

Shadows and ghosts have haunted Gotham from the beginning. The atmosphere of that most famous of comic-book cities has evolved considerably over the years, but it debuted in 1939 as a grim and dangerous place overrun with a superstitious and cowardly lot. Even in Gotham's moments of high camp the bright colors and glaring lights have accentuated the darkness rather than banished it. So the appearance of ghosts and demons of all sorts in *Batman Eternal #45* comes as no fundamental shock. And artist Javi Fernandez deftly deploys the modern visual vocabulary of such occult narratives. His blocky, elongated figures, slightly disproportioned and slightly out of focus, call to mind the work of Mike Mignola and Alex Maleev. Dan Brown's color spectrum, favoring blues and purples, lends the scenes the sense of nightmare. Altogether, the look of the comic would not be out-of-place in some iterations of *Hellboy* or the grittier versions of *Daredevil*. However, powerful as the art is, the story itself seems out-of-place with only seven issues left in the weekly series and multiple mysteries left to solve. It seems not so much a diversion as almost a dream, as if the ghosts of good intentions have come back to haunt *Batman Eternal*. A large portion of the comic relates the end of the *Batwing* arc, which served very little purpose at all except to take up space and keep Luke Fox from slipping into total obscurity. It is true that the subplot introduced Jim Corrigan to Gotham, and thus set the stage for the current *Gotham by Midnight*, one of the more interesting experiments in group editor Mark Doyle's ongoing reinvention of the Batman line. But *Gotham by Midnight* does not harken back to *Eternal* at all in its internal conversations, and there were probably several other ways to set up that experiment, especially considering the new policy of relatively loosened continuity permeating through the Batman line (and very soon to spread into the rest of DC's offerings, if recent announcements are to be believed). In what passes for the main action of the comic, Batman discovers, with Corrigan's help, that Achilles Milo was guided in his actions at Arkham by a dream teacher, a psychic incubus in the form of a bird. However, this interesting piece of information does not lead anywhere before Batman discovers evidence of demonic activity of another kind, namely that R'as al Ghul has been buying up the pieces of the former Wayne Enterprises and incorporating them under highly symbolic names. Frankly, that development, exciting as it may have been at an earlier point in the story, now only brings forth a weary sigh. It seems all too likely this is just another last-minute detour, another excuse to slip in another iconic Batman villain in the waning moments of the 75th anniversary celebration. It also raises yet more ghosts of continuity. How, precisely, does this relate to the recent appearance of R'as al Ghul in *Batman and Robin*. Does it in fact relate? Or, as seems all too likely, has loose continuity simply dissolved into no continuity at all? The post *Batman Eternal #45* appeared first on *Weekly Comic Book Review*.

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