

**Jephael's Radical TMNT Fan Site Proudly Presents  
The Origin Story of Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird**

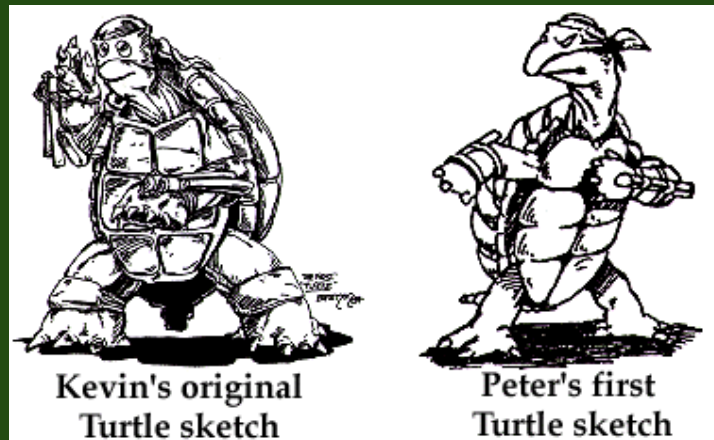
Kevin Eastman was born in 1962 in Portland, Maine to Sandra and Kim Eastman. His childhood was spent in the tiny hill town of Groville, Maine where he grew up with his three sisters, Marlene, Judy and Maryann. An inherited talent, Kevin began drawing as soon as he was able to hold a crayon. The eventual discovery of comic books would soon give meaning to his crazed doodling. Basically a self-taught artist, Kevin studied mainly the school of comics - Jack Kirby, Russ Heath and John Severin being his early favorites before he moved on to the more unusual styles of Richard Corben and Vaughn Bode when he reached high school. Kevin's first published work appeared in Clay Geerdes' COMIX WAVE and Brad Foster's GOODIES mini-comics in 1980-81. In 1982, fate brought Kevin to Northampton, Massachusetts where he would meet Peter Laird, an artistic friendship that would lead to the formation of Mirage Studios in 1983 and the creation of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles shortly thereafter.

Peter Laird was born in North Adams, Massachusetts in 1954. An interest in drawing was evident at an early age but it wasn't until high school and the discovery of Jack Kirby's work on THE NEW GODS, THE DEMON and other titles as well as Barry Smith's CONAN that the interest became a serious passion. Graduating from the University of Massachusetts with a B.F.A. in Printmaking, Peter entered the professional world with a sincere desire to become a freelance illustrator and comic book artist. After five years of struggling to attain this goal with some small successes, Laird's life was transfigured by two significant events occurring within a year of each other. First, he met Kevin Eastman and then he met his future wife, Jeannine. These two events dovetailed serendipitously when Peter moved with Jeannine to Dover, New Hampshire, which happened to be a mere twenty miles away from Ogunquit, Maine, where Kevin was working at a lobster restaurant.

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After a long day of work way back in 1983, Kevin and Peter were relaxing at Laird's house watching television and sketching. "We got real punchy!" Peter explains, and they started drawing cartoons to amuse themselves. At the time Peter was doing editorial illustration and advertising art with some success while Kevin was working as a short-order cook and drawing comics in his spare time.

As the evening evolved, Kevin eventually drew a bipedal turtle with nunchukus strapped to its arms and called it a "Ninja Turtle". Peter, aware of a nifty idea when he saw one, asked "Why not a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle?" and thus the legend was born.



Eastman and Laird liked the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle idea too much to let it remain idle in their sketchbooks. The creative duo wrote an origin story that parodied Frank Miller's Daredevil and Ronin series, comics that Kevin and Peter held in high esteem. The lone TMNT became a group of 4 turtles who had a ninjitsu sensei, a mutated rat named Splinter. Kevin and Peter experimented with drastically different looks for each Turtle, but finally settled upon a singular outfit that they all would wear.

Each Ninja Turtle was named after a renown Renaissance artist. "We had all the Japanese fighting methods, but we didn't want to make up Japanese names because we thought they'd seem too strange to American readers. So we decided to go in the opposite direction and used distinctly European names. We both had studied art history, so we picked Raphael, Donatello, Leonardo and Michelangelo." Back in those days, neither Kevin nor Peter owned a computer with a spell-checker, so Michelangelo was misspelled as "Michaelangelo", fortunately everyone seems to get the point regardless of the additional letter "a".

With the story written, Kevin and Peter began doing the artwork. Since the creative duo had similar styles, they were able to switch tasks back and forth. Some pages were penciled by Kevin and inked by Peter, some pages were penciled by Peter and inked by Kevin. Once the complete comic book was finished, they had to find a publisher for the work. The guys tried unsuccessfully to find someone willing to print the title, much to their dismay... and eventual good fortune!

Kevin had just gotten a \$500 income tax refund check, so the artists decided to self-publish the comic. They borrowed an additional \$700 from Kevin's uncle Quentin Eastman and used the money to print 3000 black and white copies of the first issue of the TMNT. They had enough money left over from the printing bill to take out a single one-page advertisement in a popular comic book newspaper entitled Comics Buyer's Guide. "We expected to sell them all as single copies through CBG," Peter said, "but we got calls from distributors instead and learned about the wonderful world of discounts." Distributors buy wholesale copies of a publisher's books, typically at a 60% discount, and then sell the comics directly to the retailers at discounts ranging between 40-58% off of cover price, depending on volume.

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With the new information in hand, the TMNT comic was made available to the comic book distributors, which in turn made it easier for the comic shops to order the book. Retail distribution also relieved Kevin and Peter from the arduous task of individually packing and shipping their comic!

The first issue of the TMNT went to the printer on April 1, 1984... no foolin'! The printer finished the job in time for Peter and Kevin to debut the title at a comic book convention in Portsmouth, New Hampshire on May 5. Oddly enough, the printer hadn't printed the Turtle comic in the usual comic book format. TMNT #1 was an over-sized book. "We'd gone to a printer (who knew nothing about printing comics) with a locally produced TV schedule giveaway," Kevin commented, "We told him, 'This is what we want: a colored stock cover and black and white newspaper inside.' We never thought to specify size, so he printed the issue in the same dimensions as the TV schedule giveaway we used as a sample!" Ah well... it all worked out in the end!

Kevin and Peter decided to name their new publishing company Mirage Studios; since there wasn't an actual studio (only kitchen tables and couches with lap boards), they thought that "Mirage" was a fitting moniker. Peter had experience working with newspapers, so the duo made up a four page press kit, with a story outline and artwork that they sent to 180 TV and radio stations. On a whim they sent the package to the Associated Press as well as the United Press International. This initiative proved highly valuable, as several local newspapers ran long stories on Mirage Studios and their creation, the TMNT. PBS radio also did a five minute story on the mutant terrapins, and perhaps most significantly, a reporter from the UPI wrote a story about the Turtles that was picked up on the national wire and ran in countless newspapers across the USA.

This massive exposure created a demand for the interestingly titled comic that caught everyone by surprise! All 3000 issues sold out quickly, much to Kevin and Peter's delight! A second printing of the comic went to the printers and sold out its print run of 15,000 copies, and was followed shortly by a third printing that sold out its run of 35,000 issues! The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles hit the starting gate at full speed!

The success of the TMNT comic book led to other projects. Palladium Books produced a full-blown role playing game featuring the Turtles, Dark Horse Miniatures produced several sets of TMNT lead figures for the role playing gamers and collectors alike and First Comics producing full color reprint volumes of the original series. Kevin and Peter continued to produce Turtles comics as quickly as they could and their popularity grew.

"When we created the Turtles, we wanted to spoof the world of super hero characters and poke good natured fun at the heroic but not-so-funny characters that dominated the business." said Peter, "The Turtles are fun heroes with an attitude. Basically, they act and think like average teenagers."

"They're always willing to lend a helping hand, but are constantly on the alert for the funny side of life." added Kevin. It's a formula that has worked well!"

As the popularity of the comic grew, attention outside of the comics industry flourished. As stated above, the first issue of the TMNT had an original printing of only 3,000 copies, but by the time Turtles' licensing agent Mark Freedman came aboard, the comic was selling over 125,000 copies (making it perhaps the most successful B&W; comic in recent history in the USA.) Mark caught wind of the TMNT thanks to Palladium's TMNT RPG book and was excited by the look and attitude of the Turtles. Believing that he could expand upon the Turtles' success, Mark contacted Peter and Kevin.

Through much trial and tribulation, Mark connected the TMNT with a small toy company interested in breaking into the boys action figure market and willing to take a chance on a concept that all the major toy companies thought was too risky (be wary of the opinion of "experts")! Playmates Toys agreed to produce the action figures if a television deal could be struck, and Mark pulled it all together upon meeting with animation producers Murakami, Wolf, Swenson, Inc. A mini-series was produced for syndicated release, and within days of airing it was apparent that the TMNT would prove every bit as popular to the television audience as it already was with comic readers. From there, Mark's company, Surge Licensing, formed an unstoppable marketing powerhouse that set a new standard of excellence in the licensing and merchandising industries!