



Venom: Circle of Four

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Hell is spreading across the Earth from out of Las Vegas. Ghost Rider is responsible but what price is she willing to pay to save mankind?! X-23, Venom & Hulk must defeat their worst enemies, buying Ghost Rider time to stop hell's march across the globe! As a clone, X-23 has often wondered if she has a soul. This is where she gets her answer! Who is Ichor and why has he targeted Venom for Death?!

Collecting: *Venom* 10-13, 13.1-13.4, 14

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From Reader Review Venom: Circle of Four for online ebook

Arlomisty says

This was OK.... not my favorite characters... I was more interested in the new Venom character....

Michael says

I like Venom and I think Flash Thompson makes a great host. I've been jumping all over while reading this series. I just got a hold of this volume from the library. I wasn't sure what to expect, I know something went down considering I'd read volumes past this one. The first three issues we learn a little bit about crimemaster and jack o'lantern. That part of the story was good, but the circle of four part was awesome! I really loved the team up. Maybe because it was a new version of the new fantastic four. That was such a cool idea that I'm glad that this story totally stole the character for it. You have Venom in Spider-man spot; X-23 in Wolverine's spot; Red hulk in for grey Hulk; and a new Ghost Rider for the old Ghost Rider. I really want these heroes to become a superteam. The cross over was so much fun. They're in Vegas battling hell! A crazy story that was fun. I live fun comics and this one was a lot of fun. Plus the new new fantastic four, although they were never called that. That's who they are in my mind.

Quentin Wallace says

This one didn't seem to live up to its potential. I thought it was a great concept, but the execution fell flat.

Blackheart, the son of the devil, is attempting to literally bring Hell to Earth. Standing in his way is the "Circle of Four", consisting of Venom, Red Hulk, Ghost Rider, and X-23. Sounds like a great idea, but then things start to fall apart.

I think the biggest flaw was just the story length; it was too long. It dragged in the middle and seemed to be treading water. If it had been an issue or two shorter I think it would have been much stronger. First the heroes have to fight twisted reflections of themselves, then they are tricked into thinking things are over and they won, and then Hell invades Earth..so forth and so on, just a little too much going on.

Overall the story did have its moments, and it wasn't all bad. The art itself was good, we got to see some cameos by Dr. Strange and Damion Hellstrom. Overall though, just fell a little flat. I think the idea of those four heroes teaming up may have raised my expectations too high, so it may have just been me.

Eric Mikols says

Probably a few issues too long, but wacky fun nonetheless.

Sean says

So this is how a crossover should be done. Tight, fast, and fluid. Not a hundred tie-ins. Rick Remender, Rob Williams, and Jeff Parker do a great job of showcasing a ton of characters while keeping the books focused on the story at hand. The story here starts off great and loses quite a bit of steam towards the end. Alejandra Blaze is annoyingly one-note and drags the rest of the four down. I can't help but think that a more developed Ghost Rider would have improved the book. The villains were perfectly villainous but the book did over extend itself. Two less issues would have served it better. The status quo changes of a few characters is a good way to see if a story actually has sticking power and there are some here. The ending felt too tidy and Captain America is made to look too inept. The art was good and creepy. Overall, a pretty good book that lasted too long.

Martin says

This one was a lot of fun, even though I don't usually go for/enjoy stories like this (involving Hell and whatnot). It was much better than Venom by Rick Remender - Volume 1. I like how Remender blends humor with high-stakes action. 4 unlikely allies team-up to stop Blackheart from spreading Hell on Earth: Red Hulk, Venom, X-23, & Ghost Rider. That's one team-up I did not see coming.

* * *

From my review of volume 1:

Interesting concept: using the symbiote as a secret weapon and using a soldier to wear it and carry out special missions. That's a new take on the played-out Venom character, and it could work. But the soldier being Flash Thompson? Really? I had a hard time getting behind that. I'm sure there are at least a good dozen existing characters that could've made this work better.

* * *

We get a good example of this in this book when Red Hulk not only "wears" the symbiote, but also [temporarily] absorbs Ghost Rider's Spirit of Vengeance. The result is one bad MoFo, and we'll probably never see that again in comics. Too bad.

Anyway, the heroes initially **FAIL** and it's only by making a pact with Mephisto that they can come back, get a second chance, and finally save the day. This pact with the Devil goes something like this: the heroes get to come back, but when Mephisto needs them for something, they must answer the call, no matter what he needs them to do. It goes without saying that this could lead to very interesting developments for our 4 protagonists, if this story thread is followed up on by another creative team.

And, um, since when is Ghost Rider a *woman*?

Matt says

Collects Venom (2011) issues #10-14, and issues #13.1-#13.4

In this collection, Agent Venom teams up with X-23, Red Hulk, and the Alejandra Jones version of Ghost Rider.

I thought this was a little better than some of the stuff that came before it in this series, but it still isn't a favorite of mine.

Mike says

This sucker starts off with a bang-up irrevocable conflict: Flash gets blackmailed into doing a job for Jack-O-Lantern's daddy-o, some weird crime boss who might go by the name of CrimeMaster. (God I don't know, this shit sometimes goes over my head. I'm a simple guy just trying to have fun reading comics - is that so wrong?)

Watching Flash writhe under the restraints of his predicament is awesome - wanting to murder every bad guy connected to this job, wanting to smash in the face of Jack-O-Lantern (wait - if you try to smash in the face of a guy who has no discernible face left, and your fist passes straight through thin air to the back of his skull, is it still murder or does it qualify as a mercy killing?), and even wanting to deck Captain America (c'mon, raise your hand if you've ever wanted to punch that sanctimonious asshole's lights out).

Remender's Jack-O-Lantern reminds me of Aaron's Bullseye from his Punisher Max run, or pretty much any a Ennis villain - sociopathic, in-your-face confrontational, ridiculously outspoken about their opponent's behaviours - wait, isn't that Deadpool under the uglier-than-Deadpool mask? Maybe - just letting off a little steam.

However, this sucker is actually structured as a form of punishment for Remender fans: a series of "point something" issues written by a bunch of non-Remender people, all trying to get their take on one of these ridiculously unrelated characters on a few pages and make a name for themselves (and maybe even come up with a plausible premise for why the hell these characters belong on the same pages except in a Beyonder S&M scenario). (Can you imagine the Beyonder in - instead of his 80's white jumpsuit - a leather-and-latex hoop skirt/bustier/horse-bodied outfit? And then just walking around nonchalantly and ignoring his outfit completely? Cause I can.)

Our four anti-heroes go to battle with their antitheses, a gimmick as bad here as it was in Justice League's Forever Evil. Instead of Evil Supes snorting crushed kryptonite, we get a hulking brain matter...hulk with a speech impediment, among the half-baked pitch meeting ideas that fall flat as soon as they open their mouths. Stupid "facing your fears". Stupid "temptation is greater when you have something to lose". Stupid dumb demon antagonist.

The whole series of "point" issues suck - even Remender's, the momentum was so bad. It wasn't until the last issue - when his Fear Agent artist Tony Moore came on - that this became ridiculous and outrageous enough to be fun again. Moore+Remender is a salve against mediocre creativity.

Did Flash learn a valuable lesson here? Does he have more suffering in his futures, courtesy of his own failings? Tune in next time kids! Despite some serious misgivings (what was the name of that farm animal they have photos of you with, Rick, to get talked into this pointless fiasco?), I'll keep following the tale of Flash's torture. It seems Remender has a lot more flaying yet to do.

Aaron says

Man, I really wanted to love this one. I know Venom received a lot of critical acclaim when it first debuted, with a lot of people praising it for its "highly original take on Venom," but I never really felt like this original take was anything more than just a new idea done fairly poorly. Gradually, though, Remender has allowed his unique style to seep onto the Venom pages, and the beginning of this book finally saw him break all the way through.

The first quarter or so is great! At the end of volume 1 of Venom, Flash Thompson/Venom has seen himself allied with the Crime Master, a shadowy, evil figure who seems to love committing crimes just because he is, well, the master of them. It's a little ridiculous, but in a fun way. Anyway, at the beginning of Circle of Four, Flash is stuck on a road trip with Jack-O-Lantern, one of the most horrific and downright evil villains around. He's basically a sadistic serial killer who loves flaunting Flash's situation right in his face, and the tension between the two is palpable, gritty stuff.

But then that all goes away. After this short storyline, we're treated to an extremely random team-up between Venom, Red Hulk, X-23 and the Ghost Rider as they fight off the expansion of hell on earth. There's some decently fun moments in this, but overall it just feels like a big stretch in this otherwise fairly grounded, human series about Flash's struggle to keep the Venom symbiote in check.

Additionally, it seems that the various writers who pick up some of the middle issues (Jeff Parker & Rob Williams), have no idea what the difference between Venom and Spider-Man is. After going from a brooding, professional soldier in Remender's hands, he suddenly turns into a quippy idiot in theirs. He makes a bunch of jokes about how many guns he has (one of the most tired jokes in comics at this point) and some other nonsense, destroying the character a little bit every time, before finally getting returned to Remender's more serious guy at the end of the book. It's very inconsistent and jarring. You'd think these writers would've maybe read up on the character before just doing whatever the hell they wanted with him, but I guess not.

In any case, the Hell storyline wraps up a little too neatly for my taste, and becomes pretty rote by the end. I wasn't anywhere near as big a fan of it as I was Remender's smaller-scale stuff, which I'm hoping continues in the final volume. So far, though, I'd say there's no real reason to read this Venom unless you really, really just want to see a "different take" on Venom. Just being different isn't enough for me, though.

Chloe Natasha says

This was enjoyable enough, with a good dose of chaotic comic showdowns and literal hell on earth, but it wasn't particularly memorable. I'm likely at a disadvantage though, given that I only picked this up because it's part of my X-23 binge. I have only a vague idea of who the rest of these guys are (a female Ghost Rider was a pleasant surprise for me!) so I really wasn't all that invested in what was going on.

The further exploration of Laura's crisis regarding her soul was nice though. I just want to reach into the pages and tell her she's human; that she not only has a soul, but she's deserving of life. She's slowly coming to learn that on her own though, which is beautiful to read. I do love that girl! Wading through comics I have minimal interest in is absolutely worth it for her journey.

Overall, a quick and somewhat confusing read, but it was chaotic and fun and full of badasses, so it wasn't all

bad.

Joe Young says

Rick Remender - writer

Jeff Parker - illustrator

Flash Thompson is blackmailed by the Crime-Master into running off with the Venom symbiote to Las Vegas to steal something for him. Captain America sends Red Hulk after the wayward soldier. Meanwhile, Johnny Blaze is on the road and trying to mentor the new Ghost Rider but she is all like "forget you, old man." X-23 is also in Vegas, tracking down somebody who stole her DNA.

Then, literally all Hell breaks loose. Blackheart, the wayward son of Mephisto, is on Earth in human disguise running a casino. He casts a spell using elements from the heroes and opens a portal to Hell on earth. Now it's up to our ragtag group of anti-heroes to defeat Blackheart and send the demons rampaging on the Vegas strip back to their rightful home down below.

Great art from Jeff Parker and some pretty nifty writing from Rick Remender. Enjoyable, but not recommended.

4/5

Nicolo Yu says

This hardcover collection contains two story arcs that seamlessly segue into each other since the first one is a Venom three-parter that lead in to the Circle of Four crossover event.

This collection is a great example of Rick Remender making beautiful music with the toys Marvel editorial gave him. He did a phenomenal job in recreating the symbiotic Venom into Agent Venom the super-soldier by bonding Spider-Man's former symbiote with a Lee/Ditko creation in Flash Thompson. This merger added a classic lineage to a 90's comic staple.

Remender also re-imagined Spider-Man villain, Jack-O-Lantern as more than the cheap Hobgoblin knock-off he once was by giving him a killer origin, in more ways than one. I liked how the writer turned the Circle of Four crossover into a great lead-in for his farewell arc on the title. Crossover events could easily put a series writer off track but Remender managed to make it work for his story. It also helped the the cancellations of the titles Venom was originally going to cross into got cancelled, thus making those issues point 1, point 2, and point 3 in the Venom series numbering.

I have no complaints on the art side. Remender and the other writers got themselves some pretty capable artists. In fact, Remender got both Walking Dead co-creator Tony Moore and Eisner awardee Lan Medina on his issues. I would not have minded though if the cover artist, Stefano Caselli go to do some interior pages.

Overall, this is a great collection to add to my library.

Silas says

This was a weird left turn for all the characters involved. Flash as Venom goes to a really dark place in an interesting, compelling story, and then Hell takes over... and it gets weird in an '80s punk comic sort of way and a bunch of other characters show up. I guess something else happens with them later (or will, I haven't heard anything about it), since it is foreshadowed here, but the story is... weird. It's well done, but not at all in keeping with the tone of the characters involved, or the direction that the story seemed to be headed. It's also kind of unclear how much of what happened here is going to stay the way it seemed. I guess things will be a bit different in the future.

Jeff Lanter says

This is a very disappointing volume in the Venom series. The first three issues are strong and show all of the same qualities that has made Venom great. Him being unable to catch a break and being blackmailed by Jack O' Lantern is gripping and awful (in a good way). Then we're suddenly forced into an "event" where Venom, X-23, Red Hulk, and Ghost Rider have to prevent Hell from taking over the Earth. The whole thing feels very forced. Venom and Red Hulk have little to no reason to be there (well there is a reason, but it isn't compelling at all) and it feels like the whole point is actually about Ghost Rider and not the other characters. To make matters worse, Remender doesn't write very many of the issues and even when he does, there is no snappiness to the dialogue or cleverness to the plot. This is a very generic event where heroes team up, lose for awhile, and eventually win against all odds. Chances are good you've read that before. To make matters worse, the artist changes every issue and the styles don't mesh well. Some of the art is good, but most of it is just serviceable. I have to admit, I read through the 13.whatever issues as fast as I could so I could review this book and move on to the next volume. I hope that they get Venom back on track or this series is one of the most promising ones I've seen to be derailed by the combination of losing the writer and forced events.

Ryan Woodroof says

Thoroughly enjoyed!

Red Ghost Venom Hulk Rider is pretty nifty. Good story. Would recommend to anyone looking for something entertaining to read.
