

Sometimes stories, like people, have to pause for breath. In the hectic rush of plotlines, in the frantic desire to squeeze in every last bit of characterization, even a well-crafted narrative can twist and meander, requiring a few pages of stillness to allow all the jumbled elements to settle into a stable pattern. Batman Eternal has not reached such a place. Far from it, D.C.'s premier weekly now needs to accelerate toward a powerful and satisfying conclusion, not least because the ENDGAME arc currently underway in Batman has pretty much spoiled any hope for surprise or shock. Instead of such a dash to the end, Batman Eternal #44 is a strolling detour, a mysterious diversion of valuable panel space in service to Eternal's least compelling subplot. The Arkham storyline might well have served for an interesting arc in an ordinary Batman comic, but in Eternal it has been largely a diversion, at best a vehicle for introducing Jim Corrigan to the city and keeping Luke Fox in view. Nothing about it would seem to justify pressing attention on the part of Batman, certainly not with the Riddler and Spoiler to interrogate, villains running around the city in possession of Wayne Enterprises equipment, and Clayface doing his level, and very effective, best to implicate Batman in the chaos engulfing Gotham. Nevertheless, Batman decides rather than spending time on any of these more important threads that he will pursue Achilles Milo, a rogue pharmaceutical scientist whose interests somewhat parallel those of the Scarecrow but with a decided dark magical bent. He apprehends Milo as the latter is attempting to flee the city, and the villain obligingly confesses to using Arkham as a laboratory for scientific and arcane experimentation at the invitation of the mysterious individual behind all of Gotham's troubles. But his story is cut short by the arrival of a band of malicious ghosts who attack Batman and his prisoner with glee. In other plots, Spoiler continues to maintain that Bruce Wayne (one assumes Clayface in disguise, although one may assume wrong) is the mastermind destroying the city, while the aforementioned Luke Fox copes with powers haunting his armor. The first story thread is repetitive, the second unnecessary. ACO's art is a strength of this issue. His well-formed, anatomically accurate figures are rendered in slightly blurred focus, lending a sense of power and raw strength. One look at his bulky, menacing Batman is enough to explain why he was chosen to provide art for the recently announced *Midnighter* ongoing. Romulo Fajardo's understated colors meld well with this art style, giving primacy to line and shape rather than hue, shade, and shadow. The post Batman Eternal #44 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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