

After a long anticipated but troubled opening, Brian Michael Bendis' Eva Bell epic continues in this week's All-New X-Men Annual #1. The structure Bendis has devised for the two-part story is actually quite interesting, as the majority of the essential developments occurred in the previous installment. If not for the hook at the very end of the issue you probably could have just assumed that Eva was headed home at the end. This issue is all about the fallout, but it's a dramatic improvement. Limiting himself to two points in time was obviously a big help for Bendis' writing, but, more than that, this issue succeeds where the other didn't because each one presents a clear story to be told. Admittedly, Eva's anachronistic banishment loses quite a bit of tension once you realize that she can leave the moment she feels threatened, but I felt in the moment enough to buy into Eva's distress on a first read. I think the threat Tempus finds "at the dawn of man" banked a little too heavily on name recognition, but the strange relationship between the two is very charming. Not only that, but a somewhat ambiguous encounter with some cavemen lays some potential groundwork for future stories that I hope build on what's present here. I also applaud the early pages of this comic. While on their own, they might have seemed like padding, the sense of immersion and the suspense of discovering who Eva has found are very much welcome once the (no longer so) young mutant passes out to dream of happier days. Nevertheless, this comic was clearly building to its big reveal. I'm rather bothered by seemingly contradictory time travel rules, especially since we know that Eva returns home at the story's end, but the emotional punch this issue delivers makes it hard to focus on that. After all, last issue failed because we didn't understand what Eva was losing in leaving her future, this one succeeds partially because of the same trait. A little distance from that feeling benefits the issue, though it won't be there in the collection, and the sudden narrowing of focus, from world threatening threats, to a view of Marvel time's entirety, to this most personal of losses is powerful. After a failure to communicate the importance of Eva's odyssey two weeks ago, we leave this comic with a solid understanding of what preys on Eva now that she's returned. Much as Bendis' writing is his strong suite and much of it as there is, the show really belongs to Andrea Sorrentino. Bendis gives Sorrentino some incredibly beautiful ideas to play with and he happily goes absolutely wild with them. It's undeniably hard to read at times, but never when it's intended to communicate necessary information. Bendis seems perfectly aware that Sorrentino is the big draw of this comic and gives him ample space to work. That's convenient for a decompressed writer, but a lot of the dialogue actually gets crammed together on a couple of exposition heavy pages. The rest of the issue is lovingly dedicated to really selling the influence of time on the narrative and giving Sorrentino room to let Eva's emotions breathe a little. I don't know that we needed all we got, but, after Uncanny X-Men Annual's somewhat rushed visits to the worlds of Killraven and the Rawhide Kid it's very welcome. The problems from last issue remain for Sorrentino, if lessened somewhat. Characters still seem to change their features from one angle to another and indefinite expressions occasionally slip into anatomically questionable dull surprise. Sorrentino is at his best when he's depicting the strange and the sweeping. For better or worse, this artwork rarely looks 'normal'. Even so, the dream sequence turns weaknesses into strengths and Sorrentino draws the suspense and intrigue out of each oddity the script demands, and possibly a few it doesn't. It's also impossible to ignore the spreads in this comic. Whether they're literal full pagers or the aggregate of clever panels, Sorrentino really does a fantastic job of expressing concepts through intense, breathtaking images. There are some brilliantly inventive layouts in this issue that help to make this a visually unique book. The issue is also full of abstract ideas that feel perfectly natural through Sorrentino's art and few comics make you feel quite as small as this one. Of course, I would be

remiss if I didn't mention Marcelo Maiolo, who supplies the issue's colors. Though the colors themselves are subdued, the almost psychedelic hues help support the scope of the artwork and almost threaten to envelop you as you read. Some Thoughts: Andrea Sorrentino was kind enough to provide this uncolored page on his twitter account. Comparing it to the colored version is an interesting exercise. On one level it shows you how much is missing without the colors, diminishing Sorrentino's contribution, but on the other it highlights the level of detail and storytelling skill that he brings to the book. Seriously though, the fact that Eva goes home at the end pretty much contradicts the major premise of the story, doesn't it? The post All-New X-Men Annual #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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