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With the return of the  
X-Men crossover in 'Messiah  
Complex,' we tap X-legends to  
review the biggest X-epics ever done

BY MARK JACOBS



ED BRUBAKER



CHRIS CLAREMONT



ADAM KUBERT



JIM LEE



JEPH LOEB



MARC SILVESTRI



FABIAN NICIEZA

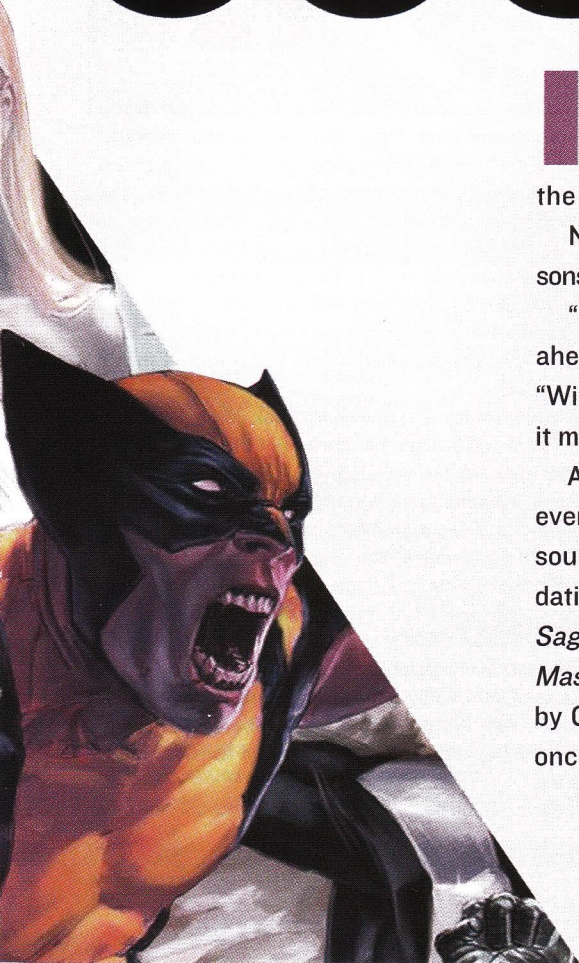
# COUNCIL

Infernos, massacres, deadly apocalypses and the fall of mutant heroes—the X-Men crossover was never kind to Professor X's students. But fans loved the drama, action and high tension of the huge summer blockbusters.

Now, the tent poles of the X-Men franchise that once arrived like seasons, with noisy continuity head-trips and mutant genocides, get rehabbed.

"If your biggest titles need to be shaken up to generate interest, go ahead and kill some people," says "Messiah" penciler Marc Silvestri. "Wipe out mutants, populations, whatever you need to do, so long as it makes some sense for the characters in that universe."

As "Messiah Complex" rockets to its mutant-changing conclusion, every former X-Man from Chris Claremont to Jim Lee and Jeph Loeb sounds off on the biggest X-events of the last 30 years, from the foundation stories that set the stage (*Giant Size X-Men* #1, *Dark Phoenix Saga*, *Days of Future Past*), to the suspenseful early days (*Mutant Massacre*), to the all-star limited-run writing and art teams epitomized by Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely that now receive the affection once freely given to *Fatal Attractions* and *X-Cutioner's Song*.





## GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1 (1975)

**WHY IT MATTERED:** A precedent-setting team lineup change complete with new character introductions.

**JIM LEE** (*Uncanny X-Men* artist/co-plotter 1989-92, *X-Factor* co-plotter 1991-92): It took the original X-Men concept and made it more real. Now there are mutations all over the world, so you've got an international team, with characters that are truly persecuted. They made them look freakier and gave them better powers and more unique personalities with different life experiences. I always love the X-Men when they're in their blue and yellow pajamas.

**ED BRUBAKER** (*Uncanny X-Men* writer 2006-present): Those character introductions are so cool. I could have read 48 pages of them. But when you reread it, don't you think Professor X should sort of be in a hurry? His team is missing and he's globetrotting in his wheelchair. He could do all of that mentally. In my mind he's a projection and it's all happening simultaneously while he's sitting in a room. That's how Grant Morrison would have told that story.

## DARK PHOENIX SAGA (1980)

**WHY IT MATTERED:** Someone important dies. Readers love it.

**JEPH LOEB** (*Cable* writer 1994-97, *X-Force* writer 1995-97, *X-Men: The Road to Onslaught* writer 1996, *Wolverine* writer 2007): [Chris] Claremont and [John] Byrne were just kicking ass. Romance. Mystery. Violence. All the stuff the X-Men do really, really well.



The legacies of *Giant-Size #1* (above) and "Days of Future Past" (below) still live on in today's X-Men.



**LEE:** A great story in its purest form. They didn't realize what they had and exploit it until later. In the original storyline, Jean Grey doesn't die, they were just going to psychically lobotomize her, but [then-Marvel Editor-in-Chief] Jim Shooter didn't want her killing a whole planet of broccoli people and getting off. I remember seeing un-inked pages that John Byrne had drawn, the original ending. They looked like they were drawn fairly quickly, probably because they were in a rush. It didn't end with the visual crescendo that one would imagine a storyline like that would. I like it when characters are killed. I care about it. And then if they come back, I care less.

**ED BRUBAKER:** Jean Grey was my first real comic book death. I was mad when they started *X-Force* and brought her back—not that they brought her back, but the way they did it. If they had the Phoenix reborn, that would have made sense, because that's what phoenixes do. But to have Jean Grey in Adam Warlock's extra cocoon? And I say that as someone who's killed people and brought people back. You've got to put more work into it than Adam Warlock's extra cocoon.

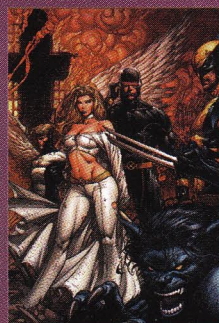
## DAYS OF FUTURE PAST (1981)

**WHY IT MATTERED:** The alternate future begins here.

**BRUBAKER:** After "Days of Future Past," the idea of going to the future or the past or an alternate reality became a core part of what the X-Men do. Now when you're doing a big X-Men thing, you have to consider the X-Men's fear of the future.

**LEE:** That story was classic. All you needed. And then they kept building on it.

## UNCANNY X-MEN Brubaker pulls the team apart!



Readers who think they've got Ed Brubaker's take on the X-Men figured out should think again. "My post-'Messiah Complex' arc is an all-fun arc," laughs the writer. "It's the weirdest thing I've ever done on *X-Men*."

In a series of five stand-alone issues starting with February's *Uncanny X-Men* #495, Brubaker and artist Mike Choi launch "X-Men Divided" which delves into the lives of the core X-Men characters in the wake of the action of "Messiah Complex."

"[In the crossover] we have three or four months of non-stop X-Men action with a bazillion villains and a bazillion fights and huge dramatic overtones," Brubaker

explains. "This arc is almost like a 'What do we do next?' kind of arc and a reevaluation time. Part of it has Scott and Emma taking a vacation in the Savage Land. Wolverine, Nightcrawler and Colossus are on a European road trip."

The writer also promises that "X-Men Divided" would keep long absent X-Men such as Angel in the picture for the team's eventual reformation in next summer's *Uncanny X-Men* #500.

"There's an enormous amount of freedom knowing that *Uncanny* is basically going to be the main X-Men continuity book," says the writer of his taking the reins as the flagship team's primary architect, noting that *Uncanny* #500 would provide him a chance to turn the status quo on its head. "What we're doing with that book is really going to freak X-Men fans out, hopefully in a good way. We're doing something that I just threw out at a meeting once because I thought, 'Why has this never happened?' And everyone was like 'Oh my God! It's perfect!' This was an idea I had when I was 13!"

"Out of 'Messiah Complex' they have this new agenda," says Brubaker of where the team will move next. "Instead of just doing what Professor X's vision of what the future should be, it's Cyclops' vision of what the X-Men should do. What is the X-Men's mission? That's what's going to be different in a way that will really please people." ■ **KIEL PHEGLEY**



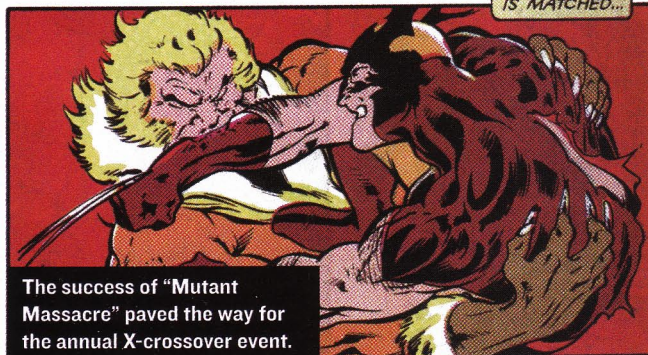
If I was a new reader I would not be able to absorb the wall of information that is the mutant universe today. It's a victim of its own success. I had some storylines that built on it too. We toyed with the future stuff, but we tried to raise more questions than we answered. At least that was the intent. It would be out of line to answer things that other people posited in their storylines. But that original was amazing. I loved it. If I were to get on the book again I would kill everybody and leave one mutant.

**CHRIS CLAREMONT** (*Uncanny X-Men* writer 1975-1992, 2000-01, 2004-06; *X-Men* writer 1991, 2000-01): The hope was to create a great story. We weren't thinking about what's going to happen in 10 years. No one knew if the X-Men were going to be around in 10 years. [Today's continuity] is sad. On one level I'm flattered that writer after writer takes over the books and recycles stories that have come before them. But for the most part it's limiting, going back to the same ground again and again and again.

## MUTANT MASSACRE (1986)

**WHY IT MATTERED:** *It was the first X-crossover. The often overlooked, but never to be underestimated, great, great grand-crossover of them all. Plus, it actually was a massacre.*

**CLAREMONT:** It hadn't been done before. Jim Shooter said we had to do it based on the success of *Secret Wars*. The idea was that we would do a crossover, it would be fun and we'd move on. Be careful what you wish for. For 30 years heroes went untouched. We kind of touched them with the death of Phoenix, but she came back. We wanted to remind everyone, in primal terms, that we deal with dangerous people in dangerous situations and there are consequences. And there were way too many Morlocks.



The success of "Mutant Massacre" paved the way for the annual X-crossover event.

**MARC SILVESTRI** (*Uncanny X-Men* artist 1987-90, *Wolverine* artist 1990-92): If your biggest titles need to be shaken to generate interest, go ahead and kill some people, wipe out mutants, populations, whatever you need to do. As long as it makes some sense for the characters in that universe.

**LOEB:** Anything Chris [Claremont] did, we are still building on 30 years later.

## FALL OF THE MUTANTS (1987)

**WHY IT MATTERED:** *The follow-up to the Mutant Massacre sent the X-Men to Australia (unexpected), killed a nice multilingual New Mutant named Cypher (sad enough) and unleashed the metal-winged, blue-faced Archangel (um, shock).*

**SILVESTRI:** That's when Angel got cool, right? When Walt Simonson hit him with Apocalypse?

The redesign of Angel was a smart one. When you saw him on the cover it was jarring, because everyone knew him as the fair-haired rich guy with the angel wings. I think he had it coming. Walt, to his credit, said, "Here's a guy with wings, he should be really cool—and a way to make him really cool is to turn his world upside down."

**CLAREMONT:** When Louise Simonson was the editor and later with Ann Nocenti, we were not ferociously interested in X-crossovers, partly because we felt we'd burn out the creative juices. After the Mutant Massacre was so successful, the creative challenge became, "Can you top this?"

## INFERNO (1989)

**WHY IT MATTERED:** *The story of the Jean Grey clone Madelyne Pryor with a baby and a nasty demon habit finally*



## CABLE The X-Men's resident soldier battles across time



Come February, Marvel's most famous time-traveling soldier finds a new mission and a new series as *Cable* debuts from crime novelist Duane Swierczynski (*The Wheelman*) and artist Ariel Olivetti (*Punisher War Journal*). But while the character's most recent adventures have taken place in the comedy-tinged *Cable/Deadpool* series, Swierczynski takes Cable back to his rough and tumble roots.

"From page one of issue #1, Cable's in it up to his neck," teases the writer. "Once you understand Cable's peculiar predicament, you'll be fully primed for the arcs to follow. It was cool to plan the series this way, because this is usually my M.O. when I write crime thrillers: start with someone in a really effed-up situation, then watch the character squirm and fight and change until the very last page."

And the situation calls for lots of time travel.

"You can expect to see some familiar Marvel U faces throughout the series, but perhaps not in the way you might expect," says Swierczynski. "This isn't 'Back to the Future.' Cable's not going to zip back in his DeLorean and accidentally cause his mother to fall in love with him. Though that might be fun, come to think of it—imagine Cyclops as George McFly."

"When I sat down with the boys in the X-office, we talked about the certain, predictable ways that time travel stories have played out over the years. Then we tried to run in the opposite direction."

That direction includes a fair amount of "Messiah Complex" fallout, including a new adversary that hits Cable close to home. "Cable does have one central nemesis throughout the series, but interestingly I wouldn't go so far as to call him a 'villain,'" the writer says.

In the end, the biggest mystery in the series may be its star. "His internal conflict is what makes him tick. There's something priestly about him, yet at the same time, there's something John Rambo about him." ■ KP



comes to a head. New York City is possessed, the heroes get a little crazy, and monster slapstick ensues. Mr. Sinister is involved, as usual.

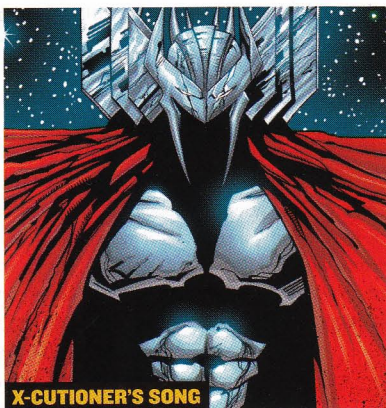
**CLAREMONT:** We had to do it again. The pressure was, "Can we top this?" And to an extent we did, partly by just getting silly. We've got a lunatic taking over Manhattan and turning it into a Dali-esque nightmare; in *Excalibur* you had Kitty ending up in the costume of a cheerleader while at the same time in [*Uncanny*] *X-Men* you have the deadly killer post box.

**SILVESTRI:** It had the shocker shot of Wolverine kissing Jean. The big double-page splash of the two of them getting together. Those are the moments you remember because it meant something. I don't remember if it actually *did* mean anything, it could have been one of those alternate-universe-type situations, but that shot was iconic.

## X-CUTIONER'S SONG (1992)

**WHY IT MATTERED:** *Cable* is explained. Just not simply.

**FABIAN NICIEZA** (*X-Men* writer 1992-95, *X-Force* writer 1991-95, *Uncanny X-Men* scripter 1999): That crossover was already scheduled on the publishing budget at the time the guys [Jim Lee, Marc Silvestri, *X-Force*'s Rob Liefeld and *X-Factor*'s Whilce Portacio] were leaving to start Image Comics. They waited just long enough to maximize their bargaining power before leaving, and the rest of us had to put together a major multi-title crossover on very short notice. Our directions from Marvel were to type. Quickly. And make sure it doesn't suck. And sell a tremendous amount of copies, since this is our big volley after the Image guys left and we need to make



a statement. New artists, new writers, all things considered, it's a minor miracle we even got it done. So...honestly, you know, mission accomplished. We were aiming more to 10-, 14-year-old boys than 40-44 jaded disenfranchised superhero readers. So we made everything a bit more bombastic, Stan Lee hyperbole-style than the books nowadays.

**BRUBAKER:** I picked up *X-cutioners* and I got about two issues into it and had to put it down because I was like, "I don't know who any of these people are. This thing seems like a real mess." [*Laughs*] People keep comparing our crossover [*Messiah Complex*] to the '90s crossovers, and I guess it's got that same energy and the sheer mass of characters and different villain groups in one story, but I haven't read any of that, which is kind of funny.

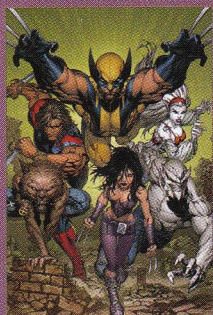
## FATAL ATTRACTIONS (1993)

**WHY IT MATTERED:** This event commemorating the *X-Men*'s 30-year anniversary was noteworthy for the Wolverine-gets-his-adamantium-yanked-out-by-Magneto money shot.

**NICIEZA:** This one was less "my" story than *X-Cutioner's Song* was. I was a bit burned out after having broken down most of that story, so I rode in the passenger seat on this one. I knew it would be [artist] Greg Capullo's last issue on *X-Force*, so I wanted to go out with a bang, and I think we did that. I also knew the "deboning" of Wolverine was going to be a huge event, which it was and helped shape that character's run for years to follow. Peter David blurted

## X-UNIVERSE

New series, new members and new missions arrive on the heels of *Messiah Complex*



**X-FACTOR** (left) After the cataclysmic finale of "Messiah Complex," February's *X-Factor* #28 finds the mutant investigators in flux. "There will be serious ramifications that will strike to the core of not only their mission, but their very location," teases writer Peter David who welcomes a lineup change in the form of mutant adaptoid Darwin. "I think he's kind of cool. He knows stuff. No, there's only so many times I can make that [saying] work," quips David, referring to his running Layla Miller line, "she knows stuff." "He *does* stuff. He brings a fresh perspective."

**X-MEN: LEGACY** Star-crossed lovers Rogue and Gambit won't be finding their happy destiny come February as this 12-issue miniseries by Mike Carey and Scot Eaton finds the pair mixing it up with a number of mutant menaces. And as the series rolls out, expect mysteries and revelations hidden in the minds of five of the X-Men's most powerful allies and foes and major plans for the Master of Magnetism.

**X-FORCE** Forget what you think you know about the team name *X-Force* as *New X-Men* writers Craig Kyle and Chris Yost team with artist Clayton Crain for a new black-ops-style team led by Wolverine. Featuring Warpath, Wolfsbane and X-23, expect things in *X-Force* to get hairy quick.

**WOLVERINE** Logan may have survived "Messiah Complex," but not without one final score to settle in February's issue #62 by writer Jason Aaron (*Scalped*) and artist Ron Garney: "Get Mystique." Then in June, *Wolverine* #66 superstar artist David Finch joins writer C.B. Cebulski for Wolvie's fight against the ninjas of The Hand displaced after Elektra was revealed as a Skrull.

**WOLVERINE ORIGINS** An unnamed government agency hires Deadpool to assassinate Wolverine starting in January's issue #21. "This is a job that very few people have the qualifications to take on," explains writer Daniel Way of the potential hit. "Bringing Deadpool in gave me a chance to break out of that somber, grim tone. It's going to make it more rambunctious without it being too jarring." Way and artist Steve Dillon leave *Origin* after this arc to start a new *Deadpool* ongoing series sometime in '08. **KP**





it out during our story conference, if I recall, but I think he was joking when he said it. Everyone looked at each other and smiled and liked the idea quite a bit. That's how I remember it. Just one of those moments where a seemingly ridiculous idea made perfect sense.

**SILVESTRI:** I didn't like that at all. I understand *why* it was done. Wolverine's our biggest character, he's been around for a long time, let's f--- with him. But one of the things that made him so cool is that he's virtually indestructible but he has to suffer all the pain in the world. You just can't break him. That's a strong part of his basic appeal. Someone thought that if we make him fragile and breakable it will give him more depth, but he doesn't need that.

**CLAREMONT:** I wasn't particularly thrilled with Wolverine's origin either, but then Len wasn't thrilled with me making him 300 years old.

**ADAM KUBERT** (*Wolverine* artist 1993-96, *Uncanny X-Men* artist 1999-2000, *Ultimate X-Men* artist 2000-03): It was really cool, but for me it sucked because that's when I started drawing Wolverine, and in my first issue [*Wolverine* #75] he didn't even have his adamantium!

## AGE OF APOCALYPSE (1995)

**WHY IT MATTERED:** *This surprising crossover—which takes place in an alternate future where Magneto becomes the father of the X-Men after Professor X is inadvertently killed—was full of clever plot twists and inventive character treatments. During the story, Marvel replaced all of its mutant titles with renamed “AoA” titles such as Astonishing X-Men (formerly Uncanny X-Men), Generation Next (Generation X) and Weapon X (Wolverine).*

**LOEB:** Not only was it my first crossover [as a writer], so I have a lot of fond memories, but it was incredibly bold to cancel all the books and start them over. You have to remember there was no Internet, so the fans really didn't know what the hell we were doing.

**BRUBAKER:** It's an intriguing idea. I remember being in the comic book store and overhearing someone talking about it at the time, getting really mad and saying he would never buy comics again.

But it's a cool story. You could see [2005's reality-altering] *House of M* coming out of it.

**CLAREMONT:** Again, you're dealing with tropes that already exist.

**SILVESTRI:** Refresh me. How does that end? Alternate realities can be a disaster waiting to happen, but handled correctly can be very intriguing. I'm a big fan of the “Terminator” franchise, at least the first two. I like the cosmic stuff, when you put down the book or walk out of a movie and you're like, “Damn, that hit me with a lot of force and I'm not really sure why.”

**KUBERT:** “Age of Apocalypse” was memorable because I was a part of it. Redesigning all of the characters was really interesting. What was also interesting was having to do it quickly. I redesigned Wolverine with that stump for a hand thinking “They'll never accept this,” but I had to have something to [then-X-Men editor] Bob Harras to have something to bring to a meeting in an hour.

## ONSLAUGHT (1996)

**WHY IT MATTERED:** *An example of when the crossover bubble bursts, it showcased Onslaught, a giant, villainous blend of Magneto and Professor X with big teeth and the power to be really powerful.*

**LOEB:** The Onslaught origin, as it went on, got so f---ed up. The story kept changing. It's no wonder [then-X-Men writer Mark] Waid quit in the middle of it. What a mess. [*Laughs*]

**KUBERT:** I did the bookends for that crossover, the beginning and the ending of it. I had to draw a hell of a lot of characters. It's a lot of pressure and a lot of work, but fans love having

a gazillion characters in a book. Artists don't love having a gazillion characters in a book.

## E FOR EXTINCTION (2001)

**WHY IT MATTERED:** *Not technically a crossover but definitely an event, Grant Morrison's reconsideration of the X-Men universe introduced a storm of ideas that are still in play today.*

**SILVESTRI:** I liked Morrison's run on *New X-Men* in general. Some of it may have been too far out for people, but I like that stuff. I'd love to work with the guy again, let's put it that way.

**CLAREMONT:** I liked the first year better than the second. The major problem I had with Grant's work was making the team public. For 30 years I was told vociferously by management starting with Stan—it's really weird being one of the few writers left still working who used to

work directly for Stan—that one of the key elements of the X-Men's existence is that they are clandestine, secret, hidden. And if you take that away they become just like everybody else. Which they did. I also liked the White Queen as a villain. It would have been much more fun to have Scott fall in love with her and as a bad guy. But God knows Stan and Len are probably pissed off enough at me for some of the things I did to their creations.



“Onslaught” basically shuffled off the Avengers, FF and Hulk into another pocket universe.



AGE OF APOCALYPSE

