
- ¹⁶³ "Stacking Up," *Wizard: The Guide to Comics*, number 109 (October 2000), p. 47. The numbers are also comparable on *imdb.us*.
- ¹⁶⁴ Krämer, "Would you take your child to see this film? The cultural and social work of the family-adventure movie," pp. 294-295.
- ¹⁶⁵ Krämer, "Would you take your child to see this film? The cultural and social work of the family-adventure movie," pp. 296-305.
- ¹⁶⁶ Krämer, "Would you take your child to see this film? The cultural and social work of the family-adventure movie," pp. 296-305.
- ¹⁶⁷ Krämer, "Would you take your child to see this film? The cultural and social work of the family-adventure movie," pp. 307-308.
- ¹⁶⁸ Reynolds, "Masked Heroes," pp. 12-16.
- ¹⁶⁹ This is the primary focus of *Batman: Gotham Knights*, issues 1 through 11 (New York: DC Comics, 1999-2000). Each adventure is accompanied by psychological analysis of the Batman and his assistants Dick Greyson (formerly Robin and now Nightwing), Alfred Pennyworth, Barbara Gordon (formerly Batgirl and now Oracle), Tim Drake (the present Robin) and Batgirl.
- ¹⁷⁰ dating comes from: Leonard Maltin, "Paramount/Famous Studios Filmography," *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons*, revised edition (Toronto: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1987), p. 449.
- ¹⁷¹ Fritz, "Comics to toons — can't argue with success," p. 122.

Notes on Chapter Four

- ¹⁷² Diamond Comics Distributing divides its comic offerings into those by “premiere” publishers Dark Horse, DC, Image and Marvel and those by smaller and independent publishers.
- ¹⁷³ While not covered by any comics journal, the 22,000 copy/\$35,000 line still became known to Marvel fans thanks to the Internet. More information can be found on usenet newsgroups *rec.arts.comics.marvel.universe* and *rec.arts.comics.marvel.x-books* or by accessing 1996 and 1997 postings to those newsgroups via Internet newsreader *www.dejanews.com*.
- ¹⁷⁴ In the early days of Marvel Comics, Stan “The Man” Lee was the writer of every title the publisher offered. To compensate for the heavy workload, Lee and the artists established “The Marvel Way” of comicbook writing. Lee would write a short summary of what would occur in the issue. The artist was then free to interpret the summary in any manner they chose. The completed art would then come back to Lee for scripting (dialogue) before going for colouring and then print.
- ¹⁷⁵ Lee’s euphemism for prime rival DC continues to be used at Marvel to this day. See: “Stan’s Soapbox” in all monthly Marvel comics, 1999-2000.
- ¹⁷⁶ The Justice Society of America, or JSA, is another name for the All-Star Squadron — DC’s first superhero team. The Justice *League* of America, or JLA, premiered in the fifties, over a decade after the All-Star Squadron, and in 1985 were headquartered not in New York City but in outer space. Today, the JLA are based on the moon while the JSA are based in New York City.
- ¹⁷⁷ For example, DC’s *Elseworlds* series which assumes a much different historical context. At Marvel, the rule of shared universe has only been disrupted once in the company’s forty years of publishing comics. Licensee *The Transformers* was set in the regular Marvel Universe until the publisher decided to change the four issue limited series into an ongoing series. Since giant robots battling each other would require regular intervention of the superheroes, Marvel chose to withdraw *The Transformers* from the Marvel Universe with issue five and put it in the separate universe of fellow Hasbro product *G.I. Joe*.
- ¹⁷⁸ To further consistency amongst the Superman books, DC began adding another icon to the cover just below the issue number. This icon identifies the year of publication and the chapter of that year’s Superman narrative.
- ¹⁷⁹ Mark Salisbury, “Frank Miller,” *Writers on Comics Scriptwriting* (London: Titan Books, 1999), p. 198. Miller has written a number of film scripts on top of his comic series, including *Robocop II*.
- ¹⁸⁰ Brooker, “1986-1997: Fandom and Authorship,” p. 285.
- ¹⁸¹ Brooker, “1986-1997: Fandom and Authorship,” pp. 285-286.

¹⁸² Universal put *The Incredible Hulk* adaptation on hold when Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) estimated the cost of a computer-generated Hulk would force the budget over \$300 million. Fox is holding production on its adaptation of *The Fantastic Four* until the proposed budget for the film comes closer to the \$85 million they wish to spend than the \$100 million suggested cost. For more, visit: rec.arts.comics.other-media.

¹⁸³ Brooker, "Batman: One Life, Many Faces," p. 186.

¹⁸⁴ Brooker, "1986-1997: Fandom and Authorship," p. 289.

¹⁸⁵ Brooker, "1986-1997: Fandom and Authorship," p. 289.

¹⁸⁶ Brooker, "1986-1997: Fandom and Authorship," pp. 259-260.

¹⁸⁷ A key problem in the study of adaptations, according to Imelda Whelehan. See: Imelda Whelehan, "Adaptations: The contemporary dilemmas," *Adaptations: from text to screen, screen to text*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 3-4.

¹⁸⁸ The *Mystery Men* DVD release includes a deleted scene in which Mr. Furious, The Shoveller and The Blue Raja attempt to contact The Sphinx before deciding to go after the Invisible Boy.

Notes on Chapter Five

¹⁸⁹ "The Strangest Teens of All" ran above the title from *The X-Men*'s debut in 1963 until 1974, when Marvel debuted the "All-New, All-Different" X-Men in *Giant Size X-Men* number 1. Info obtained from: rec.arts.comics.marvel.x-books.

¹⁹⁰ Michael David Thomas, "The Jim Shooter Years — part one," excerpt from an interview done for <http://www.comicbookresources.com>, *Comics International* issue 127 (December 2000), p. 45.

¹⁹¹ Amongst others, including My Little Pony, Air Raiders and the Visionaries. Only *G.I. Joe* and *The Transformers* would survive as comicbook series. *My Little Pony* would be the only other Marvel-produced animated series to have an extended episode released theatrically as a feature.

¹⁹² Parsons, "Batman and His Audience," p. 74.

¹⁹³ *Marvel Super-Heroes* was followed by *Spider-Man*, *The Fantastic Four*, *The Incredible Hulk* and a second *Spider-Man* series which quickly became *Spider-Man & His Amazing Friends* (respectively).

¹⁹⁴ Jim McLachlan, "The *Wizard* Q&A: the 'real' Spider-Man," *Wizard: The Guide To Comics*, number 89 (January 1999), pp. 106-111.

- ¹⁹⁵ The list is published by Diamond Comics Distributors in its monthly catalogue *Previews*. It can also be found reproduced in *Wizard: The Guide To Comics* and *Comics International*, the latter with sales number attached.
- ¹⁹⁶ Hoping to profit from a bad call, Marvel released "Pryde of The X-Men" on home video in 1986. The episode is significant because of its inclusion of The Disco Dazzler on The X-Men, a character that would not join in the comics until months later.
- ¹⁹⁷ The episodes were repackaged as feature films for Europe, Asia and Australia before being released on home video.
- ¹⁹⁸ *The Punisher* was shown in Vancouver, Canada.
- ¹⁹⁹ Actually, Spider-Man had been licensed thrice. Before the agreement with each studio came to a close, however, they had either dissolved or become insolvent. MGM bought the license off two of those studios, which led to the lawsuits over who actually had control of the license: Marvel or someone else.
http://www.findarticles.com/m1312/n1_v372/21076334/p1/article.html
- ²⁰⁰ Michael David Thomas, "The Jim Shooter Years — part three," *Comics International*, issue 129 (January 2001), p. 55.
- ²⁰¹ Russo, "The *Wizard* Q&A: Avi Arad," pp. 50-56.
- ²⁰² Rob Allsetter, "Trailers....," *Wizard: The Guide to Comics*, number 84 (August 1998), p. 75.
- ²⁰³ A sample of postings on *rec.arts.comics.marvel.universe* and *rec.arts.comics.other-media* over the weeks that followed revealed some fans (with disbelief) actually liked the film while others clearly disliked it. [For the record, I fall in the first category.]
- ²⁰⁴ Peter Sanderson, "The X-Men in the 1960s," *The Ultimate X-Men* (New York: Dorling Kindersley Publishing Inc., 2000), p. 12.
- ²⁰⁵ The Avengers roster was: Captain America, Thor, Iron Man (each with separate books for solo adventures on top of *The Avengers*), Ant-Man/Giant-Man/Goliath/Yellowjacket (Dr. Henry Pym changed code names frequently), Wasp, Wonder Man, Hercules, Quicksilver, Scarlet Witch, Hawkeye, the Vision and the Black Panther. Hellcat and the Beast were also present but did not become members — along with "token black member" The Falcon — until 1976.
- ²⁰⁶ Len Wein and Dave Cockrum, *Giant-Size X-Men*, number one (New York: Marvel Comics, 1975) and *The X-Men*, volume one, number ninety-two (New York: Marvel Comics, 1975). Both issues reprinted in black and white in *The Essential X-Men*, volume one (New York: Marvel Comics, 1996).
- ²⁰⁷ As Byrne did with all things Canadian. Byrne used his stint on *The X-Men* to launch *Alpha Flight*, the comicbook of Canadian superheroes.

- ²⁰⁸ Craig Shutt, "Secret Origins," *The Wizard Wolverine Special* (1999), p. 25.
- ²⁰⁹ Paul Wardle, "X-Men: Filming Marvel Superheroes," *Cinefantastique*, volume 2, number 32 (August 2000), p. 15.
- ²¹⁰ Wardle, "X-Men," p. 15.
- ²¹¹ Wardle, "X-Men," p. 11.
- ²¹² Sadly, the first trailer is not available on the DVD release because the licensing fee for the music during its action montage was too high. From: <http://www.ign.com>, 13 November 2000.
- ²¹³ Daniel Fierman and Jeff Jensen, "'X' Appeal," *Entertainment Weekly*, number 543 (June 2, 2000), p. 15.
- ²¹⁴ At least according to rumours. See: www.zentertainment.com newsletters leading up to the feature film.
- ²¹⁵ The big exception being "Duel of the Fates" from *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*.
- ²¹⁶ The number of creators being shuffled around from book to book in the industry led *Wizard* to carry a "Where are they now?" table in its monthly "News and Notes Column."
- ²¹⁷ "The X-Axis Reviews - 5 July 2000" posted to newsgroup rec.arts.comics.marvel.x-books by their author, Paul O'Brien.
- ²¹⁸ Seth Jones, "Mutant Merchandise: Toys R Us launches official X-Men online store," *Wizard: The Guide to Comics* #106 (July 2000), p. 34.
Jay Faerber, Karl Waller and Mark McKenna, *X-Men: Wolverine (An X-Men Movie Prequel)*, Toys R Us giveaway edition (New York: Marvel Comics, 2000).
- ²¹⁹ At least temporarily. After the merger with Apocalypse killed him at the end of "The Twelve" storyline in *The X-Men* #97, he took some time off and got better. He returned to life in *The Search for Cyclops* mini-series, and resumed his official X-Men duties in *The Uncanny X-Men* #391.
- ²²⁰ It's actually one of the film crew in a Spider-Man costume. In another outtake shown at the 2000 San Diego comicon, Logan and Marie are spooked by director Bryan Singer flying past their car window like Superman.
- ²²¹ In a bid to prevent any future blind runs, Marvel announced that it would only print everything except trade paperbacks to initial orders from that point onwards. Trade paperbacks were excluded because Marvel felt readers should always have access to important adventures of the past.

²²² "Dude, Where's My Cash? From the comedies that laughed all the way to the bank to the smash-hit action thrillers to the big-budget bombs of 2000, we've got all their numbers," *Entertainment Weekly* #578 (19 January 2001), pp. 50-51. The list is sorted by domestic box office gross compiled from weekly reports in *Variety*; *The X-Men* were beat by *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (\$257.8/74.3 million), *Mission: Impossible 2* (\$215.4/350), *Gladiator* (\$186.7/258.3), *The Perfect Storm* (\$182.6/143.1) and *Meet the Parents* (\$162.2/55.2).

Notes on Chapter Six

²²³ Whelehan, "Adaptations: The contemporary dilemmas," p. 3.

²²⁴ Rob Allsetter, "Movieland caught in web of comic-book epic," *The Ottawa Citizen* (Saturday, 10 March 2001), pp. K1, K5.

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