

## Transnational Adaptation of a Marvel comic book event: the case of X-Men: 'fatal attractions' in Finland

Laura Antola

To cite this article: Laura Antola (2021): Transnational Adaptation of a Marvel comic book event: the case of X-Men: 'fatal attractions' in Finland, Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics, DOI: [10.1080/21504857.2021.1888762](https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2021.1888762)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2021.1888762>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 23 Mar 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 138



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## Transnational Adaptation of a Marvel comic book event: the case of X-Men: 'fatal attractions' in Finland

Laura Antola

University of Turku, Turku, Finland

### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the transnational adaptation of Marvel's superhero comics. Investigating how a particular form of storyline, the comic book event, was altered for publication in Finland provides new insight into transnational comics publishing. The article demonstrates how adaptation changes the nature of comics storylines, as pieces are selected from the vast source material, and a full range of characters and stories is never granted for the new audience. Marvel's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary event for its mutant themed comics, 'Fatal Attractions', included spectacular features, such as collectable wraparound covers with holograms, and a story that involved all the X-titles. When it was adapted for the Finnish audience, 'Fatal Attractions' lost most of the qualities that made it an event. Through an analysis of the choices made in the adaptation process, as well as the Finnish adaptation's paratextual elements, this article brings a new perspective to the study of transnational adaptation of comics.

### ARTICLE HISTORY



Received 25 August 2020  
Accepted 5 February 2021

### KEYWORDS

Superheroes; adaptation studies; comic books; comic book event

## Introduction

Superhero comics are usually produced by a team of people, from writers to pencilers, inkers and editors. The translator or translators become one of the collaborators in this production process (Altenberg and Owen 2015, i). The Finnish versions of Marvel's superhero comic books in the 1990s are an example of the many different practices that take place when comic books are adapted for a new audience in a new cultural setting (Brienza 2010, 2016). In this article, I analyse how an event storyline, originally crossing over several comic book titles, was adapted in the Finnish comic books *Ryhmä-X* and *Sarjakuvalehti*, local publications combining several Marvel's comics. By focusing on the 1993 event titled 'Fatal Attractions', I ask what happens to the form of the event, the story itself, and its interpretations in the adaptation. I demonstrate how the comics storyline is altered, as the transnational adaptation selects pieces from the source material, never granting the Finnish readers the full range of characters and action. Adapted in Finland in 1995 as 'Kohtalokas vetovoima' ('Fatal gravity/attraction'), 'Fatal Attractions' was not published in its entirety, and the focus of my article is on the adaptation and translation processes, including the paratextual elements. This case shows how comic book

**CONTACT** Laura Antola  [lahean@utu.fi](mailto:lahean@utu.fi)  Turun yliopisto Historian, kulttuurin ja taiteiden tutkimuksen laitos, 20014 Turun yliopisto, Finland

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

storylines and characters are reimagined in a specific national context (Stein 2013, 129) as they are published in another cultural setting and another language.

Adaptation studies often refers to the process of intermedial transposition, from comics to film for example (e.g. Mitaine, Roche, and Schmitt-Pitiot 2015), but it can also be used to describe rewriting for a different audience. Adaptation resembles editorial practices such as shortening texts, but at the same time, adaptations often add new parts in the existing product in an attempt to update it. (Martins 2015, 46–47.) Publishing comics in a new cultural environment and in another language is usually described as translation, although as translation scholar Federico Zanettin has shown in his work, many aspects of the translation process of comics are not directly related to language. Translating comics can involve changing page or panel size, reversing images for a different reading direction, changing colours or altering the images in another way. (Zanettin 2014; Borodo 2018.)

I analyse what was left of the event, as its storyline was adapted in Finland. As I demonstrate, many of the qualities that make the original publication an event were lost in the adaptation, such as matching cover designs and other marketing tactics. However, details such as the story spreading over different titles were kept in the adapted version. I started by comparing the Finnish issues with online re-publications of the American originals to see what had happened in the adaptation process. Although my focus is on how the story itself was adapted, I include paratextual elements, such as the covers of both American and Finnish versions, and letters pages from the Finnish publications in my analysis. The covers as well as the letters pages and the editor's writings participate in the completion of the final product, and together with the content and textual translation are part of the Finnish adaptation.

The 'Fatal Attractions' event features the return of Magneto, the most notorious X-Men villain. It was originally published over six issues, in six different titles: *X-Factor* #92, *X-Force* #25, *The Uncanny X-Men* #304, *X-Men* #25, *Wolverine* #75 and *Excalibur* #71, between July and November 1993. Each issue contains one part of the event's storyline, meant to be read in the chronological order in which the issues were published. In total, the original event includes 246 pages of comics (excluding advertisements and covers), of which 171 pages are featured in the Finnish adaptation, published in March, April and May 1995. The adapted version of the event is divided over issues 3–5/1995 of *Ryhmä-X* and issue 5/1995 of *Sarjakuvalehti*, which features the fifth part of 'Fatal Attractions', published originally in *Wolverine* #75. Similarly to its original run in the USA, the story is spread over more than one title in Finland. The ending of the storyline, published in *Excalibur* #71 (40 pages), is left completely unpublished, whereas the first part, published in *X-Factor* #92 is included partially: only 8 of 38 original pages are featured in the Finnish adaptation. The other omissions are more subtle, as one or two pages are left out from original issues. As a whole, 'Fatal Attractions' features a mass of textual elements, such as dialogue, inner monologue of the characters, as well as a dark subject matter, starting with a comparison of the story's villain Magneto and Adolf Hitler, and ending with him torturing the fan-favourite hero Wolverine.

### **Localisation or adaptation?**

Concepts from translation studies have been used to analyse the transnational publishing process of comics. In his work, Federico Zanettin uses localisation, derived from audio-

visual translation industry, to describe the changes made when comics are published in different languages (Zanettin 2014). Zanettin, as well as Michał Borodo, describe the translation or localisation process of comic albums, where one story or one section of a story is published in a new format and new language. Borodo touches upon the aspect of paratextual elements while he describes the changes made to an American version of a Polish comic. (Borodo 2018, 115–116.) In this article, I will add to this discussion started by translation scholars by looking at another product of popular culture: the American comic book.

Instead of localisation, I refer to the changes made by the Finnish editor as adaptation. Localisation implies that location is the main focus of the changes in the product. Zanettin describes the localisation process of comics as a ‘global product development cycle’, starting from market analysis and internationalisation of the source material, and ending with the final product – a translated comic (Zanettin 2008b, 201–202). In Finnish superhero comics, however, the changes cannot be described simply as changing titles or character names, localising foreign references or adjusting page size or colours. In fact, previous research on the translations of American comics in Finland includes a study on the instructions given to translators working at *Aku Ankka*, a comic book dedicated to Disney’s animal comics, and the research shows the instructions to include adjusting stories and even rewriting them if necessary, adapting the original comics for the new audience. (Toivonen 2001; Koponen 2004, 30–33.)

Even today, with media products travelling globally, texts translated to different languages are adapted as they cross cultural and national boundaries. Differences in location as well as cultural context affect the audiences’ processes of reception and meaning making. (Kustritz 2015, 29.) While these days the translators of mainstream (superhero) comics have access to an internationalised version of the source material, where the product has been prepared for easier modification for different markets, the Finnish 1990’s superhero adaptations did not have access to similar digital resources. In the internationalisation, instructions are provided for editors and translators as to which textual elements should be translated, and changes can be made directly to the digital version of the comic book. This way, also images can be altered and for example diegetic texts can be modified easily. (Zanettin 2014.) The changes described by Zanettin are mostly based on the location of the new version; translation, change in reading direction, page size, and altering content according to local customs.

Following Linda Hutcheon, adaptations are recognised re-workings of original texts that can never fully replicate the original (Hutcheon 2006, 16). Although previous research on the transnational adaptations of comics has mainly used the concept to describe indigenously produced versions of familiar characters (Stein 2013, 128–129), I argue that the Finnish publication with storylines altered for a new audience and new publishing format in another cultural setting, a transnational adaptation of the original comics.

### **What is a comic book event?**

‘Event’ is a concept used by the comic book industry (see e.g. the ‘Events’ directory on the Marvel website: [https://www.marvel.com/comics/events\\_crossovers](https://www.marvel.com/comics/events_crossovers)) as well as fans and scholars, and it describes a storyline designed to involve two or more comic book titles,

featuring a storyline built so that all issues need to be read to be able to follow it (Kaveney 2007, 176). Events can be built around short-lived titles of their own that tie in with existing comic books, but they can take place over several existing titles, such as 'Fatal Attractions'. In the early 1990s, interest towards Marvel's comics was rising with the help of multiple variant covers, collectors' editions and other special events. (Costello 2009, 193.) Since the 1970s and the emergence of several different X-Men-related titles, Marvel was publishing more and more events and crossover storylines each year. This shifted the structure of storytelling from one character's continuous story taking place in one title, towards a structure where important parts of the story happened in several different titles.

Events are a way to engage consumers with the product, but what happens when they are adapted for a different audience? In the case of 'Fatal Attractions' in Finland, the focus was on publishing a coherent storyline, instead of adapting the event format. Only three or four monthly Marvel comic book titles were simultaneously published in Finland during the 1980s and 1990s, which means that most Marvel comics never reached the Finnish audience. For example, in 1993, when 'Fatal Attractions' was published by Marvel, there were at least 9 titles featuring Marvel's mutants published in the USA monthly.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, in Finland in the 1990s, only the monthly *Ryhmä-X* was dedicated to X-themed adventures. Two other Finnish superhero comic books, *Sarjakuvalehti* (The Comic Book) and *MARVEL*, occasionally featured stories headlined by members of the X-family, but mostly carried other heroes.<sup>2</sup> In the USA, in addition to the several X-themed comic books with their own superhero line-ups, the central team of heroes, the X-Men, were divided into two teams and two comic books, titled *X-Men* and *Uncanny X-Men*. Technical reasons, such as smaller number of titles and thus pages, and collaborating with other Nordic countries to reduce printing costs, guided the adaptation process. Due to the significantly smaller volume of publications, even events marketed to be read as a whole were edited, shortened, or only partly published. The strategy of focusing on larger plotlines instead of adapting events as a format altered the narratives, as well as character development in the adapted version.

To understand how comic book events function, we can draw on the theorisation of media events. The media event has been widely theorised in media studies (e.g. Dayan and Katz 1992; Couldry 2003; Kellner 2003), with the common conclusion that the media have the power to create events and spectacles that they define as important. In the 1990s, media events were defined as occasions that celebrated the central values of a society. They were produced by broadcasting companies, often in collaboration with governments, defining discussion topics and strengthening national identity. Television was the site of media events, with its visual images flowing into the living rooms of supposedly passive viewers. (Seeck and Rantanen 2015, 165–167.) Later, Douglas Kellner has argued that all media events can be described as media spectacles (Kellner 2003, 1). As opposed to the passive viewers of media events, the spectators of spectacles are active consumers, choosing which media to follow. (Seeck and Rantanen 2015, 169–170.) Comic book events, such as 'Fatal Attractions', can be likened to media events in the sense that they are framed as something important for the audience to follow. Comic book events are engineered as spectacles; the audience consists of consumers that can choose which spectacles to follow, and the storylines are often sensational.

In addition to spotlighting central values, media events are defined as being broadcast live on television (Seeck and Rantanen 2015, 165–166). The publication of comic book events is planned and timed as well, and they are marketed as spectacular moments. Although they might not be simultaneously experienced live by the spectators in a similar way as a royal wedding, comic book events can include a live element such as a special happening at a comic book store, or the promise of a special reward if the purchase is made on a specific day. When it comes to the Finnish adaptation, the event moves farther from being experienced ‘live’, since it was published almost two years after the original came out, and there were no live elements arranged to accompany its publication.

Roz Kaveney (2007) calls event storylines ‘one of the more commercial ventures that superhero comics go in for’, with the purpose to persuade fans to buy even more comics (176). Although events usually feature surprising elements, equally often they have little or no impact in the longer ongoing storylines of the characters they involve (176; 182). Big crossover events, such as ‘Fatal Attractions’, might not always drive the narrative forward in a creative way, but they are hyped into spectacle by advertising, similar to Hollywood films (Kellner 2003, 7), simultaneously becoming collectable commodities. The commercial purposes of comic book events differentiates them from media events highlighting society’s core values. The spectacular aspects are enhanced by ‘Fatal Attractions’ being a celebratory anniversary event. The anniversary makes the crossover more unusual as an event, as it ties all the different titles in the X-Men family together.

### **Adapting a storyline or adapting an event?**

‘Fatal Attractions’ celebrates the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of X-Men comics. *The X-Men* was first published in 1963, and between 1963 and 1993, several new X-titles were launched. ‘Fatal Attractions’ combined all titles into one crossover event. The event starts in *X-Factor* #92 when a villainous group, the Acolytes, attacks a charity hospice. They are confronted by the titular team of mutant superheroes, X-Factor, who fight the Acolytes while questioning their motives and use of violence. The issue is filled with talk as the heroes and villains debate their differing views. However, almost none of this is featured in the Finnish adaptation; only the first 8 out of 38 pages where the villains attack the hospice were published in *Ryhmä-X* 3/1995.

With the Finnish adaptations it is not always clear how meaning forms between consecutive pages, since the adaptation combines stories from several original X-titles. In this case, *Ryhmä-X* 3/1995 starts with a longer story originally published in *X-Men Unlimited* #1, and continues with five pages from another original comic book, *Cable* #3, followed by the first eight pages of ‘Fatal Attractions’. Similar to the use of American popular films in Turkey, where parts of original films, including footage and music, were combined to make a new product for the Turkish audiences (Smith 2017, 36), the transnational adaptation published in Finland consists of pieces from different sources chosen to present the new readers with a coherent storyline.

Publishing only eight pages from the first chapter of the event influences both the overarching storyline that spans several issues in the event, as well as the interpretation of the pages that precede the excerpt. The excerpt from *Cable* #3, which will be analysed in more detail in the next section, ends with a panel where two characters enter a teleportation device and their bodies start to fade, and on the next page, the readers

are faced with a group of characters surrounded by smoke, clearly entering a new location for the first time. The transition between these two panels evokes a confusing mixture of closure in the reader. The fading bodies of two characters using a teleportation device is followed by a group of people arriving at a new location amid smoke. Following the logic of panel transitions and closure (Gavaler 2018, 222–223; McCloud 1993), it is natural to interpret these two events as being connected, and that the device has brought the group of characters to their location. In fact, the full-page panel is the very first page of the entire ‘Fatal Attractions’ story. The panel’s placement in the Finnish adaptation does not mark it as the beginning of a new story, but instead the transition implies that it follows from the previous scene.

The first eight pages of the ‘Fatal Attractions’ event, published in *Ryhmä-X* 3/1995, and the five-page scene that precedes it, function as the foundation for the upcoming storyline. The heroes, X-Factor, are a group of superheroes with their own title, and despite their adventures overlapping occasionally with those of the X-Men, in Finland the previous issue featuring the group was published seven months earlier.<sup>3</sup> Publishing the eight page excerpt from *X-Factor* showcases further that the event format loses its importance in this case of transnational adaptation, as the focus is on broader storylines. It reminds the readers of characters that are not frequently seen in *Ryhmä-X*, adapting the text for the new Finnish context. Moreover, the excerpt ends in a cliffhanger that compels readers to keep following the story in upcoming comic books.

Most of the 30 pages omitted from the Finnish publication focus on a political issue in the Marvel Universe that the X-Men and their allies have been facing since the 1960’s. The narrative emphasises the tension between mutants and humans. The first eight pages display the villains’ contempt for powerless humans, and later in the story, the readers learn that the feeling is mutual as human security guards and a political figure act aggressively towards the comic book’s mutant heroes. In the omitted section, tensions start to build towards the major conflict that will take place in the following parts. It provides a background to the actions of several characters, but these 30 pages are not crucial to understanding what happens in the next instalment of the event, and hence could be omitted in the adaptation in the interest of moving forward with the plot. To sum up, the transnational adaptation process of ‘Fatal Attractions’, as well as other stories published in the Finnish superhero comic books, was constructed by choosing material from several different original comic books, omitting or adding pages and sections as it seemed necessary or convenient for the plot. The adaptation was made specifically for the Finnish context, and national qualities such as the number of published titles and pages, as well as feedback from the readers (Author 2020) were considered.

### **The meaning of paratexts in adaptation – from covers to letters pages**

In the Finnish adaptation, paratextual elements are used to clarify the plot and provide readers with reading strategies (Gray 2010, 26) for navigating the storyline collected from different titles and issues. Paratexts include for example letters pages and the comic books’ covers, and in the case of ‘Fatal Attractions’, a ‘fact file’ spread of Magneto and a five-page excerpt from *Cable* #3.

In *Ryhmä-X* 3/1995, the start of the ‘Fatal Attractions’ storyline is not marked with a title or any specific reference to denote the beginning of something new. Instead, after



the previous chapter has ended, a spread reminiscent of a fact file with information about Magneto, the title's main villain, signals the ending of a previous chapter and its separateness from the upcoming story. The spread is followed by a short five-page passage, in which Cable and his friend Garrison are sitting in an empty spaceship. Garrison suggests they play the game 'twenty questions' and starts asking Cable questions. The questions and answers are similar to the ones readers pose on the letters page, such as 'who/what are you', 'why did you not know that Stryfe is your twin brother' etc. (*Ryhmä-X* 3/1995, 54–58). Both the fact file and the excerpt function as texts that prepare readers for other texts (Gray 2010, 25): in this case, the 'Fatal Attractions' storyline. Through these paratexts, readers get more insight into the characters, just as they would from reading the letters page. Because only a fraction of the ongoing storylines involving the mutant characters is published in Finland, the strange situation surrounding Cable is clarified through an 'interview', and this information is strengthened and emphasised by repeating its content on the letters page, as the editor writes: 'This issue gave us important information regarding who are Cable and Stryfe. A quick look at the past is therefore inevitable.'<sup>4</sup> (*Ryhmä-X* 3/1995, 2).

Just as the storyline itself, the covers are a part of adaptation and the result of selection and subject to translation. Covers are usually designed to attract readers to buy the comic book. They might include teasers, such as showing the hero in a surprising scene, dialogue between characters, or other textual elements to intrigue potential readers. As Stan Lee and John Buscema write in their 1978 guidebook *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*: 'the cover is probably the single most important page in any comic book. If it catches your eye and intrigues you, there is a chance you may buy the magazine. If it does not cause you to pick it up, it means one lost sale' (Lee and Buscema 1986, 138). Comic book covers are consumed speculatively. This means that the covers, as part of the comic book's paratext, prepare the readers for the story itself. (Gray 2010, 24–25.)

In the case of 'Fatal Attractions', all six of the original American covers feature a similar textual and visual element to tie the issues from different titles together. Although all the original issues, including the covers, are written and drawn by different people, the cover design brings the crossover together even before the story is read. Typically, cover art is featured simply on the front cover of the comic book, but on special occasions, such as events or first issues of new titles, comic books can feature wraparound covers. The wraparound covers of 'Fatal Attractions' have a unifying design feature, a darker stripe running down the right side of the front, with the title 'Fatal Attractions' and a short text that hints at what happens in each part of the story. On the cover of *X-Factor* #92, for example, the teaser is 'Out of the light and into thy father's shadow', which alludes to a discussion between two characters. The text is not too revealing to spoil the experience of reading the comic for the first time. The design also has an exclusive feature: a hologram detail on the dark stripe. The hologram as a rare feature marks all issues of the event as collectables. The special covers not only signify these six issues belonging to the same event. They also mark the event as something spectacular that should not be disregarded.

The covers of the Finnish adaptation do not follow the original design, strengthening the argument that the focus of the adaptation was not on the event. The covers of the four Finnish issues in which the storyline is published make no reference to the name of the event itself, even on the two original covers that are used. Instead, three of the covers



include references to specific plot points of the comic books at hand, and one of them, the cover of *Ryhmä-X* 4/1995, reveals a significant detail. In this issue, the front cover from *Cable* #1 (1993), originally a wraparound cover of an issue that does not belong to 'Fatal Attractions', is used, but original text elements are removed and replaced with the logo of *Ryhmä-X*, as well as the text 'Magneton ja Cablen paluu!', 'The return of Magneto and Cable!'. The cover reveals that both characters, who have died in earlier stories, are alive. It contradicts the instructions given by Lee and Buscema in their guidebook: '[the cover] must be provocative enough to make the reader want to get the magazine and read the story, but it mustn't give the ending away, or tip the reader off to any surprises' (Lee and Buscema 1986, 140). Replacing the cover with a new one is a common part of comic book adaptation (Zanettin 2014), and this choice of cover highlights how the Finnish adaptation was made for a new and different audience in a different cultural industry. The cover does not emphasise the on-going storyline as an event, like the original US covers, but instead it is a continuation of the five-page paratext concerning Cable in the previous issue. The character's return is confirmed in image and text, replacing the original cover image and text alluding to the themes of the entire event with a clear announcement. The change emphasises the shift of focus in the transnational adaptation process towards straightforward action.

After the cover, the readers come across the next paratextual element of the issue on the very first page. In the first paragraph of the letters column, its editor Mail-Man confirms the facts printed on the cover: Cable and Magneto are alive. *Ryhmä-X* 4/1995 starts with one page of the letters column, followed by the Finnish version of the second part of 'Fatal Attractions', originally published in *X-Force* #25. The main tension in the original comic book is built around two intruders appearing one by one at the X-Force's headquarters. At first, the reader is invited to guess at who the first intruder is. There are clues, such as showing his shadow, before revealing that the intruder is the team's former leader Cable. Similarly, as the second stranger arrives to whisk the team away to a space station, there are some clues, this time textual, as to where they have been taken. On page 38 Magneto's face is finally shown, and he is confirmed to be alive, revealing that the stranger was one of his henchmen. According to Gray, paratexts condition the consumers' entrance to media texts and offer certain reading strategies (Gray 2010, 25). The readers of the Finnish adaptation know the plot points mentioned above already after seeing the cover that declares 'The return of Magneto and Cable!'. This provides the Finnish readers with choices, be it looking for clues of the two characters on the pages, paying less attention to details because the biggest plot points have already been revealed, or having learned from previous issues not to look at the letters column until they have finished reading the story.

Publishing Cable and Garrison's game of twenty questions and the eight pages where the Acolytes attack humans in a hospital is part of the adaptation strategy of focusing on useful information and advancing the plot. As described earlier, originally there is no connection between these two short passages. Instead, they have been included in the adapted version to give insight into certain central characters. Used in a paratextual way, the passages as well as the covers and letters pages illustrate how the Finnish adaptation presents a new version of the original storyline, made to fit the Finnish market and the readers' expectations.

## Adapting the Marvel Universe

While engaging the public to consume more comics is an important reason for producing events, world-building and showing the connectedness of the Marvel heroes is another one. However, as the Finnish comic book in the 1990s followed larger plotlines instead of focusing on a single X-Men -related title from the USA, world-building was often left out in favour of plot advancement. This is evident also in the adaptation of 'Fatal Attractions'. With a total of 68 pages, *Ryhmä-X* 4/1995 begins with the second part of the event (originally from *X-Force* #25 as mentioned earlier), followed by the first half of the third instalment, originally published in *Uncanny X-Men* #304. Magneto's evil mastermind is at the focus of the third instalment of the event, and the narrative includes an inner monologue displaying his tortured past and the events that led to him becoming the supervillain he is. *Ryhmä-X* 4/1995 features a shortened version of this monologue, leaving out pages where the character's past is explored in detail.

Both omitted pages differ from the narrative around them. The first missing page is the first in a flashback scene where Magneto reminisces a traumatic event from his past, the death of his child. Before this scene, the panel arrangements, colouring and drawing lines are conventional for the superhero genre. They evoke the type of realism connected to superhero comics – clear outlines of characters, buildings and artefacts, recognisable facial features, and white gutters between panels. During the flashback, the visual style changes dramatically. The page missing from the Finnish adaptation consists of one large image of Magneto holding a child in his arms. There are no panel borders or the typical black outlines around the characters in the page-sized image. Three small panels are superimposed on the large image, and the cloth that the child is wrapped in flows from the large image to one of the small panels on the left. Compared to the purples and reds of the previous page, the colour scheme consists of grey, green and blue. The second omitted page is, similarly, very different from the preceding and following pages. There is one large image on the page, no panels or outlines in the drawing. With its black and white colouring and yellow details, it is the illustration of Magneto's suffering that led to the first use of his powers. The images on both omitted pages are drawn with staggering lines and are reminiscent of sketches. The style emphasises the inner monologue of their main character, who is contemplating his feelings and thoughts at a time of distress.

By omitting the two pages where the villain's emotions and traumas are highlighted, the Finnish version of the story becomes more focused on action and violence, leaving less space for the role of Magneto's traumatic experiences. When it comes to the flow of the text, these omissions are not very noticeable. The transition to and from the flashback scene remains the same regardless of the omitted pages, due to the black gutters and dream-like style of the entire scene. Closure moves the narrative from the past to the present (Gavaler 2018, 222–223; McCloud 1993.) No necessary information regarding the plot is left out with the image of Magneto holding his child in his arms and the text boxes around the image mostly recap the origin story of the character. However, the emotional power of this page is significant, as it shows the main villain of the story in an understanding tone. Instead of just being evil, there is something in his past that has contributed to what he has become. Leaving out two pages from Magneto's inner

monologue does not make it more difficult to understand the plot itself, but it can affect how readers relate to the main villain.

A recurring characteristic of the omissions is leaving out world building and character development. Another notable omission of pages occurs in the fourth part of the event, originally published in *X-Men* #25. In its adaptation in *Ryhmä-X* 5/1995, two pages are left out that, again, do not affect the flow of the plot or render it impossible to follow, but rather shrink the Marvel Universe. The fourth part of the event begins as Magneto commences his attack against the superheroes by using his superpowers to shut down a magnetic forcefield surrounding the earth. After the attack, visualised with a splash of pink electricity surging over the earth, the next two pages illustrate how the magnetic pulse affects people in different parts of the world: in the USA, Japan, Russia, and England. Each scene takes place in a different location, and at a different time. The passing of time is indicated with text boxes: ‘Manhattan, New York, ten seconds after Magneto’s detonation’, ‘Los Angeles, California, two minutes after detonation’, and so on. Each scene is depicted in one or two panels, and their purpose is to show how the impact spreads from one country to another and affects millions of people.

Another purpose of these scenes is to tie Magneto’s actions to the Marvel Universe. In New York, the people realising that something has happened to their electronic devices are the Fantastic Four, in Tokyo it is the mutant Sunfire, and in England we see two members of Excalibur having tea as they realise that the power is out. Showing the reactions of other Marvel heroes emphasises the interconnectedness of the fictional world the characters inhabit. Simultaneously, it emphasises the importance of the ‘Fatal Attractions’ event, its nature as a spectacle. These pages are not part of the Finnish adaptation. Instead, the first scene after Magneto’s blast starts with two captions explaining that after 11 minutes, the blast has come full circle around the world and is sweeping over Washington DC. The omission of these short scenes is characteristic to the transnational adaptation seen in Finland, where personal relationships and expanding the universe are left out.

The high point of the ‘Fatal Attractions’ story is Magneto torturing Wolverine, the, perhaps, best-known hero of the X-Men, by using his powers to rip the metal enhancement out of Wolverine’s body. The whole issue #75 of the character’s self-titled comic book is dedicated to the aftermath of this significant act. No pages or panels are omitted from the Finnish adaptation of *Wolverine* #75, but other types of changes are made to the original in the adaptation. In addition to the translation proper (e.g. Zanettin 2008a), the comic book is visually adapted (Zanettin 2014) for the Finnish audience. The most notable instance of visual adaptation is the title splash page of *Wolverine* #75.

The original title page, a splash spread over the second and third page of *Wolverine* #75, is filled with colour, shapes, and characters. The title of this section, ‘Nightmares persist’, is drawn in big, red letters at the top of the splash, and together with a melting face of a clock in the lower right corner it makes a reference to Salvador Dalí’s painting *The Persistence of Memory*. In the adapted version, the visual aspect of the title is erased. The Finnish title, ‘Painajaiset jatkuvat’ (‘The nightmares continue’), is printed on a black bar that covers the face of the main character, and the verbal reference to Salvador Dalí is lost in translation.

In the third and fifth chapters of ‘Fatal Attractions’, the inner life of first Magneto, and then Wolverine, is prominently depicted in the original publications, but only one of

these depictions is published in its entirety in Finland. The fifth chapter consists of 38 pages of Wolverine's traumas, memories, and thoughts, which are all published as part of the Finnish adaptation. The Finnish adaptation ends with Wolverine's trauma, as the sixth and final part of the event is not part of it at all. Thus, the main villain and popular hero are treated differently in the adaptation process.

Originally published in *Excalibur* #71, the finale serves as an epilogue to the event. The *Excalibur*, a mutant superhero team residing in the UK, are at the centre, and the issue is another example of the interconnectedness and worldbuilding of the Marvel Universe. On the first five pages, there are three instances where the editor makes notes about previous episodes. This was a standard feature in Marvel's comics at the time. When the characters in the story refer to the past, it is annotated by the editor in a text box in the corner of the panel. In this issue, two characters are going through the previous events of 'Fatal Attractions', and the editor comments e.g. 'It all happened in *Uncanny X-Men* #304 -Suze'.

The plot of the final part does not change the main outcomes of 'Fatal Attractions', which are the return of Magneto, him stripping Wolverine of his metal enhancements, and his subsequent punishment by X-Men's leader Charles Xavier. With *Excalibur* #71, none of this changes, but instead the issue summarises the world of mutant superheroes for their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In addition to reminding the readers what has just taken place in the previous issues of the event, the final part includes references to the heroes' past. For example, in the second to last panel on page 14 there is an image of the original X-Men line-up from 1963 as the current leader, Scott, recollects past struggles and victories. Three pages later, another character contemplates her first encounter with the other mutants.

*Excalibur* #71 highlights the characters' past in the nostalgic ways described above, but it is not a simple celebration of the previous decades. A plotline regarding a central character who feels overwhelmed by recent adversities continues throughout 'Fatal Attractions', and culminates in the event's final part. The character is betrayed by his closest friend, which affects the personal relationships of several characters. Leaving out the final chapter of 'Fatal Attractions' continues the Finnish adaptation's focus on storyline and plot advancement, as the more introspective finale is left out. With these changes, the storyline is adjusted to a new audience in a new cultural setting, where world-building and character development, as well as publication formats such as the event, are not valued as much as in the cultural industry it comes from.

## Conclusion

'Fatal Attractions' was originally published as an anniversary event, meant to tie the storylines of six different comic book titles together. It was marked and marketed as a special occasion with matching covers that included a special hologram effect, and a shocking plot twist as one of the most popular heroes was tortured by the main villain. The event's theme revolved around the differences and similarities between the villain Magneto and the leader of the X-Men, Charles Xavier, showcasing their connectedness and even showing some understanding towards the villain. The final chapter recalled the past 30 years of X-Men comics while also bringing some changes to the line-up of main characters.

Several of the qualities of an event storyline are lost in the Finnish adaptation of 'Fatal Attractions'. Reasons for this are temporal distance, and the lack of special qualities that make the event a spectacle. Choosing not to publish the final part, leaving out most of the first part, and cutting individual pages from the middle of the original issues to favour plot advancement over character development, change the adapted story.

Media events are typically broadcast live and shared by a simultaneous audience. The Finnish adaptation, which was published almost two years after the original, lacks this sign of an event, and the temporal distance also means that the anniversary aspect is lost. The omissions change how the event unfolds, including cutting the final chapter out completely. This case study shows that analysing particular forms of comic book storytelling, such as event storylines, offers new insight into the study of transnational adaptations. Events where several characters' stories intertwine are usually published for commercial reasons, but they can simultaneously serve to deepen the characters and their relationships, as well as expand the characters' world. In transnational comics publishing, the same logic of persuading readers to buy more comics does not often apply, and the publications are restricted by page volume and smaller circulation. Omitting parts of a storyline in the adaptation, the stories and characters are changed simultaneously. The case of 'Fatal Attractions' is an example where leaving parts of the event unpublished results in the story becoming more straightforward. Concentrating on action, shortening the introspective inner monologue of Magneto, and leaving out world-building means that the Finnish adaptation misses the event's purpose to bring together the different titles and show how they are connected in the Marvel Universe.

## Notes

1. X-Men, TUXM, Excalibur, X-Factor, X-Force, Wolverine, Cable, X-Men 2099, Alpha Flight.
2. *Sarjakuvalehti's* line-up in 1995 featured Ghost Rider, the Punisher, Daredevil, Sabretooth and Wolverine; *MARVEL* featured Hulk, Namor, Ghost Rider, the Terminator, Alpha Flight, Gambit, Venom, and the crossover 'Infinity Crusade'<http://www.perunamaa.net/sarjakuvarock/marvel/sarjis/sarjis1995.html>, <http://www.perunamaa.net/sarjakuvarock/marvel/marvel/marvel1995.html>.
3. <http://www.perunamaa.net/sarjakuvarock/marvel/r-x/r-x1994.html>.
4. ”Tässä numerossa saatiin kuitenkin tärkeitä lisätietoja siitä keitä Cable ja Stryfe ovat. Nopea katsaus menneeseen on siis välttämätöntä.” (*Ryhmä-X* 3/1995, 2).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Suomen Kulttuurirahasto [00190169 Keskusrahasto].

## Notes on contributor

**Laura Antola** is a doctoral student in Media Studies at the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. Her research is focused on adaptations of superhero comics and the early forms of superhero fan culture in Finland.

## References

- Altenberg, T., and R. J. Owen. 2015. "Comics and Translation: Introduction." *New Readings* 15: i–iv.
- Antola, L. 2020. "It is nice that you want to improve this comic book together with us. "The letters page's significance in the transnational adaptation of Marvel comics in Finland." *Participations* 17 (1): 29–46.
- Borodo, M. 2018. "Translation, Localization and Foreignization: The Metamorphoses of a Comic Book about a Girl from the Socialist Bloc." *Across Languages and Cultures* 19 (1): 99–120.
- Brienza, C. 2010. "Producing Comics Culture: A Sociological Approach to the Study of Comics." *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 1 (2): 105–119.
- Brienza, C. 2016. *Manga in America. Transnational Book Publishing and the Domestication of Japanese Comics*. Bloomsbury.
- Costello, M. 2009. *Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books and the Unmasking of Cold War America*. New York: Continuum International Publishing.
- Couldry, N. 2003. *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach*. Taylor & Francis.
- Dayan, D., and E. Katz. 1992. *Media Events. The Live Broadcasting of History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gavaler, C. 2018. *Superhero Comics*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Gray, J. 2010. *Show Sold Separately. Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*. New York: NYU Press.
- Hutcheon, L. 2006. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge.
- Kaveney, R. 2007. *Superheroes! Capes and Crusaders in Comics and Films*. New York: I.B. Tauris & Co.
- Kellner, D. 2003. *Media Spectacle*. Taylor & Francis.
- Koponen, M. 2004. *Wordplay in Donald Duck Comics and Their Finnish Translations*. U of Helsinki, postgraduate thesis.
- Kustritz, A. 2015. "Transnationalism, Localization, and Translation in European Fandom: Fan Studies as Global Media and Audience Studies." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 19. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2015.0682>.
- Lee, S., and J. Buscema. 1986. *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*. London: Titan Books.
- Martins, M. D. A. P. 2015. "The *Manga Shakespeare* Series Translated into Brazilian Portuguese." *New Readings* 15: 46–56.
- McCloud, S. 1993. *Understanding Comics*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Mitaine, B., D. Roche, and I. Schmitt-Pitiot, eds. 2015. *Comics and Adaptation*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Seeck, H., and T. Rantanen. 2015. "Media Events, Spectacles and Risky Globalization: A Critical Review and Possible Avenues for Future Research." *Media, Culture and Society* 37 (2): 163–179.
- Smith, I. R. 2017. *The Hollywood Meme: Transnational Adaptations in World Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Stein, D. 2013. "Of Transcreations and Transpacific Adaptations: Investigating Manga Versions of Spider-Man." In *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives: Comics at the Crossroads*, edited by D. Stein and Mayer, 145–161. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Toivonen, P. 2001. "En Serietidning På Fyra Språk." *Acta Wasaensia* No. 88. Vaasan yliopisto.
- Zanettin, F. 2008a. "Comics in Translation: An Overview." In *Comics in Translation*, edited by F. Zanettin, 1–32. Manchester: St. Jerome.

Zanettin, F. 2008b. “The Translation of Comics as Localization. On Three Italian Translations of *La Piste Des Navajos*.” In *Comics in Translation*, edited by F. Zanettin, 200–219. Manchester: St. Jerome.

Zanettin, F. 2014. “Visual Adaptation in Translated Comics.” *inTRAlinea* 16. <http://www.intrali-nea.org/archive/article/2079>.