

While Thor #1 may have marked the beginning of a new era for Marvel's Asgardians, it cannot be said that it is the beginning of the story. Indeed, while it was rightly presented as a jumping on point, Jason Aaron's current volume of Thor is very much a continuation of his work on Thor: God of Thunder and nowhere is that more apparent than in this first Annual issue. Split between God of Thunder's three time periods with three creative teams to match, Thor Annual #1 is an interesting addition to the current volume. I don't think it can be said this is a crucial issue to understanding the story of the main series, however I really don't think that that was ever the intention. Thor Annual #1 aims to tell three cute, engaging stories and, in that, it succeeds. The first story is that of King Thor, written by Jason Aaron, himself. Readers of God of Thunder may get a stronger reaction to this tale, but it should be more than accessible to the new reader. Aaron opens the story with a funeral and immediately sets the scene of a world ending not with a bang but with a whimper. It's a good plot, but a simple one, and, at times, the dialogue cannot disguise that fact. Both Thor and the Girls of Thunder fall into simple archetypes but Aaron manages to steer us around the rocks of those dangerous waters, if, admittedly, only barely in places. Still, the emotional depth and refreshing quiet of the piece are hard to deny, especially once it comes time to name Thor's present. It's nice to see the hard nobility of King Thor contrasted against the wild energy of the Girls of Thunder and the double page splash is likely to bring a smile to your lips. Nonetheless, I can't say I'm a huge fan of Timothy Truman's artwork in this story. While it's not bad work by any means, there's just enough awkwardness in the anatomy and expressions to hurt the overall effect. The realism of the style suits the grim world King Thor is confronted with and pays off big on that spread, but often it captures the mundanity rather than the spark of reality. While it may not be his fault, I also don't care for Truman's rendition of the Girls of Thunder. They remind just a little too much of stripped down video game characters for me to feel comfortable. Their basic costumes and the artist's attention on their midriff and legs feel vaguely but undeniably dehumanizing and Aaron's writing doesn't have the depth to reassert their agency in such a short story. Noelle Stevenson's tale of the modern Goddess of Thunder is similarly cute. Still adapting to the world and body of an Asgardian, Thor finds herself on a slew of Herculean labors as chosen by the Warriors Three. Stevenson's webcomics background serves her well as she crams fun and intrigue into even the briefest representations of Thor's exploits. One test, very much recalling the shape of Hercules and Hyppolyta's girdle, is especially excellent for demonstrating the differences between this Thor and the old one, particularly at this stage in their development. The story is fluffy, down to the cotton candy colors that Marguerite Sauvage brings to the piece, but it's positively oozing with charm. My only real complaint is that it feels like Stevenson is trying to have things both ways. Over and over Thor reiterates that she doesn't need to prove herself to anyway, she just wants to do the same things as the Odinson did on the insistence of a trio of drunken Asgardian bros who insist that it was "all in fun". To her credit, Stevenson makes a nice little story out of it, but given how reactions to the new Thor and heroines like her have gone, particularly of late, I can't help but feel like the story both wants to address and ignore the parallels it naturally summons. At the least Fandral could have thrown a fedora on. It's also worth mentioning that this is the first time we've seen the Goddess of Thunder in Asgardia proper. It seems odd to think that she would stop into a pub with the All-Father looking for her and I can't necessarily find another spot in continuity where this fits, but not only is that what Annuals are often for but it proves that the idea has legs and makes me excited for the day when we see more interactions between Thor and her new kinsmen. Marguerite Sauvage is a fine fit for this tale. She brings life to the very particular tone Stevenson is working in and walks the same tightrope of appeasing 'traditional'

fans and appealing to readers better attuned to this new Thor, perhaps even better than her creative partner. Admittedly Thor is looking a little demure for the character that Stevenson writes, but there's a vitality in the work that is a great benefit to the story. Sauvage also does great work in the details: the elf-maid assessing Thor's biceps, Hogun playing the harp, Thor celebrating an epic toss. While there are places where the art feels subtly out of sync with the script, Sauvage largely makes up for it by bringing her own potent storytelling chops to bear. The final story is from newcomer and former WWE star, CM Punk. People have been wary of this story since it was first announced. They worried that it signaled a willingness to turn Marvel's characters over to anyone with enough name recognition, and perhaps there's a little bit of anti-wrestling stereotypes thrown in as well. Regardless, I was pleasantly surprised by Punk's freshman effort. There's no denying that it is another fluffy tale and one of a very particular temperament, but I doubt we'd be bothered by that if it came from an established writer. Admittedly, Punk's story is very formulaic. As such it's better read in the way that you watch a classic Looney Toons short, interested in what twists and gags develop the arc of the story rather than expecting something unfamiliar. In this the tale is rather amusing, from Thor's drunken misidentifications to the inventive, and delightfully anachronistic, Marvel-themed drinks the barkeep produces, there's fun to be had here, more so for the fact that it comes attached to the other two stories. I also have to give Punk credit for really nailing the relationship between Young Thor and Loki. It's easy to get caught up in Loki's hype but sorcerous Jotunn we find here is pleasantly restrained and appropriately ambiguous without becoming too mysterious. The seeds of his future villainy are already planted, but Punk impresses with a Loki that makes sense with his later characterization yet still feels like a part, if a distrusted one, of Thor's retinue. Rob Guillory is, by far, the artist most in tune with his writer, giving the script the wild, cartoony energy that it deserves. It's pretty incredible how much his artwork stands out with Sauvage's pages preceding him, but perhaps it's the stronger lines and darker colors that help it to distinguish itself. Regardless, Guillory brings the exact right balance of the classic and the bizarre to make his panels look odd without veering into the gross, which, given the subject matter, could easily have been a problem. Moments of drama are peppered throughout to set the stakes and give a sense of extremity to the story. The reactions are phenomenal and Mjolnir's inscription, I kid you not, actually reads "Do you even lift, Bro?!!" I don't know that Guillory would have worked on just any Thor story, but this one was a perfect choice. The post Thor Annual #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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