

Say what you will about “The Last Will and Testament of Charles Xavier”, and there is plenty to say, but it definitely marked a turning point for Brian Michael Bendis’ Uncanny X-Men. After a dramatic interlude with the brothers Summers we turn to another pair of mutants from the now defunct Xavier Institute. I’ve mentioned before that, despite my love of the original New Mutants, I’ve always been utterly bored by Illyana Rasputin. She’s always been one of the most tiresome X-Men to me. Nonetheless, I can’t remember the last time a character I’m so uninterested in has become such a delight to read as Bendis’ take. So, particularly with his time with the X-Men coming to a close, it’s nice to have a Kitty and Illyana issue. Before we get to the meat of the review, be warned, this is an entirely unnecessary issue. You’re not here to get essential context for the series the way you were for the last issue, this one exists just to be cute and heartfelt, but I assure you, it is those things. While most of the Xavier Institute staff has expressed reservations about Scott’s leadership at one point or another, the level of focus on the man called Cyclops may have distracted you from the somewhat obvious fact that, by being party to the “new mutant revolution”, the other faculty were consciously and actively agreeing with at least some of its methodology. With the revelation that Cyclops’ revolution was essentially a bluff last month, those heroes who went along, who not only admitted agreeing with the idea of revolution but potentially radicalized their views in order to support it, have had the floor pulled out from under them. Bendis doesn’t spend a lot of time dwelling on this point, but it’s a rather fascinating dimension to the issue and Magik’s frustrations make it clear enough that it is in play. Indeed, Magik is not what you’d call a warm and fuzzy person. She reads as someone who can’t really deal with her anger but who also isn’t willing to let it consume her. And so, unable to vent her frustrations she throws herself, and her unwitting BFF, into her work. The Monster Island setting does little to add to the issue besides generate an easy shorthand threat. While this feels like something of a waste, it really isn’t the focus. No, this issue is all about relationships. Bendis has a terrific handle on Kitty and Illyana’s friendship and manages to express that despite, or perhaps through, the frustrations the pair are feeling. Admittedly, the banter felt a little quick to me, a little too rapid fire, but the content is excellent. Kitty and Illyana have distinct voices that feel in line with the characters’ histories and they play off of each other naturally. By far one of my favorite moments in the early part of the issue comes when Kitty makes a joke about Illyana taking her to the island to dispose of her body, the resulting exchange captures that moment when your close friend reveals a flaw in your dynamic, including the awkward but telling reversion to form shortly after. Before long we hit the meat of the story. It’s touching but emotionally manipulative as it gets. This is a very standard plot that gets by on the strength of the characters and your desire for things to turn out alright. That’s not a terrible thing, but the issues that were building up until this point don’t really get resolved through this and Magik’s powers make for a woefully anti-climactic ending. Still, oh my goodness, Bo is super cute and the interaction between she and the older mutants is well handled. You can practically hear Kitty’s “Pretty good.” It’s also interesting to see a younger mutant, a concept that actually makes a lot of sense given the hormonal mess that is ‘normal’ onset of puberty in girls these days. At times Bo’s grasp of English seems to change to suit the dialogue, but for the most part Bendis does an impressive job of writing a child in this extreme situation. Kris Anka provides the art this month and does a great job of it. Anka seems to be trying something new this month, utilizing what seems to be a more malleable style with thicker lines. It’s definitely different, but it doesn’t suit his strengths any less. The geometric, cartoony qualities bring out the character of the mutant heroes as well as the strange collection of creatures that call the island home. The issue has a bold pop to it that is innately pleasing to the

eye, without drawing too much attention to the change. That said, it's not the most even issue, with Anka clearly experimenting with different techniques. There are varying levels of success, both in expressing the ideas at hand and in stitching them into a complete issue. Bo, for instance, looks great, but distinct from "Kitty Cat" and "Magic". Speaking of Illyana, I so appreciate the consistent effort Anka has made to visually differentiate her from the standard superheroine, especially after the confusion of the early Bachalo issues, where she and Emma were often fairly interchangeable. As a result however, I spent a lot of time looking at Illyana's nose this issue and it serves as an easy example of how great and how weird the artwork can be in this issue. In its best moments, Illyana's face, and especially her nose, are passively refreshing, different and well drawn. However, there are several instances where Magik sneers or her nose is drawn differently. Some of these instances look great, but others feel wonky or seem at odds with what came before. There's lots of that in this issue. Characters are drawn with one aesthetic on one page and then take on another a page later without their design, the setting, or anything else changing to indicate that it's a device. It's honestly kind of cool to see Anka trying so many things but it also doesn't come together fully. The post Uncanny X-Men #33 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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