

"In Four Months", it says on the cover. Now featuring "8 Months Ago" inside. Also? "Later." And again, "Later." Are these setting details or a metacommentary on the elusive nature of time? Whatever the time setting, the first page features characters standing around and looking at one other, silently. Same on the second page. For the remainder of the issue, the characters stand around and talk to one another. The first pages are effective as mood-building, falling out of the events from the previous issue, but the dialogue basically amounts to "Well, let's just agree we are all disappointed in ourselves and spend more time summarizing some exposition." There's one interlude featuring Dr. Doom and Molecule Man and finally the art can break free from the excitement of choosing either a close up or a medium frame for the portrait of the currently-speaking character and actually have the excitement of two characters floating in white negative space and spouting vague references to metaphors which the reader has not been clued into already. What an unfortunate choice to have the panels break up in interesting ways to mirror the decisions of the characters and be a visual metaphor for their dialogue. Thankfully, Mister Fantastic is featured for the majority of the issue to continue to give readers what we've come to expect from the Avengers-- failure. Or to be precise, summaries of their failures narrated to each other to explain how, on every way, a writer can block the narrative from following any path but the one he's pre-determined. Hey! Some character said. Let's blow things up real good! Nope, that doesn't work. Hey! Let's build an entirely new planet! Sorry. Hey! Let's get together with cosmically-abstract beings with powers beyond human comprehension! Not going to work. Not even the god-like, auteur-levels of power frequently exhibited by Franklin Richards (may he rest in peace) can match the mighty pen of the writer. But wait! That last page cliffhanger, spoiled by the front cover, perhaps offers a final hope? The characters have managed to find a race of Beyonders! Unfortunately, since they naturally are associated with the Secret Wars from 1984, and since they have been brought to the readers' attention with the upcoming, universe-shattering Secret Wars later in 2015, the readers can have little doubt that even these powerful beings can do anything except fail in the wake of something even more "beyond"... publishing decisions. I don't know why Mister Fantastic should be surprised about all his failures. He's been pronouncing that "Everything Dies" from the very beginning of this run, New Avengers #1, in 2013, for two years now. Did we honestly expect some kind of ironic twist to that statement? Did we actually expect heroes to triumph over seemingly impossible odds? Perhaps the true exercise of writing here is a new kind of experiment-- just how far can things be written as impossible in the Marvel universe? How far can a threat be escalated until our heroes, even fantastical and arbitrarily powerful ones (as all heroes kinda are), fail? How many licks does it take to get to the center of the Tootsie Pop? The problem with that question is that if you ever found an answer, then you've pretty much broken your storytelling engine. And the problem with breaking your storytelling engine is that you've pretty much have to clear the board and start all over again. Hmm, what's happening after Battleworld and the next Secret Wars, again? Oh, right. My problem with Hickman's Avengers, as this issue so clearly demonstrates, is that it might be a perfectly wonderful story, full of ennui and philosophy that we all love so much, but that doesn't mean it's a perfectly wonderful Marvel comics story. For two years now, all we've had is heroes failing, over and over. And now in this issue, we have the exact number of times our heroes have failed-- they've failed exactly infinity minus 24-or-so. Moreover, any emotional weight we are meant to feel is either so much in the abstract, as we mourn deaths of other-earths that we don't really get to see/experience, or is so cliché, as the father cradles his dead son. The last page may give some hope that there is "one last gasp" of hope to use Mister Fantastic's words, but it's unclear and unsatisfying to have to

plow through two years of this story to get to this point, or even to have to resort to a "last" gasp at all. I hope my intuition is wrong, and that the Marvel heroes will show just how heroic they can be in the face of darkness and hopelessness, that they just needed this one last gasp to have their Marvel moment of triumph in the face of tragedy. As Uncle Ben's death spurred on Spider-Man, as imprisonment, failing health, and certain death forged Iron Man, perhaps the Hickman-Avengers will become something truly great because of the more-than-impossible odds stacked against them. Or perhaps the Marvel universe will reboot, showing that our heroes failed to protect the world that they knew, and will reincarnate into versions of themselves, virtually the same, and move on to explore other stories, instead. The post New Avengers #29 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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