

When Mark Doyle, formerly of Vertigo, became group editor for the Batman Office at DC, he consciously set out to attract new talent, including writers from outside the usual comic book circles. Science fiction author and film critic Genevieve Valentine was one of his more interesting choices. Her background in science fiction and fantasy has, perhaps surprisingly, not been as evident in her writing of Catwoman as has her interest in movies and television. Reading her comics, one is reminded strongly of The Godfather and the various adaptations of LeCarre's novels. Like them, she crafts plots that are simultaneously intricate and epiphenomenal. The foundation of a Valentine book is character analysis and cultural exploration. Like Puzo and LeCarre, Valentine excels at drawing the reader into a highly detailed world with idiosyncratic values and morality, and bringing us to understand the attitudes and motivations of the people who live in that world, people who turn out, despite initial appearances, not to be so very different from us after all. Catwoman #39 picks up as Selina faces a threat on two levels. Roman Sionis, the Black Mask, is attempting to wrest control of Gotham's underworld from the Calabrese family that Selina now heads. And in the public realm, Ascolat Enterprises, headed by Aiden Mason, who claims to be her brother and who is operating in alliance with Black Mask, moves to become the face of the New Gotham, heading off Selina's plans to bring order and progress to the city. The book opens with an attempted assassination of Selina, and continues as she maneuvers between the extremes of surrender and a gang war that will leave Gotham in ruins. Putting aside that Gotham has already been in ruins at least three times in the past year, the book dwells a bit too much on the personal intrigues among the large cast to be totally successful at building tension over the ultimate outcome. Although such a sprawling group of characters might work well for a multi-hour miniseries, in a comic book arc it quickly diffuses plot momentum and confuses themes. One theme that does carry well through all of Valentine's run is that of Selina as a queen, not on a chess board, but in a realm of ruthless and violent kingdoms. The literary excerpts from such figures as Cesare Borgia and Elizabeth Tudor with which Valentine has peppered her books are somewhat affected, but still serve to reinforce the complicated choices and difficult emotions that Selina faces. The emotional moment that has gotten the most attention is a brief kiss shared between Selina and Eiko Hasigawa, an instant that reveals complexity that Selina herself readily acknowledges. Is she attracted to Eiko, or to the Catwoman suit that Eiko is currently wearing? Genevieve Valentine has said in interviews that, yes, Selina is now established as bisexual, which, given that the character has long been surrounded by an aura of pansexuality, comes as no great shock. Garry Brown's art and Lee Loughridge's colors continue to magnify the character and plot magnificently. They harken back to Tim Sale and The Long Halloween and When in Rome, before this run surely the high point of Batman and Catwoman considered as figures in gangster drama, at least the high point since the Golden Age. This book has the potential to create a distinctive look for "Gangster Gotham" just as Batgirl is accomplishing for "Hip Gotham" and Gotham Academy does for "Young Gotham." The post Catwoman #39 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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