

It's odd. After fighting so hard to get Stephanie Brown back in the New 52, getting a new Batgirl adventure is both a treat and oddly mundane. With Gotham trapped under Brainiac's dome and all superpowers shut off, Stephanie Brown has the opportunity to rethink her heroic responsibilities, at least until the dome comes down and she's thrust into a battle for the fate of Gotham City. It's an interesting counter-point to the original Batgirl's struggles over in *Convergence: Nightwing/Oracle*. Unlike Barbara, who's beginning to fall apart under the emotional stress of life in a cage, Stephanie kind of rises to the occasion. It's a fitting parallel, after all Barbara chose to become a superhero while Steph found herself thrust into the role by her father's scheming. In that regard, Alisa Kwitney seems to really get Steph's role in Gotham. Kwitney writes a Stephanie Brown who continues to challenge the conventions of superheroes but never abandons the basic instinct to help others. She doesn't sound quite like Bryan Q. Miller's Stephanie, but her pluck, her self-deprecation - especially around Cass Cain, and her odd confidence all feel essentially true to the fan favorite character. I especially love Steph taking after her mother and operating as an awesome, if informal, nurse, though one wonders what happened to Mrs. Brown. As if having Steph Brown Batgirl back wasn't enough, the issue also costars Black Bat and Tim "My Real Name" Drake as Red Robin. Tim definitely gets the short end of the stick, appearing limitedly and being...somewhat out of it for a good chunk of his screen time, which makes me sad as I do miss this version of my Robin. Kwitney's Cassandra Cain feels like an amalgamation of the character through her history, ultimately accurate but torn between eras of her history. Despite some pretty solid character work, Kwitney's structure for the issue is pretty awful. Starting in media res is kind of the hip thing nowadays - I said sounding older than I ever have - but it feels unnecessary and, therefore, gimmicky. Any sense of mystery gained from this strategy ultimately feels fake and I'm certain that many readers, especially new readers who might have picked up this revival of a female-friendly classic, were left confused by the choice. There's really no reason why one segment would come before the other, but neither one has the necessary punch to open or close the story. I also have to raise an eyebrow at Kwitney's choice to reveal a crucial detail, forgone conclusion as it was, through a television that only the characters can see. There are lots of weird choices like this and while they hint at attempts to do things differently, most of the time they just obscure the story. Having read four "Convergence" tie-ins and being in the process of writing my second review of one, I feel like I can safely say that, at least without *Convergence #1*, very few of these satellite stories feel like explaining the rules of the game. Of the ones I've read, *Convergence: Batgirl* is by far the most difficult to make sense of, firmly stating that there are pre-decided champions, seemingly contradicting other stories, but not exploring that concept at all. We also learn about this from the news, which is still on the air, instead of the booming voice of Telos. I really want to like Rick Leonardi and Mike Pennington's artwork because, when it works, it's lovely and distinct. However, that qualification is far too rarely met. The flat angular aesthetic is interesting to the eye, but the fact that this event was designed as a stopgap to cover the move from New York to LA is all too apparent in the rushed and highly uneven artwork. I pride myself on being a reviewer who's uninterested in taking pot shots, so I don't say that lightly. There really are some truly unfortunate panels in this comic and far too many of them. An early appearance from Red Robin resembles a G.I. Joe left in a microwave and one dramatic panel of Stephanie utterly morphs her facial structure, leaving her with one of the most impressive chins I've ever seen. When things go wrong in this issue, cow eyes are the least of Steph's worries. The somewhat frequent absence of backgrounds in the issue seems to point to the problem being a lack of time, which may reflect the production

process on “Convergence”, but it does little to rectify the numerous artistic blemishes in this issue. That said, I do really like what Leonardi and Pennington were going for. The storytelling choices are clear throughout and there’s a good sense of movement. Leonardi makes the Batgirl costume work really nicely, even without the cape and cowl and, while we only get a brief glimpse of this particular talent, the man can draw a gorilla. There are also a lot of little details that really work. Things like the wrinkle in Steph’s nose when she smells her year-old costume or the hunger in Cass’ face while she eyes her next meal shine. There’s a lot of things like that where one tiny element of a flawed composition really works or a critical mistake hamstringing an otherwise great panel, but in the end you’re following artists like Trevor McCarthy and Dustin Nguyen, this isn’t going to cut it. The post Convergence: Batgirl #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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