

Where do you turn when your life collapses inward, its triumphs and trophies become a weight of broken rubble, its goals and ideals become the bars of a deathtrap? Bruce Wayne confronts that dilemma in *Batman Eternal #34*. Maybe it would be more accurate to say that Batman confronts the problem, as one element of the trap consists precisely of the fact that the billionaire is only the façade for the bat. As the story opens, Julia Pennyworth, secret agent, daughter of faithful Wayne butler Alfred, and possibly the best addition to the Bat Family since the introduction of Batman's son Damian, confronts Tommy Elliot AKA Hush in one of the Batman weapons caches Elliot has been seizing and detonating throughout the city. The meeting results in mildly witty repartee and serious injury, setting the stage for one of the more insightful scenes *Eternal* has boasted since its beginning eight months ago. Alfred, distraught at his daughter's injuries, declares that she deserves better than to be drawn into the life of the Bat Family. Bruce grimly, and perhaps sadly, observes that "We all deserve better, Alfred. Most of us just don't know anything else." And so the trap snaps shut. Bruce's subsequent confrontation with Hush in the weapons cache under Martha Wayne Foundation Hospital leads to further explication of this theme, as each man faces the flaws in his self-constructed identity, Bruce that his crusade at its root is a massive neurotic exercise in avoidance, Tommy that his villainy is a scream of insane jealousy. Their recriminations are ended by a news announcement that the federal government, alarmed that the Bat caches Hush has been exploding throughout the city were financed as a Wayne Enterprises black project, has seized the company's assets. To further drive home that Batman has lost in victory, he finds on the vanquished Hush an invitation similar to that sent to Carmine Falcone earlier in the series. To the surprise probably of few *Eternal* readers, Tommy is not the ultimate author of Gotham's suffering. *Batman Eternal* serves as the backbone of the current Batman continuity. It has not performed perfectly in that task, for often it seems to create conundrums rather than clarify them. Grayson recently linked firmly to *Eternal*, placing the two books in tight concurrence. However, such problems as Dick Grayson's unmasking and death have received little attention in the series, despite their obvious importance for the world of Batman. Batman, Batgirl, Arkham Manor, and Catwoman have all moved forward in continuity, with details slowly backfilled. Finally, the place in the Batman timeline of Batman and Robin, with the solicited return of Damian Wayne, is an enormous question. The series has not always displayed internal coherence. The different plot threads have proved of varying quality and voice, not a shock considering that six different writers have had a hand in putting the story together. Kyle Higgins, author of *Batman Eternal #34* and previously writer of *Nightwing*, joined the writing group with the departure of John Layman, one-time author of *Detective Comics*. The change has resulted in improvement. Layman often seemed rather hesitant and muted in his portions of *Eternal*, as if his heart was not really in the task. Higgins has shown himself to be more engaged, with a better feel for the characters and their psychology. Raul Fernandez' inks follow the look that has largely characterized *Eternal* to this point. This Gotham is a place of shadow and secrets, of danger and increasing desperation, and his heavy lines and deep shades illustrate those facts effectively. Alvaro Martinez' pencils are clear but static. His faces are his best work, conveying weariness and worry and pain as effectively as any artist who has contributed to *Eternal*. But his bodies are rigid, seeming to consciously pose even in the midst of action shots. The post *Batman Eternal #34* appeared first on *Weekly Comic Book Review*.

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