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Outline for a Graphic Novel  
The Fantastic Four  
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### **"To Hell And Back!"**

Years ago, while still a graduate student at Columbia University, REED RICHARDS lives at the boardinghouse of JEWEL DINKINS. Jewel is the aunt of twelve-year-old SUSAN STORM and her younger brother, JOHNNY. Reed is hard at work on the "Star-drive" that he hopes will someday propel a spaceship to another solar system.

Despite Mrs. Dinkins' repeated warnings not to "open space-warps in the house," Reed has a small device in his room that he tinkers with incessantly. Whenever he tests it by opening a small dimensional "wormhole," Jewel appears to give him a firm dressing-down concerning the rules of her household. "How does she always know?", Reed wonders as he thumbs the warp closed with a remote control unit.

Reed also wonders, to the extent that he notices, what to do about the painful adolescent crush that Sue ("Susan", she insists) has on him. For her part Sue is equally embarrassed as her attempts to be seductively ladylike are frustrated at every turn by her omnipresent kid brother.

The big news in the boardinghouse these days is the impending visit of Reed's old roommate, All-American football star (Heisman Trophy winner? What position did he play? And what did he get his degree in anyway, Aviation? Also, why didn't he play pro ball?) Ben Grimm, who is coming by (perhaps on leave from the Air Force?) to spend some time with his old buddy.

On the roof of Jewel's brownstone, Johnny shows Sue the toy Reed built for him, a remote-controlled flying vehicle (which may visually prefigure the "flying bathtub" Fantasticar). They argue about Reed. Johnny thinks that Reed is too cool to be interested in "mushy stuff". Sue contends that Reed loves her. "He just doesn't know it yet."

Meanwhile, Jewel has let in a visitor, an old classmate of Reed's, and calls Reed down to meet him. The figure, who wears a hooded cloak that shrouds his face, is known to Reed but isn't who he expected. He is VICTOR VON DOOM. Doom claims, in an especially unconvincing manner, that his arrival is coincidence. He simply needs a room, and

although this place isn't up to his usual standards... Sue and Johnny enter the sitting room. Johnny races towards Doom shouting, "Mister Grimm?" Doom pushes him away and Johnny hits the floor. Sue threatens, "You hit my brother again and I'll pound you !" "I don't need my dumb sister to stick up for me, I'll pound him myself!", Johnny protests.

"Don't call your sister 'dumb', kid. She was just lookin out for ya." It's Ben Grimm, standing in the doorway. "Hi, stretch. You didn't tell me this was a class reunion. I like the hood, Doomsie. But if I had a puss like yours, I'd do the public a favor and stay off the street !"

Ignoring Ben, Doom comes on courtly with Jewel. He made a mistake, Johnny surprised him. With Reed's encouragement, Jewel gives Doom a room. Doom retires to it.

Reed makes introductions. Johnny is impressed by Ben and adds to his sister's introduction. "She's Reed's fiancé." Embarrassment all around. Johnny is confused, Ben amused. Jewel shoos Sue and Johnny away to prepare for dinner, then leaves herself. On the way out, Sue smacks Johnny on the head. "What'd I dooo?", he whines.

Ben wants to know why Reed encouraged Jewel to let Doom stay. Doom has been obsessed with proving he's Reed's superior ever since "the accident."

FLASHBACK to Reed and Doom's first confrontation.

Reed suspects Doom is up to no good again, and wants to keep an eye on him. Ben concurs uneasily, then invites Reed to hit some nightclubs with him. Reed agrees. Ben wants to know if Reed'll ask Sue to fix him up with one of her friends, as he "don't want to be no third wheel." "Give me a break, Ben."

Much later, Jewel is checking up on the peacefully sleeping Johnny when Sue calls her into the next room, "Hurry Auntie, it's coming on !" Jewel enters the den, and sits on the couch next to Sue. They begin to watch The Avengers on television. Sue wants to be Mrs. Peel.

Reed and Ben are at a table in a Village nightclub. As a jazz trio plays behind them, Reed tells Ben about his plans for a spaceship. Even with the government's help, he's already spent over half of his considerable inheritance. However, he remains confident that he can solve the remaining technical and financial obstacles to his spaceflight. As once before, he asks Ben to fly his ship on its maiden voyage but this time he means it. Ben accepts, truly honored. They shake hands. A longtime friendship deepens.

Doom sneaks into Reed's room and ponders Reed's warp projection apparatus. Just as he thought, this will do. He attaches leads from a potentiometer-like device to the warp projector and opens a warp. "Yes, with a few, simple adjustments... Soon, Mother. Soon..."

"Mrs. Peel, we're nee...--fissssst--" Back in the den, The TV picture turns to static. "Hey!", Sue complains. Jewel gets up muttering that "Reed's got that thing on again." Sue follows her out of the room.

Sue and Jewel discover Doom testing Reed's equipment. "What do you think you're doing?" Doom uses "the mists of Morpheus" or somesuch to put them to sleep.

Sometime later, Ben and Reed return to the boardinghouse. Ben banter as Reed pays for the cab. "I think the redhead would have gone with me if you'd've taken her friend." Johnny interrupts, running down the front steps in his pj's. "Aunt Jewel and Sue are 'sleep and won't wake up!"

By the time they arrive in Reed's room, Jewel and Sue are awake again but confused. "Doom!," Reed exclaims. Ben adds, "Hey, he stole your doohickey!" Jewel confirms, filling Ben and Reed in on what happened. "He just waved his hands and we fell asleep like magic," Sue finishes breathlessly. "Probably some sort of hypnosis," Reed allows. "What could Doom want with my warp drive?"

Doom explains his scheme-and the incredible apparatus surrounding them-to Boris. A few adjustments to Reed's projector and he can open a portal to Hell that his dead mother's spirit can pass. By using "Mephisto's Tears" -mystical gems somehow connected to the demon- the portal will bar Mephisto himself.

Johnny is flying his toy around. It annoys Jewel but gives Reed an idea. They can use the remote control to turn the projector on wherever it is. A device in Reed's Columbia University lab can detect the projector's signature radiation and they can find out where it is.

Sue and Johnny plan to go with. Sue is dressed in a black leotard and ballet shoes, the closest she can come to an Emma Peel jumpsuit. Johnny refuses to wear a bowler.

Sue and Johnny arrive in the vestibule, ready to go. Both Reed and Jewel insist, "No!" Ben says to Reed, "Sure, we're just gonna go get your doohickey back. Let's give Mrs. Dinkins a break and take 'em along."

At his Columbia lab, Reed tries to turn on his projector by remote control. No go, it's out of range. If only they had a more powerful transmitter. Ben's got an idea. Reed thinks it could work. Johnny and Ben go off to the college transmitter. Reed explains the plan to Sue who embarrasses the hell out of him by flirting shamelessly, if inexpertly.

Ben and Johnny sneak past a guard at Columbia's WKCR radio transmitter. Johnny "cries," distracting the other guard, who Ben grabs in a bear hug from the rear and tosses into a closet. They then reset the frequency of the transmitter, in effect turning the entire station into a remote control for Reed's projector. "Hope the FCC doesn't hear about this," Ben mutters.

As Doom continues to prepare his spell/experiment, Reed's warp projector suddenly switches itself on. "Richards is often more intelligent than I give him credit for. Still, he is too late. I am ready."

Back at Reed's lab, Sue helps Reed pinpoint the energy surge on a map. Ben calls and gets directions.

Everyone meets outside of a warehouse. Reed is holding a detection device and proclaims, "This is the place. Ben and I are going in. You two stay right here." Ben disagrees. "No way we're leaving them outside in this neighborhood at this time o' night. They'll be safer in there with Doom!"

The pre-fantastic four enter through an ominously open front door and head up the stairs. Steel bars shoot up and form a cage around them. Ben can't budge them. Doom reveals his plot and boasts of his genius. His melding of Science and Magic has accomplished something that neither could alone. He tells them about his mother. Reed explains the set-up but doesn't understand the mystical aspect. Doom laughs. Sue listens very carefully. Doom turns back to his preparations.

The Pre-FF discuss the morality of the situation. Reed doesn't believe in Hell and wonders what Doom is really up to. Johnny thinks that trying to save your mom isn't such an evil thing. Sue agrees, it won't hurt to let him try. "Yeah," says Ben. "Let him use the doohickey. Then punch him out!" At least they all agree that they have to get out of the cage. No problem. Sue squeezes between the bars. Johnny doesn't even have to squeeze.

With directions from Reed, Sue opens the cage. Doom doesn't have time to fool with them. He sics primitive Doombots on them.

Ben takes a poke at one, probably breaking his hand. Sue takes a powder. Reed is distant, thinking it out. Johnny buzzes a bunch of them with his flying toy. Three of the robots chase the toy out of a window and fall to the ground several stories below. The toy flies back in. "Not too bright," Johnny says. Reed has found the control panel and gives Ben instructions how to turn the robots off. Ben runs through the robots like a kick-off return specialist as robots close threateningly on Johnny and Sue. After making his way through the bulk of them, even tricking some into crashing into each other, Ben's way is blocked by one last robot. There's no way around it. Reed bowls it over by blocking it across the knees. Ben shuts them down and they freeze in mid-motion. Sue pushes over the one that was reaching for her. Reed is shaken up but okay. All of this is too late. Doom finishes his spell.

A mystical portal opens at the center of Doom's apparatus, debris sails across the chamber. Demons and spirits pour out freely and the warp widens. Mephisto's Tears are not acting as a barrier the way Doom thought they would. Reed says that Doom didn't consider negative pressure. Obviously this dimension Doom's tapped into has a higher energy density than our own. The warp will widen, and draw in ever greater amounts of matter, perhaps the entire city, before the effect exhausts itself. Ben is disinterested in the lecture. "How do ya shut the blasted thing off?" Reed turns off the projector with his remote control. Nothing happens. "Ben, disconnect the power supply!" Ben rips a heavy power cable from the apparatus. Sparks fly, and the effect is reversed, everything in the lab is sucked towards the warp, which is shrinking, but not quickly enough.

Sue notices that a scrap of paper inside of the pentagram isn't moving. It's safe in there. Reed doesn't see why this should be but hauls the unconscious Doom into the safety zone nonetheless. Ben does the same with Boris. Johnny and Sue are also safe inside the pentagram. Reed does some quick calculation and realizes that at the moment before the warp closes, there will be a point singularity in the room with them. Even if a full-fledged black hole isn't formed, there will be an incredibly dense object suddenly appearing in real space. It will create intense gravitic waves and deadly radiation fully sufficient to destroy the Earth. It shouldn't be happening but it is. There has to be some way to cut it off from whatever its energy source is. "I know what it is!," Sue says. "It's magic!" She fastens her lipstick to the side of Johnny's flying car and tells him to draw a star around Mephisto's Tears just like the one they're standing in. Johnny draws a pentagram around the tears and the warp disappears. The Tears, which were hovering a foot above the ground, fall to the floor in the pentagram's center.

Doom awakens just in time to see the warp close. His mother's spirit, along with all of the others, Johnny's toy, and Reed's projector are all pulled spectacularly to the warp, then trapped on the other side. Doom curses Reed and launches himself at him. Ben intercepts, flattening Doom with a hard right. Boris rushes to Doom's aid. "You want some too, pal?" He does not. As the Pre-FF are intruders on Doom's property they decide to get out. Doom nurses his busted lip, clutching the Tears in his hand and hiding the tears on his face. Today's indignities will not be forgotten. But, if he is to free his mother, he must first learn more magic.

In Hell, Mephisto laughs at Doom's failure. He's been watching the whole thing. When Doom is ready to try again, he will be waiting.

Meanwhile, in a deserted corner of Mephisto's realm, the warp projector lays ignored only a few feet from Johnny's broken toy.

Back at the boardinghouse, Ben says his good-byes. He's sure that they'll all meet again. "Yes," Reed muses. "We do make quite a team, don't we?"

A giant two-or-three page splash illustrates highlights of the Fantastic Four's career aided by a series of captions that go something like this: "A daring spaceflight. A billion-to-one accident. The discovery of power. And of purpose. Righting wrongs. Saving worlds. Discovering new worlds. Love, marriage, life. Heartbreak, separation, death. Secrets revealed. Victories won. And...a loose end or two..." At the last, we see an inset panel of Reed's warp projector coming to life where it lies half-buried in Hell.

It's the present. The Thing is walking the streets in his somewhat concealing trenchcoat. There'll be captions to let us know that this is the Ben we met in the first half of the story. He sees a car spin out of control and smash into a wall. Throwing aside his trenchcoat [this is the first time we see him clearly -now we know what the caption was referring to when it spoke of him gaining the power to do good...at a price], he rushes to the side of the badly crushed car. When he tears the car's roof off he reveals Mrs. Dinkins. She's older, he only met her once -and that years ago- but he remembers her. "Lady, are you alright? Hey, don't I know you?" Jewel claps her palms over the Thing's ears. He howls in pain and grabs his ringing head. She punches him in the face with a roundhouse right. The impact sends him sailing through the air. He lands in a heap at the foot of a building and struggles gamely to his feet. "It's clobberin' time..." he offers weakly. Indeed it is. Jewel pulls the pin from a hand grenade with her teeth, then extends the arm in front of her so that it is pointing towards the Thing. Her arm detaches midway between elbow and

shoulder and flies off, rocket exhaust streaming from its rear. The new angle reveals that the arm she punched the Thing with is now a twisted mass of metal and wires. The other arm, with a live grenade clenched in its fist slams into the wall behind the still-dazed Thing, exploding and burying him under tons of rubble.

Johnny Storm, "the Human Torch," and his wife Alicia are taking advantage of Indian Summer with a walk through the country. Johnny is shocked to see Aunt Jewel, who appears from nowhere asking for help. Johnny sits Alicia on a bench and follows Jewel to a nine foot wide metal pipe set into the side of a hill. Using his finger as a light source, he follows Jewel down the long pipe until they reach its end: an iris. Jewel pushes a button and the iris opens. A wall of water pours out at deadly speed. Johnny bursts into flames - except for his arms- and grabbing Jewel under the arms, flies towards the open end of the pipe. The water is gaining on him. We are looking at the exterior of the pipe when abruptly, water rushes out, dumping an extinguished and unconscious Johnny , and a "broken" Jewel on the ground.

Sue Richards, "the Invisible Woman" finishes a charity performance that allows us to see the range of her powers. She finally makes it to her dressing room where, no surprise by now, Jewel is waiting for her. Sue greets her warmly. "Aunt Jewel! I didn't know you were going to be here tonight." As she hugs her, Jewel injects her with a hypodermic hidden in her index finger. Sue falls to the ground unconscious.

Reed Richards is at a big university's particle accelerator looking at some fusion-power research. Jewel appears but Reed isn't buying it, he recognizes the subtle but tell-tale motion that gives away even the best robots. He stretches towards it to attack. Jewel discharges a massive amount of electricity into Reed's body. Reed writhes in pain as only he can and then, mercifully, passes out.

The Fantastic Four awaken in a gigantic room in Doom's castle. They are each bound in traps designed to neutralize their powers. Johnny floats in a tube of liquid; his arms behind his back, his feet lashed together, and an oxygen mask obscuring his face. Ben has been cast into a solid block of metal, only his neck and head are free. Reed is in a plastic bubble [actually that's kind of boring -maybe he's wound painfully around some kind of reel?-I'm still working on this but I'll think of something]. Sue's arms are bound behind her and her head is in some Kirbyesque helmet to prevent her from using her force-field powers. They are all facing a platform -almost a stage- that is dominated by a large screen. On the platform is Doom, who stands at the center of an apparatus that looks like an updated and much more powerful version of the one he tried to use to free his mother years ago. Doom's armor has been altered in a high-tech and visually appealing manner.

Reed might comment that it looks like an ELF reception web has been bonded to his armor. Doom begins to explain what he's up to. The Fantastic Four were all present when he suffered his most humiliating failure. Now they will watch him succeed at the same task. He has a new approach to the problem of his mother's imprisonment. "Boris?"

Boris hits a switch and the screen comes to life, showing that Reed's warp projector is already operational. Johnny's flying toy rests in the background. Doom enters a pentagram amid the tangle of high-tech and mystical artifacts and exits (we see on the screen) through the warp into Hell.

Mephisto greets Doom gleefully and torments him by torturing his mother's spirit as graphically as I can get away with. Doom is enraged and threatens Mephisto. Mephisto laughs and reminds Doom that this is his realm and that here, his word is reality. Doom's only response is to say, "Now, Boris."

Back on Earth, Boris is ready. He presses the enter key on a computer that has a mystic spell displayed on its monitor. The spell vanishes, replaced by the word "Running."

Doom's armor unfolds into a huge receptor web not unlike solar collector panels. Mephisto is amused. "Do you think a machine can protect you from even a fraction of my power? Burn, Doom!" Mephisto fires a mystic bolt at Doom and is horrified to discover that he can't stop -his power is flowing out of him and into Doom! Mephisto disincorporates painfully. Doom's armor glows until we can't see him within its glare. When the glow fades, Doom is transformed, his green robes are now red, and are those flames flickering behind his faceplate? "This world is mine!," he shouts, turning to look out on the FF from the screen. "Do you see, Richards? do you grasp my plan?"

Reed does, and begs Doom not to do it. "Do what?, asks Johnny. "He can't free his mother from Hell so..." "So I am bringing her the Earth!," Doom concludes. He has usurped Hell, and when he moves Earth into his dimension, he will rule over it as well. Doom creates a giant warp and the Earth moves through it as he speaks. "I have had but three goals in my life, Richards: To free my mother from Mephisto, to prove that I am your superior, and to rule this world. Today, my grandest dreams and your worst nightmares have come to pass at once. Today is Doom's day!"

The Earth now rests securely in Hell. It is hideously transformed. Everything is recognizable but twisted into the Dante version of same. This is really a chance for the artist to go nuts. Everything is disturbing, familiar but hellish, even Doom's playroom, where the FF are still bound, has been changed. The Doombots that guard the room, for

instance, have been transformed from ultra sleek, high-tech, fighting machines to metallic demons. Doom appears. "Boris! Take a note, we must do something about the decor." Boris, also transformed, does as he's told. Doom uses a fraction of his power to transport his mother into the room. She is dazed and confused (as anyone would be after decades of torture) but she understands that somehow, her son has rescued her. They hug. "Mother, I would like to introduce you to my most hated enemy, Reed Richards, and his lackeys the Fantastic Four. Richards, my mother, Cynthia von Doom!" Mom is tired. Doom creates a doorway to an elegantly decorated bedroom and sends her to rest.

Doom turn his attention to the FF. He informs them that they are the only four free minds in Hell. He has done this both to provide him with the challenge of opposition missing the last time he conquered the Earth, and to allow him to prove his continued superiority to Reed. With a wave of his hand he frees the FF from their bonds. "We can't fool around. Take him!," Sue shouts, projecting a spike-shaped force field through the torso of one of the Doombots. "Flame on!," cries Johnny. He fires a flame blast at one of the robots, then realizes that his power isn't the most useful one to have in Hell. "Great. Now what do I do?" The Thing sinks his fingers into the chest of one robot and smashes it into a second one. Reed winds his way through the feet of several of the robots, tripping them and sling-shoting one into several more. Johnny buzzes around a handful of robots, annoying them. A robots hand and arm are smashed against Sue's force field when it tries to punch her. "Reed, how can we put the Earth back where it belongs?" Reed is absorbing force blasts with his elastic body. He is confused by the mystical aspects of the apparatus. Johnny flies out of a window and the three Doombots on his tail follow him, then fall to the ground far below. Johnny flies back in. "Hee hee hee!" Sue tells Reed not to think of it as a magical problem but just as a problem. The Thing bashes Doombots with great success and makes it to the control panel. Reed has an idea. Sue blocks a force blast that was about to hit Ben from his blindside. Reed postulates the mystical power totems as 3-D shadows of Nth dimensional machines, if so this device can return the Earth to its normal hyper and real space coordinates... "Never mind the lecture!, Ben bellows. "How do ya turn the blamed thing on?" "Oh. Pull the red lever." Ben reaches for it then he the rest of the FF are suddenly transported to Times Square.

Imagine Times Square if it really were the Hell that some people think it is. The FF are in the middle of it, and Doom's face is on the screen above the Coke sign. "Ne deja vu pas.." says Johnny. "What?" "That's the persistant feeling that you've never been somewhere before." Doom speaks. He is surprised that Reed's formidable but rigid intellect could solve the problem but it's not going to be quite that simple. He will see them when they get back to Latveria.

The FF plan their next move. Sue wants to go find Franklin. No. He won't even know you. Our first priority has to be transportation to get back to Latveria, Johnny believes. If we save the world then Franklin will be safe too. Reed is wrestling with a plan. It's difficult to do because Doom is so much more powerful than they. Ben says that power isn't the point. "It was never power that beat him. We sure didn't have no power the first time we took him. It was...I dunno. Us together." They are going to go to Four Freedoms Plaza and see if they can get a Fantasticar going.

Mama Doom has been watching her son and she is shocked at his behavior. She realizes that the misshapen creature beside him is Boris, her husband's best friend. "What kind of man have you become?" Doom restores Boris to human, and explains to his mother that he plans to change Hell to paradise. He begins with the castle which he returns to its normal opulence. The FF crash through the wall flying a Fantasticar that looks like everything else does in Hell. After quickly routing a few Doombots, the FF face Doom. Ben tells Cynthia that Doom hasn't just come to Hell -he's brought the entire Earth here.

Doom roars with anger and throws himself at Ben. His gauntlets crackle with energy. He is tearing Ben apart. The rest of the FF try to restrain him. Sue projects a field to separate Ben from Doom and a second thicker one to protect them from him. It's not going to hold for long. Reed says that they have to get to the console. How can they keep Doom away? "A pentagram!" Sue isn't carrying lipstick. Reed has an idea but they'll need Cynthia's help. "My son..." she says sadly, then agrees. Reed orders the FF to form a pentagon with each of them forming a corner and Cynthia, who is standing by the console, forming the fifth corner. "Hurry, please," says Sue, whose shield is withering under Doom's attack. Reed stretches his arms around and through them forming a pentagram. Sue drops her shield. Doom rushes forward but is barred by the pentagram. "Mother, no!" Reed asks her if she understands what she's doing. She does. "Victor, never again do evil in my name." She pulls the lever...

...And reality shatters. The Earth returns to its place in real space. Things and people regain their normal appearance. And inside Castle Doom... Everything is as it was. Doom's robes are green again, the FF stand in their positions in the pentagram and Cynthia is gone. Reed's warp projector is on the floor forever closing the doorway to Hell. Doom sinks to his knees, throws back his head, and screams.

Sometime later, the FF visit the real Jewel in her boarding house. The current college residents swarm them in the lobby. The real Jewel appears and announces to everyone that these are 'her kids' and that she's proud of them. She always has been.