

Mark your calendars, True Believers! 1984 is bringing you the first issue of a true capital-E epic in the making. This is a new venture for Marvel Comics-- a so-called "limited series" that will last just twelve issues. The brainchild of editor/writer Jim Shooter, with art by Mike Zeck and Bob Layton, this series brings together no less than thirty major heroes and villains in what will surely be a Battle Royale. It's designed to tie into the merchandise of the same-titled line of action figures from Mattel Toys, but, like similar publications (Transformers, ROM: Spaceknight, Micronauts), it's not a purely shameless marketing stunt. The creators seem to be taking a decidedly purposeful approach that will effect some creative choices and impact the entire line of Marvel comics. For twelve issues! A whole year! The epicness begins on the first few pages, with a giant spacecape and star field, opening to a double-page splash of an assemblage of heroes. We've seen Marvel team-ups before, but this is one for the ages. We've never seen the Avengers, Fantastic Four, and X-Men *all* in the same place at the same time. This set-up is paralleled to a smaller extent with the villains, who also get a splash panel followed by a line-up. While the villains seem fewer in number, they are none the less more powerful. On the same team, there is Ultron, Molecule Man, *and* Dr. Doom? Oh, yeah. And did we forget *Galactus*?! The voice from Beyond, a.k.a. the Beyonder, is perhaps the true villain here, but he's little more than a plot device. It makes for an effective counterpoint to the man-versus-man conflict that is playing out among the heroes and villains-- the stakes are truly man-versus-god or man-versus-fate. Perhaps there is more than a little metacommentary here, too, as what's "beyond" characters and comicbooks are the creators themselves. What are Spider-Man and Dr. Doom but mere playthings for the whims of Shooter and Zeck? Isn't it appropriate that a toy line tie-in features a plot device that gathers figures in a kind of toybox and mashes them together-- fight, fight, fight! The 23 pages of this issue are filled with set-up, to be sure, and the art expertly helps stage all the drama. The scenes of the "beyond" are impressive, and there's a whole page as an entire planet is created. There's a balance of close-up portraits and establishing landscapes-- including one page that has both the prone, yet powerful, body of Galactus as well as a lonely Doom overseeing an alien fortress. Unfortunately, with all this set-up, there is a lot of dialogue to suffer through. The characters take time to really spell out a lot of exposition, which gets clunky at times, and thus feels forced. Magneto, for example, has an extended monologue that almost crowds out his portrait in one panel, and contains lines such as "I fight in defense of my race! My cause is just-- though even the X-Men, who like me are Homo Superior, stupidly fail to understand that!" Who talks like this? This comic costs 75 cents because the weight of all the melodrama is affecting the shipping costs! Thankfully, there are more than a few fight scenes, too. As we'd expect, the heroes and the villains have to fight among themselves a bit, and the last page features an awesome cliffhanger splash with all the villains racing into battle. It gives the momentum and suspense that ensures we'll get more battles to come, baiting you to buy the subsequent issues! The post Marvel Super Heroes Secret War #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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