

Beyond Time and Freedom: Darkseid, the Anti-Life Equation and 4th Dimensional Perspective.

Comics books play with the dimension of time in a way that other mediums are not fully able to. This is primarily due to how the audience enjoys the medium, the nature of sequential art and the printed medium of comics as opposed to film or animation reels. However, rarely are comics written in a fashion that acknowledges this fact. When it is used well, it can create a very effective and unnerving fourth wall break, such as in Grant Morrison's *Multiversity* [Morrison et al.2016]. Such as in a scene with Captain Atom, where he states while reading a comic "The story's linear, but I can flip through the pages in any order, any direction. Forward in time to the conclusion. Back to the opening scene. The characters remain unaware of my scrutiny, but their thoughts are transparent, weightless in little clouds. This is how a 2-Dimensional Continuum looks to you. Imagine how your 3-D world appears to me" [Morrison et al.2016:140].

The idea of exploring the 4th dimension is the traversing of time. The second dimension consists entirely of just the x and y axis, you have two dimensions of movement. With 3-dimensional space, you now have the z axis. Three directions of movement that allows for a three-dimensional space. Pascal Lefevre discusses the idea of two- and three-dimensional space within comics, in his 2009 paper, *The Construction of Space in Comics* [Lefevre.2009]. That comics can only suggest 3-dimensional space, "Objects that appear on a flat surface can never show the complete reality of such three-dimensional objects. The flat and unmoving image can only use monocular cues to suggest depth; interposition or overlapping, convergence, relative size, density gradient" [Lefevre.2009:159]. Even comics made using 3D graphics such as *Batman: Digital Justice* [Moreno.1990], are still an approximation of three-dimensional space. A prime example to see this in action, is within Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* [Miller.1986] during an iconic scene where Batman and Superman stare each other down before the climactic fight [Miller.1986:190]. The sense of space largely comes from the pairs relative positioning to one another, the size of both characters, and the use of lighting. Batman is firmly positioned on the ground underneath a streetlamp. Batman appears fully lit with defined detail within his design, while Superman appears above, drawn exclusively as a silhouette, denoting that he is far enough away for the light produced to not affect him. The surroundings show a row of buildings on either side, with the vanishing point extending to the horizon. A sense of space is given. We are aware that the pair are in a somewhat narrow street, with minimal lighting. We have a sense of roughly how high Superman is based on the lack of light reaching him, but also the relative size of his body. He is close to Batman on the x axis, but relatively high on the y axis. Two-dimensional space is what constructs the physical space of a comic. Three-dimensional space is what is implied through the art, and 4th-dimensional space is the dimension the reader has full discrepancy with, though the characters are largely unaware. The Temporal Axis

When looking at a comic from a 4th dimensional framework, you are taking into consideration the very idea that Captain Atom brings up during *Multiversity*. That time becomes a plain that can be as easily traversed as a direction. To move forward in time, you turn the page right. To travel back, you turn the page to the left. However, this idea of being able to move through time, much like you would a physical location, could also be applied to moving between different timelines. Exploring the multiverse much the same way as we close one comic book, one stories timeline, only to pick up another and explore that timeline. Within DC Comics continuity, the malevolent character of Darkseid is able to do this in a similar manner to the reader. Creating one of the DC Universe's deadliest threats.

The Map of the Multiverse was first introduced during *Multiversity* as an attempt to visualise the DC Metaverse. The map later found itself in stories such as *Dark Nights Metal* [Snyder & Capullo.2018] as a way of explaining the Dark Multiverse. When examining the Map of the Multiverse, we can see the Orrery of Worlds holding the alternative Earths. While there are 52 distinct world in the Orrery, a number of which the reader will recognise from the subtle hints, such as a hammer and sickle on Earth 30, referencing the *Red Son* [Millar & Johnson.2003] story. These 52 worlds could be considered simply what is distinctively known to exist, given the laws of probability state that for each and every action and choice, another universe is created in which you take an alternate action. An early version of the Orrery here is seen in *Final Crisis* [Morrison & Jones.2009] as a physical object, which does give the reader an idea of how this model works from the perspective of a being on a higher level of existence. The map shows a number of other elements, such as the Speed Force wall encasing the Orrery, as well as The Bleed that floats between worlds. But the most important detail to remember going forward is the Gods Sphere. The layer above The Orrery.

Within the Gods Sphere, elements such as Heaven and Hell, as well as the realms of Dreams and Nightmare. The Gods Sphere also finds itself home to both Apokolips and New Genesis. The realms of the New Gods. The first hints that the New Gods were somewhat above the DC Universes main cast comes from *Crisis on Infinite Earths* [Wolfman & Perez.1986], an event from 1986 meant to clean up the universe's lore for new readers. While the heroes are in the final stages of stopping the anti-matter wave, and allowing timelines to converge, we have a second story being unveiled in the bottom panels of that chapter. This second story, appearing in the tenth issue, *Death at the Dawn of Time* [Wolfman & Perez.1986], is known as the Monitor Tapes and discusses how other sections of the DC Universe are coping with this monumental destruction and recreation. When the Forever People, New Gods and specifically Darkseid is mentioned, the passage reads "On the planet Adon, five youths known as *The Forever People* used their powers to protect their adopted world from destruction. Across the Dimensions, their pursuer, Darkseid the destroyer, cloaked only Apokolips from harm" [Wolfman & Perez. 1986:12]. During the *History of the DC Universe* [Wolfman & Perez.1986], also written by Wolfman and Perez, New Genesis was also spared the destruction caused by *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.

We can see from this that the New Gods hold a place higher than the rest of the DC Universe, or at least the characters we, the reader, follows within the DC Universe. Below us, the readers and creators, but far above the likes of Superman and Batman in terms of the universal pantheon. For a figure such as Darkseid, his perception of the multiple stories unfolding in the DC Multiverse resembles that of the readers perception. The ability to look at each world simultaneously, like looking upon books on a shelf. The *Dark Nights Metal* tie-in, *Batman: Lost #1* [Snyder, Tynion & Mahnke.2018] illustrates this idea well, by displaying multiple Batman stories, regardless of continuity, inside a large library [Snyder, Tynion & Mahnke.2018:02]. This is a major factor in why Darkseid can appear in so many stories and still have an overarching knowledge of the fundamental DC Universe. If we look at an Elseworld story such as *Superman: The Dark Side* [Moore & Dwyer.1998], Darkseid and his forces clearly have knowledge of the overarching DC Mythology. Given this is a timeline where Superman's rocket is intercepted by an "unknown force" causing it to land on Apokolips rather than Earth. Superman is kept by Darkseid, despite not showing himself to be all that special, because Darkseid and Metrona are aware of what this child has become on other timelines. That the existence of Kal-El/Clark Kent continues to be significant regardless of where you are in the multiverse. Something Dr Manhattan points out in *Doomsday Clock* [Johns & Frank.2019].

It is important to distinguish exactly how the New Gods, specifically Darkseid, interact with these worlds in the multiverse from up in the Gods Sphere. During John Byrne's *New Gods* [Byrne.1995-

1997] run, the idea of the New Gods using 'Avatars' is heavily discussed. This idea of the Avatars states that each of the Darkseids we see in each multiverse, or rather each of the New Gods given they all possess the same ability, are pieces of the original. An avatar created in their image. Of course this doesn't mean that those appearing in a story are only ever avatars, as the original can travel via Boom Tube just as well as an avatar can. An example of this would be Scott Free, Mister Miracle, who travelled to Earth himself to escape Apokalypse. There was little use sending an avatar, as it was Scott Free himself who wanted to escape.

At the beginning of *Final Crisis*, Darkseid falls from the God Sphere down through the dimensional barriers. In *DC Universe #0* [Morrison, Johns & Perez.2008], Darkseid's descent is described by the Barry Allen Flash as "The light. The shadow. I'm the only one who can see the shadow. This gigantic shadow cast across the Multiverse. Falling over everything" [Morrison, Johns & Perez.2008:20]. This gives true weight to Darkseid's purest form. The version that resides in the Gods Sphere. It's very clear that this version of Darkseid is not just an avatar sent from above. This is the true Darkseid. It also gives a sense of scale to what the New Gods true forms are in comparison to the rest of the multiverse in terms of size.

With the New Gods perspective and scale compared to the multiverse now discussed, it's perhaps best to now think about Darkseid's ultimate goal. The Anti-Life Equation. This equation, when completed allows Darkseid to take those who hear it under his control, due to the equation causing feelings that life, hope and freedom are pointless. The Anti-Life Equation is revealed during *Final Crisis* as:

'Loneliness + Alienation + Fear + Despair + Self-worth / Mockery / Condemnation /
Misunderstanding x Guilt x Shame x Failure x Judgement. N=Y where Y= Hope and N=Folly, Love =
Lies, Life = Death, Self = Dark Side.'

We do see this equation in action a few times, though confined to specific stories, such as *Final Crisis* and the recent *DCeased* [Taylor & Hairsine.2019] elseworld-esc story where the equation is corrupted and leads to a zombie like outbreak for those who hear it. The Anti-Life Equation essentially strips those affected by it of free will and puts them at the mercy and command of Darkseid. Using it, Darkseid brought almost the entire world to it's knees in *Final Crisis*, even making Wonder Woman and others part of his new Female Furies.

It is heavily possible that due to the fourth dimensional world view of the New Gods, and especially Darkseid. Being on a much higher world plain, Darkseid already holds some level of authority over the citizens of each universe in the multiverse. If Darkseid was to use the Anti-Life Equation, expanding its scope from simply one universe or planet, onto a temporal axis plain, effecting the entire multiverse, Darkseid would essentially obtain power similar to the comics creators.

Possessing the ability to move across world lines through the multiverse and bend characters to his will, much in the same way that the creators, and to some degree the reader, can. To move between storylines as simply as taking a new book off of the shelf. Able to bend characters to his will and create his desired storyline. Granted, there are several problems with this idea. Firstly, as one of DC's greatest villains, it's highly unlikely that his plans would actually succeed, given a large number of stories featuring Darkseid, feature his plans being foiled by Superman, Batman, Superboy and many others. Noticeable standouts are the before mentioned *Final Crisis*, *Comic Odyssey* [Starlin & Mignola.1989] and *Legion of Superheroes: The Great Darkness Saga* [Levitz & Giffen.1989]. But it still represents the vast potential of Darkseid and the New Gods in general.

Of course this perception of seeing the multiverse from a higher plain is also shared by others inhabiting the Gods Sphere. Such as Neil Gaiman's *Death* [Gaiman & Bachalo.1993] and *Sandman* [Gaiman & Kieth.1989-1996] as well as the rest of the Endless. Beyond that, you have somewhat more powerful beings such as the Monitors, and the somewhat recently integrated Dr Manhattan. While the Endless have dominion over elements such as death, dreams, delirium, destiny, desire, destruction and despair. The Monitor's are observers and protectors for each of the universes inside the Multiverse, and Doctor Manhattan can see all of his timeline at once. It's the overwhelming potential of Darkseid and the Anti-Life Equation that draws particular focus.

As I've stated, Darkseid's potential is almost on the same level as that of comic creators, or perhaps even the reader, as we are also capable of deciding the universe we visit through selecting which stories we choose to experience. With creators deciding what the characters will experience, confront and defeat. However, given that Darkseid is also a character within the comics, he is also subjected to the same laws as every other character. Jack Kirby, a creator in our real world created both Darkseid, the New Gods and the Anti-Life Equation. Grant Morrison wrote *Final Crisis* where Darkseid succeeded in using the Anti-Life Equation on Earth. It's the notion of allowing characters within comics to experience the same level of control in regard to the temporal axis, that truly shows the reader the level of control we have within comics.

We as readers are able to experience the comic book medium in a way unlike any other medium. Our ability to control the temporal axis and visit different realities within fictions is incredibly unique. In order to truly appreciate it, it perhaps needs to be put in the perspective of the characters we read.

In short. Darkseid is. And we are Darkseid.

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