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DAREDEVIL: BORN AGAIN

Author: Miller, Frank

Artist: David Mazzucchelli (illustrator); Richmond Lewis (colorist); Christie Scheele (colorist); Joe Rosen (letterer)

Publisher: Marvel Comics

First serial publication: 1986

First book publication: 1987

Publication History

Daredevil: Born Again was originally published in the monthly, thirty-two-page superhero comic book *Daredevil*, issues 226-233 (February-August, 1986). The issues were collected in graphic novel format in 1987 and went through several editions, including a deluxe hardcover edition released in 2009. The deluxe edition included recolored covers of the monthly *Daredevil* issues without the *Daredevil* logo, as well as the original, uninked pencil drawings from issue 228 and sample penciled pages from issues 229, 231, and 232. The deluxe edition also included Frank Miller's script for issue 233, "Armageddon." Finally, though not part of the *Born Again* story arc, "Warriors" (*Daredevil*, issue 226) was included in this collection because it was the only other *Daredevil* collaboration between writer Miller and artist David Mazzucchelli. *Born Again* colorist Christie Scheele and letterer Joe Rosen also contributed to the "Warriors" issue, with other contributors including Denny O'Neil (writing) and Dennis Janke (art). The first issue of the *Born Again* story line, "Apocalypse" (*Daredevil*, issue 227), was voted the eleventh best of the top one hundred Marvel Comics of all time in a 2001 readers' poll.

Plot

The story begins as Karen Page, Daredevil's former lover, sells his secret identity to a drug dealer for heroin. This information is passed on to Daredevil's



Daredevil: Born Again. (Courtesy of Marvel Comics)

enemy, a powerful crime lord known as the Kingpin. The Kingpin uses his influence to bankrupt and disbar Daredevil's public persona, Matt Murdock, who does not understand his decline until his house is bombed, making him realize that the Kingpin is responsible. Now homeless, Murdock plots to get his life back, but he no longer knows whom he can trust. When he calls his law partner and finds that his partner and his girlfriend have become involved with each other, he becomes unhinged. He confronts the Kingpin as

Murdock, rather than Daredevil, and is bested. The Kingpin locks him in a car and attempts to drown him, but he escapes. When he stumbles across some thieves stealing Santa Claus suits, he tries to stop them and is stabbed. Wounded, Murdock finds his way to the gym where his father trained as a fighter. This reinvigorates him, and he vows to get his life back.

Next, Murdock finds himself in a mission attended by nuns. His stab wound takes some time to heal, but he discovers that his long-lost mother is a nun. Meanwhile, Page travels to New York in the hope of saving him. She contacts his law partner and learns that Murdock is missing. Meanwhile, reporter Ben Urich decides to make public that Murdock was framed. The Kingpin's mob goes after Urich, and Murdock saves him.

The Kingpin knows that Murdock is in hiding and tries to flush him out by having one of his men pose as Daredevil. Murdock defeats the imposter and rescues Page, who was captured by a drug dealer. The two rekindle their relationship.

Undeterred, the Kingpin sends Nuke, a supersoldier in his employ, to find and destroy Murdock, who is living quietly in the Hell's Kitchen area of Manhattan. However, when Nuke goes on a rampage, Daredevil emerges fully costumed to face him, and the two battle. After a short time, the Avengers, led by Captain America, appear and take Nuke into custody. However, Nuke escapes and is eventually shot.

Daredevil takes Nuke to the reporter Urich, contributing to the downfall of the Kingpin, who is indicted for numerous crimes. Although he avoids jail, his power is broken, and he vows revenge. The story concludes with Daredevil and Page deciding to remain in Hell's Kitchen, their lives having been transformed.

Characters

- *Daredevil*, a.k.a. *Matt Murdock*, the protagonist, is a blind lawyer and superhero who was both athletic and bookish growing up. His father, a prizefighter, made him promise to get an education. At fifteen, he was blinded while pushing an old man out of the way of a truck. The accident exposed him to radioactive materials that heightened his other senses. Remaining true to his father's wishes, he became a brilliant attorney. Using his athletic abilities, his heightened senses, and his legal expertise, he fights crime as Daredevil.
- *Karen Page* is Murdock's former secretary and girlfriend. She left his employ and embarked on an unsuccessful career as an actress that led her to star in pornographic films. By the beginning of *Born Again*, she has become a heroin addict.
- *Franklin "Foggy" Nelson* is Murdock's law partner, existing in the shadow of Murdock's legal brilliance. He emerges as an exceptional attorney in his own right, defending Murdock against fraudulent claims.



Daredevil: Born Again. (Courtesy of Marvel Comics)

- *The Kingpin*, a.k.a. *Wilson Fisk*, is a powerful crime lord determined to destroy his archenemy, Daredevil. He is also an able wrestler.
- *Maggie Murdock* is Matt Murdock's mother. As a boy, Murdock was told that his mother had died. In *Born Again*, she returns as a nun who cares for him while he is homeless.
- *Glorianna O'Brien* is a photographer and a girlfriend of Murdock. She is frustrated by Murdock's absences, not knowing that he is Daredevil, and becomes involved with Foggy Nelson.
- *Ben Urich* is a crack reporter for *The Daily Bugle*. From following Daredevil's career closely, he has surmised that Murdock is Daredevil. As a result, he has become Murdock's confidant.
- *Captain America*, a.k.a. *Steve Rogers*, is a superhero who received his powers during World War II, when he was too weak to join the U.S. Army. He agreed to participate in a scientific experiment and was transformed into the supersoldier Captain America. He was frozen in ice toward the end of the war, and when he thawed out, he returned to fighting crime as a member of the Avengers.
- *Nuke* is a supersoldier, the product of an attempt to create more soldiers like Captain America. However, this experiment went awry, and Nuke often works outside the law.

Artistic Style

The visual presentation is one of the most interesting aspects of *Daredevil: Born Again*. For the most part, the art by Mazzucchelli is representational in style, focusing on soft lines that indicate understated movements and facial expressions. Some objects are depicted as oversized to indicate their impact on a character; for example, a loudly ticking clock is depicted as very large. Likewise, the action scenes are simplified, helping to present an understated action story. Catholic images such as cathedrals, stained-glass windows, and nuns abound in *Born Again*, reflecting both the content of the story and the theme of redemption. In keeping with the redemptive theme, the color red is used heavily. This is partially representative of Daredevil's red costume, but it also symbolizes the

idea that bloodshed is necessary for rebirth. The other predominant color is black, and both colors emphasize each other. Other colors used in the story are softer, making both the red and the black stand out in contrast.

Another important visual component of the story is the use of small panels to depict movement and larger panels to indicate isolation. Generally, the small panels are used for routine or quick actions, while the larger ones slow down the pace and allow the reader to focus on the characters. In several cases, overhead shots are used to better depict the characters' powers. When an ill Daredevil confronts the Kingpin, the reader sees how small he is when viewed from above. When the triumphant Daredevil emerges from a fire, he faces the reader defiantly.

Miller had been both the writer and artist of *Daredevil* from 1979-1983 and had a distinct visual style, focusing on clever use of blacks and hard lines. Mazzucchelli's artistic style in *Born Again* borrows some of Miller's visual language while portraying dramatic scenes, but his work also echoes earlier, less stark *Daredevil* artists such as Wally Wood, Gene Colan, and Gil Kane.

Themes

The theme of *Daredevil: Born Again* concerns personal redemption, as Daredevil, or Matt Murdock, must save himself after his life has been shattered by the Kingpin. Murdock embarks on the epic hero's journey; he is deprived of his worldly goods, questions his sanity, and is physically wounded nearly to the point of death. However, as the title indicates, the hero is reborn and restored. The chapter titles—"Apocalypse," "Purgatory," "Pariah," "Born Again," "Saved," "God and Country," and "Armageddon"—further imply this rebirth. As the story progresses, Murdock's law partner comes out of Murdock's shadow; Murdock finds his mother, whom he believed since childhood to be dead; and he rekindles his relationship with his former lover, Page. As the story closes, Murdock must build a new life for himself.

Impact

Although it did not garner any major industry awards, *Daredevil: Born Again* wielded great weight in the

comics industry. It solidified Miller's position as one of the premier mainstream comic book storytellers and gave newcomer artist Mazzucchelli star status. The *Born Again* story line set the pattern for the Daredevil character for the next several years, as Murdock relocated from his brownstone to New York's Hell's Kitchen, where Daredevil battled drug lords and street thugs rather than superpowered villains.

The *Born Again* story line also helped ground many superhero stories in the real world, as opposed to a more fantastical world populated by supervillains and magic. *Daredevil: Born Again* was part of the break away from the superpowered fantasies of the 1970's and early 1980's, signaling the turn toward more mature stories.

Stephen Weiner

Films

Daredevil. Directed by Mark Steven Johnson. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003. This feature film starring Ben Affleck, Jennifer Garner, and Colin Farrell was in part based on the Daredevil character presented in *Daredevil: Born Again*. The film was received well enough that a follow-up film also starring Jennifer Garner, *Elektra* (2005), was produced.

Further Reading

Bendis, Brian Michael, and Alexander Maleev. *Daredevil: Lowlife* (2003).

Miller, Frank, and David Mazzucchelli. *Batman: Year One* (1988).

Miller, Frank, and John Romita, Jr. *Daredevil: The Man Without Fear* (1994).

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Wright, Bradford W. *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

See also: *Daredevil: The Man Without Fear*; *Elektra Assassin*; *Elektra Lives Again*