

a e COMICS

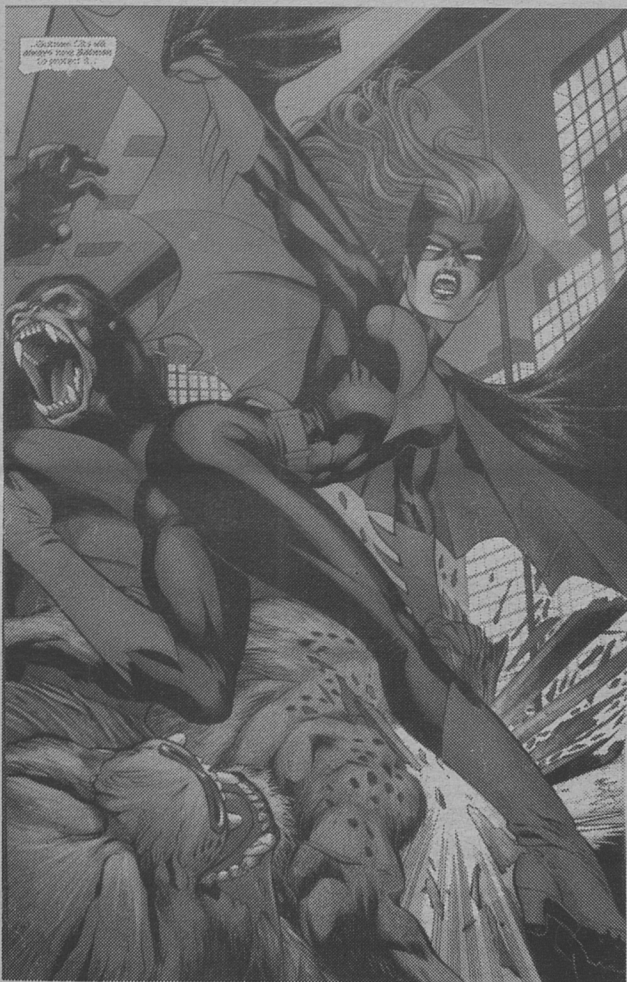
Batwoman is Back!!!

A Review

BY DONNA IVERSON

Batwoman is back after a twenty-five year absence. And if you missed her the first time around, no matter. You are going to like her better this time as a lipstick lesbian.

In mid-July, DC Comics issued *Batwoman Begins!* with a "She's here!! Batwoman! She's Here!" banner running along the bottom of the issue. Dressed in crimson and wearing a black bat mask,



Batwoman faces off against Gotham City monsters in both human and animal form. The new Batwoman is part of a 52-week comic book series that DC Comics is using to introduce more multicultural characters including Asians and Latinos.

In addition to Batwoman, the new "diversity" heroes are Blue Beetle, Devi, Rama the Heavenly Archer, the Atom and Snake Woman. A variety of comic book publishers are creating these ethnic characters in both English and Arabic versions.

Originally portrayed as a love interest for Batman, the previous Batwoman was murdered off in 1979 by the League of Assassins and the Bronze Tiger. In her first incarnation, she lusted after Batman, not knowing that he was her cousin. In the 2006 issue, there is no mention of this, or any explanation for her ten-year attraction to Renee Montoya, a former girlfriend.

Batwoman's alter ego is Kathy Kane, a drop-dead gorgeous heiress with an interest in Gotham City real estate. In the first scenes, dark-haired Renee Montoya, a former police detective who is now a private investigator, contacts Kane about a corruption scheme she has uncovered. The balloon captions in the corners of the comic sequence reveal that Montoya and Kane still have a thing

for each other after a ten-year absence.

At their reunion, Montoya introduces her partner Charlie, a hunky male who does nothing but complain about Montoya's smoking habits and smoldering crush on Kane. Kane is hooked up with Mallory, a blond shorthaired doctor who watches from a car while she reads the *Gotham Gazette*.

Sparks fly from the get-go. Kane is pretty pissed off that Montoya will reveal little about the case.

For her part, Montoya is trying to protect Kane, not knowing that she is Batwoman. When the bad guys appear, Batwoman comes to Montoya's rescue, although the caption on the page reads "Gotham City will always have Batman to protect it."

Ironically, it is Montoya who seems the more interesting character in this new Batwoman saga. She portrays the steely toughness of a former cop who wants to protect Kane.

What? After the fight is over, a faceless male comments to Montoya that he senses that Batwoman "likes you." Montoya's reply? "Shut up."

This special issue of *Batwoman* appears to be a trial balloon to determine if there is enough reader interest to reintroduce her as a regular comic hero, a sort of female version of Batman, who never disappeared from the bookstore shelves. Ironically, it is Montoya who seems the more interesting character in this new *Batwoman* saga. She portrays the steely toughness of a former cop who wants to protect Kane.

Personally, there was little in this comic book story to make me want to read another issue of the new *Batwoman*; although it is heartening to see the creation of new women superheroes, with Batwoman being one of them. As mostly males buy comic books, it will be interesting to see if Batwoman survives in the marketplace, and who exactly will be reading it.

The depiction of Batwoman as a lesbian does speak to growing acceptance of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people as heroes now appearing in films and television shows as well as in comic books.

Batwoman Begins! remains a largely male creation, however. The people responsible for the new *Batwoman* are listed as Geoff Johns, Grant Morrison, Greg Rucka and Mark Word with art by Joe Bennett, Todd Nauck, Jack Jadson, Alex Sinclair, Nick Napolitano and Marlo Alquiza.

Male fantasy still trumps feminist sensibilities in this collector's comic book available at Earth Prime Comics on Church Street in Burlington. ▼

Donna Iverson is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Winooski.

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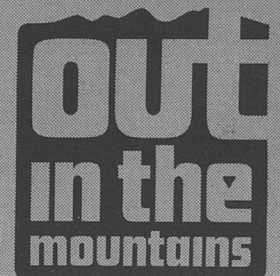
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