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STAR TREK NEMESIS

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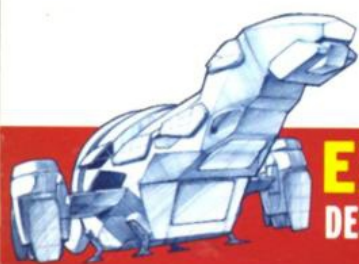


SIGN
MEL GIBSON
LOOKS
THE SI

FIRST LOOK!

BIRDS OF PREY BATGIRL

Dina Meyer leads the new
female superhero team!



EXCLUSIVE! INSIDE FIREFLY
DESIGNS AND IMAGES FROM JOSS WHEDON'S NEW SF SHOW



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reviews

Edited by David Bassom

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"Intriguing, atmospheric and evocative, *Birds of Prey* deserves to do as well as its stablemate series, *Smallville*..."



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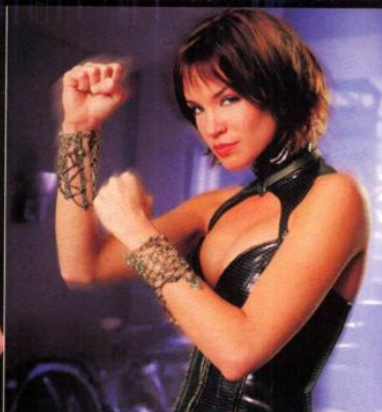
Birds of Prey

Pilot
The WB
US premiere: 9 October 2002

THE PLOT: When Selina Kyle (a.k.a. Catwoman) is murdered, her daughter Helena is raised by ex-Batgirl Barbara Gordon (Dina Meyer), who remains paralysed after being shot by the Joker. Years later, Helena (Ashley Scott) is a vigilante superhero known as Huntress, while Gordon is the technical wizard who supplies backup from a clockwork tower. Into the mix wanders Dinah, a young girl with genuine super powers...

THE LOW-DOWN: Anyone familiar with the *Batman* comic books will recognise where this storyline is coming from; there are echoes of Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's *The Killing Joke* and Grant Morrison and Dave McKean's *Arkham Asylum*, as well as other key texts including Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* and, of course, the original *Birds of Prey* comic book. Yet this pilot intrigues not so much thanks to the story but to the atmosphere. The visuals are incredibly atmospheric (especially during the flashbacks involving *Batman*, *Batgirl* and the *Joker*), and the programme manages to wonderfully reproduce the sound effects evoked by a printed comic without resorting to campy cartoon 'zaps' and 'pows' onscreen.

There is a lot of promise here and definitely a gap



in the market for a trio of superheroines. The pilot certainly sets the scene with each main character bringing their own talents to the mix whilst solving a typically Gotham crime mystery. *Birds of Prey* deserves to do as well as its stablemate *Smallville*. **Brigid Cherry**

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Fresh from revitalising the *Superman* franchise, the producers of *Smallville* turn their attention to the *Batman* universe with similarly successful results. *Birds of Prey* looks set to be another soar-away hit.

For similar comic-strip action, read the original *Batman* and *Birds of Prey* comics and watch the animated *Batman* series. For more girl power, watch *Buffy*, *Xena* and *Charlie's Angels*. Web site: <http://www.thewb.com/Shows/6> <http://www.gothamclocktower.com/>



Prey Mate

In the course of her acting career, Dina Meyer has confronted Saurians in *Dragonheart*, giant bugs in *Starship Troopers*, oversized flying bloodsuckers in *Bats*, a memory-zapped Keanu Reeves in *Johnny Mnemonic* and, perhaps scariest of all, the rich neurotics in *Beverly Hills 90210*. Now, Meyer is taking on a whole new set of challenges as Barbara Gordon — a.k.a. Batgirl and Oracle — in the new Warner Bros. TV series *Birds of Prey*.

The show is set seven years after a fateful night in New Gotham City when the Joker shoots Batgirl, leaving her a paraplegic. In the wake of events, Batman mysteriously disappears, but Batgirl reinvents herself, maintaining her Barbara Gordon computer science teacher persona by day, but becoming cyber-genius Oracle by night. As Oracle, she mentors young psychic Dinah/Black Canary (Rachel Skarsten) and Helena Kyle/Huntress (Ashley Scott), the daughter of Batman and Catwoman.

Speaking exclusively to *dreamwatch* during a break from filming *Birds of Prey*'s first season, Meyer says that she sees a few comparisons between her role as Oracle and her own position in the *Birds of Prey* company.

"Oracle's life is running fairly parallel to mine actually," she notes. "I've always played physically demanding roles, and now [as Oracle] I'm stuck in a wheelchair; Batgirl was always very physical and now she's stuck in a wheelchair. Oracle is the leader of the group and [on set] I'm the actress who has the most experience, so I'm kind of the big sister to both the girls in a sense."

Flying Start

Meyer began dancing at the age of five, but her parents steered her into studying for a business administration degree at college. After graduation, however, she decided to change direction. "I said, 'Okay, now it's my turn to do what I really want to do,'" Meyer recalls. "I gave

The latest spin-off from the legendary Batman franchise, **BIRDS OF PREY** is already shaping up to be a soar-away smash hit. Star **DINA MEYER** offers *dreamwatch* an exclusive preview of the new superhero adventure series, and discusses her role as Batgirl's latest incarnation, Oracle.

Words: Abbie Bernstein



myself six months initially to see if I could get some work, something to give me a sign that I was taking the right direction. In six months, I had three national commercials."

Cast in a 12-episode arc in *Beverly Hills 90210*, Meyer moved to California. When her stint on the series ended, she was out of work for approximately two weeks before landing the female lead in *Johnny Mnemonic*. Since then, although she has worked in a variety of genres, Meyer acknowledges that she's probably become best known for her science fiction and fantasy roles.

**NEW
SEASON
TV!**

"I think it's all about just understanding the character and being in the moment at all times. The [acting] technique I studied always told us to put the attention on the other actor. If we focus on the other actor, as opposed to ourselves, we in return will give a truer reaction to whatever is going on."

However, when the "other actor" is actually a CGI effect to be added later, maintaining this focus can be difficult. "It's hard to have a conversation or just have dialogue with something that's not there," Meyer laughs. "When I did *Dragonheart*, I was told that Draco [the massive dragon voiced by Sean Connery] was right in front of me and his eyes were eight feet apart and he was moving towards me in the scene. So yeah, I've had to learn quite a bit of CGI technical acting, which goes against everything that I learned [in acting class]."



Gotham's Guardians

Meyer is delighted to be teamed with three-dimensional human co-stars in *Birds of Prey*: "Ashley and Rachel are both no-nonsense, fun, laid-back girls that are not competitive, whiny or wimpy. I'm not saying all girls are that way, but if you're on a show and you've got a bunch of actresses together, a person could think the worst – 'Oh, God, whose hair is not right, whose make-up is not right?' – but they're not like that. They're really cool girls who want to get their hands dirty."

Being Batgirl was never a childhood fantasy, Meyer admits. "I don't think I ever really wanted to be a superhero – I always wanted to sing and dance on Broadway," she laughs. Nevertheless, when she read for the role of Oracle after casting had been going on for some months, she immediately struck the producers as superhero material. "My audition was Thursday morning. I'm a big fan of [producers] Brian Robbins and Michael Tollin, and I just went in there and I guess it went very well, because half an hour after the test, I had a job. It all happened really, really fast – highly unusual for a pilot. I think they tested a couple of girls, but they just didn't have whatever they were looking for."

"Oracle has to have a real inner strength, she's very independent – you need to believe that she was a superhero at one point, and able to become something even stronger now that she's confined to a wheelchair. I guess I exuded some kind of strength that they felt this character needed."



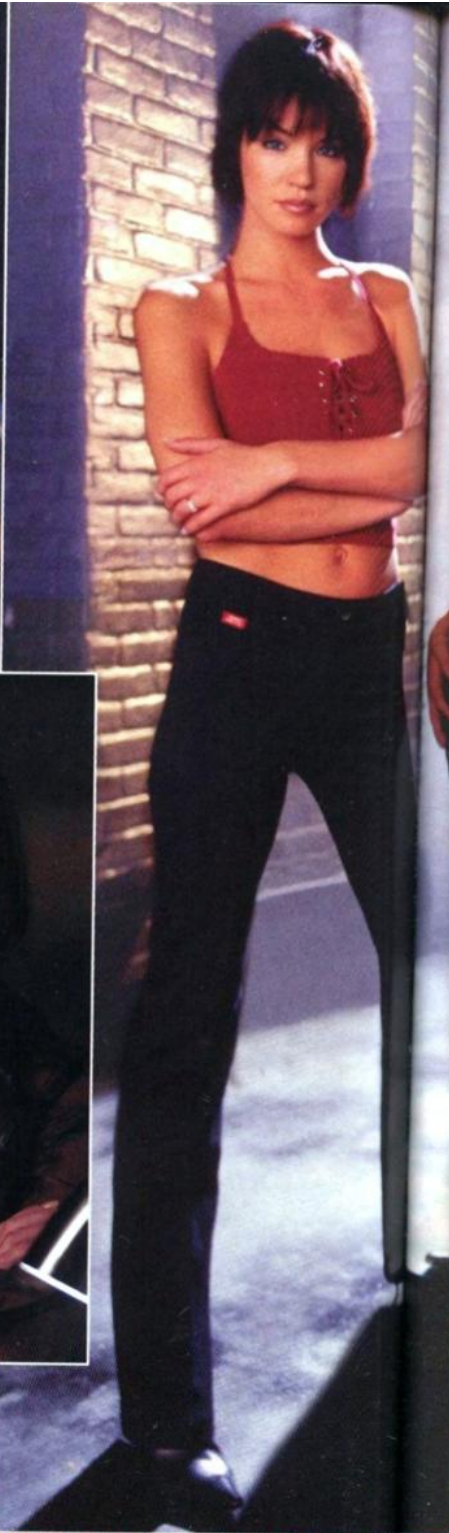
BIRDS OF PREY

Oracle has other qualities too, Meyer adds: "She's the nurturer, keeping Huntress on track, then taking on Dinah and training her and making sure she goes to school — there's a maternal aspect. And then [as Oracle] I have my own issues."

Playing someone with a triple identity is hard enough, but in Meyer's mind, dealing with the character's partial paralysis is the real trick. "My main concern as an actress playing someone who's in a wheelchair is 'sitting on my instincts.' You're not able to throw your hands up and walk away from somebody if you're in the middle of an argument, for instance. You have to wheel yourself away and slowly leave," she laughs, "and if it doesn't happen quick enough, [it takes] too much time out of the scene to navigate yourself to wherever you want to go. So there's a certain way of blocking out a scene to make it interesting and still move at a certain pace."

The chair wasn't cooperative at first. "There was a slight delay in either moving forward or backward. So if you wanted to exit on a certain line for dramatic effect, you have to actually push forward or back on the joystick prior to when you want to actually move. Hence,

Black Canary (Rachel Skarsten, above) and Huntress (Ashley Scott, right) have much to learn from Batgirl-turned-Oracle Barbara Gordon (Dina Meyer).



From Romulus With Love

Prior to shooting the *Birds of Prey* pilot, Meyer filmed a guest spot on an episode of *Six Feet Under*, and then played the Romulan Commander Donatra in *Star Trek Nemesis*. The latter marks her first time portraying a non-human, and required a daily four-hour make-up process.

"I had a prosthetic forehead that they stuck to my head. The morning make-up routine consisted of me getting my head wrapped — they make your hair pin-curl and they put your head in a wig cap, so all your hair is pulled off your face. Then you go to the make-up trailer, where they attach the prosthetic forehead and prosthetic ear tips and then they pile on the make-up. When it's sunny outside and you're sitting with 14 layers of slick greasepaint make-up on, it's not comfortable."

As for wearing the Romulan costume, she reports that it wasn't quite as bad. "I did have to stand much straighter in it, because of the way they zip you into it — you kind of feel like you're up on a cross."

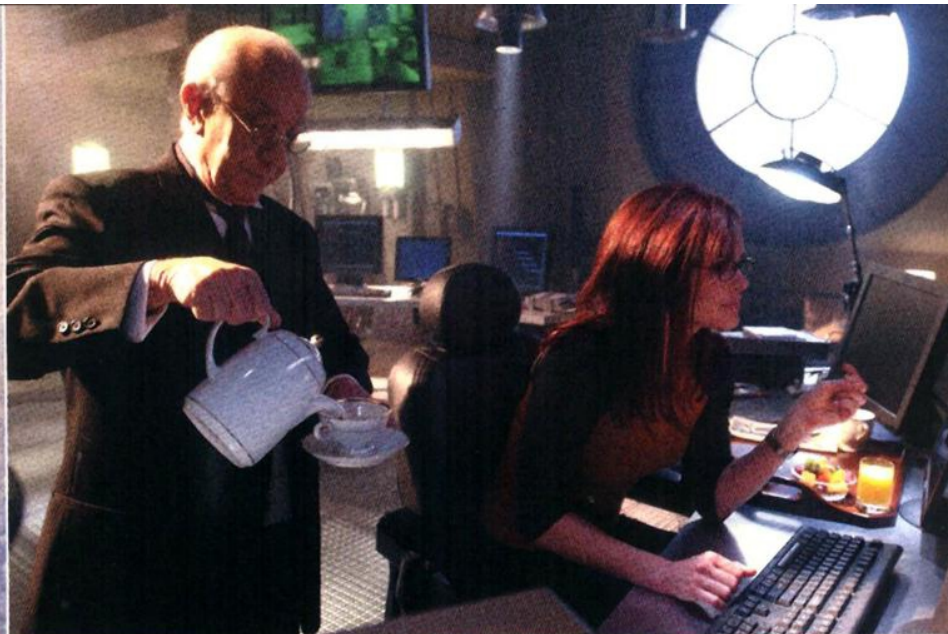
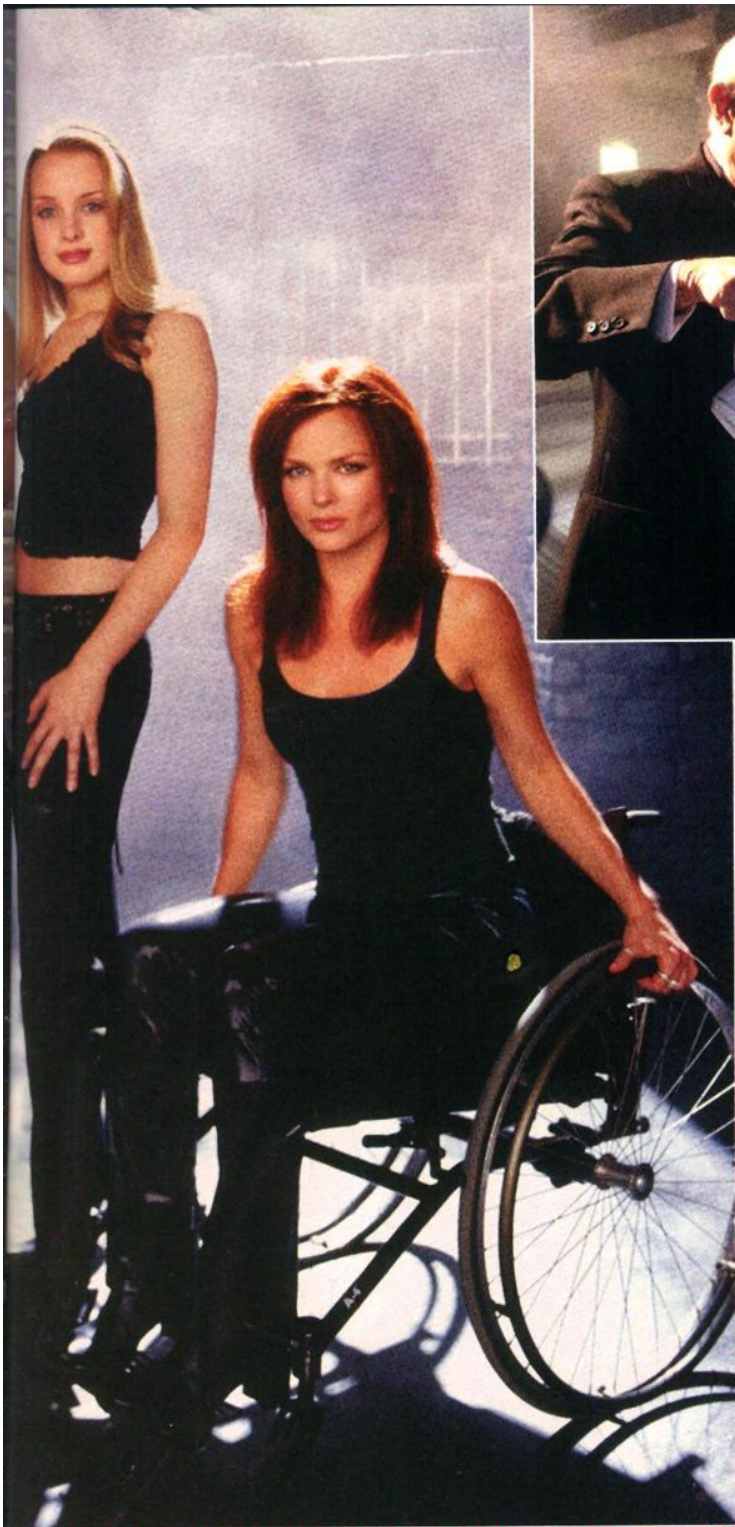
Overall, though, Meyer feels fortunate to be a part of the new *Star Trek* film. "I've never been a Trekkie, but *Star Trek* has been around longer than I have, so it was really exciting to just have something to do with the franchise."

therefore, you are now thinking about operating a chair, as opposed to being in the scene. That to me is the biggest problem with the wheelchair. I have to decide, 'Okay, I want to leave on this line, so I'd better make the move on the joystick prior to finishing my line.'

"It's very technical," she laughs. "Right now, [the chair is] in the shop — they are redesigning it for me."

This doesn't mean that Meyer won't see any action. "We are going to have Batgirl flashbacks," she reveals. "I will have some butt-kicking. Barbara Gordon, after being paralyzed, studied escrima, which is the Filipino art of stick fighting, so I've been training with escrima sticks. They're going to give me retractable military batons to use. They're like two-and-a-half-foot-long broom handles. My forearms are getting like Popeye's, and I'm getting strange blisters on the inside of my thumbs. Other than that, it's fun!"

Playing a computer genius means there are plenty of cool tech toys as well. "Barbara Gordon/Oracle is a master of weaponry, so we're going to have really neat stuff that they're actually going to build on the show," Meyer plans to learn how to operate all of her character's gadgets. "I really want to master whatever it is I'm working with. In *Starship Troopers*, they had us in boot camp, they had us lying in the dirt with machine guns and we were doing target practice and taking guns apart and cleaning equipment. I'm a firm believer in that. I tend to give a much fuller performance if I know what I'm doing."



"I can honestly say that the Birds of Prey pilot was one of the best experiences I've had on a set. The people involved and the overall energy was just really fun and very professional."

Prey Time

The Birds of Prey pilot was shot in April, and filming on the episodes commenced in July. Meyer used the break to educate herself about the story's comic book origins. "Once the show got picked up, I did some research online. There's this wonderful site called canarynoir.com, which gave me a bunch of information about Batgirl and Oracle."

The series' writing staff is knowledgeable about the property's background too. "They've hired people that are very educated in the DC universe," Meyer points out.

What's her take on the online feeling about the upcoming series? "There are some

people that are really excited about it, and there are some people that are really not. They don't censor themselves," Meyer notes with a laugh. "I don't know if they know that we're watching, I don't know if they care that we're logging on and checking what they have to say, but every time I get on, it's always like, 'What are they writing today? What are the kids saying today?' Every time you see your name, it's, 'Do they like me? Do they not?' But I'm happy to say, for the most part, I've got good responses. The fans are pretty happy with my being cast as Oracle."

The fans' happiness at Meyer's casting is shared by the actress herself. "I can honestly say that the pilot was one of the best experiences I've had on a set. The people involved and the overall energy was just really fun and very professional."

Dina Meyer finds there's no difference in the work ethic on a fantasy series than on a straight drama. "The thing is, we're telling a story," she declares. "And we want to tell that story as best we can, whatever the subject is — superheroes are people too!" ●

Birds of Prey airs in the US on Wednesdays at 9pm from 9 October, courtesy of the WB