

Darick Robertson: Into The Night

"There are some things in this world that are neither human nor mutant, but threaten both species. There are places in this world where shadows rule—and creatures of darkness and light struggle, hidden from view. Where the superhuman and the supernatural meet, where the line between sorcery and science blurs, where the occult and the quotidian intermingle... there stalks the Nightcrawler."

That's how writer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa pitched **Nightcrawler**, a new monthly series set to debut this September from Marvel Comics. The book will be the first to feature the solo adventures of the fuzzy blue mutant on an ongoing basis. Joining Sacasa on the series will be talented artist Darick Robertson. Robertson cut his teeth on the acclaimed DC/Vertigo series **Transmetropolitan** before moving over to Marvel to pencil the controversial mini-series **Fury** and the Punisher origin tale **Born**. Late last year he also relaunched the monthly title **Wolverine** with writer Greg Rucka.

Although **Nightcrawler** is still in the early stages of development, Darick took some time to answer questions about the recently revealed project.

MARKISAN NASO: How did you get involved with **Nightcrawler**?

DARICK ROBERTSON: It was offered to me by Marvel when it was clear that I would be available towards the end of my **Wolverine** run.

I had mentioned to a few people there how much I love the character and how badly I wanted to do a **Nightcrawler** project. [Marvel Editor] CB Cebulski nominated me for the title immediately, recalling how much I enjoy drawing the character and our collaboration on **X-Men Unlimited**.

The day he called he said "I got some really good news for you..."

NASO: This will be Nightcrawler's first ongoing series, even though the character is extremely popular. Why do you think it's taken this long to launch a monthly **Nightcrawler** book?

ROBERTSON: Hard to say. I don't know if there has ever yet been a solo series that really captured what makes Nightcrawler interesting. Also, with the film, he's a more recognizable character now than ever before.

NASO: A lot of fans have been clamoring for the swashbuckling, beer chuggin' elf from early **Uncanny X-Men** and **Excalibur**. Will you and writer Roberto be returning Nightcrawler to his more adventurous roots or are you taking him in an entirely different direction?

ROBERTSON: I have to speculate, as I've not read any scripts yet and we're just starting to plan out the first arc, but I would say we're going to head in a new direction.

Kurt has been through some personal transformations, his time as a priest, for example. This series will be dark, and mysterious. It will be set in present continuity as well, and the X-Mansion as his base, with cameos and team ups with some of the other X-Men throughout.

I want to bring the elements of Nightcrawler that I love to it, like the fencing and the gymnastics, but not all the baggage from the many directions he's been pulled over the years. Like the film, they took some of the old and some of the new and added their own twist, and came up with a great movie



version. I want to bring him home, but not reinvent him yet again. I also want to lose that stuff that I disliked. I never enjoyed him being too much the pirate, as that makes him silly, but I like that he fences. That can be cool. I also didn't like the priest angle, so I want that roguish nature in there too.

Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa and I have been communicating about what he envisions and what I bring to it is a longer appreciation of Nightcrawler and his past, since I've been such a long time fan. So Roberto is open to collaboration and [Marvel Editor] Mike Marts is guiding this book hands on. I think it has great potential to be new and still satisfying to long time fans.



NASO: It sounds like you are participating more in the development of this series than you have on some of the other books you've drawn. Do you find it easier to offer ideas to a new writer like Sacasa than to established vets like say, Garth Ennis or Warren Ellis?

ROBERTSON: Not really. It's always dependent on the personalities of the people I'm working with. In this case it was Roberto's suggestion and I appreciate his willingness to collaborate. How much I'll actually be involved is still undetermined, but since this is a new venture, I'm glad he's open minded. Ennis and Ellis were too.

NASO: Nightcrawler has been very closely associated with the X-teams and hasn't really ventured out on his own. Is there a reason he's going solo, or does the book plan to simply focus on his off-day adventures?

ROBERTSON: Actually it's more specified to missions that his knowledge and powers are useful for.

I hope to go into details about his personal life over the course of the series and hope we explore who Kurt Wagner is and what makes him tick, along the way.

NASO: On your message board you mentioned that the series will have a dark, mystical edge to it and that Nightcrawler will actually be taking on Dr. Strange type cases. Roberto's proposal also likened Kurt to "John Constantine with blue fur and a tail." Can you elaborate on this?

ROBERTSON: I'm really just going off from what Roberto suggests in the story proposal.

"Kurt Wagner is what his codename says he is: A creature that prowls night, working to solve the darker mysteries other people can't—or would rather not... Deeply spiritual, in tune with the world beneath the regular world—a netherworld of magic and myth, demons and angels, ghosts and monsters (human or otherwise)—Kurt is an orphan in the most profound sense of the world. Even his primary super-power, teleportation, underscores his constant feelings of displacement—of not belonging."

NASO: Would you like to see Dr. Strange show up in the book?

ROBERTSON: Yes, I would.

NASO: Traditionally Nightcrawler has had difficulty being accepted by society, more so than most of his mutant pals. Is this something that will be addressed in the series?

ROBERTSON: I hope so. It's my main draw to the character. I like that he can't truly escape his mutant existence like the other X-Men can, generally. Jean Grey and Scott Summers can fit in at a grocery store and go relatively unnoticed. Without the image inducer, Kurt stands out in a crowd and is an easy focal point for all that anti-mutant hysteria. Despite all of that, Kurt is a kind soul



and deep thinker. I really appreciate that interesting angle and his tormented past.

NASO: What X-characters you'd like to see show up in Nightcrawler and why?

ROBERTSON: Well, I'll ultimately be hedging to draw as many of the X-Men as I can, but for story's sake, Logan and Kitty seem like natural guest stars, but I'd like to draw Rogue also, because I have a fondness for the character.

NASO: The portrayal of Nightcrawler as a priest has created some controversy in the comics community. Earlier you even said you didn't like the priest angle. Will Nightcrawler's faith be explored in the new series?

ROBERTSON: In some ways his faith will be challenged and explored, but he won't be wearing the collar. I think making that character a priest was a mistake. I never saw him as going that route. It clashes with his roots, I believe, and I think always played as a gimmick.

NASO: You were a Nightcrawler fan before you got the ongoing gig. Are there any particular Nightcrawler stories that had an impact on you growing up?

ROBERTSON: Absolutely. The Paul Smith/Claremont years of the **X-Men** and the friendship between Logan and Kurt was just so cool to me.



NASO: What past Nightcrawler artists are you looking at for inspiration? What is it about their renditions that you like?

ROBERTSON: Alan Davis, Paul Smith, John Byrne and Adam Hughes have all done definitive versions in my opinion. Davis made him a great leading character and brought out his charm, Byrne really gave him his personality, by making him hang upside down to answer phones, that sort of thing, Paul Smith gave him depth and made him truly likeable and Adam Hughes captured all of that in his version in **X-Men/Wildcats**.

NASO: How do you view Nightcrawler physically?

ROBERTSON: Built like an Olympic gymnast. Someone who cares about his physique because he's so self-conscious about his blue skin and demon-like appearance.

NASO: What about him do you most want to capture in your art?

ROBERTSON: His humanity.

NASO: What makes him interesting to you?

ROBERTSON: All of it. Mostly, I find the idea of the great human being buried in a monster's body very interesting.

NASO: After you drew a few issues of **Wolverine** Marvel asked you to make the character better looking, a change that I assume was influenced by Hugh Jackman's Wolverine in the **X-Men** films. You weren't too happy about the alterations at first, but you accepted the changes. Any chance there will be requests for changes to Nightcrawler?

ROBERTSON: That's not exactly how it happened. Wolverine is such a high profile character and appears in so many titles. Marvel decided that everybody needed to be on the same page with Wolverine and Hugh Jackman was pointed out as an example of the classic Wolverine. When I came to **Wolverine**, I had this burning desire to really define the character and how he looks. I really wanted to make that an element to my run that would stand out.

At the time, I was drawing him pug ugly and squat, the way I see him, and another artist was drawing him with a goatee and another tall and thin. Marvel wanted everyone to agree on a look. It affected me noticeably, and I was unhappy, because I had 4 unpublished issues that were affected by the change, but I wasn't singled out.

That's less likely to happen with Nightcrawler as everyone agrees on his look. They've seen me do the character a few times, most recently in **Wolverine #6** and the dream issue #12, and know what they're in for. Marvel likes the sketches, so I think we'll be fine.

I don't feel a need to define Nightcrawler's look, as much as I just love to draw him and am just looking forward to enjoying bringing him to life on the page month after month.

NASO: Obviously you are psyched to draw **Nightcrawler**. But you've often said that **Wolverine** was your dream book when you were a kid. When all is said and done you will have drawn about a year's worth of **Wolvie** issues. Are you satisfied with your run on **Wolverine**? Would you like to draw the book again someday?

ROBERTSON: I will have drawn more than a year's worth, actually. Fourteen issues in all. With Greg leaving, I'm comfortable going also, but in some ways, I had hoped we'd have a longer and meatier run. If Logan shows up in **Nightcrawler**, I'll enjoy drawing that just as much.

If they offer me a return to **Wolverine** after I finish with **Nightcrawler**, I'd certainly consider it. There's still a chance I'd be tapped for special series like "The End" and such. From everything I was told, the change in teams was more about bringing in a fresh team with Greg's departure than any dissatisfaction with the work that I was doing. I was told the door was open for me to return for another arc. I certainly would enjoy working with Mark Millar.

I never imagined I'd be so lucky as to move onto a **Nightcrawler** series on the heels of **Wolverine**, so in some ways it's still a childhood dream manifesting. It's hard to feel disappointed!

NASO: The sketches at your website of Nightcrawler depict him in street clothes. Will he be wearing his costume in the series, or are you taking a more realistic approach?

ROBERTSON: I don't know yet. The sketches are just sketches. I'm experimenting with different looks, trying to get a feel for Kurt in 2004. I'm thinking about what he'd wear, what will give him a real personality and presence as a lead character, rather than just a solo X-Man. If this series is going to work, it's going to rely on the reader wanting to follow Kurt around. If the X-Men seem absent all the time, the series will fail.

NASO: In the past you've said you prefer to ink your own work. Will you be inking Nightcrawler?

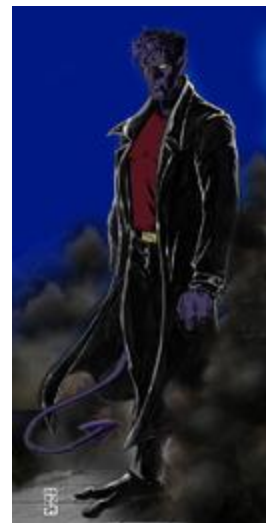


ROBERTSON: Right now, that's the plan.

NASO: And why is inking your own work so important to you?

ROBERTSON: I enjoy it, honestly. I like seeing my own work through. Many of my favorite artists ink their own stuff, and it's a newer skill for me that I am enjoying the challenge of honing. Ultimately, no one knows better than I do what I want my art to look like when it's done. There are things that get changed at the last second when I'm seeing it come together in ink, and I like presenting that to the audience. Of course, that also deprives me of a scapegoat when the work isn't so hot.

NASO: How many issues a year will you be able to draw? And do you plan to stay on **Nightcrawler** longer than you did on **Wolverine**?



ROBERTSON: Right now I'm committed to a years worth of issues. They don't want any interruption of my run and neither do I. I'd like to do 12 straight issues, and continue on from there if it's working out.

NASO: If anyone ever doubts your love for Nightcrawler all they have to do is take one look at that picture of you dressed as the "elf" for Halloween in 1984. Any chance you'll throw on the spandex again now that you're drawing the monthly comic series?

ROBERTSON: Only if I get back to being 140 pounds, like I was 20 years ago.

For more about Darick Robertson visit his website at www.darickr.com.