

I suppose it speaks to the popularity of a title when it's got an annual out before it's actually had an annual round of issues. If nothing else, it shows a lot of confidence in the series, confidence somewhat earned by Grayson's consistently fun, occasionally very good run thus far. Seely-King have proven their ability to churn out an entertaining done-in-one every month, but right now, it's too early to say whether this will have any major impact on Dick himself. This annual doesn't do much to sway that assessment either way. It's a well-written product, with Seely-King carrying you easily through to the end with their usual good pacing and solid dialogue. But all that work is sort of a wash when you can guess where it's all going within a few pages. [Spoiler alert!] Most of the issue ends up being Seely-King doing their damndest to convince you that the chatty Robert McGinn ("Rock") is not Dick in disguise, even though that's the conclusion you instantly jump to as soon as you see Helena bound up in a car trunk. To give credit to Seely-King, they've given Helena such an air of competence that it's hard to imagine her falling prey to anything as mundane as a Taser attack, even a surprise one from behind, and harder still to believe that she'd remain trussed up for long—as if agents of her caliber aren't trained for that garden variety scenario. But considering the fact that Dick started this series wearing a wig and mastering a foreign accent, you're inclined to think Rock's giant scar and lively Irish brogue are just the next step in Dick's spy work. Even if these points don't immediately occur to you, signals abound that Rock is not who he claims to be: his mentioning a sojourn in Gotham, Clare remarking that she'd heard he died there, and above all else, his incessant, overcompensating commentary on Irish culture ("People are forgetting...we're Irish. We have our own stories to tell.").* And if all these hints pass you by, surely your alarm bells must be ringing when Clare calls up her man in Gotham for a second opinion on Rock and gets the okay from none other than Matches Malone, of whom "Rock" says enthusiastically, "Old Matches and I go back to when I was still wearin' boy panties." The only person who manages a decent counterargument to Rock being an imposter is Paddy, who points out, "If he were Spyril, he wouldn't tell us about their secret bloody Hypnos. He'd just use them, wouldn't he?" True, unless Paddy and Clare's boss has "stolen GL skin," whatever that means, which allows him to see through the Hypnos. Actually, much about the infamous St. Francis is thrown in at the last minute, giving you no time to understand who he is and what he does, much less how he came by one of the Paragon parts (which are themselves still poorly defined). Clare and Paddy fare little better; they're just earpieces for Dick's never-ending story, dupes to help him get what he needs. The annual's not a total waste. One important detail about Helena's backstory comes out, her being "Frank's girl, supposed to take over the entire Sicilian mob. And instead she ran." Some of the functioning of the Hypnos comes to light, including a potential vulnerability in rainy conditions that unfortunately, only the doomed Paddy realizes. But if that's all you can take away with you when you come back to Grayson proper, it's not much, is it? Another saving grace to this issue is it gets a higher level of art than annuals tend to get. Mooney has a fairly detailed, sober style that fits Grayson's grounded tone. Even though his linework is less pronounced than Mikel Janin's, it actually looks more natural and lighter on its feet that way. Mooney's attention to body language and facial expression is similarly natural, with Clare showing a whole range of thought despite saying little and emoting less. I wouldn't mind seeing more of Mooney's work on this title if there's ever an opportunity. Some Musings: * I feel like Dick briefed himself thoroughly on Irish history and folklore to prep for this mission and didn't want to let it go to waste. The post Grayson Annual #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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