

DC Comics has pronounced a death sentence for Secret Origins, a title that never found a useful purpose in the DC ecology. Mostly, it simply provided condensed versions of origin stories already told in more detail elsewhere. In fact, many of the characters chosen for Secret Origins segments, for instance Batman and Superman, have such famous backstories that retelling their origins was almost a ceremonial exercise. Nevertheless, the title might have provided valuable service by giving origins to less eminent heroes, or by allowing for expansions or corrections to recently printed stories. The three segments included in Secret Origins #8, origin stories for Grayson of Spyral, Animal Man, and Katana, show some hints of what the book might have been, while illustrating the problems with what it was. The lead segment focuses on Dick Grayson, who some might find an odd choice as Grayson had already rated inclusion in a Secret Origin issue, the first of the New 52, in fact. However, that story appeared before recent developments in Dick Grayson's career. This version, authored by Grayson writer Tim Seeley, brings the character up-to-date. In the process, Seeley provides a much-needed fix for some difficulties that have crept into Grayson's story since Flashpoint. For one thing, he manages to smooth over the more controversial elements of the previous Grayson of Spyral origin, the ill-regarded Nightwing #30. He does this with his trademark humor and sensitivity to psychology, as well as his own strong interpretation of the characters. Seeley especially emphasizes a Bruce Wayne/Dick Grayson relationship so intense and positive that it amounts to a middle finger aimed directly at the scowling ghost of Fredric Wertham. He also does not shrink from explicitly embracing most of the popular character beats of Dick Grayson's history, including a Robin whose bright goodness restrains the inner darkness of Batman, the Romani heritage introduced by Devin Grayson, a formal team of teenage heroes that harkens back to the New Teen Titans of the 1980s, Dick's romance with alien princess Starfire, and the era of Dick Grayson Batman and Damian Wayne Robin. Seeley rounds the tale out with a look at the inner workings of Spyral and the relationship between Dick and his partner, Helena Bertinelli, a seasoned spy who, despite her professional scruples, seems to be rapidly falling in love with her charming compatriot. Jeromy Cox brings his well-regarded coloring skills to bear as he does in the main Grayson comic. Stephen Mooney, that book's backup artist, is growing more comfortable with drawing the characters, particularly Helena, although he still occasionally depicts them as too old. His Dick Grayson, in particular, sometimes looks some fifteen years older than his supposed age. The problems with Grayson's origin, particular the confusion attendant on the end of Forever Evil and the bizarre lack of impact on the Bat Family of the character's supposed death, are not addressed in the segment, but they run too deep to be fixed in a dozen pages. The Animal Man segment is simply a beat-for-beat retelling of the main storyline of Jeff Lemire's Animal Man run, complete with the art style of that title. It provides a useful primer for readers of Justice League United, where Buddy Baker currently appears under Lemire's pen, but adds nothing of interest to the origin. It illustrates Secret Origins at its weakest and least useful. The final origin story, an Ann Nocenti tale focusing on Katana, adds some details to that hero's background. Unfortunately, the details really don't expand or deepen the character's scope, and this segment illustrates the potential for Secret Origins that it all too often did not realize. Final Grades: GRAYSON: A- ANIMAL MAN: B KATANA: B The post Secret Origins #8 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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