

The first panels of Batman Eternal showed us Bruce Wayne, beaten and chained to a shattered Bat signal, at the mercy of his enemy as the city burns around him. Scott Snyder has already spoiled any tension with his Endgame arc, not that anyone familiar with comics would ever expect anything but a victory for Batman and his confederates. Still, with the absence of any real mystery, except for the identity of the enemy, Eternal has now become an intellectual exercise, a kind of game in which we watch the pieces moving across the board to reach the final configuration we know they must assume. Given that Batman was last seen on a futile visit to R'as al Ghul, we know that nothing climactic can happen until he returns, as he does at the end of this issue. The various fights in which the members of the Bat Family find themselves are so much Kabuki, so many quasi-ceremonial gestures meant only to lead into the final steps of the dance. Even the outcome of the events in the Bat Cave, an outcome that settles the short term fate of Alfred and Tommy Eliot, is more mildly amusing than exciting. Still, two characters do reach story beats that seem to have value in their own right. The first is the story of Gordon and the riot at Blackgate Penitentiary. That subplot has sputtered and lagged for nearly the entirety of the comic, and it finally moves toward a head in a pleasing action sequence involving Gordon, Bullock, Bard, and the Penguin. Gordon becomes an action hero in his own right in this sequence, which speaks to the depths of the character. We are used to him as the face of the official order, or at least its benign aspects. However, his history suggests violence and darkness. How else could one rise to become a police commissioner, especially in a city like Gotham? When he observes through locked bars that the rioters are safer outside than in a cell with him, we believe him. To the credit of writer Kyle Higgins, a line that might have been low comedy is probably the most powerful panel of the issue. The scene between Spoiler and her villainous father is much less successful. Higgins uses it to tease the end, saying that all the clues have been visible from the very beginning. Perhaps they have. But at this point, one suspects that the reveal will entail more frustration than awe. And that may be the ultimate lesson to be taken away from this interesting experiment in weekly comics. The post Batman Eternal #49 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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