In May 2012, the second wave of the New 52 launched with Earth 2 as its central offering. It proved to be an exciting and impressive experiment in world building and character development. James Robinson chose to look to the days of the Justice Society and the original Earth 2 before Crisis on Infinite Earths destroyed the first multiverse, while introducing new themes and references. Like the New 52's Earth 0, Earth 2 had endured an invasion from Apokalips and managed to beat it back. But the price this world had paid was much steeper than that of Prime Earth. Earth 2 had been almost totally devastated, and parts of its territory were still occupied by the Apokaliptan forces. Society and government had cracked and reformed, leading to the creation of a semi-tyrannical World Army suspicious of any and all perceived threats to the world order and its own power. And the three greatest heroes of the world, called the Wonders, namely Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, had been killed in the climactic battle of the war, while Helena Wayne and Kara Zor-L were hurled into the Earth 0 dimension to become Huntress and Power Girl.Into this shattered but slowly healing realm Robinson introduced a new group of Wonders: Jay Garrick, the Flash; Alan Scott, the Green Lantern; and Kendra Munoz-Saunders, Hawkgirl. Each of these differed from their classic versions in interesting ways. Jay was young and new to his powers. Kendra was a treasure hunter whose wings were an experiment courtesy of the World Army. And Alan was powered not by alien technology but by the power of the Green, thus becoming an avatar in the tradition of Earth 0's Swamp Thing, but with a very different manifestation of his world's life force. Gradually, Robinson built a wider cast around these three. We saw new interpretations of Doctor Fate, Solomon Grundy, the Atom, and Sandman. It seemed that this really was a very different world with a very different feel and history and destiny.And then the story took two twists that, in retrospect, proved fatal. The new trinity was largely abandoned in favor of a new Batman and new Superman. And the world was plunged again into a war with Apokalips, a war it was doomed to lose. Legend has grown that these changes coincided with the departure of James Robinson the arrival of new writer Tom Taylor, but in fact the changes were already underway before Robinson left the book. In truth, the developments need not have been ruinous. The new Batman, Thomas Wayne, was a very different character indeed from his dead son, and incorporated aspects of Hourman in interesting ways. When Taylor introduced the new Superman, Val-Zod, as a pacifist, he also brought a sophisticated discussion of the complexities of a refusal to fight and kill, of its costs and controversies. The interpretations of Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen introduced into Earth 2 were likewise fresh takes on these traditional characters.But it can't be denied that something was lost when the story moved in the direction of Batman and Superman, when Kendra and Jay and Alan were left behind for Thomas and Val and Jimmy and Lois. And it can't be denied that the return of the war with Apokalips meant the end of important possibilities for exploring the meaning of world government, and the relationship of government to superheroes.But the true tragedy came with the launch of the weekly Earth 2: World's End. The title of the weekly tells the story. The decision had been made to destroy Earth 2. There is fascination in destruction, but destruction for its own sake is not a story, but merely a process. Daniel H. Wilson, the main scribe for the weekly, is a frustrated screenwriter. His scripts read like scenes from an action movie. But there are good action movies and bad action movies. Good action movies actually have plots, however simplistic. Bad action movies only have disconnected scenes framing the special effects. World's End was the latter kind of action movie.Earth 2 quickly become simply a monthly annex to the weekly title, as Taylor departed and both the weekly and the monthly came under the control of the same set of writers. For six months, all that was built before

came apart in incoherent bursts of imagery as the forces of Apokalips tightened their grip on the hapless planet. Some worthwhile narrative elements did survive, such as the introduction of Earth 2 versions of Dick Grayson, Ted Grant, and Yolanda Montez. However, even these elements lacked coordination and effectiveness, as witnessed by the fact that the name of Dick Grayson's son kept changing from one issue to another, first Johnny, then Tommy. By the final issue, it wasn't even clear who had escaped from the dying planet and how they had managed to do so.The post Earth 2 and World's End: The Dawn Before the Darkness appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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