

FANTASTIC FOUR 48

PLOT BY CARLOS PACHECO AND RAFAEL MARIN

NOTE: Let's consider this story a fairy tale, the ultimate fairy tale. We have two kids, like Hansel and Grettel (Franklin and Valeria), four heroes (the FF), a quest, a good witch (Roma), a traitor (Nova), a labyrinth (Galactus's lair), a magic kingdom (Roma's refuge), an evil witch (Abraxas)... and the destiny of the multiverse in the balance.

PAGE 1

Four panels. In the first one, what we are witnessing is the creation or duplication of planets. The image we see is reflected on the waters of a pond or a sort of baptismal pile. In first term, we get to see two female hands, Roma's hands. The pond is a sort of Galadriel's Mirror, the screen she uses to show the children (Franklin and Val) what is happening in the multiverse. The hands are seen from Roma's POV. She explains through captions how worlds and suns replicate and create duplicates of life everywhere.

Second panel. The hands have waved, as making a magic pass, and the image in the pond has changed. Now we get to see an aerial vista of a distorted NY, a sort of Fritz Lang's metropolis, where technology still has the aesthetics of the 1930's. A giant zeppelin is hovering over the buildings of the city. This is, as we already know, the world of DOC FANTASTIC AND HIS FIVE FOR THE FUTURE. The world where Reed Richards has gone, to merge with his counterpart. Roma explains this to the children (and to the readers, BTW)

Third panel. Another movement of Nova's hands. Now we get to see the armada of Atlantis soaring the seas or the air. Stylish ships Flash-Gordon-style with the symbols of the Atlantean Republic on them. Perhaps the United Nation building can be seen in the waters of the pond... a building that —of course is underwater in this world dominated by Atlantis. The name of the world, by the way, is ATLANTERRA. Roma explains how the ruthless dominion of the water-breathers over the surface dwellers have caused the imminent danger of homo sapiens as a species.... as the superior technology of the Atlanteans have decided to bring to the planet the ice asteroids of the Asteroids Belt... This is the world where SUE RICHARDS has gone in her quest.

Fourth panel. Roma moves her hands once more, and the surface of the pond now shows the panorama of the Red Square in Moscow. The ominous, gigantic figure of GALACTUS over the spires of the Russian government HQ. Galactus is about to start draining the life resources of this parallel world... Roma explains this is the place where BEN GRIMM has gone... but his mission is not to stop the Devourer of Worlds, but to find a treasure that could help them all save the fabric of the multiverse!

PAGE 2

Splash page. Now we get to see ROMA, in the center, FRANKLIN and VALERIA surrounding her, all of them watching the magical pond. The kids are astonished and even terrified. Roma is as hyeratic as always.

In the waters of the ponds now we see (upside down, as the image is shown to the kids, not the the readers, how THE HUMAN TORCH and NOVA roam the giant aisles of Galactus« spaceship).

Title and credits here.

PAGE 3

ROMA turns to the children. She explains ETERNITY, whom she guards, is like a living being. It comprehends everything that lives, that has lived, that will live. But in the dawn of times a tiniest spark of ETERNITY separated, got a conscience of its own... and started to develop on his own.

This was ABRAXAS. The living being started to multiply, to grow, to cultivate new universes inside the fabric of Eternity. Its goal ("his" goal from now on) is to become Eternity at the end of the proccess. A process that has taken millenia... a process that Eternity tried to stop by creating a force able to stop him: GALACTUS!

ETERNITY is a living being, a living body. Abraxas could be the analogy of a cancer. And Galactus the anti-bodies that figth the infection. For every new universe, a new Galactus was born... thus was the equilibrium mantained... Galactus devoured the universes Abraxas was leaving in his mad escape onwards... till "our" Galactus died... and the equilibrium was shaken!

The only way to restore the equilibrium is to get the NULIFIER our Galactus had... and in this quest are the Fantastic Four submerged now! 3 of them have travelled to different alternate versions of Earth, to find in the different Johnny Storms the clues to the whereabouts of the Nulifier! Trying to avoid Abraxas use the children as hostages against their parents, she has rescued them and bring them here, to her interdimensional real (the background of her realm is a sort of crystaline domo that will be shattered to pieces at the end of the story!)

"Hush!", Roma says. "The first act is going to conclude. Look at the waters of the pond!".

PAGE 4

We get to visit again the world of ATLANTERRA. Inside the house of M.D. SUE STORM (not Richards in this world). A mere second has passed since last issue: this world«s JOHNNY STORM is a young thug, Sue is a doctor, their father is still alive... the world is in danger of being annihilated by the Atlanteans that don«t give a damn for the surface dwellers... and Johnny and his pal Mac have entered the house after trying to rob a bank. MAC is a strong man, with long hair and a beard. He has been hurt by the cops... and now Johnny wants her sister to help his wounded friend!

Sue hesitates only a fraction of a second. This is the Johnny Storm she has come to find. A Johnny Storm who is not a hero, as in her original world, but a wicked teen... but nevertheless this Johnny has, inside his brain, the fraction of memory her real Johnny needs... But Mac seems in bad shape... She has to help him!

Sue is no doctor, but years as member of the FF have taught her how to treat a bullet wound. She orders the man to sit, while Johnny and their father exchange a hard, sorrowful look.... There are years of misunderstanding between the two, but this is not the time for reconciliation.

Sue uses a force field to stop the bleeding while she prepared to use some bandages on the man. His brother asks her if she is going to use some of her famous torture instruments (it seems now clear that Sue has helped Johnny in the past) to extrude the bullet....

But the bullet gets out of the wound as by magic!... Nothing a good force field can«t do!

She looks the eyes of Mac. He is a somber man that didn«t even moan... but Sue has seen those very eyes many many times!

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It can«t be.... This world is about to end in a cataclism of water against land and she has no time to solve any politics... But Mac is, has to be...

A quick invisible force field onto the man and his beard and long hair dissappear to reveal Mac real personality, the pointy ears, the frown, the gills... PRINCE NAMOR MACKENZIE, THE SUBMARINER! It«s such a quick movement neither Johnny nor their father get to glimpse it!

Suddenly Sue understands in this world Namor McKenzie was never the Emperor of Atlantis (Atlantis is a Republic here), and remained an amnesic hobo in the streets of NY, to be found by a Johnny Storm who never got the powers of the Human Torch!

Johnny... bring me some water! , Sue asks.

Sure, sis , Johnny replies. I wondered when you were going to ask for it. You know, in every film docs use hot water to extrude bullets and to help children being born...

Sue doesn't need hot water. She throws a bucket of water to the wounded, amnesic Mac.... much for the surprise of Johnny and his old man!

And then NAMOR suddenly remembers who he is, what he is, where he has been!!!

He tears his clothes, drops his shoes.... Man, he is furious!!!

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He looks at the woman who has awoken him....

--And flies in rage through the window... to meet his future!

Neither Johnny nor his dad can understand what they have witnessed... suddenly Mac has turned into a flying nude man... an Atlantean?

Sue takes her ball from her pocket. She has no time to explain, she says. Johnny, Dad, perhaps this man will be the hope this Earth needs to make the Atlanteans understand they can't endanger the whole human race, the whole survival of the planet just to achieve their goals. He is an hybrid after all, a noble hero of sorts, in the place she comes from...

But now she needs Johnny's help. She can't help this world, but Johnny surely can. Not only this world, but the whole universe, the whole multiverse...

Johnny starts saying his sis has lost her marbles... but he cannot avoid looking at the little ball....

A dazzling lightm, while his memories are taken.

CHANGE TO ROMA. This is it , she says. Your mom has done it. Watch in the mirror. Your uncle Johnny Storm has regained a part of his memory!

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CHANGE TO GALACTUS« ship. Johnny Storm screams, as part of his memory returns, burning his brain! Nova watches him, terrified!

Johnny hesitates for a second. Galactus« ship is so big, so immense... In fact, G«s ship is a construct that is bigger from the inside than from the outside (like the TARDIS of Dr. Who), a machine that uses the foils of space to navigate the currents of the cosmos, as Galactus is not only a being of matter, but in reality a cosmic being of pure energy. Nova tries to help him...

But Johnny rises his head. He has remembered! This way!, he signals. And both Human Torches flie thru the giant aisles... to find...

Behind a giant metallic door, what we could consider Galactu«s attic. A giant tri-dimensional wall that surrounds the two Torches, trapping them inside a labyrinth....

And the walls of the labyrinth, they discovered, are a puzzle, where each piece is A NULIFIER SUPREME. The bricks of the 3-d wall are just nulifiers... or aren«t they? What better way to hide a tree that inside a forest? There must be thousands, millions of Nulifiers here... and only ONE is the real one!

Both Torches hesitate, astonished by the magnitude of this treasure. They could spend here thousands of years trying to find it...

They can only wait for the rest of the FF«s help! (A CAPTION WITH NOVA«S VOICE HELPS US TO TRAVEL TO THE NEXT PARALLEL WORLD....)

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DOCTOR DOOM«S ominous figure menaces BEN GRIMM, who is in his human form (his former human form, not the paunchy Ben of our last issues), and is trapped inside a metallic structure. Doom is accusing Ben of being a wife-beater (in this world he is divorced from Sue Storm), and warns him she shouldn«t have come to this place... Ben is really looking for Johnny Storm and his memories and has no desire to fight THE CHALLENGERS OF DOOM! (this Doom has no mask, as he is not deformed)

Ben could easily break this cage by changing into his rocky self, but he doesn«t want to jeopardize his mission being taken for a monster. Listen, pal , he says. I dunno what the heck you think you«re doin«, but this Galactus fella is gonna eat the whole planet in a matter of minutes if you don«t help the Russians and go to help them

Never! , shouts Doom. The Russians obliterated my motherland of Latveria, forcing me to exile. They have hated me and my scientific objectives since then. It is a trap and Doctor Doom is fooled by no one! Behind him, Reed Richards, Sue Richards and Dr. Bruce Banner seem to agree with their leader!

Lissen, pal, lemme get out of here. I«m not looking for lil«Sue... it«s Johnny Storm the one I need!

Doom has no time to reply, as a veeery big tremor shakes the building, cracking the walls and the cage where Ben is! It has started! , Ben shouts. Galactus is draining this planet«s resources. Now it«s to late to face him, Doom. Your pride has condemned the Earth!

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A big panel, to show chaos in NY! Though Galactus has landed in the far side of the planet, the effects of his machines are shaking the whole Earth! It«s Doomsday! The buildings shaking and coming down, great cracks on the floor, the lights are off, are G is draining the electric energy, bystanders run, some fight for a means of transport to escape... to escape where?

Doom is in shock! Can it be true? Could he have avoided this if he had acted to help the Russians?

Reed and Banner try to measure the draining of energy... but their computers turn off!

Ben, now freed from the cage, approaches Sue. She is frightened, almost hysterical (you don«t get to witness the end of the world every day). Ben tries to be brief and clear: Suzie, lissen to me. I can«t... I can«t explain. I can only say that I«m sorry for what... for what I may have done to you in the past. I really am. But now... lissen, the world is doomed, but there is hope, there must be hope. I need to find Johnny... where is he? Could I get him before we all.... die?

Sue looks at him silently. For a moment, she seems to recognize this is not the man she once loved... or perhaps people do change with time!

PAGE 10

CHANGE to the streets. Ben Grimm is running against a tide of people, now that he knows where he can find Johnny Storm... providing Johnny hasn«t run in panic as most of the people he is meeting in the streets!

A penthouse, where Johnny Storm lives... Ben has no time to climb stairs, and the lifts are out of order, as there is no energy left in the city... The heat of the streets has

dissappeared too! It's a sort of nuclear winter what they all are living in a matter of seconds! Ben turns into the THING, and climbs the surface of the bulding, using his strength to open holes in the bricks!

He gets to the penthouse... to find a dilapidated Johnny Storm, possible drunk in the desperation of understanding the end is nigh!

There is no light inside the penthouse, so Johnny doesn't recognize Ben is a rocky monster. He is almost blind, with desperation and hopelessness. If only he had travelled with Sue and Doom and Reed and Banner in that bloody spaceship... if only he had turned into a superbeing as they all... Perhaps he could have convinced Doom that the Russians were not faking this time, as he was convinced...

Ben feels a sudden simpathy towards this young man who has been nothing, not a hero not a monster, just a plain, not-very-clever human being that now, in his final moments of life is aware of the many things he could have done.. perhaps.

You can still help save the world, Johnny, pal , Ben says, and realises the kid is COLD, as Galactus is draining the whole population of Earth lifeforce... The Thing himself is covered in frost. This, I promise. Not only this world, but the universe .

He takes the little ball and shows it to Johnny....

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CHANGE TO ROMA. She closes her eyes, as in trance. I feel the memories of Johnny Storm riding thru the interdimensional void... Ben Grimm has succeeded... though one of the many worlds of the Universe has... DIED!

CHANGE TO JOHNNY STORM AND NOVA. Johnny feels another discharge of memories returning....

And he points at one wall. There it is. The Nulifier is in this wall .

Well, this simplify the quest , answers Nova. Before we had to sort millions of decoys... now we only have to decide which one it is... among hundreds of thousands

The FF are making it. As a team, as we've always been. The memories I've received mean two of them have found my counterparts in other worlds of the Althernity .

Have faith, Nova. The third one will find my twin and we'll be able to get home and save the day , Johnny smiles.

CHANGE TO REED RICHARDS... to Doc Richards, the adventurer and scientist with the goatee.

So... Johnny... is dead? , he muses.

PAGE 12

A big panel, has the camera has gone back to show the lab of Doc Richards and his old-fashioned 30«s-style apparatus. Doc and Sue more or less in the center of the room, and the famous FIVE FOR THE FUTURE surrounding them, doing each of them those sort of things scientists and adventurers do (see last issue for reference). One of them, MR. GRIM (with an M), a giant dressed like the Elephant Man (i.e. Ben Grimm«s version in this world) announces the Zepellin of DOCTOR FAUSTUS is coming towards them! Sue is telling Doc her brother died, of course, more than two years ago when he... (she doesn«t have time to finish her explanation, whatever it is, as Ben«s warning interrupts them all)

The building where Doc Richards and his pals live (The Empire State Building?) is overshadowed by the big hull of the zepellin of THE MONOCLE, who is using a electronic force field to imprison the whole city.

Reed orders the Five for the Future to go to the roof and watch the advances of the Zeppelin. But he remains behind, in the lab, trying to comprehend what surrounds him... All his life he has been conscious of his superior intellect... but this counterpart of his is by no means as intelligent as he is. He notices his mental capacity is not as big... an his body lacks the superpowers to stretch. Could it be he, our Reed Richards, obtained an ampliation of his mind thanks to the COSMIC RAYS? This Reed Richards didn«t go out to space, he didn«t receive any kind of power, physical or mental...

A newspaper in a picture in the wall shows him the news of the experiment where whale-hunter Ben Grimm tried to get to the Moon... by travelling in a cannonball fired from a giant gun Doc Richards has invented....

PAGE 13

A quick survey of the technology and the equations his counterpart was developing when that villain THE MONOCLE attacked again the city shows Reed this "Doc" fantastic was trying to develop a sort of anti-gravity discs, more or less like the ones the WINGLESS WIZARD has develop in his world!

And he quickly finds a failure in the design, that«s why the attempt to attack the zepelin that creates a magnetic bubble around NY, making it a prison, failed!

Reed quickly starts working in the half-built, obsolete machinery.... He has no second feelings to "steal" the Wingless Wizard designs, as he apparently has no relevance in this world!

The presence of the zeppelin over NY and its gravity field crushes the Five for the Future to the roof of the building....

And Reed works with the speed of rays. For him to mount the machine is as easy as to change fuses!

A small cannon throws hundred of diminute discs....

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They jump to the hull of the zeppelin, where they are attached....

CHANGE TO THE MONOCLE'S BRIGDE. All the energy of his flying machine suddenly stops.... He cries something unknown is happening to his controls...

And the zeppelin, now inverted the polarity and the magnetic power of its hull is REPELLED by the same mass of NY city!

It goes away, at a speed no one could imagine!

BACK TO THE LAB. Reed smiles: he had done a similar experiment at highschool... when he was six years old! The Monocle and his zeppelin are now going to the Moon at lightspeed! But Reed has a mission to fulfill.

If this world's Johnny Storm has died... how is it that his gadget has made him come here?

He turns and sees Susan's eyes!

Of course! Somehow, Johnny's last moments shared a stare with his sister.. and somehow UATU had anticipated the knowledge would pass to another person. His own sister in this case...

Reed shows Susan the small ball he has in one hand...

The ball retrieves the mind energy of the late Johnny Storm....

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---and it relies it to our Johnny Storm, somewhere in the cosmic fold of Galactus« sacnta sanctorum!

Johnny steps back, shaken by being "complete" once more.

He looks up!...

And the thousands of false NULIFIERS dissolve to be only one!

Johnny takes it... "This is the one!", he says.

"Are you sure?", asks Nova.

"Yes, it has... my patterns are recorded inside it!"

PAGE 16

A BIG PAGE, almost a SPLASH. NOVA attacks Johnny, throwing him a cosmic fire discharge that forces him to let go the Nulifier! NOVA is a traitor! She has been working for Abraxas all the time!

A long, small panel in the bottom of the page, to show ROMA«S cry of anguish! So near, so far....! They have lost the battle! If Abraxas gets the Nullifier, nobody will stop him now, he will be able to change reality, to create more and more worlds... till ETERNITY itself collapses!

PAGE 17

Shaken, Roma steps back from the pond. The two children are frightened, without understanding the magnitude of what is happening! Quickly, before Nova has time to get to her master, ROMA summons the two Human Torches to her hidden kingdom!

The two Torches start to materialize. Nova has the Nulifier in one had, Johnny«s semi-insconscious burning figure caught by his neck...

Then, from the waters of the pond, a humanlike figure starts to form.

ABRAXAS, now a being of pure sparkling water, smilingly gets out of the pond!

Roma tries to face the mad deity.... She accuses him of not caring what his mad attempts to create could provoke.

ABRAXAS steps towards her. "Everything I do is an act of love. How can you accuse me of being a danger, of not caring?"

"Can an act of love kill"?, he asks.

PAGE 18

The watery figure kisses the silver armored ROMA in a very impressive splash page.

PAGE 19

The two children watch in horror how the bubble around them starts to crack.... Nova smiles wickedly...

Roma's helmet falls to the floor.

Her spear, broken, falls too....

Abraxas steps back, to reveal the dead body, almost a mummy now, of what once was the proud GUARDIAN of Eternity!

The bubble cracks again....

PAGE 20

Abraxas turns towards the children. "So, here you were, all the time!"

Nova has fulfilled her mission. Her new master can be happy. She has got the Ultimate Nullifier. Now, nobody can defeat him!

A new tremor.... and the FANTASTIC THREE appear from their quest.... thanks to the last spark of power of Roma, who has been able to bring them here.... to the other side of the universe... (Reed, by the way, has still a goatee, as he hadn't shaved properly when he started his mission, and perhaps a trace of the merging of realities remain in him)

Or not? The bubble cracks completely, dissolving in a million shards. The eden it was is revealed to be...

PAGE 21

Inside Central Park? A big panel to show a known landmark of the park, with the figures of the 7 humans and the demigod prominent, please. IT'S NIGHTTIME, and the stars are prominent in the sky!

NOVA stretches her hand to give the NULLIFIER to Abraxas.

Reed stretches trying to avoid it...

And a simple gesture and he is propelled back! Abraxas doesn't even look at him!

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ABRAXAS caresses the Nullifier, the weapon that will give him limitless power.

The Fantastic Four are unable to do anything! Nova is a traitor!

Close shot on Franklin's frown!

A view of the night sky. A star shines more than any other star!

TO BE CONCLUDED!

