



## Astonishing X-Men Omnibus

*Joss Whedon (Text) , John Cassaday (Illustrator)*

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Now in one titanic tome: the entire chart-topping run of super-team Joss Whedon and John Cassaday Winner of multiple prestigious Eisner Awards, Whedon and Cassaday's Astonishing X-Men was a smash hit with critics and fans alike from the very first issue - winning praise from dozens of top media outlets including Entertainment Weekly, Publishers Weekly, TV Guide, and New York Magazine, as well as racking up nearly every major comic-book industry award. Buffy the Vampire Slayer creator Whedon and Cassaday (Captain America, Planetary) assembled a tight cast - Cyclops, the Beast, Wolverine, and Emma Frost, joined by returning fan-favorite Kitty Pryde - and set forth a groundbreaking pace, from the opening pages of a Sentinel attack to the unexpected return of a beloved X-Man. Then, building on early momentum, they ratcheted up the danger and drama with a shocking second year, creating a must-read book that can truly be called "astonishing" Collects Astonishing X-Men #1-24, and Giant-Size Astonishing X-Men #1.

## Astonishing X-Men Omnibus Details

Date : Published October 7th 2009 by Marvel (first published September 30th 2009)

ISBN : 9780785138013

Author : Joss Whedon (Text) , John Cassaday (Illustrator)

Format : Hardcover 672 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Comics, Graphic Novels, Superheroes, Marvel, X Men, Comic Book, Fiction

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## From Reader Review Astonishing X-Men Omnibus for online ebook

????? says

With a total of twenty-four issues, the 2005 debut of *The Astonishing X-Men* feels like you're viewing one season of an American television show which is perfectly understandable, seeing as its writer Joss Whedon is also the one that brought us TV gems like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly*, *Dollhouse* and *Angel*. This gorgeous omnibus edition collects all issues of Whedon's legendary run, comprised of Cyclops, Emma Frost, Kitty Pryde, Wolverine, Beast and Colossus. Truly engaging, endlessly creative and shockingly sublime in the right places, *The Astonishing X-Men* has to be the BEST X-MEN SERIES I've read this year (with Jeff Parker's *X-Men: First Class* being the close second). I would consider this as a rather a fine example of a writing that works phenomenally when it comes to telling a really engaging superhero story with a balance between plot and character developments.

Like I said, it feels like the first season of a favorite show, filled with stellar moments in the plot construction and the character arcs that make it float and stay on course. Both riveting in execution of story and delivering some of the most emotionally meaningful moments about characters (especially two female superheroes), Joss Whedon's *The Astonishing X-Men* is something I will recommended readily to a fan of the X-Men films but has yet to read them in comics. This is a great starting piece to ease newbies in while at the same time pleasing the long-time crowd of fans.

The twenty-four issues are divided into four story arcs which are composed of six installments each. We have *Gifted* where a scientist develops a cure for the mutant gene, and the new team of the X-Men band together to prove that they can be just as loved by the public and the media as the other superhero teams such as the Fantastic Four and the Avengers. In *Danger*, the X-Men faces the threat of their most formidable foe yet; a sentient being who has lived in the Xavier School and watched them fight during combat simulation and is therefore more than informed regarding their weaknesses. For *Torn*, Emma Frost (a reformed villainess) commits the unthinkable, fracturing her teammates and certain important relationships within their group. The last arc, *Unbreakable*, ties together all three previous plot stories with its own primary focus on the alien planet Breakworld which, according to some prophecy, is destined to be destroyed by an X-Man. The conclusion of that arc continues to the Giant-Size edition whose ending was the most unexpected and stomach-churning pay-off I have ever been subjected to. Just thinking about it again makes me very sad and very mad. That being said, Whedon performed consistently in his writing for each issue, holding back no punches and making sure that each blow hurts enough to give you a lingering ache.

But like most of Whedon's work, he knows how to take characters to places and then he breaks and molds them into something better and enthralling, even if it's fragmented with the kind of holes you can never mend.

The two stars of his series are Kitty Pryde and Emma Frost. Whedon's first issue began with seeing Kitty Pryde again as she walks back into the Xavier School for the Gifted, bags in hand but looking as if she has never left the place at all. What I enjoyed about Kitty in her appearances here in the series is the fact that she's a darling. Really, she is. Inquisitive, selfless but clever, and brave to a goddamn fault, Kitty always becomes the star of a story when a writer really knows how to commit her stellar characterization on paper. I thought she had an impressive run so far, taking on the responsibility of becoming an X-Man head-on even if she maintained that "being an X-Man does not always suit me". In spite of whatever insecurities she had about her skills and role in the team, she never lets it get to her and performs under pressure quite creatively and adamantly. This isn't really the first time Kitty caught my attention. In Claremont's *X-Men: Forever*, she

accidentally phased through Wolverine while a mutant got them stuck and when she separated from him, he got a piece of his adamantium claw on her knuckle. The way she dealt with that physical transformation was so riveting to watch because at her core, Kitty remains the resourceful and compassionate kid she is through all of it. In her first appearance after the *Dark Phoenix Saga*, thirteen-year old Kitty is inexperienced in so many ways but was eager to learn and prove herself. This is around the time *Days of Future Past* hit, and her older self and younger self merged to save the day. It's such a shame that the movies don't put her front and center (alongside Wolverine if they must insist, considering Logan and Kitty have a good brother-sister thing going on anyway), especially when they cast a talented actress like Ellen Page for the role. In any case, at least in Whedon's *Astonishing X-Men*, she truly got to shine.

Meanwhile, the White Queen has always fascinated me since her very first appearance in the *Dark Phoenix* storyline as one of the formidable henchwomen of the Hellfire Club. It's worth noting that she and Kitty were introduced together especially here in Whedon's tale where the two are obviously at odds with each other. Kitty has made it no secret that she has no love for Emma and does not and will probably never trust her. And Emma knows this. She understands people way more than we give this cold-hearted woman credit for. The reason why she brought Kitty into the fold in the first place (as revealed in issue #18), is because Emma is losing her mind because parasitic Cassandra Nova hijacked her telepathically, and she knew Kitty would be the only one who won't hesitate to kill her. That's a powerful thing to entrust someone with, and it didn't help her already temperamental relationship with Kitty either. But Emma had revealed to Kitty that she is capable of murder if she's motivated for the right reasons, and such a startling revelation, I know, has shook Kitty, but she's not able to deal with that for now. Still, I think, in a twisted sort of way, Kitty began respecting Emma and what she can do after that incident. With little empathy and people skills, Emma can be so easy to dislike and cast aside as a woman forever trapped in the villain role, but Whedon had composed her here in such a validating perspective where she's finally vulnerable and in love with a man she feels she doesn't deserve. That broke my heart as much as Scott Summers has thawed the frost in her heart. She's so entralling in the story arc **TORN** that I can hardly keep up with her! I really like Emma, more than I ever thought I would. Her relationship with Scott is also worth shipping. They're an intriguing pair.

That's not to say that the male characters are slacking. Cyclops was allowed to truly shine as he rediscovers his purpose as the leader of the team while Colossus takes on fate itself and tries to bend it to his own will. Meanwhile, we have Beast, who gets to contemplate about his mutation and whether or not he wants to go through another painful physical transformation as Wolverine finds yet another young girl to become a promising protégé to train. The variety of villains for this series has served their respective purposes, short-lived as they may be whole a few were certainly impactful, and they only enriched the tapestry that Whedon has painstakingly and with great love care weaved for us readers. There was even a motion comics series because everyone apparently came to an agreement that this is meant to be shown visually in another medium because it's just that damn riveting. I recommend for you to check out said motions comics yourself which has copies online. As I finish this review, I literally can't think of a single disappointing thing about this series. Well, except for the Giant-Size's ending concerning Kitty Pryde but even that wasn't enough to lessen my adoration for the entirety of the series. I am still so duly impressed by the quality that Whedon has produced here. This remains as a strong contribution to the X-Men universe nonetheless!

Overall, Joss Whedon's *The Astonishing X-Men* has accomplished what it set out to do when it started: to astonish the world. A perfect mixture of sustainable action, relentless twist and turns and resonant character insights and relationships, this is a series that you will be a fool not to start reading at once. The majority agrees that this is just bloody brilliant and a worthy addition to any fan's X-Men collection.

**RECOMMENDED: 10/10**

## **DO READ MY REVIEWS AT:**

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### **Jon says**

**this book is having a strange effect on me  
maybe the pages are infused with some kind of mutagenic DNA altering CIA/Borg nanoprobe  
experimental devices? it's possible**

The X-Men are people whose lives are drastically altered by extraordinary circumstance and their story is characterized by the very humanity they personify in their quest for acceptance. They become in essence the caretakers of that humanity, which they have been accused of not possessing.

This omnibus would be an outstanding addition for anyone collecting X-Men. As a standalone volume to someone unfamiliar with the X-Men, this extract of the ongoing saga would still be an exceptional reading experience: the artwork is an evolutionary development from innovators of the form such as Moebius, and the narrative has a depth of characterization one would not expect in a comic.

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### **Ksenia says**

Josh got this for me for my birthday earlier this year and he has been nagging me ever since to read it. It combines two things I (we) like: X-Men and Joss Whedon. This collection had been getting rave reviews. So did it live up to the hype? I think so.

One doesn't need to have read any X-Men comics before this. I watched the cartoon when I was a kid, and I am slowly, slowly making my way through the Essential volumes that we got at last year's NYCC (I am still on volume 1). But that's ok! Why? Because there are some handy-dandy pages in the beginning that briefly tell and illustrate what has happened prior to this. Very helpful. Like, did you know Colossus was dead? I didn't know he was dead. I didn't know he and Kitty Pryde had a thing, sorta, going on.

Yes, Kitty Pryde. Move over Wolverine! Someone else has the story focus.... Wolverine is in this but he sort of takes a backseat story-wise. He's in it throughout though. And he actually takes a young X-Man under his wing, in his own Wolverine-way.

But it is Kitty we are focused on. And Emma Frost. And Cyclops. Jean Grey is old news people!

There are some interesting twists and turns and we do get to find out some interesting stuff about the characters, most notably Cyclops, and why he truly has to wear those special glasses.

There were a few parts I was confused about, mostly concerning Emma and the Hellfire Club. Note: she was a bad guy before she joined the X-Men. But the Hellfire Club reappears in her life and I was left scratching my head. Cause all of a sudden, there were two Emmas.....? I think. Maybe I missed something. Either way, this did not hinder the story line, because I just moved on.

In a way this was an interesting throwback to the old X-Men, in terms of storyline. The X-Men are on a foreign planet trying to save our world. In the Essential Volume One, they are doing just that. But that is what the X-Men are supposed to, right? Save the world, while trying to save themselves from each other and the rest of the regular people ("mutants are evil! we have a cure for them!" is also brought up).

But it's not all seriousness here. There is an amusing part where Wolverine and Beast revert to their childlike-selves.

So if you like X-Men AND Joss Whedon, then this is for you. And if you only like one of those things, then this is still for you. And if you don't like either of those things, then this is for you too.

I know I will be wanting to read the following volume in the Astonishing X-Men to see what happens to all the characters. A lot happens to them here anyway, but you definitely want/need to know what happens next.

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### **Paul says**

This was a great read, I spread it out over a week but it can certainly be done in a day's time. Having a basic knowledge of X-Men mythos would be great for this, but there is a wonderful intro explaining everything you needed to know from over 500+ issues of comics that preceded the story here.

I really enjoyed the story and art. Already a big fan of Whedon's work with Buffy and Angel, I was planning to love the story, humour, snappy remarks and deep narrative that he gives through all his work. The art was beautifully crisp and colourful and the perfect combination to the feel of the story. The story takes place after Genosha's destruction, just as good ol' Cyclops takes the helm. the choices for villain's were excellent and I loved how strong and vulnerable the X-Men were throughout; the chance for failure was there and that's what grounded the story for me.

The Omnibus has become scarce nowadays and I was luck to grab a copy at a reasonable price; if you can manage to find one, I'd the oversized trim is worth the extra money over the paperback; especially for the Giant Size comic that closes out this series.

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### **Arif says**

Being a huge X-Men and Whedon fan, it was almost a crime that I hadn't read his run on X-Men. Now that I have, it's no surprise, it's brilliant.

Whedon's writing contains what you'd expect: witty and clever dialogue, strong conflicts and real emotion. He's complemented by Cassaday's stunning art which perfectly captures the script, and he creates some show-stopping panels.

The roster of characters are all written and drawn extremely well. I loved Emma Frost here, and her relationships with Kitty and Cyclops were the most engaging. All three characters shine here, thanks to Joss. Wolverine, while not in the focus, has an enjoyable, comedic role. Beast and Colossus also get their own share of great moments.

It's not perfect, but I definitely recommend this run. It's not too difficult to understand even if you haven't read any X-Men before, and it's just a great story.

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## Rory Wilding says

Growing up in the 90s, comics weren't really my thing, so my love of superheroes came from the cartoons such as Bruce Timm's *Batman: The Animated Series* and of course *X-Men*. Following the release of the average, but somewhat disappointing threequel of the *X-Men* film franchise, when I really start getting into comics, I was recommended *Astonishing X-Men* by *Buffy* creator Joss Whedon and *Planetary* artist John Cassaday. Years later, I got the omnibus, which covers the entire run which is so far the only *X-Men* run I've read so far.

Following Grant Morrison's *New X-Men*, Whedon takes what Morrison had established in the X-world such as its characters and creates four distinctive story arcs in which Whedon and Cassaday make these characters their own. Instead of doing the run-through of the whole series, I'll briefly tell you about the first arc: "Gifted". When Kitty Pryde returns to the X-Mansion as both teacher and X-Man, a mutant cure has been found which puts pressure on the mutant kind as well as some members of the X-Men, while an evil alien comes to Earth and wreaks havoc.

While the plot of the mutant cure inspired *X-Men: The Last Stand*, what *Astonishing* achieves at more is the character dynamics through Whedon's witty dialogue as the heroic mutants are in conflict with one another, whether it is about the cure or the teamwork they have to provide. With "Gifted" as well as the other story arcs, Whedon doesn't take things too seriously, and like his cinematic *Avengers*, the writer finds humour in places you don't expect, with dialogue that very subtly references pop culture like *Harry Potter*. Not perfect by any means, as some of the ideas (such as in the second arc "Dangerous", which deals with artificial intelligence) are over-emphasized so at times the story lacks action.

However, whatever flaws this series has are minor due to the fun interactions by the X-Men and their young students. As we get to see a dysfunctional but moving romance between the team leader Cyclops and the former villainess Emma Frost, while Wolverine isn't always the centre of things, but does get his cool moments, the true star of the series is Kitty Pryde (who inspired Whedon's own creation of Buffy Summers) as she is the youngest of the X-Men but manages to stand up (and phases) against even a bitch like Emma Frost. At its most moving moments, is the relationship between Kitty and Colossus and despite their differences, together they found love.

Accompanying the great writing by Whedon, is John Cassaday's beautiful artwork which mostly allows wide panels that give the action a very cinematic look, with special plaudits to colorist Laura Martin. During the publication of the series when they were monthly issues, but due to Cassaday's attention to detail with his art, the series went through several delays, which was subjected to criticism. However, once reading the series and look at the realistic illustrations of the characters and the epic locations, you can forgive a delay or two as you are instantly in love with the work of Mr Cassaday.

With this omnibus, you get a set of pages known as "X-Men 101" which goes through the whole history of the X-Men since their introduction in 1963; as well as the humourous emails between Whedon and the Marvel publishers. As a fan of the X-Men from the 90s TV animated series and the current film franchise, *Astonishing X-Men* by Joss Whedon and John Cassaday was for me, a great introduction to the heroic mutants in comic book form. If you were a fan of Whedon's spectacularly fun extravaganza of *The Avengers*, this book was instant proof that the writer is Marvel's golden boy.

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### **Rosa says**

I read about this run somewhere (I wanna say DC Girls Kicking Ass) and I love most of what Joss Whedon has done. I was also a huge fan of the X-Men way back when so I saw no bad here. It was a great read and I couldn't put it down. I was up until 4 am reading it.

There is a great intro in the beginning that catches you up on the history of the X-Men to this point, which was really useful b/c I am clueless about Emma Frost, the destruction of Genosha and the virus.

A small group of X-men reform the superhero team and run the school. This one is less about the students and more about the adults. The four story lines I thought went incredibly well together.

I am a huge fan of Kitty Pride and Colossus separately so the two of them together was definitely awesome. I do wish they hadn't killed Kitty Pride off b/c I felt like she was a great character for girls to relate to, particularly young girls, although as evidenced through Colossus very few characters stay dead in the comics.

I also really liked this version of Beast, both artistically and his evolution/de-evolution. He is still probably one of my favorite characters.

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### **Jonathan Terrington says**

I believe any fan of the Astonishing X-Men line of comics will enjoy this colourful omnibus regardless as to whether or not you've read any individual stories. The plot is on the whole typical X-Men brilliance with sacrifices, psychic twists, mixed agendas and a threat to the world.

There are many familiar faces in this book as well as a few new faces. Fans will appreciate Emma Frost, Cyclops, Wolverine (no X-Men comic can go without Wolverine), Kitty Pryde, Colossus and even an appearance from Professor X. And the artwork, which was lush and vibrant, really helped characterise them and bring them to life.

Of course this wasn't the perfect graphic novel selection. There were a few moments where the book either seemed to go off on a tangent. And there were moments where it would wander into the real of Deus Ex Machina and I would go: Oh okay...yeah, no...as if!

Still the talents of Joss Whedon's writing are fully displayed for all to see. And for those with no idea who he

is - shame on you, I'll have to unleash some of Stephen's lightning down upon you. He's only the creator of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Firefly and the director/writer of the upcoming Avengers film. And his full creative prowess here introduces new characters, writes the old characters lovingly and provides a brilliant few closing lines.

I would say that this is one of the better X-Men storylines I've read. I'd already read the 'Dangerous' arc (which ties into everything else) but yet was impressed by how I could enjoy that stand alone and yet it linked back into a far more grand and sweeping plot.

If you enjoy your X-Men graphic novels with some colour and interesting stories read this. If you're interested in checking out the X-Men read this (it does start with an 'all you need to know'). If you're interested read this. In short just read this.

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### **Richard says**

I've never been a big Joss Whedon fan-boy. I've never really understood the hype. But after reading this...man, he can write a mean X-men story! It can be tricky writing for the X-Men, especially these days, with tracking so many characters and trying to keep it fresh and interesting, but Whedon does an skillful job here in this 25-issue run that he had with the heroes.

Whedon shows a real love for the characters here, and the book features some of the most creative sequences I've seen in an X-Men tale. Whedon takes these well-known characters, consolidates all of their best attributes, and lets it all fly in this epic story. He not only has a great sensitivity to each X-Man's personality, but he takes their specific powers and explores all of the possible ways to showcase them, leading to massively entertaining sequences. One great example is the way the book shows how powerful skilled psychics can be, especially in the amazing sequence in the third volume, Torn, when the mansion is attacked by the Hellfire Club and telepathically manipulated by Cassandra Nova and Negasonic Teenage Warhead.

You can also tell the love that Whedon (as with many other writers) has for Kitty Pryde (Shadowcat). She has many fans but Whedon really showcases all of the aspects of her powers here and it's all very fascinating. What happens when Kitty has an orgasm? One of the reasons why the X-Men are some of my favorite heroes to read is because of the specificity of their individual powers, so I had a blast with all these little moments. And the book also features one of the coolest character entrances ever with the appearance of Colossus.

And of course the witty dialogue and entertaining set-pieces that Whedon is known for is on full-display here, showing that he might be one of the best candidates to tell superhero stories, which he's proven here, and with his popularity with the big superhero movie franchises. And with this book run, he set a good standard for X-Men storytelling!

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### **Anne says**

Wow! I'm going to go ahead, be a nerd, and say it... This was *Astonishing*!

I haven't read much by Whedon, so I wasn't sure what to expect, but this was great. The X-men comics are some of (in my opinion) the hardest to break into, because there are *so* many characters, and they've been around for *so* long. Whedon put me at ease by dedicating a few pages at the beginning of the book to highlight some of the important things that had happened over the years in the X-universe.

*This was a HUGE help to me, so I suggest newbies seek out this edition.*

The story itself was really good, but it's too long to go into everything in a review. It is however, an epic tale that is *not* to be missed.

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### **Tundxetra says**

A wonderful depiction of the X-folks from Buffy's Whedon and Wizard magazine's Cassaday. A surprise return, numerous surprise enemies, great art, Brand and S.W.O.R.D... and unbelievable exemption from all of Marvel's events (!!!!!), that's right, no crossovers!

I can never decided which I prefer Morrison's or Whedon's run... and it always comes down to... Morrison's series says F.U. to Marvel tradition, continuity and 'rules' and was near genius; whereas Whedon's uses Marvel tradition, continuity and 'rules' and still makes a near genius series. Ye my answer is Astonishing. A firm 9 out of 12... making it one of my rare FIVE STARS reads.

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### **Sage says**

*I am a leaf on the wind. Watch how I soar*

Awesome!!! My first Joss Whedon comic and it's a X-Men title! No more rebirth stories, maybe someone cool will die. Great humor, excellent story arcs, questionable leaders. X-Men and Whedon just makes too much sense!

So, imagine my surprise when the opening story arc is a ??? rebirth storyline!!! I mean yes, it's for a cool character but ugh... I had just finished reading Smith's Green Arrow and John's Green Lantern. Just my luck

What else? Umm.. yes Scott Summers is a whiney leader with massive insecurity issues. Nobody trusts Emma Frost, Beast wants to be less... *Beastly* I presume. So there's Wolverine right? Eh, more of a comedic tool for this book..

At least there's Lockheed! He plays a fun role in this story.

So why did I actually give this book four stars (decently high rating)? Because the writing is actually very well done. The story is a little X-Paint By Numbers (oh noes, some alien race wants to destroy Earth) but the dialogue and execution is fantastic (what I expected from Whedon). I also really like the Kitty Pryde character and she is a focal point of the story. Summers becomes somewhat less whiney and kinda cool later and it introduces the Armor character (someone I knew very little of prior to reading this).

Extras are a bit limited but what I did like is that there was a brief introduction section... kind of a mini Wikipedia entry as to what's gone on with the X-Men leading up to this book. Unless you've read every X-

Title out there, there are likely things you've missed (or were simply confused about). This helped clear things up prior to reading.

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### **Michael Kitchin says**

Joss Whedon (or anyone, for that matter) has a tall order writing for the X-Men: Don't just freshen decades-old personas, but make sense of all that mashed-up continuity and -- most especially -- craft a story worth reading. Turns out Whedon and Cassaday do the job, with extra points for clever dialogue, innovative/convincing twists of plot, and great artwork. Their run also aspires to what many hero titles miss: We know superhumans struggle with paradoxically mundane anxieties, what's important is why they bother helping normal people at all. If established superheroes can be made new again, in short, this is how it's done.

The volume opens with a brief, coherent summary of the last 40-odd years of X-Men history before jumping into a white-knuckle re-assembly of the team thanks to preceding deaths/betrayals. After roughly a third of the book things are rolling again (i.e., approaching disaster), with the X-Men struggling to mesh with other super-teams, S.H.I.E.L.D., and awful approval ratings after their last big party in Manhattan (thanks to Magneto). By the last third, however, various master plans and bad guys poking their heads along the way collide in an apocalyptic scenario for not one, but two worlds. Love, war, and unexpected, life-and-death decisions, all in abundance.

I recommend this for anyone looking for a long-ish (600+ pages), complete superhero storyline with possibly the best art going, Whedon/Cassaday fans, or hopeful X-Men fans done with the old Spandex.

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### **Felicia says**

Erg, wow. Is there another superhero collection that HUMANIZES the heroes this successfully? Because I haven't read it.

This series BLEW. MY. MIND.

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### **Keith says**

I recently "reread" this run via a skim of the 4-book version accompanied with a marathon of the motion comic series on Netflix, which is actually a pretty enjoyable -- not to mention strict -- adaptation of the source material, once you get past the stilted motion-comickyness of it all (and after a few episodes, you really do.) Whedon's dialogue, as well as it works on the page, is obviously performable, even if performance makes the his X-gang even more of a Buffy/Firefly clone than they were before (or vice versa, I guess, since Whedon has admitted to growing up with a crush on Shadowcat.)

So the Whedon-ness of the characters and stories nearly overwhelm this series, and if it weren't for the fact

that, as mentioned, he's essentially always been kind of writing X-Men anyway, that might be a real problem. But it works -- the dialogue is intimate, if perhaps also overly clever. The characters feel lived-in, and Cassaday's art is pure, smooth, cinematic eye-candy. I'd argue that the four arcs that comprise the book don't hang together all that well (despite the constant narrative voice that insists they do), and don't have much sense of scope. Two of the arcs take six issues each for only about several hours of storyworld-time, and there's just not much sense that the universe has been fleshed out past the rooms the scenes take place in -- it feels almost like a play, in which the immediacy of what happens on stage is a trade-off for the blank abstraction of the world beyond. Even the action just feels like a series of set pieces with a fill-in monster at a fill-in superhero locale, and the characterization is post-modern enough that someone (often Shadowcat) will always provide a quip to undercut any hint of dramatic intent.

But the aura of threat feels real and agonizing throughout, even when the villains behind that threat are less than believable -- probably because, as with all of Whedon's work, our heroes feel flawed and raw and human, and their struggles are ultimately both painful and poignant. Admittedly, whenever I reread this run I feel almost cruelly manipulated by it. But it always works on me, goddamit.

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