



Episode 373 – Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hello everybody, thanks for coming by. This is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 373. Man, these numbers keep going up and it keeps blowing my mind that I get to keep coming back and talking to you couple times a week and you all keep listening thank you for that continued support. You know we do all these episodes for free and you can go back and listen to all of them free at any time and we ask for just a little bit from you whether that's sharing an episode leaving us a review somewhere or making a purchase at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) we really appreciate your help to keep this going. If you do make a purchase you can use the code `podcast15` to save 15% on anything over at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). The show notes for this and all the other episodes including transcripts are [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). So let's dig in for this episode were going to talk about a comic book that was famous in the 80s and 1990s and who would've thought that a story but a group of turtles you know an animal that supposed to be slow would actually succeed as fast ninjas, martial artist fighting bad guys and their Sensei who taught them martial arts is actually a rat. Now for those who don't know, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, I'm gonna tell you a whole bunch more and for those of you that do follow along because we might get into some stuff that you didn't know about.

The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles also refer to as TMNT or just Ninja Turtles for short consist of four fictional turtles in their teens who have human traits. They're named after great Italian Renaissance artists including Leonardo for Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rafael and Donatello. And they learned their martial art ninja to hence being Ninja Turtles from their rat Sensei who is also anthropomorphized



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their mission of course is to defeat the bad guys as in every great show and movie and comic book but also remained hidden from society because let's face it they are kinda strange and people do well with strange and unusual and so where they usually hiding during the sewers of New York City. The comics are published by Mirage Studios which was founded by Kevin Eastman, Peter Laird and after becoming famous the comic book expanded into not only an animated cartoon series on television but also video games toys movies and a ton of merchandise and I'm going to guess that a good number of you out there like me had at least some ninja turtle stuff if you're, you know within a certain age range. I had action figures, I had a actually I think my most interesting piece of ninja turtle memorabilia, and I think I have this, I'm gonna try and take a photo of it is a pencil case that I got while vacationing in Spain and Ninja Turtles in Spanish is Tortugas ninja and I remember at age 12 watching Ninja Turtles in Spain in Spanish and just being absolutely transfixed. Mirage Studios published the first comic book from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles series in 1984 in Dover, New Hampshire. And it started as a whole Larry sketch from Eastman during a brainstorming session with Laird one evening and that was how the concept for TMNT was born. They were convinced of the concept and they self-publish a single issue comic despite having virtually no money. They took a loan from Eastman's uncle and used some tax refund money. The comic was inspired by popular comics from the 80s including Marvel's daredevil and new mutants, Dave Sims' Cerebus and Frank Miller's Ronin. It was liked by so many people and it was published by various companies in different incarnations from then on.

The next big thing and arguably the big thing that came for Eastman and Laird was a proposal from Mark Friedman who was a licensing agent who wanted to make toys and other things using the Ninja Turtles. The first company that manufactured those toys was dark horse miniatures in 1986. And the little lead figures were only 15 mm tall pretty tiny. The following year, playmates toys proposed to partner with the two and expand into action figures and this led to a variety of companies and individuals collaborating in that project development. Jerry Sachs of Sachs Finley agency assembled the animators at Murakami Wolf Swenson, led by Fred Wolf and there's a name some of you might recognize, then Wolf and his team of animators brainstormed with the playmates group headed by Carl Aronian and Richard Salas who was the sales VP and Bill Carlson who is the playmates and vice president. And this led to some different tasks, some distribution of work. Aronian gathered several designers as well as John Schulte to work on a simple back story for the toy packaging for the entire run of the product and the show. Sachs [00:05:11.02] green against brick for the high concept pitch and the writers Murakami Wolf Swenson conceptualized the sense of humor. The first show that was launched was a miniseries to sell in the toy action figures in which the playmates toys enter team served as associate producers and contributing writers. The entire creative team was responsible for coining phrases such as heroes in a 1/2 shell and the Ninja Turtles battle cry, turtle power. More people came in as the series develop including Jack Mendelson who served as story editor, scriptwriter and David Wise, Michael Charles Hill and Michael Reeves who wrote most of the scripts.

The first launch of the miniseries was promising not successful and it needed to be relaunched three separate times in order to catch on. Then group W, the broadcast company syndicated the show when



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they noticed the product started selling. The next round of animation was funded by group W and was shown on CBS. Since then, the show became a mainstream success in the late 80s and early 90s and a wide array of turtles merchandise was sold everything from video games and school supplies, hey I mentioned earlier, skateboards, dispensers, breakfast cereal, bedsheets, towels, toy shaping kits and just so much more stuff. The animated TV series which continued until 1996 with 10 season was characterized by more cheerful mood as opposed to the gloomy atmosphere in the comic book series. And if you've ever read those comics, you know how much of a departure in spirit that the cartoons were. After this another series was released but a live-action one and new elements were added to the story including the introduction of 5th female turtle named Venus de Milo. However unlike the first series, this one was highly unsuccessful and was canceled [00:06:58.28] after just one season 26 episodes the first live-action film title Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles was released in 1990 and became one of the most successful independent films. Two sequels were released under the titles Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: the secret of the ooze in 91 and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles three in 1993. The next film was a 3D animation that was released in 2007 under the title TMNT. Now, I don't know how many of you out there are like me and have seen all four of those movies but I've definitely seen all four and some of them much more than once.

After some time the original animated TV series got a reboot in 2003 but under the same name Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Story line pretty closely followed that of the original Mirage comic book series and entire series had seven seasons, a hundred 56 episodes and aired from February 2003 to March 2009 on Fox box also called for kids TV and also on the CW for kids for the last season. On October 21, 2009 Laird made his statement on his blog, though the blog post does not exist and more, about the selling of the TMNT property to Nickelodeon subsidiary Viacom, many fans were disappointed because TMNT was such a successful project the most successful project from Mirage studios but Laird said that the property quote deserved a new owner and that he had faith that the new owner will treat the property with respect and make most. However, he also admitted that he did not know what the future Mirage Studios would be after such a big decision. The first project to come out of Nickelodeon was a new CGI animated TMNT TV series premiering on September 29, 2012 and as early as 2009 after purchasing the rights to TMNT, it was announced in a new film would be produced in partnership with Paramount pictures and the target release date would be 2012. It took until 2014 however with Jonathan Liebsman as director and Michael Bay as producer. There's a name to get polarizing in movies.

All in all there are at least 88 characters in the entire TMNT universe while 10 of them are crossover characters such as Batman. Were only going to talk about a few of the main characters that you have seen or even heard of if you know anything about the Ninja Turtles. Leonardo also called Leo the leader of the turtles he is the eldest he's the most serious and most dedicated follower of their Sensei Splinter and he can be identified by his blue mask and his weapons which are sometimes are presented as katana swords or ninjatos. He's also the most discipline among the brothers and often gets in the conflict with Raphael because of Raphael's aggressive attitude. Leo's named after of course Leonardo da Vinci. Michelangelo also called Mike or Mikey is the youngest of the brothers and is characterized by his



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carefree, goofy, humorous attitude he's identified by his orange mask and by his use of two nunchaku, please don't call them numchuks that drive me crazy and that's his was prominent weapon. He also uses sometimes a grappling hook [00:10:11.16] three section staff bunch of other stuff. The Southern California accent can also be picked up in some of the iterations and he talks about surfing. Michelangelo of course named after the Italian sculptor Michelangelo. Donatello also called Don or Donnie no surprise here was my favorite growing up. He is the nerd among the turtles he has interested in science and technology and first uses knowledge to resolve conflicts instead of pure physical combat he's identified by his purple eye mask and a signature weapon a bow a.k.a. Staff and is the third eldest of the brothers. Donatello's named after Italian sculptor Donatello. Raphael also called Raph the second eldest and identified by his red eye mask and his signature weapon Sai and he was my second favorite because as an early teen I started really using and enjoying Sai as my weapon of choice. Raphael's attitude includes being easily angered and aggressive and he often wants to make the first move in combat he is the least friendly of the brothers and usually make sarcastic remarks and offers deadpan humor. While he does have a rebellious attitude he remains loyal to his brothers and to their Sensei and Raphael's named after the Italian Painter Raphael. Splinter is the turtle Sensei aka Master who taught them how to fight through his art of ninjutsu which he learned from his previous owner, remember Splinter was a rat and Master Hamato Yoshi. Aside from being a Sensei he also serves as the adoptive father of the four turtles. Now Splinter's origins do differ depending on which body of work were talking about. In the 87 TV series the Archie's comic series and the 2012 TV series, Splinter was in fact Hamato Yoshi himself who mutated into a rat through the ooze. In the 2003 series, he was tomato Yoshi's pet rat and just mutated through the ooze but had been observing what was going on from Yoshi. In the IDW Comics he was the reincarnation of Hamato Yoshi when Yoshi was slain by Saki who later became shredder. Now I have plenty of other information here on other characters April O'Neil, Casey Jones, shredder, the foot soldiers, Karai, Baxter Stockman, Krang, bebop and rocksteady. But if you want to check those out, I'm not gonna dig into all those individual descriptions you can find those at the website [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com).

Now, here's the big question the writers did they have a martial arts background? Let's start with Kevin Eastman Eastman was born in Portland and studied at Westbrook high school in Westbrook, Maine. There he met Steve Levine who shared the same interest is him and that is comic books. In 83 he already had several works but he lacked a publisher and while searching for one he met Peter Laird and partnered with him on various comic projects including Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Peter Laird on the other hand was born in North Adams Massachusetts and we have a lot of his biography but his interests of course including comics and he'd work for a local newspaper earning just \$10 per illustration. These two great comic book writers artists did not have any martial arts background. They didn't even expect that the turtles would be a success and anything close to the time that it was. In fact, there are a lot of inaccuracies in the comments with regards to actual ninjutsu to or just martial arts in general. Though the art itself is not established and centralized as judo and karate we can still pick up quite a few things if you sit down and read the comics maybe they had a hard time looking for good ninja to references or



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maybe they were just taken by that wave of ninjutsu, ninja fascination that existed back then. For some reason Eastman and Laird just really wanted the turtles to be ninjas rather than karate or tae kwon do practitioners and they equip them with Asian weapons. Anyway the comics sold like crazy because people love the concept of the story and of course the turtles.

When we talk about the Ninja Turtles we can't ignore the impact that they've had on popular culture on the martial arts and as such a pivotal work in popular culture that fed martial arts schools with a wide number of new students. In fact if we were to make a list of the movies that led people in the martial arts schools, for all time. You know, were probably talking about I'm not ordering these in any particular way. It's enter the Dragon, it's the karate kid the original and it's the first Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. These three movies inspired so much interest in martial arts that even if you don't know the Ninja Turtles well I'm sure you're aware of them, even if it's not something that you've ever enjoyed, if you're a martial artist you owe it to the martial arts to at least check out a little bit of it because we also owe so much to these two gentlemen Eastman and Laird and their creation.

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