

There's a mystery afoot in Gotham Academy, but up to this point, it's still not even clear what the nature of the mystery is. Are Olive and Co. on a supernatural hunt for the ghost of Millie Jane Cobblepot or some other spirit-ghoulie? Is there a conspiracy in the heart of the Academy itself, perpetuated by the students and faculty? Or maybe after all is said and done, the strangeness revolves around Olive herself, and the key to solving the mystery is buried within herself and her forgotten memories. Without knowing exactly what we're dealing with here, it frequently feels like Olive is wandering around, searching for a path to an unknown destination. Curiosity, rather than any fixed goal, drives her forward. The best she can do is grasp at any clue that falls her way, or that she falls into, as is the case with Tristan Grey, the red-eyed blond who claims to have caught her once already. At this rate, it'll take quite a while longer before the series accumulates enough information for us to know even the right questions to ask. Olive is partially hamstrung by the people around her, unable to focus on her investigation or ask too much without alerting their interest. Who knows but that she might have followed up after Tristan's ambiguous statement if Kyle (with whom she hasn't made a complete break with yet) wasn't nearby, watching with his inscrutable gaze. She might have gone back to the North Hall to check on what grabbed her if she wasn't now on the headmaster's radar. So instead of latching onto these threads directly, she has to take the scenic route, which isn't such a bad thing. It means more opportunities to interact with the colorful characters populating the Academy, which is fun if not always useful. Just like the new Batgirl gets great mileage from all the denizens and landmarks of Burnside, there's a lot of charm to the way Cloonan-Fletcher adapts obscure figures from the Bat-canon to the Academy's staff. Case in point: Simon Trent, who portrayed the fictional Gray Ghost that inspired a young Bruce Wayne to a life of crimefighting, now playing the role of Gotham Academy's resident thespian ("Beware, MacDuff! Beware the thane of fife! Dismiss me! Enough!"). We're also getting to the critical point where you have to decide whether you like the cast being offered or not. With this issue, it feels like the title will land on the safe side of yes. While no one exactly reaches out and grabs your heart, you can feel your fondness growing for Maps' spunk ("You can't call me off! I won't be called off! I want information!"), Heathcliff's hopelessly adolescent crush on Pomeline, even Eric the creepy artsy kid's social awkwardness. These are the gentler sort of high school archetypes, as opposed to the loud, annoying, conflict-ready ones you usually see in teen comics. The fact that Pom and Olive are already closer to allies instead of nemeses pays tribute to that. "Cute" can be a toxic word to throw at comic book art, but there's no getting around it when you look at Kersch's work. Even at the issue's darkest moments, like the spooky appearance of the headmaster or the Olive's sudden encounter with an Arkham escapee in the dorm walls, Kersch's art has too much of a disarming quality to be seriously threatening. What the issue lacks in suspense, however, it makes up for in sheer personality. The characters' likability I mentioned earlier largely comes from their young, energetic expressions and movements: Maps' salute as Olive stalks out to confront their "ghost," Heathcliff anxiously pushing his floppy hair out of the way as he talks about Pom, the glint of triumph in Olive's eyes and little smile as she gets the answer she's been looking for. Even the coloring has a gentle disposition, despite taking on intense hues of green, red, and blue at times. The art of this series is just pure delight to look at, which often makes up for unremarkable dialogue and plotting. Some Musings:- You know, Eric never did answer why he was in the girls' dorm. I'm sure it was all just a silly, perverted misunderstanding.- Damn, Lucy, talking smack about Olive behind her back. Not cool. The post Gotham Academy #4 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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