



Astonishing X-Men, Volume 5: Ghost Box

*Warren Ellis (Writer) , Alan Davis (Illustrator) , Mark Farmer (Illustrator) , Clayton Crain (Illustrator) ,
Kaare Andrews (Illustrator) , Adi Granov (Illustrator) , Simone Bianchi (Illustrator)*

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It's the book you've been waiting for The superstar team of Warren Ellis and Simone Bianchi are ready to take the X-Men to the "Second Stage".

Messiah CompleX pulled the X-Men team together, *Divided We Stand* tore them apart. Now the X-Men are back to business - with a new look, a new base of operations, and a mystery to solve that will take them into previously uncharted territory and test them to their core.

Collecting: *Astonishing X-Men* 25-30, *Astonishing X-Men: Ghost Boxes* 1-2

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From Reader Review *Astonishing X-Men*, Volume 5: Ghost Box for online ebook

???? ???? #BookDiet2019 says

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From this point forward in my *The Astonishing X-Men* reviews, I'll be doing a collective analysis of a story arc instead, much like this one which is comprised of issues #25-30 and penned by Warren Ellis who is generally an awesome comic book writer. This is due to some time constraints in RL stuff at my workplace. I simply can't find enough time to write individual reviews anymore, at least for the time being. As a compromise, I'll finish *The Astonishing X-Men* with the consistent format of collective reviews because since Whedon's run, I honestly just ran out of steam for this title. It's not because it left a bad aftertaste in my mouth (well, there is that fucking goddamn shitty Giant-Size issue about the conclusion of *Unstoppable* concerning Kitty Pryde's fate). After all, I was irreconcilably in love with the entire twenty-four-issued run (that I actively try to forget that Giant-Size even happened). It's mostly because of my RL obligations taking most of my time so I was forced to read more than pause to construct reviews for the blog.

However, I also think it's because I don't know if anyone can top whatever clusterfuck awesomeness Whedon has accomplished in the first run. Mind you, Ellis has done a fine enough job in his story arc *Ghost Box* (which I will discuss in detail below), but I simply can't find enough strength in me to devote individual reviews for each issue so I think it was a really wise choice in my part to post one official review for each volume. We're now at the fifth. Let's get on with it.

THE ASTONISHING X-MEN ISSUES #25-30, "GHOST BOX"

This segment of the AXM is composed by a new writer and artist, and picks up in the aftermath of the Decimation which is the historical event prompted by cuckoo Scarlet Witch when she re-wrote Marvelverse and expunged the mutant gene for good to punish her daddy Magneto for being a world-class jerk. Also known as M-Day, this crossover big event can be read in its glorious coverage in Brian Michael Bendis' *House of M*. For its second season, *The Astonishing X-Men* is back with the heroes that Whedon established in the first run: Cyclops, Emma Frost, Wolverine and Beast (minus two other members) and with the addition of the recruit Hisako and the visitation of now Queen Ororo Munroe who got married to the former superhero Black Panther so she's both a wife and fellow ruler of Wakanda in Africa.

Before we head on to the story, let's first talk about Simone Bianchi's illustrations first. I don't think I ever once commented on the visual style of X-Men comics until John Cassaday's in the first run of AXM. I may have complimented Stuart Immonen once or twice for his art in Bendis' *All-New X-Men*, but generally I don't pay attention to the visuals which is weird because I often indulge in describing the artwork for the current run of Batman titles in DC specifically when it came to the work of artists Greg Capullo and Patrick Gleason. Still, I was heavily critical of *Age of Apocalypse* because its visual style was too period-particular for my taste and honestly, the most of nineties comics back then for me were ugly to look at so I'm biased on that front. For Ellis' run, I think Bianchi's illustrations didn't exactly fit the narrative until the third installment. The entirety of the art is just too pretty with a lesser pronounced depth to convey motion, even when it came to more action-oriented scenes. Still, when it's expository, Bianchi managed to draw some intriguing panel choices that can even be comparable to Capullo's rendition for Snyder's *Batman*. I think that most of the time Bianchi's art can be distracting when I'm focusing on the action part. But when it's all just characters conversing and sitting around contemplating and planning among themselves, her illustrations

bring dimensions to these interactions, enhancing the more subtle psychological messages implied in the dialogue. And for that, I can commend Bianchi. I think his artwork for action scenes did improve, however, when we got to the last two installments, particularly on #30 which was loaded with lots of creative fight sequences and landscape panels depicting explosions and the like. It was beautiful composition which was splendidly colored as well. Overall, Bianchi's work for Ellis' arc *Ghost Box* is a mixed bag but when it does shine on the most special places, it blinds.

Here are some sample pages that I liked in issue #30

Now let's talk about the content itself. After M-Day, there are only less than two hundred mutants that are active globally and the X-Men are determined to defend and protect those precious few in any way they can. After the birth of the the so-called mutant messiah in *Messiah Complex*, said baby carrying the X-gene post-M-Day was then whisked away by Scott's son Cable (Nate Summers) who traveled across dimensions to keep the baby safe from harm. Now the X-Men are just waiting for any sort of sign from Cable and this unique specimen he is safekeeping, so they decided to keep working cases in the meantime. Hisako is a former student of the Xavier School recruited back in Whedon's *Unstoppable* last arc and she was still in her adjustment period, mostly keeping close with Wolverine who is now her go-to mentor, and cracking up jokes in his expense to lighten the mood in their group every so often. I find her readily endearing especially when she makes it easy to forget sometimes that Kitty Pryde is gone, and so is Colossus. The reason why these two lovebirds aren't even here anymore (when they took up a good 70% of what is going on in Whedon's run) is because GIANT-SIZE ASTONISHING X-MEN IS CRAP. Kitty is left inside the hollow center of the giant bullet that would have murdered Earth if she didn't phase it. So now she can never be removed there because she's intrinsically part of the weapon, physically-speaking. But it begs the question: If M-Day happened and the mutants were de-powered, was Kitty the lucky few who retained her powers much like most of the veteran X-Men? I mean, that should be the case. Otherwise, the bullet would have stopped phasing and broke earth's core already. Ah, fuck it. Let's not talk about this anymore. I'm just getting angry again.

All you need to know is Colossus is gone because how the fuck does anyone expect him to keep on fighting after losing his soulmate in such a horrid, depressing way? So yeah, we got Hisako as a new member and the pleasant return of Ororo Munroe whom Bianchi, to his credit, drew so ethereally and appealingly that you never forget that she is supposedly a self-made goddess. It shows in the way she hovers in the panels, all silver-haired beauty and deadly strength. My favorite moments in issue #28 have to be when she and Emma were trapped together with a mutant whose sole power is to inhibit other mutants' powers. So Storm had to do it the old-fashioned way and freaking knife-attacked the bastard to near death like the pro she is. I will always enjoy that scene because she got to work with Emma and both ladies do not back down especially when they are pushed against a corner by some enemy. I'm already rambling on about characters when I haven't even discussed what *Ghost Box* is all about. Well, the X-Men are investigating the murder of a mutant, but further scientific findings revealed that this mutant's genes were tampered on, meaning that his X-gene sits on the wrong chromosome. They follow a set of clues which led them to the spaceship graveyard called Chaparanga where people are literally taking apart spaceships for metal scraps they can sell to parties and places interested in acquiring them. The setting has a very haunting look to it the moment it was shown and this is where they found another modified mutant who killed himself rather than to reveal his group's plans to the X-Men.

This dead mutant had been trying to get a machine called a Ghost Box to operate but Storm messed up the electrical currents and so he was unsuccessful. The team brought the Ghost Box with them and it got the attention of Special Agent Brand who is now Hank's "lab partner" o the side (and by lab partner, we mean they are sexing each other; or, as Scott likes to call it, the two are committing "crimes against nature").

Brand's first name is Abigail, and Scott is not happy with her and even said a bad word in her presence which amused everyone because no one has pissed off Scott enough to make him say the F-word. Through Abby Brand, they discovered that a Ghost Box is a portal between parallel dimensions. Later on, they went to Tian which was apparently the headquarters of Chinese X-Men who were left for dead the moment M-Day hit the shores. That was when they encountered three more modified mutants (dubbed by Beast as Triploids). So, these Triploids have Ghost Boxes and they came from several dimensions that have their own mutants but with X-genes resting in a different chromosome. Somehow, they figured out that M-Day doomed the mutant species in our world, and now are interested in conquering ours because...well, why not? Unfortunately, former X-Men Forge disagrees. And when Forge disagrees with something...bad things follow.

Goddammit, Forge. Must we always meet this way?

Before we get to that, I'd like to post this great exchange between Scott and Ororo in issue #26 which spoke volumes of how much they differ in handling their leadership roles, and the fact that Scott was kind of a hardass on Ororo and I actually liked that because he was more committed in his making the difficult choices he has now more than ever. Ellis has done a phenomenal job keeping the established characterizations from Whedon's previous run intact, making readers feel at ease because these people are the ones they can recognize and still relate to as if the writer hasn't changed at all for this title. So here's Scott being straightforward with Ororo regarding deaths:

Now let's go back to Forge. Apparently, the asshole has once again lost it, most especially after M-Day occurred. I mean, the guy is already hanging by the thin line and now it has gotten so worse. How worse? Well, he operated on mutants and transformed them into his own version of Triploids. And now he planned on using a Ghost Box to travel to those other dimensions and attack them. Because in Forge's demented, decaying mind, that solves everything. And, of course, since this is an alien invasion, it's the territory of S.W.O.R.D., much to Scott's chagrin. Agent Brand stepped in in the nick of time and fired a concentration of lasers to destroy the parallel dimensions on the other side as soon as the Ghost Box went online, so to speak. But before that, we get this harrowing conversation between Forge and Ororo who already have a complicated history. God, let's not bring up *The X-Tinction Agenda*. It's sad and I feel a little bit bad for Forge here

The five-issued arc *Ghost Box* was nice. Nothing that special or memorable but it made up for its superb character interactions and small moments of humor and poignancy. The appearance of Storm is a welcome treat. The last two series that I read where she was a central figure was *X-Men Forever* and the goddamn *X-Tinction Agenda*. I hope she stays around for the next arc. **STORM IS MY THIRD FAVORITE FEMALE CHARACTER** from the X-Men and I love reading more of her. I expect Ellis to deliver some Storm-centered scenes my way in his next arcs, hopefully. A girl can dream. Overall, *Ghost Box* was not a bad start. I'm still very much invested with its character roster.

RECOMMENDED: 8/10

DO READ MY REVIEWS AT:

Martin says

Warren Ellis nails the X-Men perfectly. The way he writes the characters is spot-on. His trademark quips don't disappoint, either. In "Ghost Box", he writes one of the funniest lines I've ever read: «Emma Frost. I didn't recognize you with your legs together.» Ha! There are a lot more funny lines, all delivered in typical Ellis fashion.

Followers of Ellis' writing will notice that he brings his obsession of parallel universes to the X-Men by way of the convenient ghost boxes. In that respect, the similarities with his other series (Planetary) are glaring: other worlds are trying to conquer ours. The science he uses in the book is well-explained.

Simone Bianchi's art is fantastic. His page layout is inspired and his pencils are very detailed. He comes up with truly scary monster designs (reminiscent of his SEVEN SOLDIERS work - check it out). His costume designs are neat and his spaceships just unbelievable.

Minor gripe: We all know Wolverine likes beer. Ellis feels the need to remind us of this fact whenever someone makes a reference to Wolverine's weight. Funny once or twice, yes, but it gets old fast... Also, three of the four short stories included after the main story arc, while interesting to read, are downright depressing.

Because of the "bonus" short stories, I must downgrade my rating to 4 stars.

Sam Quixote says

Set after the events of "House of M" where all but a couple hundred mutants were wiped out by Scarlet Witch's curse "No More Mutants", and after the events of "Second Coming" when the first mutant, Hope, was born after the curse, "Ghost Box" is about parallel worlds affected by Scarlet Witch and their desperate attempt to enter our world to survive. Ghost boxes are gateways to other universes and the X-Men set out to find, and destroy, the few remaining ones before the deranged rebel mutant Forge can set in motion plans for a secret war and an apocalyptic solution.

You won't find a bigger Warren Ellis fan than me but this book sucked. The story is so slow, boring and confusing. The X-Men talk about parallel universes (always a headache inducer) then talk pseudo-tech stuff (always forgettable and meaningless) then talk mutant genetics (zzzzzz) before fighting some villain you've never seen before, defeating him, and then going back to talking about those three same subjects. Again and again and again. Before they encounter Forge and then more talk about parallel universes... you get the idea. Despite a full 8 issue book, I'm still not 100% what ghost boxes are but I do know that I don't care about them and never want to read about them ever again.

I will say this about Ellis, he does what Bendis, Aaron, Hickman and Fraction collectively failed to do in the

last Marvel Event, "AVX" - he gives Cyclops a personality. Cyclops in this book not only talks like a real person with actual characteristics but also seems relatable and - god almighty! - likable. Maybe that's why this is called "Astonishing" X-Men - that's a hell of an accomplishment right there.

I really didn't like Simone Bianchi's art. It's muddy, dark, and hard to look at. All of the pages have this washed out quality to it, everything kind of bleeds together on the page, one dark tone into another, so it's hard to make out what's going on in certain scenes. It might've helped if the colours were turned up a bit but I still thought Bianchi's pencils were too thick for this to be effective.

While Ellis has written these similar kinds of stories in his "Planetary" series, it just didn't work in the X-Men universe. Bad art, even worse story, but with some interesting characterisation and sparkling moments of dialogue from Ellis, overall "Ghost Box" is a poor follow-up to Whedon/Cassady's masterful run on this series and is definitely one of Ellis' lesser efforts.

Tundextra says

So this is the third time I'm reading this, and finally it makes sense! Ellis is a great storyteller but sometimes he has the dialogue dominate the storytelling making the visual format pointless, this would be a case in point, despite the interesting art by Simone Bianchi. The story? The Astonishing X-Men are joined by Storm, as they find themselves investigating Ghost Boxes and more. A solid 7 out of 12 from me.

Paul says

This volume of Astonishing X-Men just did not work for me at all. I really disliked the art. There were just too many cold colors, so many grays, browns, and dark blues. The characters were drawn extremely inconsistent. Just when I thought the art wasn't that bad because of a great scene, the very next scene had the characters looking completely different. Beast changed appearance with the art constantly.

The plotline was just OK. There were a lot of things being said but not a whole lot going on. Ellis definitely failed at the humor in this, each attempt at humor made me cringe. The whole idea of there being these boxes that allowed individuals to traverse between dimensions was interesting but it never really got to the point where the plot met the ideas. Some really unclear story writing in this one for me.

Disappointing.

Fables&Wren says

WrensReads Review:

Um... what the heck happened? This was boring.

checks details of book

oh.. that's right..**Joss Whedon didn't write this.**

I was reading this and thinking "why does this feel really different? Why do characters sound a little off?"

Joss Whedon! Where did you go?!

I was bored. But the art was still really pretty.

WrensReads | Goodreads | Twitter | Instagram

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

Joss Whedon left and this series went all sorts of to hell. The biggest problem with this volume is that, in the previous installment, Joss, as he is wont to do, had a character sacrifice herself to save the rest of the X team. She wasn't dead, but she was certainly going to be gone for quite a while, assuming she ever made it back, and it was all very emotional. This volume never mentioned that. At all.

The plot of this is just awful and mostly doesn't make sense. The last chapters are depressing and come out of absolutely nowhere. The group had won a battle with the bad guys and then all of a sudden things are different. And apparently they lost. But there's no explanation of what's happening. I can't say whether the last sections were, fittingly, an alternate universe thing or if the series is over or what. I suspect it was an alternate universe, but that should definitely be made more apparent.

Mike says

Fantastic premise for a mystery. Hilarious dialogue - nay, *writing* above all. Genius ideas on the origins of mutants, how it works, where all the friggin spaceships have gone, the works.

The art isn't perfect but when it's good it's really good.

Ellis thinks big, really big - takes what's been going on in the ongoing storyline, adds some futuristic thinking and injects some real live imagination. It's always fun to see the universe expand under Ellis' tutelage.

But if this parallel universe concept he's introduced leads to a Marvel "Crisis on Infinite Earths", by god I'll hunt down Ellis and beat him to death with his own femur.

guanaeps says

This book takes a few issues before the scope of its story is realized, and then it simply becomes a fascinating read.

Simone Bianchi's art is beautiful and strange, but sometimes it lacks the kinetic energy that is called for in a "super-hero" comic. Some pages feel jagged and still.

Alan Davis, Adi Granov, Clayton Crain and Kaare Andrews all contribute their incredible artistry to the Ghost Boxes issues, dealing with...nah, won't spoil it. These shorts hit hard though.

Warren Ellis is great.

Anne says

I loved Emma Frost. *Loved* her! What a bitch, right?

Anyway, I liked the whodunit aspect of **Ghost Box**. It wasn't exactly a cozy little mystery to read by the fire, but it was fun watching the group put the puzzle pieces together.

The artwork was stunning. Really. The detail the artist put into these characters was amazing. But (you know there's a *but*), occasionally it was hard to tell exactly what was going on in the panels. *Is that his foot on that guy's neck, or is he flattened up against a wall? Then again, I'm getting older* Ahem. So. Maybe I'm the only one who had a problem with this?

Overall, this way great, and I'd recommend it to anyone, even those who are not fans of the X-Men.

Jedhua says

Book Info: This collection contains *Astonishing X-Men* issues #25-30, and *Astonishing X-Men: Ghost Boxes* issues 1-2.

ABSOLUTE RATING: {3+/5 stars}

STANDARDIZED RATING: <3/5 stars>

Since their recent relocation to San Francisco, the X-Men have been taking it easy for a change, and enjoying their well-earned break. But when the San Francisco Police Department call on the team for their assistance in solving an unusual case, the mutants are again thrown into the thick of it. Recently joined by Storm (wife of Black Panther and queen of Wakanda), members Emma Frost, Beast, Cyclops, Armor, and Wolverine head off to the crime scene, and discover what appears to be a secret war between two superpowered factions of mutant-like entities. With each new piece of the puzzle revealed, the X-Men are left with more questions, soon finding themselves facing a hostile invasion force, and fighting for the world's very survival.

First off, let me say this: what Ellis has managed to fit into the very first issue of this collection is – and excuse the pun – nothing short of **astounding**. Opening with the X-Men in their brand new base of operations, the writer creates a his own fresh and unique take on the team. Before actually getting too far into the main plot, he devotes half of the issue to characterization, and not only does he succeed in giving each member a well-defined persona, but he also manages to catch readers up on some of the recent events in the X-Verse that led to that point. Later on, when we get to the crime scene, Ellis hits the ground running, and

the plot quickly grows in complexity, and only becomes more layered with time. The writing is painstakingly meticulous, in a way that only Ellis can manage, and kind of reads like a cross between police procedural, conspiracy thriller, and sci-fi invasion story.

But as strong as the characterization generally was, I felt that Beast and Emma spent so much time trying to impress and dominate with wit, intellect, and sophistication, that sometimes I wished they would just shut up altogether. Similar to Morrison's *New-X-Men*, their imposing personalities got to be a little irritating with time, and I couldn't help but wonder how much Ellis got inspired by that series. At first, I guess the clever dialogue they provided was somewhat endearing, but I think Ellis got carried away after a while. Furthermore, I really don't think it was the best idea to maintain that level of intragroup teasing and whimsical cracks beyond the first issue; it kind of undermined the seriousness the story seemed to require, and created an atmosphere of the whole affair being "just another day at the office." Still, I'll admit there was some solid chemistry between Emma and Storm, as well as between Cyclops and Abigail Brand, that helped to keep things entertaining along the way.

I expect many people would have been put-off by Ellis' harshly intellectual and overall no-nonsense approach for the book, labeling it as colder and less fun than the previous volumes of the series. Although for some, his attempt at humor may have been partly able to reduce the sting of this effect, to me, it came off as more artificial and forced than anything else. But on the positive side, I found Ellis' X-Men to be the most decisive and competent you're likely to ever see them. Led by the fearless and uncompromising Cyclops, they make superheroing look easy, and that was pretty damn cool. And his conception of the team is so unbelievably credible and thought-out that I'm convinced that if the X-Men were real, they'd probably look a lot like this.

Conceptually speaking, the writing was extremely ambitious and calculated; Ellis weaves an intricate tale involving alternate dimensions, manufactured mutants, and derelict spaceship graveyards, as well as puts some very practical ideas out there in terms of X-Men field protocol. Now don't get me wrong: that's all very interesting and what not, but no more than a third of what Ellis included here seemed necessary to tell his story. Combined with his technical dialogue, this resulted in a kind of sensory overload. I think Ellis' approach also created some pacing issues, and even though he tells his story efficiently (considering what he had in mind), he just had too much story to tell and not enough time to tell it – even within the full eight issues he had available. There were times when I felt it would have been better just to move on with more concrete plot progression rather than toss even more variables into an already hectic mix.

As hard as Ellis seemed to be trying up to issue #27, I was still teetering between a 2.5-3 star rating for the book right up until I reached *Ghost Boxes*. Each told through the eyes of a different character, the four short stories collected in this two-part limited series explore the different hypothetical implications of the X-Men's failure to prevent the annexation. Bleak, brutal, and reminiscent of Ellis' *Supergod*, these stories are likely to either impress or repel most readers used to more conventional *X-Men* books. For me, not only was I enthralled by the bold storytelling and poignant writing, but I was also reminded of what a little downsizing

could do for the narrative under Ellis' discretion. Honestly, this was probably the best part of the entire book.

Picking back up with the main storyline again at issue #28, things do settle down a bit – at least in the sense that it feels like we're finally provided with enough concrete answers to outnumber our questions. Also, Ellis does take more time than before to insert great action sequences in-between all that science talk, and things seem to move along faster. And with less trivial banter among team members, I really felt that things were finally coming along. So from here, it's pretty smooth sailing, and the finale is both exciting and satisfying.

As for Simone Bianchi's art, I'm not quite sure what to make of it one way or another. Truth be told, I was nearly disgusted by it when I first encountered it during *Wolverine Origins*. Now, I feel much more tolerant of it, but it did take me a while to get comfortable with it, and by the end it's still hard to call it something I actually liked. It was usually at its best during the fight sequences, but outside of that, it often looked wax-like, making some of the scenes difficult to interpret, and it kind of set a dry and depressing tone for the book. The quality of the illustrations seemed quite variable throughout, but the guy does seem to do some decent landscapes and draw expressive faces. At the end of the day, Bianchi was an interesting choice for this book, but by no means even approaching Cassaday's talent.

*[Is it just me, or does Emma's face look just like it was drawn by Greg Land? Where the heck did *that* come from?]*

All in all, I think I enjoyed this book well enough. It had its ups and downs, but I think it was worth it just to experience the ups, and to witness Ellis operating at what I assume must be pretty close to full capacity. But at this point in his career, *Ghost Box* felt more like a testing ground for the writer's ideas than it did a serious Ellis book, and I think he must have put off a lot of readers who were coming out of Whedon's run with very high expectations. I'll probably check out the next volume to see if he's able to smooth things out a bit. But since some of my friends and followers who loved this volume rated the next one lower, I'm optimistic that's because it has less of the stuff that I found troublesome with this volume.

Brittany says

I think that I jumped into this too soon after the absolutely fantastic Whedon/Cassaday run. Not only was that my first X-Men, but they were a team that proved to be pretty flawless. I got spoiled, and I let myself believe that switching writers and artists at the same time would be no big deal, because it would still be the same characters with the same backgrounds and the same relationships.

That is what made me angry. According to the numbers, Volume Four covered issues #19-24, and Volume Five covered issues #25-30. So what the fuck happened. When we left Volume Four we had Kitty Pryde stuck in a bullet that she had basically morphed into. But everyone said "WE WON'T GIVE UP ON OUR SHADOWCAT!" and Colossus is all like "Kitty I love you please let's be together forever I will do anything to get you back." And so I am expecting at least some sort of MENTION of Kitty in Volume Five. But no. I

am thrown into a new location in San Francisco, Storm shows up (which is awesome), Brand is still a main player, new baddies are running a muck, but Kitty and Peter? NOPE. THEY-WHO-MUST-NOT-BE-NAMED. The only time Colossus is mentioned is when Armor (who literally complains about her X-name from sun up to sun down) says she can throw Logan like Colossus used to. That's it. That's all the big guy gets. Which is more than Kitty, who must be like a plague now. I guess she is dead in the world of Astonishing X-Men.

Anyways, onto the story at hand. I found it slow at first. No real action, a typical murder, and thus, a mystery. Slow slow slow for the first two chapters, and then all of a sudden BAM! We have a real story on our hands. The ghost boxes became incredibly interesting, but not more interesting than the New Mutants i.e. MONSTERS. They were amazing! The one with two mouths was creepy and horrendous and a great bad guy! The story behind mutants being on other planets, in other universes, made me want comics about THEM. That's how well the story was told. On this point, I cannot flaw this comic. It sucked me in before I knew what was happening. I figured I wouldn't like this after the disappointing first chapter, but I was so proven wrong. And the wit turned out to be astounding. Brand and Beast in particular are hilarious with their sex life.

Did I mention that Ororo kicked ass WITHOUT her powers? Because I really am in love with her for that.

The artwork, though detailed, lent itself well to some, and not so much to others. I loved Beast from the beginning. There was so much detail put into him and he looked exactly as I thought he should. Storm looked GORGEOUS. Seriously, she was beautiful. Her outfit, her hair, the details in her face. She was perfect. And when Brand showed up, wowza. She was drawn into this complete BADASS and her look lent itself to her domineering speech incredibly well. Characters I had a problem with though? Main point: Logan. I know that he is Wolverine. I know that he is hairy. But I think that we surpassed X-Men and moved on into Werewolf territory. He ALMOST had hair coming out of his eyeballs. That is how close we got. He still a man, and his hair was too out of control for me. But I might just be picky.

I also had a problem with the action sequences. This is a big point as to why my rating is so low. I know from the dialogue and the points leading up that yes, there were fights and battle scenes. But I just couldn't SEE it. And this really bothered me. I don't read X-Men for their witty dialogue alone. I need and crave their action and the BAM! KICK! KAPOW! (though they are much more clever than I am). I just wanted more, especially after the amazing things Cassaday did with these characters. But that time, sadly, is gone.

All in all, I will definitely continue reading. And I wasn't sure if I would in the beginning, so this is saying something. But I need the action to be better, and I need Logan to go back to being a real person instead of a dog.

Scott S. says

In the remaining days of 2017 I devoured the enjoyable Whedon / Cassaday run (volumes 1 to 4) of *Astonishing X-Men*. While I try my best to be open-minded when new folks pick up the reins of an on-going series I felt burned this time. *Ghost Box* had little in common with the earlier work.

While it started out as interesting - the initial two or three chapters were good and had me briefly hooked - I soon realized by the halfway point that my enthusiasm had cooled to indifference. The drab color scheme and artwork become overbearing, and the muddled story-line just flat-lines.

Nicolo Yu says

As soon as I finished reading Ghost Box I knew I had to write my thoughts on it down.

Marvel picked the best writer to replace Joss Whedon on Astonishing X-Men. Whedon launched the title with John Cassaday, returning the X-Men to its superhero spandex roots after Grant Morrison's biker leather chic take on New X-Men. Warren Ellis followed up what was a well-received neoclassical take on Marvel's mutants with a story that is pure Ellis. Mad science, parallel worlds and space ship graveyards are all concepts that have appeal to the writer and have appeared in various forms in his past work. I say that this is an excellent follow-up because he doesn't ape what came before, but he placed a bloody stamp all over it.

I figured I would miss Cassaday and his cinematic flourishes on Astonishing, but Simon Bianchi and his team made their every panel a work of art. The digitally painted finished art was a bit muddied but not to spoil one's enjoyment of the detailed line work and intricate panel design.

This was a sad story for Forge as he succumbed to the madness his genius bordered on. I fear Ellis may have totally destroyed the character in the last chapter, but to be fair, Forge has been on that road since he sacrificed the souls of Army mates in a sorcery spell to enact his revenge on the Viet Cong.

This is a great collected edition as both the story and art simply astonish.

Originally reviewed on The Raving Asgardian, my personal blog about comics and its myriad forms.

Sesana says

Really more like 3.5 stars, but I can't bring myself to bump it up to 4.

Maybe I should have taken a break between reading Joss Whedon's excellent run on Astonishing X-Men before picking up anybody else's take. It may have helped. Now, if you put down the last Whedon volume and then immediately picked this one up, you'll probably feel a bit lost. It reads like a lot happened in between, and I ended up confused that they'd moved base and seemed to have gotten over the events just one issue prior. I noticed that the synopsis here mentions two X-Men minis that I have no intention of reading, and that might help it make more sense.

So, I do like Ellis, most of the time. And there are very good things being done here. Any time that Storm and Emma share a panel, it's going to be entertaining. I'd really come to like Emma and Scott as a couple through Whedon's run, and that continues here. The actual ghost box plot itself is fascinating, though yes, it is a bit Planetary. All good things. It just isn't quite up to the same level as what I was getting from Whedon, especially where the dialog is concerned. And the four alternate endings were all horrible and depressing almost to the point of being unreadable.

Now, let's talk about the art. The first time I saw it, I was actually quite impressed. Very detailed. But the further I got in the book, the more those details becomes confusing, muddying the point of the panels. More is not always more, even when it comes to details. This isn't even touching on what I thought of the artist's

design for Storm, but let's touch on that. What was that thing? What experienced superhero would wear something like that to save the world in? Especially when she's also a queen? Can somebody tell me what is so wrong with a female superhero wearing a costume that's not entirely nonsensical for fighting crime?

In the end, Ghost Box ended up being pretty good for me. Just pretty good.
