

If I were to have a misguided rubric for reviewing comics, the most points would definitely go to novelty. Many's the time when an otherwise unremarkably executed comic stayed on my pull list for ages just because it offered something different to a market full of reiterations of the same handful of plots. That's my attraction to Morrison, who's always original even when he's blatantly riffing off established works. You can only imagine the result when he's writing something purely of his own conception. Annihilator isn't the best example because it does retread heavily on ideas Morrison's worked with before. Nameless doesn't even have the metafictional trappings he's so fond of working with, though you might argue the eponymous hero's lucid dreaming is a variation of the fictional awareness running through his other stories. Either way, that higher level of consciousness usually doesn't give the characters more than a slight edge in navigating their stories. Morrison often compensates with a plot too massive and dense for any amount of knowledge to make much of a difference. For all his deftness at diving and resurfacing through multiple layers of dreaming, Nameless invariably finds himself tripped up by the inherent unpredictability of his surroundings. He can be traipsing through a swampy temple on one page, sweating in his bedroom the next, then getting interrogated in a room containing all the universe two pages later. No wonder he feels like it's futile to tell the difference between what's real and what's not. And if he has that much difficulty, God help the rest of us. Morrison projects are never easy to feel your way through, but the first half of this issue is not unlike trying to find a needle in an overcrowded rave when you're not sure what the needle looks like. It starts straightforwardly, albeit grimly, enough, but once Nameless enters the picture, dragging his mindboggling life with him, you're hanging onto the plot for dear life. Nameless' jumpy, free-associating, highly referential narration is anything but helpful: "Way I see it, everything's been fucked up since 2001 anyway. Since the towers came down—since the pylons fell on Trump 18 and Malkuth was gathered up into Yesod-- My mom died just up the road at the Western. Here we are at the Botanics now. The lights take forever. Fish fuck bullshit. Signs of the end times—I'm starting to miss my trolley. Sign of Pisces. Hebrew letter 'nun' means 'fish'. 'Fish' and 'Death'. And death is daath." This is a pretty demanding speech, even for Morrison, requiring some knowledge of astrology, Kabbalah, and linguistics to synthesize his information into something like understanding. If Malkuth represents the physical plane and Yesod the mechanism that links to a higher level of reality, Nameless may be describing the Inception-like state of the world. The skewering of the two fish symbolizes the end of the spiritual age, which, by equating to daath, brings true enlightenment. These are abstract concepts fitting for Nameless' esoteric quest for "the dream-key of Nan Sanwohl," and in fact he later claims to be an expert on the occult, which the surrender of his name certainly supports. Yet once he snaps out of the dream world, things get decidedly more conventional as the story suddenly turns into your garden-variety disaster scenario. But there's still a mystical twist; the presence of a massive sigil on an extinction-sized asteroid heading straight for Earth suggests the missile was launched by some apparently powerful forces who have it out for humanity in a bad way. Indeed, "billionaut" Paul Darius already has the technological means to take out the asteroid; he needs Nameless' help defending the crew from undefined, malevolent, outside forces. Burnham is a favorite collaborator of Morrison's, and it's not hard to see why. No matter how far out Morrison's ideas go, Burnham is right there with him, inundating you relentlessly with symbols and surreal imagery straight out the last ten minutes of 2001: Space Odyssey.* But Burnham's art has an inescapably grounded quality, sensitive to the grit, wrinkles, and messiness of the real world, making even the issue's dreamscapes seem tangible and lived-in. You can only tell the difference by the broken, nonsensical lettering of the signage

in the dream world, and its unnaturally deserted spaces. Without any fanciness, Fairbairn uses light and color to infuse Nameless with a cinematic quality, evoking moods you feel in your gut even when the story is focused on getting its information across. There's an eeriness to the localized glow of Darius' video-drone against the darkness of a rainy night, as if the world is already in the shadow of doom and he bears its only fragile light. As Nameless stares at the sunrise just before his space journey, its golden colors are diffused against a heavy, gray horizon, giving it an evanescent quality, like the covering dawn before the storm. Some Musings:* That's an apt analogy, I think, given that Nameless mentions that 2001 is when everything started to go wrong.- A "fly man," for those who don't know, is the guy who operates the riggings and other components that operate the lights, scenery, etc. on a stage. The post Nameless #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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