

Finally our villain stands revealed. Yes, thanks to *The Incredibles*, we often mock the trope of the "villain monologue," but as we can see here, it's a useful device to be sure. We finally learn all about our villain, especially (and thankfully) his motivation and abilities. So, let's take a minute and assess the Quiet Man. As his name suggests, he's quite the opposite of the Fantastic Four, who famously embody "celebrity" as one of their aspects. The team started out in the public eye from their very first issue #1, and Reed Richards has said this was a deliberate choice so as to be embraced by the public rather than hide away and be feared as the X-Men often were. In the same way, the QM is all about selfishness and hoarding. He keeps his discoveries for himself, where Reed shares with the world. He hoards a wide array of accomplishments, where Reed and his team seek out ways to help others. So of course the one thing he cannot have, the love of Sue Storm, takes him on the path of petty vengeance. He's essentially a child, contrasted to Reed's patronage and maturity. It's an intriguing set-up of opposites, and not one enabled by many of their traditional antagonists. That said, it's difficult to see such "power"-slash-influence in a visual medium, and so we have to only witness it as the result of a long con, the series of unfortunate events in recent issues. In fact, we are asked to believe that this Quiet Man was responsible for nearly every (possibly all?) of the attacks against the team "since the beginning of the Fantastic Four's existence." At that moment, I lose a bit of respect for the villain. Too bold a claim, Quiet Man. Too bold. It's a claim intended to add to the QM's presence, but in fact it takes away from it, as it likewise takes away from the import of the previous stories he now claims to be responsible for. Interestingly, there's also some parallels to Sue, the Invisible Woman, and our anonymous villain, the Quiet Man. Unfortunately, by making QM essentially a spurned would-be lover, he becomes a bit out of place in our modern stories, who have moved past the somewhat dated notion that women are objects to be "won" by protagonists/antagonists. Perhaps the Quiet Man should have been set up to be the Invisible Woman's antagonist, rather than Reed's. Sue should be the one he's captured and trying to "prove" himself to, to force these retro/modern themes to collide. Hopefully, we will see some of this as the FF move to their final showdown in subsequent issues. A more complex take on villainy and motivation is found in Bentley's story, where he's taken in by the Wizard and the Quiet Man, and will be forced to make some significant decisions in his path. For some reason, I'm quite intrigued by Bentley and his complexity makes for more interesting reading than any of the Future Foundation kids. The remainder of the issue is all set-up for the next one, which seems to feature some tie-in to the Axis event, despite that event will be finished by the time of the next issue. It's poor timing, as the Invisible Woman is currently struggling with her own inverted self, Malice. That might have been a nice opportunity for some exploration of heroic themes, but seeing as how the tie-in to Original Sin was little more than a token nod in order to force the Thing into the demands of the story at the time, I would be just as happy if the FF got to ignore the whole Axis thing to let its own story breathe a bit more naturally. The art is split to feature four pages of flashback and the remainder as present. Both are nicely rendered, although I'd prefer a more distinctly "retro" style for flashbacks if they are meant to be as such. (One thing that the Original Sin tie-in took advantage of.) Kirk and Kesel's work for the rest of the issue is awesome, as always. One thing to notice in particular is their display of the Quiet Man's face-changing power. It's multi-panel sequence as the wave of distorted skin passes one way then the other across his face, which lends momentum and continuity through simple and otherwise unrelated, static portraits. The post *Fantastic Four #14* appeared first on *Weekly Comic Book Review*.

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