

FANTASTIC FOUR 51

WRITTEN BY CARLOS PACHECO AND RAFAEL MARIN

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PROLOGUE: A group of explorers in the white, snowy mountains. A shot of the group walking single file along a snow crest. The caption only indicates it's 1942. (as there is some confusion about the setting of Attilan as it was first introduced in FF-fortysomething, it's better not to say if it is THE HIMALAYAS or THE ANDES).

The explorers (we'll reveal later in this prologue who they really are) are roaming the whole world looking for impossible realms: Prester John's, the hidden mountains of the Ancient One... and certain forgotten society of a legend: the Inhumans.

Close on the face of the expedition's leader. A blonde man, with dark glasses covering his face, he is wearing gloves and a parka. He signals. At last they have found something!

Seen from above, a green valley where we can see several huts, a fire, some yaks or llamas or cattle. In the horizon, more snowy mountains.

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The inhabitants of the valley come to greet the newcomers. Now we see these newcomers are tall, strong and hard-looking (no weapons shown yet), while the people of the valley are smaller, poorer. But perhaps happier.

One of the explorers notices one of the villagers has bluish skin, but he is not despised by the others by this fact.

The villagers live in a sort of "GREEN PATCH" in the middle of the snow of the mountains. The explorers understand there live some normal humans along with something who is... far more than human!

The leader of the group, who apparently has been talking friendly with the villagers, sees one little girl. Her hair is blondish, and her eyes are blue (many of the adults have dark hair and perhaps oriental eyes). The girl is apparently burning a fire... out of the thin air!

He seizes the girl, who turns to look at him.

And now we see she has a nictitating membrane in her eyes (a third eyelid that closes in horizontal, like some birds). If it's very difficult to show it, then let's them have eyes like cats, with the pupils in vertical. Or her eyes turn red only when she uses her powers. Whatever you like.

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Some of the explorers, obviously soldiers, check that some of the children have the same nictitating eyes... And they seem to be able to perform strange things: levitate rocks, ignite fire, isolate cold...

“This is it”, the leader says. “We’ve finally found a group of non-humans, as the old legend said”. Their quest for the so-called Great Refuge seems to have ended here. No other traces they have found, only this little group of humans and strange beings that live in a remote place, far from the rest of the world.

The leader turns to his men. “Annihilate them!”, he orders.

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The explorers take out their machine guns and exterminate all the humans and adult non-humans in the village.

Only the children remain.

The leader gets to the little blonde girl, who doesn't seem to be frightened, as if she were able to control not only her emotions, but also the emotions of all those around her. “Good”, says the leader, “we'll return to Berlin now”.

Close shot on the leader. Now we see he has a couple of SS insignias in the neck of his jacket. “We'll teach you many useful things”, he says. “After all, children are the future”.

The group take the children with them while leaving the place

(PLEASE, CAN YOU TYPE THE DIALOGUE LINES OF THE GERMAN SOLDIERS USING THE < > SYMBOLS BUT NO GERMAN WORDS THAT COULD SPOIL THE REVELATION OF THEIR NATIONALITY?)

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A NY panorama to remind and remark the setting of our stories. A warm sun shining on the buildings. It's a placid vista, a non-ominous shot. Some landmarks, real ones and Marvelite: The Empire State, the Chrysler Building, The Daily Bugle.... and of course THE BAXTER BUILDING. It's NOW.

A blue family car is leaving Downtown through the Manhattan Bridge.

REED RICHARDS is driving the car, (the car, as we'll reveal later, is in reality a convertible: a car able to transform into a flying fantastical; times have changed and the FF have decided not to be too conspicuous, right?). Reed is dressed in a brown jacket with leather patches on his elbows, a turtleneck pullover, perhaps an old-fashioned but stylish hat (the classical idea of the scientist he is; think of it as an homage to Carl Sagan). Next to him, **SUE RICHARDS**, now in an advanced state of pregnancy. Both of them should not be clearly recognizable as the Fantastic Four, as they are going to a primary school where Franklin will start his education, and the kid will be inscribed as "Richard Franklin". Perhaps it would be a good idea to show Reed wearing a moustache or a longer nose or bigger ears and Sue with dark hair or shorter hair than usual. **FRANKLIN** is accompanying his parents: the idea is that Sue and Reed are taking the kid to what's going to be his... school but the kid doesn't know what real school really is .

Parents and son talk to each other. In the apparent simplicity of the design of the dashboard we could glimpse something that implies it is no normal car either.

We see the blue car cruising the NY countryside.

The boy is excited because of the trip and so on.

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Then the car pulls up at the door of a formal-serious-but-not-ominous classical building. Franklin looks up, with an uh-oh expression in his face. (it's a school!)

A large aisle, parents and son cruise it.

A mature man greets Reed, they shake hands. Reed is identified as "Mister Franklin", not as Reed Richards. They are using fake identities to protect Franklin and the school from supervillains, of course. They are now inside an office: desk, maps, a fax, a phone, the flag, and so on. The man is the principal of the school,

...and Franklin is the kid who looks around, in awe. Perhaps a little frightened too. He is just starting to be... a big boy!

Franklin looks through a window while Dad signs a check or fills a voucher or something...

And there we see now (for the first time he should understand is happening) the playground of the school, empty of children.

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A really puzzled Franklin goes with dad and mom and the principal through a long long corridor...

The principal opens a door...

A big panel to show the inside of a classroom. There we can see the teacher (a really beautiful young woman, MISS CANDY), posters on the walls, some children playing or looking up at the newcomers. One of them is a pretty girl—imagine Gwen Stacy at 6! Another is a dark-haired strong and a little (just a little) bit fat boy who will play a very important part in the future of Franklin's social life! Franklin is shocked, puzzled and... a little frightened, as all kids in their first day of school. His new name, by the way, is RICHARD FRANKLIN! (In the school the children will call Franklin as Franklin)

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Change back to the car, several minutes later. Now we see SUE is really worried, as all mothers are when their kids go for the first time to school. Her hair, if dark, now gets blonde (or it gets longer if it was shorter): thanks to the invisible force field she applies on it.

Reed also recovers his normal aspect and tries to convince him it's all for the best. Franklin needs to be educated as a normal kid... now that he is a normal kid, and posing as "Richard Franklin" will give him a sort of "secret" identity.

Sue is not so sure. If any supervillain discovers who he is, who they are... Reed assures her he has taken care of every detail in that aspect.

Suddenly, over their heads, a sort of distant flare of light crosses the air!

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At the same time, a panel on the dashboard on the car opens, and on it we see how the image of UN Secretary KOFI ANAN appears. He greets the Richards, and says a space ship has appeared on the orbit of Earth... and is using a code of the Fantastic Four, asking permission to land!

Reed checks the code, and says OK. "Open the defensive shield, Mr. Anan", he says confidently.

The FF normal car transforms into a Fantastocar (the wheels turn into horizontal helices and the lot) and Reed and Sue are ready to meet the ship when it lands.

CHANGE. In the streets another couple looks up to watch the trace of light, now visibly a space ship. They are BEN GRIMM (in his human form) and KATHLEEN O'MEARA, who have finally agreed to have a date!

Ben is immediately suspicious. True, the ship seems friendly enough, but he has seen a lot of action in his time to understand it's not a normal sight, not after the defensive shield Reed has been working with the UN in the last months.

When he sees the Fantastocar, he immediately understands it's time for the FF to act!

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Ben says good-bye to Kathleen, and she understands he has to act: her husband was a cop who died in the line of duty. Being a tough woman, she even jokes if he is going to look for a phone box....

Ben, running under the fantastical, touches his belt, indicating the flying Reed and Sue he is there... and ready!

A bubble of invisible force field envelops him, lifting him into the air!

... and transporting him to the car, where he gets now turned into the Thing! "Too late to say 'follow that ship', uh?", he says. "Where are they heading?" (we also see here that, by touching their 4 symbols, Reed and Sue change from normal clothes to their FF uniforms)

Close shot on Reed's face. He is frowning. "The UN", he says.

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A very big panel. The small space ship lands in front of the building of the UNITED NATIONS!

The doors open....

And the ROYAL FAMILY OF THE INHUMANS go out from the ship. They are BLACK BOLT, MEDUSA, KARNAK, GORGON AND TRITON. All of them seem alienesque, majestic.. and a little sad.

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Now we see that around the ship are starting to arrive lot of tanks, police cars, the National Guard, all protecting the UN building. It's clear the space ship has radioed their approach.

MEDUSA makes a gesture of peace. “We are called THE INHUMANS, and we come in peace”, she says. “As the voice of my husband, BLACK BOLT, former king of our race, I plea the United Nations of Earth... for ASYLUM!”

“We have always hid from humanity, only appearing in public in limited occasions. You know me: I was once a member of the FANTASTIC FOUR. We are no menace to the human race. In fact, we are earthlings too. And we want to be considered citizens of Earth”

The cops, the UN secretary Kofi Anan, all look around, puzzled!

Suddenly, the air trembles between the UN building and the Inhuman’s ship, and a second ship, smaller, but with a clearly aggressive aspect, materializes there! It’s a sort of big fighter which has been using its cloaking device to get to Earth unnoticed! (like the “Birds of Prey” of the Klingons in Star Trek)

The ship finally stays there, floating a meter or so from the ground... and it opens fire against the INHUMANS!

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The Inhuman ship bursts!

While the Inhumans jump and the people there try to take cover, we see the rests of the ship are fixed mid-air!

And then the scene shows how, up in the air, the car of the Fantastic Four has been watching the events... and Sue has used her invisible force field to protect people from the explosion!

From the alien ship then jump out a group of ET’s... galactic bounty hunters that are hunting down the Inhumans! They are members of different known alien races of the Marvel Universe. A sort of “dark” Starjammers: a giant Badoon (MUD’AH); a blue-skinned Kree half-woman half-cyborg (LINGA); a short Rigelian with a black helmet (sign of being an outlaw, his name is CORDAN); a member of the race of Chamaleons (as Hobgoblin of the Shi’ar Imperial Guard was; this one’s name is MISTUR; a being that shows the

marks of having been the host of a warrior of the Brood, and is the leader of the bounty hunters (SANDORR) ... They attack the surprised Inhumans...

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...Just to encounter the opposition of the FANTASTIC FOUR as well! People flee from the battleground, while The Thing and the giant Mud'ah start a fist-to-fist fight.

Gorgon's foot hit the ground, and MISTUR, the hobgoblin-like being (from now on, the chamaleoid), falls back in a little mountain of rubble while he was trying to fire his gun against Black Bolt.

Linga, the cyborg-woman hits Reed with a neuro-rod, making him lose control of his limbs...

But just for a second: he rebounds as a human slingshot....

And the cyborg-woman is thrown against an invisible bubble of Sue's.

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Medusa's hair moves like a whip, disarming as many invaders as she can.

Karnak and the Rigelian meet. Karnak uses a judo trick against the black helmet of the renegade Rigelian...

And the blow is turn against him and the pain he feels in his hand is terrible as the helmet seems to have no weak points!

The leader of the bounty-hunters attacks Black Bolt. They both are strong men, and for a second both fly to the sky, far from the battle. The leader of the bounty hunters comments he is finally going to get a reward that will allow him to retire to a galactic casino or similar....

... but from Black Bolt's antenna a blast makes him fall to the ground!

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He falls to the place where TRITON is battling to the blue skinned Kree cyborg woman.

“We’re not ready to battle them!”, exclaims the woman, while she disposes briefly of Triton but finds Reed Richard’s elastic limbs try to seize them. “They are too many, and we don’t know the extent of the powers of these three humans in blue!”

The Rigelian pushes some buttons on his chest, and calculates the probabilities of getting their objective (which is capturing the Inhumans or at least Black Bolt) are now a 23 %.

“Retreat!”, order the leader of the bounty hunters, throwing to the floor a grenade that covers the scene in a grey gas....

And while humans and inhumans are choking and trying not to breath what could be a lethal chemical extraterrestrial bacteria and SUE tries to focus her powers to contain the gas in a bubble of hers, the bounty hunters aboard their ship.

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Among the debris, we see one of them cannot recover from the battle. It is MISTUR the chamaleoid, who is semi-camouflaged in the debris. It doesn’t matter, he thinks. Once his friends leave, he’ll send them a distress signal and they’ll teleport him away.

The ship goes out to the atmosphere, fleeing to jump to hyperspace. Ready to connect the cloaking device that makes it invisible to scanners...

But just then a satellite turns in its orbit...

And the ship is destroyed by the defense satellite!

CHANGE: Somewhere in a military installation, a group of scientists and high rank officers celebrate how their prototype of a satellite for the anti-extraterrestrial defense has worked perfectly. Among them, in second term but clearly identifiable, a woman (a secretary?). We’ll get to her later.

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Change, back to NY. The chamaleoid MISTUR is still there, next to lot of debris, impossible to distinguish for normal eyes. He has been waiting there for several hours, sure that nobody on Earth has the technology to detect him... not even the FF!

He mixes then with normal people, unnoticed, his form changed.

The chamaleoid gets into an alley. He has to think. Now he is stranded in a world he knows nothing about, far from the hub of the galactic empires he has been working for in the past...

And suddenly, out of nowhere, a squad of green-helmeted GUARDSMEN from the Vault attack him!

Mistur is appalled! How can they track him even when he mixes with the walls behind?

A discharge from a two-men team, and he is K.O. One guard comments to the other their experiments with the SKRULL they have had in captivity for some months (since FF 37) have been reaaaally useful.

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CHANGE TO THE BAXTER BUILDING. A sort of family meeting. Medusa and the rest of the Royal Family of the INHUMANS tell the Fantastic Three what has happened to them in outer space, how they were forced by RONAN THE ACCUSER to try to murder Lilandra... because if they didn't obey Ronan would have terminarted the whole people of the Inhumans.

“But in the last second, Black Bolt turn against these orders. He refused to scream and kill that woman”, Medusa explains, while Black Bolt seem more remote than ever. “It was finally Ronan who pull the trigger”. (A PANEL TO SHOW RONAN'S PULLING THE TRIGGER AND BLACK BOLT'S INSUFFERABLE PAIN, from INHUMANS 4)

“Later, we discovered it was a decoy, not the Empress, who died. And while Black Bolt challenged Ronan to a duel and won.. our people preferred to live in space, turned into a battle station, a pirate nest”. (THE DUEL BETWEEN BLACK BOLT AND RONAN, and the moment where the Inhumans refuse to obey Black Bolt”.

“We have returned to Earth. But we have no kingdom now, no Attilan, no Great Refuge in the Himalayas”.

“As a race, the INHUMANS exists no more. We are exiled from our own people, and that’s why we went to the UN, because Black Bolt thinks we should be recognised as inhabitants of this Earth... and we want to seek for refuge in the US”

Reed promises to help them. In fact, he has already contact certain person who should appear there any moment...

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CRYSTAL and LOCKJAW appear just them, teleporting from wherever they are (Genosha?). The melancholic mood of the meeting is somewhat happier now that sisters and family are reunited.

Crystal notices happily Sue is pregnant, and Sue tells her it’s a long story.... and they have not seen the end yet.

Then Crystal turns round and sees JOHNNY is nowhere. Sue tells her he is in a leave of absence from the group. “Yeah”, grumbles Ben. “The kid wants to find fortune and glory in the movie business”.

CUT TO A MOVIE SET. The dolly grips, cameras, stuntment and so on. They are shooting a western. We can see HAWK, the producer, and BOB DIAMOND, star and director. In second term, the misterious LON ZELIG (The Super Skrull, as we know).

“Ok”, says Hawk. “Tell the kid it’s time for him to start saying his lines”.

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Splash page. JOHNNY STORM in his van, just minutes before shooting his first scene.

He is looking at his reflection on a mirror. He is dressed up as RAWHIDE KID, and can't believe he is IDENTICAL to the character.

In off, from the door, a knock and a voice: "Your time, Mr. Storm!"

In an homage to Quantum Leap's last seconds, a petrified JOHNNY muses "Oh, boy!"

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CHANGE. EPILOGUE. The chamaleoid opens his eyes. He discovers he is in chains, under hypnotics drugs or whatever. In front of him, some people. One or two green helmets are identifiable. One voice tells the other to connect the intergalactic translator Richards provided for them.

We see then a high-ranked red-haired young military man who is trying to get information from the Alien. Behind the military man the woman we saw on page 16 steps ahead: she is a formal sub-secretary with jacket and some military insignia (Do you remember Diana Prince before Crisis?). (She is SENSO, whom we introduced in our Grey Gargoyle issues, but as she can change forms -or the perception people has from her form- she can have whatever aspect it is needed but we won't reveal this yet). The military man warns the ET if he wants to live he should cooperate. What did they want? Why did they attack these strange fellas.... THE INHUMANS?

Understanding he can't resist, or perhaps under the influence of the hypnotic drugs, the chamaleoid tells them what he knows from the story of the Inhumans mini-series we did with Jose Ladronn: How these five Inhumans are known in the Shi'ar galaxy as the terrorists who tried to murder Lilandra Emperatrix!

A panel to show in flash-back the moment Black Bolt's sonic scream killed the fake Lilandra.

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-A couple of panels to show the battle of the Inhumans with the Imperial Shi'ar Guard and the moment the dead "Lilandra" turns into Hobgoblin.

"But they didn't really kill the Empress", the chamaleoid continues. "It was a member of my own race, posing as her. Stupid kid, he sacrificed his life for love of a dictator".

-“It's a matter of time the powerful Shi'ar offer the greatest reward anyone could imagine for the heads of these terrorists”, the chamaleoid explains. “It was just a matter of pure chance that we met them in a space station, and could identify them, even under disguise”.

-“We followed them till this backwater planet.... and now my friends are dead, and Lilandra's ransom won't have any beneficiaries”.

. The woman (Senso) frowns. “So nobody knows these Inhumans terrorists are here, on Earth”, she asks.

“Nobody”, replies the chamaleoid. “It was pure luck”.

-The military duo get out from the cell and while leaving the place the woman turns to one of the green helmet guards: “I don't know how we can protect our families. We, the whole planet, will be doomed if this alien being is able to contact the rest of his brood. Do you have any children, gentlemen?”

-Keeping the camera inside the room where the alien unconscious remains we see him in the foreground while in the background the couple of guardmens enter in the room with no peaceful attitude.

Close shot on the woman's eyes. He has a nictitating membrane, yellow catlike eyes, or the whatever the same thing is the Nazis in the beginning noticed in the little girl she was once!