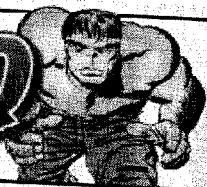


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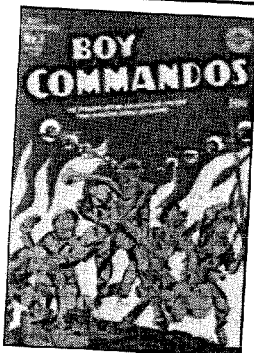
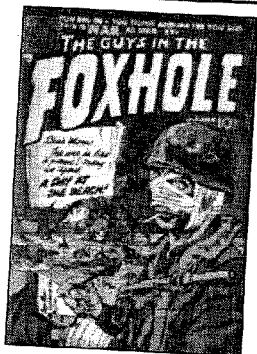
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THE JACK FAQ

FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT JACK KIRBY



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Who inked *Fantastic Four* #1?

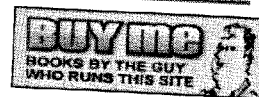
Well, first, let's name some folks who didn't: Bill Everett, Dick Ayers, Art Simek, Marvin Stein, Sol Brodsky and Jack himself. All have been wrongly credited over the years. Jack himself once was quoted as saying it was Simek and he was wrong. Artie Simek was one of the best letterers in the business and he lettered #1...but there is no record of him ever doing anything in comics besides lettering. And whoever inked *F.F.* #1 also inked #2 (which was not lettered by Simek) as well as a few concurrent non-series stories in Marvel's anthology comics. It is doubtful Jack ever knew who inked the first *Fantastic Four* in 1961, as he paid very little attention to that kind of thing.

As for who did: Some historian-types argue for Christopher Rule, whose career dated back to work on newspaper strips of the twenties. He had mostly drawn for comics like *Patsy Walker* but occasionally inked some of Jack's stories for the monster anthology books. I believe it could be Rule. The inking in *F.F.* #1 does show some similarities to the linework in stories he signed for the teen comics and to Kirby "monster" stories that are believed to have been inked by him. But the match does not seem to me exact and there's also this: One would assume that if he even set foot in Stan Lee's offices around '61, we'd also see his handiwork in the teen comics of that period, as such stories were his specialty. But though not every one of the teen comics has been checked, we so far have no verified sightings of his work — there or in any comics anywhere — after around 1959. He passed away in 1983.

A more likely candidate in my opinion is George Klein, who worked intermittently for Marvel, dating back to at least 1942. In 1961, Klein was freelancing for several houses, doing work that (to me) looks more like the inking of *Fantastic Four* #1 than known work by Rule. Klein began getting steady assignments from DC, primarily inking for the *Superman* titles, when Stan Kaye died in late '61 — which is about the same time the mystery inker disappeared completely from Marvel's line. At the time, DC paid a lot better than Marvel, and rumors still abounded that Marvel was on the verge of going outta business. Since inking *Superman* was probably the safest job in all of comics, it's easy to imagine any inker forsaking Marvel and making that jump. Klein

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returned to Marvel in 1968 and had just taken over inking Kirby on *Thor* at the time of his death the following year. That inking has only a few similarities to *F.F.* #1, but then Klein's last ink work for DC is quite unlike what he did for them in '61.

Now, let's make matters more complicated: Rule and Klein were close friends who often worked on each others' assignments...so it's not impossible that they both inked the material in question. It's also not impossible that when we compare the inking in *F.F.* #1 to "known" Rule work, we're actually comparing it to work that was actually inked by Klein in the first place. So we may never know for sure.

[NOTE: The above was written a few years ago. I have since seen some art examples that convince me — "beyond a reasonable doubt," as they say in courtrooms — that the first two issues of *Fantastic Four* were inked by George Klein and probably only by George Klein. So that's my answer now.]

Why was the Fourth World called the Fourth World?

I can give you about eleven answers to this and if you'd asked Jack eight times, you'd have gotten eight more. Len Wein, who worked at DC at the time, says that it was a cover blurb intended to only appear on the covers of the fourth issues. It referred to the fact that every issue of a Kirby comic was like a world unto itself; ergo, each #4 was a "Fourth World." Folks then adopted it to refer to the whole epic that flowed betwixt Jack's books. Meanwhile, Steve Sherman — who worked with me as Jack's assistant at the time — recalls Jack coming up with it as a variation on the term, "The Third World," as used in a socio-economic context. It was Jack's way of transcending that term, as Jack transcended everything.

That may be true but I don't recall that. Apparently, Jack also told a few folks that he considered the material his fourth universe in comics. The Marvel books would have been "Kirby's Third World" and I've never quite gotten clear what the first two were. There are other answers, even less credible. Personally, I buy none of them. I don't think there was any logic behind it, at least when Jack first used it. I think it was just a term that popped into his head and he liked the sound of it. Later on, he came up with several different retro-active explanations.

Didn't Jack have another name for the whole series?

Yeah. The original idea was that the three books would be called *Orion*, *The Forever People* and *Mister Miracle*, and then the overview title would be "The New Gods." Somehow, before its release, the *Orion* book had its title beefed-up and was being called *Orion of the New Gods*. At that point, the series was going to debut in DC's tryout comic, *Showcase*. Jack objected to this. He felt that readers would not commit to an "epic" that was being offered to them on a trial basis...so DC cancelled *Showcase* and a book called *New Gods* appeared on the schedule in its place. I'm not sure anyone consciously decided to change the title. I think it was a case of folks referring to the book by a shorthand name which caught on around the office. Anyway, Jack thought the name change was fine.

How were these comics originally released? What order did Jack do them in?

Taking the last question first: You can figure this out very easily, as almost every story had a little code number on it for its initial publication and occasionally for a reprint. The number starts with "X" and they're sequential, denoting the order in which the work went onto DC's pay records. With only a few very minor exceptions, this is the same order in which Jack did them. John Morrow's fine magazine, *The Jack Kirby Collector*, has tracked down most of the "X" numbers and

run lists of them. I believe the first things Jack did for DC were the first issues of *Forever People*, *New Gods* and *Mister Miracle*, in that order. The books were subsequently released bi-monthly in that same order, commencing with *Forever People* #1 the first week of December, 1970. This was followed three weeks later by *New Gods* #1, then three weeks later by *Mister Miracle* #1 and then, with the occasional skip week, the cycle began again.

What did you (M.E.) do on the Fourth World comics?

Darn near nothing. Rumors that Steve Sherman and/or I or anyone else was ghostwriting Jack's dialogue are absolutely untrue. We acted as sounding boards, occasionally plotted a sequence here and there — largely busy work that Jack didn't need and mainly for *Jimmy Olsen* — and I wrote the page in *Mister Miracle* #6 on which Big Barda took a bath. Oh — and Steve and I designed the color scheme for Mister Miracle's costume. But apart from that and the letter pages, we were pretty much unnecessary...a condition I have done my darnedest to maintain to this day. And this is as good a place as any to suggest to folks that they not seek out the Kirby-less *New Gods* stories I did for DC in the eighties. A lot of things went wrong and I was too dumb to fix or work around them.

Didn't Jack originally plan to turn the Fourth World comics over to others?

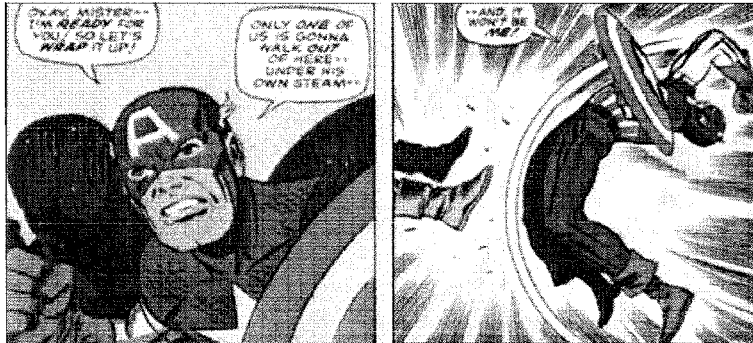
Yes. When Jack went to DC, one of the things that most interested him was the prospect of doing new forms of comics — graphic novels, upscale magazines, etc. He had little interest in and did not see much of a future for the conventional 32-page comic. Ergo, he hoped to launch the Fourth World books and pass them on to others who would do them under his editorial supervision, while he worked on new forms. Alas for Jack, DC decided against most of his proposals in that area; they never got farther than *In The Days of the Mob* and *Spirit World*, which were scaled-back versions of more elaborate Kirby ideas...and even those were abandoned before they had any real sales data. So Jack wound up sticking with the Fourth World comics and deciding to build them into a personal magnum opus.

Had Jack's original plan come to pass, the Fourth World books would probably have been written by Steve Sherman and myself, working from his plots. As for the art, he had in mind to lasso Wally Wood to draw *Orion*, Steve Ditko to draw *Mister Miracle* and Don Heck (or maybe John Romita) for *Forever People*. However, those were only names that were mentioned and there's no reason to believe those artists would have been the final choices. Jack was also hoping to spawn a number of spin-off comics from the Fourth World. Almost any named character had, to him, the potential to be a separate comic. At one point, for a week or so, it looked like they might be adding *Big Barda and Her Female Furies* and *Lonar*, but neither came to pass.

Did Jack really have a bad memory?

By common definition, yes...but I think it was more a matter of his mind wandering in nineteen directions at once. Every so often, he would surprise me with some (apparently) crystal-clear recollection of thirty years before. And often, things he said that seemed like memory lapses would turn out to be more a matter of skipping over details in the telling. Jack would sometimes tell me a story that didn't seem to check out...but, upon reflection or research, I would understand that his story was accurate; he'd merely raced past a few key portions. He also tended to make odd associations in his mind, compressing two events into one — a habit that was, I believe, not unrelated to his instinctual sense of story construction. Stan Lee's memory is also, by his own admission, poor. It's therefore difficult to determine which of them was responsible for some of the more absent-minded errors that cropped up in their collaborations...like the famous

Captain America "blooper"...



What happened to Jack's lawsuit against Marvel?

It is a great urban myth of the business that Jack Kirby sued the Marvel Comics Group. There were a couple of points where he was seriously considering it and talking to attorneys, and there were also other times when he threatened it — to Marvel or in the fan press. Ultimately though, he and Roz decided that neither his health nor bank account could withstand what could have been a very long, expensive and emotional war. Still, one sometimes hears — even from folks who worked at Marvel and should know better — that Kirby sued and lost, sued and won or sued and settled. None of these happened. I think the problem was that Marvel's lawyers always overreacted. They were constantly trying to strong-arm Kirby into signing this or that, or even threatening to sue him on some trumped-up claim. Whenever he threatened them back, they got hysterical and ran around yelling, "Jack Kirby's suing us," even though, at least on those occasions, Jack wasn't considering the possibility.

Do you think *New Gods* would have been more successful if Jack had stayed at Marvel and done it there?

That's like asking if John Lennon's first solo album would have been better if he'd stayed with the Beatles and they'd all worked on it with him. It would have been a completely different work, and it might not have happened at all. First of all, Jack would not have given his *New Gods* concept or any of the zillion characters it entailed to Marvel unless he received a drastically-different "deal" than what they were then, in 1970, willing to make with him. What he wanted was not all that different from what is standard in today's industry, even for beginners but, at the time, Marvel's execs reacted like he was demanding their first-born. Had they by some fluke of sanity made a deal and Jack decided to do *New Gods* there, then the next question would have been whether he'd have written it on his own or if Stan or someone would have handled the scripting. If the latter, I'm quite sure it would have been a completely different series. It would not have been the same comics with different dialogue. For that matter, if anyone else at DC had been involved in the writing, that would also have yielded entirely different comics.



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