

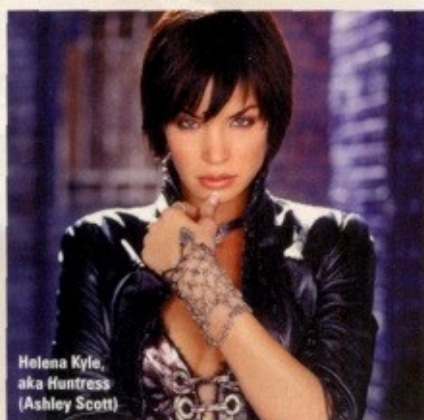
Birds of Prey

The former Batgirl starting a new life, a young woman with telepathic powers – and Batman and Catwoman have been very naughty people...

IT'S A TRICKY business, starting a spin-off that has no physical link to the thing it was sired by. While Batman, and his alter ego Bruce Wayne, is a highly recognizable character, he's been through so many permutations on screen (whether TV or cinema) that it's tricky to know where to begin. This is the problem facing *Birds of Prey*, based on the popular comic that currently makes up part of DC Comics' Batman Family. And the solution? Blend it into the world of the Batman enough that people would accept it as part of the ongoing story, and throw in a few elements that haven't been seen before.

I've been through the differences between the comics version and the TV version before, so I won't bore you with all of it again. Suffice to say that the TV show hinges on accepting the fact that Catwoman, aka Selina Kyle, had some kind of superpowers, that she and Batman were lovers, and that the pair had a daughter, Helena (Ashley Scott). Helena inherited her mother's metagene, the genetic marker that gives her non-Human abilities, and set out to fight crime, waging war against criminals because one took her mother's life.

The other members of the team are Barbara Gordon (Dina Meyer), daughter of Police Commissioner James Gordon and formerly Batgirl. Shot and crippled by The Joker, Barbara used her computer skills and Wayne Foundation money to set herself up as an information broker named Oracle. Finally we have Dinah Lance (Rachel Skarsten), a young girl with the power to read minds at a touch and move things telekinetically. The daughter of



Helena Kyle,
aka Huntress
(Ashley Scott)



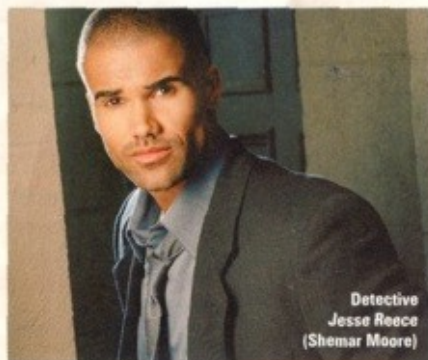
Barbara
Gordon,
aka Oracle
(Dina Meyer)

Caroline Lance, also known as legendary crimefighter Black Canary, it's possible Dinah will one day acquire her mother's ability to emit a sonic wave, the so-called 'canary cry'.

It seems *Birds of Prey* is having a bit of an identity crisis, as it's not sure if it wants to be *Smallville* or *Mutant X* at the moment, and neither is the perfect role model. Without kryptonite mutation to fall back on, the writers have seized on metahumans as a constant source of story ideas, simply bringing in a villain with superpowers every week and setting him or her against the Birds. In the first episode we get a man who can make people visualize their fear so realistically that they die of terror, the second episode (*Slick*) features a man who can change into water, the third (*Prey for the Hunter*) someone who steals superpowers and uses them against their owners, and the fourth (*Three Birds and a Baby*) a child that ages rapidly and has been genetically designed to be a killer.



Dinah Lance, Black
Canary-in-waiting
(Rachel Skarsten)



Detective
Jesse Reece
(Shemar Moore)

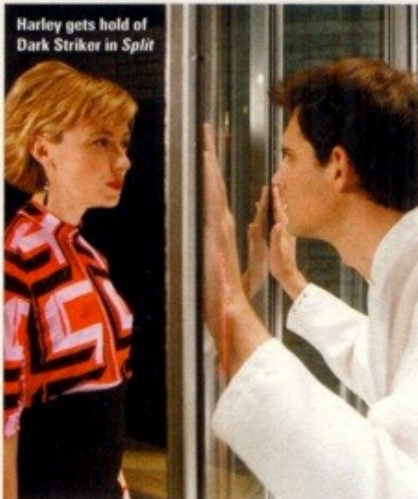
'It seems *Birds of Prey* is having a bit of an identity crisis'

Considering this show is from the makers of *Smallville*, you'd think they might have learned their lesson by now, and it's only fifth episode *Sins of the Mother* where we see something a little more character-based when Black Canary puts in an appearance, in the form of the perfectly cast Lori Loughlin. It's a dramatic improvement, allowing Skarsten to display Dinah's feelings towards her long-absent mother and bring some emotion to the series.

So far, like *Smallville*, the show has got one thing right: the chemistry is excellent between the three female leads, providing a reason to watch outside of kick-ass action. Sadly it's still letting itself down in several key areas: the CGI employed to create fly-bys of New Gotham and some of Huntress's more superhuman manoeuvres is dodgy at best, and the fight sequences are a little over-enthusiastic, resulting in visible stunt doubling once too often.

The idea of having a villain for the season is a good one, but watching Harleen 'Harley Quinn' Quinzel send supervillain after supervillain out into the wild isn't especially fulfilling. What's needed is for the Cupid of Crime to hit the streets in costume and cause some serious mayhem. So far she's not loopy or proactive enough to be a major thorn in the Birds' side.

Obvious love interest Detective Jesse Reece (Shemar Moore) is also a little limited. Unable to keep up with Huntress, he seems to exist purely to clear up after her, but *Sins of the Mother* shows signs of development in both his personal and professional life. The larger oddness with



Harley gets hold of Dark Striker in *Split*



The quietly evil Dr Harleen Quinzel (Mia Sara) in *Primal Scream*

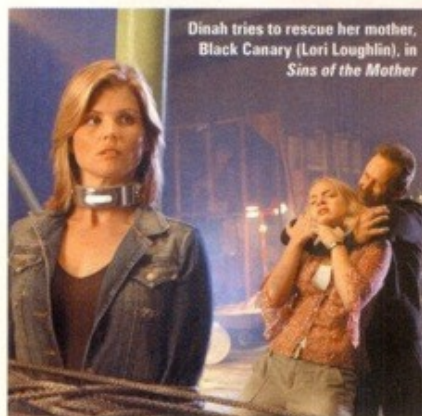
him is his inability to believe the weird things he sees. He works for a precinct which had a gigantic Batsignal on the roof, yet doesn't believe Batman exists. Is he mad or just stupid?

Nor does it make any sense that the metahumans are *persona non grata* in this world, firstly because of similarities to the aforementioned *Mutant X*, and secondly because this is meant to be a world in which Batman exists, and therefore Superman, Wonder Woman and all the other DC Comics heroes should too. Metahumans and costumed crimefighters should be a respected way of life, not a hidden underclass.

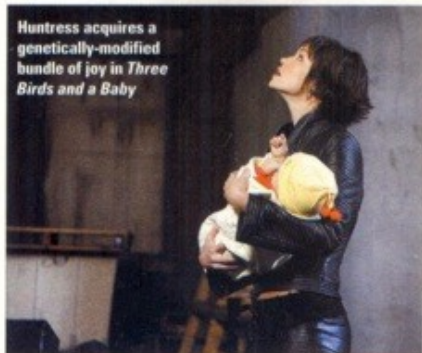
Additional:

Rather annoyingly, just as I finished this article, it was announced that *Birds of Prey* had been the second casualty of the new season. It seems the viewing public weren't especially enamoured of the show either and began tuning out fast. It's a shame, as the show had a lot of potential; now it will forever remain a missed opportunity.

Paul Spragg



Dinah tries to rescue her mother, Black Canary (Lori Loughlin), in *Sins of the Mother*



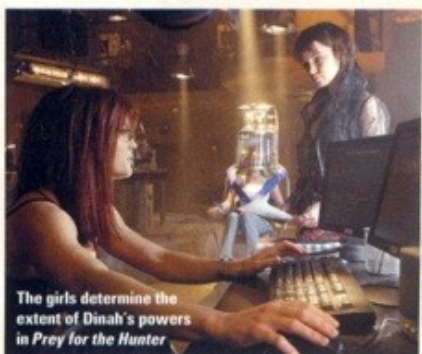
Huntress acquires a genetically-modified bundle of joy in *Three Birds and a Baby*



Starting as she means to go on in the pilot episode



Huntress tries to protect Reece from a metahuman killer in *Slick*



The girls determine the extent of Dinah's powers in *Prey for the Hunter*

Dina Soars

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As the all-knowing Oracle in *Birds of Prey*, Dina Meyer has all the most secret superhero information. Which, of course, she is willing to share!

ACTRESS DINA Meyer is currently soaring as Barbara Gordon in The WB's latest superhero grabber, *Birds of Prey*. As Batgirl, Barbara once crushed crime side-by-side with the legendary Batman until one fateful night, she became a casualty in the war against the Joker. A single gunshot left her a paraplegic, while another confrontation with the killer clown left The Caped Crusader's one true love Catwoman dead.

In the aftermath, Batman vanished and a wheelchair-bound Barbara reinvented herself as Oracle, the ultimate cyber informant. Nowadays, she protects New Gotham along with her two metahuman protégées: The Huntress (Ashley Scott), the feral daughter of Batman and Catwoman, and Dinah (Rachel Skarsten), a psychic runaway.

"I used to moonlight with Batman and I knew Catwoman," explains Meyer about her character's colourful history. "It's odd I would know Catwoman had the child but Bruce Wayne didn't. It's kinda weird. When Helena wound up orphaned, I took her in and became her legal guardian and mentor. I'm training her to be a superhero in the footsteps of her father."

Loosely based on DC Comics' same-titled book, *Birds of Prey* has already had a few minor bumps in the road. For starters, actress Sherilyn Fenn dropped out of the role of the devious Dr Harleen Quinzel even before the pilot had aired. Besides the recasting, the première episode changed a few tones and, in Meyer's opinion, it's been for the better.

"It's not as heavy," she explains. "It's still dark but it's just not so melodramatic. We're not taking ourselves that seriously, and please underline that because when people read these things they go, mockingly, 'What? They are not taking themselves seriously anymore? What the hell?!!' We're still taking the whole concept of Gotham, crimefighting and superheroing seriously,

just not so extreme. The dynamic between Oracle and Helena, though still conflicting at times, is not as... bitchy! We don't want it to be a cat fight but there should be some differences of opinions."

And then there's grumblings of diehard comics fans who just want the show played out according to the Bat bible.

"That was another thing with the pilot," offers Meyer. "Viewers were like, 'Oh, we don't know, we don't like it'. We have to give a lot of information, a lot of backstory, show certain characters and establish relationships. Then they're like, 'They didn't really touch on this.' It's like 'Dude, it's only an hour! We're laying the foundation!'"

"The questions and certain concerns that people have that I've been reading online will be addressed and answered," she adds. "Things about the Huntress's coat, the cat noises, and things that are driving them crazy... I ask everyone to sit tight and be patient."

Not everyone is so nit-picky though. Combine all the comic book references and masses of girl power with Meyer's enthusiastic reaction to slipping into tights and it's no wonder those tuning in are going batty for these birdies. "It does feel cool to be wearing the costume and to look in the mirror and see myself as Batgirl," admits Meyer during a break from the set. "That's f**king bitchin'! It's pretty surreal. There's part of you that feels kind of silly but there's another part that feels invincible and could kick anyone's ass!"

That doesn't mean Meyer would parade around as Batgirl on a full-time basis.

"The costume basically consists of a very thin one millimetre websuit with a leather corset and leather padding," she explains. "It's all very constricting. The cape is extremely heavy. It looks really cool but it doesn't physically feel cool. It's difficult to do a spinning back kick and have a cape,



"There's part of you that feels kind of silly but there's another part that feels invincible and could kick anyone's ass!"



cowl and hair. It's also hot and you're sweating. You can't drink anything because you might have to go pee and it takes 20 minutes to get out and then back in. You're overheating and dehydrating, but it's cool."

The thing is, Batgirl only swings into kick butt mode in flashback sequences, but considering Meyer's track record, viewers want to see her doing more. In the past, she's blasted giant bugs in *Starship Troopers*, swatted those nocturnal creatures in *Bats*, stared down a talking lizard in *Dragonheart*, and seduced bad boy Dylan McKay in *Beverly Hills 90210*. Her resume practically screams 'Action!' so one has to ponder whether the talented 33-year-old ever considered stepping up for the part of the Huntress.

"Well, I would normally gravitate towards a role like that because it's more fun and I'm extremely physical," reflects Meyer. "But I also think I'm at a point in my life and career that I want to try something new."

Good attitude, because before she could mutter 'Pow! Zap! Whack!', Meyer had landed the role of Barbara Gordon.

"It all happened so quickly," explains Meyer. "I had plans Wednesday night and at about 6pm, I got a call from my manager who said 'We're messengering you this script for an audition tomorrow.' I'm like 'Man! I have to break plans now!' But it was Brian Robbins who produced *Smallville* so I basically crammed. I went



Oracle looks a bit wistful

in at 10am Thursday and found out I would be testing Friday evening. By 7pm, I knew I had the job."

"I loved the character of Oracle," she continues. "I think she's impressive, having been through everything she has. She's even turned into a stronger character than she could have ever been prior to being shot. In the comics, Oracle is an information broker to other DC superheroes. I really dug that. This is definitely the greatest challenge I've ever had."

Meyer is already a deadringer for her alter ego, so nailing the look isn't the problem. And she's a computer savvy, self-professed Internet surfer to boot! (Yep, she keeps tabs on all the *Birds of Prey* message boards and sites). Instead, what gets the New York native in a fender bender is portraying Oracle's disability.

"God, where do I start?" exclaims Meyer when asked how hard it is working in a wheelchair. "Not only as an actress but being somewhat hyperactive makes it difficult. Having to remain in my seat all the time is challenge #1; driving the chair around is challenge #2: hitting marks, not running over toes, not knocking into doors, not falling off of ramps! Where do I begin? I'm still in the process of mastering it. You're in it all day and there's no one on set that can drive that thing better than me. I think I amaze more and more people each time we have these crazy choreographed scenes. But it's take two, take three, take four... There's going to be one great gag reel."

One department where she's certainly no laughing matter is in hand-to-hand combat. "I'm pretty adept in martial arts and fighting since it's been in almost every movie I've done," she explains. "I have a pretty big dance background too. I've been dancing since I was about five so I'm very flexible. Fight scenes are choreographed in a way similar to dance routines. It just comes naturally."



After seven hours, Oracle eventually asked for help with her game of Minesweeper

"I'm at a point in my life and career that I want to try something new"

"I did some stick fighting yesterday," she discloses. "I was training Dinah. I'm actually quite good. I think I might take it up on the side. There's going to be some scenes where I get to use the sticks."

Actually, with some of the plots already mapped out, Meyer may be using a lot more stick work than she's letting on. Lifted straight from the funny pages, superheroine Black Canary will be hitting the town, not to mention long-time foe Lady Shiva, one of the deadliest women in the world. And if rumours are true, Shiva is gunning for Batgirl. Also slated to make an appearance is the KGBeast, Metropolis vigilante Dark Striker, and doesn't a rematch with The Joker seem inevitable? But the guest appearance viewers are really climbing the walls for (no Spider-Man pun intended) is the big Batman himself. It's no surprise that Meyer isn't letting the bat out the bag.

"I don't know if that's a Warner Brothers rights thing, but I only know what I'm shooting today and a preliminary script for the next episode," comments Meyer. "No one gives us the inside info. I'm not saying it's not going to happen and I'm not going to say it is."

Well then, how about Dick Grayson, aka Robin, aka Nightwing? The two have been romantically linked in the comic, but on the small screen it looks like Wade (Shawn Christian) may be courting her.

"We're just touching upon it right now," she says. "It's starting to develop but she's so consumed with her work. I know comic book fans want to see Nightwing show up, but right now, she has another love interest."

The established Bat family aside, the possibilities seem endless. There's the evolving relationship between Barbara, Helena and Dinah, plus the Dark Knight's rich rogues' gallery to draw upon. Or since the Huntress is the child of a different dynamic duo, how about the daughter of Wonder Woman popping by? But Meyer doesn't need any of these suggestions since her imagination is already churning out ideas.

"I read something about Power Girl in the comics," she says. "I think it would be amazing to have guest superheroes where I could be giving out the information like in the comics. It's like 'Huntress, we need to call in this guy to help you'. However, there's only an hour in an episode."

Unless there's a late reprieve, however, it seems such speculation is unwarranted: the plug was pulled on *Birds of Prey* just after this interview took place. In the meantime, however, genre junkies can find Meyer trading in her New Gotham stomping grounds for some exciting Outer Space conflict in the tenth film for a very long-running franchise.

"I'm doing more this December with the new *Star Trek: Nemesis* movie," reveals Meyer. "The Romulans are the feature's bad guys and I play Romulan Commander Donatra. It was pretty wicked. I don't have scenes with *The Next Generation* because my scene with Patrick Stewart is over that viewscreen."

"It would seem I have quite a Sci-Fi following," she concludes.

Bryan Cairns



Oracle liked her jumpers to match her hair



Oracle and boyfriend Wade



Oracle

