

After a three-month absence Francis Manapul and Brian Buccellato return to Detective Comics, bringing Anarky and the Mad Hatter along with them. It's kind of unfortunate that the duo's run was interrupted, as this issue, while undoubtedly the start of a new story, still feels very connected to the pair's previous work. It's really interesting how different this arc feels despite the sense of continuity in the plot. It's like we're seeing another side of the same ideas. Manapul and Buccellato's focus on Harvey Bullock and Bruce Wayne, as opposed to Batman, returns to good effect and it still feels like something of a revival of an older brand of comic. This time, however, it reminds a little more of the late 80s and early 90s, fitting for Anarky. Setting Batman against a disaster rather than an adversary is a classic move that helps distinguish the issue. There's also a nice handle on Bullock's character. There are so many little things I really want to like about this issue - a focus on the Bruce/Alfred relationship, a legitimately unwell Mad Hatter, a Batman who doesn't default to macho stoicism in every situation - but there are some significant hurdles that it just can't clear. One of the most noticeable is the pacing. The decision to include both a Mad Hatter segment and an Anarky investigation leaves 'Tec #37 feeling a little cramped. I don't hold that choice against the issue because I'm confident that the Mad Hatter mystery will lead to bigger things down the line, however, it does seem unduly significant in terms of the page count. The investigation at Wayne Industries feels very rushed for something that appears to be the 'A Plot' of this issue. Likewise, there's only the bare minimum presented in the Bruce and Alfred moments, probably due to a lack of space. Part of this is just weak plotting, but I think that the team would have been able to pull it off if they weren't so eager to include so many large panels. In fact, it's odd that Manapul and Buccellato have been the ones trying to answer my prayers of a return to densely plotted, interconnected mysteries, as their artistic style naturally lends itself to decompression and incredible splash pages. It feels like these two drives - perhaps those of the two writers, Manapul and Buccellato, and the two artists, Manapul and Buccellato - are at war, and the title suffers for it. The writing is perfectly fine, but rarely surpasses expectations. At its best the dialogue is sincere and sturdy, lacking the extra punch it needs, while, at its worst, it just feels like it's trying to emulate some other comic. A number of scenes are also weakly justified. They say that all parts of a story should reveal plot or character. The Mad Hatter's ramblings, well done as they are, don't introduce new facets to the character, nor have they yet affected the plot in a meaningful way. Similarly, the writers make a welcome effort to highlight Alfred's difficult role in Batman's life, but the scene ultimately either feels like forced foreshadowing or a rehash of stronger moments we've seen before. Perhaps unsurprisingly, things come together best when Manapul and Buccellato call upon their significant creativity and talent for visuals. It's not just that their beauty covers things up, either. The most interesting layouts bring out an energy that reminds us that these are talented storytellers. By far, my favorite moment is Batman's appearance to Bullock, which, despite being a fairly simple idea, positively sings. The layouts aren't too mindbending this time, but they're strong throughout with moments of blazing creativity. Manapul has a real skill for depicting the presence of time, which takes center stage as the comic counts down to its dramatic final page. Manapul brings something of a movie editor's touch to the sequence, conveying nervous jump cuts through clever compositions and layouts. It also feels like Manapul is trying new things, though he doesn't want to make it too obvious. The angles used in this issue are often more pronounced than I remember those in "Icarus" and there's a greater emphasis on Batman's imposing presence. The Wonderland Gang don't look their best, but, if a stunning first page is anything to go by, it looks like Anarky might suit the artists better. As for Buccellato, he brings a festive red and green palette to the issue. While the red fill lighting in the

Mad Hatter sequence clashes somewhat awkwardly with the objects in the scene, Anarky's appearance on the first few pages proves that this can be quite effective. The two colors separate for a while after that, the warm tones visiting Bullock at the GCPD and the greens making a rather beautiful, deathly scene in the Batcave before the two reunite, much stronger, for the climax. It's also worth mentioning that the snow effects in this issue look great. Whether on the ground or in the air, the snow is a huge part of this issue's look and demonstrates the artistic and technical aptitude of the two creators. Some Thoughts: There are also a couple of odd moments in this issue that confused me. First up, I'm not sure why Batman connects the skulls to the Mad Hatter. Admittedly I didn't read his origin in Batman: The Dark Knight, but why would Bruce assume that they have some relation to Jervis? Silly as it sounds, the only reason I could think of is if he had been carrying them on his person when he fell into the water and they floated up, but Alfred posits that they were left out in the water for years and only recently dislodged. Particularly in a body of moving water, I can't imagine that the bodies even came from near there. Did I miss something? Side note: do skulls float? I mean, obviously they do here, but that doesn't sound right to me. Secondly, and more trivially, Bullock states that the computer is counting down but it's clearly loading up to 100%. Thirdly, why are the copiers rigged up to the same system as the doorlocks? What business needs that level of network integration? And finally, I don't know that I can believe that you could set a printer to explode remotely. That seems like a bit of a stretch, even for comic books. The post Detective Comics #37 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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