

Physicians and scientists struggle to destroy disease. But, as Robert J. Lifton chronicled in his classic, *The Nazi Doctors*, some people find it far too easy to label their fellow humans as a pestilence. In *Justice League #36* Lex Luthor faces the consequences of his past decisions as his attempt to protect the Earth from metahumans blossoms into a deadly catastrophe. As detailed in the last issue, the recent assassination attempt on Luthor in his headquarters resulted in the breaching of his private scientific vault and the release of the lethal Amazo virus. Luthor had crafted this disease using enzymes isolated from the bio-mechanical monster Amazo, who possessed the ability to absorb any superpower with which it came into contact. Luthor had intended that the resultant virus target metahuman DNA, shutting down the victim's super powers. But his creation rapidly evolved beyond those parameters, resulting in a disease that kills metahumans and humans alike. But, not only did Luthor find himself caught in a spiral of tragedy, but also a similar spiral of irony. The Amazo virus simply kills metahumans, but it grants humans superpowers for a brief period before they expire. Not only has Luthor unleashed a lethal weapon against the very people he was trying to protect, but he has actually touched off an epidemic of the very metahumanity he was trying to guard the Earth from. The story opens with most members of the Justice League lie dying. Batman has avoided infection due to Luthor's intervention, and Superman and Wonder Woman, being an alien and a god respectively, prove immune to the Amazo disease. But Metropolis is a deserted disaster area, and as panic spreads through the world the remaining members of the League, aided by Steve Trevor, search through the quarantine zone for Patient Zero, hoping that Luthor can use the original patient's physiology to determine how the virus first mutated and thus craft a cure. Thus, in another ironic twist, the man now universally excoriated as the creator of the plague may be the only one who can control it. Color, more than images of words, drives home the visceral sense of illness. Brad Anderson infuses the issue with a green haze underlain by grays and reds, lending the scenes a feeling of corruption and putrescence. Jason Fabok's naturalistic forms and extensive use of splash pages helps the illusion that the reader has stepped bodily into a dying world. Fabok also deploys vertically stacked panels on several pages, creating the sense of a cascade, as if a waterfall of events were beginning to pour over the page barriers, sweeping the storyline out of control. The themes ring true and deep, while the visuals support them perfectly. Yet, a feeling of shallowness lies over the entire issue. Ongoing plot threads involving the tension between Bruce Wayne and Luthor, the development of the new Power Ring, the mysterious figure trying to kill Luthor, and the prophecy of destruction approaching with Darkseid and the Anti-Monitor, all weave in and out of the tale. Ordinarily, this might not prove a concern. But long experience warns that Johns often gives his plots and themes short shrift. The Trinity War, beautifully set up if not flawlessly executed, proved to be naught but a prelude to *Forever Evil*. Within that event, the themes and preparation surrounding the conflict between Owlman and Nightwing amounted, in the end, to nothing. The post *Justice League #36* appeared first on *Weekly Comic Book Review*.

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