The solicitation for Spider-Man and the X-Men is basically a love letter from Marvel to me. To me and, I imagine, a number of former nerdy kids out there. You can basically chart out my life in the details it gives us: Dinosaurs, Spider-Man, sharks, teaching and the value of the student/teacher relationship, The Daily Show, The Jean Grey School; it's kind of everything I love. The question is, how does the comic hold up to that sterling solicit? To get to the point, the results are mixed. Elliott Kalan clearly adores the Marvel universe and is looking for ways to create natural tension between Spider-Man and the X-Men, so we begin this strange experiment with Peter arriving at a school that is not terribly pleased to have him. You see, most of the faculty, and a good number of the students, don't like the idea of having a human guidance councilor, a non-mutant telling them how to be normal or ethical. It doesn't help that Spider-Man's understandable but problematic attachment to his secret identity means that no one is completely sure that he's the genuine article. The idea is actually fairly interesting. The school, despite its longstanding history as a place of hiding, has always been a safe space, a place for mutants to feel protected and open with one another. There are no masks at the Jean Grey School. Throw the notoriously secretive and frequently flippant Spider-Man, into the mix and there was bound to be some tension. The problem is with how Kalan handles the situation. Spider-Man and the X-Men #1 doesn't frame this as a matter of unwanted supervision or lack of trust, but rather as a racial issue. Even longtime allies of Peter's - Amazing Friends, even - are quick to dismiss him. The X-Men are acting more than a little prejudiced. It's even stranger to hear that coming from the integrationist JGS faculty. That's unfortunate enough, but Spidey's response to their well-meaning, but uncomfortable objections is to insist that they just need to learn a lesson about responsibility! And Kalan backs him up. Admittedly, I think we could give the series more time before we pretend to know to whom it confers moral authority, but I definitely got the sense that Mr. Spiderman is going to go into this minority school and get them to learn an important lesson. It's awkward and it doesn't even have the common courtesy to play that trope for laughs. While part of me is distressed by the short-sightedness Kalan is imbuing these characters with, I do have to admit that he gets Spider-Man. Peter's been his own worst enemy since Amazing Fantasy #15 and, while it's played up here, the same flighty sense of humor that endears him to the reader would be incredibly annoying in person. In fact, there's no doubt that this is classic Spidey fare. Familiar issues such as the troubles/necessity of wearing a mask, freedom vs. responsibility, and Peter's singular lack of irony in his love for science all come into play. It's all archetypal Spider-Man, but it sometimes feels like a tale of an earlier Peter Parker. I'm reminded of the X-Men's first encounter with the Avengers in X-Men #9 or the "The Mutant Agenda" crossover on Spider-Man: TAS, a little younger sounding, a little stiffer ala Stan Lee. The other thing this series reminds me of is Jason Aaron's Wolverine and the X-Men. It's a little odd to have a dozen issues of WatXM vol. 2 separating them, but, given that I didn't keep up with Latour's stint on the title, it feels like a perfect transition from one to the other. There's the same strangeness, the oddball sense of humor, about the school and even the same frustration from the faculty, if directed at a different target. If you enjoyed Aaron's first few issues or the ones that immediately followed "AvX", you really ought to give this book a shot. The one thing that's odd about it is that it feels so much like Aaron's take. Kalan's comedy writing was heavily touted, but so far it feels like he's playing it relatively safe. There's none of The Daily Show's biting wit, nor any big belly laughs. I'd say it's going for quirky rather than outright funny. Kalan's clearly still getting his feet somewhat. Nearly a page of Peter musing out loud about his top secret mission seems like a questionable choice and a number of the jokes that fall flat feel like they would have worked if a person had been reading them out loud. That

said, when the book is really in its element, doing what it set out to do, it leaps up in quality. The sequence in the Danger Room is quite solid and does a much better job of conveying the different facets of the class, communicating the differences in the students' view points through the particular way they voice the majority opinion. So Kalan's first swing at an ongoing doesn't quite connect. A shame, but not a tragedy, and one that is lessened by his collaboration with Marco Failla. This book is basically a renamed and revamped Wolverine and the X-Men and Failla's art fits in nicely among the other artists who have covered the Jean Grey School, falling into the same flat, somewhat geometric mold that's defined so many of them. However, the elements unique to him are a perfect fit for the evolution this title has taken following the death of its lead. Indeed, the quality that strikes me most is the spindliness of Failla's figures.The entire book seems to scream "Spider-Man!" Ties and movement lines and even faces all have a tensed, slender quality that recalls Ditko's original vision of Spider-Man. Everyone is this book is looking positively trim, even Glob Herman has shed a few pounds! The only exception is STEGRON THE DINOSAUR MAN!, which is kind of a shame, but he probably has like three stomachs, so I'll not fat shame him. Look at Storm in the first panel and you can see what I mean almost immediately. There's a sharpness to her features that really works. Failla is also one of the first artists to really nail Shark-Girl's look, the thin lines conveying the sharp, aerodynamic shapes of her namesake animal. Faces like Hellion's that don't suit the style take a little time to get used to, but it grows on you. There are some minor problems with exaggerated proportions. Spider-Man's eyes are enormous and Beast's feet are distractingly tiny, but, in terms of cons, Failla's biggest one is just that he doesn't bowl you over. Some Thoughts: I'm not sure I understand what Peter's trip to the museum was trying to teach. He claims its a reminder that species need to work together to survive, but I don't know what a carnosaur-coalition would have done against a massive asteroid impact and catastrophic climate change. Admittedly this is a pet peeve of mine, but I am tired of the odd moralizing that the KT extinction brings out. Personally, I'd love to find out that Peter was having a bad day and just wanted an excuse to go to his favorite place. I hope Kalan keeps and explores the academic rivalry between Peter and Beast. While I think Hank is clearly the superior mind, he's made some rather questionable calls in his time and having someone who can at least follow his logic could be really fun. It's even more interesting if you consider that Peter is often less of a scientist and more of a science enthusiast, stepping in, fresh, at the last minute, after the experiments have failed, and picking them apart. While I tried not to let it affect my thoughts on the issue too much, as I think it's a valid choice, it bothers me that Kalan is ignoring Peter's history of teaching. I really love the idea of Peter as a science teacher and I'm glad to have a place to see him working with kids again, but part of me rejects the idea that he seemingly becomes less mature around them rather than more. The post Spider-Man and the X-Men #1 – Review appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

Read more: http://weeklycomicbookreview.com/2014/12/12/spider-man-x-men-1-review/