

Before we get started, here's wishing all of you a merry Christmas and happy holiday, whichever one you prefer! Maybe Damian's return didn't end up on anybody's wish list, but it's sort of a nice, fitting present for the season, don't you think? Of course, when you consider that he died only a couple months short of two years ago, bringing him back seems a tad premature, even for a Christmas miracle. In fact, after reading this issue, you'll see it as the gift you not only didn't ask for, but you don't know what to do with after unwrapping. In the case of this outer bookend to the whole Robin Rises saga, you'll also feel like you've received something you already have. The first thirteen pages of Alpha are pretty much lifted from the last three or four pages of Batman and Robin #37. You'd think the difference in page count would mean more substance and drama, but really, the expansions are largely superficial. I'd even go so far as to say the B&R version is the superior experience due to Patrick Gleason's more striking art (more on that later). So a third of the issue is redundant for B&R readers, who I'm guessing make up the bulk of Alpha's audience. The rest of the issue is an action fest that's diverting, but not on par with the madness of Omega. A surprise Kalibak attack* doesn't have anything on an all-out battle royale between Batman, Frankenstein, Ra's Al Ghul, Gilbert Godfrey, a posse of ninjas, and a squadron of Apokoliptian soldiers. Alpha's action is even less dynamic than it could be with Cyborg out of commission and our trio of filler Robins barely getting a hit off before going down. Instead, the focus is on Damian and his newfound superstrength and invulnerability. Am I the only one who hears that and thinks, Why? It's an interesting development, one sure to spawn a few obligatory plotlines about Bruce adjusting to a son he can no longer physically intimidate and Damian taking responsibility for his powers. After that, though, things get tricky from a storytelling perspective. Sure, having that kind of powerhouse in the Bat-family allows them to stand up to opponents that'd normally be out of their league, but it also takes the guts and brains out of their battles. You can see the pros and cons right here: Damian forgoes much of his ninja training in favor of tossing vehicles at Kalibak. Setting aside these long-term concerns, the issue is flawed in a number of other ways. Again, B&R readers get gipped when the cliffhanger of Bruce collapsing in #37 turns out to be nothing more than momentary exhaustion. Alfred offers immediate relief by noting Bruce's pulse is steady, which is entirely unnecessary since Bruce proves he's A-OK by getting back into the fight a few panels later. Clearly, there's to be no fallout from his abuse of the Hellbat suit, not even in the form of League chastisement. After punking Vic, dragging him to Apokolips, and causing him to malfunction at least twice, he's takes it all astonishingly in stride: "Thanks for the kidnapping fun, but Justice League duty calls." Bruce is almost cheerful when he says he'll come in for his scolding at some point. On top of all that, there's Kubert's art. Like John Romita Jr., he's supposed to be a big name in the business, but honestly, I often find it difficult to see why. He's got a good style going for him, lively and capable of pretty much anything, but there's a certain flimsiness to his lines that causes them to buckle under any kind of coloring and his storytelling is not terribly inspired. Since he and Gleason draw identical sequences in their respective issues, you actually have some fair comparisons before you. Let's take the moment just before Bruce plunges the Chaos Shard into Damian's sarcophagus. Gleason chooses a ground-up POV and brings us close so we can see every detail of Bruce's near-mad expression, the bulging muscle in his arm as he grips the bright-hot shard over his shoulder, as if we're the ones he's about to plunge that shard into. Kubert simply peers down on Bruce from above, conveying the essential action of the moment without communicating much emotion whatsoever. And then the moment of truth itself. Again, Gleason takes us right up to the impact point so we can see the flickers of energy sparking off where the shard enters the coffin, dark bubbles forming in the core of the shard as

it works, flickers of light licking through the cracks of Bruce's arm. Gleason makes it clear a powerful chemical reaction is taking place. Kubert just makes the shard light up like any common bulb. It's really no contest. Some Musings: * Kalibak may be a god, but he's also an idiot for not taking a good amount of back-up with him. I'm pretty sure our heroes would have been screwed, even with Damian's extra firepower, had that been the case. - [Spoiler alert.] Oh, and Talia is alive, too. Boo. The post Robin Rises: Alpha #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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