



By Rachel Sandell Published Aug 5, 2023, 10:00 PM EDT

Rachel Sandell is an experienced editor and proofreader with a love for language and storytelling. A graduate of the creative writing MFA program, The Rainier Writing Workshop, she is the author of five short stories and analyzes the different facets of fiction her spare time. She's also a huge...



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SUMMARY

- Shredder, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' main villain, has been making their lives difficult for almost 40 years since his first appearance in 1984.
- The Shredder's origin story was inspired by a cheese grater, which led to the creation of his iconic armor in the comic series.
- The Shredder is characterized by his determination, physical strength, manipulative nature, and ability to adapt through different iterations and successors. He remains a terrifying adversary for the turtles.

Every Harry needs a Voldemort, every Batman needs a Joker ... in short, every hero needs a villain. The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles are no exception: they have been chased through their long history by a particularly determined and terrifying bad guy.

From comics to TV to film, and from reboot to reboot, the Shredder has been making the turtles' lives difficult for almost 40 years since his first appearance in Mirage Studios' *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles #1* (1984), and his most recent appearance in the post-credit scene of *Mutant Mayhem* hints that he's not going to be retiring anytime soon.

Throughout the years, **different versions of the turtles have changed**, and the Shredder has changed along with them, but his determination and cruelty have followed close at hand. Whether the Shredder is the original wearer of the armor, Oroku Saki, or a different villain donning the spiked helmet and continuing the legacy, the Shredder has had a fascinating journey.

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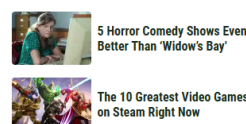
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Creators of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, **Peter Laird** and **Kevin Eastman**, came up with the idea for the four protagonists while trying to make each other laugh one day. Eventually, the idea grew into a comic series by Mirage, a studio they built themselves for the purpose of publishing their masterpiece. In a similarly silly fashion, the Shredder was born from an odd inspiration: **a cheese grater**.



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As Eastman explains in a 1991 documentary (*The Making of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Behind the Shells*), he and Laird asked each other what a villain with cheese grater armor might look like and concluded that he'd be lethal. Although the finalized version of Shredder lacked actual cheese grater costuming, his iconic armor grew from the initial inspiration.

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In the original Mirage comic run, the **Shredder is defeated in the first issue**, presumably falling off a building to his death. However, in true comic book fashion, he reappears in perfect health and ready to fight the turtles again later on. From this moment on, it would be increasingly difficult for the turtles to permanently rid themselves of the Shredder and his prominence in their lives.

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Several early versions of the Shredder see him as a man with a thirst for vengeance and power. With ties to a powerful clan of warriors in Japan, Oroku Saki often begins his journey by picking a fight with his rival Hamato Yoshi, whether for revenge due to perceived wrongs or out of jealousy, and usually Yoshi's wife Tang Shen dies as collateral damage.

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Even after Saki moves his life to New York to be the powerful leader of an untouchable crime syndicate (usually as leader of the Foot Clan), his past comes back to haunt him. In some versions, Hamato Yoshi is mutated into Splinter the rat sensei of the turtles, returning to raise his four young proteges as warriors to stop the Shredder's evil plans.

Other versions see Splinter as Hamato Yoshi's pet rat (as in the 2003 TV version), or as a lab rat carrying Hamato Yoshi's reincarnated spirit (as in the IDW comic run). Either way, the Shredder and Splinter are usually bitter rivals, and that bitterness extends to Splinter's pupils, Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo, and Donatello.

The Strengths of the Shredder

Although Shredder's armor (sometimes magical, sometimes just very sharp and all but unbreakable) is the more obvious strength of this bad guy, he harbors other strengths as well — unfortunately for the turtles.

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Determination is one of the Shredder's key characteristics, and that can be clearly seen in his dedication to becoming a master of martial arts himself. Even before becoming the Shredder, Oroku Saki puts in the work to become physically powerful over a long period of time, attributing his battlefield prowess to hard work and his ability to steel himself (pun intended) in the face of difficult but worthwhile endeavors. His hunger for power and thirst for vengeance are often contributors to his unbreakable determination.

The Shredder's pre-existing physical strength, paired with the deadly armor he wears, make him a truly terrifying adversary. While his armor may not be natural (like a turtle shell), he fights with the heavy steel fluidly.

Though many villains prefer working alone and hoarding victories for themselves, Shredder also recognizes the advantages of teamwork (at least, as far as teamwork can work for him). As well as being a master fighter, the Shredder is well-versed in manipulation and uses this talent to his advantage to both attract allies and trick foes (one example: **the 2012 film series**, in which he tricks Splinter's daughter Miwa into thinking she is Shredder's own daughter, renaming her Karai).

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Shredder is often seen teaming up with the Krang, alien life forms that can promise him immense power (at a cost), as well as commanding a host of Foot Clan soldiers and mutants alike. Despite some versions of Shredder getting beaten by higher powers (as in the **Michael Bay** films), usually Shredder finds a way to come out on top.

His knack for lying, combined with his powerful presence, makes him a force to be reckoned with, and saying no to someone like him is usually a death sentence.

Variations of the Shredder



Though most versions of Shredder present the villain as Oroku Saki, he isn't always the man inside the armor. The original comic run introduced the concept of Shredder clones, which could do the villain's bidding without any danger to his person.

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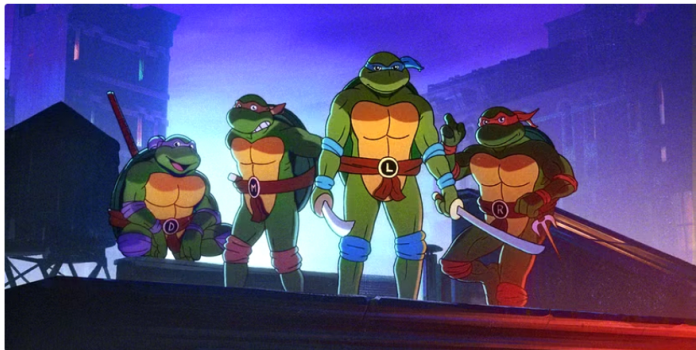
Other characters have also taken up the Shredder mantle, making "Shredder" a legacy name in those iterations. The 2003 TV series, for example, featured the alien Utrom Ch'rell as the main villain in the Shredder armor. The same series also included other versions of Shredder, including Oroku Saki as the Tengu Shredder, or demon Shredder, a mystic creature capable of taking souls.

Sometimes the Shredder armor is passed down to the next wearer, as happens when Shredder's successor Karai inherits **the Foot Clan** in the 2003 series, or in the comic miniseries **The Last Ronin**, when Oroku Saki's grandson, Oroku Hiroto, becomes Shredder and successfully kills three of the four turtle brothers as well as Splinter, something that not even the original Shredder accomplished.

One of the good guys has even become the Shredder: in the Image comic run, Raphael was able to get an advantage on his enemies for a brief period of time by wearing Shredder's armor and taking up the role as Foot Clan leader in New York.

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The Future of Shredder



While the many iterations of TMNT characters have changed, Shredder has remained iconic and terrifying no matter which version he appears in, or which face he wears. Whether Oroku Saki has reappeared from a past long forgotten, or he has raised up a new generation of Shredders, the villain has always maintained his own unique style of terror, manipulation, and strength, with an unbreakable will and a never-ending thirst for power. His lack of care and honor stands in stark contrast with Splinter and the turtles, making him the perfect nemesis for the close-knit ninja family.

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Although *Mutant Mayhem*, the most recent TMNT film, features Superfly (**Ice Cube**) and a whole host of other baddies as the main antagonists, the movie's post-credit scene teases the existence of Shredder in **this new storyline**. While the Shredder was absent in the first movie, he will certainly not sit out for future installments. With the sequel to *Mutant Mayhem* already greenlit, we can be sure that we haven't seen the last of this bad guy – whoever he may be now.



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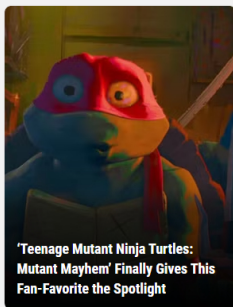
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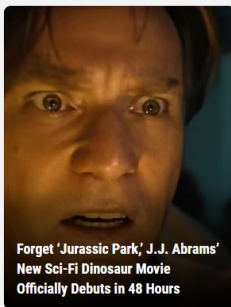
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