

PENGUIN
CLASSICS



MARVEL
COLLECTION



DISCUSSION GUIDE



COVERS
THE AVENGERS,
FANTASTIC FOUR,
AND X-MEN!



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THE PENGUIN CLASSICS MARVEL COLLECTION

presents the origin stories, seminal tales, and characters of the Marvel Universe to explore Marvel's transformative and timeless influence on an entire genre of fantasy.

For decades, Marvel has published groundbreaking visual narratives that sustain attention on multiple levels: as explorations of the relationship between power and responsibility; as metaphors for the experience of difference and otherness; as meditations on the pain of adolescence and the fluid nature of identity; as examinations of the meaning, and limits, of patriotism; as ironic juxtapositions of the cosmic and the quotidian; as resources for the understanding of political and social history; and as high-water marks in the artistic tradition of American cartooning. For the first time, these classic stories of some of the most iconic super heroes in the history of American comics are Penguin Classics.



THE AVENGERS

THESE EDITIONS available in both deluxe hardcover and iconic black spine paperback formats, collect *The Avengers* #1-4, 9, 16, 26, 28, 44, 57, 58, 71, 74, and 83.

Starting in 1961, Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and their collaborators transformed the super hero genre with a series of new creations, including *The Incredible Hulk*, *The Mighty Thor*, and *The Invincible Iron Man*. In 1963, Lee and Kirby brought these characters together for the first time in a new magazine called *The Avengers*—adding a revived Captain America shortly after. Over time, the Avengers’ roster would frequently change, mirroring transformations in the Marvel Universe and the society it reflected. This unique collection gathers key issues from the first few years of the series.

FOREWORD BY LEIGH BARDUGO



A foreword by Leigh Bardugo, a scholarly introduction by José Alaniz, and a series introduction by Ben Saunders offer further insights into the enduring significance of *The Avengers* and classic Marvel comics.



THE AVENGERS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY JOSÉ ALANIZ



1. Why do you think writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby decided to make the Hulk a founding member of the Avengers only to have him angrily and violently leave the team soon after? How does the Hulk contribute to the overall group dynamics, and how do you feel about his departure?
2. Though originally based upon a flesh-and-blood 1940s character of the same name, the 1960s Vision is an android and a key member of the Avengers. How does Vision anticipate some of today's anxieties over artificial intelligence and machines taking over from humans?
3. What does the frequently shifting makeup of the Avengers team roster tell us about super hero serial publications? How does it reflect the post-World War II US?
4. Women have always represented a minority in *The Avengers*, a title that in the 1960s was almost exclusively written and illustrated by men. You may have noticed, too, that Janet Van Dyne/the Wasp often utters outdated and sexist “boy-happy” phrases. Do you see any of this changing in the issues published in the 1960s? How does this context inform the final story in the collection featuring the all-female Liberators?

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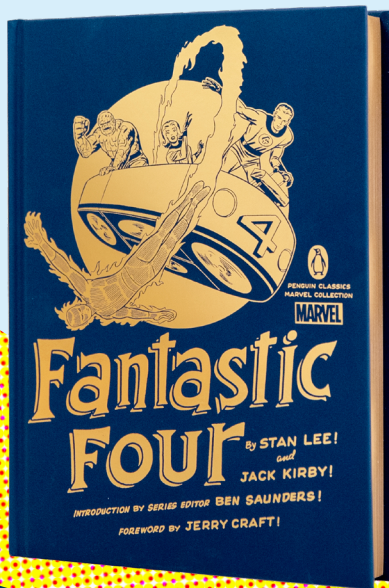


THE AVENGERS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY JOSÉ ALANIZ (CONTINUED)



5. Marvel did not introduce a Black super hero until 1966, with T'Challa/the Black Panther. How do you think *The Avengers* handles the tumultuous race politics of the 1960s, especially in the issues featuring the Black Panther?
7. Jack Kirby, Don Heck, and John Buscema are very distinct artists. What key stylistic differences do you see? Does a given artist's style and storytelling choices affect your reading experience? If so, how?
8. How would you describe the coloring in these issues, which stretch from 1962 to 1970? Why do you think comic book coloring—arduous work historically done by women for low pay—tends to get taken for granted by readers and critics? (Note: the color in modern reprints, including the ones in this edition, has been digitally remastered.)



FANTASTIC FOUR

THESE EDITIONS, available in both deluxe hardcover and iconic black spine paperback formats, collect *Fantastic Four* #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 48, 49, 50, 51, and *Fantastic Four Annual* #6.

Throughout the 1960s, *The Fantastic Four* doubled as both the flagship title and the creative laboratory of the Marvel Universe. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby introduced dozens of new characters and concepts in its pages, while expanding the emotional bandwidth and visual vocabulary of the super hero genre with every issue. This collection gathers some key tales from Lee and Kirby's lengthy tenure—from their first experiments in generic hybridity through to the remarkable fusion of the cosmic and the quotidian that is "The Galactus Trilogy."

FOREWORD BY JERRY CRAFT

A foreword by Jerry Craft, and a scholarly introduction and a general series introduction by Ben Saunders offer further insights into the enduring significance of the *Fantastic Four* and classic Marvel comics.



FANTASTIC FOUR

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY BEN SAUNDERS



1. The Fantastic Four is not just a super team united by their possession of unusual powers or by their mission. They are also a kind of family—a combination of family-of-origin and family-of-choice. How does this idea of the super family make them different from other super hero teams such as the Avengers or DC’s Justice League of America? What kinds of storytelling possibilities are opened up by the idea of a super family?
2. In my introduction to the volume, I describe the Thing as “perhaps the most original American comic book super hero to have appeared since the genre first blossomed in the late 1930s.” What is the basis for this claim? In what ways was the Thing a groundbreaking character at the time?
3. The Fantastic Four comics are notable for combining humor with tragedy to produce a more complicated emotional tone. Can you find some examples where the comics in this collection seem to mix dramatic modes or shift abruptly between generic and emotional registers?

(CONTINUED NEXT PAGE)



FANTASTIC FOUR

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY BEN SAUNDERS (CONTINUED)



4. The series is also notable for what critics call self-reflexive moments—that is, moments that draw attention to the fact that we are reading a comic book created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. Such moments might include scenes where characters read or refer to other comic books, actual appearances by Lee and Kirby themselves, and a technique called “breaking the fourth wall,” where characters in the story directly address readers. How many examples of self-reflexive or “meta” moments can you find in these comics, and how do they work?
5. In what ways is Galactus different from a typical super villain?
6. Every comic in this collection was penciled by Jack Kirby—but his style evolves quite dramatically over the course of the volume. How would you describe the transformation in his approach to line work, figure work, anatomy, and perspective from the first story to the last?





X-MEN

THESE EDITIONS, available in both deluxe hardcover and iconic black spine paperback formats, collect *X-Men #1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 38, 41, 42, 44, 45, and 46.*

The seeds of a pop-cultural phenomenon were sown with the launch of the first *X-Men* comic in 1963, at the height of “the Marvel Revolution,” under the creative team of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. The title was bookended by some of the best super hero comics of that era; the first issue established a creative formula that continues to inspire contemporary creators, while the final issues remain acclaimed for the groundbreaking artwork of Neal Adams. This collection gathers several key tales from the original run of the classic *X-Men* series.

FOREWORD BY RAINBOW ROWELL

A foreword by Rainbow Rowell, and a scholarly introduction and a general series introduction by Ben Saunders offer further insights into the enduring significance of the *X-Men* and classic Marvel comics.



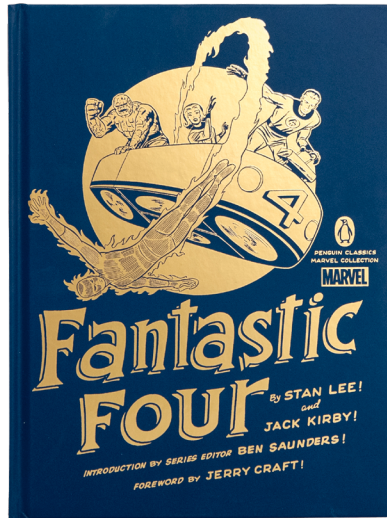
X-MEN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY BEN SAUNDERS



1. Mutation sometimes functions as a metaphor for “being different” in the X-Men series, allowing writers and artists to use the concept to explore the experience of isolation, loneliness, and even social prejudice. Where do you see this “mutant metaphor” at work in the various comics in this collection?
2. The enemies of the X-Men are frequently also mutants. What are the implications of this intramutant conflict? How do the mutant foes of the X-Men differ ideologically from the X-Men themselves? How do they differ from one another (for example, is the Blob motivated by the same kinds of reasons as Magneto)?
3. The story of “Unus the Untouchable” in *X-Men #8* bears some resemblance to the famous myth of King Midas. Look up the myth of Midas and compare the two tales—in what ways are the stories similar?
4. In the first Sentinels storyline (*X-Men #14-16*), how would you describe the role played by the media (newspapers, television) in advancing the plot?
5. The final issues in this collection are drawn by Neal Adams—a widely admired artist among comic fans. How would you describe his artistic style? What makes his work distinctive on the page?





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