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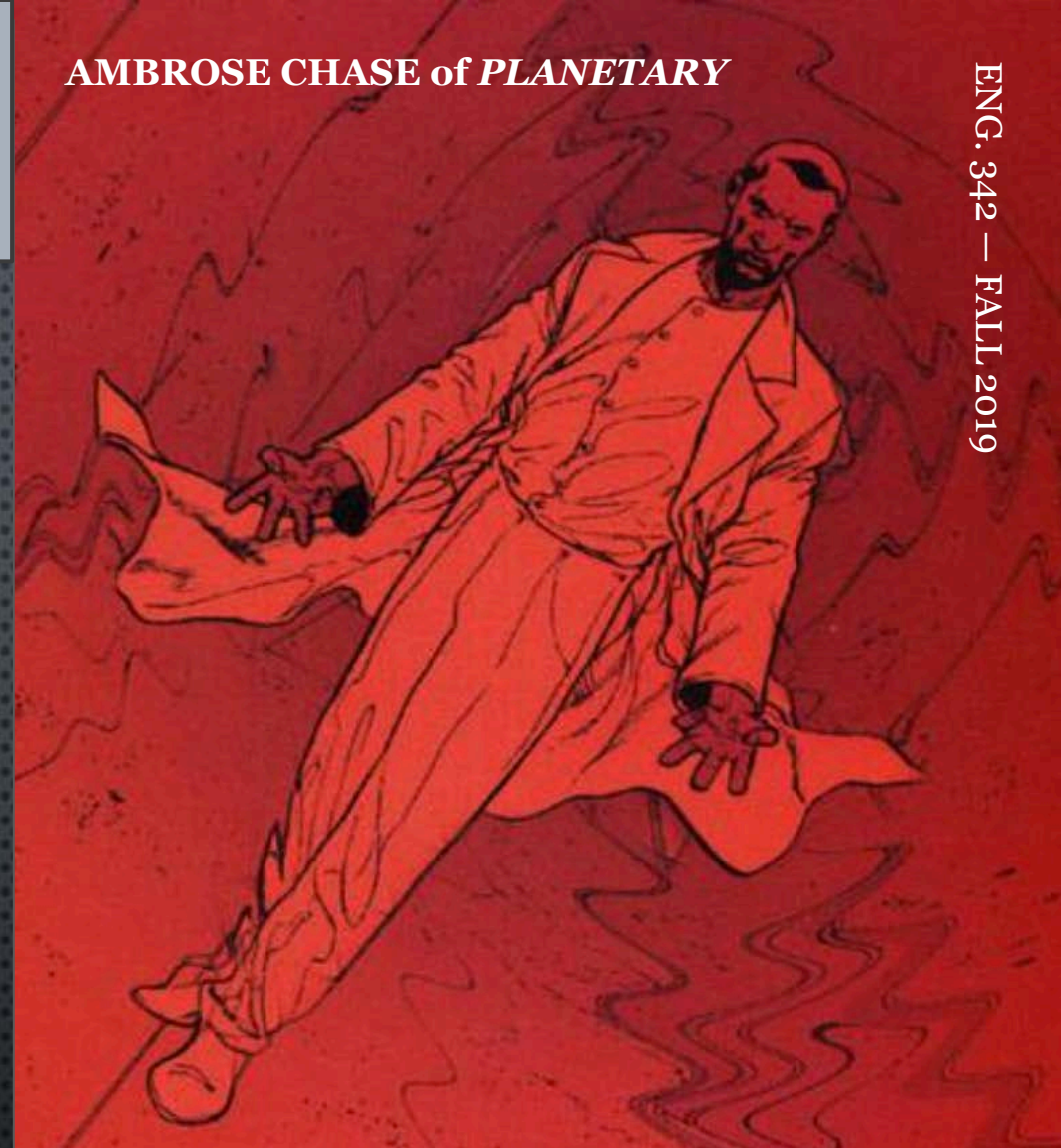
MSU Special Collections Comic Art

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AMBROSE CHASE of *PLANETARY*

ENG. 342 – FALL 2019



**FUTURIST
PROTAGONISTS:
EXAMINING THEIR SHROUDS OF SECRECY**

AN INTRODUCTION

- Instances exist where futurist comic book characters who possess extranormal or supernatural powers are suppressed and forced to remain secretive of their existence.
- In contrast, ordinary humans who don't possess powers can be the ones to press this secrecy. In this zine, it's explored how Ambrose Chase navigates both.



EDITORIAL NOTE

BY CLAIRE MOORE

AMBROSE CHASE stands out among the three other members of the Planetary team. The “Archaeologists of the Impossible” don’t seem complete without his presence. Gravity manipulation and the bending of the very laws of physics themselves are Chase’s powers, and what usefulness he brings to the team with them – especially as they face their adversaries, The Four, in their quest to unravel the secrets of their superhero-scarce world.

Warren Ellis writes Ambrose Chase from a futurist standpoint. As such, Chase exists in a world of science fiction and his powers were genetically passed down from his father. His father survived Science City Zero, where genetic experimentations took place.

In this comic zine, Chase’s powers and his affiliations with other members of the Planetary field team are described in detail. As one delves further into the zine, one will see comparisons and contrasts of Chase to four characters: Agent J of the Men in Black; Storm of Marvel’s X-Men; Monica Rambeau of Marvel Comics; and the Watchmen/Angela Abar of both the Watchmen comic series and 2019 television show.

Each character shares with Chase at least one, if not more, of Ellis’s four futurist elements. Those include science fiction, genetics, anthropology and sociology. In addition, the matter of maintaining a secret identity and loyalty to an organization shrouded in secrecy (Chase does both) is compared and contrasted between the other characters. Chase is similar to Storm and Monica Rambeau (aka Captain Marvel and later Pulsar) in that he has superhuman powers (called *posthuman* in WildStorm). He contrasts with them in that he doesn’t purposefully make his identity publicly known. Chase also differs from Agent J and Angela Abar – he has powers, while they do not. However, he’s like them in that he belongs to an underground organization.



AMBROSE CHASE'S DEATH (NOT REALLY)

- He appears to die during a routine mission on a raid to The Four's facilities, when he is shot multiple times.
- However, his body disappears from the presence of Jakita, leading the rest of the Planetary team to believe he's somehow survived.
- He did survive – by freezing time around himself. He is revived in PLANETARY's final issue.

Who is AMBROSE CHASE?



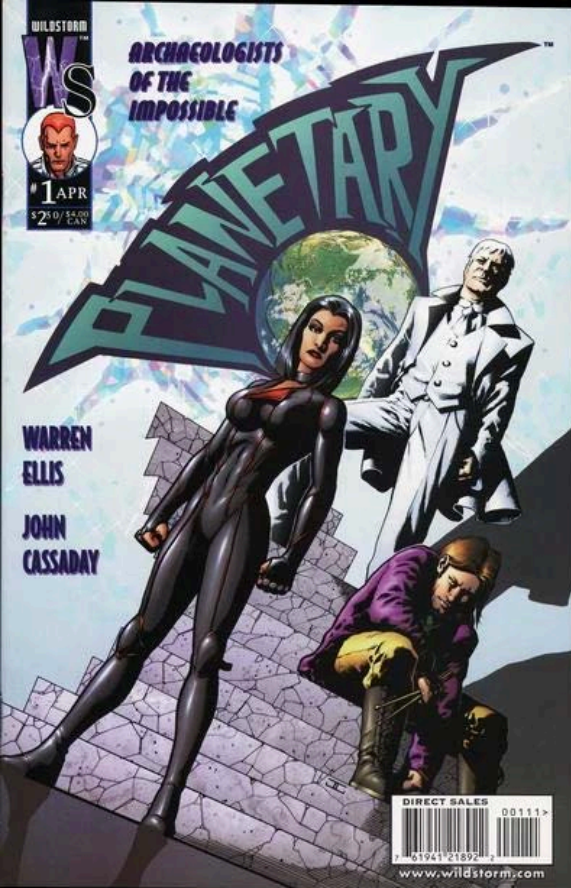
CHARACTER PROFILE



Chase is imbued with a selective physics distortion field. is the child of a survivor of Science City Zero, a genetic experimentation laboratory.

What is PLANETARY?

*Chase first appeared in PLANETARY #9 in 2000.



CREATORS

- Warren Ellis, British comic book author



Image Credit: warrenellis.com

- John Cassaday, American artist



Image Credit: The Hollywood Reporter

Front cover of
PLANETARY VOL. 1
Published April 1999.

Chase has long been acquainted with ELIJAH SNOW, who recruited him to join Planetary. Planetary is a team of archaeologist individuals who aim to discover the secret history of their mysterious world.

IN SHORT

Covert operations, like the Men in Black.

Representative of extranormal humans, like Storm.

Contrasts with Monica Rambeau's desire to be well-known.

Identity kept within mysterious organization, like Angela Abar chose to do.



*PLANETARY ran from 1999 to 2009 for a total of 27 issues.



Academy-Award winning actress and comic book fan Regina King was cast in a newly-created role HBO's 2019 version of **WATCHMEN**.

- King portrays Angela Abar, a police detective who, after surviving an attack by “Seventh Kalvary” white supremacists, publicly resigns from Tulsa’s police force. But she dons a mask and hood at night and acts as a vigilante to stop the Seventh Kalvary.
- Like the Planetary team, Abar – aka “Sister Night” – and her fellow Tulsa officers are not part of a universe where heroes are well-known or embraced. King’s character has no superpowers, like Ambrose Chase does, but there is an effort on the Seventh Kalvary’s part to shroud history. That’s also happening in **PLANETARY**, and the team is working to stop it.

“I’m not talking about X-Files stuff. Fun as it is, it’s done to death. I’m talking about a world in the superhero genre whose only known heroes, for the most part, are sourced in **conspiracy theory and hallucinated alien histories**. What if, underneath all that, there was an entire classic old superhero world?”

— Warren Ellis, author of **PLANETARY**, in his proposal for the series.

Image Credit: Warren Ellis: *Captured Ghosts* documentary



CHARACTERS TO BACK UP THESIS

Warren Ellis is a futurist.

That means he weaves ideas of science fiction, anthropology, sociology and genetics into his work.



Image Credit: HBO

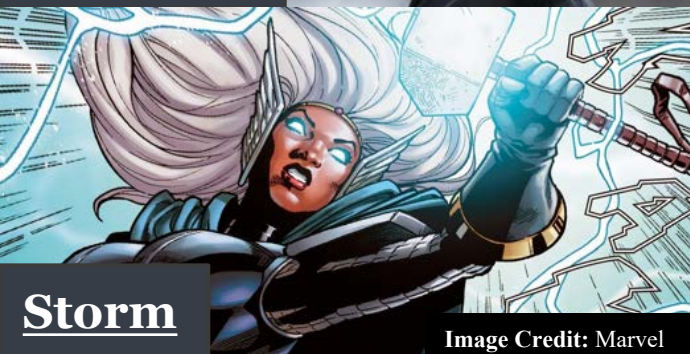


Image Credit: Marvel



Monica Rambeau

Image Credits: Marvel

These additional characters support the idea that those imbued in supernatural affairs or gifted with extranormal powers bear the weight of secrecy and suppression, but also face conflict to protect their worlds from what is unknown.



Agent J



Image Credit: HBO

2019 TV ADAPTATION PUTS REGINA KING IN SHROUDED ROLE

According to *The Washington Post*, the 2019 series “instead leaps from the 1920s Tulsa massacre of black people to a present-day battle between vigilante cops and a group of masked white supremacists. Regina King said the sensitive subject matter is a way of addressing present-day issues while also paying homage to Moore and Gibbons’s creation.”

MORE



WHEN THE SHROUDED TAKE ACTION

Watchmen – created by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons in 1986 – is set in a universe where mainstream superheroes are a thing of the past and costumed vigilantes are outlawed. As fate would have it, protagonists are pulled back into the mix when one of their old colleagues is murdered.

Comic book protagonists with extranormal powers face a common trend: the pressure to maintain a “secret identity.”



Think of the public pressure faced by mutants from the *X-Men*.



Let's explore what Ambrose Chase experiences because of his possession of extranormal powers. How does this affect his role in Planetary, a covert team?



According to the research article [The Circulation of Icons in Planetary: Pictures, Popularity and Materiality](#), comic readers are

“...invited to explore the ‘secret history of a fictional world’” with *Planetary*.

MORE: Characters live in a universe that has a secret history.

“It provides this composite universe with a secret history, which borrows from a variety of popular genres and forms. In this dissimulated past, several events described in popular culture have in fact happened, but have been kept secret from the population or have simply gone unnoticed, so that the series’ fictional world superficially resembles our own.”

MONICA RAMBEAU

Comparing and Contrasting Futurist Elements of Monica Rambeau and Ambrose Chase

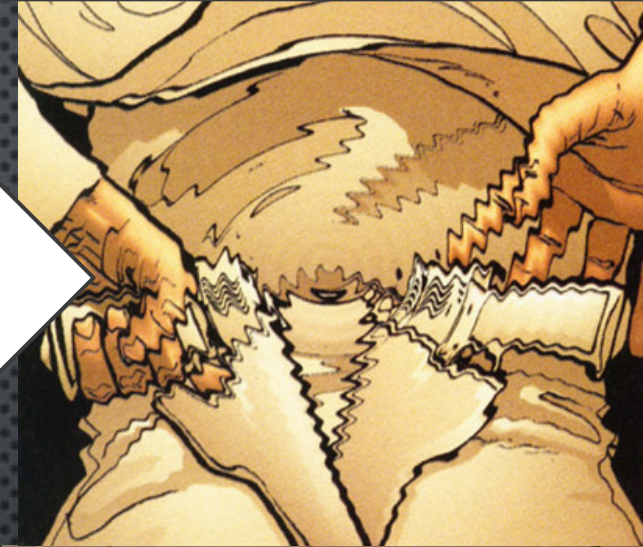
- Rambeau is in Marvel’s Earth-616 – a place where extranormal-powered humans aren’t out of the ordinary.
- Rambeau is set in a well-established universe, with a history mapped out down to the last details.
- Rambeau is well-known as a powerful member of the Avengers (and in comics history as one of the most powerful Black female superheroines).
- Rambeau cares very deeply about her public title of Captain Marvel (and when someone else takes the mantle, she quickly renames herself).

- Chase’s world doesn’t give him a well-known hero name – just a team name that evokes mystery.
- Chase is part of a team that is dedicated to re-establishing what their world’s actual history is.
- His powers were well-established since he was young. Planetary members knew of him even at that age.
- Ambrose Chase is referred to simply as a member of Planetary and doesn’t take on a separate superhero mantle or title.



COVERT CHARACTERS UNCOVERING COVERT SECRETS

In addition to putting Chase in a highly mysterious universe, Ellis writes Chase as possessing those aforementioned “futurist” elements.



Of the four key “Archaeologists of the Impossible,” Chase is introduced latest in the series.



FUTURIST ELEMENTS OF *PLANETARY* CHARACTERS



ELIJAH SNOW

- Founder of the Planetary field team dedicated to uncovering universe's secret history.
- The “Fourth Man”
- Highly intelligent.

JAKITA WAGNER

- Possesses superhuman strength, durability, and vision, handed down genetically from her father.
- Sometimes listed as second-in-command of Planetary team, after Snow.



THE DRUMMER

- Technopathic, genius-level intellect, skilled at hacking
- He can use his drumsticks to more easily intercept information by tapping them on objects.

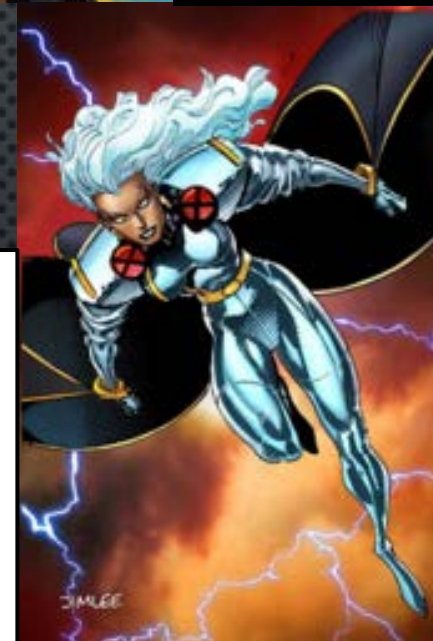
Image Credits: MSU Special Collection Comic Art

STORM (X-MEN)



Threats to Mutants

In what has been perceived as a metaphor for the civil rights movement, mutants face oppression from forces afraid of their powers, or those who wish to destroy them (see Sentinels at right). As a well-known leader among the X-Men, Storm is an antidote to this in-universe suppression.



Sentinels



Image Credit: Marvel

Storm — a weather-wielding superheroine long affiliated with the X-Men team in the Marvel comics universe — clearly doesn't have the same extranormal powers as Ambrose Chase.

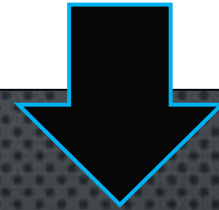
But she does belong to a faction surrounded by conspiracy and mystery, and those are the mutants.

Image Credit: Marvel



Ellis writes Chase and the Planetary team as cynical protagonists who are secretive in their operations. Why is that?

Consider how *Planetary* takes place in a world where extranormal humans are suppressed by another mysterious party called The Four.

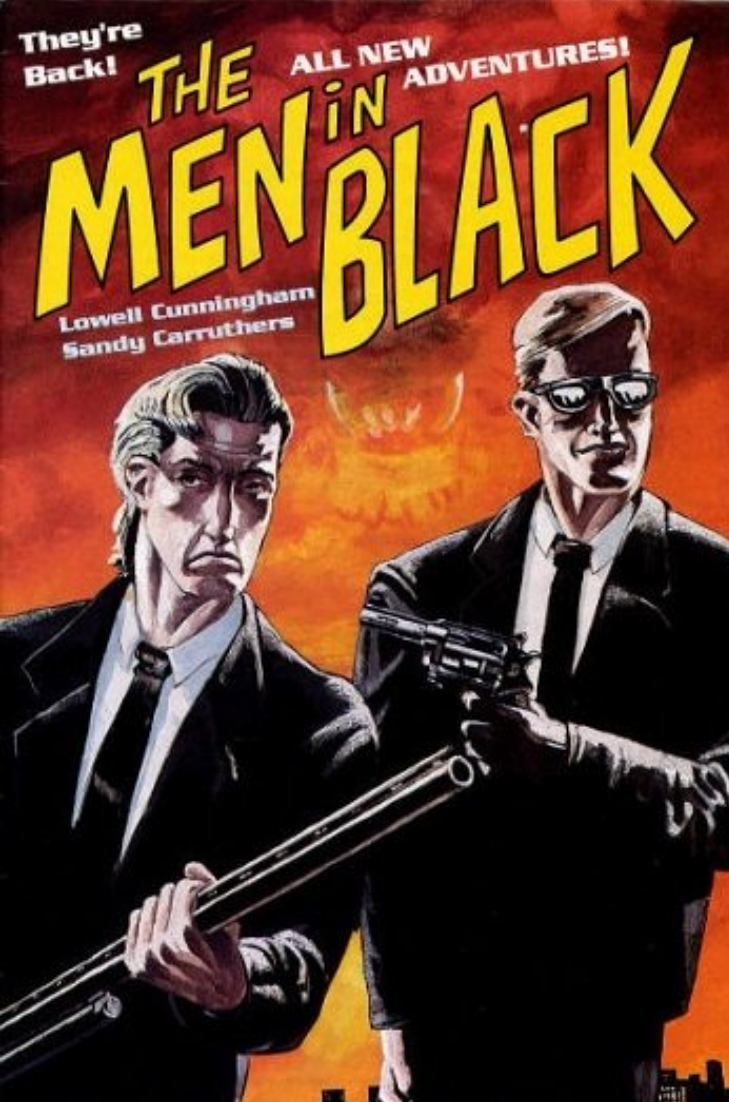


THE FOUR

“The Four” have been called Ellis’s attempt to turn the idea of the Fantastic Four on its head. The Four are people who have obtained metahuman abilities as the result of a disaster.

But they turn into what we’d consider villains — and they suppress the evolution of typical “superheroes.”





The Men In Black comic first published in 1990.

The tone of the original series was considered darker than the film adaptation, which was received as more lighthearted and comical.

THE ORIGINAL AGENT J wasn't Black in the original comics, as you can see above. Lowell Cunningham and Sandy Carruthers first wrote and drew the series for Aircel Comics.

BUT:

Marvel's adaptation of the film into a comic book was published in 1997.

In both, the Men in Black keep alien affairs under control and attempt to maintain secrecy of them.



MARVEL BUYS OUT AIRCEL COMICS and Will Smith's casting as James Edwards in the 1997 film adaptation leads to Agent J being canonized as African-American.

- Agent J's storyline involves him trying to live up to the standards of control and order set by the Men in Black organization.

Neuralyzer

