



By Trent Drake

Cyber Force #5-7

Image Comics

Art by Marc Silvestri

Story by Eric Silvestri

Another day, another artist-turned-fan-favorite who thinks he's Jack Kirby.

Marc Silvestri became a fan favorite for his work on Marvel Comics' *Wolverine*. His run on that high-profile book included the first appearance of the notoriously silly cyborg duo of Elsie-Dee and Albert. Elsie-Dee (lcd) and Albert were a cyborg bomb in the form of a cute little girl and a clone of Wolverine, respectively. And in a way, Silvestri's still doing those characters in his own book, *Cyber Force*.

The *Cyber Force* is a team of mutants who were cybernetically enhanced by an evil corporation named Cyberdata. Once they broke free of their programming, they decided to become a force for good in the world by blowing up bad guys and talking in pseudo-military fashion whenever possible. Thus was born a team of covert operatives named... well, you know.

This book is bad. Silvestri (the artist) makes all kinds of anatomical mistakes, and his facial close-ups are quite gruesome. The artwork is typical Image stuff full of bulging, over-detailed, hyper-muscular males and and blatantly underclad, over-developed, hyper-mammary females. The men look like action figures and the women look like they're posing for a cheesecake calendar. In Silvestri's defense, he does draw some pretty mean-looking machinery. It don't make up for the other stuff, but it's cool enough on its own.

The plot, on the other hand, has nothing going for it. It's loaded with cliches, bad characterization and over-abundant captions. *Cyber Force* assaults a temple, it blows up, then they go after another temple, and it blows up too. Pretty simple... but everything is so over-written as to render it incomprehensible. And the characters! The best of them, Velocity, is sixteen years old and displays way too much of her body. Ripclaw is a rip-off of both WildC.A.T.s' Warblade and X-Men's Wolverine. The rest are forgettable Cable clones.

The one special thing about this comic is its innovative use of computer coloring to create very nice special effects. Velocity is the first speedster to benefit from the new computer coloring, and hopefully she won't be the last.

A bad attempt to cross the X-Men with the A-Team, *Cyber Force* rates a solid F.

"Prodigal"

A cross-over storyline running through the Batman books DC Comics (various artists and writers)

In the aftermath of the memorably bad "Knightfall," "Knightquest," and "Knight's End" storylines comes this tale of comic books gone right.

When Bruce Wayne had his back broken by Bane, he asked the new hero in town, Jean Paul Valley (Azreal), to replace him as Batman. Unfortunately, Azbats (as the trade

young person to take his place, and this is the first time a Robin has ever graduated. The trouble is, Dick has never been a very confident crime-fighter. As Nightwing, he was constantly trying to measure up to the Batman and never quite succeeded. Now that he is Batman, he's still trying to live up to it... but the pressure is even worse, and the stakes are much higher.

Other characters have also reacted badly to the Batman identity crisis. Commissioner Gordon, the original Batman's greatest advocate, is losing his trust in the cowled vigilante, and his anxiety over who's wearing the mask now is ruining his marriage.

And to top it all off, my favorite villain, Two-Face, has been released by a computer error. As a result, his famous dual nature has found a new outlet: computers, which run on binary code. Two numbers, one and zero, defining an entire universe. Two-Face latches on to this interesting philosophical idea with tremendous zeal, and nearly brings Gotham to its knees by messing with the police database.

Now, this is the way a comic book should read. I've read eight parts of this ten-to-twelve part series and I can't wait to see how it turns out. I know from the trade magazines that Dick will give the mantle back to Bruce, but when? How? Will the redefining of Two-Face last? Can Gordon save his marriage? Can Batman win back the trust he's lost? Can Robin continue to fight crime when his father is trying to bond? I'm going to have to stay tuned.

Now that the story is out of the way, let's talk about artwork. Since the story runs through four different Batman books (*Batman*, *Detective Comics*, *Shadow of the Bat*, *Robin*), that means at least four different art teams. Three of them are desperately trying to be Norm Breyfogle but falling short. I don't understand why DC lets these middling art teams handle their best character.

However, I will lavish both praise and criticism on Phil Jimenez, who pencils *Robin*. The bad news first: he draws Robin with bulging, slick muscles that are completely inappropriate. But the good part is that this guy could, with a little more work, be the second coming of George Perez. He draws excellent figures, faces and backgrounds in a classical style. It's a refreshing antidote for a guy who has read one too many Image comics.

One minor complaint that has nothing to do with art or story: I hate multi-book cross-overs. Trying to keep track of what part is in which book and then tracking them down is damned tiring, to say nothing of what it does to each book's continuity. This isn't really a problem with *Batman*, but try reading an X-Men crossover sometime!

And now, the best part: The whole "Prodigal" story is still available off the rack for a low cover price. Treat yourself to one of the best thought-out story arcs in recent comics history.



magazines have dubbed him) was a violent, obsessed individual more inspired by Image's sales figures than by any kind of coherent plot development. His murderous, take-no-prisoners style horrified everyone. Alfred quit the mansion, Robin was kicked out of the Batcave, and several crooks got killed by low-hanging captions. Eventually, a recovered Bruce Wayne had to return and take the Bat mantle from Valley, thus restoring the Batman to his former glory.

Or did he?

Bruce has decided that he can't take this Batman stuff anymore. He wants to live a life without the Batman. But he knows he can't leave Gotham without a protector. So he turns the Bat legacy over to the man who should have gotten it in the first place: Dick Grayson, a.k.a. Nightwing, a.k.a. the original Robin. Thus begins one of the neatest Batman story arcs of recent years.

The premise of this story is intriguing, to say the least. The position of Robin was created so that Batman could train a