

There is a principle of intelligence work, or maybe one should say of common sense, that states you never keep a coded message in the same briefcase with the code book. That amounts to locking a door and leaving the key hanging on a book in plain sight and easy reach. Now, if you want to create delay and confusion, you can always package the message with the code book for another code entirely, which is like leaving a key to another door beside the lock. The key to the code for Batman Eternal is not in that comic, but rather somewhere else, in fact in a tie-in to another weekly, altogether. At this point, it probably comes as no spoiler (yes, an intentional joke) that the putative master villain in Batman Eternal has been revealed as Arthur Brown, otherwise known as Cluemaster, a failed game show host who, in the agony of his ineffectual struggles with the world, refashioned himself as a bargain-basement Riddler. The key to this mystery, to the riddle of Batman Eternal, actually appears in Grayson: Futures End #1, in which one of Cluemaster's habitual codes features as a pivotal plot device. Tom King, author of the Grayson volume, probably had no intention of referring to Eternal, but Cluemaster's code is revealing, nontubeless. Like almost everything to do with that villain, it is simplistic to the point of being childish, and obvious to the point of being invisible. And that is the nature of the mystery. At the heart of Eternal. From almost the beginning of the book, we were presented with a group of villains possessing the skills and motivation to inflict all of the agonies that have wracked Batman, and Gotham, from the beginning of the story. We were even told way back in Batman 28, our first glimpse of Eternal, that Stephanie Brown, Cluemaster's daughter, was the key to everything. But Arthur and his team of fourth-rate villains seemed so minor, their motivations too petty, to their actions too transparent, for us to take seriously. Even Stephanie, despite her long history with the Batman line, did not seem the type to be at the center of such a deadly enigma. We forgot the advice of Agatha Christie, the queen of literary puzzles, that the obvious so very often proves to be correct. That is, after all, why it's obvious. Is this the final revelation? Perhaps not. Batman Eternal has often been a kind of funhouse mirror to last decade's Hush, right down to using Tommy Eliot as one of the adversaries. And the final misdirection of that book may presage a last twist, here. After all, if this is the ultimate solution, then the answer to Batman's plight is itself obvious enough. He has a city full of allies waiting in the wings, and now that Cluemaster and his gang are in the open, their power level is no match for that of the Bat Family. But, as with so much else about this series, that is probably overthinking. The post Batman Eternal #50 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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