

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

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BY THE
COMICS
CODE
AUTHORITY

Fantastic FOUR

51
JUNE

MARVEL
COMICS
GROUP

IND.

12¢

"THIS
MAN...
THIS
MONSTER!"

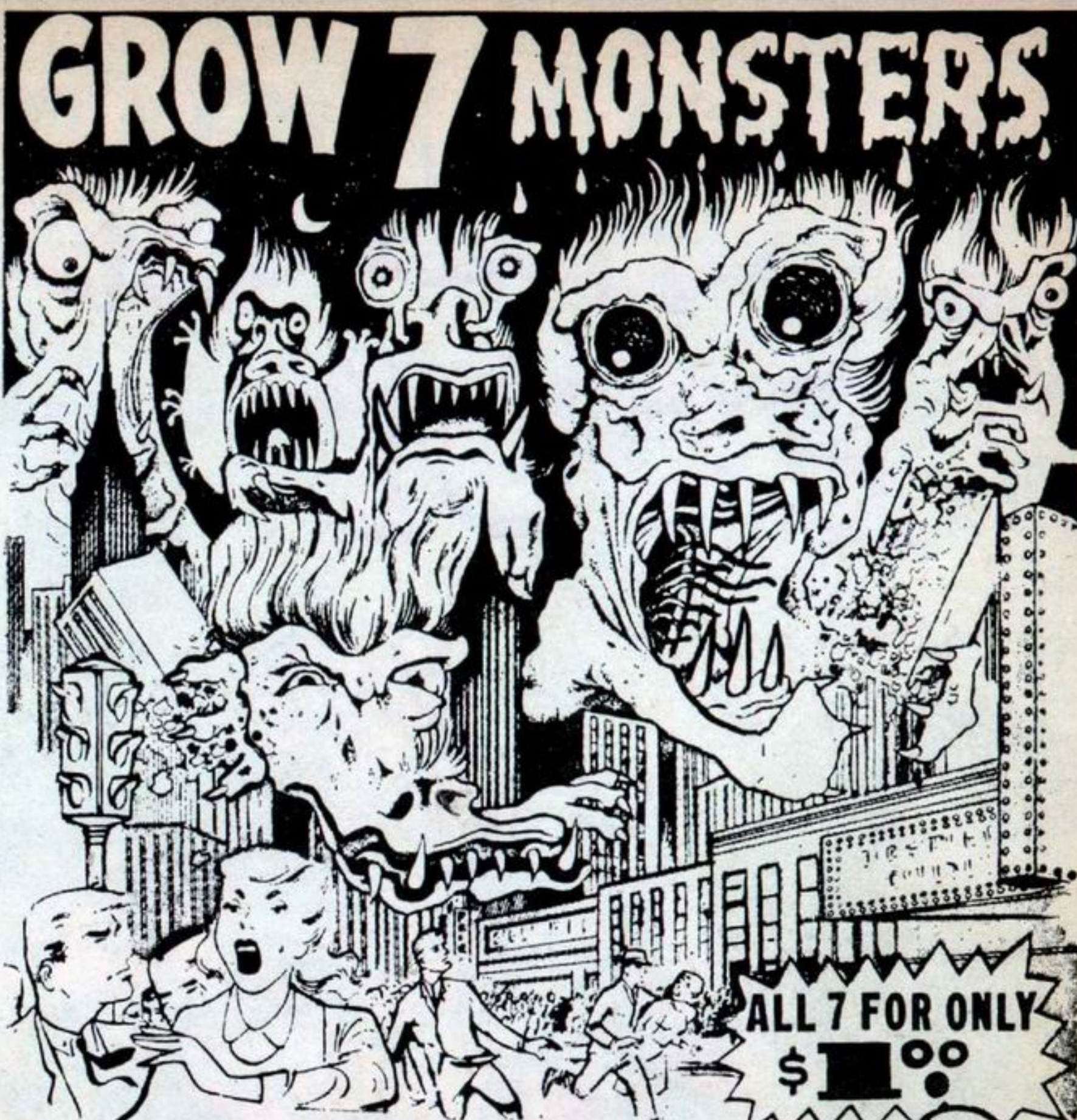


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AWAIT YOU
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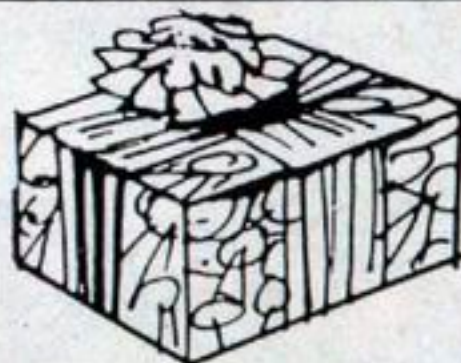
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THE FABULOUS **F.F.** MUST SOLVE THE TERRIBLE RIDDLE OF...

"THIS MAN... THIS MONSTER!"

QUITE POSSIBLY,
THIS MAY BE ONE OF
THE GREATEST ILLUSTRATED
EPICS YET PRODUCED
BY...

STAN LEE
WRITER

JACK KIRBY
PENCILLER

JOE SINNOTT
INKER

ARTIE SIMEK
LETTERER



OCCASIONALLY, A TALE NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION! THIS IS SUCH A TALE! A RAINY NIGHT--A STRANGELY FORLORN FIGURE--AND RARE WONDERMENT AWAITS US--!

I'LL NEVER BE HUMAN AGAIN!
I'LL LIVE--AND DIE--JUST
THE WAY I AM!

LOOK,
DAVE!
ISN'T THAT
--THE
THING?

HE MUST
BE! TODAY
ISN'T
HALLOWEEN!



WANT A LIFT,
BIG FELLA? A
GUY CAN CATCH
A COLD THAT
WAY!

A NORMAL GUY, Y'MEAN! WEATHER
DON'T BOTHER ME!

IS ANYTHING
WRONG? YOU
LOOK KINDA
BEAT!

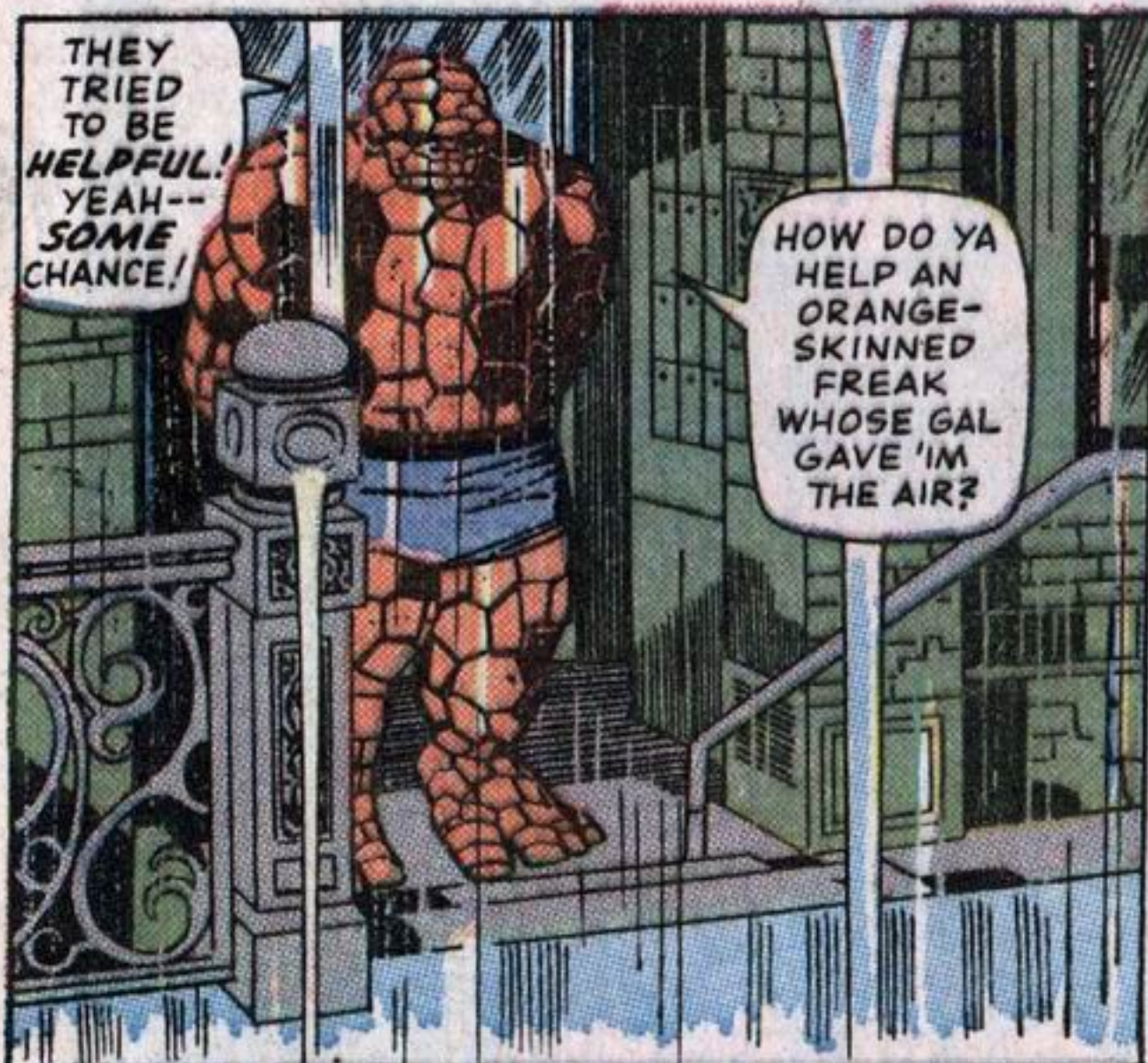
SO WOULD YOU,
IF YA HAD A
FACE LIKE
MINE!

AWW, DON'T MIND
ME! I'M OKAY!
EVERYTHIN'S
COMIN' UP ROSES!
SEE YA AROUND!



THEY
TRIED
TO BE
HELPFUL!
YEAH--
SOME
CHANCE!

HOW DO YA
HELP AN
ORANGE-
SKINNED
FREAK
WHOSE GAL
GAVE 'IM
THE AIR?



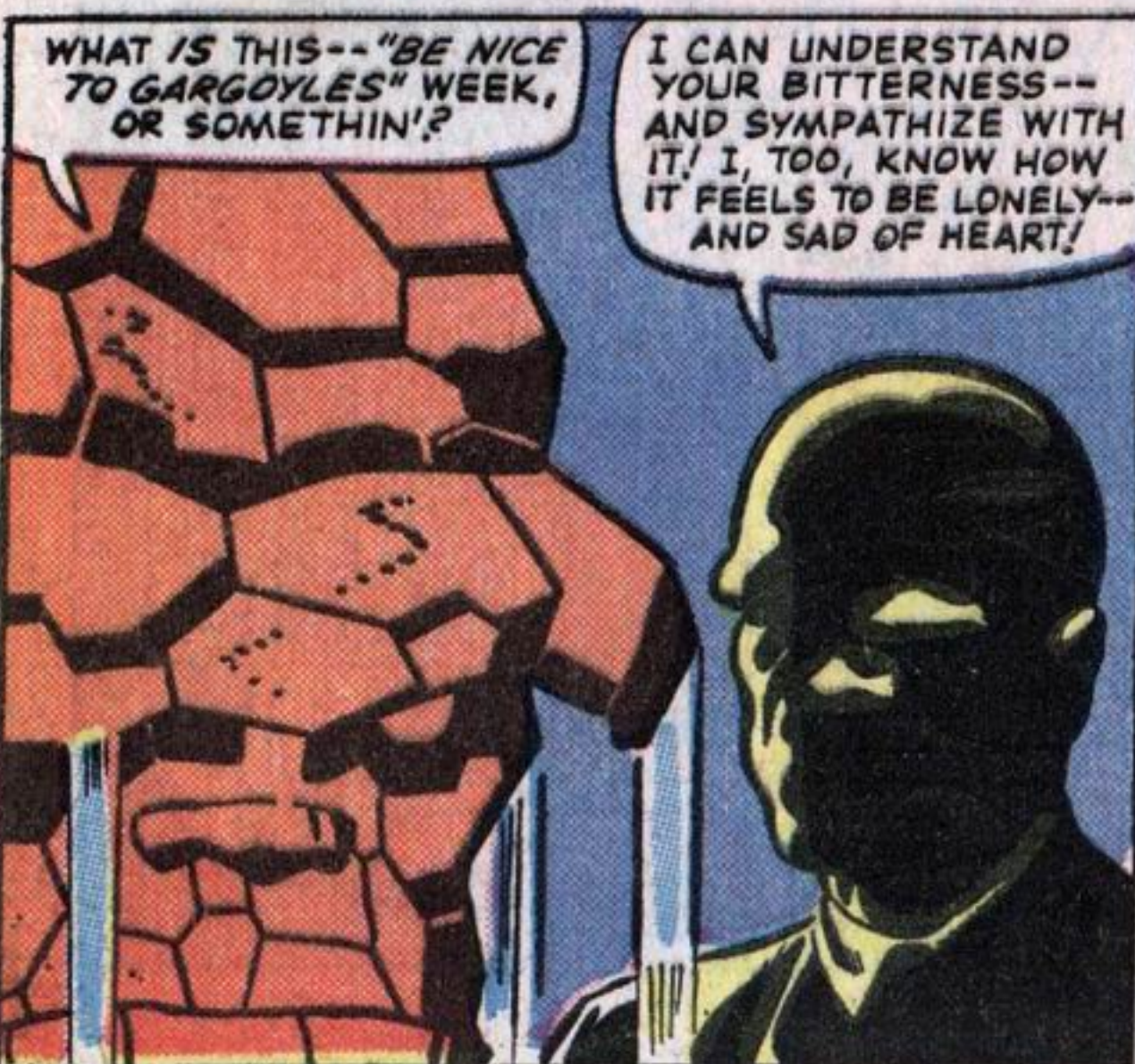
I WONDER WHAT MADE
ME WALK TO THIS
NEIGHBORHOOD? ALMOST
LIKE SOMETHIN' WAS
PULLIN'--HEY!

I SAW YOU
OUT THERE
IN THE RAIN!
WHY NOT
COME IN
WHERE IT'S
WARM AND
DRY?



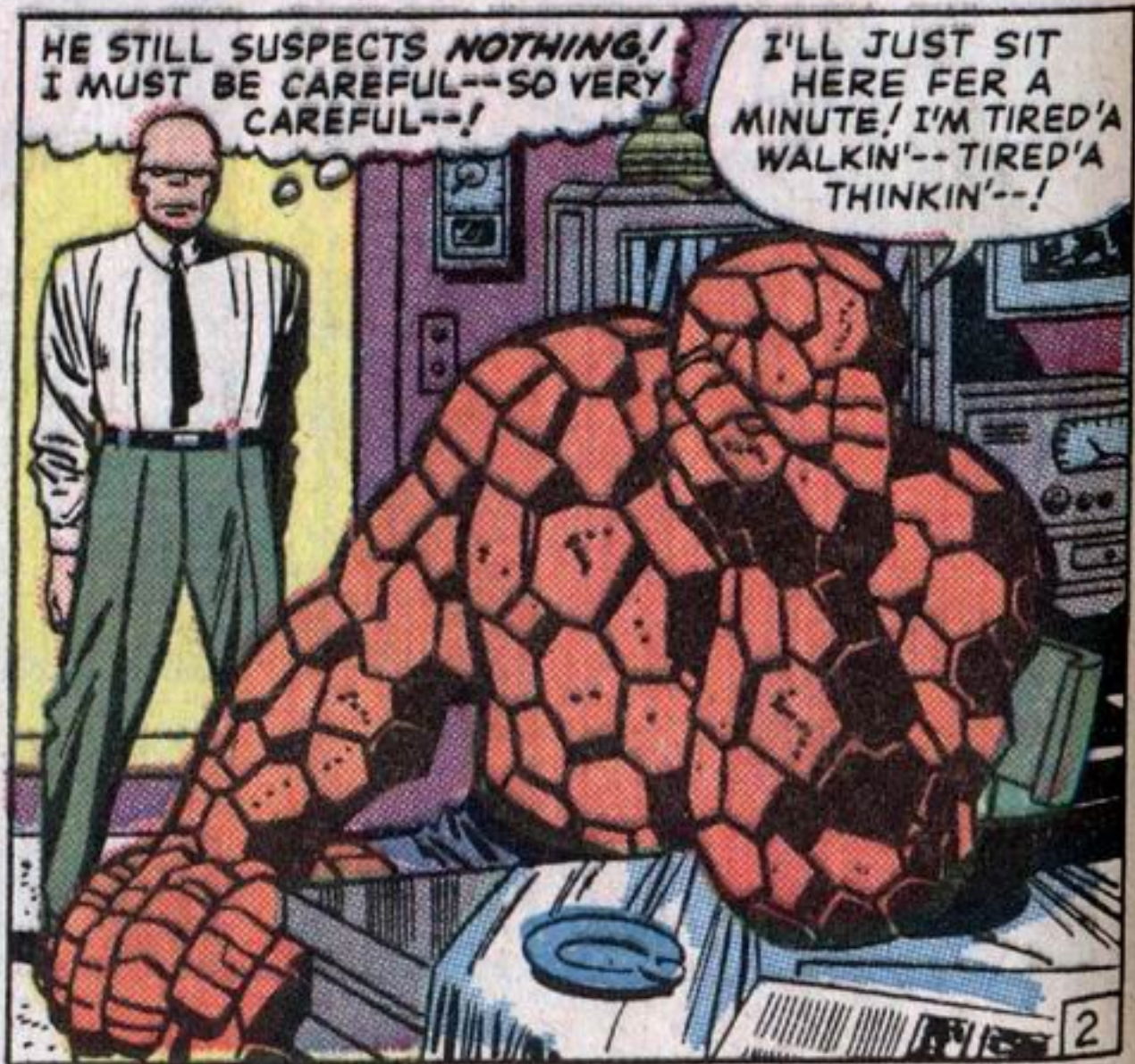
WHAT IS THIS--"BE NICE
TO GARGOYLES" WEEK,
OR SOMETHIN'?

I CAN UNDERSTAND
YOUR BITTERNESS--
AND SYMPATHIZE WITH
IT! I, TOO, KNOW HOW
IT FEELS TO BE LONELY--
AND SAD OF HEART!



HE STILL SUSPECTS NOTHING!
I MUST BE CAREFUL--SO VERY
CAREFUL--!

I'LL JUST SIT
HERE FER A
MINUTE! I'M TIRED'A
WALKIN'--TIRED'A
THINKIN'--!





PERHAPS A WARM CUP OF COFFEE WILL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER!

THERE AINT ENUFF COFFEE IN THE *WORLD* TO--
AW NUTS!

I'M BEGINNIN' TO SOUND LIKE A BLASTED SOAP OPERA!

THAT'S ALL RIGHT--I DON'T MIND!



WHAT'S *YOUR* ANGLE, PAL? YOU A TALENT SCOUT FER A FREAK SHOW OR SOMETHIN'?

NO... BUT I *TOO* HAVE BEEN--REJECTED!



I'M A *SCIENTIST*--BUT, I'M ALSO A MAN WHO KNOWS HOW IT FEELS TO BE *SCORNE*D BY OTHERS--TO BE *MOCKED* AND *RIDICULED*--BECAUSE OF MY *THEORIES*!



KNOCK IT OFF--YER BREAKIN' MY HEART! ONE *REED RICHARDS* IS ENUFF!

AH, I WISH I HAD *RICHARD'S MONEY*--AND HIS *EQUIPMENT*!



WITH HIS REPUTATION--HIS FAME--HIS ASSETS--HE CAN ACCOMPLISH SEEMING *MIRACLES*!

YOU SURE COME ON STRONG, MISTER!



WELL, THANKS FOR THE JAVA, CHUM! I'M GONNA GRAB ME SOME SHUT-EYE...!

HE'S TIRED! THE "*COFFEE*" WORKED WELL!

WAIT!



NO NEED TO GO OUT IN THE RAIN! I HAVE A COUCH YOU CAN USE! IT ISN'T MUCH--BUT, IF YOU'RE SLEEPY--?

I DON'T *GET* IT! I CAN HARDLY KEEP MY PEEPER'S OPEN! I'M *BUSHED*--!



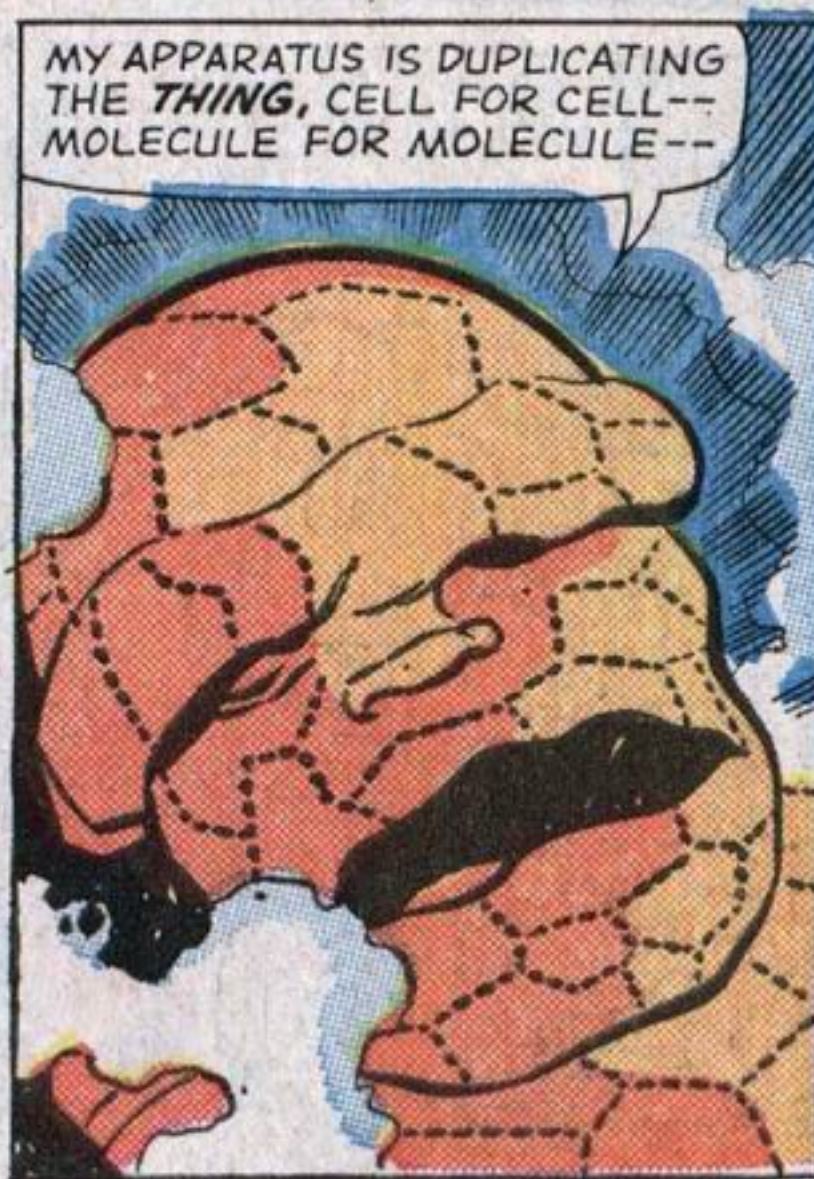
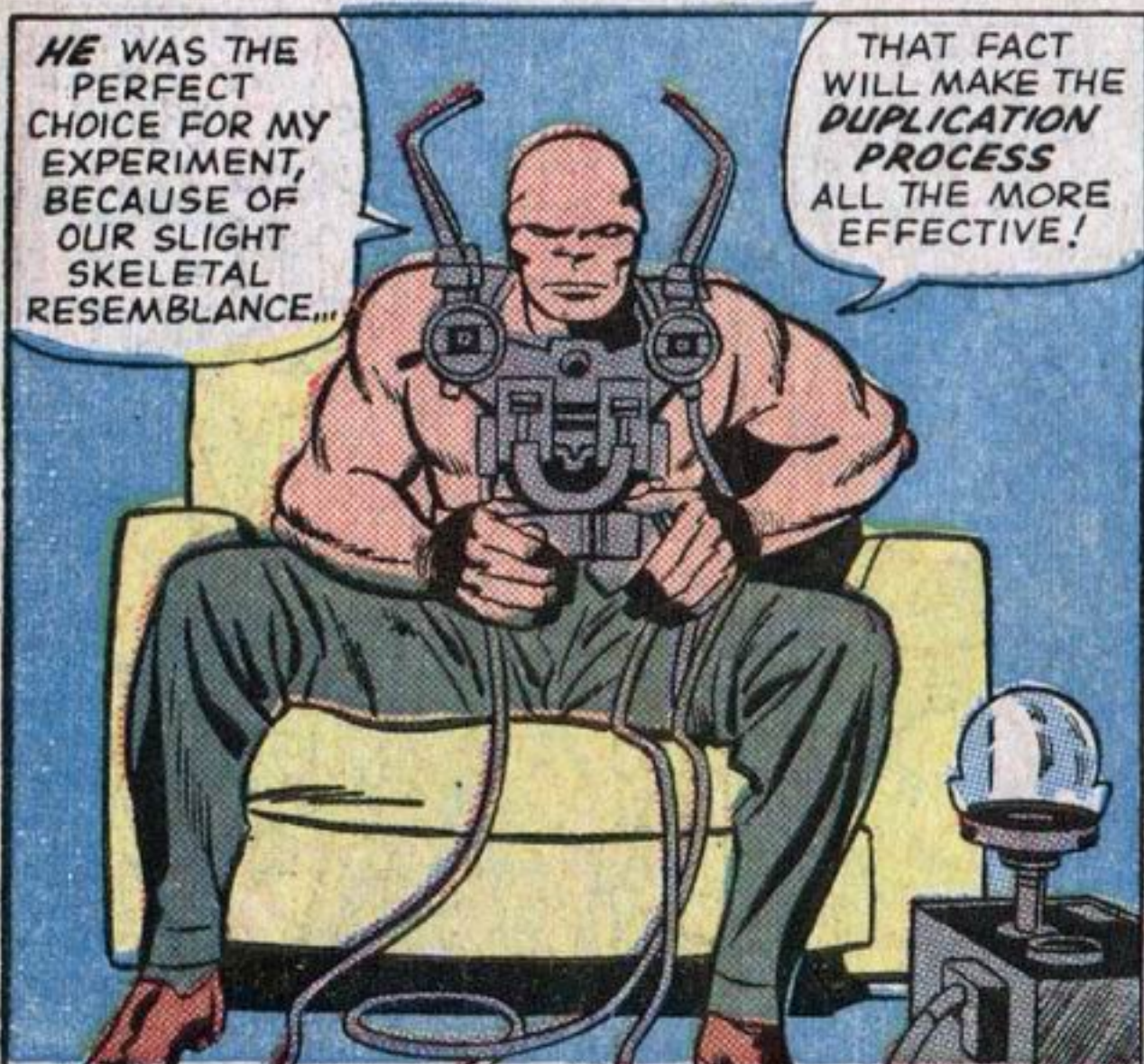
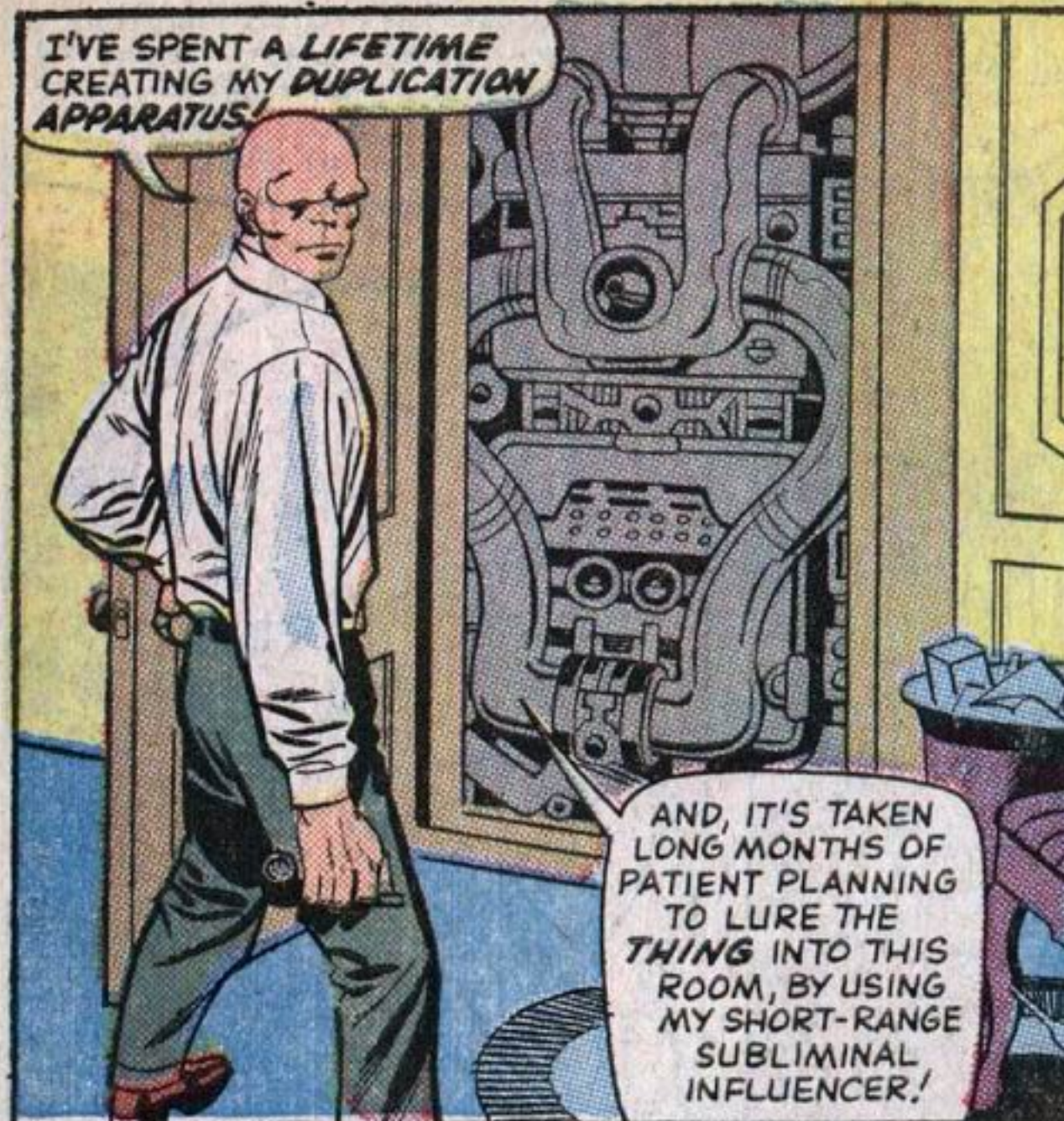
SO FAR, SO GOOD! HE'S SOUND ASLEEP! EVERYTHING WORKED *PERFECTLY*!

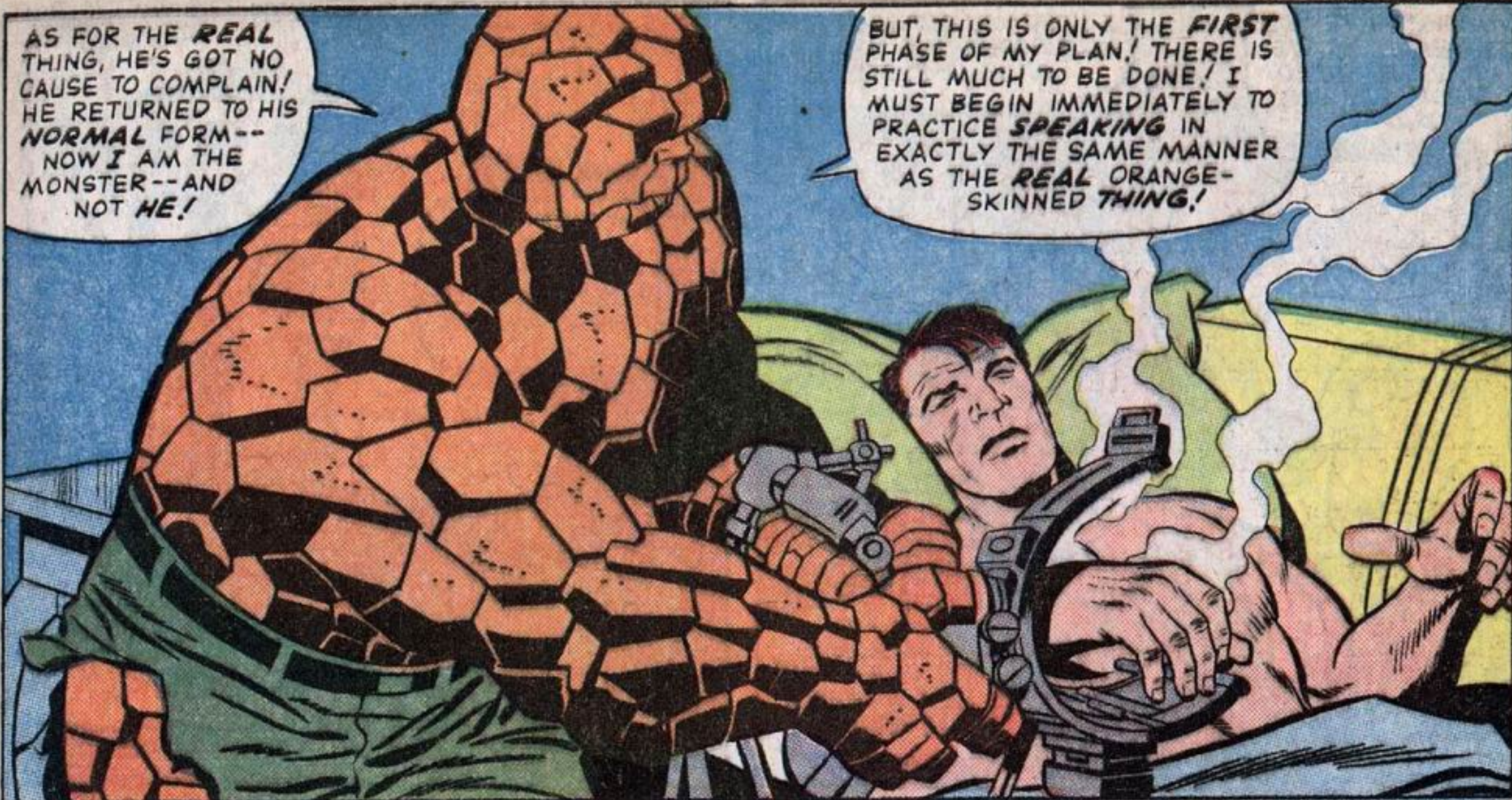


AFTER TONIGHT, THEY'LL LAUGH AT MY *THEORIES* NO LONGER! I'LL HAVE *PROVEN* MYSELF AT LAST!

AND THEN, I'LL SCORE THE GREATEST *TRIUMPH* OF ALL! SINGLE-HANDED, I'LL DESTROY THE ENTIRE *FANTASTIC FOUR*!

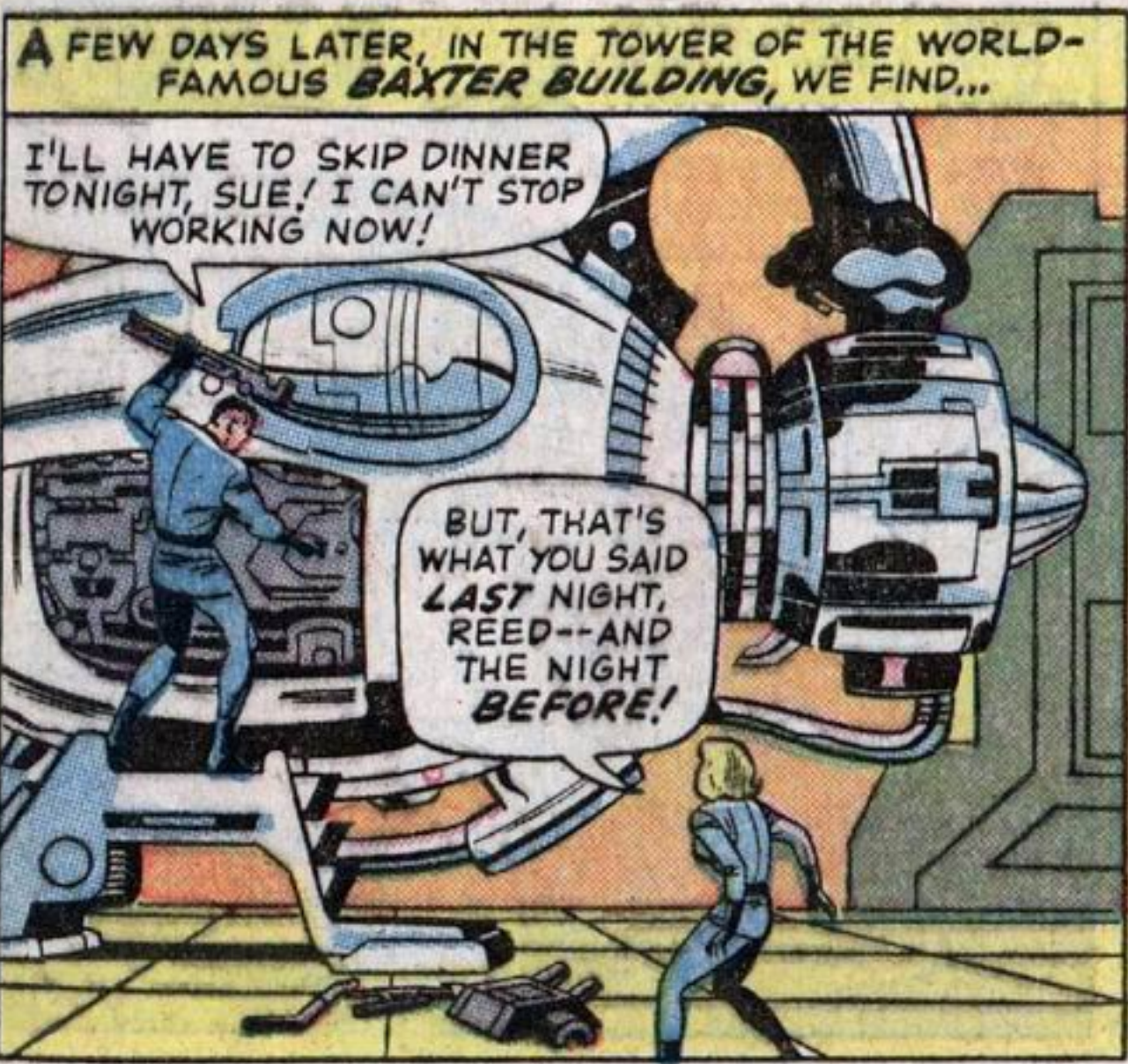
THUS, I'LL PROVE FOR ALL TIME THAT I'M THE MENTAL *SUPERIOR* OF REED RICHARDS!





AS FOR THE **REAL** THING, HE'S GOT NO CAUSE TO COMPLAIN! HE RETURNED TO HIS **NORMAL FORM**-- NOW I AM THE MONSTER--AND NOT HE!

BUT, THIS IS ONLY THE **FIRST** PHASE OF MY PLAN! THERE IS STILL MUCH TO BE DONE! I MUST BEGIN IMMEDIATELY TO PRACTICE **SPEAKING** IN EXACTLY THE SAME MANNER AS THE **REAL ORANGE-SKINNED THING!**



A FEW DAYS LATER, IN THE TOWER OF THE WORLD-FAMOUS **BAXTER BUILDING**, WE FIND...

I'LL HAVE TO SKIP DINNER TONIGHT, SUE! I CAN'T STOP WORKING NOW!

BUT, THAT'S WHAT YOU SAID LAST NIGHT, REED--AND THE NIGHT BEFORE!



I'M SORRY, DEAR-- BUT IT WON'T TAKE TOO MUCH LONGER!

IF THIS WORKS, IT WILL GIVE EARTH A **WEAPON** WITH WHICH TO FIGHT EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL MENACES--SUCH AS **GALACTUS!**

DO YOU THINK-- HE'LL RETURN??



THERE'S **ALWAYS** A CHANCE! AND, IN THIS NEW **SPACE AGE**, WE MUST HAVE ADEQUATE DEFENSES AGAINST ANY ATTACK!

I-I THINK YOU KNOW MORE THAN YOU'RE **TELLING ME!**

YOU'VE HAD WORK CREWS ALL WEEK BUILDING NEW MACHINES --ESPECIALLY THAT ONE IN THE LOCKED, LEAD-LINED ROOM!

HOW DID YOU FIND OUT--?



BUT, BEFORE THE PUZZLED GIRL CAN REPLY, A FAMILIAR VOICE BOOMS OUT--

WHAT'SSIZ ABOUT A LOCKED ROOM, STRETCHO?

BEN! YOU'RE BACK!

SURE! IT'S NICE'A YA TO NOTICE!



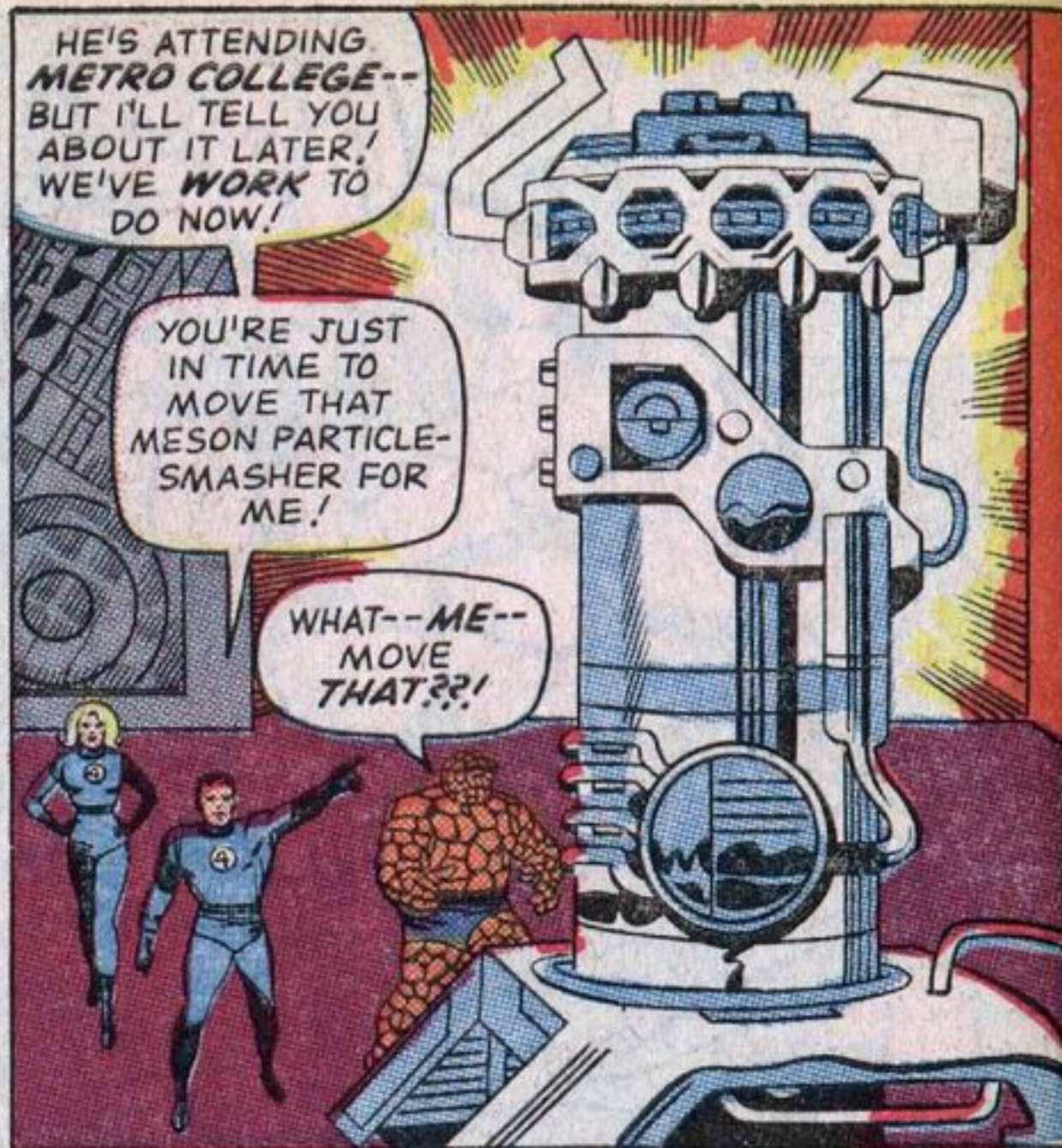
WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, BEN? WE HAVEN'T HEARD FROM YOU FOR DAYS!

I HAD ME SOME THINKIN' TO DO!

I HOPE YOU GOT WHATEVER WAS BOTHERING YOU OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM...

WE'VE NO TIME FOR PRIMA DONNAS HERE!

RELAX, HAMBONE! I'M OKAY NOW! HEY, WHERE'S THE TORCH?



HE'S ATTENDING METRO COLLEGE-- BUT I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT IT LATER! WE'VE WORK TO DO NOW!

YOU'RE JUST IN TIME TO MOVE THAT MESON PARTICLE-SMASHER FOR ME!

WHAT--ME--MOVE THAT??!



QUIT CLOWNING, BEN! I'M WORKING AGAINST TIME! EVERY MINUTE COUNTS!

OH--YEAH, SURE! OKAY-- I GUESS I CAN LIFT IT-- IF YA WANT ME TO!

OF COURSE YOU CAN! YOU'VE DONE IT DOZENS OF TIMES BEFORE!

SURE! SURE! I JUST FORGOT!



HEY! HOW ABOUT THAT??! WITH ONE HAND, YET!

OVER HERE, BEN! C'MON-- STEP ON IT!

WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU, BIG FELLA?



CAN'T YOU GUESS WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO HIM, BIG BRAIN??

THAT--THAT SOUNDS LIKE BEN!

WATCH YOURSELF, STRETCH! THAT GUY'S A FAKE! HE AINT THE THING --I AM!



REED! IT-- IT ISN'T POSSIBLE! BUT--LOOK!

EASY! THERE MUST BE AN ANSWER!

AWRIGHT, SMART GUY-- TALK! HOW'D YA DO IT?? HOW'D YOU TURN YOURSELF INTO THE THING?

I SAID TALK!

WAIT'LL I STOP TREMBLIN', SONNY!



LOOK, I DUNNO WHO THIS NUT IS, BUT IF HE DON'T STOP BREATHIN' IN MY FACE--!

HE KNOWS WHO I AM, ALL RIGHT! HE--HE **DUPLICATED** ME, SOMEHOW! HE TURNED INTO THE **THING**--AND I TURNED BACK TO **BEN GRIMM**! WE GOTTA MAKE 'IM ADMIT IT!

NOW **HOLD ON**, MISTER! THE **THING** ISN'T EXACTLY AN EASY MAN TO **IMITATE**!

HE'S NOT **IMITATING** ME--HE IS ME! I MEAN--!



STEP ASIDE, EGG-HEAD! I'LL SETTLE THIS BEFORE YA CAN SAY AUNT PETUNIA!

NO, BEN! HAVE YOU GONE **MAD??** YOU CAN'T **ATTACK** HIM WITH THAT **TITANIUM STEEL BAR**!



YOU GOTTA BE **KIDDIN'**! IF I WANTED TO CLOBBER 'IM, I WOULDN'T NEED ANY **BAR**!

I JUST WANNA PUT ON A LITTLE **SHOW** FOR YA--!



NOW, IF I AINT REALLY THE **THING**, THEN WHO'S DOIN'-- **THIS??!**

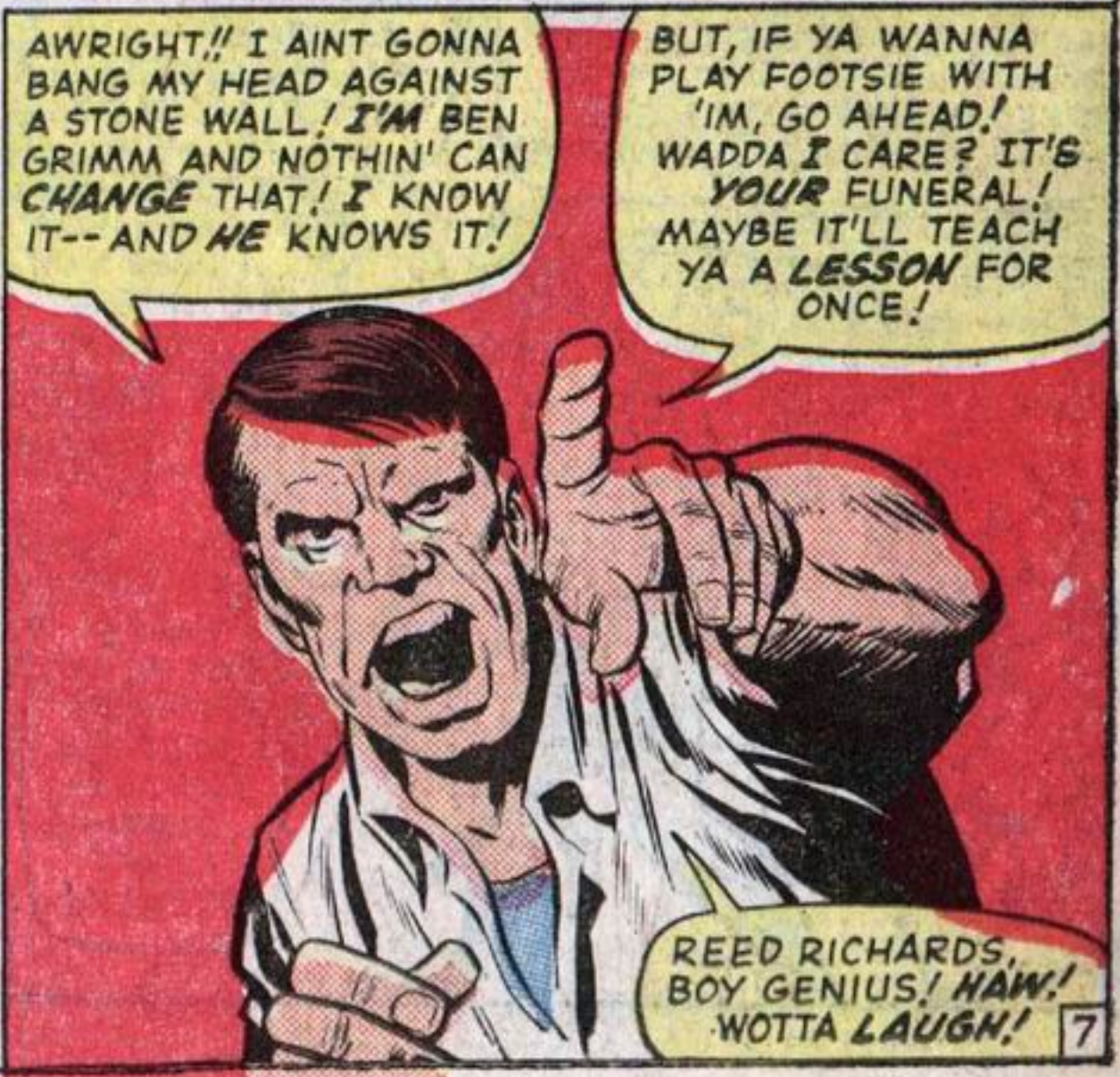


ANY QUESTIONS?

LOOK, FRIEND, I'LL ADMIT YOU BEAR AN UNCANNY RESEMBLANCE TO **BEN GRIMM**, BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU CAN EXPECT TO GET AWAY WITH SUCH A FOOLISH CLAIM!

Y-YOU MEAN YOU DON'T **BELIEVE** ME??!

YA CATCH ON REAL QUICK, BUB!



AWRIGHT!! I AINT GONNA BANG MY HEAD AGAINST A STONE WALL! I'M **BEN GRIMM** AND NOTHIN' CAN **CHANGE** THAT! I KNOW IT--AND HE KNOWS IT!

BUT, IF YA WANNA PLAY **FOOTSIE** WITH 'IM, GO AHEAD! WADDA I CARE? IT'S **YOUR FUNERAL**! MAYBE IT'LL TEACH YA A **LESSON** FOR ONCE!

REED RICHARDS, BOY GENIUS! **HAW!** WOTTA **LAUGH!**



IT'S **INCREDIBLE!** NOT ONLY IS HE A **DEAD-RINGER** FOR YOU, BEN, BUT HE **SOUNDS** JUST LIKE YOU!

BIG DEAL! HE'S PROBABLY BEEN TAKIN' **ELECUTION** LESSONS! TOO BAD I HADDA BLOW THE GUY'S GIMMICK-- I WONDER WHAT HE WUZ AFTER?



Y'KNOW, FER A MINUTE THERE I THOUGHT YA WUZ STARTIN' TO **BELIEVE** THAT **PHONY!**

IF HIS STORY WEREN'T SO **IMPOSSIBLE--** HE **DID** SEEM TO BE BEN GRIMM!

NOW DON'T GET HUFFY, BENJAMIN! YOU KNOW I'D TRUST YOU WITH MY **LIFE!**

IN FACT, THAT'S JUST WHAT I'M ABOUT TO **DO!**



HUH? **NOW** WHAT IN BLAZES ARE YA TALKIN' ABOUT?

I'VE GOT TO TEST A MACHINE I'VE JUST COMPLETED, BEN--AND IF ANYTHING GOES WRONG, ONLY **YOU** CAN SAVE ME!

REED! WHAT DO YOU MEAN? WHAT IS IT? YOU--YOU HAVEN'T **TOLD** ME--! THERE ISN'T **TIME**, SUE! HAVE FAITH IN ME--AS I HAVE IN **BEN!**



BUT, IF IT'S THAT DANGEROUS --WHY CAN'T I HELP YOU--?

I KNOW YOU'VE THE **HEART**, DARLING-- BUT YOU HAVEN'T THE **STRENGTH!** ONLY **BEN** CAN DO IT!

DO WHAT, REED? TELL ME--!

YES! I--I OWE YOU THAT MUCH!



THERE ARE THOSE WHO HAVE MASTERED THE **SPACE-TIME** PRINCIPLE--THE ABILITY TO SPEED FASTER THAN LIGHT, TO ANY PART OF THE UNIVERSE!

GALACTUS--THE WATCHER--THE SILVER SURFER-- THEY ALL CAN DO IT!

BUT--HOW DOES THAT AFFECT US?

THERE CAN BE **NO DEFENSE** AGAINST A FASTER-THAN-LIGHT ATTACK!



AND SO, FOR THE SAFETY OF EARTH--THE SAKE OF THE HUMAN RACE--MAN **TOO** MUST BREAK THE SAME BARRIER!

DANGER!

EXPERIMENT-SPACE TIME

AND THEN--
THEY ENTER
THE LOCKED
ROOM--
WHERE THEY
FIND--!

THIS HUGE, RADICAL
CUBE IS DESIGNED
TO CREATE A
DIMENSIONAL ENTRANCE
INTO *SUB-SPACE*, WHICH
IS THE AREA I MUST
EXPLORE!

I'M GOING TO
ENTER THE CUBE
NOW, BEN-- WHILE
YOU HOLD THAT
REEL OF SUPER-
TENSILE-STRENGTH
CABLE!

WHAT AM
I SUPPOSED
TO **DO** WITH
THE BLAMED
THING??

IF I RUN INTO
ANY **DANGER**,
I'LL **TUG** ON IT--
AND YOU'RE TO
PULL ME BACK
HERE **IMMEDIATELY**,
NO MATTER **WHAT**!

REED! WAIT--! TAKE
ME **WITH YOU!** PLEASE--
LET ME GO, TOO....!

I **CAN'T**, MY DARLING!
BUT, KNOWING THAT
YOU'RE HERE--WAITING
--I'LL COME BACK
THOUGH SATAN
HIMSELF SHOULD
BAR THE WAY!

AT THAT VERY MOMENT, UNAWARE OF THE CRISIS RAPIDLY DEVELOPING AT F.F. HEADQUARTERS, JOHNNY STORM AND HIS COLLEGE ROOMMATE, WYATT WINGFOOT, ARE AT THE KOZY KAMPUS KOFFEE SHOP..

THEY SURE ARE NOISY IN THAT BOOTH BEHIND US, JOHNNY!

YEAH! IT'S WHITEY MULLINS, THE BIG-MOULDED FOOTBALL STAR, AND HIS PERSONAL CHEERING SECTION!

I HEAR THAT THE HUMAN TORCH ENROLLED AT METRO, WHITEY! LOOKS LIKE YOU'LL BE HAVING SOME COMPETITION NOW!

NOT A CHANCE, SUGAR! TAKE AWAY HIS FLAME AND HE'S NOTHIN'!

GOT NEWS FOR YOU, WHITEY! HE'S IN THE NEXT BOOTH!

YOU'RE JOHNNY STORM, RIGHT? SAY HELLO TO WHITEY MULLINS!

SO THAT'S THE FAMOUS HUMAN TORCH! BIG DEAL!

OKAY--HELLO!

NO--HE'S NOT WHITEY!

BETTER TURN AROUND, JOHNNY! WHITEY WANTS A TALK TO YOU!

SO, LET 'IM TALK!

HOW ABOUT SHOWIN' US WHAT YOU CAN DO, KID? LET'S SEE YOU FLAME ON!

ALL RIGHT, IF IT'LL GET RID OF YOU SO I CAN FINISH MY JAVA IN PEACE!

HERE!--SATISFIED??

SURE! AND I'LL EVEN HELP DOUSE IT FOR YOU--LIKE THIS!

GOOD OL' WHITEY! HE'S A PANIC!

HEY!

GREAT SENSAHUMOR YOU GOT, MULLINS! HOW'DJA LIKE A FAT LIP TO GO WITH IT?

YOU WOULDN'T TALK SO BIG IF YOU WEREN'T THE HUMAN TORCH, SQUIRT!

I DON'T NEED MY FLAME TO HANDLE A CRUMB LIKE YOU!

I SAY YOU DO!



AND I SAY THAT HE *DOESN'T*!
WHO THE HECK ARE *YOU*??!

STAY *OUT* OF IT,
WYATT! THIS IS
MY FIGHT!

MY NAME IS *WYATT WINGFOOT*-- AND I
DON'T LIKE TO SEE MY FRIENDS PUSHED
AROUND-- NOT EVEN BY A GRANITE-BRAINED
GRIDIRON STAR!

OH!! LOOK AT THOSE
SHOULDERS--!!

WYATT WINGFOOT!
WHY DOES THAT
NAME SOUND SO
FAMILIAR??

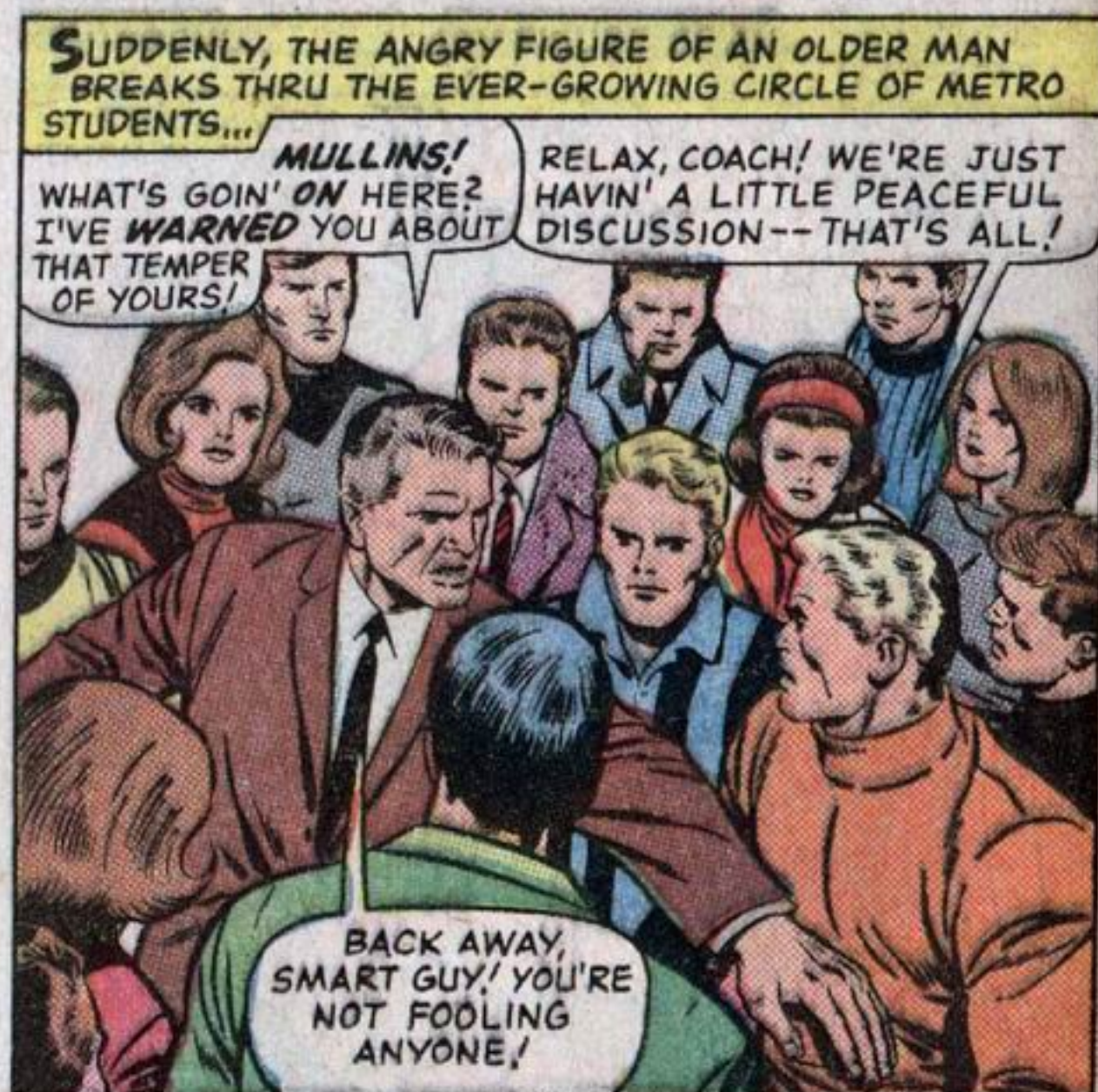


SO THE TORCH HAS TO GO
AROUND WITH A
BODYGUARD, HUH?

KNOCK IT OFF,
MULLINS! THIS
ISN'T *HIS*
FIGHT!

WHY DON'T YOU
JUST GO BACK TO
YOUR BOOTH?

NO ONE
TELLS ME
WHAT
TO DO!



SUDDENLY, THE ANGRY FIGURE OF AN OLDER MAN
BREAKS THRU THE EVER-GROWING CIRCLE OF METRO
STUDENTS...

MULLINS!
WHAT'S GOIN' *ON* HERE?
I'VE *WARNED* YOU ABOUT
THAT TEMPER
OF YOURS!

RELAX, COACH! WE'RE JUST
HAVIN' A LITTLE PEACEFUL
DISCUSSION-- THAT'S ALL!

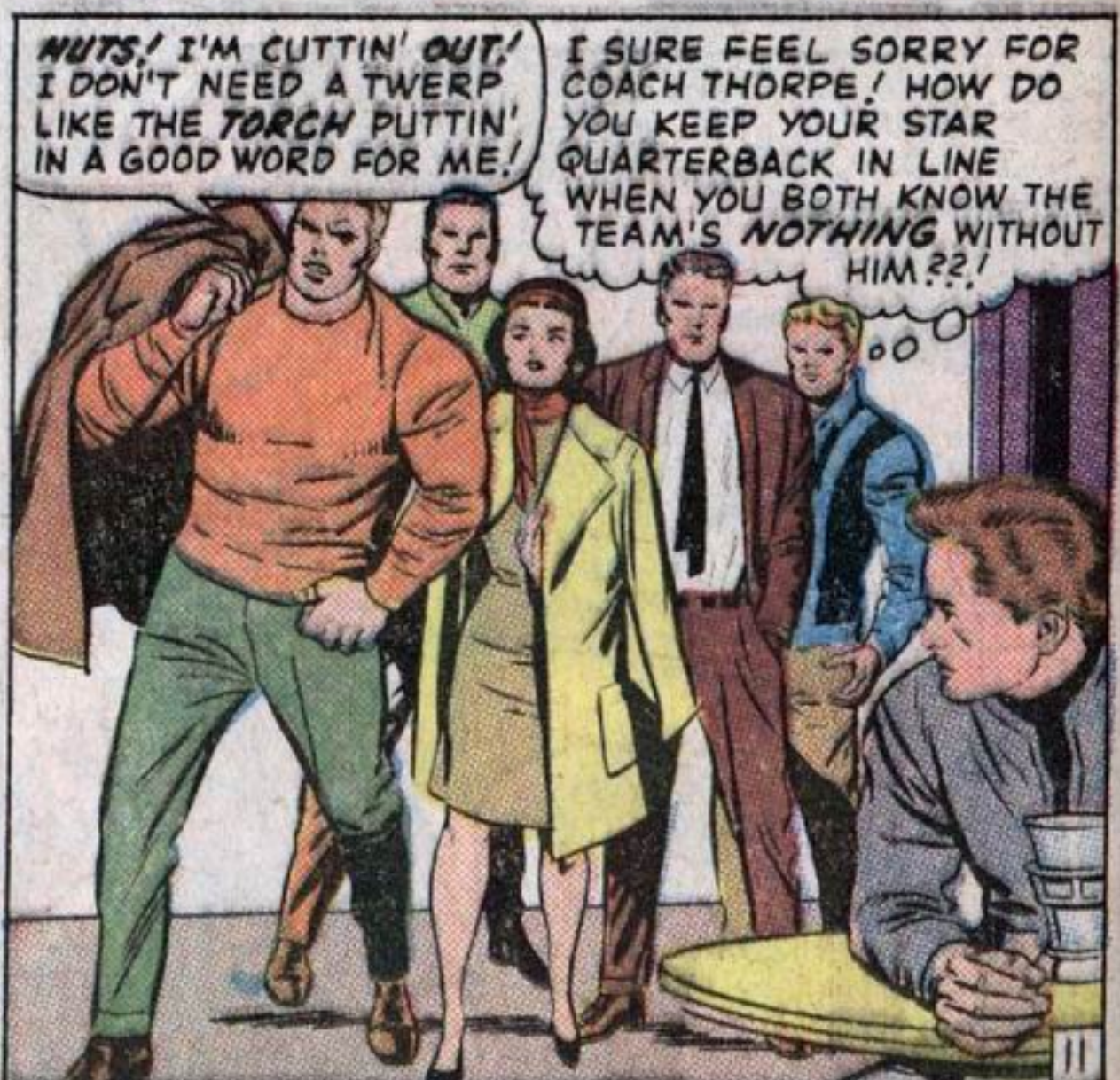
BACK AWAY,
SMART GUY! YOU'RE
NOT FOOLING
ANYONE!



LOOK, COACH--YOU
CAN CHEW ME OUT
ON THE FIELD--OR
IN THE LOCKER ROOM
--BUT *THIS* ISN'T
ANY OF *YOUR*
BUSINESS!

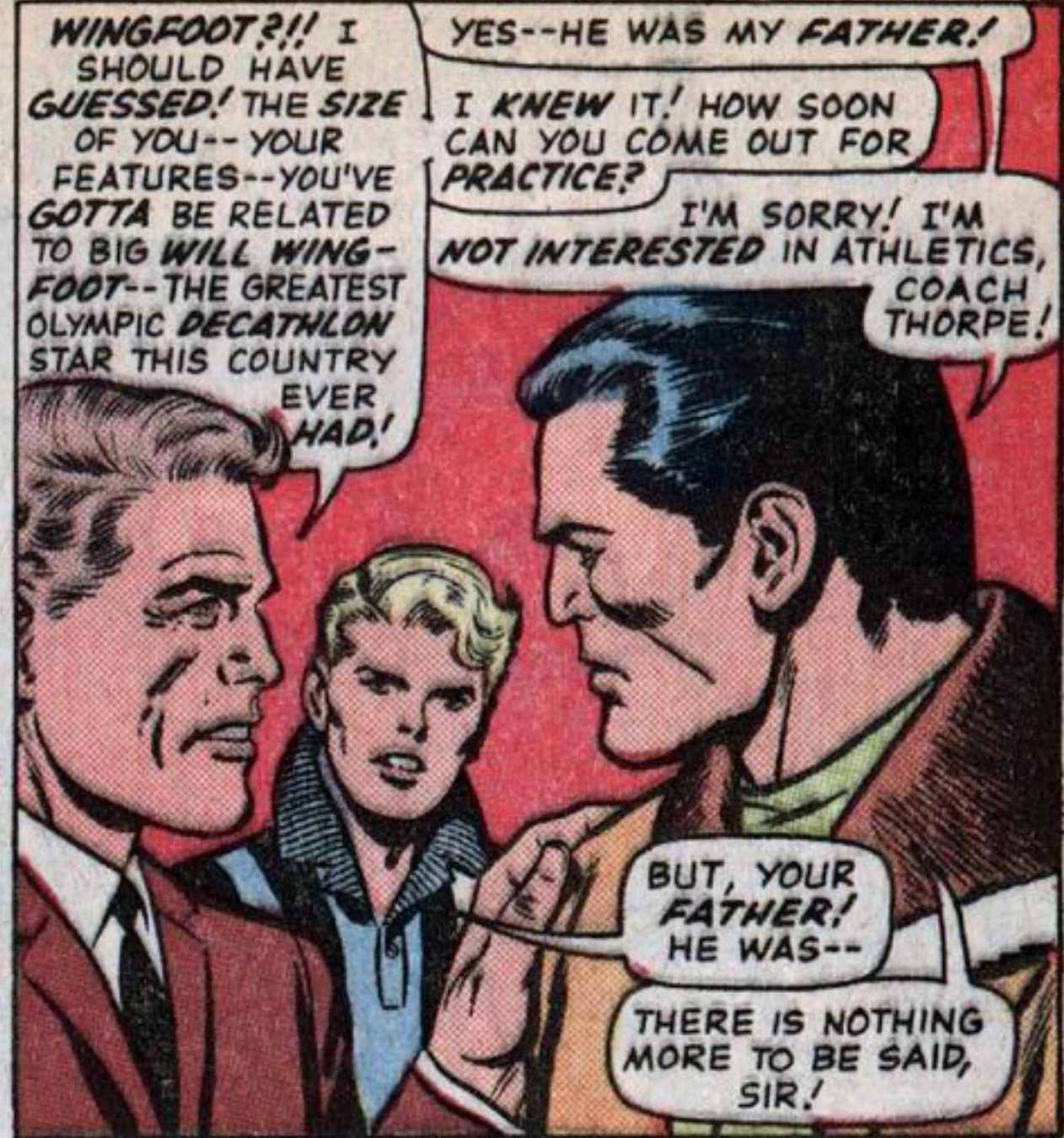
SO LONG AS YOU'RE ON *MY* TEAM,
ANYTHING YOU *DO* IS MY BUSINESS
--AND DON'T EVER *FORGET* IT,
MULLINS!

DON'T BLAME *HIM*,
COACH THORPE! I GUESS IT
WAS JUST AS MUCH *MY*
FAULT!



HUTS! I'M CUTTIN' *OUT*!
I DON'T NEED A TWERP
LIKE THE *TORCH* PUTTIN'
IN A GOOD WORD FOR ME!

I SURE FEEL SORRY FOR
COACH THORPE! HOW DO
YOU KEEP YOUR STAR
QUARTERBACK IN LINE
WHEN YOU BOTH KNOW THE
TEAM'S *NOTHING* WITHOUT
HIM??!



REMEMBER, BEN--
DON'T LET GO OF
THAT LINE! MY
LIFE IS IN YOUR
HANDS!

THERE CAN BE NO TURNING BACK
NOW! ONCE I PUSH THIS LEVER,
THE PHASE-DRIVE MECHANISM
WILL BE AUTOMATICALLY ACTIVATED!
IT *MUST* BE DONE--NO MATTER
WHAT--!

NOW!

CLACKK!

I'VE *DONE* IT!
THE UNIVERSE
SEEMS TO BE
TEARING
ITSELF OPEN--
FALLING APART--!

I'VE
SHREDDED
THE VERY
FABRIC OF
INFINITY--
WHERE ALL
POSITIVE
MATTER IS
TRANPOSED
INTO *NEGATIVE*
FORM!

AND NOW-- I'M
PLUNGING
THRU THE
RESULTING
VOID WHICH
I'VE CREATED
IN THE SPACE-
TIME
DIMENSIONAL
BARRIER!!

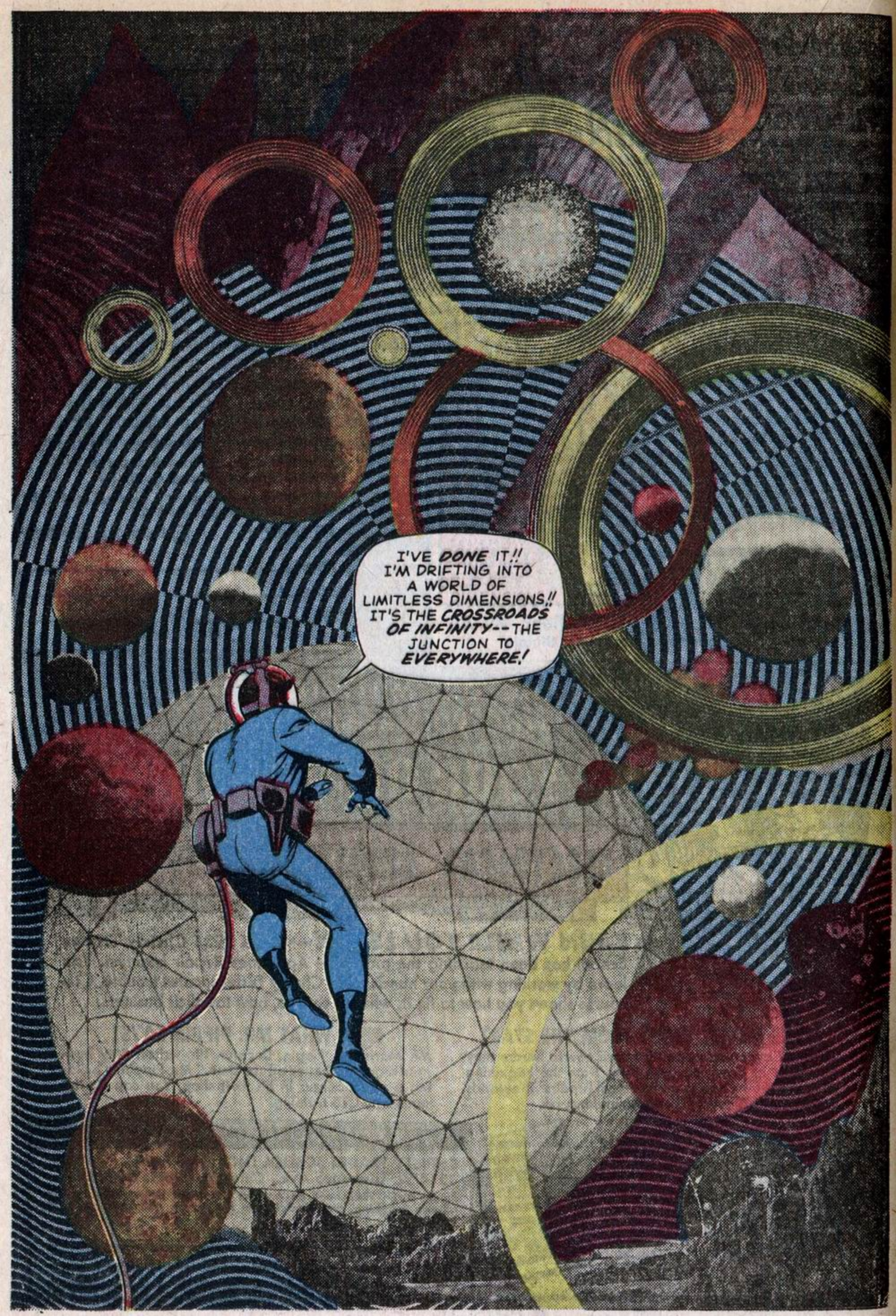
IT'S ALMOST MORE
THAN HUMAN EYES
CAN *BEAR*! I'M ACTUALLY
WITNESSING A *FOUR*
DIMENSIONAL UNIVERSE--
BUT THE EFFECT OF SEEING
IT WITH *THREE-DIMENSIONAL*
VISION IS INDESCRIBABLE!

THE *LINE* WHICH
IS TIED TO ME IS
MY ONLY CONTACT
WITH *REALITY*!
IF *THAT* SHOULD
BREAK, I'D BE
LOST *FOREVER*!

EVERYTHING IS
MOVING *FASTER* NOW!
THE UNIVERSE HAS
BECOME A VAST
KALEIDOSCOPE OF
LIGHT AND SOUND!!
THERE'S ONLY ONE
EXPLANATION--

-- I'M FINALLY
APPROACHING MY GOAL!
I'M AT THE VERY
EDGE OF *SUB-SPACE*!

CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE



I'VE DONE IT!!
I'M DRIFTING INTO
A WORLD OF
LIMITLESS DIMENSIONS!!
IT'S THE **CROSSROADS**
OF INFINITY--THE
JUNCTION TO
EVERYWHERE!



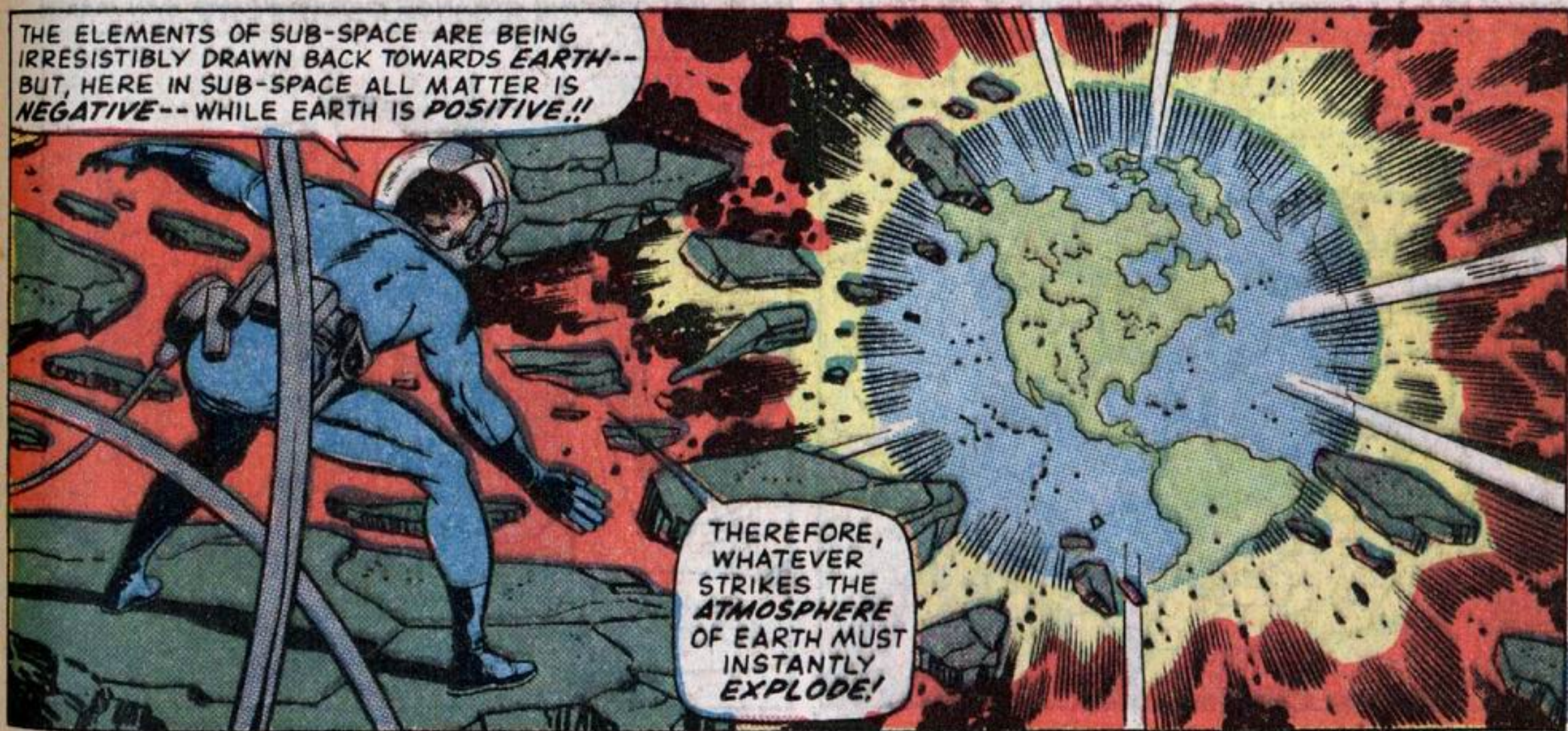
BUT, I STILL CAN'T CONTROL MY MOVEMENTS! I'M BEING BUFFETED HELPLESSLY THRU THE VOID--!

YET, EVERY FORM OF MATTER SEEMS TO BE PLUNGING MADLY TOWARDS ONE CENTRAL SOURCE...



AND THEN, SUDDENLY, THE LONE, DEDICATED HUMAN WHO IS **REED RICHARDS**, SEES THE SENSE-SHATTERING **FATE** THAT SEEMS TO AWAIT HIM--!

AHEAD OF ME!! IT'S THE ONE THING I **FEARED!** THE ONE THING THERE CAN BE **NO DEFENSE AGAINST!**



THE ELEMENTS OF SUB-SPACE ARE BEING IRRESISTIBLY DRAWN BACK TOWARDS **EARTH--** BUT, HERE IN SUB-SPACE ALL MATTER IS **NEGATIVE--** WHILE **EARTH IS POSITIVE!!**

THEREFORE, WHATEVER STRIKES THE **ATMOSPHERE** OF **EARTH** MUST INSTANTLY **EXPLODE!**



MY ONLY CHANCE FOR ESCAPE IS THE **LINE--!**

BEN HAS TO FEEL MY **TUGGING!** HE'S GOT TO PULL ME **BACK--** WHILE HE STILL CAN!



NOTHING'S HAPPENING!! IF HE FAILS ME NOW-- I'M **DOOMED!**

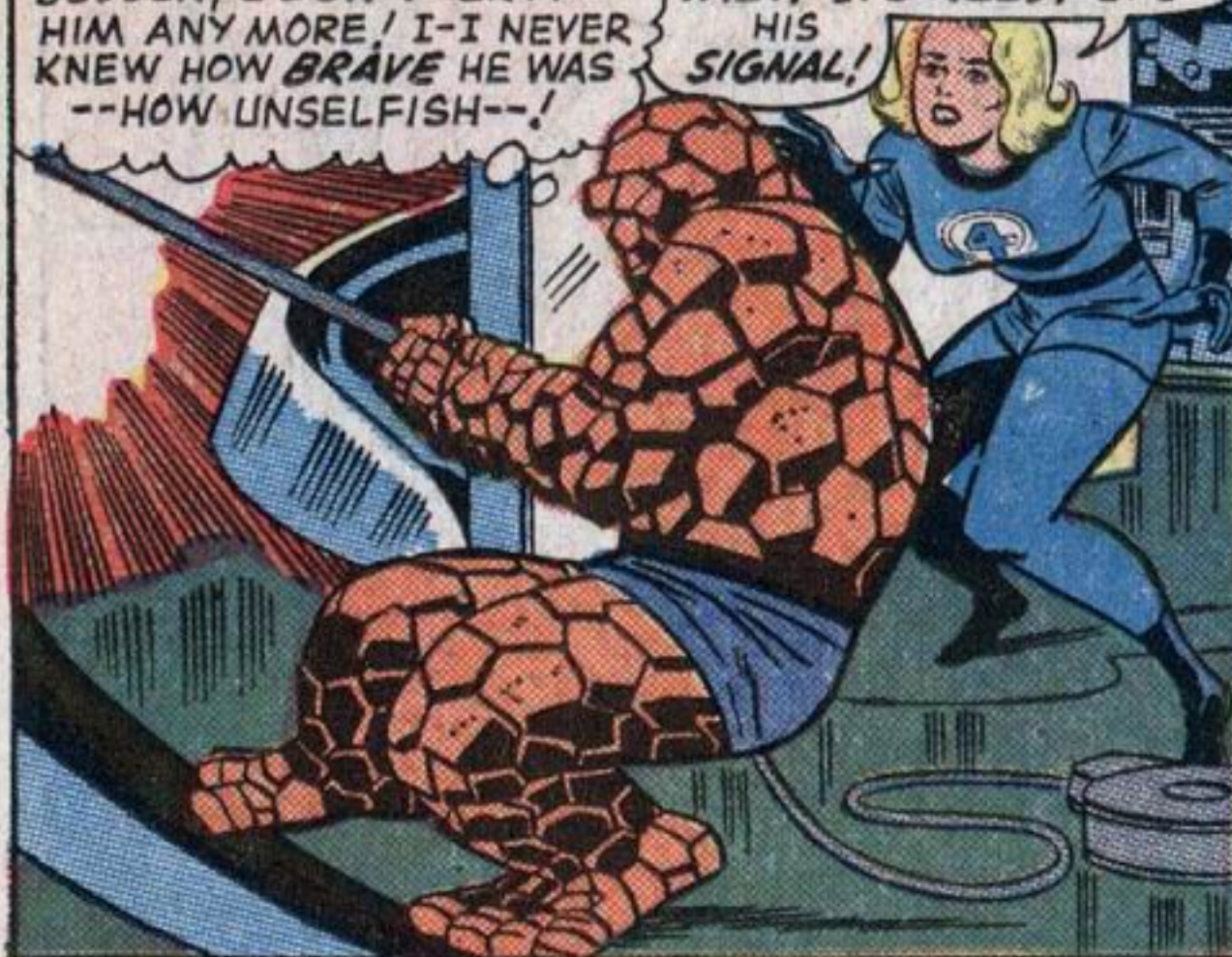
BEN!! WHERE ARE YOU?? **BEN!!** **BEN!!**

AND, AT THE OTHER END OF THE FATEFUL LINE, WE FIND--

HE'S **TUGGING!** ALL I GOTTA DO IS **IGNORE** HIM, AND I'LL HAVE BEATEN THE ONE MAN I'VE ALWAYS ENVIED--THE ONE MAN NO ONE **ELSE** COULD EVER DEFEAT!

BUT--ALL OF A SUDDEN, I **DON'T** ENVY HIM ANY MORE! I-I NEVER KNEW HOW **BRAVE** HE WAS --HOW **UNSELFISH**--!

BEN! THE LINE IS GROWING **TAUT!** IT'S **REED!** IT'S HIS **SIGNAL!**



BEN!! FOR THE LOVE OF **HEAVEN--!**

I NEVER DID A WORTHWHILE THING IN MY WHOLE LIFE!! BUT NOW--I'VE FINALLY GOT THE **CHANCE!** I CAN REALLY **BE** BEN GRIMM!

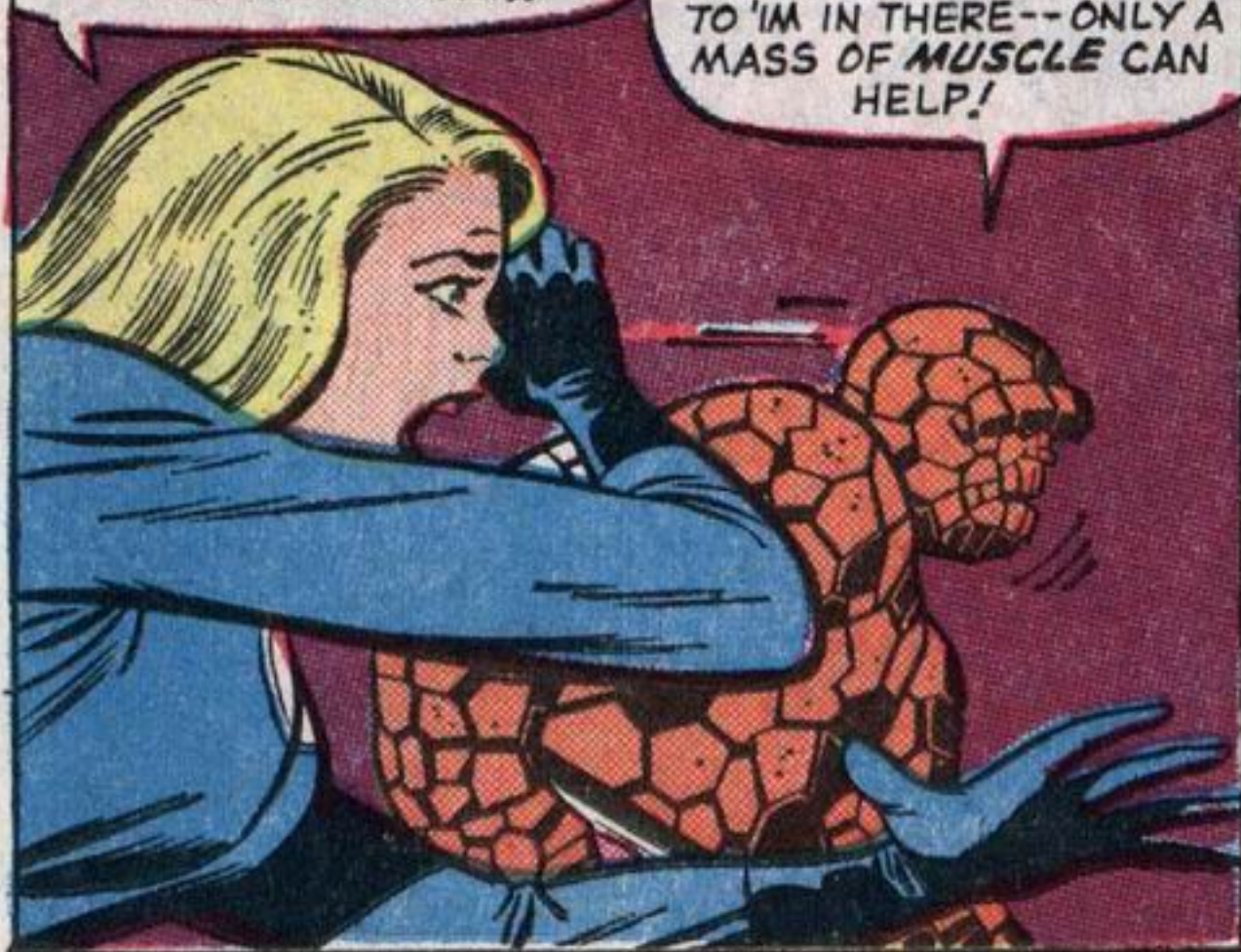
I'VE GOTTA **DO IT!** I'LL **SAVE** RICHARDS!!

DON'T WORRY, LADY!! I'LL GET 'IM-- **NOW!**



I'VE GOT TO GO TO HIM!! HE CAN'T BE LEFT **ALONE** IN THERE!! HE **NEEDS** ME! HE **NEEDS** ME!!

STAY BACK! DO Y'HEAR?? **STAY BACK!!** THERE'S NOTHIN' **YOU** CAN DO! WHATEVER'S HAPPENIN' TO 'IM IN THERE-- ONLY A MASS OF **MUSCLE** CAN HELP!



ALL THESE YEARS--WHEN I THOUGHT I NEVER GOT THE BREAKS--NOW I KNOW THE **TRUTH!** IT WAS **MY** FAULT--NOBODY ELSE'S! I WOULDN'T WORK **HARD** ENOUGH--I WOULDN'T MAKE THE SACRIFICES THAT A **REED RICHARDS** WOULD--!

PULL HIM IN, BEN! QUICKLY-- **BEN!**

I NEVER **SAW** THINGS SO **CLEAR** BEFORE! IT--IT'S ALMOST LIKE I'VE **REALLY** BECOME THE **THING**--NOT JUST AN IMITATION!

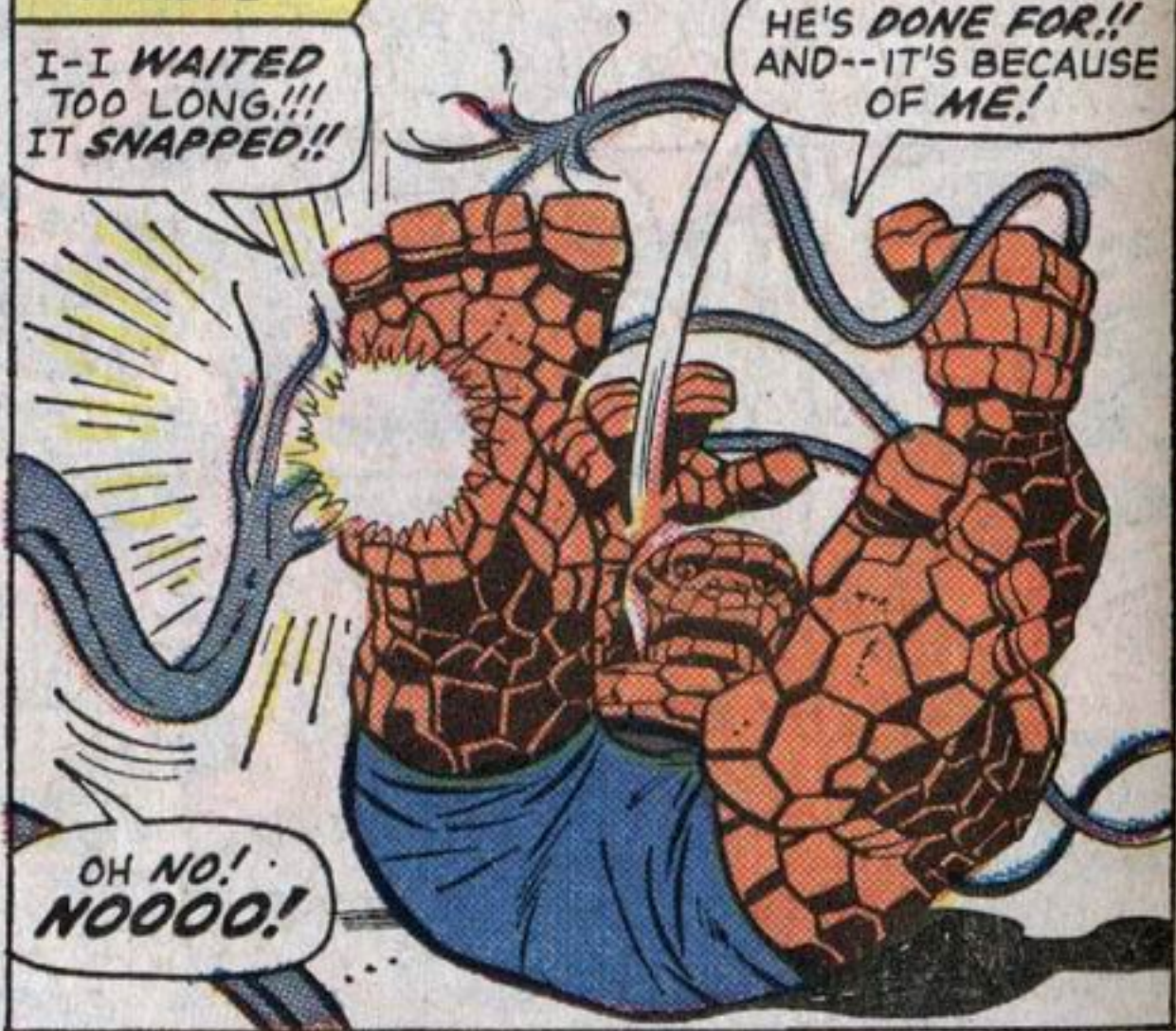


BUT, BEFORE THE STRANGE CHANGELING CAN MAKE A MOVE--

I-I WAITED TOO LONG!!! IT **SNAPPED!!**

HE'S **DONE FOR!!** AND--IT'S BECAUSE OF **ME!**

OH NO! **NOOOO!**



YOU WAIT OUT **THERE** BABY! I'LL **WHISTLE** IF I NEED YA!

MEBBE, IF I'M **LUCKY,** I CAN STILL GRAB THAT BUSTED HUNK'A LINE--BEFORE IT'S TOO **LATE!**





I GOT IT!



BUT, IN MAKING HIS LAST-DITCH, DESPERATE LEAP AFTER THE THIN STRAND OF CABLE, THE MAN WITH THE *THING'S* BODY IS *HIMSELF* INSTANTLY DRAWN INTO THE INCREDIBLE BARRIER BETWEEN THE DIMENSIONS--

NOW I'VE DONE IT! WHATEVER HAPPENED TO *RICHARDS* WILL HAPPEN TO *ME*, TOO! I CAN'T TURN *BACK*!

LUCKY THE BODY OF THE *THING* IS STRONG ENOUGH TO STAND EXTREME CONDITIONS WITHOUT A PROTECTIVE HELMET, OR I'D BE DONE FOR *ALREADY*!



THERE HE IS-- STILL ALIVE! BUT, FOR HOW LONG?



BEN!! YOU *FOOL!!* YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE COME AFTER ME!! NOW WE'RE BOTH DOOMED!



YOU WERE JUST SUPPOSED TO PULL THE *LINE* IN WHEN I *TUGGED!!* BEN--OLD FRIEND--I-I DIDN'T WANT THIS TO HAPPEN TO *YOU!!*

IN A FEW SECONDS-- WE'LL REACH THE ATMOSPHERE BELOW US, AND IT'LL MEAN INSTANT *DEATH!!* IF ONLY *YOU* HADN'T COME--!

SO *THIS* IS HOW IT'S GONNA END! AND EVEN *NOW*-- HE'S WORRIED MORE ABOUT *ME* THAN HIMSELF!!



BRACE YOURSELF, BEN! WE DID THE BEST WE COULD-- ONE CAN DO NO MORE! YOU--YOU WERE THE GREATEST PARTNER A MAN EVER HAD--!

THAT'S THE GUY I SPENT YEARS *HATING*-- BEING *JEALOUS* OF!! I-I AINT EVEN WORTH HIS LITTLE *PINKY*!



BUT THEN, AS BEN GRIMM KNOCKS ON THE DOOR OF ALICIA MASTERS--HE SEES--

MY--MY HAND!!!

STARTLED--SHOCKED--STUNNED INTO SPEECHLESSNESS--HE HAS NO WAY OF KNOWING THAT, A UNIVERSE AWAY, THE MAN WHO HAD TAKEN HIS IDENTITY HAS NOW GIVEN IT UP AGAIN--FOREVER!

FINALLY, WHEN THE INITIAL NUMBERED REACTION HAS PASSED...

I-I'VE BECOME THE THING AGAIN!

NOW I CAN GO BACK 'N Clobber THAT CREEP WHO'S POSIN' AS ME!

BESIDES, BY TURNIN' INTO BEN GRIMM AGAIN, I MIGHTA HAD A CHANCE WITH ALICIA--EVEN AGAINST THE SILVER SURFER!

BUT NOW-- IT'S TOO LATE! I'M A WALKIN', LIVIN' MONSTER AGAIN!

MAYBE THIS IS THE REAL ME! MAYBE BEN GRIMM IS NOTHIN' MORE THAN-- A DREAM!

AND, A SCANT FEW SECONDS LATER...

I-I THOUGHT I HEARD SOMEONE-- AT THE DOOR--?

BUT--NO ONE IS HERE NOW!

YET, I HAD THE STRANGEST FEELING--IN MY HEART!--AS THOUGH IT WAS SOMEONE-- WHOM I LOVE!

BUT NOW, LET'S RUSH BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING BEFORE THE THING GETS THERE, BECAUSE WE DON'T WANT TO MISS THIS NEXT EVENT--

REED! REED, MY DARLING--IT'S YOU--YOU'RE ALIVE!

HE DID IT! I'M BACK!

BEN SAVED YOU! I KNEW HE WOULD--I KNEW IT! HE'S NEVER FAILED US YET!

BUT--REED! WHERE IS HE? HE DIDN'T RETURN WITH YOU! WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM??

SUE--I DON'T KNOW-- HOW TO SAY IT--! IT HAPPENED SO QUICKLY! ONE MINUTE WE WERE TOGETHER--AND THEN --IT WAS OVER!

I OWE HIM MY LIFE--!

IT'S MY FAULT, SUE! THE LINE I TOLD HIM TO HOLD--IT--IT MUST HAVE PULLED HIM INTO SUB-SPACE--!

NO, DARLING--NO! HE DIDN'T DO AS YOU SAID! HE **WAITED** TOO LONG--UNTIL THE LINE **SNAPPED!** I **SAW** HIM!

DON'T TRY TO SPARE MY FEELINGS, DEAR! YOU **KNOW** HOW I FELT ABOUT BEN! HE WAS **MORE** THAN JUST A FRIEND!! I'D HAVE GIVEN MY **LIFE** FOR HIM--A THOUSAND TIMES--!

IF ONLY WE KNEW **WHY** HE DIDN'T PULL THE LINE IN TIME--!

WHAT DOES IT MATTER **NOW**--WITH HIM **GONE**--?

THE **PHONY** MUSTA BIT THE DUST--AND THEY STILL THINK HE WAS **ME!**

THE JAW-BREAKIN', EGG-HEADED **SQUARE!** HE **DOES** HAVE FEELIN'S, AFTER ALL! WHO'DA GUESSED?!!

YA CAN COOL THE CRYIN' TOWEL BIT NOW--I'M ALIVE 'N KICKIN'--LIKE ALWAYS! IT WAS THAT **OTHER** GUY I **WARNED** YA ABOUT WHO CASHED IN!

BEN! OR--OR IS IT BEN?? HOW CAN WE **KNOW**??

IT IS THE REAL BEN! I CAN **SENSE** IT, REED! **THAT'S** THE ANSWER I WAS LOOKING FOR--**THAT'S** WHY THE **OTHER** BEN DIDN'T PULL THE LINE IN TIME--HE WAS AN **IMPOSTOR!**

IT'S TOO GOOD TO BE **TRUE!** BUT, I'LL TRUST SUE'S FEMININE INTUITION ANY TIME!

OH, BEN--BEN **DEAREST**--WE THOUGHT WE HAD **LOST** YOU!

EASY, SUSIE GAL! YOUR **HUSBAND** MIGHT GIT JEALOUS 'N TRY TO POLISH ME OFF WITH SOME NEW FIFTY-BUCK WORDS!

OKAY, **NOW**--WHAT ABOUT THAT ROTTEN CREEP WHO TRIED TO TAKE MY **PLACE** HERE? WHAT'S THE **LOW-DOWN** ON 'IM?

TRY NOT TO JUDGE HIM TOO HARSHLY, BEN! SOMEHOW, AT THE LAST MINUTE--SOME OF YOUR OWN **HEROISM** REACHED OUT THRU THE ENDLESS VOID--AND TOUCHED HIM!

HUH??!

I'D **STILL** LIKE TO HAVE GOTTEN MY OWN PAWS ON 'IM JUST **ONCE**--!

IT'S TOO **LATE** FOR THAT NOW, OLD FRIEND!

WE'LL NEVER KNOW WHAT MONSTROUS THINGS HE HAD DONE IN THE PAST--OR, WHAT MONSTROUS PLANS HE HAD MADE!

BUT, **ONE** THING IS CERTAIN--

--HE PAID THE **FULL PRICE**--AND, HE PAID IT--LIKE A **MAN!**

NEXT ISSUE:
DESTINED TO BE THE MOST TALKED ABOUT NEW CHARACTER OF THE YEAR--
THE BLACK PANTHER!

NOTE: OUR LETTERS SECTION APPEARS AFTER NEXT PAGE...