

I don't think that there's a series in recent memory that surprised me more or more pleasantly than *Tooth & Claw*, now renamed *The Autumnlands: Tooth and Claw*. In fairness, part of that comes from the fact that I knew literally nothing about this series when I picked it up, but either way it was quite the debut. With this second issue, it's becoming clearer what this series will be. Issue #1 presented us with a sprawling civilization of magic users thrown into chaos. The sense of the survivors being out of their element is out in full force this month as they struggle, rather literally, with the world and the system they've made. Half of the issue is devoted to a lengthy battle sequence and most of what remains is the group trying to figure out their next steps and retelling the legend of their mythic hero. The telling, of course, triggers an argument about the race of the champion, but we've been here before. Indeed, that's a frequent problem with the issue. We've already heard that the attempt to claim the Champion is a contentious issue and, while I expect that this and other elements of the myth will come into play again, it doesn't particularly add to the story of this issue. We also get two similar discussions of the party's safety. *Tooth & Claw*, it seems, is going to be a rather decompressed read. If you count the visions of the story as part of Enna's dialogue around the campfire, the entire issue is one long sequence, willing to repeat itself occasionally to sell the reality of the setting. But perhaps what's most amazing is that it works. *Tooth & Claw #2* is still a gripping read. There was no point in my experience with it that I wanted to, or even thought of, putting it down. That's rather surprising given the amount of infighting and bickering in this issue, but, as last month, the strength of this issue is the sense of immersion Busiek is cultivating. The world remains mysterious but lush. Likewise, the characters ebb and flow naturally, moving from one thought to the next without ever taking you out of the story. It's strong writing, even if I wish he would have been more careful with what those thoughts were. There is one fantastic moment in the writing that bares mentioning, however. Caught between magicians too sheltered to survive the wilds and their 'servants', all too happy to prove it, Dunstan watches in horror, muttering, "They hate us." It's not that he doesn't know that the Bison Tribes' treatment is cruel, he clearly thought as much last month, but, clearly, he never thought them smart enough, sentient enough, to agree with him. The idea that they are not resigned to their lot in life is totally alien to him. Even as we move forward with a quest to revive magic, we have to consider that unleashing it in the first place was a mistake. Benjamin Dewey continues to draw an impressive comic. Particularly in the opening pages, his work is phenomenal. The first page is dramatic and moody, full of creeping shadows and menacing imagery that quickly explodes into gorgeous, pulpy goodness. From there we're back into the modern day and more familiar work. The attention to expressions is not quite what it was last month, but it's still well above the norm. As for bodies, they're solid, but the circumstances of the story limit Dewey's ability to call upon the incredible costume design of last issue. Then again, in the case of one of the major players that is a massive understatement. The introductory splash of the Great Champion is certainly impressive, but the anatomy is more than a little disproportionate. And, yes, I know that all sounds like dick jokes, but it really isn't. Seeing the Great Champion in action allows Dewey to prove that he's more than capable of drawing a traditional action scene as well as he rendered the oddly fascinating political debates of last issue. Though it appears that Dewey wasn't particularly fond of backgrounds this issue, frequently employing negative space or simple tones with some foreground elements, I never found it distracting or in any way troublesome. The pure white backdrops draw attention, not only to the action in the panel, but to the uneven, storybook gutters beside them and the vast expanses of navy sky and green foliage set a palette for the issue that brings out the beauty of the characters' earthy coloration. In fact, color is a huge part

of this issue and it seems apparent that Dewey very consciously considered that fact. He and Jordie Bellaire do some excellent work together and seem to get on famously. Honestly, Bellaire might be the member of the team who most turns out the strongest showing this month. Bellaire not only chooses beautiful colors for the issue but gives the world a tactile dimension. Dunstan's hazy first glance at a monstrous wall of charging bison is a particularly strong display of what Dewey and Bellaire can create together. The contrast between the subdued, yet gripping, colors that Bellaire uses for the majority of the issue and the vibrant flashes of the wizards' magic is a powerful thing. The selected shades are spot-on and the lighting effects used make magic feel like a part of this world. I also have to mention that Bellaire is likely a big part of the character's expressiveness, as characters like Dunstan are communicated through subtle shadows and shifts of color as much as they are by linework. Some Thoughts: It's obvious why the Great Champion should be a human, and less so but still obvious why Busiek chose a male human, but I have to say that, at this point, it feels rather conventional. I'm excited to meet this legendary hero, but the resolution of the debate of his species doesn't add much to my reading of the story yet. I also have to say that while I like the frank honesty of Busiek's story, I wonder if it needed to be a mature readers title. This series rests right on the line between calling out the ridiculousness of our culture's sensibilities and a nearly teenage instinct to poke them and see what happens. It wouldn't really matter, but with a series this good it begs the question of why it was important enough to include when it seriously limited the audience. I expect Busiek will begin to make this clear before long, but what are your thoughts? Both the inside cover and the first page have heartily reaffirmed my interest in Crows' place in this world. The Ramfasti are really cool but disappear as quickly as they grabbed hold of your imagination. I hope we'll hear more about them soon. The post *The Autumnlands: Tooth and Claw #2 – Review* appeared first on *Weekly Comic Book Review*.

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