In the typically Morrisonian fashion, Thunderworld opens with some pretty grandiose context: "Poised at the dazzling, crystalline pinnacle of imagination's loftiest empyrean peaks. Here, on the inconstant borderland that separates what is from what might be awaits your gateway to ultimate adventure…" Besides sheer audacity, the speech expresses everything Morrison believes and does with superhero comics: it stretches the very heights of belief; it is inconstant and always changing; and it evolves (or devolves, as the case might be) based on what we know is real and what we wish was real. All of these things make the adventurous spirit of superhero comics possible. Within Thunderworld, the speech is meant to describe the Rock of Eternity, but the Rock itself is a symbol of wonder. When Dr. Sivana conquers the Rock and begins to mine its "suspendium" (a rare substance that allows him to suspend time but can just as easily be a thinly veiled metaphor for suspension of belief), it's unsurprising when the Rock's décor changes into that of a sterile office space full of cubicles. It's a cautionary tale for what happens when reality is imposed too strongly on the type of fiction superheroes exist in. The Wizard Shazam laments, "They're digging out the magic—when it's gone—when it's all hollowed out—when nothing remains but cogs and wheels—pipes and bright lights—the universe will lose its secret heart. You'll have it all but none of it—none of it will be worth anything." To translate, when we no longer have anything to wonder at, we won't have anything to live for. And if comics are the so-called pinnacle of wonder, then we must therefore live for comics. Q.E.D.* With all this underlying worship of comics, it makes sense that they play a major role in Thunderworld by allowing Sivana to collaborate with his Multiversal counterparts on their master master plan. Ostensibly, the plan is based on cold, hard science in contrast to the flickering glow of magic that powers Shazam and his champions. But the science in this case involves the generation of enough artificial time to insert an extra day, "Sivanaday," into the calendar, a day in which all his most dastardly ideas become scientific proofs. It doesn't take the wisdom of Solomon to recognize that this brand of science is even more absurd than the magic our heroes practice, leading Captain Marvel to conclude, "[S]cience and magic are the same thing. Two sides of the same human coin." At least, both form the fundamental basis for superhero comics. Both plot and character are, as they frequently are in Morrison comics, subjugated to the metafictional points he wants to make in the issue. Sivana's plan is thinly motivated and unravels in predictable fashion. None of the characters, not even the big red cheese himself, are that finely developed (or at all, in some cases).** At best, Morrison renders the Marvels with more finesse than writers tend to do, spotlighting their magnetic enthusiasm while playing down their goody-goodyness. I appreciate that Billy is not above calling his enemies "idiots," and all the Marvels employ a healthy amount of trickery to win the day. Plus, Billy gets in a pretty great burn when he informs Sivana, "New data came to light. There was a sudden paradigm shift." That's a sophisticated joke for Captain Marvel. Despite these small defects, the issue is a great deal of fun and a much-needed break from the grim outlook of the previous Multiversity chapters. Indeed, the fact that the Marvels manage an unqualified win is unusual, considering the series' losing streak. Chalk that to the absence of the cursed Ultra Comics here, but I'd say it has more to do with the nature of the Marvels themselves. Near the end of the issue, Billy skims through Society of Super-Heroes #1, scoffing, "What happened to happy endings? 'I'll get out and destroy everything…' Ha! I don't know about you. But that sounds to me—like tomorrow's big adventure!" S.O.S. is modeled after the Golden Age heroes, who were designed to counteract the crushing weight of war; the Marvels represent the purest form of superheroes, so they aren't dismayed even by the prospect of Multiversal doom. They give you reason to hope for the best. Stewart is much like Chris Sprouse in that his art obviously

draws its spirit from an earlier age of heroes yet retains a modern sensibility. The Marvels are fully their sunny selves, with grins as wide as Stewart can make them without actually going off their faces, but they're also clean and naturally formed, their movements smooth and full of impact. More importantly, Stewart's flexibility allows him to make every silly concept of Thunderworld a delight, bringing out the best of the Lieutenant Marvels and Monster Society's all-too-brief appearances. Kudos also to Fairbairn, who's better known for his glossy, dark colors on Swamp Thing, but who proves just as capable at bringing out the best and brightest of Thunderworld's best and brightest. Some Musings: * As you can tell, I was amazing in my logic courses. ** The one exception may be Georgia Sivana, whose transformation from homely girl to busty woman fails to cure her of her insecurity. She's incredulous and obviously flattered when Freddie seems receptive to her aggressive flirtation ("That's it? Are you for real? Is this how dating works when you're pretty?"), to the point that it's a bit tragic when she realizes it's all a ploy to restore her to normal. - Watch out for that Hannibal Sivana. He's too creepy and brilliant not to come back at some point. The post The Multiversity: Thunderworld #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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