

Part of what's made Pak's run on Action Comics such a joy to read—except for the appalling Doomed arc, which would be better off shunted to a dark corner of your memory and never dragged out again—is how he's taken the title to places Superman hasn't been for a long time. In Subterranea, he experienced an older, adventurous style of sci-fi in the spirit of Jules Verne or Edgar Rice Burroughs. Here, Clark gets to delve into sci-fi as horror, a genre which he often seems too pristine for. The thing that strikes fear into his heart isn't the massive, deformed creature he unveils at the end of the issue, however. What frightens Clark is the corruption of the familiar, the strange possession of Smallville's citizens that turns his hometown into a skin-crawling parody of itself. Against the sickly green mist that's invaded the community and already left a couple of its members dead, the sustained folksiness of everyone else is just creepy. What used to be charming and comforting now adds another sinister layer to the setting. Once the Smallvillians turn against Clark, he's put in a position of some delicacy, as he can't go all-out against them nor the monster that appears to be controlling them. Given the psychic forces at work here, one wrong move can lead to all kinds of nasty consequences for the townspeople that Clark can't foresee. At the same time, every moment he hesitates allows the mist to spread, dragging in others for who knows what purpose, although the tentacles latched to various (even alien) victims already tells you that it's painful and degrading. All this gives Pak an opportunity to explore Clark's angst about his own powers, an avenue every Superman writer seems to be harping on lately. Since it's rather vogue for every superhero to have a troubled childhood, Clark's has lately been riddled with traumatizing incidents related to his powers, whether it's setting his dad's fields on fire, giving a neighbor a heart attack, or spreading an existing wildfire with a well-intentioned blow of super-breath, possibly killing someone already trapped behind. This latest flashback, and the feelings of monstrosity it brings back for Clark, ties into his recent transformation into an actual monster, proving that we're still in the aftermath of Doomed, whether the title acknowledges it or not. With a new complication every other page, there's no time for the kind of character work Pak brought last issue. Clark, Lana, and John are too busy mulling over what's going on to interact very much. At one point, Lana does raise an eyebrow over her neighbors' untroubled faith in Superman, something which doesn't get past Clark, but that's about it. And let's not even talk about Hiro, who proves less than useless, arriving at the scene only to get caught in it himself while occupied with thinking of commercial uses for the teleporting mist. You can only hope this is all part of Pak's plan to redeem the grating teen prodigy, although he has his work cut out for him. Kuder's art is what makes the issue, emphasizing every moment of action by making the body language as taut and energetic as possible. So much of DC house art makes the action look flimsy and staged, but Kuder's characters put their all into it. When Clark flies, you can see the gritted concentration in his face and the power in his muscles, showing the unseen resistance he's striving against. When the Smallvillians launch psychic attacks, the distorted features on Clark and Lana's faces and their flailing limbs display the mental pain they're suffering. And of course, what really brings the horror is Kuder's anatomically detailed and complicated design for the creature who emerges from the mist, its countless tentacles probing, tangling, sucking on the many victims within its grasp. Some Musings: - I kind of love kid Clark's longish, scruffy hair. He should consider going back to it, especially if he's at all serious about maintaining a secret identity. The post Action Comics #37 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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