

Tales That Astonished

NEW GODS



KIRBY IS COMING! boomed the adverts. Could it be the legendary artist who had created (or co-created) many of the greatest characters in comic history was leaving Marvel to work for the Distinguished Competition? Jack Kirby of Silver Surfer, Iron Man, Thor, the Fantastic Four, Doctor Doom, Captain America and oh so many more, had quit mighty Marvel to return to former employers DC. Why? Well, most of that can be set firmly at the door of the gleaming silver skimmed alien - the Silver Surfer. At the height of his powers, Kirby had sent Thor into new galaxies, whilst brought the Fantastic Four into new levels of story telling with the introduction of the Watcher, Galactus, the Inhumans, the Negative Zone and, of course, Chrome Dome.

In Jack's eyes, the Silver Surfer was completely alien in every way. A very different life force to humans – almost *messianic*. He was Kirby's most precious creation – and it broke his heart when Stan Lee decided to use John Buscema on the new solo comic book. Lee had very different ideas to Jack. The Surfer became very human – there was a home life, a love interest and a desire for combat. So Jack left.

To persuade Jack to work for them, DC offered him total control. Art, plots, script – everything! And what ground breaking title did Jack ask to work on? Not the JLA, Superman or Batman, but Jimmy Olsen!?!? Ever the caring individual, Jack would only accept a title that had no regular artist.



So **KIRBY IS HERE!** And pretty soon came the hint of things to come. Rumours of an anti-life equation and battles on other, higher planets. Then, in the blink of a proverbial eye, the Fourth World was here with the New Gods at its forefront.

So who are the New Gods? Well, they live on New Genesis, where, under the rule of the High Father, all is peace and light. Children and learning are praised whilst fun and laughter are everyone's ambition. Apart from one. Orion! An angry god, who seeks battles and violence. Wielder of the Astro-Force! Actually, more a cross between Thor and the Silver Surfer with an anger none of Jack's previous heroes ever had.

In opposition to New Genesis was Apokolips – a dread place whose inhabitants suffered due to their own awful cruelty to each other. And at the head of this damned planet stood Darkseid! Probably Kirby's most famous DC creation, old Stone Face was determined to rule New Genesis and was going to use the Earth as a means to an end.



Orion meets the challenge on Earth and is determined to battle Apokolips foes, in particular Kalibak the Cruel, with the aid of some freed Apokolips captives. Unfortunately, they are a motley bunch of Earthlings, ranging from the young teen to the middle-aged family man.

In awesome battles, Kirby relates the story of incredible battles and the realization that Orion is Darkseid's son. Sounds a little familiar? New Gods, it's rumoured, was very much an inspiration to Star Wars.

And the other characters? Firstly, there was a race of bug people condemned to behave like the bugs on Earth – all except one. Mantis! Who sees more to life than the endless scavenging. Then there's the antithesis to the Surfer – the Black Racer! The harbinger of death on a pair of skis!



So if it was so great, why was the comic cancelled? The reason given was poor sales – although that's now in dispute. At the heart of it though was: these are Marvel characters and this was a DC Universe. Orion, a mighty fighter in the Marvel universe could not compare to the Big Blue Boy Scout who, at that time, could move moons! Who needs a scowling Orion when you have a scowling Batman? Perhaps, if the Fourth World was kept just as that, we could have seen the conclusion to this saga.

Jack Kirby's New Gods, Fourth World, Mister Miracle, Jimmy Olsen and Forever People are available as trade paperbacks.