

Like nearly all DC concepts, the Secret Six have gone through several incarnations, changing guise and motivation while all the time sticking to a single basic premise: a team formed by the mysterious Mockingbird for his/her own unknown purposes. The last time Simone worked with the Six, Mockingbird turned out to be Lex Luthor then later Amanda Waller, each of whom were particularly suited to the task of keeping the volatile group in line. Right now, it's still unclear who's brought this particular gang of six together and whether he'll end up being their Mockingbird. The answer will depend on what kind of connection this twisted experiment they're trapped in has to the similarly torturous experience Blake went through by himself eighteen months earlier. Then, Blake's trials were ostensibly part of "Project: Mockingbird," yet the well-coiffed man who ran it claimed something more personal was at work: "You have a debt to pay, Blake. And you've only just started." That vengeful tone echoes in the disembodied voice ordering the new Six around: "Two years ago, one of you killed an innocent young woman." Immediately, your thoughts run to Blake, though to be fair, he's only guilty of accepting an act of pity from a woman working on Mockingbird and who ended up getting killed for her compassion. It would be odd, to say the least, if the man who actually killed her is now back to exact punishment for her death. Anyway, it took quite a while during the earlier volumes of Secret Six before we learned who Mockingbird was, so no sense in getting occupied with that now. Our attention should really be fixed on the current group's dynamic, which is still painfully thin. Like the first issue, this one gives Blake the lion's share (pun intended) of the story, leaving just barely enough scraps for his companions to flesh themselves out on. Of them all, only the centered Wells and rancid Belzer make their mark, and both are outshone by Ferdie's creepy-funny crassness: "You didn't think I was so little last night, babybuns! Know what I'm saying, winkity wink?" Simone struggles to force out some personality from the characters while at the same time generating that well-intentioned quality that defined previous Sixes. While everyone (except for maybe Ferdie) shares the same urgency when it comes to saving Alice from harm, they seem to be on the same page before that, not playing into their captors' "experiment." This near instantaneous understanding among them feels very manufactured, even before his companions silently allow Blake to speak for the group as they throw down the gauntlet to their captors. This all comes down to a problem of pacing. Since they were just caught last issue, it's a bit premature to give them the breakout now. Honestly, it'd have been nice to see the experiment play out a little longer, even at the cost of one of the characters, before they made their escape. As is, it doesn't feel like they've gone through much of an ordeal at all—except for Alice getting fried a bit—and certainly not one that merits the closeness they have by the end of the issue. With this second issue, we can now confirm that Lashley's art will be something to live with, not to necessarily enjoy. Aside from the emaciated quality of his linework, he doesn't make the greatest storytelling choices, emphasizing characters whose backs are turned to us (and sometimes with the fewer lines) to the ones who actually have something to say to our faces. Lashley also doesn't have much mastery over body language, either for dramatic purposes (see Strix striking a model pose just before the panel in which she reveals she was writing something that whole time—apparently) or for action. At one point, Blake and Strix look as if they're floating in midair or else inexplicably larger than the thugs they're fighting against. Lashley's art would be a struggle in itself, but Wright's colors only muddy the waters even further. Some Musings: \* The sad part is I think I know and yet I don't really want to know. - It's hard not to like Wells, especially since he keeps taking all of Blake's panicked violence. - Simone has a long road ahead of her in finding new pet names for Ferdie to inflict on Belzer. What comes after "derriere dumplin'," I ask you? The post Secret Six #2

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