

FANTASTIC FOUR



NORTH
FIORELLI
ABURTOV

MARVEL

9

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Here
they
are...

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**BEN GRIMM
THE THING**

**REED RICHARDS
MR. FANTASTIC**

**SUSAN RICHARDS
THE INVISIBLE
WOMAN**

**JOHNNY STORM
THE HUMAN
TORCH**

Together,
they are the

FANTASTIC FOUR

**& ALICIA
MASTERS-
GRIMM**

After a period of estrangement, the Fantastic Four reunited and have taken up residence at the Grimm family farmstead. Sue and Alicia began investigating a local shopkeeper who seemed to have disappeared from all but their own memories and were shocked when Johnny also lost his memories of Reed and Ben. Johnny's replacement for his missing teammates is the living flame construct he dubbed "Flame-O."

When Sue, Alicia, Johnny and Flame-O searched the nearby town, they discovered that the alien Xorgorr had captured numerous locals, including Reed and Ben. Xorgorr uses mind control to transform her captives into her servants, wiping everyone's collective memories of their existences. Sue and the others confronted Xorgorr, who then ordered Reed, Ben and the rest of her minions to kill them!

**"ART IS LONG—
AND LIFE IS SHORT"**

writer: **RYAN NORTH**

artist: **IVAN FIORELLI**

color artist: **JESUS ABURTOV**

letterer: **VC's JOE CARAMAGNA**

cover artist: **ALEX ROSS**

variant cover artists: **OSCAR VEGA; SIMONE BIANCHI**

designer: **CARLOS LAO**

assistant editor: **MARTIN BIRD**

associate editor: **ANNALISE BISSA**

editor: **TOM BREVOORT**

editor in chief: **C.B. CEBULSKI**

Fantastic Four Created by
STAN LEE & JACK KIRBY

When you want to make comics accessible to blind people, one size doesn't fit all.

BLAST YOU, RICHARDS!

I'D REALLY RATHER YOU DIDN'T!

RICHARDS!!!

DOOM

Some of us care about what the characters look like. Most blind people still have *some* vision, after all.

For others, it's irrelevant, especially if what people look like doesn't actually *impact* the story.


In July 1945, there was a newspaper-delivery strike in NYC. In response, the mayor went on the radio and read out the funny pages, ensuring that the city's comics-loving kids wouldn't be impacted by what the adults were doing.

He described what was happening in the comics, did voices for all the characters, brought it to life.

It was to score political points, but it also made comics accessible to millions of people--for free and by no less a person than the mayor of New York City himself.

People who'd never been able to read comics before suddenly could experience them.





These days, he's
trying to murder
me because a wood
monster told him to.

**IT'S
CLOBBERIN'
TIME!**

Ben!
Please,
no!

Snap
out of it,
babe!!

Ben!!

ALICIA MASTERS-GRIMM IN:

**"ART IS LONG--
AND LIFE IS SHORT"**



Ben and Reed continue to attack the Fantastic Four -- and it's too much. Sue, Johnny, Flame-O and Alicia are losing.



Xargorr tells us *her* story.
Her "astonishing tale."*

How her species
first came to Earth,
in conquest.

NOW, HUMAN...
BEHOLD!!!

*As seen way back in
Tales To Astonish #23. --Tom



BEHOLD HOW I EMIT ULTRA-FREQUENCY
ENERGY WAVES! SEE THE WAVES LEAVE MY
BODY!! SEE THEM SPREAD OUT IN EVER-
WIDENING ARCS!! WATCH, EARTHLING!
WATCH THE BEGINNING OF
MANKIND'S END!

Their leader was a being named
Moomba, who--like her--could make
anyone *forget* anything he wanted.



When his conquest
failed, he and his
forces *left*--after
erasing humanity's
memory of their
presence.

But
Xargorr
decided to
stay.



Since then, she's been *taking*
people: slowly, then quickly.
Erasing any memories that
would interfere with what
their *new* lives would be.


The lives of
servants, building
and staffing her
underground
palace...



...and doing it *happily*,
because they'd *forgotten*
there was ever another
way to *live*.

And worst of all, this selfish, *petty* alien
has made me see my husband as the
thing he's fought for *years* to never be,
the thing I've *never* seen him as before.





But Ben and Reed *stay*, enveloped by that torrent of flame.

Because despite everything they've been made to *forget*--

--they still know Johnny won't *burn* them.

They've lost their *relationships* with Sue and Johnny, but they still know *everything else* about them: their *go-to moves*, their *weaknesses*-- the things they won't *do*.

Which means Sue and Johnny won't win. They *can't*.

Desperate, I try to help. I look at the facts of what's going on, taking what's already set in stone, and I use it...

...to tell myself a *different* story.

Sue! Sue,
I just had a
completely
crazy idea.

Girl,
I am *all*
ears.

You gotta
get this bubble
to Johnny!

A few more hits
and there won't
be a bubble!

Sue!!

Okay,
okay, just--
hold on tight.

Rather than trying to
sustain the force-field,
in a burst of strength,
Sue *enlarges* it...

...stretching
Reed and sending
Ben flying.

(He'll be okay,
I swear.)

Then she
shoots us out
the side...

...and sends us
careening toward
Johnny.

Sis?!

My point of view normally isn't that *dynamic*. It's just *sound*, after all.

Sensation.

Okay. Susie, I want you to make a small force-field between my hands--about 2 feet tall but soft. *Malleable*.

Like *clay*, Suze.

I don't--

An invisible *idea* of the space around me.

Oh my god. I get it.

I don't! How the heck are we supposed to *beat* these guys?

By having Ben and Reed fight someone whose moves they *don't* know--because they've *never* fought her before.

Me, Johnny.

You can sense how I'm *shaping* the field, right, Sue?

I feel it.

I need you to make a full-scale copy. And it's a two-way street, okay?

Gotcha. Everything that happens to it out there happens to your model too.

And as for Johnny...

Whoa!

Sue's *moving* you to where I need you to be. When you feel a slight pressure, that's your cue to send out flame.

From Human Torch to human squeeze ball. Got it.

Keep Flame-O on crowd control--but I need the rest of your focus *here*.

Like I said, I'm blind. Even with *rain* showing its *contours*, I can't *see* what Susie's *built*.

But I can *hear* the rain bouncing off it. I can *feel* the space around me change as the air inside this force-field becomes *pressurized*.

So while I gotta admit I'm not one hundred percent on what this all looks like...

Now, Johnny!

Flame on!!





Please, Reed! Stop this, think about this **logically!** Even if you don't remember me, you must remember your knowledge of **ethics**, right? Your **decency**?

Hah! I've removed those too!

Anything that stands in my way, he's forgotten!



I don't care *how* much you make him forget, Reed would never *truly*--

Hah! *OF course* he would! He's *human*!

Memories are all you have!

Humans are the great explainers, taking whatever's happened to you and deciding it forms a somehow-immutable **identity**.

Remove those events--remove that **history**--and you're a blank slate.



There's no *you* to you! You're all just **products** of your history, the sum total of your **experiences**!

Coincidences and random chance that you canonize as **fact**!



I don't believe you, Xargorr.

The fact that your **husband** and **best friend** are trying to kill you right now would seem to argue otherwise, Earthling!!

Hold that thought, Xargorr.

Allie! We're gonna need something new: Reed and Ben are adapting to the octopus!

On it! Buy me a few seconds!

You got it!

Graggh!

Even if we have forgotten you, Invisible Woman, that is to be counted as a blessing.

Gonna need you to walk me through that one, honey!

It's a simple enough syllogism. Memory, Susan, is a curse.

Grief. Doubt. Revenge. *Hate*. All are predicated upon *memory*, upon letting a recollection of the past *alter*--and sometimes *destroy*--your future.

Yeah, what Reed said! Ya can't *hate* someone if ya don't *know* nothin' about 'em!

Without it, you become *free*. You can be truly *happy*.

I hear Ben's respect--his love--for his best friend. He's still *him*, somewhere in there.

And Sue hears *glimmers* of the man she loves too: his logical thinking, his brilliance. They're making good points, but they're all proceeding from a twisted premise.

An evil premise.

So.

We'll just have to knock *that* part out of 'em.



Sue didn't fight alongside Reed and Ben for years without learning how much damage they can take.



Our invisible mech brings them right up to that line...



...and then pushes them over, into unconsciousness.



Now all that's left is the alien, Xargorr. All that's left is to--

Sue! The arm, it's tearing, it's--



We're losing Johnny!



I suspected that might open up a hole in your force-fields, Dr. Storm! A momentary gap...

...but long enough to erase Johnny's memories, turning him to my side!

I've taken everything. All he is--all he knows--is to obey me.

And to destroy you.



Kill them, Johnny Storm!

You got it, bud!



Oh god, there's a bunch of Flame-Ons now. Alicia, I don't know if I can--

They're the Fantastic Four, stranger! And they're all I need to burn you!



FLAME ON!!







RARRRGH!!

A trap. To lure Xargorr close and trick her into using her full strength, only to **reflect** it back at her with an invisible parabolic dish.

Susan had made her hair invisible, so it'd **look burned off**. She **bent light** to make her clothes look ruined.

And she turned the top layers of her skin **transparent**, selectively **darkening** the spectrum of her blood and muscle to simulate **fourth-degree burns**.

Xargorr thought humans could be made to believe *anything*. And my friend Sue bet her *life* that even with everything else gone, there was something *innate*, something *essential* and *good* inside us that would always *be* there...

...and she was right.

Take away as much of him as you want, but Johnny Storm will *still* try to help people. Even strangers. **Enemies.**

He's not a killer.

I wonder if--in that moment, just before she forgot about her own powers forever-- Xargorr **realized** that.

When it comes to humanity, we all start out *good*.



So that's how we won. Xargorr made *herself* forget about her powers forever, and without them, she's *much* less of a tyrant.

As for everyone else--who weren't exposed to Xargorr's power at *full strength*...



...over the next few days, they begin to *recall* their old selves.

People began waking up to a world more *special*, more *rich*, more *loving* than the one they thought they knew.



And the town's got a new *tourist attraction*: Xargorr's colossal--and now-empty--underground *palace*.

Things are *turning around* for the community.



Best of all, we got our *family* back. Our loved ones remembered the people they *used* to be.

What happened was a nightmare--but it's not one they *believe* in anymore.



And there've been *benefits* too. Sue and Johnny's teamwork has improved, and now that he's out of his *rut*, *Je* *thrilled* to find out how *creative* he can be with his powers.

Flame-O, it seems, is on.



Oh! And I never told you what kind of comics reader I am. Do I care what characters look like when Ben's reading my comics to me?

Nah. Not really.



But I *do* make him tell me if anyone shows up who's big and handsome and rocky and orange.

Wait, wait, wait. Just how handsome *is* this guy, Benly?



C'mon, Alicia, he ain't *handsome* at all, he's--
Ben.



Well.

IT'S
CLOBBERIN'
TIME!

...I suppose--
I mean...
I *guess* in th' right light...



...there's mebbe a chance he ain't *half-bad*, sweet pea.



Right answer, babe.

THE END!

FANTASTIC FOUR FAN PAGE

Thank you for reuniting the team in FANTASTIC FOUR #5. It's been an unusual and interesting start to this new creative team's time on my favorite comic. I really like how Reed is using his powers in unique and surprising ways, which makes sense because he is a genius. So many other artists in the past have just had Reed stretching around in the same old ways, but in this issue, we see Reed extending multiple arms from his body to strike multiple opponents. Very cool! Keep up the unique ways that Reed and the other members of the team use their powers!

I was disappointed to not see any of the villains on the cover actually appear in the comic. To see the Fantastic Four battling Annihilus, Blastaar and Stygorr and then not see a single one of them inside the comic felt like a tease. Was Alex Ross led to believe they would be in the comic? Maybe you can make it up to us by having this battle actually happen sometime in the near future.

Victor Allen
Colorado

Glad you've been enjoying things, Victor! As for the cover not matching the interiors, Alex knew that the group would be battling an invasion from the Negative Zone and therefore threw in all of the big Negative Zone villains he could think of. If it helps, assume that they were there just outside of the panel frame!

Dear Marvel,

I have been reading FANTASTIC FOUR since the early 1970s, and I have rarely been moved by any title in the way I have by North, Coello and Aburtov's FF. The characters are so well fleshed out, the dialogue intelligent and witty, the plots still surprising and the art astonishingly good. During every one of the four issues so far, I have laughed out loud and shed a tear. Thank you so much to all the team.

I have a question about continuity. The first issue of FANTASTIC FOUR was in 1961. To have received the training to go into space, they must all have been at least 25 years old. Let's say they were all 25, and put their birth years at 1936. In MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #20, October 1976, Ben Grimm is back in 1942, and he says, "Alicia ain't even born yet." Let's estimate her birth year at 1945, meaning she was 16 or 17 at her first appearance—FANTASTIC FOUR #8, November 1962. The latest date mentioned in FF #1 by North et al. is 2006, but a phone of the type Alicia uses wasn't available until

2007, so let's say the story is set between 2007 and 2022. That makes members of the FF currently between 71 and 86 years old, and Alicia between 62 and 77. How do the FF and Alicia look so fabulous for their age? We could be mistaken for thinking Sue and Alicia are still in their 20s or 30s, Reed and Johnny in their 30s or 40s, and Ben—well, who knows how a man ages when he has skin like rock. Either Reed has designed some fitness regime for them that works astonishingly well, or he's invented some device that means they age at a different rate to the world around them. Will there be a future issue in which the secret is revealed?

Ian Pittaway

We don't make a really big deal about it, Ian, but for decades now, the Marvel Universe has operated on a sliding timescale of "Marvel Time" that follows our characters around and compresses all of their adventures into it. So while we've been publishing the series for over sixty years now, for Reed and company, only something like thirteen to fifteen years have passed. This does mean that certain contemporaneous references in stories from the past have to be overlooked (Ben and Johnny no longer ever met the Beatles in their heyday), but it keeps our characters from aging beyond all recognizability.

Hello,

Just a brief letter to say thank you for such great stories. I'm really loving the FANTASTIC FOUR right now. Gives me the Hickman vibe!

My small wish would be for you to fix Franklin. Franklin was and always should be a mutant. The OMEGA mutant. Also, I know it was a thing in comics to make preteens/teens all moody and annoying. Franklin grew up with a great family, and I don't think he'd be that way. He also had a lot of friends in the Future Foundation. I think his friends and family would have influenced him to be a better young man. The competitor did the same thing with a young lad who says a magic word. Being moody doesn't work for these characters. Remember, Franklin's going to get Galactus as a herald one day and be that awesome future man!

Michael Vincent

Take it from a father, Michael, no matter what their environment, you never entirely know who or what your children are going to grow up to be! That goes for Franklin the same as anyone else!

Gotta say, this is my favorite Alex Ross cover for this series (and maybe in general) yet! I thought it was just a trippy one-off, but sure enough, my fave four got tossed into the molecular blender! I like these mad-scientist adventures that don't lead to a bunch of canned fisticuffs. Where can I find a "Gyros Reborn" to eat at in the "real world"? And who designed the new logo? I love its clean, sleek design, it makes this classic mag feel like it's cutting-edge stuff. One last Q before I bid you adieu: What's going on with Reed's stretching? Not complaining but he's got some Eel O'Brian stuff going on these last few issues. Here's to (hopefully) at least twenty more issues!

Gyro craving,
Andy Boba
Grand Rapids, MI

Thanks, Andy! The new logo was designed by Alex Ross, who took inspiration from the science-fiction pulp magazines of the 1930s and 1940s, most notably ASTOUNDING.

I haven't absolutely loved this FF run yet... I say yet because the potential is definitely there. But Ryan North fundamentally understands what makes the FF tick, how to write the characters, how to integrate humor into it without it becoming a snarkfest and the overall family dynamic. This issue reminded me of something Stan and Jack would do with some headier concepts (problem arises, solved by issue's end and with a tease toward the future), and that's a great thing. Ultimately, I think things are headed in a fantastic direction, and I look forward to seeing where this creative team goes with Marvel's first family.

Phil Deiner
Erie, PA

Well, next issue, the creative team welcomes special guest artist Leandro Fernández for what may be one of the trippiest stories we've ever done—and in this run, that's saying something! See you then!

Tom B
5/16/23

As always, if you've got an opinion to share, you can email it to us at MHEROES@MARVEL.COM. Be sure to mark your letters as "Okay To Print!" if you'd like to see them featured here on the Fan Page!

