

Returned from dual kidnappings to the Mojoverse and Savage Staten Island, of all places, Spider-Man and his special class find drama waiting for them in the form of the Jean Grey School science fair and an insecure Hank McCoy. The last issue of Spider-Man and the X-Men was an extremely necessary win for the fledgling series, proving that it has what it takes to be a series worth watching. However, we've still got a ways to go before things are stable. This is definitely a different issue from the three that preceded it. Unlike previous installments, SMatXM #4 eschews the villain team up dynamic in favor of a more character based story with a couple of big moments. While the opening fight against the "Sinister Six" is serviceable, the obscurity of the members and the brevity of the fight make it a little confusing at times. It also continues to highlight how broken Spider-Man is in regards to his "No One Dies" policy. Nonetheless, there are some funny bits and the fight is short, a mere four pages, so it doesn't eat up too much of the issue. Arriving back at school, Elliott Kalan rather immediately puts the spotlight on the characters. Whenever Spider-Man and Beast bicker in this issue, it generally leaves me thinking less of both of them, but the science fair does prove an effective way of developing the special class. While you'd think that a newer writer with a slightly old fashioned sensibility would lean towards plot, Kalan's greatest talent for this series seems to be the way he treats the X-kids with honest respect and a desire to see them grow. It's hard not to love a series that's trying to build up characters like Glob Herman or Shark-Girl, and I actually really like what Kalan's doing with the group. Both Glob and No Girl get some great moments this month, while the direction Kalan is taking Shark-Girl and Rockslide continues to be a strong one. The faculty is more of a mixed bag. Though I understand Kalan's take on Beast, I still don't much care for it. Still, it's much better than it would have been if Kalan had continued the unanimous hatred of Spider-Man from the elder X-Men. Luckily he begins to develop that situation with a lovely scene between Spidey and Storm. Storm starts out her uncharacteristically grumpy self but giving her something that warrants her anger quickly resets the scene and allows for some solid character work. Even if Kalan may be fudging the timeline a little, it's a solid little moment. We also see some quick resolution to the Spider-Man/Rachel Grey feud. Rachel seems to be largely reduced to the essentials of her characterization, quite different than the character we're seeing in X-Men and other titles of the present, but she makes a fine second road block for Spidey and allows a pretty cool moment to come to pass. The art comes courtesy of RB Silva this month. Silva definitely has a more traditional look to his art than series regular Marco Failla. Attention to details like the distortions in the fabric of Spider-Man's suit help to give the book a distinguishing realism that's very different from the cartoony look Failla brought to the title. The 'human'-looking characters are quite strong this go around, with Rachel Grey looking particularly nice, especially during the pages where inker Rob Lean uses thinner lines on her. There's actually a quality around some of Silva's work that reminds me of Terry Dodson. The more visible mutants are a mixed bag. Silva proves to be another of the rare artists who does great things with Shark-Girl, but his beast design just doesn't work for me. He also draws Glob Herman with very prominent eyes and not a lot of skeletal detail. This works when it counts, but looks a little fishy when Glob is just hanging around in the background or far from the reader's perspective. I also have to say that Rockslide does not benefit in close-up. Regardless, while the style employed is hit and miss, the essential beats come through loud and clear, thanks to some strong storytelling. Silva has a talent for communicating an idea in a single panel and impressively manages to do so without feeling broad in his interpretation. His compositions have archetypal power without feeling stereotypically familiar. One thing to be said of this choice is that it directs attention towards a couple of key panels and tends to slide by on dialogue

heavy scenes. Overall I think Failla is a better fit for this series, but Silva does a nice job filling in and not only manages to combine elements of his own style with Failla's for his depiction of Storm but crucially avoids the repeated problems that Failla has had with the beleaguered headmistress for her most important scene to date. Some Thoughts: I suppose by real world standards it's none too modest, but, charming as Shark-Girl's banter with Delilah is, it seems like an odd costume to take offense to, given the state of comics fashion. Storm wasn't a teenager when she joined the X-Men, was she? I mean I doubt she was old enough to rent a car, but it still seems like referring to her as a teen superhero is a bit of a stretch. While I don't want to be too hard on RB Silva who did a fine job on this issue, I can't help but wish we'd gotten a whole issue from Stacey Lee instead of just an awesome cover. The post Spider-Man & the X-Men 4 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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