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OCTOBER 2002

— sexy trio of crime fighters
takes flight in New Gotham.

Birds of Prey

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The Best Wing

Eclectic Birds of Prey flies onto The WB

"You try fighting the forces of evil when your blood sugar is low."

It has to be one of the juiciest lines to slay prime-time since *Buffy* peaked and *Charmed* performed magic on us.

Don't touch that dial ... here comes *Birds of Prey*, the lovechild of The WB and executive producers Laeta Kalogridis (*Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, *The X-Men*) and Brian Robbins (*Smallville*). The slick, new, sexy post-modern comic book TV series, which debuts this month, has "dark" written around the edges and enough emotional fireworks to make viewers stick to it like salt on a margarita.

Sink your teeth into these plot nuggets: Batman is in a self-imposed exile and Catwoman has just waved ta-ta to life number nine. Years after Batgirl, a.k.a. Barbara Gordon (Dina Meyer), takes a bullet and is paralyzed by the Joker, she reinvents her crime-fighting self and decides to battle the bad

With a little help from high-tech, Dina Meyer's character Barbara Gordon/Oracle battles the bad guys from her wheelchair.

guys—right from her wheel chair. Using her mental prowess—she's transformed into a high-tech computer maven—she embraces a new moniker, Oracle, and mentors the ornery secret daughter of Batman and Catwoman, Helena/Huntress (Ashley Scott). Together, from their clock-tower lair in what's now dubbed New Gotham, the duo takes on the criminal element,

Oracle with her mind, Huntress with her physical force. But what's this? Just who is the bucolic and mysterious Dinah (Rachel Skarsten) who wanders into the ladies' lives? Wait and see.

Expect swank weapons and electronic gadgets, lighting with a definite mood, sweet camera angles, brooding flashbacks, supernatural phenomena, unexpected betrayal from a featured player and an Alfred (Ian Abercrombie) you can warm up to.

Provocative as it is, *Birds of Prey* is based on Frank Miller's obscure DC comic, and by the looks of it, it has enough guts to dive deep into emotional waters, balancing action and moxie with stories that, overall, are basically relationship driven. This *Batman* with an estrogen twist has already sent loyal comic book fans buzzing into online chat rooms. In one corner, there are the extremists: "Cease this show's production and focus on Bruce Wayne [the early years]!" In the other, there are those eagerly awaiting the Oct. 9 debut: "Hey—BOP is definitely not a rip-off of other shows [like *Charmed*, *Smallville* or *Buffy*]!" Regardless of which side of the fence you sit on, it's clear the show's producers are inclined to hold true to Miller's original vision.

"From a visual standpoint, we [studied Miller's] comic book and really want this show to look like it," says producer Brian Robbins, who helped launch *Smallville* into WB orbit. "I spent several months with a storyboard artist drawing the show, and it really looks like those drawings."

Actually, long before The WB found a hit in *Smallville* (read: Superman: the early years), *Birds of Prey* was flapping around in the wings.

"The truth is, before we wanted to do *Smallville*, we wanted to do a show set in the Gotham world; *Smallville* just happened first," Robbins says. "But the success of *Smallville* certainly paved the way for *Birds of Prey* [even though] this is a different show, it's a different world."

How different?

Enter three scintillating leading ladies who are ready to "kick some butt"—Dina Meyer, Ashley Scott and Rachel Skarsten. Meyer, best known for her role as Jason Priestly's temptress school teacher on *Beverly Hills 90210*, also stars in this winter's *Star Trek: Nemesis*.

***Birds of Prey* premieres Oct. 9 at 9 p.m. ET on The WB**

Check Satellite DIRECT's local channel listings for station numbers in your area.

Scott has made a dent in supporting roles on TV's *Dark Angel* and in last year's *A.I.* Skarsten is the "new-comer," although she starred in *Virginia's Run* opposite Gabriel Byrne.

Initially Skarsten thought a show boasting three female leads could be "a recipe for trouble," but she's quick to ad the three actresses get along famously.

"I was worried because things like this could turn out to be really cheesy," Skarsten says of the show's comic book premise. "But then I read the script and I thought, 'okay, they've done a really good job here.' In *Smallville*, the atmosphere is lighter, and *Birds of Prey* is much more gray and black and that gives us something more to play with. If anything, when you're young and you're watching shows, you want to relate to the characters and see them go through [similar] things."

Translation: In between busting chops, you can expect emotions to fly high. Issues of trust, intimacy, grief and love are all there, blending the intensity of a show like *Party of Five* with the superhero angst of *The Dark Knight* comic book.

"Hopefully it'll give young women—and anybody, really—a sense of empowerment," Skarsten points out.

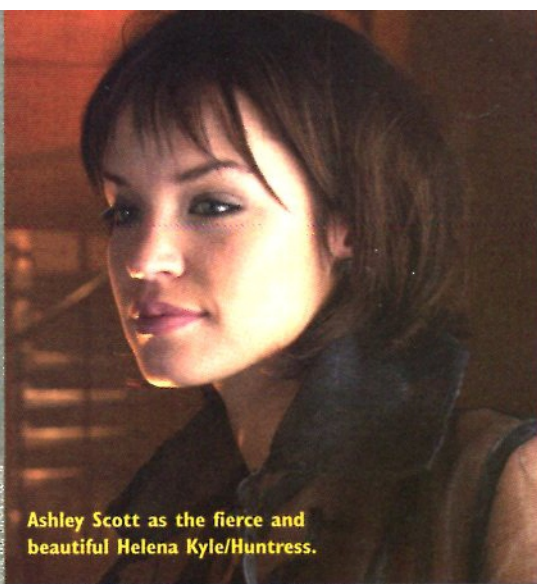
While Skarsten plays the "new crimefighter on the block," a character whose mysterious psychic visions promise to be explored in a number of story arcs—producers have zipped lips about the real significance of her Dinah—it's Ashley Scott, as the quick-witted, sharp-tongued Huntress who may send eyebrows a raising with her character's superhuman strength and ability to leap tall buildings of New Gotham. Beyond those kicks and jabs, her outfits are anything but drab. *Birds of Prey* is also an adventure series where none of its superheroes wears masks and as the show rolls along, viewers can expect to see more of a street look in the crime-fighting costumes. Good or bad, it certainly has comic book fans buzzing.

"I tell you what ... those fans are on top of it. They know their stuff," Scott says, admitting that she's just recently begun to do more research on her Huntress character in the *Birds of Prey* comic books. And listen to the lines the writers toss her: When asked why she doesn't carry a weapon by beefy co-star Shemar Moore's (*The Young and the Restless*) tough detective, her response is simply: "I am the weapon."

As for Meyer and her alter ego, Oracle, playing a character in a wheelchair has its challenges. Sure, it's motorized, but special "driving school" came into play and, surprisingly, so did mastering Chinese fighting sticks while remaining seated in the wheelchair. How, exactly, does she handle one of the most unique sit-down jobs in television?

"You mean, not having legs to stand on?" Meyer jokes. "Well, that's a limitation, but it makes you hit on your instincts as an actor. I'm actually quite good [in the chair]. I'm really good in reverse."

But seriously ... "I think being disabled has actually made Oracle a stronger person. If you were a superhero at one time in your life and your legs were taken away from you for whatever reason, I think most



Ashley Scott as the fierce and beautiful Helena Kyle/Huntress.

would've thrown in the towel. In losing her legs, Oracle has actually grown stronger and more powerful. She's found her calling [after] following Batman for so long, and if she had never been paralyzed, she wouldn't have seen where she could go."

Still, even Meyer admits that the biggest "oracles" are happening online.

"Like [my character], I'm quite the cyber geek," she says. "I've done a bunch of research and found that there's quite a bit of expectation—high expectation. Oracle, like the others,

is a favorite character. And I just hope that I can do her justice and not let the

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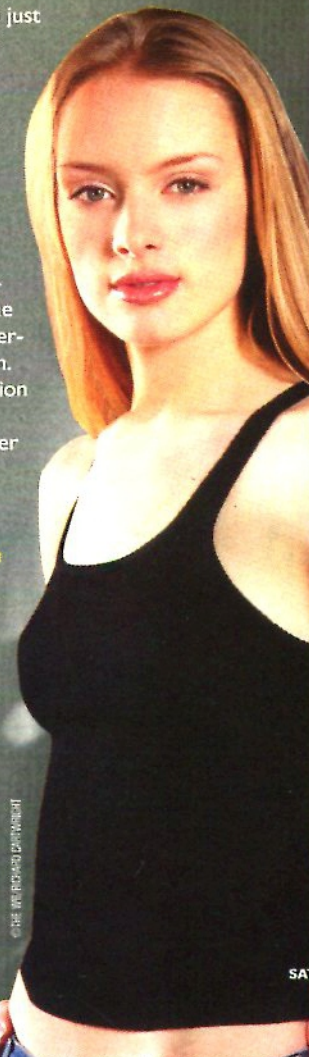
—producer Brian Robbins

fans down."

But creator/producer Laeta Kalogridis isn't too worried. She's simply focused on moving forward and, "Exploring the next generation of superheroes in New Gotham. That's kind of our mission statement."

By Greg Archer

Rachel Skarsten stars as the mysterious Dinah Lance.



For the (Cyber) Birds



Craving the 411 on *BOP*? Take flight at these online locales:

www.canarynoir.com

The word "Birdwatching" mysteriously appears and beckons you into this site. Funky animation, a list of the comic's (and the show's) characters, information on collectables (for the comic book baron within), trivia and plenty of opinions for message board enthusiasts.

www.gothamclocktower.com

Interesting notes on the show's music—Michelle Branch's "All I Want" is featured in the premiere—news on comic book trade publications and the scoop on the entire cast.

www.dccomics.com

The mecca of comics boasts more features than can be printed—everything from "Sneak Peeks" to a link to the "Gotham Girls" site.

www.tvtome.com

A gaggle of viewer comments and a rather nice episode listing stand out. Clever graphics boast razor-sharp pictures that give a sense of what the show will look like.

www.southern-oracle.net

The dreamy appearance here dazzles. Promo images, sound bytes, music listings and sensory files, which highlight the show's fancy crime-fighting gadgets. Links to other sites.

www.theweb.com

The *Birds of Prey* icon takes you into the show's grand web site. Expect a flock of tidbits on the series.