

I was very much excited last issue when Neil offered the people of Earth a chance to schlep themselves to another, more perfect dimension, mostly because it seemed like a situation Clark would find difficult to deal with. Indeed, Neil no sooner finishes broadcasting his deal when Clark arrives, sputtering to find something wrong with the plan. As Neil says, no one's being taken against their will here, and Lois insightfully points out, "If Superman made you the same offer, would you take it?" This still leaves Clark with plenty of avenues to attack the whole plan, especially the part about it being "more complicated than Neil thinks." The military response and cutthroat rush to get on one of those ships are the least of it. Imagine if Neil actually succeeds in getting six million people off the planet. Imagine being one of the people left behind, living with the thought that you missed your chance at utopia. Wouldn't that make you more interested in escaping the world's problems rather than solving them? That's probably the fear driving Clark's opposition, though he doesn't articulate it very clearly. He's frustrated that Neil doesn't give humanity its due. "What has gotten better?" Neil demands. "In the last twenty-five years? Plenty has. A perfect world doesn't happen overnight." It certainly won't happen if people give it up for lost and set their eyes elsewhere. Clark also fails to point out that Neil's jumping to conclusions when he sees humanity as screwed. In his speech to Earth, he claims he's "tried to acclimate to my birth planet," but has "seen enough to know the reality of a better tomorrow on this planet is impossible." Here's the problem, though: hasn't he been on Earth for only, like, two days?\* If that's as much patience for discomfort that Neil can muster, no wonder he thinks everything's doomed. If Johns had things at all this, forcing Clark to see an actual philosophical conflict through, he might have gotten a powerful story out of it. He might even have sent Superman into unknown, dangerous territory. But that could only happen as long as he maintained the presumption that the Fourth Dimension is perfect, no strings attached. Instead, this issue begins to reveal the inevitable caveats, starting with the fact that Neil's ships refuse to take on anyone they find unsuitable. That intolerance suggests that the Fourth Dimension may not be the warm, welcoming society we've inferred up to this point. It may be that 4D is free from violence by force rather than nature. This would certainly explain Neil's anxious behavior at the end of the issue, as he tells his parents can't come with him, insisting, "I'm trying to protect you!" Eventually, he confirms that there's a cost to the "perfect world" he landed on, and that "Earth must pay for it." The logistics are unclear, but you definitely get a herald-of-Galactus vibe when he admits, "...I've done this before. But this was different. This was Earth..." Even more appalling, Neil can avoid all this heartache if he can adjust to life on Earth; he's just not willing to stomach its imperfection: "What kind of life could I ever have?" Would anyone find it offensive if I said I still don't quite understand what the big deal over Romita is all about? It's inoffensive and full of energy, and Romita definitely gets the big moments, like the two-page splash of one of Neil's massive ships looming over Metropolis amidst a heavy rain. But the sketchy lines don't always produce a consistent or clear image from panel to panel, and there's a bit of flatness in the more dramatically demanding scenes. At Romita's most marginal, Martin's contributions are more clearly seen, her ghostly blue lighting effects giving certain sequences their power. Some Musings: \* It's a bit like Thor regaining his worthiness after a three-day exile to New Mexico. - Has anyone decoded the 4D language yet? The letters obviously correspond to the Roman alphabet, but when they seem mixed up when Neil and Klerik speak in their native tongues. The post Superman #36 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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