

Act Twos are notoriously difficult beasts. They happen at the point of the narrative where exploration of the conflict should happen, but it also needs to have a kind of narrative momentum that propels into the climax or Act Two "tipping point." There are elements in this issue that meet that first criteria, as it builds off the previous chapters' explorations, but, while I'm extremely excited about the cliffhanger, that part feels less like a tipping point because I'll have to wait for next issue to really see it pay off. It's definitely a plot-driven issue, as it essentially becomes a series of vignettes, each one the "continued" part of what was set-up the issue before. Apocalypse and the X-Men move into Manhattan? Check. Daredevil confronts Iron Man? Check. Scarlet Witch seeks out Dr. Doom? Check. The only truly "new" section we have is Loki wanting to help Thor, which leads directly into the cliffhanger, as the assembled no-longer-villains strike a dramatic pose. That's also the scene that makes me lament not being able to see the event from a single through-line, like a point of view character. Nova seemed to be set up for that last issue, but here he's entirely absent, thanks perhaps to the tie-in issue that's too expensive for me to add to my budget. It's a by-product of presenting scenes like this, as merely a montage of set pieces that have no real resonance. They're all connected because of the underlining high-concept of the event, but beyond that, there's no real reason to want to visit them at all. They can appear or disappear as needed; we readers are simply standing in place as characters are trotted by, emerging from the crowd every now and then. (I've also mentioned the emptiness of characterization, since none of the inverted-heroes really question or wrestle with their new-found state. There is no improvement on that front here, either.) Also continuing from last issue are the artists Terry and Rachel Dodson. I can't add much to my overall impression which I gave in my last review (essentially, that it's wonderful and expressive but perhaps fails to capture an appropriate visual tone.) There is, however, a very curious choice to make the very first page a series of completely black panels, overlaid by Apocalypse's broadcast to New York, which I can't really justify. Whether this is a deliberate choice by the writer or artists, I'm not sure. See also the page with Mystique "out front." This means that she is standing alone in the middle of a plaza yelling upwards at the looming spaceship/skyscraper used by the X-Men? Someone is being stupid, but should I put that label on Mystique, the writer, or the artist? I hesitate to label the latter, since the comicbook as a whole is quite well laid out, especially in the bits of fight choreography that happen. And Now... Here are bits of character's dialogue that could read as criticism of their own comicbook: "We've given up" (Rogue) "They've gone mad." (Mystique) "Sad to see you go dark." (Sabretooth) "Oh look. I'm boring you." (Iron Man) "Buzzkill." (Iron Man) "I only feel disgust." (Thor) "So, you know, Tuesday." (Spider-Man, speaking of heroes versus heroes) -Danny Wall

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