

Marvel Universe Transformed Presents The Punisher:

By Brian Kilby

A cold February rain pours down over New York City. An old filthy wino lays huddled in a stinking alleyway. He lays there, nursing a bottle, vainly crying to God to stave off a wet death in pneumonia. Cats unable to find shelter will freeze to death, leaving a bountiful feast for the rats that retreat into the gutters. A man who whores his daughter for cocaine hides away and finds warmth in his mind altering drugs.

Everyone hides from something in New York City. The weather. The world. Themselves.

Nobody hides from me.

My name is Frank Castle. I'm the Punisher.

The day before yesterday...

A local pool hall, a tabernacle of depravity.

A man sits at a table, counting his money. He sits there, oblivious to the tempest of blood and sweat that beats down upon the cheap linoleum floor.

I ask him, "Who is out to kill Richard Eller!?"

He looks at me, smiling like the cat that swallowed the cockroach and answers "I am."

I didn't even have time to react. As fast as I ever saw a man move, he takes a butter knife from the table and tosses it towards me...with all my training, skill and exercise, I manage to dodge it. I turn around and find him gone. A second and a half later I get a nice surprise in my bad shoulder...stinking knife bounced off of the wall and tagged me.

It hurts like living Hell.

He'll pay for that one.

The wind howls, chilling to the bone. Cold, like the look in his eyes. He is planning to kill former mayor Richard Eller, for God only knows what reason. He is the deadliest of assassins. His name is Bullseye and he kills for money.

Not for much longer.

We're both killers, he and I, but there ends our similarities. I kill because I must. I made a vow upon the bloodied, twitching bodies of my family that I would end the suffering. That I would punish those that cause pain, those that destroy lives. Bullseye kills because he's good at it. He is epitome of the evil that I slave to destroy...but I got sloppy. He got away. Slow. Too slow. I've pushed my body beyond its practical limits. I've done damage that can never be healed...all because I was too slow. Too slow to save my family.

My family...

The wind howls and the rain falls...my family dies.

When the birds sing and the sun shines...my family dies.

A thousand times, they die. In my head. In my arms. At my feet. They die and I do nothing but lay there over their bodies, reaching...reaching for something....

It didn't take long to figure out what I was reaching for....

How many families has Bullseye destroyed? How many lives has he ruined? How many other men reach over at night to give his wife a kiss, only to find nothing. Nothing but a bottle. Nothing but a whore. Nothing but a gun....

Bullseye has done many horrible things in his career...a career that I will end tonight.

Chapter Four: Crime and Punishment.

Elsewhere, a killer is speaking on the phone.

"Yeah...I've kept it nice and high profile, just like you said."

On the other end of the phone. "Then I take it that it was you who foiled my bomber's plans?"

"Heh, yeah. 'Made a command decision on that one. I didn't want him in the way, so I iced him. You know that I can do this on my own. I didn't need a rookie with a chemistry set to get in my way. I took the initiative."

"My dear Bullseye, taking the initiative can get you killed."

"Yeah, yeah but--"

"No 'buts', you will make the hit at noon. I've made arrangements so that my dear friend Richard's celebration is televised city-wide, do not fail me."

"I won't."

"Fear, Bullseye. Fear. Hold a man's life in your hands and he will do anything. No one will be able to link this to me...but everyone will know. The Kingpin is back...and no one, not even his most trusted ally is safe." Fear, The Kingpin thinks. 'Fear.' He sits there, smiling with dreams of ten-thousand dollar suits and shattered lives.

The Conversation ends.

Bullseye hangs up the courtesy phone of his filthy motel room. It's a courtesy that the phone works, unlike the sink or the toilet. With nothing better to do, he watches a roach crawl across his foot. He watches it, curiously. Startled, the roach scurries away, moving aimlessly around the room. Bullseye leans back in his chair and plays with a disused pen cap.

Ill-content, he takes a long breath, he then glances at the money on the table and smiles. "It's not a bad job sometimes," he thinks. "Good hours, lots of fresh air, exercise...." He flips the pen cap across the room and hits the roach, killing it. "...fringe benefits." Bullseye smiles. "Yep, this is a damn-good job. I can't see myself doing anything else."

He glances at the clock. "Three more hours...I can get a nap in before that." He leans further back in the chair.

"A damn good job..."

For the next two hours Bullseye dreams of dollar-signs, easy women and broken vigilantes.

War Journal. Thursday. The Fourth. Ten a.m.

I've searched and dug, Eller is under armed security in a mob safehouse... "Mob safehouse," I get a chuckle from that...the mob was trying to keep safe from me. My sources said, after some encouraging, that he will be at the banquet. He's scared. This is too strange, why show up? Why make yourself a target? Why get yourself killed? I vowed that he would not die, that he would live as a broken monument to those who aspire to be him. That vow may be broken itself. If he's not careful enough, he's going to die. In all honesty, I can't say that it bothers me much but then again, I'm an optimist.

I sit here in an old alleyway. Garbage strewn throughout, I spot an old milk bottle and, a few feet away, some old oily rags... a thought comes to me. A nice warm thought.

War Journal. Thursday. The Fourth. Party Time.

I sit here in the audience listening to jokes and old stories. If that wasn't bad enough, I had to put on a stupid tuxedo. Thank God I have a gun stashed in the jacket and a few scattered around the room. Oh, and another, better surprise.

"As a young actor, before his days as Mayor, Richard told me that to be the best in your field you have to work hard, be quicker than the rest, smarter than the rest and you have to have a nice car. Never worked for him, got me an Oscar, though."

The speaker gets a strained chuckle from the audience.

"Yeah, he wasn't much of an actor...but he was a good man, in fact, at his weight, he was a few good men! Ha!"

The audience laughs a little harder.

Eller sits at a table, on-stage and at the butt of many bad jokes. He's obviously not happy, I wouldn't be either. He's been called old, out of shape and his manhood has been questioned. Of course that and--

Krakoooooom!

We hear an explosion, everybody stands up. I take off this stupid suit. Time for work.

Bullseye jumps through a window, smoke not far behind. "Hello people, I'm getting a bonus for not killing you, so I'd appreciate it if you all got the Hell out of here!" Everyone runs out, Richard Eller tries. "Not you, friend. You're the guest of honor." Bullseye grins and looks towards the TV cameras. He runs over to the camera and rips off the microphone. Looks like he wants them left on.

I take out my automatic rifle and fire a few shots--a few shots are all I get out before the gun is knocked from my hand by a fancy flower vase.

The room clears and an old security guard runs in. "I'll take care of him, Sonny." The old man fumbles around and withdraws his revolver. He gets a salad fork through his sternum for the effort. That's what you get for twenty years at minimum wage? No thank you. The old security guard's lungs fill up with blood. Like a walking pneumonia, he staggers a few feet, drops his revolver and falls over dead. I make a leap for the gun and rap my fingers around her, in constant motion I roll over and put my sites between Bullseye's eyes.

I take two quick shots. As soon as the bullets are in the air, he picks up a silver platter and deflects them.

"One, two, Franky. Four more? Let 's find out." He smiles and throws the platter towards me.

I duck and take another shot at him. He picks up soup spoon, throws and knocks the bullet from the air. He's showing off. He's gonna get sloppy and get himself killed. I love it when they do that.

"Three down. Keep it up."

I roll towards him intending to put a couple in his belly. "Four, fi--!" One hits, glances off a rib, the other is lost as he back-hands me.

Visibly angered, he tries to regain his composure. "Four, five." He covers his rib, I tagged him at least. That'll help me sleep tonight. "Got any more?"

I shake off the last blow, still hurts--he's got a lot of force behind those fists. He glances at the revolver and smiles. He stares me down, just begging to be shot. Playing chicken, Bullseye? He flinches. "Cocka-doodle-doo." I fire, hot gun powder fills my nostrils and powders my face, it's a good sensation.

Time freezes, my heart stops and my eyes tell me something that can't possibly true. Bullseye looks at me, throws out his hand and snatches the bullet from mid-air. I hear the familiar sound of a bullet breaking skin and hitting bone. Blood pours down his wrist. he smiles. He smiles!

"And that would be six." He tosses the bullet back, it tags me in the neck. It took little more than a second, I feel the strength leave my legs. On knees of cotton, I fall.

Looks like Bullseye's done with me...for now. He walks over to a corner, where Richard Eller lays weeping.

"Ah, Mr. Eller," says Bullseye. "How good of you to show up. Mr. Fisk told me to ask you something. What was it again?" Bullseye strokes his chin. "Ah, yes. The family? How are they? Wife and kids doing well? Mr. Fisk is," Bullseye smiles, "concerned for them."

"I-I know--he's going to kill them!"

"Oh no, Mr. Eller, you know better than that. He's going to kill you. Your wife and children will be safe, thanks to your cooperation."

"Wh-why are you doing this?"

"I'm doing this because it's my job. I get a nice little thrill and a big-fat paycheck for snuffing you out. Mr. Fisk is doing this, on the other hand, because it suits him to do so...or, at least, that's what he . If you ask me, I think that he gets a giddy little thrill from it too." Bullseye looks down at the poor, pathetic old man and frowns. "Buddy, you're no fun at all." A nice, swift kick snaps the old man's neck.

"Damn! I forgot to tell him.--." Bullseye coughs. "Nobody is safe from the Kingpin! Aw, man--doesn't have the same effect when the guy's dead. Oh well, you heard it Frank, didn't you?" Bullseye lights a cigarette. He turns around, he takes a draw off the cigarette and exhales through the nose. "Where'd you go? Don't worry...I might not even kill ya, I haven't decided yet." He spots a trail of blood that leads behind a table. "Hiding? It won't do you any good."

Bullseye walks to the table and lifts his leg to kick it over. I'm not behind the table...I'm under it. I take the butt of the Russian beast and take his other leg out from under him. As quickly as I can, I climb up on him and start beating his head in. He's strong. Stronger than I am. He has no problem, barring the chunks of meat that I'm biting out of his shoulder, in wrestling me over. He's on top of me and I've dropped the gun. He's pounding on me, bones break under his fists. He's strong and bulky and I'm--I'm blacking out. With a blinding punch, he's taken out my eyes, I can't see anything but a blur.

Unable to fight back, I reach for something to hit him with. He keeps pounding, I'm not gonna last long like this. I feel blood pouring down my chin and I feel my face and ribs softening up.

That's when I grab it--the Russian, the mammoth shot gun. With one free arm, I take it. My vision is improving, I see Bullseye beating away, he's not slowing down but my

vitals are. I put the Russian to the side of his head... or to his face, I can't tell, vision's still no good.

I pull the trigger.

I don't need my vision to hear the roar of Hell cast open. He's off of me. I see his head snap back and I see a fine red mist fill the room, reminds me of a Spring morning.

He's down, looks messy. Dead? I can't tell. I do spot something on the ground, something that's glowing. His cigarette...I pick it up, find a package that I brought in with me and I crack it open. A molotov cocktail, Bullseye's just got a one-way ticket to Hell, paid for by me.

I turn around and he's gone. "What in the Hell--?"

"You think you killed me? You think your gun scrambled my brains? My skeleton is reinforced with adamantium! WHAT YOU DID WAS PISS ME OFF!"

I can't see him, something made of glass hits me in the back of the head. Then a dish in the back and a tea cup in the chest. He's pelting me with dinnerware, I get knocked around the room. If it wasn't for the thick skull and the kevlar, I'd be dead. I can barely see, I'm bleeding, I have to end this fast. Time for me to give back. I run towards a light that I think is a window. He keeps throwing. It keeps hurting. I keep bleeding.

I hit the window and turn around. I get a bead on him, I see him--he's about fifteen feet away from me. "Bullseye! Fire in the hole!" I light the bottle with the cigarette and I throw it towards him.

He catches it and laughs. "It'll take more than a little fire to hurt me, Franky-boy. A lot more." He tosses it aside. The bottle shatters and the fluid covers the floor, burning everything.

"I know--" I wrap my fist up and shatter the window. "That's why I switched the water line on the sprinkler system this morning--with the gas line!" I jump through the window.

A column of fire and heat pours from dining hall's windows, throwing me into the New York air. I catch some of the heat, scorches my suit, would be worse if it wasn't for the ice-cold rain.

It took me less than six minutes to lose, Eller's dead. I can't say that it wasn't fun, though.

I did hear something, however. It was a name--one that I didn't want to hear. Fisk, the Kingpin. Body counts are bound rise--on both sides.

I make my exit. The fire department will handle this, the police will investigate, they'll find Eller's body, the security guard and anybody else who might've been unlucky enough to get in Bullseye's way. They won't find Bullseye, though. I'm sure that he got away. He'll be back... after me, looking like Jigsaw's ugly sister, I'm sure. He'll be back and I'll be waiting.

Elsewhere, in the sewer line under the city. "Oh yeah, you got me this time, Franky-boy. I'll admit it, you caught me off guard. You're good, I won't deny you that. But buddy, I'm the best. You'll be seeing me again. Count on it." A badly burned and battered Bullseye staggers off, victorious, if one can call it that.

Yet somewhere else, a television tuned to a Fisk owned channel goes black. The Kingpin sits smiling. "Bullseye, my boy," he says to himself. "You've done well. You've completed your objective and for that I applaud you. You've managed to inflict pain and suffering upon those who I wish to regain control. Very good. For that my dear Bullseye, I will mend your wounds, I will soothe your injuries and I will reinstate you as my chief assassin...until I can find a suitable replacement." The Kingpin laughs with a grin that extends to the depths of his marbleheart. "Indeed."

End.