

The Fantastic Four (unreleased film)

The Fantastic Four is an independent superhero film completed in 1994. Executive produced by low-budget specialist Roger Corman and Bernd Eichinger (who went on to produce a big-budget *Fantastic Four* film in 2005), the film was based on Marvel Comics' long-running comic book and featured the origin of the Fantastic Four and that superhero team's first battle with the evil Doctor Doom, combining the superteam's origin from *The Fantastic Four* #1 and Doom's origin from *Fantastic Four Annual* #2 with original elements. Despite a tentative scheduled 1994 release date, the film was ultimately never released officially, but illegal copies began circulating after a few years.

Contents

- Plot
- Cast
- Production
- Marketing and release plans
- Critical reception
- In popular culture
- References
- External links

Plot

Reed Richards (Alex Hyde-White) and Victor Von Doom (Joseph Culp) are college friends who use the opportunity of a passing comet to try an experiment; however, the experiment goes wrong, leaving Victor horribly scarred. Sue (Mercedes McNab) and Johnny Storm (Phillip Van Dyke) are two children living with their mother (Annie Gagen), who has a boarding house where Reed lives. Ben Grimm (Michael Bailey Smith) is a family friend and a college buddy of Reed's.

Ten years later, Reed, Sue (Rebecca Staab), Johnny (Jay Underwood), and Ben go up into an experimental spacecraft as the same comet passes by Earth. They are hit by cosmic rays from it, due to a necessary diamond being exchanged for an imitation of itself by the Jeweler. Reed dedicates this mission for his friend Victor, believing he was dead years before.

<i>The Fantastic Four</i>	
 <div>Film poster</div>	
Directed by	Oley Sassone
Produced by	Steven Rabiner
Written by	Craig J. Nevius <p>Kevin Rock</p>
Based on	Fantastic Four by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby
Starring	Alex Hyde-White <p>Jay Underwood</p> <p>Rebecca Staab</p> <p>Michael Bailey Smith</p> <p>Kat Green</p> <p>Joseph Culp</p>
Music by	David Wurst <p>Eric Wurst</p>

Upon crash-landing on Earth, the four discover that the cosmic rays gave them special powers: Reed's bodily structure has become elastic; Sue can become invisible; Johnny can generate fire on demand; and Ben has transformed into a creature with stone-like skin: the Thing. They are later captured by Victor's men, who pose as Marines, and meet villainous monarch Dr. Doom. After escaping from Doom's men, the four regroup at the Baxter Building, trying to decide what to do now that they have gained superpowers. An angry Ben leaves the group to go out on his own, feeling he has become a freak of nature. He is found by homeless men and joins them in the lair of the Jeweler (Ian Trigger).

Victor had needed the diamond necessary to capture the comet's powers. The Jeweler would then give the real diamond to the blind artist Alicia Masters (Kat Green), who was also kidnapped by homeless henchmen working for the Jeweler. The Jeweler wants Alicia to be his bride, with the diamond as his wedding present to her. However, Doom and his henchmen locate the Jeweler's lair. Doom's henchmen first try to make a deal with him, to no avail. Doom, displeased, seizes the diamond and threatens to kill Alicia, whereupon Ben enters the room, only to revert to human form. Pursued by Doom, Ben runs out onto the city streets, frustrated at his helplessness. He somehow reverts to the Thing.

A gunfight ensues between Doom and the Jeweler's men. Doom takes the diamond to power a laser cannon that will destroy New York City. Ben returns to his friends; by now, Reed has learned that Doom is actually Victor. Realizing they are the only ones who can stop Doom, they don costumes and travel to Doom's castle. There, the Fantastic Four battle a series of Doom's military. Reed has a final battle with Doom, which ends with Doom supposedly committing suicide, though after falling into the fog, his glove, still on the balcony, starts to move. Johnny becomes the Human Torch to stand between the laser cannon's shot and the city, pushing the beam into outer space. Ben frees Alicia and finally introduces himself to her. She feels the rocky surface of his face but is not fazed by his altered appearance. Thereafter, the Four dedicate themselves to fighting evil, and Reed and Sue marry.

Cast

- Alex Hyde-White as Reed Richards / Mister Fantastic
- Jay Underwood as Johnny Storm / Human Torch
 - Phillip Van Dyke as young Johnny
- Rebecca Staab as Sue Storm / Invisible Woman
 - Mercedes McNab as young Sue
- Michael Bailey Smith as Ben Grimm
 - Carl Ciarfallo as the Thing
- Joseph Culp as Victor Von Doom / Dr. Doom
- Kat Green as Alicia Masters
- Ian Trigger as the Jeweler
- Annie Gagen as Mrs. Storm
- Robert Beuth as Dr. Hauptman
- Ricky Dean Logan as Busboy

Cinematography	Mark Parry
Edited by	Glenn Garland
Production company	Constantin Film Production
Distributed by	New Horizons
Running time	90 minutes
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$1 million



Promotional still of *The Fantastic Four*

Production

In 1983, German producer Bernd Eichinger met with Marvel Comics' Stan Lee at Lee's Los Angeles home to explore obtaining an option for a movie based on the Fantastic Four.^[1] The option was not available until three years later, when Eichinger's Neue Constantin film company obtained it for a price the producer called "not enormous" and which has been estimated to be \$250,000.^[2] Despite some interest from Warner Bros. and Columbia Pictures, budget concerns precluded any production, and with the option scheduled to expire on December 31, 1992, Neue Constantin asked Marvel for an extension. With none forthcoming, Eichinger planned to retain his option by producing a low-budget *Fantastic Four* film, reasoning, he said in 2005, "They didn't say I had to make a big movie."^[2] In September 1992, he teamed with B-movie specialist Roger Corman, who agreed to produce the film on a \$1 million budget.^[2]

Production began on December 28, 1992 under music video director Oley Sassone. Storyboards were drawn by artist Pete Von Sholly.^[3] The 21-day^[4] or 25-day^[5] production was shot on the Concorde Pictures sound stage in Venice, California, as well as in Agoura, California for a spacecraft-crash scene, the Loyola Marymount campus for a lab-explosion scene, and the former Pacific Stock Exchange building in downtown Los Angeles for team-meeting scenes.^[4]

Costume designer Réve Richards recalled in 1993 going to Golden Apple Comics on Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles to buy *Fantastic Four* comic books for research, and, upon explaining his task, "[T]hese people in the store just swarmed me and said, 'You are going to be faithful to it?'" And I told them, 'This is why I am buying these books.'"^[6] Paul Ahern was hired as weapons consultant,^[6] and Scott Billups for computer visual effects.^[7] The special-effects makeup was by John Vulich and Everett Burrell of Optic Nerve.^[8] Stuntman Carl Ciarfallo, who wore a rubber suit to portray the monstrous superhero Thing, worked with actor Michael Bailey Smith, who played the Thing's human self, Ben Grimm, so that their mannerisms would match.^[8] During the months of post-production, music composers David and Eric Wurst personally contributed \$6,000 to finance a 48-piece orchestra for the soundtrack.^[4]

Marketing and release plans

A 1993 magazine article gave a tentative release date of Labor Day weekend 1993.^[9] During that summer, trailers ran in theaters and on the video release of Corman's Carnosaur. Cast members promoted the film at a clips-screening at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles and at the San Diego Comic-Con International. By this time, the world premiere was announced to take place at the Mall of America in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on January 19, 1994, with proceeds from the event earmarked for the charities Ronald McDonald House and the Children's Miracle Network.^[10]

Eichinger then informed Sassone that the film would not be released. Speculation arose that the film had never been intended for release, but had gone into production solely as a way for Eichinger to retain rights to the characters; Stan Lee said in 2005 that this was indeed the case, insisting, "The movie was never supposed to be shown to anybody," and adding that the cast and crew had been left unaware.^[11] Corman and Eichinger dismissed Lee's claims, with the former stating in the same article, "We had a contract to release it, and I had to be bought out of that contract" by Eichinger.^[10] Eichinger, also in that article, calls Lee's version of events "definitely not true. It was not our [original] intention to make a B movie, that's for sure, but when the movie was there, we wanted to release it."^[10] He said future Marvel film impresario Avi Arad, at this point, in 1993, a Marvel executive,

...calls me up and says, 'Listen, I think what you did was great, it shows your enthusiasm for the movie and the property, and ... I understand that you have invested so-and-much, and Roger has invested so-and-much. Let's do a deal.' Because he really didn't like the idea that a small movie was coming out and maybe

ruining the franchise.... So he says to me that he wants to give me back the money that we spent on the movie and that we should not release it.^[10]

Arad recalled in 2002 that while on a trip to Puerto Rico in 1993, a fan noticing Arad's Fantastic Four shirt expressed excitement over the film's upcoming premiere, of which Arad said he was unaware. Concerned how the low-budget film might cheapen the brand, he said he purchased the film "for a couple of million dollars in cash" and, not having seen it, ordered all prints destroyed.^[12]

Eichinger continued negotiations to produce a big-budget adaptation, speaking with directors including Chris Columbus, Peyton Reed, and Peter Segal. After pre-production briefly went underway in 1996, Eichinger and his company, by that time called Constantin Film, began production in 2004 of *Fantastic Four* with an estimated \$90 million budget.^[12] Following that film's 2005 release, Eichinger and Constantin produced a \$130 million^[13] sequel, *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (2007). A reboot for the film series was released in 2015.^[14]

Although never officially released, *The Fantastic Four* has been subject to bootleg recordings.^[15] The film is available to watch on YouTube and Dailymotion.

Critical reception

The film received an approval rating of 29% on review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, based on 7 reviews.^[16] In a November 2008 list of the "50 Top Comic Movies of All Time (...and Some So Bad You've Just Got to See Them)", *Wizard Magazine* ranked this film higher than *Batman & Robin*, *Steel*, *Virus*, and *Red Sonja*, all of which were released in theaters, but had poor reviews. Clint Morris of *Film Threat* magazine said of a copy of the film he obtained, "[Y]es it's terribly low-budget and yes it's derisorily campy and feebly performed, but at the same time there's also something inquiringly irresistible about this B comic tale that makes you wonder why it didn't get a release somewhere along the line. Even if it does resemble *Toxic Avenger* [more so] than say, *Spider-Man* ... The script isn't actually all that bad and some of the actors—notably Michael Bailey Smith—are actually quite good here, and with an extra polish I think they might have been able to release this thing."^[17] Neil Calloway of Flickering Myth said "the production values are of a 1990s daytime soap, with some rather clunky dialogue."^[18]

In popular culture

In 2013 a main story arc in season 4 of the television series *Arrested Development* concerned Tobias Fünke's attempt to stage a musical based on The Fantastic Four. The setup for the story concerned his romantic relationship with an actress who had played Sue Storm in an unreleased Fantastic Four movie. This backstory parodies the development of the 1994 Corman movie^[19] and the storyline is an extended satire on various comic book rights battles.

In 2014, a trailer for the documentary *Doomed! The Untold Story of Roger Corman's "The Fantastic Four"* was released with Corman and the rest of the cast and crew explaining what transpired with the film and its production.^{[20][21]} The documentary was released in July 2015.^[22]

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External links

- *The Fantastic Four* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109770/>) on IMDb
 - *The Fantastic Four* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/10005582-fantastic_four/) at Rotten Tomatoes
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