

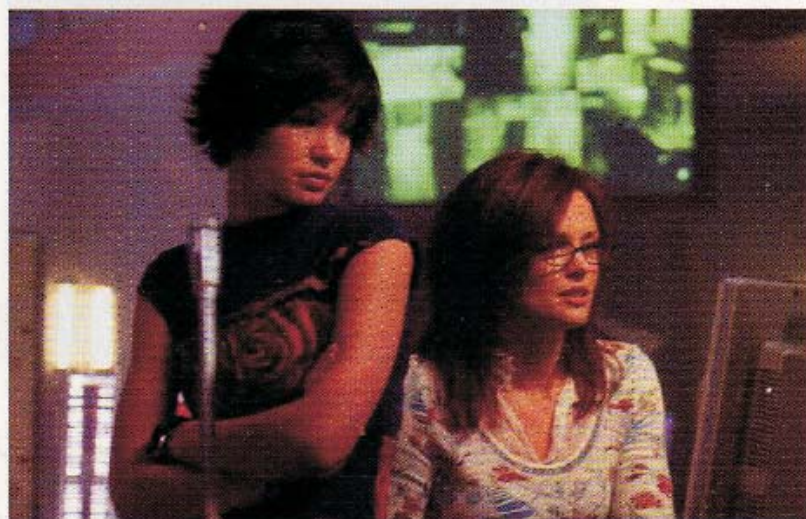


Left
Her brother had a fever dream
that led to the police

XPOS
ISSUE 73

Birds of Prey

Steve Lyons reveals the tangled, contradictory origins of Huntress, Oracle and Black Canary, the *Birds of Prey*.



1 OK, LET'S GET THE BASICS OUT of the way. The *Birds of Prey* TV series premiered on 9 October, with a reworked and extended version of an unbroadcast (but downloadable) pilot episode. The city of **New Gotham** has been abandoned by the legendary Batman, but a trio of female crime-fighters are keeping order in his absence. Dina Meyer plays **Oracle**, Ashley Scott is the **Huntress** and Rachel Skarsten is **Dinah Lance**. And it's all based on a DC comic book.

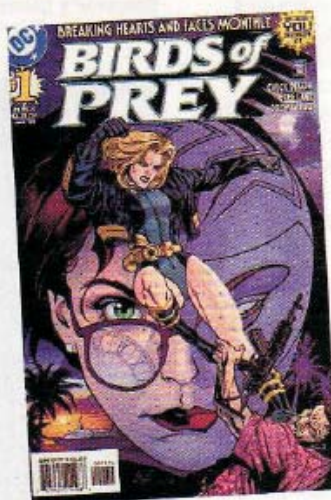
2 Yep, that's **Batgirl** in that wheelchair. At least, she was once. **Barbara Gordon's** career in spandex was ended when she was shot by the Joker in Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's 1988 graphic novel **Batman: The Killing Joke**. She resurfaced a year later as the mysterious Oracle, providing information to the Suicide Squad: a government task force made up of convicted super-criminals. Now, she works mainly with Batman and his many imitators in Gotham City. The

Joker incident is relived in flashback in the *Birds of Prey* pilot, although the idea that the Clown Prince of Crime also killed the Catwoman is the show's very own.

3 We thought movie and TV producers had grown out of making pointless changes to

comic book characters, but apparently not. *Birds of Prey's* Dinah is only very loosely based on DC's **Black Canary**, who first appeared in 1947 as a member of the Justice Society of America. The original Canary, Dinah Drake, had no super-powers, but she made up for that by going into action in a blonde wig and fishnet tights. Her daughter, Dinah Lance, stepped into the fishnets in 1969, aided by the ear-piercing shriek that she christened her 'canary cry' (none of this telepathy rubbish). This Black Canary was a long-time member of the Justice League of America and partner (in all senses of the word) of Green Arrow; today, however, she is a single woman – and she's ditched the tights, 'cos they were sexist. So, now she keeps her legs bare instead. Right up to the top.

4 As for the Huntress being the daughter of **Batman** and **Catwoman**... well, that's true, actually. At least, it was once. Once upon a time, you see, there were an infinite number of DC universes – and, while the '60s versions of Batman, Superman and co continued to fight the good fight on Earth 1, their '40s counterparts were allowed to grow old gracefully on Earth 2. Bruce 'Batman' Wayne married Selina 'Catwoman' Kyle, and their daughter, Helena Wayne, went into the family business. All that stuff on TV about her inheriting her mother's cat powers is tosh, though. Anyway, now that DC have reconciled all their continuity into one consistent universe with one past and one future (supposedly), this happy union of old enemies has been re-connected away. The modern-day Huntress is Helena Bertinelli, daughter of a mob boss, who became



Top
Ashley Scott and Dina Meyer as
Huntress and Oracle

Bottom
The Birds of Prey make
their four-color debut

XPOSÉ ESSENTIALS.....

a vigilante after her father's murder. And, with her philosophy that the ends justify the means, she has made herself the black sheep of the extended 'Batman Family'.

5 Barbara Gordon might be the most famous Batgirl, but she was neither the first nor the last. In 1961, young Betty Kane learned that her aunt had a secret. As Batwoman, Kathy Kane's main power was to embarrass Batman with her amorous advances – so, naturally, Betty fixed herself up with a costume, called herself Bat-Girl with a hyphen and set her sights on Robin. The current Batgirl, Cassandra Cain, was intensively trained throughout childhood by a master assassin before escaping to join the superhero set in 1999. In fact, Babs isn't even the only ex-Batgirl in *Birds of Prey*: before Cassie came along, the Huntress tried out the pointy ears for size too.

6 Black Canary and Oracle became a team in 1996, in a *Birds of Prey* special by Chuck Dixon and Gary Frank. The Huntress has never been an official Bird, although she and Catwoman did work alongside Babs and Dinah in the four-part mini-series *Birds of Prey: Manhunt*. Three more one-shots followed: historically, comic books with female leads have never been that successful, and DC wanted to test the market. In 1999, though, Bird was the word and the ladies got their own ongoing series at last. It continues to this day – and a TV adaptation is hardly likely to harm its long-term prospects.

7 Barbara Gordon was on her way to a costume party at Wayne Manor in 1967, dressed as an



unusually curvaceous Batman. When she ran into the villainous Killer Moth, she decided to become a superheroine instead. However, it took her some time to become a fully liberated female. In the 1970s, she was known as 'The Dominoed Daredoll' – and in one notable early appearance, she spends all her time adjusting her costume and attending to runs in her tights. Ah, not to worry though – it turns out that her difficulties were feigned so as to distract lascivious crooks with her pins, allowing Batman and Robin to defeat them. Quite why the Dynamic Duo weren't similarly affected by their colleague's exposed legs, we can't imagine.

8 This is Barbara Gordon's third outing in live action. Indeed, she wouldn't exist at all were it not for the *Batman* TV series. The producers wanted a female Bat-character, and they didn't care much for the Kanes – so, a new Batgirl was hastily introduced into the comics so that Yvonne Craig could bring her to life. Babs, of course, is the niece of Commissioner Jim Gordon – but, when Alicia Silverstone made for a very...

um, memorable Batgirl in 1997's *Batman and Robin*, she was renamed Barbara Wilson and said to be the niece of Bruce Wayne's butler Alfred Pennyworth instead. Alfred, incidentally, also comes in the *Birds of Prey* pilot. Small world, eh?

9 Hiding behind the unlikely alias of Harleen Quinzell in the TV series is the Joker's former protégé and paramour, **Harley Quinn**. Unusually, Harley began life in *Batman: The Animated Series*, but became popular enough to make her first appearance in official comic book continuity in 1999's *Batman: Harley Quinn* special. Portrayed by Sherilyn Fenn in the original *Birds of Prey* pilot, she was replaced by Mia Sara when Fenn proved unavailable for a full series. Harley looks set to be a regular thorn in the TV *Birds*' sides.

10 Batman's arch-enemy, **The Joker**, first appeared in two stories in 1940's *Batman* #1. He died at the end of the second one, but the readers quite liked him, so he experienced an implausible resurrection. As well as maiming Barbara Gordon, he murdered Jason Todd, Dick Grayson's successor as Robin, in 1988. He has followed Batman into most of his screen adaptations, most famously as realized by Caesar Romero in the '60s TV series and Jack Nicholson in 1989's *Batman*. So far, he has only been seen in blurred flashback in the *Birds of Prey* series, his voice provided by Mark Hamill, who has been playing the character in animated form for a decade. But with Batman on the missing list, we have to wonder if the Joker – not to mention the rest of the caped crusader's famous foes – will ever return. ●



Top
Harley Quinn made her debut in
Batman: The Animated Series

Bottom, left to right
Three incarnations of Batgirl –
Dina Meyer, Yvonne Craig and
Alicia Silverstone