

The art of magic lies in misdirection. A skilled illusionist feels no need for flashy hand gestures or pyrotechnics, and even less for sudden reveals and forced segues. Rather, the best magic tricks rely on a flow of performance to sweep the audience down a twisting path that opens in an unexpected place. Such magic has a home in literature as well, with narrative pacing and execution carrying the work that acting skill performs on stage. Unfortunately, Batman Eternal #36 does not show narrative magic. Hand waving takes the place of subtle misdirection, exposition does the work of skilled plotting, and gaudy reveals substitute for pleasing discoveries. As the story opens, Tim Drake and Harper Row rush to save Batman from the predicament he had gotten himself into last issue, with his car falling and about to explode. There is some nice character exposition with Harper at her sick brother's bedside that reminds us of the nanotech plague storyline that we haven't followed for a while, and that also lays the groundwork for a possible romantic entanglement between Tim and Harper. Meanwhile, Julia frantically races around the Bat Cave, finally remembering a failsafe command that will trigger the blow out of the batmobile's undercarriage. But it was not necessary, as Batman assures us there were several ways for him to escape, although he never explains how he was silly enough to get into that easily foreseeable predicament to start with. The current "living" members of the Bat Family appear to threaten Jason Bard, who seems at the beginning of an arc from villain to ally, although it could easily be derailed. We have our obligatory confrontation between Batman and Hush, and a final reveal of the Riddler, watching and commenting from the shadows, which surprises no one who has read the solicits for upcoming issues. It all feels clunky and patched together. The Bat Family members appear for no other reason than it is time in the story for them to appear. Yes, Julia sent out a distress signal, but that is pure hand waving to explain a necessary plot development. Batman escapes because he has to escape. Hush and Batman have their confrontation because it's time for a confrontation like that, complete with the wearisome "you deserve worse but we can't kill" themes that at this point in Bat history are good for nothing but eye-rolling. The Riddler is positioned as if he might be the ultimate villain, but once again solicits have spoiled that, and besides it would simply be a repeat of the original Hush storyline. The Riddler is there as a pivot point to signal the beginning of the third act of Batman Eternal. The beginnings of the Tim and Harper relationship are well realized, as is the warming bond between Batman and Julia. Similarly, Vicki's exploration of Bard's background provides interesting detail, unfortunately dropped in as a chunk of exposition, that Bard's partner died when a would-be Detroit Batman interfered with a police operation. Bard, in a piece of motivational sleight of hand that comes across as transparent and awkward, pins his rage on Gordon for tolerating and encouraging the original Batman. Fernando Blanco's art, Marcelo Maiolo's colors, and Steve Wand's lettering are carried over from the last issue. They remain perfectly serviceable. The post Batman Eternal #36 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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