



Mark Millar and Motonobu Hori Talk 'Super Crooks'

The creator and director of Netflix's first superhuman heist anime series discuss their comic-inspired show that follows a small-time, superpowered crook, Johnny Bolt, and what he hopes will be his biggest - and final - score.

By [Victoria Davis](#) | Tuesday, November 30, 2021 at 2:43pm

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SUPER CROOKS



NETFLIX

'Super Crooks,' now streaming on Netflix.

The story begins like many superhero origin stories - a young boy, living in a small town where nothing exciting ever happens, discovers he has an extraordinary, superhuman gift. With his best friend by his side helping him train, the young boy seeks to become the next great hero. But, unlike most superhero stories, this particular tale goes on to feature half the town getting electrocuted in the local pool, soon joined by scores of pigs dumped from a hog transport that for some reason flew hundreds of feet into the air.

It's a heck of a way to kick off the first episode of Netflix's first superhuman heist anime, *Super Crooks*, which premiered November 25. The show, adapted from the 2012 comic by Mark Millar, legendary writer behind *Jupiter's Legacy*, *Kick-Ass*, *Kingsman*, *The Magic Order*, *Wanted*, *Old Man Logan*, *Marvel Civil War* and others, is produced by *My Hero Academia*'s Bones animation studio and directed by *Carole & Tuesday*'s Motonobu Hori.



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"I never expected it to be an anime project, but the minute [Netflix said 'studio Bones,' I was like, 'Okay, I'm in,'" says Millar. "And when I saw the first character designs, it felt really exciting. I love it when two things that weren't meant to be together come together. And I had never seen this kind of mash-up before."

Super Crooks follows a small-time, super-powered crook named Johnny Bolt. After his catastrophic teenage attempt to be a hero, a downcast Johnny decides to use his powers of controlling electricity to steal expensive goods. Years later, after getting released from prison, and despite promising his girlfriend that he would "lay low," an adult Johnny, in true *Ocean's Eleven* style, recruits a seemingly unbeatable crew for one last heist, the biggest job of their lives. There's just one problem. The target is a ruthless, also super-powered, crime boss who, when crossed, is known to mysteriously, but literally, blow the heads off people's loved ones.

The first 10 episodes of the 13-episode anime series act as a prequel to Millar's original comic. After nearly 10 years since its publication, Millar says it's not only exciting getting to see his story brought to life in a new way, but also getting to tell the story in a medium that has captured his imagination since childhood.



"When I was about five, I'd fallen in love with movies, but I was making comics when I was three or four years old," says Millar. "These are my two passions. And animation is kind of a beautiful blend of both of them because it's comics coming to life.

He adds, "*Battle of the Planets* was my first experience with Japanese anime. And even as an eight-year-old, or whenever it first appeared in Scotland, all of my friends were like, 'We've never seen anything like this before.' And it was almost like this was coming from another world because it was so beautiful. It looked like paintings. And to sort of have my own version of that is really cool. I love it."

Super Crooks is beautiful, filled with incredible amounts of eye-candy action - from car chases to explosions of the fiery, electrifying and smoke-filled variety. But the anime's animation also has a gritty, old-school feel, part rendered from the mind of director Hori, and part derived from the original *Super Crooks* comic illustrations of Leinil Yu, who was a character design supervisor on the anime.

"When it came to the gritty backgrounds, I was thinking of American comic books and the paper used for those comics, and that tangible sort of quality to it," explains Hori. "I really wanted that texture in the show. And there were a lot of grotesque expressions. But I think that's more because it's Mark Miller, rather than just that it's an American comic book. Those kinds of expressions have recently become more of a rare thing to see."

"I really wanted Leinil's original tone to run all the way through this thing," adds Millar. "These guys knocked it out of the park. It was like 10 times better than what I had in my head. I couldn't believe it."

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While Hori has animated for a variety of genres, this is his first experience directing a superhero crime story. "I have always loved Mark's work," he shares. "And when Mark gave me the plot, I thought, 'Oh, this is going to be a really big challenge.' But, when it comes to Japanese anime, we are, I feel, very good at action, and also expressing the inner emotional landscapes as well. I wanted this show to feel like a restaurant buffet of both."

The fascination with the emotional and mental state of serial heisters wasn't just a topic that fascinated *Super Crooks'* current director, but also Millar himself. It's where he got the idea for Johnny Bolt in the first place.

"I was watching all the superhero movies being made - this was 10 years ago now - and all the superhero comics that had run, at that point, for almost 80 years," he explains. "And I thought, as someone who loves crime movies, that it was really weird that I had not seen a superhero comic or a superhero movie starring the villains. Because we love *Goodfellas*. We love *The Godfather*. We love *Ocean's Eleven*. We live vicariously through these guys. And to tell a story, from the villain's point of view, that doesn't really even have superheroes in it, felt kind of fresh."

Many years ago, Millar had originally planned for *Super Crooks* to be developed as a low-budget, live-action film. The project got as far as Millar connecting with a producer and director to put together a rough draft of a screenplay. But that's as far as it got.

"At the time, a lot of people were saying, 'I don't think this super character thing is going to last much longer,'" remembers Millar. "And that sounds crazy now, but they really thought the bubble was going to burst on this stuff soon. So, the project just kind of fizzled out and never happened."



That is, until 2017, when Netflix, as Millar says, "pounced" on *Super Crooks*. And it's no wonder. The streaming giant has only continued to increase its investment in anime - a style of animation growing in popularity seemingly by the hour - and *Super Crooks* combines the best of what

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 **Correction:** The short aired as part of Adult Swim's 2020 April Fools Day, not 2019. That aside, January 9th can't come soon enough!

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audiences have seen from big-time anime series over the last few years. There are superheroes, action, romance, and a solid anti-hero one can't help but root for.

"In adapting this work, one of the things that I was most mindful of was maintaining that dynamic and that power that I found in the plot," says Hori. "You have to give some thought as to why these people deliberately have chosen a life of crime and to be a villain in that kind of world. And I did read a couple of books about crimes and criminals, and I think this happens to most people where they have a strong calling, or some kind of uncontrolled urge that pushes them in a certain direction. These characters just have the unfortunate luck of loving what they do, which is crime."

But, according to Hori and Millar, *Super Crooks* has another distinct, winning element that they believe will contribute to the show's success: its music, created by Japanese composer Towa Tei. "I had been a fan of Towa Tei for a long time and wanted him on this project because he produces happy music, at least in my mind," explains Hori. "Of course, we have a crime story here. But when Johnny is committing a crime, I feel like that's the kind of music he's listening to in his head, this kind of happy tone that really fits with how excited he is about what he's up to."

"Even the end credits and opening titles, they're just so beautiful, unlike anything I've ever seen before," adds Millar. "It's been many years since I've seen a title sequence that really gets me excited. The ones that came out before I was born were like mini movies and they have an amazing soundtrack that stays with people for decades. But, for *Super Crooks*, it has that music that you just can't get out of your head."



When it comes to the creator's hopes for the show, Millar admits he "may not be the person to ask," having claimed prior to the release of both *Kingsman* and *Kick-Ass*, "I think this is going to be bigger than *Titanic*." "I'm the guy that's super optimistic about my stories," he reveals.

But, all the same, Millar is looking forward to introducing *Super Crooks* to a wider audience. "A comic book has got a niche audience," says Millar. "There's only a certain number of people who will read your book. But there's something about TV that just opens up the story to the world. Even in my own family of four brothers and one sister, they never read my books. They love me, but they've just never read any of my books. But they will watch the movies; they will watch the TV shows and get really excited about them. So, I love the fact that this takes my world, something that's often hidden on paper, and opens it up into the mainstream. It's a lovely thing."

Millar adds that working on this anime has also ignited his own interest in the world of Johnny Bolt once again.

"One of the first things I did was write a sequel and my plan is to do three of these because it's such fun to do," he says. "It's really inspiring, when something comes back and looks this good, it just encourages you to do another one. It's like having kids. When we had the first kid, I was like, 'That was awesome. I'm going to go have another.' It's the same thing when you create a franchise or a show. It's like, 'That was such fun. We should do this again.'"



Victoria Davis is a full-time, freelance journalist and part-time Otaku with an affinity for all things anime. She's reported on numerous stories from activist news to entertainment. Find more about her work at victoriadavisdepiction.com.



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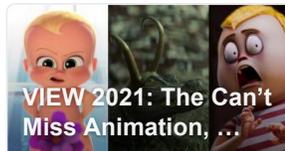
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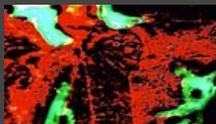
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