

# POSE **SPECIAL** #21

EXPLORING FANTASTIC MOVIES AND TV

Joss Whedon reveals  
what's in store for  
**Buffy, Angel and Firefly!**

**Birds of Prey**  
Guardians of Gotham!

Return to  
**Dinotopia**

Plus previews of  
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and many more!

The complete guide to the

# New Season

All the best new shows, from **Birds of Prey** to **The Twilight Zone** and **Haunted**



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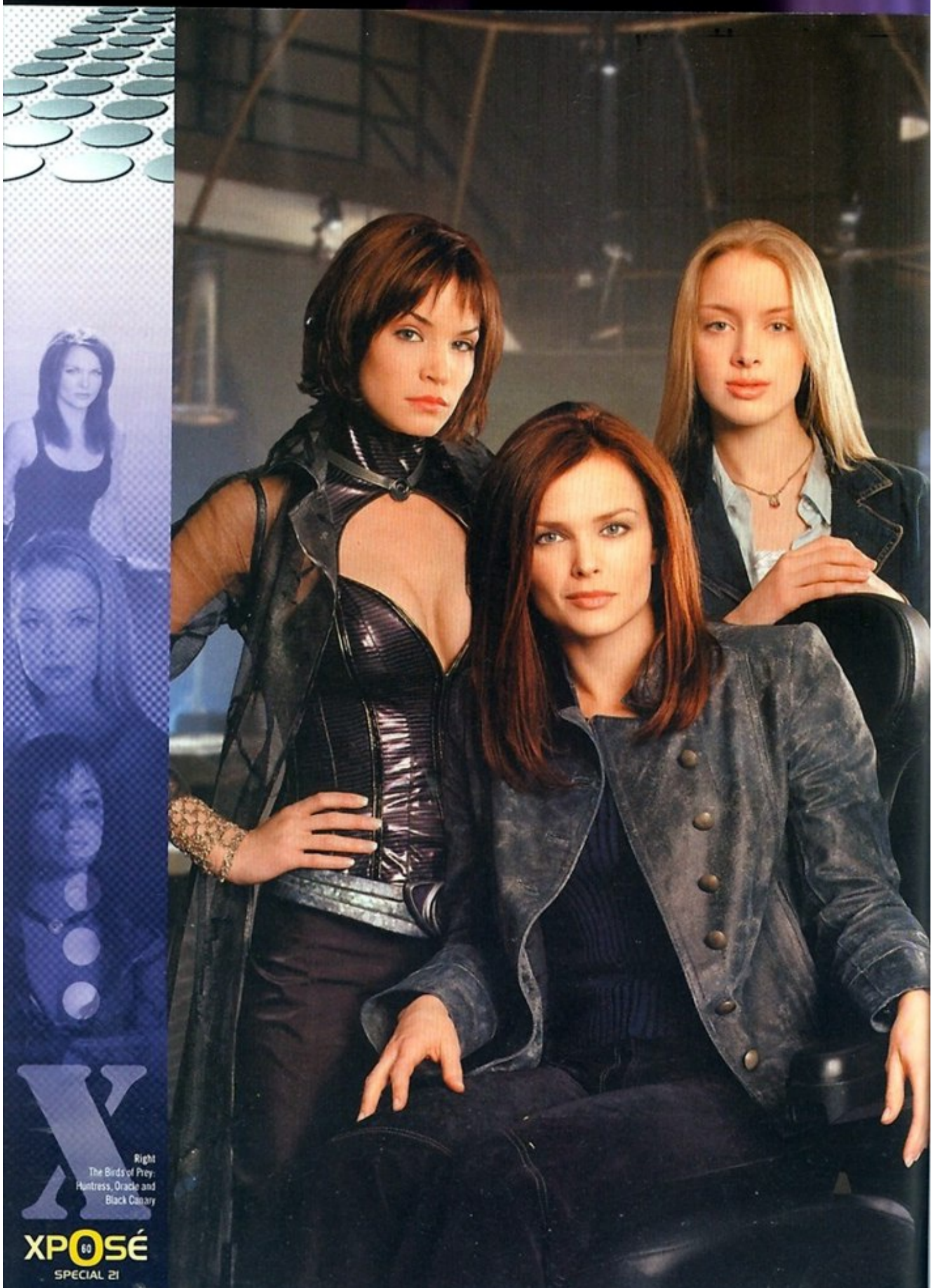
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Right  
The Birds of Prey:  
Huntress, Oracle and  
Black Canary

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New  
Season

# BIRDS of PREY

Season One ● The WB ● From October 9

Batman may be gone, but the troubled city of New Gotham still needs protection from the Joker's followers. **Grant Kempster** introduces the *Birds of Prey*.

**D**EEP WITHIN THE alleyways beneath New Gotham's many gothic towers there is a vigilante hero who fights the good fight. But this isn't necessarily who you think it is. There's no cowl, no cape and certainly no briefs worn over the tights, not for this fashionable babe. Yes, that's right: this is a gal kicking ass in the dimly-lit streets of New Gotham, and while she may not be the city's Dark Knight, she does share something with him. DNA, to be precise. She's his daughter.

Hard as it is to believe, the Huntress – aka Helena Kyle (played by the darkly beautiful Ashley Scott) – is indeed the lovechild of Batman and his feline adversary, Catwoman.

Aiding Huntress in her quest to keep New Gotham's streets clear of the maniacal loonies that made Batman's job so tricky in the past is Oracle, although you may know her better as Barbara Gordon, aka Batgirl (Starship Troopers' Dina Meyer). But Barbara's days of bad-guy battering are long gone, since the Joker shot her some seven years ago, on the same night he killed Catwoman. Barbara



survived the attack, but has remained wheelchair-bound ever since, and is only able to fight crime via The Huntress and some incredibly high tech equipment funded by the Wayne Foundation. Finally, those familiar with the comic-book series from which this pseudo-sequel to the Batman franchise is derived, may well be familiar with the character known as the Black Canary (Rachel Skarsten).

While the producers of this series may have taken a few liberties with the psychic heroine's powers, it's this character which takes the third place at Gotham's Clocktower from whence the Birds of Prey keep the peace.

With such a strong ancestry, *Birds of Prey* should do well, and if not it will always hold under its wing the possibility of the Dark Knight's return to tackle any ratings dip. ●

## Episodes to come...

● The pilot episode provides the background info on our main characters, as well as some nifty flashbacks detailing the conflict which left Batgirl disabled and caused Batman to go MIA. This televised version is in fact a partial re-shoot, due to the unavailability of the actress who was to have played the series' big bad, Harleen Quinzel, for the rest of the season. Originally played by Sheryllyn Fenn, Harley's scenes have now been reshot with Mia Sara in the role. The producers took this opportunity to revise some of the elements they felt weren't working. Thus, Huntress has a slightly altered costume and the Clocktower is, in Dina Meyer's own

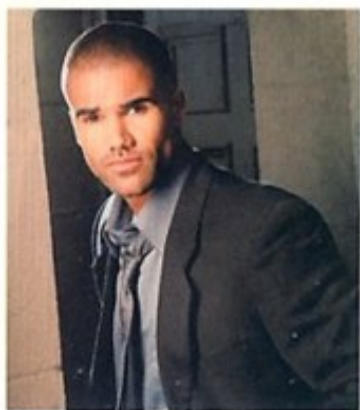
words, "less like the Tim Burton *Batman* and more like the Joel Schumacher one". Oh dear.

● Episode two, entitled *Stick*, features a nasty meta-human (like *Mutant X*, the superheroes in this series have a genetic reason for their powers) with the ability to turn himself into liquid.

● *Prey for the Huntress* holds back on the 'villain of the week' in favor of some character building.

● *Smackdown* will begin with some more Batgirl flashbacks and may feature the popular DC comic character known as Shiva.

● *Sins of the Mother* may bring the Black Canary's mother into the mix, revealing that she was herself a masked crime fighter back in the old days.



Top left  
The trio in their  
Clocktower base

Bottom left  
Shemar Moore is  
detective Reese

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# Females of the Species

.....  
**David Richardson** quizzes the producers of *Birds of Prey* to discover what they've got in store for New Gotham.

**W**HEN *BUFFY THE Vampire Slayer* transferred to UPN for its sixth season, some pundits suggested that the WB had lost a critical element in its programming. Yet the network recovered swiftly, filling *Buffy's* shoes with the Superman series *Smallville*, which follows the teenage years of Clark Kent (Tom Welling). Building upon the elements that have made *Smallville* so popular, executive producer Brian Robbins has teamed with Laeta Kalogridis to bring another comic book adaptation, *Birds of Prey*, to the screen, this time using characters and settings devised for DC's *Batman* series.

"It's the best of both worlds," enthuses Robbins. "You have a huge franchise in *Batman* like you have in the *Superman* franchise, but yet you have something that is not as well known so you get to play with the mythology even more and educate people on it. The *Batman* world is a great world to explore."

*Batman* is seen - during a fleeting flashback - in the *Birds of Prey* pilot, battling with The Joker. Yet from that point on the character is put to rest: *Birds of Prey* isn't about the microcosm of Bruce Wayne, but rather focuses upon the affairs of a new breed of superheroes, Barbara Gordon/Oracle (Dina Meyer), Helena Kyle/The Huntress (Ashley Scott) and

Dinah Lance (Rachel Skarsten), seven years after The Joker changed their lives irrevocably. It's a dark world in New Gotham, one that couldn't contrast more with the bright, sunny, cornfield vistas of *Smallville*.

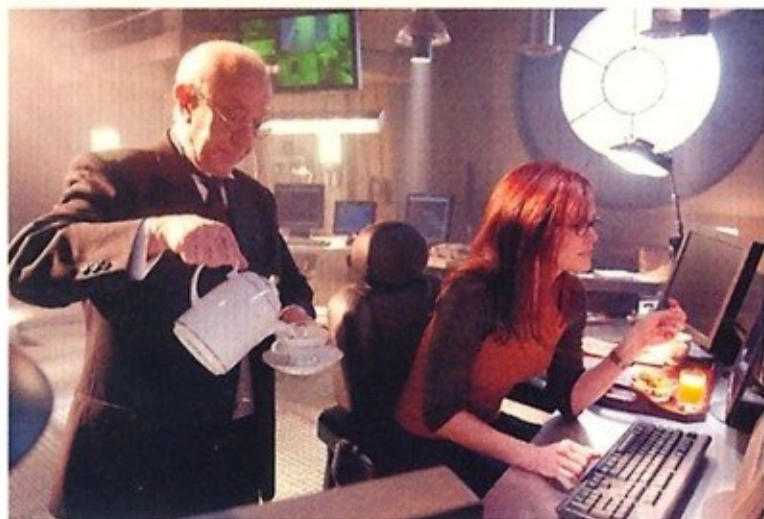
"The success of *Smallville* certainly paved the way for *Birds of Prey*," says Robbins, "but this is a different show, it's a different world, and I think audiences will see the show differently to *Smallville*."

"That's what's great about it," continues his fellow executive producer Laeta Kalogridis, "we're not doing the same show. If we were doing the same show that would be boring, right? So we have a much different landscape, which in a lot of ways is cooler and more fun. The truth is before we wanted to do *Smallville*, we wanted to do a show set in the Gotham world, and *Smallville* just happened first."


Inspired by both the *Batman* comic books and the films that preceded it, *Birds of Prey* has opted for a very distinct visual style, defined by cinematographer J. Clark Mathis and producer designers Michael Helmy and Jaymes Hinkle.

"We really wanted the show to look like the Frank Miller comics," offers Robbins, "and the hope is to keep that look going through the series."

"From a visual standpoint we sat down and we looked at those comic books. When Laeta was writing the script and we were visualizing the show, that's all we did was look at



Right  
Trusty old Alfred (the  
Abebramovic) serves up  
the coffee



"I had been very enamoured of the character of Huntress"



Right  
Dana Meyer is Barbara Gordon

Opposite  
Rachel Skarsten  
is Dinah Lance

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those comic books. I spent several months with a storyboard artist drawing the show, and the show looks like the drawings."

The series' visuals may delight the fans, but, by reworking the concept defined for the comic books for their own ends, Robbins and Kalogridis run the risk of attracting criticism.

"The biggest change we made is that Huntress is kind of a day player in the comics of *Birds of Prey*," admits Kalogridis. "She shows up every so often, and she's not a regular. It's pretty much Black Canary and Oracle."

"Honestly, what happened was that I had always been very enamoured of the character of Huntress from the pre-*Crisis* DC. Huntress is a different character after *Crisis* than she was before; I always liked the one before and always wanted to see her explored on television or in a movie.

"This was an opportunity to do that and give her the same kind of interaction with Oracle that Black Canary had. As soon as I chose to do that, then we decided that using Black Canary as that character wouldn't really work, because you wanted the partnership. That's how the change came about."

In the pilot episode, the role of the psychic Dinah Lance in the ensemble remains unclear. Accepted as one of the *Birds of Prey*, she's actually the only superhero without a designation. Could she be Black Canary?

"That would be telling," says Kalogridis. "What would be the point of the show if we talk about everything that's going to happen before it does? Dinah is something of a mystery and that's intentional. I don't really want to answer the question."

It's also established in the pilot episode that both Helena and Dinah are more than human. In one scene, The Huntress goes into action, her pupils automatically adjusting into those of a cat - reflecting her heritage as the daughter of Catwoman.

"There have been a number of origin stories for Catwoman within the DC universe - several actually," muses Kalogridis, "and none of them agree. One of the things that we thought was fun to explore was the idea that she might not have been human. She might have been what they call 'metahuman' - in the DC universe there's humans and metahumans," he adds.

"It's pretty clear in Tim Burton's movie that she's not normal: I mean she falls out of a window and she dies. The cats come. I mean, she's not *right*."

"It's obvious to us that she does not come back as a being entirely human, so what I wanted to do was use that origin story and experiment with the idea that, therefore, the daughter of

Batman and Catwoman is going to be half human and half metahuman. So Dad's human, Mom was not. That's the reason you see for the physiological difference. It's arguably a bit of a departure, but it depends on which one you're looking at."

Check out the fan Internet sites for *Birds of Prey*, and controversy was already brewing ahead of the pilot's airdate. Their concern appears to center upon the treatment of Batman in the TV series – and the fact that he has been removed from New Gotham so that the show can focus on the three female superheroes.

"Let's be really specific about what they're upset about," states Kalogridis. "And by the way, they have every right to be upset, in my opinion. Accidentally on a website somewhere the word 'flee' got into why Batman left Gotham. Batman does not flee anywhere. So the wording is incorrect."

"The idea is that he went into a self-imposed exile after this one night where these awful things happen. We took the idea from *The Dark Knight*, a very famous Frank Miller comic cycle, that there would be a period where Batman would say, 'I've had enough. I'm going to walk away from this for a little while. I'm going to remove myself.' And you don't know exactly why he's gone in the sense that he could be pursuing The Joker for what happened that night. He could be doing any number of things."

"The important part is that the trauma of what happened on that night changed everything in New Gotham. It changed all the characters' lives. It changed Batman's life. He went into self-imposed exile for the same reason that they became superheroes: because things change, and this is an evolution in New Gotham. The best storytelling in comic books, the very best graphic novels like *Dark Knight*, is about how the characters never stay the same."

Do Robbins and Kalogridis plan to bring Batman back to the world of *Birds of Prey* – perhaps in a sweeps week-centred guest role?

"Probably not," ponders Robbins. "He's getting ready for the *Batman/Superman* movie."

"We're interested in moving forward and exploring the next generation of superheroes in Gotham," claims his creative partner. "That's our mission statement."

That philosophy will also apply to the villains of *Birds of Prey*.

"One of the more fun things we're going to explore is all the children of those Batman villains who are locked up in Arkham Asylum," reveals Robbins. "The sons and daughters that are out there with that same evil blood running through them."

"We want to take the opportunity to do a combination of villains that people maybe have seen or heard of, and villains that they haven't," adds Kalogridis.

"Ones that have some connection to the mythology but may not be ones that everybody's familiar with."

Ask the producers to elaborate on the subject, and they shift uneasily. Can we expect the son of Penguin? Daughter of Mr Freeze? Maybe the nephew of the Riddler?

"You're hurting me here!" exclaims Kalogridis. "It's so much more fun to me, as a viewer, not knowing what's coming. And that's why I hate to broadcast what's coming before, and it's not necessarily that it's meant to be a big surprise exactly. It just makes the ride more fun and more spontaneous. I never even read spoilers. I hate them."

From the precedent established in the original Sixties series (which featured Eartha Kitt, Joan Collins, Vincent Price...) and continued in the feature films (which boasted Michelle Pfeiffer, Jack Nicholson, Jim Carrey...) viewers have come to expect big name villainy in live action *Batman*. Whether this trend will continue in *Birds of Prey* remains to be seen.

"Maybe," teases Robbins. "If it makes sense. The most important thing is just to make sure that when we do those known villains, we do them well. We do them smart, and we keep spinning it so it seems fresh and you don't feel like you're watching the old *Batman* show."

Of course, we are aware of one villain already – the first episode introduces Harley Quinn, initially in the guise of Helena's therapist, before revealing herself to be a megalomaniac



"It's more fun not knowing what's coming"



"We are going to have arcs that are continuing through the story"



with plans for taking over New Gotham. For the pilot episode the role was taken by *Twin Peaks*' Sherilyn Fenn, although it has since been recast and reshot with Mia Sara.

"Sherilyn Fenn isn't available to do the series," Robbins clarifies. "When we did the pilot we saw it as a character that would recur, but then obviously after it was put together we thought it was an essential part of the show."

That first episode implies that Harley Quinn could form part of an ongoing story arc for the series - her initial plans for domination are defeated, but her position as a psychiatrist at Arkham Asylum gives her the opportunity to strike again.

"We are going to have arcs that are continuing throughout the story, and Harley will be developing a certain way," says Kalogridis. "But for the most part what we're trying for is that anybody turning into the show won't feel lost when they turn it on. The girls will be developing their relationships with each other. The show individually will have self-contained stories that you can flip it on and not feel like you're removed from what's happening."

"The A stories will be the standalones," adds Robbins, "but there definitely will be continuing arc stuff in there."

It's clear that Robbins and Kalogridis are walking a fine line with *Birds of Prey*: they must appease the existing fans, because they are a guaranteed core audience who could support and generate strong word of mouth. But they must also appeal to floating viewers, pulling in the figures to attract advertisers and keep the show on the air.

"The hope is to do both and do both well," says Robbins. "It's not about satisfying the comic book fans, although we hope to. It's about making a TV show."

"It's the same way that *Smallville* flipped the methodology and had a new spin on it and still satisfied the comic book fan. When you break that down, it is really about relationships at heart, and this show will do the same thing. Just because we're going to deal with relationships doesn't mean we're going to disappoint the comic book fan."

"I'm interested in going out there and giving them my best shot and trying to realize it the way we saw it," declares Kalogridis. "If we fall on our faces, [at least] we realized the vision that we had. That's really how I feel about it." ●



Top  
Craze and Horror: center  
Bottom  
Ashley Scott is Helena Kyle

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# The Tough Guide to...

# Gotham City

Keep away from women in leather if you plan to visit the city of the Batman.

IF YOU ARE PLANNING your first vacation to the bustling city of New Gotham, then you mustn't be put off by the poor reputation that our beloved metropolis harboured in the days of old. This is New Gotham. Long gone are the days when you couldn't walk two blocks without getting fleeced by some deranged masked criminal. No longer do you have to steer clear of the penguin sanctuary at Gotham Zoo, and rest assured that entering the local joke shop will not result in certain death (although shop-owner Frank's hand-buzzer can cause problems to those with pacemakers). New Gotham is a safe and happy place to visit day or night and although renewed news stories have begun surfacing of vigilantes once again roaming the rooftops, please, please don't be put off. New Gotham is a safe place. Safe, do you hear?

**History:** Gotham City's past is a nefarious one. Many years ago there existed a masked vigilante who went by the name of Batman. This sick and twisted man practically controlled the night skies of Gotham, giving way to an array of ridiculously dressed master criminals who spent decades trashing our fine city. Amongst these infamous names were The Riddler, The Penguin, Mister Freeze, Catwoman and the most feared of all, The Joker. Claiming to be on the side of good, Batman harboured his own clan of masked men and women, including the underage Robin and the ineptly named Batgirl. This preposterous battle ended seven years ago when the Joker murdered Catwoman and was disappeared after becoming the victim of a revenge attack by the self-proclaimed 'Dark Knight'. Neither Batman, Batgirl nor any of their cronies have ever been heard of again.

**Holiday jobs:** There are many jobs that can be found throughout New Gotham. The aforementioned Penguin Sanctuary at Gotham Zoo is always looking for new help, as the keeper, Ozwald Copperpot, is getting a little old in the fins. If you have any training in psychiatry, then why not join Dr



Harleen Quinzel down at Arkham Asylum for a summer season. Alternatively, there are plenty of administrative positions at Wayne Enterprises.

**Survival tips:** As stated previously, New Gotham is very, very safe. However, should you come across anyone wearing undergarments on top of a pair of tights, back away very slowly. Unless of course you happen to be in Gotham's red light district, in which case, get stuck in.

**Day trips:** There are many great sights to see around New Gotham. Amongst the best is Wayne Manor, a true remnant of old Gotham. To be found high within the mountains on the outskirts of the city, this Gothic mansion holds open days on Wednesdays and Thursdays. A trip to the top of the Gotham Clocktower is also a treat, although this attraction is currently being leased out to Wayne Enterprises. ●

*Grant Kempster*

