

The tragedy of Arkham's dark reputation is that it started as (and arguably still is) an institution of good. By definition, it's a place that puts its faith in rehabilitation, in understanding the criminal mind so as to better heal it. It's true, given what you know of the most notorious Arkhamites, that sadistic and depraved as they are, they're also seriously troubled people. But in trying to relate to them, you risk getting snared in their twisted thinking. Let no one forget the cautionary tale of Harley Quinn. Or, for that matter, the history of Amadeus Arkham himself, who apparently ended up a patient in his own asylum.* To be accurate, Bruce says that Amadeus was "incarcerated" there, either indicating that he became like the criminals he tried to treat or emphasizing that Arkham is only an asylum in name and a prison in practice. There's no better time for Bruce to meditate on all this, now that his home has become a den for the most screwed-up minds in Gotham, and he's joined them. You have to wonder whether Arkham's credibility will survive in the process. Given the atrocious rate of recidivism among patients (Lex Luthor provides the damning average of a one-month holding time in Justice League #37), Bruce should already be questioning why he sends so many of his worst enemies there. Now he's seeing firsthand how incapable the staff can be in handling these people. Incompetence, such as when the orderlies roll out Seth to wait for an ambulance, only to watch him fall into a rat-infested sinkhole, is a concern. That Jeremiah Arkham seems to make no headway in treating his patients is also a bad sign. Obviously, though, the real problem is the unknown killer running loose in the manor, one cunning enough to keep up with Bruce in a fight and give him the slip afterwards, and crazed enough to traumatize Zsasz. [Spoiler alert!] Or maybe the real problem is a disguised Joker, sneaking into the place and somehow infecting Clayface to become the even more hideous Clownface. Or maybe the real problem is Seth, whose fall seems to shake him out of his reverie ("I'm awake. My nightmare is over."), reviving the violent tendencies that got him into Arkham in the first place. These are all unfortunate developments in themselves, but especially so for the two men trying to keep things together. Bruce grows increasingly distraught as he wanders the back halls of his home, seeing bloody handprints and weapons left behind as if the perp is marking his territory. Jeremiah at first seems fixated on preserving his institution's legacy, but in private, he reveals genuinely altruistic motives: "We can come back from this... We can still help people. Just relax before the police arrive." There's so many plotlines juggling through the air that you're likely to take interest in at least one of them, provided Duggan manages to keep some of the logistics clear. For example, you're pretty sure he reveals Joker to have been Border all along, but it's not entirely clear. Border was introduced quite suddenly and briefly last issue, only hinted to be Bruce's "ally on the inside," yet all along turns out to be his archnemesis with a new hairdo and no makeup? That's one twist you find hard to swallow. To be fair, Crystal contributes to the confusion by putting Joker in shadow just before he reveals himself, so you can't quite see whether he was disguised as Border or not. There are other such moments where the storytelling isn't as precise as it should be. I for one was a little disoriented when in one panel, we see Bruce gazing broodily at the doctor's back and then all of a sudden he's wandering the halls in doctor's gear and we realize he knocked out the poor man and took his clothes, only we never see it. Aside from that, Crystal does his best to contribute to the claustrophobic feeling of the series, especially as Bruce wanders the manor's dark backways, by making the panels narrower and narrower. Some Musings: * I'm a bit sad to hear it. I always felt sorry for the guy during my All-Star Western days. The post Arkham Manor #3 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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