

I don't know when a change of accent color has been a bigger deal, but it is so nice to see Dick Grayson in the black and blue again. Of course, it's not just a change of a primary, with it comes a whole world of baggage and relationships, well loved and well missed. Welcome to Post-Crisis Gotham City. A return to this older version of the city means a chance to see characters who don't exist anymore. Not only is Dick Grayson in blue but he's Nightwing again. Mr. Freeze is a lovelorn victim of a cruel tragedy rather than a delusional murderer. Barbara Gordon is Oracle! It does feel like coming home. But while the chance to play in a sandbox we thought was lost to us is tempting, Gail Simone wisely chooses to keep the circle small and deal with the characters in depth rather than devote time to a larger group. It pays off as Simone writes Oracle as well as ever, perhaps better. Having lived in Barbara's head for so long, it's clear that Simone knew exactly how Oracle would respond to life in Brainiac's dome and the results are thoughtful and literary. She also writes a fun and passionate Nightwing, if one who's almost too romantic and emotionally sturdy to be the man we knew pre-Flashpoint. Regardless, the scenes between Dick and Babs absolutely pop and their affection for one another couldn't be clearer, even if Barbara's having a hard time connecting to it. Conveying those kinds of overlapping and complicated feelings can be difficult for even the best writers but Simone makes it look rather easy. Simone also gets to remind us that she's got plenty of experience with sword and sandals adventures like Red Sonja in the form of our antagonists, Flashpoint Hawkwoman and Hawkman. Though it's sad to see the Justice Riders of Earth-18 come to such ignominious ends, their defeats not only give the characters some attention and grandeur but also establish the Hawks excellently. Arriving in Gotham, they prove both logical and brutal, a challenge for our heroes on multiple fronts. The more you read this issue over the stronger it becomes, as Simone's subtleties take root. Indeed, while there are bright sparks of brilliant writing the tone of the issue is one of omnipresent decay and, accordingly, much of Simone's most effective work goes into the hard work of crafting a narrative that reflects that waning energy without getting boring. Despite her efforts, however, even Simone can't overcome some of the basic flaws of the "Convergence" paradigm. As in the other "Convergence" tie-ins this week, the rules of the contest are very unclear. Is it just survival of the fittest? Are there preselected champions? If so, how does that jibe with the presence of other contests going on in the same city between characters from the same city-worlds? Actually, is this even the same Gotham as in the other tie-ins? Dick is Nightwing rather than Batman and Starfire technically should be preoccupied with the events of Convergence: The Titans so is this a pre-Final Crisis Gotham? The rabbit hole just keeps getting deeper and deeper. It's not good when the reader has that many questions at the end of an issue. Unlike many of its peers, Convergence: Nightwing and Oracle handles the two-part structure of the event fairly well, connecting the Hawk incursion and the trauma of the dome through Barbara's reactions to them. However, that still requires a lot of time and plenty gets pushed to the side or compacted awkwardly as a result. Most obviously is the incredibly rushed transition from Dick's proposal to the arrival of the Hawks, despite the sense that Simone wanted more time for the prior plot to sit and the explicit mention of a passing hour after that. There's also the fact that Dick takes a definite backseat this issue. While we spend a good amount of time with him, the story is Barbara's. Dick's scene with Kory does a fine job of giving him a moment where his emotional needs are addressed, but it feels a little out of place and, especially once the Hawks arrive, Dick's importance to the story wanes quickly. Despite how well Simone writes Dick and Barbara as a couple, as heroes they feel very disconnected and that disconnect leads only one of them to feel necessary at a time. By the time we hit the last page, the admittedly badass last page, Dick feels a little like another

piece on Oracle's chessboard. The art comes courtesy of Jan Duursema, Dan Parsons, and Wes Dzioba. Duursema's renditions of the Hawks is particularly strong. Though it doesn't seem consistent from all angles, the 'beaks' of their masks have a rounded quality that could easily look really weird but actually is quite pleasing. Their body language also does a great job of blending the human and the animalistic, their poses refined but coiled except for a few moments where we see them in the thick of it. Duursema also uses the artificial brows of their helmets to great effect. It doesn't seem surprising that Duursema seems to excel with the Hawks, most of her best work is in moments of strength. Oracle's final moments in the issue and the relief of Dick's meeting with Kory look wonderful. There's a sharpness to Hawkwoman and Oracle that lets you know just how serious these women can get, just how evenly powerful they are. That said, moments of weakness aren't the best. Look at the Justice Riders or Mr. Freeze and you'll see very clear instances of Duursema's lines dipping into the uncanny valley. The preciseness of these characters' facial anatomy is too much and it comes out legible but unnatural, sometimes simian. It's less pronounced in Dick and Barbara, but Dick's cheekbones can get pretty intense and one panel of a furious Oracle just looks awkward. I also have to say that heads and bodies vary noticeably in the body type of the person depicted. In some panels they look very skinny, while in others they look like they've gracefully gained a few pounds. It's great to see the classic Brian Stelfreeze Nightwing costume, though I will say that Duursema's rendition looks like a very modern redesign. There's actually something very Injustice: Gods Among Us about the costume and the art in general. It's also worth mentioning that the art style is definitely evocative of later issues of Nightwing and Birds of Prey. Some Thoughts: I didn't actually read all that much "Flashpoint", but I can't actually find any mention of Flashpoint Hawkman and Hawkwoman. Apparently the Shiera Sanders Hawkgirl was a member of Wonder Woman's Furies, but are these new characters, and, if so, doesn't that seem at odds with the concept of "Convergence"? I also notice that Barbara's wheelchair has handles. I know that that can be a charged issue in the wheelchair-using community and I actually originally learned that from Oracle. It's an easy mistake but an important one. While some readers may not have even noticed it and others, myself included, might have thought it was a typo, apparently Barbara's taste for "linguini with calm sauce" is a call back to an old Birds of Prey story. Who'd have thunk it? My girlfriend and I are both fans of Dick and Barbara as a couple, though I don't really prefer Barbara or Kory over one another. As such I gave her the issue and it resulted in a rather interesting difference of interpretation. While I read the scene as Kory encouraging Dick to pursue his happiness, no matter who it was with, she thought that the two of them were having an affair even as he planned his proposal. I think this was a misread, but upon inspection, there's really nothing to indicate that this is not the case, save for the reader's faith in Nightwing and Starfire. I'm curious if anyone else read the comic this way. This one is nitpicking but I have to ask: what pocket is Dick keeping the ring in? There is no way that Nightwing suit has room for that ringbox. It doesn't interfere with your enjoyment of the story, but it is kind of funny to think of Nightwing with a box-shaped lump on his hip. It's also interesting to see how Mr. Freeze leaves the story. While Barbara's monologue implies that Freeze's heart just isn't in it anymore, given that his suit runs on diamonds as well, it's possible that he's actually being very literal. It kind of gives the scene a different tone when you consider it that way. The post Convergence: Nightwing/Oracle appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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