IN THIS CHAPTER

- Non-traditional super heroes
- Examining their not-so secret origin
- Exploring family dynamics

Chapter 1
The Founding Family of Marvel

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The first thing to know, when you're talking about the Fantastic Four, is that these characters are important. They are literally the foundation of the Marvel Universe — all of the other Marvel characters are in some way influenced by them. The characters we know best — the Hulk, Spider-Man, Iron Man, Jean Grey — are all variations on a theme introduced in *Fantastic Four.*

I mean, **Mister Fantastic**/Reed Richards, **Invisible Woman**/Susan Storm-Richards (although it was Invisible *Girl* back then), **Human Torch**/Johnny Storm, and **the Thing**/Benjamin J. Grimm are the first super heroes created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby together. (If the magnitude of that escapes you, be sure to read Chapter 2, where I discuss both men, their prolific collaboration, and how their creations continue to resonate in the Marvel Universe.) Without these characters, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (or should I say, MCU?) as we know it would not exist . . . and Disneyland would be a much more boring place. As you can see in Figure 1-1, the FF (as they are often referred to) aren't boring.

Nowadays, fans take it for granted that a super hero is more than a square jaw and flowing cape. Our heroes grapple with more than just the bad guys. They're

people and they struggle with everything that comes with that — but that wasn't always the case. Spider-Man has to worry about paying the rent and his Aunt May's health. The X-Men are targets of anti-mutant bigotry as much as they are of super villains. Daredevil struggles as a man of faith who revels in violence to battle evil.

There was a time when *super heroes* was a genre aimed squarely at kids, and more than that, at boys. The Marvel Age of Comics is what began to make super heroes a genre for everybody. This is a good time to tell you that the Marvel Age of Comics *began* with the publication of *The Fantastic Four* (1961) #1. Like I said before, these characters are *important.*

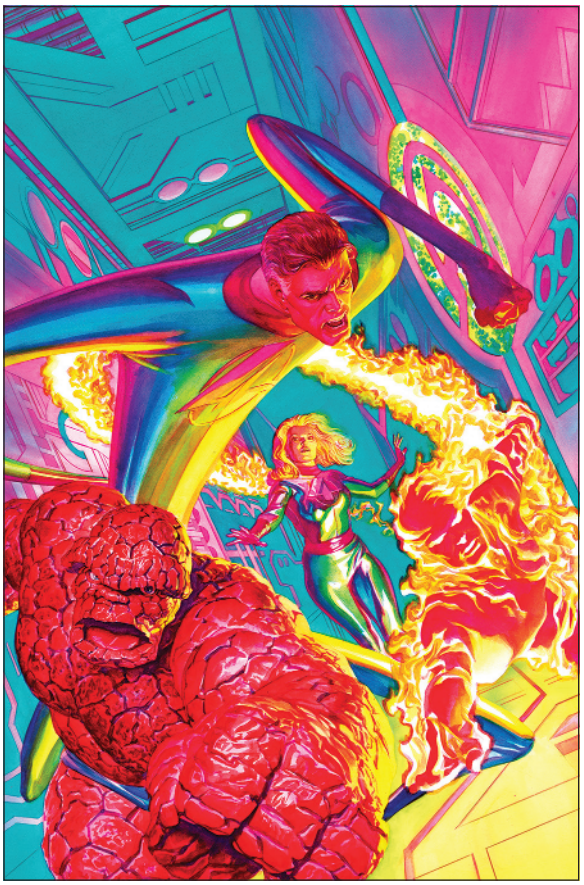


FIGURE 1-1: The Fantastic Four — anything but boring!

Art by Alex Ross.

Explorers versus Super Heroes — Two Great Tastes That Taste Great Together

One of the first — and coolest — things to know about the Fantastic Four is that they're not super heroes in the traditional sense. I mean, yes, they have incredible superpowers, they wear eye-catching outfits, and they do battle with some of the worst villains the Marvel Universe has to offer. They check a lot of super hero boxes.

But for most super heroes, the mandate is to battle evil and protect the innocent . . . those things are *job one.* But the FF looks for ways to *help* humanity more than protect it . . . and they do so in the same way that people do in the real world, by expanding human knowledge and potential through discovery and invention.

Writer Mark Waid, in the first issue of his run on *Fantastic Four*, coined the term "imaginauts" for them. They weren't simply battling evil or adventuring — they were learning. They were *creating.* In a way, they were cut from the cloth of their hyper-imaginative creators (we'll get to them in a bit).

*"These guys **aren't** super heroes. Not **really.** They don't fight **crime**. They don't go on **patrol** . . . They're **astronauts**. They're envoys. **Adventurers. Explorers** . . . Maybe they've been **around** a while, but the only thing **old** about the FF is that they never stop taking us to the **new**."*

—MR. SHERTZER, THE FF'S PUBLICIST, FANTASTIC FOUR *(1998) #60 BY MARK WAID, MIKE WIERINGO, KARL KESEL, PAUL MOUNTS, RICHARD STARKINGS, AND ALBERT DESCHESNE.*

Getting to Know Marvel's First Family

The Fantastic Four travel the world (or rather, the Multiverse), exploring and learning . . . and occasionally getting into huge fights with monsters and villains bent on mayhem! But through one magical choice, the FF are more relatable, more accessible . . . and more fun than their Golden Age forebears.

Lee and Kirby made the Fantastic Four a *family* . . . and that somehow gives fans more of what they want from these kinds of characters, whether they're explorers or super heroes (or both).

I mean sure, when you're looking for stories with characters to root for, you want something dynamic and exciting, but you also want more than that. You want

something *thought-provoking*. You want something that offers new perspectives on the world and the people in it. You want something that surprises you while still feeling comfortably familiar. You want your families . . . but *more.* The family dynamic is on display from the very beginning, in *The Fantastic Four* (1961) #1 . . . albeit a dysfunctional one.

Their very first interaction as a group is a flashback to their origin, with test pilot Ben Grimm admonishing Reed Richards about their upcoming test flight and the dangers of "cosmic rays." Ben refuses to fly until Sue calls him out for cowardice. Ben angrily agrees to fly the mission . . . but then Reed tries talking Sue and Johnny out of accompanying them, to no avail. Sue is Reed's fiancée — she goes where he goes . . . and Johnny goes where *she* goes.

But Ben's worries are justified. The ship is bombarded by cosmic rays! The crew is overcome, and they crash land back on Earth . . . but the damage, the miracle, has been done. This bickering but deeply loyal family has become the Fantastic Four.

They have become *more.*


TIP

Before I begin diving deeply into these characters and what makes them who they are, let me make it clear that I'm talking about these characters and events as they appear in the comics, specifically on "Earth-616," which is the main Marvel Universe. All of this inspires what eventually happens in films, TV series, and cartoons, but none of this necessarily applies to their canon. (This is the *real* geeky stuff!)

Mister Fantastic — A hero as complex as his stretchy body

Take a good look at Figure 1-2. This shot really captures the essence of the Fantastic Four's leader, because it offers a number of insights that you really need if you want to understand who he is. It shows us a collection of super-sciencey (and Jack Kirby-esque) gizmos, it shows us one stretching arm, and it shows us the small, satisfied smile of a man who thinks he knows what he's doing.

I don't see any choice but to look at each of those qualities (albeit not in that order)!

His real superpower isn't what you might think

Every super hero has an origin, secret or otherwise. Spider-Man has his radioactive spider, Captain America his Super-Soldier Serum, and the Hulk his gamma bomb. The Fantastic Four have theirs, in the form of those pesky cosmic rays . . . but they're not *really* what created the Fantastic Four.

Reed Richards is the secret origin of the Fantastic Four. Mister Fantastic is his own secret origin . . . in large part because he had his real superpower before he ever even smelled a cosmic ray.

Some of you might read that and think, "Justin, what the heck are you talking about? Mister Fantastic *stretches*, and he's not able to do that until that fateful flight through the cosmic rays!" And you'd be right to say so . . . but I'm not talking about his stretching.



Art by Dale Eaglesham.

FIGURE 1-2:
Reed Richards, Mister Fantastic — Super hero, Scientist, Renaissance Man!

As cool as stretching is, what makes Reed Richards such a special character is his incredible intellect. His genius begins to reveal itself at an early age — he is canonically taking college courses at age 14, and by age 20 has multiple degrees from schools like CalTech, MIT, and Harvard. He also attends the fictional Empire State University, where he meets both his best friend, Ben Grimm, and his worst enemy, Victor Von Doom. (We'll get to the Thing later in this chapter, in the section "The Thing — The real heart of the team" — and the villains get their moment in Chapter 3!)

A true polymath, Reed is considered among the best in the world (universe?) at most branches of science, including multiple fields of engineering, physics, chemistry, and even biology — and this is true *before* he and the others take their momentous spaceflight.



REMEMBER

Oh, and did I mention that this particular test flight is aboard a spacecraft that he himself designed and built? Reed Richards is as smart as people get . . . and he knows it, as we see in Figure 1-3.

This brings us to another quality of Reed's that drives stories and events in the Marvel Universe forward far more than stretching, his defining character flaw: his arrogance.

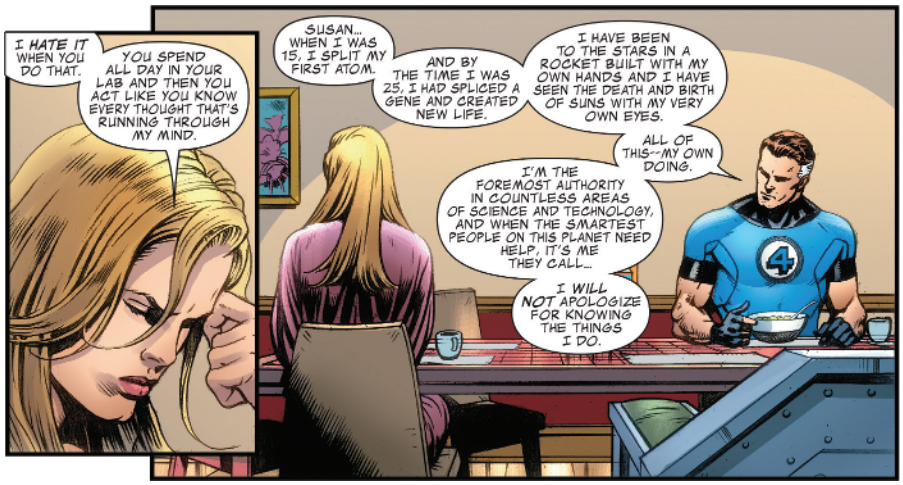


FIGURE 1-3: Reed reminds his wife that he is both extremely gifted and extremely arrogant.

By Jonathan Hickman and Dale Eaglesham.

Genius has its downside

Reed and his family do not become the Fantastic Four by design. They are not supposed to be exposed to the cosmic rays. The flight is funded by a U.S. government on the verge of pulling the financial plug. There has not been enough testing of the vessel, in particular its radiation shields, but Reed proposes sneaking aboard and launching *now.*

Ben, who I remind you is Reed's best friend, cautions them against this reckless choice. He's an actual test pilot, after all . . . he knows the risks.

"Count me out! You know we haven't done enough research into the effect of cosmic rays! They might kill us all out in space!"

—A PRE-THING BEN GRIMM, FANTASTIC FOUR *(1961) #1 (BY STAN LEE & JACK KIRBY)*

But Reed doesn't listen. After all, they have to beat the Commies into space! (Hey, it was 1961! Nowadays, Reed's fervor to launch his ship is considered more a young man's scientific need than anything nationalistic.)



TIP

I should note here that Marvel tends to eschew "retcons" (as in, *retroactive continuity*) when it comes to the events taking place in the Marvel Universe, at least in the sense of line-wide reboots, but there are times when they simply have no choice. (There are also times when new creative teams want to add new perspectives to old events.) If "beating the Commies" in 1961 is allowed to remain a thing, then the FF are probably in their *eighties.* Time is allowed to pass in the comics (Reed and Sue have gotten married and had two kids, after all), just *slowly* . . . and

the entire Marvel timeline exists on what they call the *sliding timescale.* As of this writing, and for the foreseeable future, *The Fantastic Four* (1961) #1 took place about 15 years ago — no matter when *now* is.

This combination of Reed's towering intellect and equally impressive overconfidence turns them into super heroes . . . and that same combination will get them into trouble again and again over the years:

- He splits from his family during the so-called "Civil War" because he believes he can predict the outcome of a world without the Super Hero Registration Act. (It's a whole thing.) He, along with others, cloned the super hero Thor, in an effort to subdue rebelling heroes, who instead became the murderous super villain Ragnarok.
- He co-founds the Illuminati, a group of super-powered leaders and geniuses, in an effort to protect the world clandestinely, which directly leads to the "Secret Invasion" by the shape-changing Skrulls.
- He creates a whole new batch of trouble when he attempts to *solve everything* — and ends up at odds with a "Council of Reeds," sociopathic versions of himself from other universes, free of pesky familial connections.
- Perhaps worst of all, Reed sticks his nose where it doesn't belong — in someone else's experiment, namely that of Victor Von Doom. With the best of intentions, Reed tries to tell Von Doom that he's made a mistake . . . and when the experiment goes awry, permanently scarring Von Doom's face, Reed is (unfairly) blamed and has helped to create the Fantastic Four's worst enemy.

In each of the instances above, Reed acts with nothing but good intentions — assuming that *he knows best.* Usually, he does . . . and that often keeps him from seeing the times when he doesn't. (You know what they say about good intentions!)

Okay, so maybe stretching *is* a real superpower . . .

Now, don't worry, I'm not going to move on without talking about why the Thing calls Reed "Stretcho!" Mister Fantastic's body has become almost infinitely malleable. He can assume virtually any shape or form because his body is essentially colloidal — indeed, his body has become so fluid that even maintaining his normal physique requires concentration.

This means that yes, he stretches, but it also means he can assume other shapes. He turned himself into a parachute and used an arm for a lasso in his first appearance, and he's been known to transform his fists into hammers or maces while in combat, shunting significant additional mass into them so they do real damage. He can squeeze/flow through even hairline cracks in otherwise solid objects.

He has even reconfigured his body and mind to allow him to comprehend concepts or equations that would overwhelm any traditional human mind, although he rarely mucks around with his own brain too much . . . as shown in Figure 1-4.



FIGURE 1-4: Reed . . . um . . . stretches his powers to the limit!

By Ryan North and Ivan Fiorelli.

Beyond his incredible intelligence and versatile powers, Reed has an enormously loving heart and an insatiable curiosity, qualities that are often at odds with each other. He loves his family and will do almost anything for them — but he is easily distracted by any scientific question that crosses his path. Even the concept of the Fantastic Four, which positions his super hero family almost as celebrities, is intended to provide the best possible lives for the people he loves most, who he has cursed never to be normal. But nothing stops him, once he realizes what he's done, from turning their powers, their lives, to doing good.

The Invisible Woman — The real muscle of the team

Almost no one in the Marvel Universe has had as long and arduous a character arc as Susan Storm-Richards (as Figure 1-5 demonstrates) . . . but that's to be expected. On one hand, being the first female hero in the biggest and most popular line of super hero comics breaks one heck of a glass ceiling. On the other, being the first female meant being, for a while at least, the one most saddled with sexist tropes and stories.



FIGURE 1-5: The Invisible Woman over the years.

Art by Russell Dauterman.

In the beginning, the Invisible Girl (and calling her a "girl" was probably the most egregious example of that sexism — they didn't call the Human Torch "Fire Boy") was considered the weakest member of the team — and that was probably true.

Her only power at the time was the ability to turn invisible, which was good for reconnaissance, sneak attacks, and evading threats . . . but not much more. But what she lacked in power, she made up in courage, despite the less enlightened era. Unfortunately, as often as not, that courage meant a willingness to become the Sub-Mariner's would-be bride or Doctor Doom's hostage. Even when performing serious tasks, like searching for her missing brother, there were moments like the one seen in Figure 1-6, undermining her heroism.

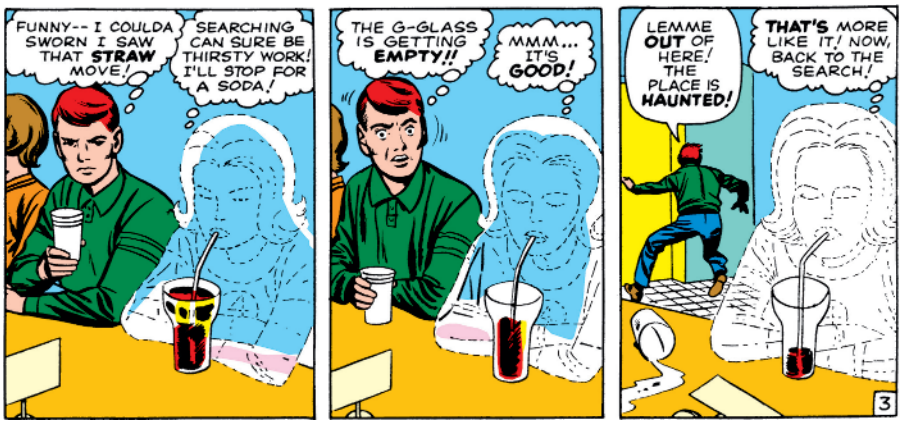


FIGURE 1-6: The Invisible Girl wasn't always given the toughest assignments.

By Stan Lee and Sol Brodsky.

She was also a pretty blonde with aspirations of being an actress before she became a super hero. Now, she's been *retconned* (there's that term again) into having a doctorate in archaeology — She's *Doctor* Susan Storm-Richards. Of all the growth she's had over the decades, this might be the piece I find most personally satisfying.

In *Fantastic Four* (1961) #22, her powers expand — and things begin to change. She gains the power to make other things invisible, which is much more remarkably versatile than it sounds, and she gains the ability to project invisible force fields. But even then, she doesn't quite come into her own, at least, not until the 1980s.

It was writer/artist John Byrne who had Sue start using her powers in a much more creative and interesting way. Her force fields can be shaped however she likes, and she can use them to temporarily restrain even beings as powerful as the Hulk. Her ability to move and manipulate objects using force fields is all but indistinguishable from powerful telekinesis. Byrne was careful to make these changes gradually, over the course of his run. Sue wanted to be a more powerful and useful member of the team, and less a liability — so Reed, as team leader, began pushing her to train her powers, increasing her strength, stamina, and control. (It was also during the John Byrne years, which ran from 1981 to 1986, that Sue was rechristened the Invisible *Woman.*)

To put it another way, keeping her family all invisible for any length of time once exhausted her — but more recently, she is literally able to turn the sun's rays invisible over a swath of three states for three days, a feat so incredible that the U.S. government became concerned about her status as a global superpower. She is now routinely referred to as the most powerful member of the Fantastic Four.


REMEMBER

The best thing about her, however, is that being "most powerful" simply doesn't interest her. There was a time when she was the most fearful, brave but fearful, member of the family — but now she is perhaps the most confident. Confident people don't need to prove how powerful they are, and neither does Sue. She's the hero we see in Figure 1-7, more interested in her roles as teammate, mentor, wife, and mother.

Look, I'm a guy who fancies himself a feminist, and one of the reasons that I get to write this book comes from my admiration of how Sue has developed as a character. I firmly believe that Sue Storm-Richards is why I gravitate to (yes, I'm going to use the dreaded phrase) strong female characters . . . and why I want to write them. Sue Storm-Richards is an absolute icon.

The Human Torch — His superpower is *exactly* what you think

If Susan Storm-Richards has one of the longest character arcs in all of comics, then her brother Johnny has to have one of the shortest. He's gotten a little older and considerably more experienced in the use of his powers, but in many ways, he's still the thoughtless and irresponsible kid now as he was in *The Fantastic Four* (1961) #1.

Becoming the Human Torch is probably the best thing that could have happened to Johnny. He's a reasonably bright, reasonably attractive young man who would have made a reasonably successful race car driver and auto mechanic. He's a bit of a hot (no pun intended) dog and kind of undisciplined unless properly motivated. Winning races was probably not motivation enough — but saving the world definitely is. Of course, it goes a little deeper than that.

Johnny and his sister were essentially orphaned at a young age — their mother died young, and their father ended up in jail. Sue all but raised Johnny; she's the last person he would ever allow himself to disappoint. To be fair, Stan and Jack probably weren't thinking that Johnny would ride the rocket because he didn't want to disappoint his sister, but it makes sense in retrospect.

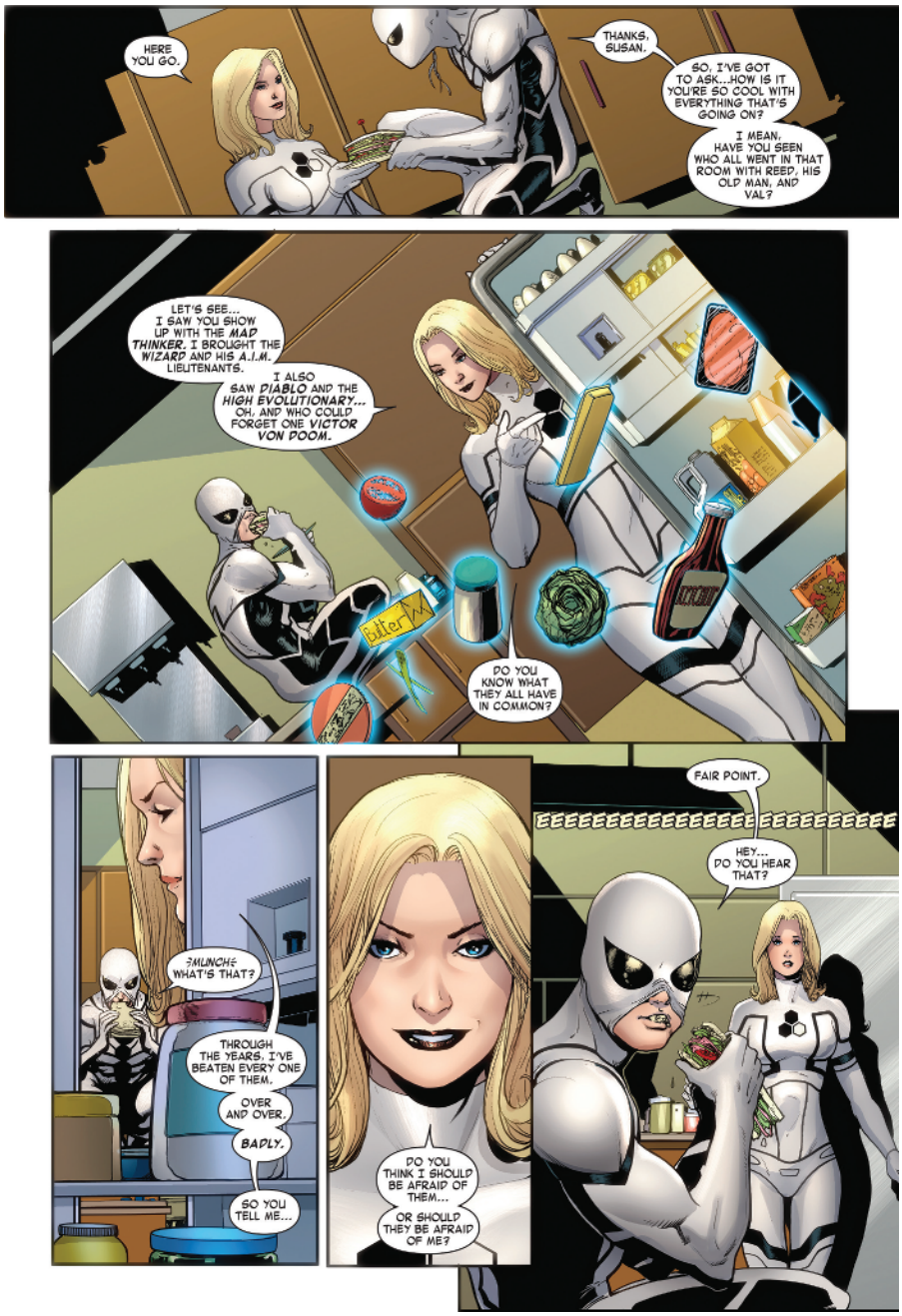


FIGURE 1-7: The Invisible Woman makes sandwiches knowing that her enemies don't want that smoke.

By Jonathan Hickman and Barry Kitson.

He was there to provide the annoying little brother dynamic, and he has excelled at that from the very start. Never one to try to get too far under sister Sue's skin, Johnny has chosen to antagonize the Thing since the very start of the series. (The biggest sign that he has grown *somewhat* is the fact that he's far less prone to mocking Ben for his appearance. Punching down isn't cool.) But he's still an annoying little brother — to the whole team, not just to Sue.

Sue wouldn't have been disappointed in a racer that won only occasionally, but she would if Johnny gave anything less than his best when it really mattered. So Johnny might be arrogant, vain, and shallower than a mud puddle — but he's one hell of a super hero.

Like Reed and Sue, Johnny's powers were very straightforward at first — he could ignite himself, fly, and throw balls and blasts of fire. Soon, his powers expanded to allow him to manipulate other fires and to sculpt temporary objects from flame, even fiery constructs as intricate as fully functional duplicates of himself, as seen in Figure 1-8.

Johnny is capable of releasing his stored power with incredible explosive force, a move he refers to as his Nova Flame. All you need to do is look at Figure 1-9 to know that it's a sight to behold.

"A mile above the city the Torch halts, suddenly channeling every iota of his power into a single burst . . . a burst that rivals the energies of an exploding star!"

—NARRATION, FANTASTIC FOUR *(1961) #232 (BY JOHN BYRNE)*

The Nova Flame is regularly referred to as being comparable to the power of a star . . . but there's also this:

*"Throwing fireballs, **juggling** fireballs, flame cages, flame number fours in the sky — am I forgetting anything, babe?"*

*"Makin' a **slightly** hotter fire than usual an' tellin' everyone it's a 'nova flame.'"*

—ALICIA MASTERS-GRIMM AND BEN GRIMM, FANTASTIC FOUR *(2022), #8 (BY RYAN NORTH & IVAN FIORELLI)*

Now, exchanges like this are a perfect example of the good-natured ribbing that takes place amongst a team . . . or a family . . . so maybe it doesn't mean anything. But maybe it means that describing Johnny's Nova Flame as comparable to "an exploding star" is a bit of hyperbole. In any event, he can really go boom when he needs to!

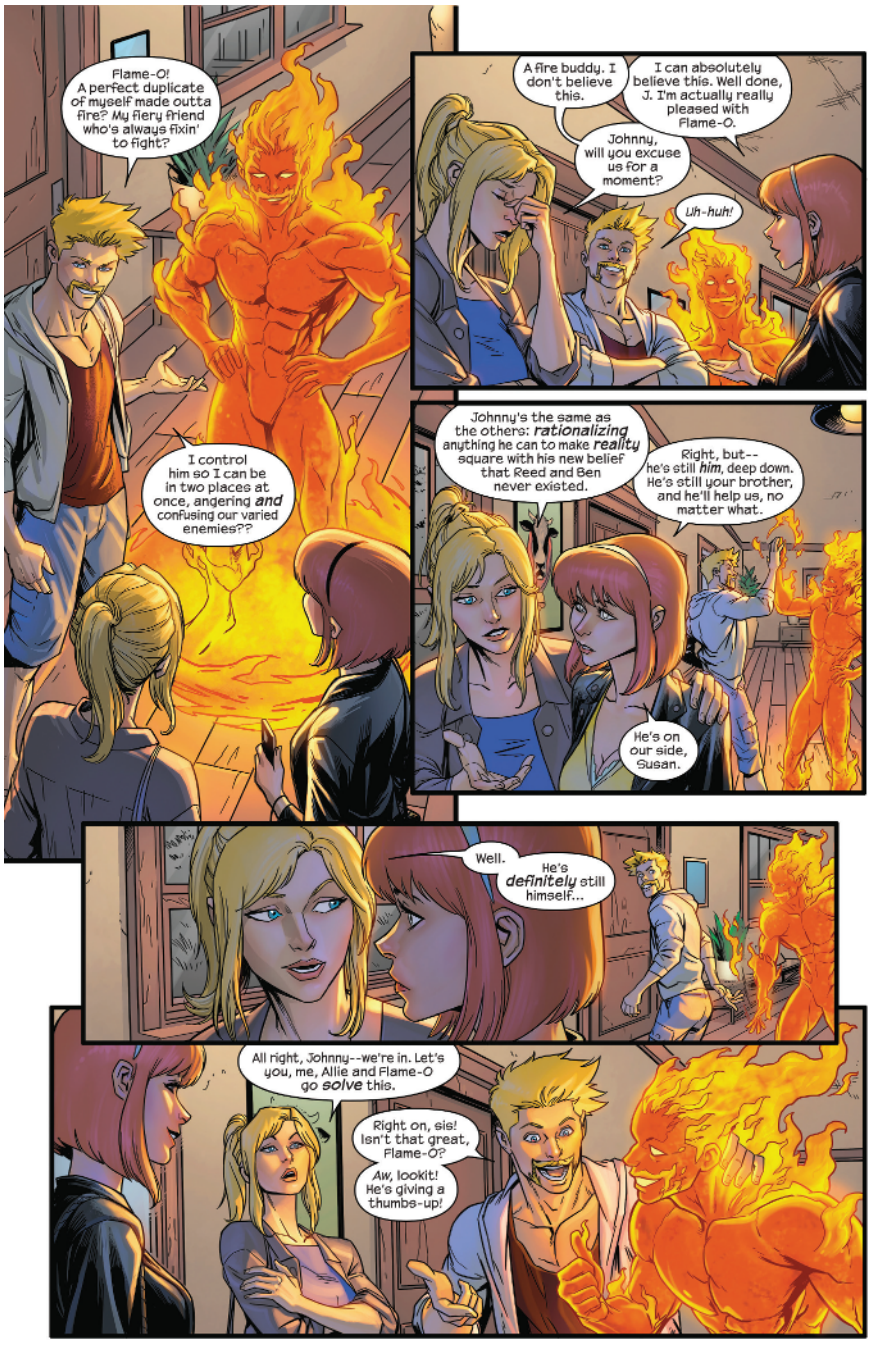


FIGURE 1-8: Johnny is literally high-fiving himself.

By Ryan North and Ivan Fiorelli.



FIGURE 1-9: Johnny uses his Nova Flame on the encroaching Annihilation Wave!

Story by Jonathan Hickman. Art by Carmine DiGiandomenico.

The Thing — The real heart of the team

If there is a most popular member of the FF, at least among comics fans, it has to be Aunt Petunia's favorite Ever-Lovin' Blue-Eyed Thing. Benjamin J. Grimm is the only member of the team (or at least the original four) to maintain his own long-running solo series.

It will come as a surprise to no one that I've been reading and rereading *a lot* of *Fantastic Four* comics the past few weeks, including the earliest part of their run starting in 1961. I know these characters incredibly well and always have . . . but I was not prepared for how truly angry Ben Grimm is in those early stories.

And why not? His best friend made him into a monster.

Before the spaceflight that gave the FF their superpowers, Ben Grimm is a real man's man. Once a college football star, now he's a test pilot — truly a self-made man. He's scraped his way out of one of the roughest neighborhoods in New York, and now he's been tapped to pilot the rocket that could change everything.

And of course, it does.

What you see in Figure 1-10 is not the almost cuddly version of the Thing that comes only a few short years later, looking more like a football mascot or something — here he looks almost like a villain . . . and sometimes even acts like one. He takes the contrary position to anything anyone says, takes offense to every startled look, and reacts with threats of force (that he sometimes acts on). But he always shows up to fight the bad guy. Always.



Art by Jack Kirby.

FIGURE 1-10:
The first pin-up of the Marvel Age, featuring the Ever-Lovin' Blue-Eyed Thing!

Everything changes when he meets Alicia Masters, stepdaughter of Philip Masters, the Puppet Master. (See Chapter 3 for more on *him.*) A blind sculptor, Alicia manages to see Ben and not the Thing, even though she produces statue after statue of the monstrous hero.

Reed, of course, devotes incredible amounts of time and energy to curing his friend — never quite succeeding. At first, it's just impossibly hard to do, but over time, Reed comes to believe that Ben doesn't want to change back and actually *resists* efforts at a cure, because he believes that it's the Thing that Alicia loves . . . not Ben Grimm.

Ben's relationship with the team goes through its ups and downs, culminating in several extended leaves of absence, but he always comes back. His relationship with Alicia has its bumps in the road as well, but now they are very happily married and parents to a pair of adopted alien kids.



REMEMBER

Reed is the brains of the team, Johnny the ego, and Sue the muscle — and Ben, of course, is the heart and soul. He's their rock, if you'll forgive the pun, the one who doesn't give up, no matter what. He gets overwhelmed sometimes and needs to get away — being a monster is hard. But if there's one . . . um, thing . . . for sure, it's that Ben Grimm can handle life the hard way.

As for his powers — I mean, he's big and strong. He doesn't age (not that it really matters). Shoot, my favorite power of his is the catchphrase! Who knew back in Fantastic Four (1961) #22 that "*It's clobberin' time!*" was going to become perhaps the most famous battle-cry in comics?

The Family Dynamic

There's the family you're born with — or give birth to: mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter. There's also the family you choose: close friends and spouses — and sometimes their close friends or spouses. Chosen families often don't share names (unless spouses count as chosen family), but friend circles sometimes like to name themselves.

When you think of a guy who does everything with his wife, her brother, and his best friend . . . what sort of a name do you imagine they'd come up with? Let's be honest, there are probably chosen families out there in the real world rocking the name "Fantastic Four." Why not? It's perfect. Everyone likes a good alliteration, don't they? They're memorable and they roll off the tongue.

Do I think that this was what Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were thinking about when they coined "Fantastic Four?" Probably not. (Well, maybe the alliteration part.) But it probably helped to shape the comic and what it ultimately became.

But let's look at the two halves of the family dynamic.

Family by blood

Sue and Johnny Storm are the only members of the team that are actually related by blood, at least to start. Johnny is only aboard the fateful spaceflight because he's Sue's little brother (although he is later retconned as having trained as a backup pilot); they were essentially stealing the rocket from the government and needed a crew. Reed trusted Sue and Sue trusted Johnny.

In the earliest days, Johnny and Sue would worry about each other . . . and that worry would manifest as nagging or pestering. When Sue goes off on her own to follow "The Miracle Man" back in *The Fantastic Four* (1961) #3, Johnny worries himself sick until she's back . . . and when the Torch quits at the end of the very same issue, it's Sue's turn to agonize over Johnny.

Of course, just like siblings in the real world, they only worry when there's something to worry about. Sue doesn't worry about Johnny when she douses his flame while he's irritating Ben — nor he Sue when he steals and burns the picture of Namor the Sub-Mariner that she's been keeping secret.

Sue and Reed get married relatively early on, and soon enough she is a mother. That's not to say that Johnny and Sue grow apart — they all live together, after all — but their relationship does evolve, just as it would in a sibling relationship with fewer superpowers and less flashy clothing. Once Reed and Sue have their first child, Franklin . . . Reed and Johnny become truly bound by blood.

When Johnny is thought dead, Sue is one of the reasons that the Fantastic Four merges into the Future Foundation — there are no longer four of them, and she can't stand to be a part of the same team if her brother isn't there. (Also, she's very clear that the Future Foundation, with its multi-pronged focus on adventure and education and involvement with the strangeness of the world, is for her a needed chance to stay busy.) As for Reed, when he tries to recover Johnny's corpse from the villain Annihilus in the Negative Zone (I promise, I cover all of these people, places, and events in upcoming chapters!), he refers to Johnny as his brother. No mention of an "in-law."

As I mentioned before, Sue is something of a mother-figure to Johnny. This makes Reed, who is already team leader, into something between an older brother and a father-figure. Johnny respects Reed immensely, and he shows it by mocking or ignoring every $50 word that comes out of Reed's mouth, the way an annoying kid brother should.

Chosen family

There's an argument to be made that the family you choose is more important than the family bound to you by blood . . . and anyone who has ever been (happily) married can attest to that. Reed Richards shares those kinds of bonds with the rest of the Fantastic Four, but I'm not sure that it was always that way.

Stan and Jack probably weren't doing a navel-gazey examination of the family dynamics when they created these characters, but they very intentionally added the good and bad of adventuring with your family. Their earliest adventures were filled with strife, but that was down mostly to them learning to deal with the stress of suddenly becoming super heroes . . . or in Ben's case, a monster.

But from the very beginning, Reed Richards owned his part in what had happened to them, and his life became a testament to loyalty. Since they could no longer live normal lives, he devoted himself to making sure they lived . . . well, fantastic ones.

It took a while for the bonds between them to fully form. Sue was torn between love for Reed and an infatuation with Namor. Ben was *angry*. Johnny was . . . well, Johnny. But Reed persisted, working tirelessly to teach them, to help them, to protect them. And they returned his efforts in kind.

They started off almost as a family of blood, bound together by a common experience rather than common ancestors. But they have become a family bound by love — love of adventure and love of each other.

As you see in Figure 1-11, they have become a family . . . because that is what they have *chosen.*



FIGURE 1-11:
Family photo.

Art by Gary Frank.