

With each issue of Batgirl, we get a better sense of the kind of title it wants to be, which is pure fun and games, with some real stakes dozing beneath the surface. The opening issue revealed that Babs has a mystery nemesis who knows way too much inside information about her to be your typical supervillain. In most other titles, Babs would be obsessing about this, occupying all our time with her efforts to seek this stalker out. In fact, it's a little bizarre that Babs isn't taking the situation as seriously as you'd expect, especially after the violation the villain commits here. It's not just that her nemesis knows her real name and number, but her history as well, as revealed by a Batgirl-themed art installation which includes a piece featuring Batgirl in a wheelchair. In Gail Simone's Batgirl, that would be a devastating moment, one that'd spur Babs to seize control of the situation and track down this insider as soon as possible, once and for all. But clearly, Stewart-Fletcher's Babs is in a psychologically healthier place; she's disturbed by the piece and she's determined to get to the bottom of it, but she's not about to lose sight of everything else going on in her life. Because Batgirl would be a lesser title if it became too fixated on its superheroics, as does most every other superhero title out there. Its appeal is in how Babs' life with her friends in Burnside is fully integrated with her vigilante activities. Babs discovers the invasive art piece by attending a gallery opening with Frankie, Dinah, and Alysia,* running into Nadimah and Jeremy (who's even more smitten by the sight of Babs in that red dress) who are waiting in the rush line. Eventually, she takes down the villain of the hour in her civilian guise as well, proving she doesn't need to wear her costume to be a kickass Batgirl. It's important to note that the villain I'm speaking of isn't the same person using her personal history against her. Dagger Type is yet another flunky, given resources to challenge and annoy Batgirl, but without the actual capability to defeat her. Like the trolling Riot Black and the otaku Jawbreakers, Dagger is driven by superficial motivations, his artistic pretensions (a "creativisionary" maker of "thinkscapes," "on the forefront of an aggressive ideapocalypse"), perhaps making him the king of them all. But whereas Riot got off on the damage he was able to inflict and the Jawbreakers were living out their wildest daydreams, Dagger is genuinely delusional, so fixated on Batgirl's fame that he tries to appropriate it for himself. Which brings us to a potentially sensitive area. While cross-dressing characters in comics aren't unprecedented (e.g., Madam Fatal), they're extremely rare, just as the transgender population remains on the fringes of the lesbian/gay movement. To Stewart-Fletcher's credit, they don't treat Dagger's appearance and ambiguous gender identity as a joke in itself, but to call attention to how megalomaniacal he really is. His audience berates him for playing on their expectations, not for his flamboyance, and that's a pretty healthy way to react to someone like Dagger. While Dagger turns out to be not so much a "genius" as a passionate imposter, this disappointment is outweighed by all the little ways that Batgirl shows itself as a thoughtfully crafted series. Stewart-Fletcher bring back the character detail of Frankie's own struggles with paraplegia by having her attend Dagger's art show in elbow crutches, but don't sensationalize it by dwelling on her condition. The revelation that the poses taken by Dagger's Batgirl pieces are actually American Sign Language that Babs can piece together into a message is actually ingenious, a bit of plotting worthy of Babs' intelligence. And above all else, I appreciate that Babs has no shortage of romantic developments (which now includes an Officer Liam Powell who's impressed with the guts of Gordon's daughter), but they're given only passing focus in the issue so the whole thing doesn't turn boy-crazy. Tarr's hip and modern art is perfect for pulling off a legitimate art installation. While Dagger may be an egotistical douche, his works do look cutting edge, bold, and entirely buyable. Even the piece of Batgirl in a wheelchair has enough emotional weight to it that you can see how Frankie can be moved by it even without knowing

its extra personal connection to Babs. Wicks enhances the dynamism of Dagger's art by juxtaposing glaring red shading against the dark gray palette, but has no problem dropping subtlety to play up Dagger's excess of flash and glam later in the issue. Kudos also to letterer Jared K. Fletcher for clean type that emphasizes Batgirl's digital reliance and aids in storytelling, especially when Babs starts tracking down Dagger. Some Musings: * Happy to see Alysia brought back for the occasion. At least Stewart-Fletcher aren't about to abandon all that Simone's established. - So is Dinah determined to be the bitchiest of superheroes or what? How can she fail to respond to Babs' text: "Remember how we used to be a team? :(" It's the emoticon that's heartbreaking. - "My work embodies the existential juxtaposition of the vernacular mixed with a postmodern manifesto of pathos and glee in a ferocious age of societal consumerism." Okay, now I'm a little afraid; I think that actually made a little sense. The post Batgirl #37 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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