

Just to clear things up: this issue is number 642 which is also "The End is Fourever" number 1, which is also "Back in Blue" part 2, which is also the fifteenth issue in Robinson's run. Got that? Also, did you notice the shout-outs to my WCBR review for last issue? I pointed out that the timing would be wrong to tie into the AXIS event, and that the "villain monologue" was a useful, but trope-y, technique. Well, Robinson must have dutifully taken that to heart, as the battle between the Fantastic Four and the Avengers here had nothing to do with AXIS but was just your standard Marvel-heroes-fight-a-bit-then-figure-out-they're-on-the-same-side kind of thing, and the Quiet Man wasn't monologuing so much as explaining what he already done. Wait, what? That wasn't a shout-out and Robinson doesn't read my reviews? La-la-la-la. I can't hear you with my fingers in my ears. Although it does make it hard to type. Anyway, the context of the FF's current plight (the current, fifteen-issue/1-year long plight) continues here, with the Quiet Man continuing and finally finishing his monologue as his way of showing up Mr. Fantastic. All of the Is are dotted and Ts are crossed to explain what's been behind the scenes up until this point, and aside from the Quiet Man himself, the true threat is in the victimization of Franklin Richards. Some of this is a bit unsettling, as some of the Quiet Man's plot seemed unnecessary, really. I suppose having the Thing imprisoned and the Human Torch depowered certainly takes them off the table, but it's in such an over-the-top fashion that it becomes something cartoonish. Literally, cartoonish-- these plots would seamlessly fit into the needlessly complicated Cobra plots from the 80s' G.I. Joe. But, hey, I can run with that. Some of my best friends are cartoonish. I'm a little less comfortable with the very tenuous complication of the Invisible Woman "turning into" Malice. First of all, how is turning her into (implicitly) a more powerful persona equivalent to sidelining the male members of the team, according to the Quiet Man's plan? But really the question is how, exactly, is "Malice" on display in recent issues? The fact that the Invisible Woman fought Dr. Doom over the fate of her daughter? (in a separate story in the Annual, by the way) The fact that she's defiant against people seen as invading her home? I would think these are pretty normal responses and shouldn't have to be chalked up to a different personality, one that's implicitly "Eee-vil." The thematic implications here about femininity are stuff that John Byrne could get away with thirty years ago but are antiquated in modern stories. The other point that seems antiquated is using Franklin Richards as a plot device. It's a shame that this little guy ever got powers in the first place, as he's been a victim ever since. Here, it's a plot device around plot devices, Robinson writes how his "dreams" are used as a power source, and they're tapping into what Jim Lee/Rob Liefeld wrote to set up an entire publishing line of comics in the "Heroes Reborn universe." But, hey. The action is good, with paced with some carefully chosen panels to build suspense-- the ominously-lit Hulk/Doc Green, the sequential "trigger finger" close-ups. There's also a couple of displays of power with Thing vs Sub-Mariner and the Invisible Woman's power and some great expression of emotions. Another key moment was how Johnny saved Valeria from what must be the most incompetent SHIELD agent ever, the one we must nickname "Friendly Fire." But the true star of the book turns out to be Bentley, who gets a whole two-page spread to show him being the hero and saving the day by way of a chocolate-gun. Or at least the moment. We got a few more issues to go, regardless of how you number them. Actually, the true star of the book should really be colorist Jesus Aburtov. Every page is awesomely rendered, especially when there are flashes of light or displays of energy and power. Kirk's characters display great emotion, but it's Aburtov's colors that render them alive. There are several key moments that are helped with the soft touches of light and shadow, usually the ones featuring Bentley, of course. Finally, our cliffhanger comes straight out of left field and features a character that I always kind of liked

when I was in elementary school, but hasn't captured the hearts and minds of readers for twenty years (1994?). I can't help but feel that using a giant page spread of the future guest star with little more than a name drop misses an opportunity for some suspense. I mean, sure the words "you need Sleepwalker" can sound ominous, but why not throw in a few verbs or something. "We need Sleepwalker-- before our dreams will kill us all!" Insert your own hyperbole. The post Fantastic Four #642 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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