

While you can be sure that they've consciously cultivated the perception, Image Comics is very much the HBO of the comic industry. There's the same freedom, the same consistent quality, the same hint of snobbery from fans. And, like HBO, while not every series they put out is an immediate hit, the company is defined by its blockbuster successes, the stories that feel like an event. In this regard, Saga and Game of Thrones are probably the best examples of what I mean. Regardless of which analogues you chose, when a series breaks into that hallowed number you can usually tell right away and it is always cause for celebration. It is looking like Descender is one of those titles. Though it was marketed with an emphasis on the 'last robot boy hunted by mercenaries' angle, a sort of cyborg Kamandi meets Jason Bourne, the first issue of Descender is far quieter, still channelling something of Jack Kirby but tending towards the darker themes of his Fantastic Four work. There's definitely a sense of reverence in the issue. A lot of the moments that set this story apart are the ones that force you to be quiet and feel small. Tim-21 is an obvious example, but rather than write the character as childish, Lemire gets in touch with the very honest helplessness that we experience in isolation, whether as adults or children. There's also some solid world building. Though Lemire is clearly leaning heavily on a few planets and conflicts within the UGC, he knows how to appeal to that curious part of us that Star Wars tapped into for so many of us and invest us in his world. I especially loved Lemire's use of population statistics in this issue to communicate important shifts in the story, not only as a way to communicate information but to express emotion. It's inherently interesting to see how unambiguously Tim-21 is considered alive, but Bandit is not until he's repaired. I sincerely hope that this device won't fade out as the story continues, as it carries an interesting weight with it. I chose the HBO metaphor to open this review very consciously. Descender is an extremely cinematic comic, borrowing conventions of framing and pace from film in an even greater sense than most modern books. Particularly as we're introduced to Tim-21 there's a huge amount of time dedicated to establishing mood and communicating the young robot's helplessness. It's decompressed to be sure, but, especially as beautiful as it is, it makes a strong argument for this being an independent series. I doubt you could get away with that in a Big 2 book. That said, while Descender has admirably employed many of the hallmarks of film, there are weaknesses of the modern movie, as well. Most obviously, the structure is a little confining, it keeps our story from branching out onto new ground. There are elements of many great science fiction stories embodied in Descender, but, as of yet, they haven't formed a new narrative aesthetic. In fairness, it actually feels like we haven't hit the moment where the story begins to gel either. Perhaps Lemire couldn't quite fit that leg of the story comfortably into one issue, but, regardless, I put down Descender intrigued but unsure of what the series would be going forward. There are many interesting ideas and a strong forward momentum, but the issue possesses the advantages and disadvantages of both, and therefore neither the full benefits nor the full problems of these. As a result it's not clear what the hook of the series is. It's also impossible not to mention how awkward a couple of crucial bits of exposition are. A huge amount of crucial information is delivered through perfectly edited news reports, Tim likes to repeat things to Bandit, and at one point a character literally insists that a scientist explain his theories despite admitting that they're fully acquainted with them. Especially in a book this good, it's odd to find characters needlessly explaining to those around them. Nonetheless, I'd also be remiss if I didn't admit that the content of these explanations, if not their format, is engaging, as is the majority of the book. Great as the script is, Descender's major selling point has to be the art. Dustin Nguyen has been one of my favorite artists for years. His Gotham work, Li'l and otherwise, is superb and, if you haven't checked it out, you're missing a definitive take on the

visuals of the Batman franchise. Despite the impressive bibliography behind him, Descender may be Nguyen's finest work yet. While the general look of the issue is in line with Nguyen's previous work, every element of his work seems to have received more attention than in past efforts. There's a greater sense of realism in the designs, for one thing, which is a drastic departure from the increasingly simplified look of Li'l Gotham. It's a choice that loses some of the slick stylization that Nguyen has been known for but more than makes up for it in variety and depth of expression. Still, more than anything, I think it's the sheer level of detail in color and shading that makes this such an intense visual experience. The cool light of Dirishu, the gunmetal rainbow of a Harvester's frame, the light dancing on Dr. Quon's hair or skin, it's not only beautiful but extremely expressive. The issue also employs color palettes to tremendous effect. The minute we return to Niyrata, you'll understand what's happening from the colors alone. Of course, Nguyen isn't perfect. As ever, his children are from the same mold, with Tim-21 resembling Tim Drake resembling Damien Wayne. There also aren't a lot of clear shots of Dr. Quon early on in the book so, when I admitted to a friend that I had been surprised to see him with facial hair later in the story, they confirmed that I wasn't the only one who thought the good doctor was a woman. Regardless, it's a beautiful issue and Nguyen is lucky to have such arresting visuals to play with. The concept of the Harvesters is incredibly powerful and Nguyen brings their horror and splendor to the page with incredible force. So far, Descender has given us a beautiful sci-fi world, but populated it with the figures and the questions of our myths. A Thought: While it hardly needs to explain itself fully at this stage, it occurs to me that, despite the presence of Harvesters and Scrappers, we still don't know what, or who, a Descender is. The post Descender #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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