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Archie's Destiny, as Shaped by Robert Frost

By GEORGE GENE GUSTINES
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Archie Comic Publications
Robert Frost's "Road Not Taken" was one inspiration for the story of Archie's future love life. [More Photos >](#)

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The wedding story was written by Michael E. Uslan and illustrated by Stan Goldberg, a longtime "Archie" artist. The first half was called "Archie Marries Veronica," but issue No. 603, on sale next month, is called "Archie Marries Betty." The end of bachelorhood began in issue No. 600, in which Archie found himself on a road named Memory Lane, which he has often traveled. This time he walked a different direction and encountered a fork in the road. He chose the left path, which allowed him to see his future with Veronica and their twins, and himself working for her tycoon father.

That perennially teenage redhead from Riverdale made headlines around the world when word leaked, back in May, that he would propose to his longtime love interest, Veronica Lodge, in issue No. 600 of the comic that bears his name. But that issue, published in August, was only Part 1 of a six-part story. Although Archie did marry Veronica, things will take a turn in November, when Archie proposes to the lady in waiting, Betty Cooper. That's just the latest twist in the romantic triangle that has thrust this nearly 70-year-old character, and his parent company, into the media spotlight.

Archie, who first appeared in December 1941, has followed the course of other comic-book characters: spinoff titles, a radio program, a newspaper strip and a Saturday morning cartoon series. But as comic books became graphic novels, Archie was talked about less and less. In 2007 the publishers of Archie Comic Publications introduced what they called a "New Look" for the Archie gang, which was less cartoony, but that experiment will end this year.

The wedding, which began as a way to celebrate the 600th issue, has become a game changer for the company. "What the story has done is to introduce Archie on a global level," said Jon Goldwater, co-chief executive of Archie Comic Publications. The company plans to roll out new titles for international markets, pursue film and TV opportunities and release a series of deluxe collected editions.

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At the end of the October issue, No. 602, Archie goes for an evening stroll and encounters the fork again. In the November issue Archie will find himself back in Riverdale High, this time envisioning a future with Betty as his wife. (A set of twins factors into this destiny as well.)

This alternative future will be a relief to the fans who reacted negatively to the marriage to Veronica. “The polls that I’ve seen ran about 80/20, Betty over Veronica, with Jughead continually coming in a strong third,” said Mr. Uslan, a comic-book historian, a longtime “Archie” fan and a producer of the big-screen “Batman” films. Mr. Uslan said his inspiration for the story included a film (“Sliding Doors”), a poem ([Robert Frost’s](#) “Road Not Taken”) and a song (“Both Sides, Now”).

Mr. Uslan’s relationship with Archie began in his childhood. “My mom told me I learned to read from ‘Archie’ comics and ‘Casper,’” said Mr. Uslan, now 58. Assembling the 1980 publication “The Best of Archie” required Mr. Uslan and his colleague Jeffrey Mendel to read every “Archie” comic ever published.

At that time Mr. Uslan met Victor Gorelick, then an editor and now co-president and editor in chief of Archie Comic Publications. Last October, nearly 30 years and a career away from “Archie,” Mr. Uslan approached Mr. Gorelick about writing a milestone story. With the comic nearing issue No. 600, and the 70th anniversary fast approaching, the timing seemed right.

“The story arc is all about choices and consequences,” Mr. Uslan said. “These choices don’t impact just the people getting married; they have a butterfly effect and alter the lives of friends and family as well.” The future is filled with the good (Moose, the often angry football goon, discovers inner peace, thanks to [yoga](#)) and the bad (references abound to the recession, layoffs, cutbacks and stock market losses). But it still boils down to the girl-next-door Betty versus the rich-and-worldly Veronica.

“Quite honestly, we thought it would have a good reaction, but this has been overwhelming,” Mr. Goldwater said. “It has gone way, way, way bigger than we had ever imagined.”

Until the wedding story began to unfold, the core readers of “Archie” were female, between the ages of 7 and 17, Mr. Goldwater said. But the new story line has multigenerational appeal, he added, with feedback from readers indicating that the comic had been shared among parents and children.

He estimated that the first part of the story line sold hundreds of thousands of copies. [ICV2.com](#), a Web site that covers the comic-book industry, estimated comic-store sales of No. 600 at just over 54,000. (By contrast, “Archie” No. 597 sold around 2,500 copies.) Those numbers do not account for newsstand, supermarket and international sales of “Archie.”

“This has really pushed ‘Archie’ into the consciousness of everyone’s mind,” Mr. Goldwater said. The plotline was mentioned on everything from the [BBC](#) to the “Late Show With [David Letterman](#)” to “The [Rachel Maddow](#) Show” and in newspapers worldwide. The response in India was especially enthusiastic, and so “Archie” will now be printed in five languages there. Archie Comic Publications plans to open its first international office in New Delhi next year and is also preparing some exclusive comics for that market that will include Indian characters.

Archie and his gang may even make their way into feature films or new animated series. The publisher recently signed with Creative Artists Agency to represent the gang in Hollywood. On the print side, the publisher is joining with the fellow comic-book publishers IDW and Dark Horse for several collected editions, in softcover and hardcover. IDW will reprint “Archie” newspaper strips, as well as best-of volumes devoted to the work of longtime “Archie” artists like Dan DeCarlo and Mr. Goldberg.

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Starting next year, Dark Horse will publish archive editions of "Archie" that begin with his first appearance in Pep Comics No. 22 in December 1941.

The longevity of "Archie" is something that Mr. Uslan saw reflected in the reaction to the story. "Archie has had a place in people's lives for generations and generations," he said. "People are shocked at how much these characters still mean to them."

And what of Archie? Is he destined to settle down with Betty or Veronica?

"I have written his final fate in one of these two futures," Mr. Uslan said. "Now, back in high school, it's up to the three of them. Everything they say, don't say, every action they take and fail to take, is going to add up to determine which of these two roads are taken. And one of them will be."

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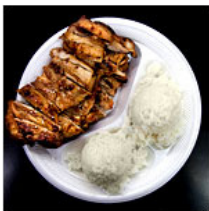
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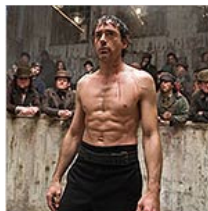


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