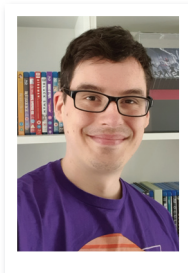


The Fantastic Four: First Steps



***The Fantastic Four: First Steps* is the fourth attempt to bring Marvel's first family to the big screen, after the abortive 1990s effort, the mid-2000s duology directed by Tim Story, and the disastrous 2015 reboot. This film brings Reed Richards (Pedro Pascal), Sue Storm**

(Vanessa Kirby), Ben Grimm (Ebon Moss-Bacharach) and Johnny Storm (Joseph Quinn) into the Marvel Cinematic Universe, as they deal with both Sue's unexpected pregnancy, and the threat of the planet-devouring Galactus (Ralph Ineson).

The Fantastic Four's legacy on the big screen has been a disappointing one to this point. While 2005's *Fantastic Four* and 2007's *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* have their fans, they were critically panned, and Josh Trank's 2015 *Fant4stic* was reviled by audiences and critics alike. Thankfully, it seems like the formula has finally been perfected, with early buzz around *First Steps* being universally positive.

Things are kept relatively simple here. We skip the Four's origin story, with only a brief mention of them getting their powers due to cosmic rays. We pick up with the team already established in their retro-futuristic alternative dimension, which is charmingly realised. The characters and their dynamics are quickly established, before the arrival of the Silver Surfer (Julia Garner) kicks off the main plot.

All of the cast are fantastic (no pun intended). There was some scepticism about the casting of Pedro Pascal as Mister Fantastic, but as usual, the talented actor delivers, bringing us an introspective but caring Reed Richards that is closer to his comic counterpart than any other iteration. Vanessa Kirby is magnetic as the Invisible Woman, and Joseph Quinn is hilarious as the Human Torch, while toning



down some of the more unsavoury aspects from previous adaptations. Ebon Moss-Bacharach does the seemingly impossible by delivering a performance that is different from, but equally as good as, the one Michael Chiklis gave us, as the Thing. Julia Garner makes the Silver Surfer one of the film's most interesting characters, and Ralph Ineson's booming voice is perfect for Galactus.

Unfortunately, as has become common for Marvel movies, the visual effects are hit-and-miss. The Thing generally looks great, and Galactus is truly intimidating. However, the effects on the Silver Surfer, and the Human Torch's flames, vary from convincing to laughable, and some of the appearances of baby Franklin Richards are distractingly unrealistic.

Equally, the pacing is not great. The movie feels somehow rushed and slow at the same time. Many of the Four's early adventures are breezed past, and we get time jumps skipping over Franklin's early months and the looming threat of Galactus. Conversely, we get long stretches of quiet character building which, while not bad in and of themselves, feel dull compared to what is missing.

Thankfully, the few action sequences deliver in spades, and the characters are compelling enough that even the simple family moments are worthwhile. Overall, this isn't a perfect film, perhaps not even a great one, but it is, by far, the best Fantastic Four film to date.