

The placid, straightforward pace of the last couple issues made me wonder whether Gotham Academy was really as good as it was cracked up to be, or whether it was just okay beneath a gorgeous surface. The story had interesting pieces, but nothing that you could examine all over to invest in, and the characters were mostly likable on their own, but weren't totally clicking taken together. Up until last issue, I could still see the series going either way in the awesome/blah department. This issue swings things safely in the awesome direction by showing how much fun the cast can be (and have) as a group. In fact, now it seems clear that Cloonan-Fletcher were taking steady, measured steps to this point, focusing on individuals, then specific pairs, until they were ready for the gang dynamic. As I said with Dead Boy Detectives, I've always loved the "group of kids on an adventure and get into trouble" story, and our Academy students are primed and eager for both. Much as you enjoy Olive and Maps chasing after an escaped and surprisingly meek Killer Croc* through the school tunnels, it's only when the two gals are scheming their next excursion with Pom and Colton that you really start to fall in love with the title again. While Olive still has a clear stake in finding out Croc's connection to her mom, the others are clearly more in it for the kicks. That excitement is infectious as they work out their plan's details, which are kind of beautiful in their juvenile simplicity and daring, appealing to the part of you that used to ditch high school. In this case, the quartet ditches their school dance, which is both a relief and disappointment. The Dance is such a tired trope in any story featuring young characters that it's nice the issue only briefly checks in before slinking out to the real highlight of the evening. But you'd also like to explore what a Gotham Academy dance looks like, maybe watch the tertiary characters interact a bit, even see where Kyle and Olive's (and Pom and Heathcliff's) uncertain relationship goes. Times like these, you miss DC's longer page count, so useful for world-building scenes like that. And while we're on the topic of missed opportunities, it's worth talking about how effortlessly the kids break into Hammer's office and take back Colton's bag of tricks—and a few other things. If you're going through the trouble to establish this intimidating, riddle-locked door, why wouldn't you at least offer a riddle to go with it? You know, instead of having Maps prodigiously solve it in a single panel? She says she's good at puzzles, but all you see is narrative laziness. Fortunately, things get a whole lot more interesting from there, as we get the first of the series' major revelations in Tristan's origins. No need to spoil it, but his reasons for being at the Academy suggest it's a lot more than just an elite private school, even without taking its secret tunnels and mysterious history into account. Tristan also supports the idea that regardless of all the other weirdness on campus, the strangeness gravitates most to Olive herself, who shows increasing signs of another, more dangerous persona within her. The title has been remarkably free of Batman since it started, but that's set to change by the look of the issue's cliffhanger. It's not that you wouldn't like to see why the Bat is so invested in this school and Olive, but his coming does rain on our gang's parade, which just barely started. You'd have liked to see a whole lot more underground excavation and befriending of Arkham inmates before he showed up to shut things down. What a total narc. By the friendly look of Croc, you can see that Kersch is committed to the cutesy look of the series, which isn't at all a bad thing since he doesn't go overboard with it. By appearance alone, the characters exude quite a lot of personality to win you over, and that's before you get to such perfection as our quartet crouching around Croc, watching as he tears into a massive turkey leg. Kersch also uses the dance as a chance to show off his flair for design, putting the students in clothes that look spiffy, but actual teens could actually afford and wear and which offer a glimpse into their who they are as well: Maps in her dashing suit, Olive in a knee-length white dress with silvery lace shoulders, Pom in gothic full-length and opera

gloves, Kyle with his Humphrey Bogart cream suit, etc., etc., etc. Obviously, major kudos to Msassyk and LaPointe for soft, warm, striking coloring. Some Musings: Is that Killer Croc? I mean, he flat-out introduces himself as "Croc," but his face is only faintly croc-like. Slightly poor design choice or something bigger? Okay, I actually kind of feel sorry for Kyle here. He's not the brightest bulb—one dance invite from Olive and all his outrage about the danger she's putting Maps in goes away—but it's a bit tragic to see him standing alone with two drinks in his hand, looking for his date. The post Gotham Academy #5 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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