

As I read and re-read Batman Eternal, especially the latest installment, Batman Eternal #51, I find my admiration for the late Agatha Christie, already high, has grown enormously. Not that Dame Agatha would have ever considered writing a comic book about an American billionaire vigilante dressed like a bat, or that she would have had the slightest idea how to go about it if, for some strange reason, she took a notion to do so. She did know a great deal about crafting a mystery, however, and the authors of Eternal could have used some of her acumen. The type of mystery in which Christie specialized was that which relied on plot above all. In her puzzles character is the servant of plotline, despite all of the pronouncements of creative writing teachers that the opposite should be the case. Similarly, setting is only important in so far as it furthers the action. One hesitates to say that this is precisely the case with Batman Eternal. One of the primary purposes of the series has been the introduction of characters into the Batman universe, or rather their re-introduction. As for setting, no less an authority than Batman scribe Scott Snyder has declared that Batman Eternal is about the relationship of Bruce Wayne and Gotham City. On the other hand, the introduction of characters has only been a relatively small part of Eternal. And as for the exploration of Batman's relationship with Gotham, that is a favorite theme of Snyder's which he sees in all sorts of stories. That isn't to say that he is completely wrong. But it does sometime seem that he reads all Batman material through monochromatic lenses. No, the primary quality of Batman Eternal, the aspect of the story that clearly looms over all others, is the mystery at the heart of it. Who is behind Gotham's agony? Who has spun the web of disaster in which Batman has become entrapped? As Christie could have warned the authors, when plot is the focus, pacing is everything. Without important and weighty explorations of setting and character to occupy the mind, it is absolutely vital that the story move at a brisk pace to keep the interest engaged and the emotions aroused. As with an action movie, any extended pause in forward motion is deadly, resulting in boredom and slight disgust. Over the course of the last year, the Batman Eternal team has allowed far too many pauses. That is truly a shame, since the solution they present is truly an interesting one. Not only is the first order solution unexpected and redolent of important themes about expectation and potential, but the second order twist provides a pleasing and fitting complexity. But it has simply taken too long to get here. What should have been a major emotional moment, is rather an exercise of intellectual revelation that leaves the reader cold. Six months ago, this would have been stunning. Now, it is only fascinating. The late, lamented Leonard Nimoy, when portraying Mr. Spock on Star Trek, used the adjective "fascinating" a lot. That was because he could express no emotion. That is appropriate for a Vulcan. It is disastrous for a mystery story. The post Batman Eternal #51 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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