

Synthesis

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He told me his name was Geddy, after the lead singer of the 70s rock band Rush. I knew him as Chris.

“But my name is actually Geddy. In kindergarten, people called me Spaghetti, and then I went by Chris.” I never asked if his middle name was Chris or if he just picked it randomly, but then again it never crossed my mind that he was lying.

The name Spaghetti might have worked: in middle school he was all skin and bones and a mop of unruly hair, the first to badmouth the big guys and to slide out of confrontation. He showed up to class sometimes, draped over his chair with an excuse on his tongue to be used when convenient, but rarely paid attention.

He turned up one day with a cloth wrapped around his arm.

“Busted it skateboarding,” he said proudly.

“He’s lying.” My friend quirked an eyebrow. She grabbed his arm and he yelled; later when his arm hit a desk he didn’t seem to care.

Though Robin is a classic sidekick of the superhero world, the persona of the Boy Wonder is a synthesis of separate characters that have evolved into the hero we know today. When he was introduced to the Batman comics in 1940, Robin’s alter ego was Richard “Dick” Grayson, the youngest of a family of acrobats who was taken in as Bruce Wayne’s ward after the murder of Dick’s parents. Under the tutelage of Bruce, Dick embraced his role with an element of humor that contrasted the somberness of Batman—a proverbial Watson to *DC Comics’* Sherlock. However, when he grew older, Dick’s rebellious independence caused him to break from the role of Robin and become Nightwing, the prodigal son of the Batman Family.

Chris and I spent passing periods talking about manga, some of which I was introduced to because he lent me his books. We discussed the beginning of *Bleach* and the end of *Death Note*, and the rest of our conversations were about *Naruto*: how we both wanted to be ninjas, and how much he hated Sasuke. The six minutes before history and shop and reading classes weren’t long enough to finish our talks, but we found an equal ground even though I had never skateboarded and he refused to read.

After the creation of Nightwing, *DC* recast Robin, and in an effort to avoid public backlash they copied the previous sidekick: Jason Todd had the same backstory as Dick. A rash nature and hot temper that made him prone to excessive brutality were his only distinguishing features from his predecessor—because he was still an accomplished acrobat and had a fondness for wit, many fans failed to notice the difference. Those who did were outraged: in response to a reader’s poll, the Joker killed Jason.

Sharing our love of gaming was difficult: the closest I came to understanding that part of Chris was in *Zelda* or *Kingdom Hearts*—they were in the center of a Venn diagram which on my side included games that were E for Everyone and on his contained M for Mature. Another split: we had different systems, and couldn’t pass

games back and forth.

“I’m doing my book report on *Halo*,” Chris announced as he walked to the front of the class. The responsive snickers made our teacher suspicious, but he didn’t investigate. I knew too little about *Halo* to know if Chris made his report on a video game, and I decided not to ask.

When he was done, he had a cheeky grin plastered on his face.

Tim Drake was Jason’s replacement. The Drake family was present the night the Flying Graysons died, leading Tim to deduce the identities of the Dynamic Duo. As Robin, Tim not only fought crime but also became a psychological support to Batman who was reeling from Jason’s death. Tim’s Robin became a detective rather than an acrobat and, instead of changing his hero persona in rebellion, he discarded the mask when his father discovered his secret.

Chris and I never talked about why he missed school so much. I assumed his absences were suspensions, but as far as I knew Chris was harmless: he shot rubber bands but never hit anyone. Threatened, but probably couldn’t beat anyone up. His greatest crime seemed to be not completing assignments, but if that was what administrators talked to him about, their lectures didn’t work.

I found out two months later than everyone else that students had taken to smoking pot across the street from the school, but didn’t think much of it.

Chris wasn’t in class much after that.

The fourth Robin was illegitimate. Holding the title for under three months, Stephanie Brown, former girlfriend of Tim Drake, took up Robin’s mantle after Tim laid it aside. Her specialization in stealth and combat, learned from her criminal father, returned Robin to an action-based role, but she was hardly acknowledged by fans and characters. Batman mistrusted her due to her tendency to disobey orders and stripped her of her title. In an attempt to redeem herself, Stephanie embarked on a mission that resulted in her death.

After middle school, I never once saw or heard about Chris. He popped up occasionally in memory—people discussing *Kingdom Hearts*, the announcement of the ending of *Naruto*, someone falling off their skateboard—but if he went to high school, it wasn’t my high school.

I decide to satisfy my curiosity. Checking his Facebook (under Chris, not Geddy) reveals he worked at McDonald’s, and he looks the same except for a tidier haircut. The rest of his wall surprises me. It is peppered with apologies to unnamed friends. Resolutions to stop doing drugs. Pleas to friends who care about him.

A recent post says, “Who ate shit and broke his arm. This Guy. No more xbox.” We still don’t have the same gaming console.

The last Robin, Damian Wayne, son of Bruce Wayne and Talia al Ghul, was raised as an assassin. He took on the role of Robin at his mother’s request to usurp Batman’s power, and his cruelty was in stark contrast to a hero’s ideals. Originally

ruthless and arrogant, Damian reforms after he works alongside his father; he strives to restore his relationship with Bruce and rectify the violence of his childhood. He breaks with his mother and, before he is killed, defends his actions saying, “Being Robin is the best thing I’ve ever done...this is the life I’ve chosen to lead. I don’t need you to save me.”