

Finally, “Everything Dies.” It was just as we’ve been told repeatedly for three years now. Now, can we move on, please? Well, this issue kicks off the Secret Wars event, the culmination of the storyline that’s been going on since 2012, or perhaps 2009, depending on how much credit you want to give some long-running subplots. But even that’s not quite true, as Secret Wars #1 doesn’t actually feel so much like the start of a new series as it does the last issue(s) of The Avengers/New Avengers. Unfortunately, it also feels very much like it’s some other universe entirely. We’re ostensibly still in the 8 Months into the “future” where characters and status quos have shifted slightly, creating a veneer of unfamiliarity to everything. I’m not invested emotionally to any of the characters, and they are all brought together to stand around in small little scenes here and there like a catalogue of set pieces that have to play out until the “real” story can be told in issue #2. I remember my friends and I buying the What If...? series in the mid-90s. We enjoyed the heck out of them, but we weren’t blind to the formula— basically, one small change to a storyline would result in some massive earth-shattering disaster or some other descent into anarchy and oblivion. What if Spider-Man never got the black suit? Everyone died. What if Wolverine never joined the X-Men? Everyone died. What if Captain America married She-Hulk? Pretty sure somehow everyone would die. These stories can make great reading, but they always feel like they aren’t “our” universe, which is of course natural. As I’ve said before, this whole “Incursions/Everything Dies” storyline makes for a great story, I’m just not sure it’s a great mainstream Avengers story. If all you “need” to know is that two universes are crashing into one another, and that these last two are “our” universe and the “Ultimate” universe, then you can enjoy the epic battle between two worlds, even though we already know the ending. Hint: Everything Dies. Any enjoyment comes from the book’s strength, which, as always, is its fatalistic tone. It’s like hanging out with a friend who always tells the same joke, except he’s Eeyore and the joke always ends with a weary sigh and no one really laughs. The Bad Guys are bad. There’s Nothing you can do. Things will blow up, people will disintegrate. Page after page. There is of course the subplot that features a group of heroes trying to complete their life raft to skip over the destruction, but this leads down a rabbit hole of more things that you probably “need” to know in order to make it feel like a solid story. Heck, the whole “who makes it onto a life raft” is a whole story in and of itself, and where, exactly, would the life raft go if everything is destroyed anyway? How did the incursion threat go from two dozen universes to just two? How did Cyclops get Sentinels and a Phoenix Egg, and what does the Egg do except shine some light on some enemy ships? Then there are some basic structural questions for the issue, too. Like: Who exactly is giving the narration at the beginning? I assume it’s Reed Richards speaking at the end? Why does Colossus have to throw the Hulk, whose whole schtick is that he can leap incredible distances? Would Kingpin really invite super villains to hang out with at a bar in his final hours? Does the Lizard really use email? Was Rocket’s joke about comicbooks being crap supposed to be funny? The art helps add to the disquieting tone of the story, but not in the way you’d think. Overall, the characters possess too much of the “uncanny valley” as the art is aiming for realism but only succeeding in creating glassy-eyed puppets that don’t feel real at all. There are basically two expressions for any given character— a grim line of a mouth or a slack-jawed gape. There is little humanity in any character pose, exasperated by thick outlines to the figures that feel less organic and more like a blown-up photocopied line. Several panels are staged well, with giant forces that loom over tiny characters. One of the most effective panels, for example, is the city opening its dome and various ships launching upward toward the viewer, followed by a half-splash of the Inhumans, tiny in perspective, heading toward them on an angle. But the very next panel has Black Bolt

attacked by something that literally must have come from nowhere, and by a figure that is unrecognizable. (All the characters and vehicles look pretty much the same, so how can you know who to root for?) While we get some effective large panels, the pace is pretty tight, focused on characters in nearly full-body poses, making it claustrophobic and difficult to follow. Only a few of the biggest panels and splash pages are saved for some appropriately large set pieces, but the majority are spent on blank panels of negative space, or nearly blank. It's effective for tone, as the ponderous narration is spread over multiple pages and paces out the reading, but it makes our reading experience a bit more empty. The post Secret Wars #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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