

To be plain about things, I like *The Woods*. I think James Tynion has a good grasp on his characters and a story to tell. I think Michael Dialynas does beautiful work and that he never settles for just a good page. Honestly, I think the series' biggest problem thus far is that some readers might find it lacking in energy. The survival horror elements are strong and it's a shame that more series can't match the level of care and honesty in their characters. *The Woods* has been a solid B title since it began. I say all of this because this month marks something new for *The Woods*. While we've seen a new story arc start already, the shift from issue #8 to issue #9 is monumental and, while some things need to be clarified before we can really take stock, I'm tempted to say that somehow this series has gotten even better. Weeks after the conclusion of the dramatic events in issue #8, Karen, Calder, Ben, Sanami, and Isaac have taken up refuge in the city of New London. The cast has lost Adrian, after a fashion, but it's swelled to include not only the three hunters but their families and government. It's a bold switch but one that works well. Now that they're safe behind walls, the characters are a little more able to tell us about themselves. Seeing Calder's skills come in handy in the wilderness was fun, but I'm a little tired of the 'society breaks down, how do they handle it' genre anyway. It's much more fun to see how people rebuild, what flaws they carry over and, likewise, it's equally engaging to watch Calder once his world is really shaken up, once he has friends. There's very little action to speak of, most of it restrained to an eerie flashback at the issue's start, and even then it's more implied. Nonetheless, the book remains interesting for the simmering tension Tynion leaves under the surface. If you're looking for an example look no further than the presence of Coach Clay. While he basically served as the capstone cliffhanger of last month's issue, Coach Clay is kinda just there this month. The cast don't know about his power play back at the school and he's in no hurry to tell them. He's honestly making a lot of sense and it would be easy to take him at his word if Tynion and Dialynas didn't throw in a pause or an awkward glance to remind you of who he is. The situation surrounding Adrian is similar, with no one wanting to think about it, despite clear signs that his departure has changed things significantly. Tynion does a great job of writing Isaac's crisis of faith, taking it in a direction that feels different from last month but in continuity with it. The balance between his speaking out of hurt and speaking the truth is delicate, some might say leaning a little heavily towards the former, but I think it's a pretty impressive success. I will say that the series relies a little too heavily on off-screen crushes and flushed cheeks to depict romance. Obviously we're not as quick to develop lifelong loves and deep friendships as our media pretends, but it would be nice to see some of these relationships developing, rather than appearing, fully formed. It's also sensible but somewhat unlikely how rarely the characters mention individuals who are back at the school, or even back on Earth. As I mentioned, Michael Dialynas rarely feels stiff in his artwork. He forms each panel to suit the needs of the scene, changing styles and details to match. The first page featuring Karen and Calder is a fine example of the obvious shifts that take place in Dialynas' work; compare the first panel to the last row or the last panel of the second row. Even more so, compare that page to the flashback the precedes it. Through it all there is a level of consistency, but the difference between two black dots and mad, shimmering eyes is significant. Strange as it is to say, I also really like the way that Dialynas draws beards. There are a lot of little details like that. It really feels like everything in this book was a conscious choice. Dialynas also continues to make the mysterious planet a beautiful, terrifying place to live. We get introduced to a new predator this month, which of course looks fantastic, as well as a huge number of staples of the New London lifestyle. It's fascinating to see how much world-building is done through the artwork, with the British colonists bending the planet to their way of life, even as the influences of the other

cultures they've assimilated begin to seep into their lifestyle. Dialynas is perfect for this series, his art is distinct and malleable and does everything Tynion's script requires of it. It's a great artistic match, but in it being so strong, I worry I have neglected to mention Josan Gonzalez's contributions. Particularly in this issue Gonzalez's colors are extremely strong. The green and purple palette that runs through the issue retains a quality of being alien, even slightly threatening, despite the seeming safety of New London. The early pages are especially striking. The colors are relatively flat this issue, without the harsh shadows of the titular trees, but that doesn't seem to stop Gonzalez from being expressive with them. Gonzalez makes the world feel very real, without all the pesky color clashes that reality brings with it. Some Thoughts: I'm very impressed with how natural the Hunters have fit into the main cast. To go from antagonists to main supporting cast like that is impressive. Not to mention that they're as interesting as the original cast. That said, I think it's fascinating that Isaac is complaining how he was threatened to the people who threatened him. I trust Tynion more than to suggest, even accidentally, that the British are the only group capable of building a civilization here. I wonder if there are other colonies somewhere or, if not, what they were willing to do that the others weren't. Also, it is possible that Nigel is the most British man ever. Firstly his name is Nigel, but more importantly, when faced with a distraught animal, he gives it a scarf. In fact, he gives it more, more scarves than it is physically capable of wearing. Am I the only one who finds that the most charming bit of character work ever? Finally, since it's rare to be able to say it, I wanted to mention that this is a great jumping on point for new readers. The post The Woods #9 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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