

As a lover of Gotham Central and a sucker for the supernatural, I was immediately taken with Gotham by Midnight. Jim Corrigan as both cop and Spectre heading a GCPD-sanctioned team of paranormal investigators, including a kooky doctor and nun as consultants? Oh, yeah—I'm in. Fortunately, I was rewarded with a solid debut issue from Fawkes and Templesmith, one which hit that sweet spot of convincingly unsettling magical realism. It's instructive to compare these early issues with those of Fawkes' other DC supernatural series, Constantine. On the most basic level, GbM has the stronger male lead, if only because Jim doesn't suffer from the same comparisons to a superior Vertigo incarnation the way John Constantine did (and still does). Besides, whereas John had to carry his title practically all by himself, Jim has the support of a colorful cast, one which Fawkes wisely starts to flesh out in this issue. Even smarter, he begins with Sister Justine, clearly the odd duck in this gang. Everyone else, even the kooky Dr. Szandor Tarr, has a practical function and traditional role in a police unit like this one, but what does Justine bring to the table? Even after an extended flashback of her first encounter with Jim and the Spectre, it's still unclear. Jim calls her a "bona fide pure soul," which is a rare and admirable trait, but not one that seems immediately useful when dealing with unknown threats. After all, it's not her soul that gives the team their lead at the end, but her memory of a most disturbing supernatural event. Speaking of, Fawkes keeps the nature of the enemy we're dealing with a mystery here, which is just how I like it—for now. The deformed, dementor-like nun in Slaughter Swamp is a nice step up from the garden-variety demons and evil mages that compose most of DC's occult threats. It's also wonderful to see Jim handling her not with a wave of his hands and some mumbo jumbo, but with some more obscure methods. Maybe too obscure. Honestly, you have no idea how Jim realizes the creature used to be some kind of teacher, that the sound of bells (even digitally replicated) is key to banishing it, and why bells do banish it. Since the plot's starting to rev up, you can let it go, but Fawkes owes us some explanation and he better not forget it. In the meantime, we have not only a mystery to occupy us, but a strong team dynamic as well. The camaraderie and ease which Jim, Justine, Lisa, Tarr, and Weaver have with each other is the spoonful of sugar that helps the dark medicine of their work go down. In many respects, they act like any other police unit, down to the tensions between the veteran detective and his younger partner—and bagels.* The issue also suggests the future addition of the aptly named Rook as the team rookie, someone who can voice all the WTFs that we can't. Fawkes' scripting is all well and good, but it's Templesmith's cadaverous art that really makes the series. Like Frazier Irving, Templesmith's natural style is made for comics involving the other. There's nothing conventionally attractive about it, not even in the slightest, so it'll have to be an acquired taste for some people. But what it does that no conventional art can is emphasize the unknowable eeriness of the forces our heroes have to deal with. Take the Slaughter Swamp nun; the face is horrifyingly twisted and distorted, yet like a Magic Eye nightmare you can make out slitted eyes and a skeletal mouth, which eventually become even more terrible when they split art to reveal a seething mass of eyes and fangs. Just by comparison, the scenes at HQ are peaceful, even relaxing to look at, as if the gathering of the whole team in their base of operations affords some small measure of safety against the evil outside. - "Nobody believes us...nobody understands us. Nobody wants us here...we're too busy protecting you to care." "We will not rest" Some Musings: * Oh, yes, Jim buys bagels for everyone after a harrowing night of creature-banishing. Don't tell me that doesn't make you love him a little bit. - "We Will Not Rest"—what a great title for a chapter. The post Gotham by Midnight #2 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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