

And just like that, we have merely another Bat-title on our hands. This is why people get cynical about Batman comics; DC releases yet another series starring the Dark Knight, promising it'll be different from all the others, and it ends up being Bruce stalking and beating down some madman with a shtick. Some might protest that all Batman stories are like that, with such reductive thinking. My rebuttal: then we should seriously reassess how many Bat-titles we're willing to support. It's not that Duggan doesn't write a perfectly good Batman tale. He plays up Bruce's predator-like intensity as he trails then corners the nutjob haunting the manor's walls, wearing down his prey's endurance with triumph very much like glee: "He's finished. He knows it. He knows it. I know it." That's the thinking of a carnivore who smells blood and knows dinner is near. So you enjoy Duggan's Batman; it just seems too similar to what you'd get anywhere else. Where his Batman does diverge from the crowd is in his compassion for the Arkham inmates. After he stops the wall murderer, he decides "to make an example of him. I'll show the Arkham patients that their safety is important too. Now they know. That I'll risk my life for them too." We often think of Bruce as standing up for the innocents of Gotham, but here he suggests the Arkhamites may be a kind of innocent themselves. It's not the easiest notion to take, considering the countless horrible things they've collectively done over the years, frequently with what easily passes for lucidity. But then you look at Fries—who's really feeling like Arkham Manor's breakout character—strolling about the wintry grounds, throwing snowballs at the Batmobile and grinning around the corner of a tree. That childlike behavior is deeply and purposely at odds with his infamy as a major rogue, forcing you to question if there's anything like forgiveness or redemption available for this man. Strangely enough, you even feel a bit of pity for Bruce's latest capture, a man who moves and behaves with the silent ferocity of an animal. An Arkham employee remembers him as a strong but silent laborer, but all you see is someone who may be canny and depraved, but also very much insane. At least, it's hard to think otherwise after he bites off his own tongue and leaves it on the snow. Bruce concludes there's not much point in uncovering who the man is because he's just another in Arkham's colorful cast of psychopaths. It's tempting to call this weak character writing, but Duggan's probably making the point that every one of the Arkhamites, from the renowned (i.e., Fries) to the unknown newcomer (i.e., Seth) is just as crazy, dangerous, and pathetic. What a shame, then, that it looks like we won't be spending much time in Arkham for at least another issue as Bruce goes off-campus to track the escapees. While I'm sort of interested to see how Bruce handles the various crazies, this just doesn't feel like what I signed up for. As previously mentioned, there are plenty of titles with the same premise, but better written. And probably better drawn, too, although Crystal is no slacker. Batman fight scenes tend to be stiff and posed nowadays, but Crystal shows that Bruce is dead-serious in his use of force and his surroundings. That panel where he smashes the wall murderer's face against a searing radiator pipe is pretty brutal, but—and no judging—in a good way. Less good is the confusing tangle of limbs when Bruce really lays into his opponent, his big punch obscured by the murderer's bent body. But the best part of Crystal's work this issue is how he plays up Bruce as predator, the way Bruce's shadow looms in his target's bulging eyes, the menace radiating from his dark expression under the demonic cowl. Some Musings:- "Nobody asked you, Victor." So should Batman and Mr. Freeze go on a road trip together, or what? The post Arkham Manor #5 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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