

With issue #12 The Woods' first year comes to a thunderous close, the likes of which I, at least, was largely unready for. There's been something so natural about following the strange lives of our protagonists that my mind seemingly rebelled against the idea of something so artificial as seasons until James Tynion IV revealed just how pointed the separation between issues #12 and #13 would be. Regardless of my readiness, Tynion manages to bring the story to a natural and very temporary close this month. In many ways, issue #12 is really just the point of the conclusion. Structurally speaking, this chapter shares much with other Tynion-penned finales and feels much more like the third act of a larger story than a separate installment with an arc of its own. I think it was Tynion's final issue of Talon that made me lament that the comics format doesn't lend itself quite as cleanly to the double-sized season finale. This fact shouldn't be read with judgement, I think it could be seen as a positive or a negative for the issue, but it is undoubtedly the case that we enter at the height of the climax. The core of the issue is change and how much we control the changes in ourselves. It's a sizable portion of the issue that's dedicated to more of Isaac and Adrian's stroll through New London and their reflections on what came before. Some readers will likely see the amount of time spent here as self-indulgent, but Tynion excels at putting himself inside the characters and allowing the reader to do the same. It's highly dramatic yet very real and it makes you grapple with all the ambiguity of Adrian's transformation. As much as the last six issues have highlighted the addictive effect of the black arrow, here we're forced to confront how much Adrian remains in character. It's the sort of thing that I feel would be a staple of some hypothetical sparknotes for the series and, accordingly, very literary, but it also feels like the distillation of some very real social anxiety, though I could easily be projecting. Either way, it strengthens my point that The Woods' strength is greatest where Tynion forces the professional and structured to coexist with the honest and the personal. Karen also comes into her own at long last and there's a cruel but fulfilling connection between her and Adrian. It presents another interesting point of view to contrast with Isaac's. You really feel the weight of precious issues on her and the importance, not only of her actions in the course of the story, but of the decision she makes before this issue begins. Meanwhile Tynion writes a deeply satisfying conclusion to Coach Clay's story for the moment. Clay and Calder in particular tie into that theme of change, both rejecting it in a fashion to unsettling results. The dialogue is slightly underwritten, in my opinion, with many lines feeling dramatic but not all that they could be. The result is an issue that doesn't quite let you catch your breath; you're always holding it, waiting for the other shoe to drop and you're not sure it will. That said, the tense, realistic dialogue makes it very noticeable when we get two and a half pages of decompressed silence as the finale nears. At this point I trust the creative team not to waste our time, but I have to admit that these pages feel a bit like padding, which is all the stranger for the fact that this story could probably have done wonders with a couple more pages in the climactic scene. I don't feel like Michael Dialynas is doing the kind of work on this series that wins awards or accolades, but I do feel like he's doing the kind of work that deserves them. Month after month, Dialynas balances consistency and innovation, fluidity, on this title. The 'villains' of the piece are evolving especially quickly, with Adrian and Clay feeling sharper and more distinct in their shapes and weight. Interestingly, Adrian's dragon's seem to share in this evolution, subtly reinforcing the growing connection between him and the planet's technology. Another thing, minor as it is, that really stuck out to me was the attention to characters' gait. The most obvious instance is a large panel of Clay leading his army through the woods. The image conveys a lot almost immediately thanks to the presence of familiar tropes, but avoids feeling derivative or obvious. Noting that led me to realize how often the flow of how a character stands was a major

part of what I was reacting to. The colors remain gorgeous, again seemingly in line with those of the more vicious dragons. With the final goal in sight, Josan Gozalez introduces a new shade of green into the glow of the black stones. While I can't say if it's intentional, the tones of the issue seem to darken into this new color as we approach Adrian's ascension. The post The Woods #12 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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