

Enter the villains and anti-heroes, stage right. Such a direction could be printed boldly at the top of Tim Seeley's script for *Batman Eternal* #37. This weekly series, the current supposed keeper of timing and continuity in the Batman universe, has exhibited any number of problems over the last several months, as well as any number of strengths. Most of the problems arise from one foundational difficulty, the inexorable and seemingly inflexible timetable governing the plot. It is as if somewhere in the Batman editorial offices there is a giant calendar with the various issues of *Batman Eternal* marked on Wednesdays over the course of 52 weeks, the main plot beats assigned to those issues written in the blood of writers and artists. There is also probably a giant sign overhead reading "ABANDON ALL HOPE, YE WHO MISS THESE GOALS." Likely any weekly series requires such draconian controls, and a book employing five writers and dozens of artists telling a story with at least four major plotlines and a small legion of characters all spread over a calendar year of publication likely cannot risk slipping a single inch. Nevertheless, often characters appear and disappear for no other reason than, apparently, it is time for them to do so. Similarly, events occur because they are written down on the hypothetical great chart of all *Eternal*. In this case the escapees from Arkham Asylum, including Bane, Poison Ivy, Scarecrow, and Mr. Freeze, gather in an abandoned restaurant to plot their next moves. The interplay among the personalities is interesting and convincing, not surprisingly as such relationships and dialogue have always been among Seeley's particular strengths. The jockeying for position between Scarecrow and Ivy, both promising emerging leader Bane an improved venom, should be familiar to anyone who has ever dealt with highly ambitious people at close quarters. Meanwhile, Catwoman has ensconced herself as the head of the Calabrese family empire, and is using her kitty cams to keep a wary eye on the villains, while Killer Croc has seized control of the Gotham docks. Batman's position in the new order looks unenviable. He is running low on allies and supplies, his money is impounded, Gotham rests under martial law, and both Croc and Catwoman are offering aid for a price he may find too high. The only bright spot is that Jason Bard, now similarly down on his luck and rejected by his former police comrades, has begun the predictable arc from enemy to friend. Harvey Bullock has perhaps the best line in this issue when he sees the limping Bard enter the bar where Bullock has been drinking with Maggie Sawyer and exclaims, "And this was such a nice rat-infested dump too." It is all entertaining and well-crafted, but it lacks an organic link to the previous storylines. Everything that happens makes sense, but there doesn't seem to be any particular explanation for why it happens the way it does, or why it happens now. The writers have evidently passed an invisible line on the timing chart, and so now the villains enter. Even worse, the sudden reappearance of Luke Fox, now with haunted armor, comes totally out of nothing. He was gone, now he is back. All hail the timetable. The art does not particularly damage the story, but does not elevate the script, either. Andrea Mutti's images and Giulia Brusco's colors are somewhat cartoonish, and while serviceable do not catch the eye or excite the interest. The post *Batman Eternal* #37 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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