

"You are, Echo." With that line Edward Nygma, the Riddler, bursts into relevance in *Batman Eternal* #39, signaling a long-delayed and much-anticipated move to begin resolution of the central mystery that has driven the series since last April. *Batman Eternal* has had many strengths over its run, but these virtues come with flaws. The problems don't counterbalance the successes, but they are sometimes very prominent and hard to ignore. Many plot points of importance to the Batman universe, plot points that should have figured prominently in *Batman Eternal*, have been ignored. A series that supposedly represents the backbone of the Bat Family titles, the standard of continuity and narrative order, has produced more confusion than clarity. And the use of four different writers, five counting Scott Snyder, has enriched the story at the cost of wandering plot threads and multiplying narrative elements that now must somehow find resolution in the next thirteen issues. In this segment, penned by Ray Fawkes who recently became the writer for the new ongoing *Gotham by Midnight*, we come to grips with the identity of the ultimate villain in the series, the figure who has been orchestrating the destruction of Batman and his city. Or better to say we come closer to that identity. In this issue, Batman seeks help of a kind from someone well acquainted with intellectual puzzles. When he confronts the Riddler in an abandoned casino, Nygma quotes a koan that ends, "You are, Echo." Now, anyone who is familiar with the Riddler and his ways would immediately begin to compress, manipulate, and generally twist those words and sounds this way and that to find meaning. The most obvious would be YOU ARE, ECHO = U R ECHO = YOUR ECHO. Lincoln March's stock in the betting pool rises accordingly, followed by that of Thomas Wayne from Earth 3. Meanwhile, Gotham continues to disintegrate. We are treated to several scenes of the city coming apart, concluding with the escape and arming of nearly all the criminals Bruce and others have apprehended through the series, and a shocking explosion of violence in the offices of the *Gotham Gazette*. The pace is accelerating and we seem to be moving to a climax. But so much is left to explore that one can't help but fear a quagmire ahead. Felix Ruiz uses busy layouts filled with vertical panels, many of the in the form of parallelograms, to suggest rapid movement. His lines are thin and clear, but the cluttered detail of his drawings and darkness of his shadows often give the pages a claustrophobic feel. Dave McCaig's muted, somewhat muddy colors add to the effect. Things have reached a seedy, desperate state in Gotham, and bid fair to get much worse before they get better. The post *Batman Eternal* #39 appeared first on *Weekly Comic Book Review*.

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