

The Agents of Doom

An Empirical Approach to Transmedia Actors

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In his book *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*, Matthew Freeman (2016), divides the components of a transmedia character into three separate categories: character-building, world-building, and authorship. The first category concerns aspects of the character themselves, such as their appearance, personal history, and way of speaking, while the second is to do with the storyworld they inhabit, including other characters, locations, and history. The third category, authorship, is to do with the actors who “dictate characters and entire fictional story worlds, building both of these aspects across multiple media” (Freeman 2016, 33).

Freeman suggests that authorship can be further broken down into two author-functions: that of a market author-function and a textual author-function. The market author-function relates to Foucault’s (1969) indicative function, focusing on the way that the presence of an author’s name guides readers to what is inside and to what other texts exist, while the textual author-function relates to those who are credited with its actual production.

To take an example from the world of comics, the textual authors for *Uncanny X-Men* #146 (Claremont et al. 1981) are those who appear in the issue’s credits – Chris Claremont (“writer”), Dave Cockrum and Joe Rubinstein (“artists”), Tom Orzechowski (“letterer”), Glynis Wein (“colourist”), Louise Jones (“editor”) and Jim Shooter (“editor-in-chief”). The market authors are first and foremost Marvel comics, whose corporate ownership is proclaimed on the cover, but also Stan Lee, who “presents” the story, as he did most Marvel comics during the 1970s and 1980s. Here Lee’s name is used to reassure potential purchasers that what they will find inside is a genuine, canonical Marvel comic, similar to the way that the names of Edgar Rice Burroughs or Ian Fleming are used in conjunction with *Tarzan* and *James Bond* texts, even when the actual stories told are nothing to do with the original authors (Freeman 2015).

As Freeman says,

[i]f both character-building and world-building [...] are important to transmedia storytelling, then authorship is crucial for achieving both character-building and world-building. (2016, 38)

In other words, transmedia characters depend on authorial actors to bring them into existence, and this chapter will look at the actors responsible for the existence of one specific character: Doctor Doom.

Doctor Doom and the Marvel Age

Doctor Doom is one of Marvel's most popular supervillains, making his first appearance on the cover of *Fantastic Four* #5 (Lee and Kirby 1962) where he threatened to "destroy the Fantastic Four forever!" According to Stan Lee, the character's popularity was clear from the start:

Within a matter of days the mail came flying in. And it all carried the same message. Bring back Dr. Doom! [...] After the first thousand or so letters we suspected we had a hit! (Lee 1976, 13)

As a result, Doom soon began to appear in other series. Just over a year after *Fantastic Four* #5, he guest-starred in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #5 (Lee et al. 1963), and over the course of the next decade also appeared in *Daredevil*, *The Avengers*, *Strange Tales*, *The Silver Surfer*, *Sub-Mariner*, *Thor*, *Captain America*, *Iron Man*, *The Incredible Hulk*, and *Not Brand Echh*, as well as a brief run as the second feature lead in *Astonishing Tales*.

Doom's wanderings were not, however, restricted to comics. Marvel began to tell their stories on multiple media platforms early on in their history, with the *The Marvel Superheroes* cartoon (1966) being the first, and Doom appeared in this as guest villain in the "Namor the Submariner" segment (Barnholden 2021). The *Fantastic Four* themselves did not appear in other media until a year later, in the *Fantastic Four* cartoon series (1967), which featured Doom in several episodes. He has continued to be featured across Marvel's transmedia excursions over the next half century, appearing in all four *Fantastic Four* movies (including the unreleased Roger Corman movie) as well as in the *Amazing Spider-Man* newspaper strip, in *The Superhero Squad Show* cartoon, in the *Lego Marvel Super Heroes* game and in many, many others, with a long-awaited arrival in the Marvel Cinematic Universe expected soon (Goodwillie 2021).

The fact that Doom has made most of his appearances as a guest rather than as the lead of a series means that he has developed independently of a specific creator or creative team, in much the same way that modern transmedia characters are developed by large teams of creators. This is true of several characters within the early Marvel Universe but, as Douglas Wolk has said, “Doom was absolutely the most interesting” (Wolk and Reed 2021, n.pag.).

Characters with their own series tend to have creative teams who generate their stories for months, sometimes years at a time, making it generally straightforward to assess who the actors responsible for them are. However, this is much more difficult for a wandering character like Doom, whose responsible textual authors change rapidly as they move from series to series, and so it is easier to make incorrect assumptions about their actors.

This tendency towards errors will be demonstrated later via the results of an online survey of comics academics and fans, who were asked who they thought were the actors responsible for Doctor Doom (Hibbett 2020). This was a self-administered online survey, which was advertised on comics mailing lists, online groups, and via twitter during April 2020, with 225 respondents eventually taking part. Alongside questions on authorship, respondents were also asked about their own knowledge and experience of Doctor Doom in different media and time periods. On average, each was aware of Doom appearing in 3.89 (median answer 4) different media types, with almost all (98%) being aware of him in comics, followed by movies (82.2%), cartoons (72.8%), and video games (48.0%). For comics, respondents were asked how familiar they were with texts in individual decades from the 1960s up to the 2010s, on a scale of 1 (“not familiar at all”) to 5 (“very familiar”). On average each had some familiarity (score 3–5) with 3.72 out of the 6 decades, with the decade 1970–1979 being known by the most respondents (67%) and 1960–1969 by the least (58%). Overall, the survey was thus representative of a wide range of experiences of the character over time and media, with a slight bias towards comics – not surprising, given that the vast majority of the character’s appearances have been in that medium. However, as will be seen, some unforeseen biases did emerge within the sample as a result of the way that respondents were recruited.

All of the data used in this chapter was taken from a wider project examining the character of Doctor Doom during “The Marvel Age.” This is a term regularly used in comics fandom, biographies, popular texts, journal articles, and academic volumes, as well as in Marvel’s

own publicity, but it is very rarely formally defined. The only aspect of the Marvel Age that is almost uniformly agreed on is that it began with the publication of *The Fantastic Four* #1 (Lee and Kirby 1961), which saw the beginning of Marvel as the creative underdog, changing the nature of superhero storytelling (Raphael and Spurgeon 2004, xiii). Ideas of the end date vary widely, but it is generally seen to be over by the mid to late 1980s when Shooter's reluctance to risk innovation meant that DC came to be seen as the home of innovation in superhero comics, with Marvel now the conservative sales-leader unwilling to experiment (Pustz 2016; Tucker 2017).

However, it is possible to periodize the Marvel Age in empirical terms by applying a production of culture approach, viewing the Marvel universe as “the product of collective, often routinized, human activity” (Brienza 2010, 105). Specifically, using the position of editor-in-chief as a marker for a change from one period to another – in line with Peterson's (1982) “Occupational Careers” and “Organisational Structure” as constraints on the production of culture – makes it possible to use the credits and the cover-dates of the comics themselves to determine the start and end dates of the period. Using this method, “The Marvel Age” can be said to begin with comics dated November 1961, with *Fantastic Four* #1 under the editorship of Stan Lee, and end with those dated October 1987, the final month in which all Marvel comics listed Shooter as editor-in-chief (Hibbett 2019).

It is important to note that these cover-dates are those which appeared on the front of the comics, not the dates they were actually issued. The standard practice in magazine publishing is to use a cover-date that is some weeks or months ahead of the actual on-sale date, in theory to give the publication a longer shelf-life before the news vendor removes it from sale (Adams 1990). During the 1960s, US comics publishers tended to use a cover-date two to three months ahead of the on-sale date (Levitz 2010). The advantage of using cover-dates is that they are readily available, as the name suggests, on the cover of comics text, whereas the on-sale date might differ depending on the company, publication frequency, and region.

For other media types, this form of dating does not apply, but dates of first publication or broadcast are more reliable and discoverable, and so for the purposes of this research the first issue dates for comics dated between November 1961 and October 1987 were used (i.e., 8 August 1961 and 14 July 1987 [Voiles 2018]).

Generating a Corpus and Sample

Data about Doctor Doom's appearances in comics was primarily sourced from *The Grand Comics Database* (1994–), an online resource which was set up in 1994 as a successor to the paper-based Amateur Press Alliance for Indexing (Klein et al. 1994; Rhode and Bottorff 2001). *The Grand Comics Database* has been widely used by researchers in comics studies (Hatfield 2012; Beaty et al. 2018), as it allows users to download information as an SQL file, a relational database format containing all of their current data in a format which can be uploaded to the user's own computer server, so that new queries can be run, and reports created, without needing internet access or further interaction with the site owners (Date 1986). The information contained within *The Grand Comics Database* has been entered over many years by a network of volunteers who suggest changes or updates to the data, which is then assessed by moderators. This peer review of the data makes it, theoretically, more comprehensive, and reliable than other systems set up by single enthusiasts, although a lack of clear guidance on what should be included means that some problems arise.

For example, initial queries of *The Grand Comics Database* showed that Doom appeared in issues 65, 85, 90, and 91 of *The Defenders*, but online versions of these texts showed him to be completely absent. Eventually paper copies were tracked down, and these revealed that Doom was briefly mentioned in the *Bullpen Bulletins* editorial page, common in all Marvel comics published that month. Similarly, in July and August 1976, the character Red Skull apparently appeared in almost every single Marvel comic, due to his role fighting Captain America in an advert for Twinkies. In both cases the original data entry volunteer had decided to enter information about paratexts, which were not usually included, leading to confusion in the analysis.

Other issues encountered along the way included multiple errors, such as naming the wrong creators, and a great deal of missing data, particularly around inkers and letterers. Thus the data was checked against information from *Comic Book Database* (Comic Book DB 2006), described as cataloguing “every comic book, graphic novel, manga, illustrator, publisher, writer, and character ... ever” (Hoover 2013, 46), and *Comic Vine*, which calls itself “the largest comic database online” (Guerrero 2006, n.pag.).

An initial search of *The Grand Comics Database* brought up 243 comics which listed an appearance by Doctor Doom within the cover-dates. Cross-checking against the other databases at first revealed an additional 22 stories which apparently featured Doctor Doom, but a closer examination reduced this number to three, with the other 19 cases being errors where Doom did not appear at all, or incorrectly listed reprints. This was a lengthy process due to the different ways that each system recorded series titles. Examples of this included the use of the definite article (e.g., some listed *The Fantastic Four* as *The Fantastic Four*, while others referred to it as just *Fantastic Four*), changes to titles of ongoing series (e.g., *The X-Men* becoming *The Uncanny X-Men* and then *New X-Men*), and various other problems such as volume numbers and annuals. These issues are common to all comics databases and have caused difficulties for other quantitative data analyses of comics (Beaty et al. 2018), with the solution always being a manual check of the individual data items (Walsh et al. 2018).

Collection of data on non-comics appearances by Doctor Doom began with internet searches employing multiple combinations of variant versions of the character's name ("Doctor Doom," "Dr Doom," "Dr. Doom," and "Victor von Doom"), with words describing media types, such as "television," "radio," "film," and "game." Similar searches were also undertaken for the *Fantastic Four*, reasoning that any media that featured them was likely to also feature their arch enemy, and this identified a great many different texts from the obvious, such as the two *Fantastic Four* cartoon series, to obscure items like the *Fantastic Four Radio Show* (1978) starring a young Bill Murray as The Human Torch. The process of tracking down media appearances carried on throughout the research, with some items appearing while looking for others. For example, the Power Records album *The Fantastic Four: The Way It Began* (Thomas et al. 1974) was only discovered while looking for information about a similarly titled Hanna Barbera cartoon episode.

Once the corpus was fully checked and cleaned it contained a total of 266 texts, divided by media type as follows:

Media type	Texts
Comic	236
Cartoon	15

Audio/Mixed	6
Game	6
Newspaper	3
Total	266

Table 1: Corpus by media type.

Carrying out a full analysis of all of 266 texts was impossible for the research project, and so a sample of “representative” cases was selected (Corpas et al. 2010). “Representative” here refers to “the extent to which a sample includes the full range of variability in a population” (Biber 1993, 243), and can be tested by comparing “the occurrence and/or proportion of situational characteristics represented in the full population” (Gray et al. 2017, 2) to that in a sample, to assess whether the two match. In other words, if it can be shown that a sample has the same properties as the overall corpus then it can be said to be “representative” and therefore valid for analysis.

The properties chosen to assert representativeness here were series title and date. These were chosen because the information was readily available and independent from the analysis. Grouping texts by date was done by splitting “The Marvel Age” into three sub-periods based on the editor-in-chief position and the cover-date for comics, or the equivalent publication or broadcast date for other texts. The sub-periods used were November 1961 to August 1972, when Stan Lee was editor-in-chief, September 1972 to April 1978, when Marvel had four different editor-in-chiefs in quick succession, and May 1978 to October 1987 under Jim Shooter. The number of texts in each sub-period is shown in the table below:

Period	Texts
Nov 1961 - Aug 1972	78
Sep 1972 - Apr 1978	54
May 1978 - Oct 1987	134
Total	266

Table 2: Texts by sub-period.

Grouping texts by the series titles was more complicated, due to Doom’s wandering nature. During the timeframe analyzed he appeared in 72 different series, and for over half of them (42 series) he only appeared in a single issue or episode. It would be impossible to make a

representative sample with so many distinct titles, and so these were grouped together in several ways.

First, annuals and special editions were grouped according to their “home” series, so that, for example, *Giant-Size Avengers* and *The Avengers Annual* were placed into the same group as *The Avengers*, while *Giant-Size Super-Villain Team-Up* was grouped with *Super-Villain Team-Up*, and so on. Other texts were grouped thematically, so that the various role-playing game companions such as *Marvel Superheroes Players Book*, *Marvel Superheroes Role-Playing Game Judge Book*, and *Marvel Superheroes Secret Wars RPG* were grouped together as “RPG Magazines,” while *Marvel Treasury Special*, *Marvel Treasury Edition*, *Marvel Comics Super Special*, and so on were grouped as “Specials/Treasuries.”

Finally, any single texts remaining were put into the general groups “Other comics,” “Other cartoons,” and “Other non-comics.” This enabled the generation of the groupings below:

Series	Texts
<i>Fantastic Four</i>	60
Other comics	27
<i>Super-Villain Team-Up</i>	16
<i>Marvel Super-Heroes Secret Wars</i>	12
<i>Not Brand Echh</i>	10
<i>The Avengers</i>	10
<i>What If?</i>	9
<i>Astonishing Tales</i>	8
<i>Spider-Man/ Spider-Man And His Amazing Friends</i>	8
<i>Thor</i>	7
<i>The Amazing Spider-Man</i>	6
<i>Spidey Super Stories</i>	6
Specials/Treasuries	5
<i>Iron Man</i>	5
<i>Daredevil</i>	5
RPG Magazines	5
<i>The Uncanny X-Men</i>	5
<i>Sub-Mariner</i>	4

<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	4
<i>The Incredible Hulk</i>	4
<i>Dazzler</i>	4
<i>Marvel Team-Up</i>	4
<i>The Thing</i>	4
<i>Marvel Fanfare</i>	4
<i>Fantastic Four vs. X-Men</i>	4
<i>Fantastic Four</i> (radio show)	4
<i>Fantastic Four</i> (1967 series)	4
<i>Secret Wars II</i>	4
<i>Crazy Magazine</i>	3
<i>Marvel Two-In-One</i>	3
Other non-comics	3
<i>Strange Tales</i>	3
<i>The Amazing Spider-man</i> (newspaper strip)	3
Other cartoons	3
Total	266

Table 3: Series groupings.

With these groupings in place, Stratified Random Sampling was used, dividing the corpus into strata by series and period and then selecting so that the distribution was the same in both, ensuring that the sample was representative of the sample as a whole (Salkind 2010; The Pennsylvania State University 2018). By this method, a sample of 69 representative texts was generated, upon which all further analysis would be based.

Entering Data

With the sample selected, a database was set up and used to enter information about the market and textual authors, along with other information collected for the wider project. This was collected afresh for the project, rather than relying on the data within existing databases, which had been shown to be extremely unreliable.

For comics texts, the market authors were taken to be the companies or individuals named on the cover, or described as “presenting” the contents on the first page. In almost all cases, the

latter took the form of “Stan Lee presents,” with Lee’s name being used to sell the contents, rather than as a contribution credit. Similarly, for other types of text, the market authors were taken from the part of the credits sequence, usually the start, where the person or organization presenting the text to the audience was declared. For example, in the 1967 *Fantastic Four* cartoon series, the credit “The Fantastic Four appear in Marvel Comics Magazine” was given, with the name “Marvel Comics Magazine” [sic] being used to market the contents, not to give credit for creating them. Information about textual authors was taken from the part of the credits, which listed contributors and their roles. For example, the textual authors of radio shows were taken from the names read out at the end of the show, while for animated TV shows it came from a combination of the opening or closing credits, depending on which was used by the individual text.

For all texts the credits were entered exactly as they appeared, rather than attempting to slot them into categories such as “writer” or “penciler.” Following this process removed the need to judge what the terms meant. In the sample, there were 267 unique descriptions of roles recorded, including otherwise unclassifiable credits such as “unashamedly unleashed on an unsuspecting world by,” “mentalist,” and “engineer.” A possible downside of this approach is that creators who are not credited on a text are not included in the analysis. For example, it was common practice in the 1960s for artists who did regular work for DC to use a pseudonym when working for Marvel (Evanier 2002). This information is sporadically available on some of the databases, but not uniformly, and often relies on additional knowledge not available in the text. The data collection was concerned only with what appears within the text itself, not that which might be known, or assumed, by cognoscenti, in order for it to be empirical and replicable.

Market Authors

Across all media types there were 21 different market authors identified, but there were only eight distinct names that appeared more than once in the sample. This was partly due to the fact that the name “Marvel” was often used differently, as in “Marvel Productions Limited,” “Marvel Comics,” “Marvel Comics Magazine” or “Marvel Comics Group.” At the beginning of the Marvel Age, this might have been due to Martin Goodman’s propensity for giving his companies several different names, but this continues throughout the entire period of study

(Simon 2011; Howe 2012). Whatever the reason, all these different names were grouped together as “Marvel.”

In non-comics texts, the names of other companies appear in cases where Marvel had to go into partnership with other organizations because they did not have the ability or capacity to produce such texts themselves. Power Records, Krantz Films, Grantray Lawrence Animation, Hanna-Barbera Productions, TSR Inc and Register, and Tribune Syndicate were all included, but none appeared more than twice in the sample so they were grouped together as “other production companies.” Similarly, other individual creators named as market authors were grouped together, giving a final list of market authors as follows:

Market author	Texts	%
Marvel	69	100
CC/IND (distributors)	50	72
Stan Lee presents	37	54
Other production companies	8	12
Other creators	4	6

Table 4: Market authors.

The clearest outcome of this is that some form of the brand “Marvel” is always used to denote market authorship of Doctor Doom, regardless of period or media type. This is hardly a great surprise, as he is well-known as a Marvel character, but it does give empirical proof for something which might otherwise only be assumed. Other production companies which were listed all came from non-comics texts and were uniformly the partner that Marvel was working with at the time. No text in the sample was produced solely by another company, without Marvel’s involvement. “Stan Lee presents” appears on almost half of all texts, although only in comics. This market authorship first appeared after Lee had stepped down as editor and writer, almost entirely relinquishing his role as a textual author in comics. No text included Lee as both a textual and market author, illustrating the difference between the two roles. The other creators named were Ed Hannigan, Bill Mantlo, Bob Hall, and David Micheline. Nowadays, “star” creators are regularly used to sell comics, with their names prominently displayed on the covers, but this data shows that this was comparatively rare during the period studied.

More surprising is the fact that Marvel's two distribution companies of this period, Curtis Circulation and Independent Distributors, appear on the cover of over 80% of all comics texts (50 out of 61). It could be argued that these markers are there purely for legal reasons, rather than as an attempt to sell the text itself, but nonetheless they are associated with the character as his distributors.

Comparing this data to the results of the survey brings up significant differences – the table below shows the percentage of survey respondents who mentioned a market author (% Survey), compared to the percentage of sample texts in which that market author was named (% Sample):

Market author	% Survey	% Sample
Marvel	87	100
CC/IND (distributors)	0	72
Stan Lee presents	30	54
Jack Kirby	11	0
Other company	41	12
Other creator	11	6

Table 5: Comparison of survey responses and empirical data for market authors.

As in the empirical data, Marvel is the highest-ranking market author, noted by 87% of survey respondents. Other companies were mentioned much more often by respondents than appeared in the sample, although this can partly be explained by the fact that the survey asked for overall views of Doom rather than just in this time period, so this figure includes names such as Fox and Disney, who do not appear in the sample.

Stan Lee was mentioned by 30% of respondents and Jack Kirby by 11%, despite the latter never appearing in the sample results as a market author. There certainly were occasions when Kirby's name was used to sell comics during the period in question, notably in 1975, when Marvel's in-house fanzine *FOOM* heralded his return to the company with headlines such as "Jack's Back!" and "The King Is Here" (Hatfield 2012), but the empirical data shows that his name was not used to anywhere near the same extent as Stan Lee's. Other creators were also named more often in the survey than in the dataset, though again this was partly due to the fact that respondents named people such as Jonathan Hickman, Mark Waid, and

even the rapper MF Doom, who would not work on the character until several years after the Marvel Age.

Finally, distribution companies were not mentioned at all. One reason for this might be that such companies no longer appear on the cover of comics, so that survey respondents were less likely to be aware of them. Indeed, the data shows that they started to disappear towards the end of the period studied, as Marvel moved towards using the direct market instead (Howe 2012). It might also indicate that such companies are not thought of by fans and academics as “authors” in the same way as “Marvel” or “Stan Lee presents,” but the fact remains that they are included on the bulk of comics texts and so have some sort of connection to the character, which is not being collected or recorded in the survey. The usefulness of the empirical data in uncovering information which is missed by traditional means is shown even more clearly by the analysis of textual authors.

Textual Authors

Analysis of textual authors showed that there were 164 people whose names were associated with Doom’s stories, the majority of whom (59%) only appeared once in the sample. This is empirical evidence for the idea expressed earlier that wandering characters like Doom are passed amongst different creators, rather than having a dedicated creative team.

Of the 67 textual authors who appeared more than once, only six did all of their work on the character within a single series. These were John Beatty (3 issues of *Marvel Super-Heroes Secret Wars*), Marie Severin (3 issues of *Not Brand Echh*), Pablo Marcos (2 issues of *The Avengers*), Peter Gillis (2 issues of *What If?*), Wally Wood (2 issues of *Astonishing Tales*), and Win Mortimer (2 issues of *Spidey Super Stories*). For all others, their work was spread across multiple series, again demonstrating that Doom was a wandering character without a single guiding creative team or regular series.

There were 18 textual authors who appeared five or more times in the corpus, and these are shown in the following table.

Textual author	Texts
Jim Shooter	29
Stan Lee	23

Joe Rosen	15
Jack Kirby	10
Artie Simek	10
Joe Sinnott	10
Bill Mantlo	8
Jim Salicrup	7
Tom Orzechowski	7
Glynis Wein	7
Sam Rosen	6
Roy Thomas	6
Mike Eposito	6
Tom DeFalco	6
Christie Scheele	5
Archie Goodwin	5
John Byrne	5
Jim Novak	5

Table 6: Textual authors.

Jim Shooter appears most often because, in addition to writing or penciling some stories, he is credited as “editor-in-chief” on almost all texts created during the third sub-period of May 1978 to October 1987. Similarly, Stan Lee’s name appears as writer, editor, or both on almost all texts produced during the first sub-period, none at all during the second, and then on four non-comics texts during the third. This is almost the reverse pattern to his appearances over time as a market author, showing again his switch in roles.

As will be shown, many of the other textual authors here are people who fans would not immediately associate with the character. Joe Rosen (who appears more often than Jack Kirby), for example, was a letterer, as were Artie Simek, Tom Orzechowski, Sam Rosen, and Jim Novak, while Glynis Wein and Christie Scheele are colorists. These creators would work on many more titles per month than writers, pencilers, and inkers, and so would be expected to appear more often. Colorists especially would appear much more often in the above table, but for the fact that they were not regularly credited during the 1960s.

In fact, the only creators in the above list who are solely credited as writers or artists (or equivalent terms), rather than also appearing as editorial staff, are Jack Kirby, Bill Mantlo, and John Byrne. This differs markedly from the results given in the fan survey, where almost all of the names associated with the character belonged to writers and artists, as shown in the next table. Respondents to the survey noted 113 different textual authors, 59 of whom were mentioned by more than one respondent. The table below shows the percentage of survey respondents who mentioned a textual author (% Survey), compared to the percentage of sample texts in which that textual author was named (% Sample), for all those mentioned 10 or more times in either sample or survey:

Textual author	% Survey	% Sample
Stan Lee	85.33	33.33
Jack Kirby	83.56	14.49
John Byrne	37.78	7.25
Jonathan Hickman	18.67	0
Marvel Comics	12.44	0
Mark Waid	11.11	0
John Buscema	10.67	0
Walt Simonson	9.33	0
Jim Shooter	9.33	42.03
Mike Weirigo	7.56	0
Ryan North	7.11	0
Roy Thomas	6.67	8.7
Mike Mignola	6.67	0
Joe Sinnott	6.67	14.49
Chris Claremont	6.22	0
Roger Stern	4.89	0
Steve Ditko	4.44	0

Table 7: Comparison of survey responses and empirical data for textual authors.

As with all of these statistics, it should be remembered that they are based on a sample, not the corpus as a whole. For example, Steve Ditko definitely was a textual author of Doctor Doom during this period, notably on his first appearance outside of the *Fantastic Four* series

in *Amazing Spider-man* #5 (Lee et al. 1963), but he does not appear in any of the texts in the sample.

In the survey, respondents were asked about textual authors as follows:

[p]lease enter the names of any people or organisations that you associate with the creation of Doctor Doom's stories. Please note that this can refer to anybody who worked on any story, not just the original creators of the character. (Hibbett 2020, 5)

The vast majority of respondents still identified Doom's creators, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, as people they associated with the character, despite the fact that the survey explicitly stated that it did not refer just to the original creators of the character. After that were creators responsible for fan-favorite runs on *Fantastic Four*, such as John Byrne, Jonathan Hickman, Mark Waid and Mike Weirigo, and Walt Simonson (Burlingame 2018; Franke 2018; Marston 2020). "Marvel Comics" is also included in this category, despite the introductory text making a clear distinction between the creation and marketing of stories, and the examples for "market authors" including other corporate entities such as DC Comics, showing that some fans see the organization as an active textual author of the character.

The presence of Ryan North in the table also demonstrates the problem of bias in any survey of opinion. At the time the survey was conducted, he was the writer of the *Unbeatable Squirrel Girl*, where Doctor Doom had recently made a guest appearance. North very helpfully retweeted my call for participants on twitter, which resulted in several fans of that series taking part, thereby skewing the results of the survey as a whole. His co-creator Erica Henderson was mentioned by 7 respondents, for example, while in the section about other characters associated with Doom, Squirrel Girl was mentioned 19 times, ahead of more traditional members of Doom's supporting cast such as Valeria (16) or Kang the Conqueror (7).

The only inker to be mentioned in this shortened list is Joe Sinnott, although Bob Layton was mentioned by six respondents, and both Artie Simek and Sam Rosen were named by one – the same person who also named Bill Mantlo, Archie Goodwin, and many others. Apart from these, and Marvel Comics itself, the entire list is made up of writers and artists, completely ignoring the cultural work that is done by colorists and letterers, as well as by most inkers, as part of the generation of comics texts. This disparity between the views of survey respondents and the empirical data is illustrated more clearly in the next table, which shows the

comparative rankings of textual authors in the survey and sample, once those who were not working during the period have been removed.

Textual author	Survey	Sample
Jim Shooter	5	1
Stan Lee	1	2
Joe Rosen	-	3
Jack Kirby	2	4=
Joe Sinnott	7=	4=
Artie Simek	31=	4=
Bill Mantlo	31=	7
Jim Salicrup	-	8=
Tom Orzechowski	-	8=
Glynis Wein	-	8=
Mike Eposito	-	11=
Tom DeFalco	-	11=
Roy Thomas	7=	11=
Sam Rosen	31=	11=
Christie Scheele	-	15=
Jim Novak	-	15=
John Byrne	3	15=
Archie Goodwin	20=	15=
John Buscema	4	-
Chris Claremont	8	-
Roger Stern	9	-
Steve Ditko	10	-

Table 8: Comparison of rankings for relevant textual authors.

What this table shows very clearly is that, apart from recognizing the input of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Jim Shooter, the results of the survey present an almost completely inaccurate view of who the textual authors during this period actually were. It also ignores textual authors from other media. These do appear further down in the results, but they are all connected to the *Fantastic Four* movies, such as the directors Josh Trank (7 mentions), Roger

Corman (5) and Tim Story (5), or the actor Julian McMahon (4) who played the character in *Fantastic Four* (2005) and *Fantastic Four: Rise of The Silver Surfer* (2007).

No other creative staff for other media were mentioned at all, though this might in part be explained by the fact that, in the sample, textual authors almost always stuck to a single media type. The only textual authors to move across media types were Stan Lee (cartoons, comics, and newspaper strip), Jack Kirby (cartoons and comics), Gene Colan (cartoons and comics), Larry Lieber (newspaper strip and comics), Mike Zeck (comics and TSR roleplaying game) and Bob Layton (comics and TSR roleplaying game). The small number of non-comics texts in the sample, though representative of the corpus as a whole, gave little opportunity for textual authors in other media to make many appearances in the data. Even with all these caveats, however, the survey was once again shown to be an inaccurate way of assessing textual authors.

Summary

This chapter has demonstrated how empirical data-driven methods can be used to create and analyze a comics corpus. It has compared the results of such an analysis to the results of a survey and shown that the two differ enormously. The empirical method includes all market and textual authors involved in the production of these texts, whereas the survey heavily privileged specific types of actors while ignoring others. For market authors, distributors were ignored, while for textual authors, most inkers and all colorists and letterers were excluded.

While the survey was not designed to capture a perfect reflection of fan and academic opinions, it does broadly echo the views often found in such discourses, where certain types of actors are much more heavily discussed, and credited, than others. As an example, even the referencing system used for this volume requires only the writers and artists to be listed, not other actors such as colorists, letterers, or editorial staff.

It could reasonably be argued that this is because other actors do not contribute to the texts in the same way. A letterer, for example, is unlikely to have the same impact on a text as the writer or penciler. However, ignoring these actors completely gives a false impression on who, or what, is responsible for the market and textual authorship of such texts across

different media. An empirical approach, therefore, is a way of, if not eliminating such problems, at least illuminating them.

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