

By Colin Kingston

With SMALLVILLE having put a new, and successful, spin on the Superman legend, it seemed only natural that comicdom's legendary Dark Knight would be next target for some "outside-the-Batcave" thinking. The result is BIRDS OF PREY, a new live-action television series for The WB. Based on the DC comic book of the same name, BIRDS OF PREY is a different look at life in Gotham City.

As Executive Producer Joe Davola explained, "The show takes place seven years after the final fight between Batman, Batgirl, and the Joker. Batgirl is shot by the Joker and basically sentenced to a wheelchair for the rest of her life. The Joker also kills Catwoman...

does not believe her about her terrible dreams."

All this is a dramatic shift from the legends depicted previous incarnations of Gotham's masked crime-fighter (although fans of the various BATMAN animated series will find some comfort in the fact that Mark Hamill once again reprises his role as the voice of the Joker), but the producers acknowledge the latitude their bosses have given them with the series. Said Davola, "After producing SMALLVILLE, we developed a really strong relationship with DC Comics. They gave us the comic book *Birds Of Prey* to take a look at, and we said it was an idea we wanted to develop."

In addition to Meyer, the cast includes Ashley Scott (DARK ANGEL) as Helena Kyle/The Huntress and Rachel Skarsten (TWICE IN A

staff does have a sense of humor about the characters and the show.

"Laeta Kalogridis (TOMB RAIDER), who is the writer of the show, created this from the characters that DC had drawn," Davola said. "She approached us wanting to have a sense of humor with the characters. I don't think these guys can take themselves too seriously, or it is going to be too stoic." Viewers will see a variety of villains. "We're going to have villain arcs through the series," said Davola. "Somebody like Harlequin will do the first year of the show. She will have other villains working for her that might just be for a two or three episode run. It gives us a lot of possibilities for good guest stars. Right now it is set up so that the Joker is in the asylum and he is basically pulling the strings on all of the

It's a Hot Night in Gotham When a New Breed of Crimefighters Take Over

That same night, a young girl sees all of this in her dreams. Her name is Dinah Lance, and she will become The Black Canary. "Now we fast forward seven years to the present. Barbara Gordon, who was Batgirl, has now turned herself into Oracle. She has all of these technological devices and is there to protect New Gotham from evil. Her crime-fighting sidekick is Helena Kyle, Huntress [the illegitimate offspring of Selena Kyle and an unknowing Bruce Wayne]. Dinah Lance joins up with them and they become the BIRDS OF PREY."

Added Dina Meyer (STARSHIP TROOPERS), who plays Barbara Gordon/Oracle, "Batman has left Gotham. We believe that he has been driven crazy by the Joker. We don't know if that's the real reason he has left, but he has taken off." As is typical of the current spate of superhero adaptations, life is not all that "super" for the main characters. "In our first episode, Oracle is dealing with the loss of her legs," said Davola. "Helena is dealing with the death of her mother and the fact that her father abandoned her. Dinah, the youngest member of the trio, is dealing with coming to a strange city because her mother

LIFETIME) as Dinah Lance/The Black Canary. Shemar Moore (THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS) plays Detective Jake Reese, a member of the New Gotham Police Department and a potential love interest for Helena. Mia Sara (FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF) plays Dr. Harleen Quinzel and arch villain Harlequin. Veteran actor Ian Abercrombie (SEINFELD) plays Alfred, the faithful butler. The casting process was a quick one for Meyer. "I was given the script on a Wednesday evening. I auditioned on Thursday morning. I found out on Thursday afternoon that I was going to be testing on Friday. About a half-hour after I tested I had the part. It was a nice way to start the weekend."

Unlike many superheroes in movies and television, these do not wear masks. Explained Davola, "It was a back and forth debate about the mask. The Huntress goes out there at night and she is in and out really quickly. We eventually decided it wasn't something we wanted to do." While this new series has followed the lead of recent television efforts and eschewed the camp factor that was the driving force of the sixties BATMAN, the writing

crime in the city."

Meyer admitted it took some time to get used to the wheelchair. "The producers thought it would be a good idea for me to navigate around and see what it was physically like to sit in a wheelchair. I had driving lessons on the Warner Brothers lot. "There is talk about Oracle being fully adept at the Filipino art of stick fighting. I think that would be really great to stay in the chair and kick ass from there. I'm very flattered to be chosen to play this role," the actress added. "I think Barbara Gordon is truly a super superhero. She went from being this sort-of ass-kicking Batgirl to losing the use of her legs. She uses her disability to become even stronger. I think that is just fantastic."

Davola sees some critical differences between SMALLVILLE and BIRDS OF PREY. "In SMALLVILLE, you really have a superhero in training. Clark is just getting the powers and learning how to deal with them smack in Middle America. What you have in BIRDS OF PREY are women who are already superheroes. They are dealing with it day in and day out and they are struggling to have a normal life at the same time." CFQ

BIRDS OF PREY

