

# ENTERTAINMENT



**T**ired of testosterone? Looking for a break from the seemingly endless horde of muscle-flexing, ultra-macho costumed heroes? If so, you may want to sink your claws into the new ongoing Catwoman series from DC. Readers of action books seeking credible female protagonists are usually met with such stereotypical staples as sex kittens (Starfire, Crimson Fox), sidekicks (Dagger, Hawkgirl), or imitators of male super heroes (Spider-Woman, She-Hulk, Batgirl, Supergirl). While there are many strong, interesting female characters in comics they are, with the inexplicable exception that old (but recently revitalized) standby Wonder Woman, relegated to obscurity or supporting roles, and many attempts at ongoing super-heroine comics have failed (Supergirl, the Cat, Ms. Marvel, Dazzler, Amethyst, and the recently cancelled Black Canary to name but a few). Despite this trend, Catwoman stands a good chance of success.

For one thing, the book is a unique adventure series not only in its use of a female protagonist, but also due to the fact that the book's heroine is a criminal, an honourable but deadly woman who earns her living as a master thief. It's a decidedly different perspective on the cops-and-robbers biz through the eyes of a female felon. Secondly, the book will benefit from Catwoman's recognition factor. With millions of readers, TV viewers and movie goers being familiar with some version of the character because of her importance in the mythos of that multimedia property Batman. Catwoman is one of the best known and longest running female comics characters (it's been over 50 years since she made her debut in Batman #1, and she still fills out a skintight costume rather nicely thanks to the comic book miracle of suspended time passage).

For those few who may be unfamiliar with Catwoman, she achieved fame as one of the earliest and best known members of Batman's rogues gallery (surpassed only by the Joker, who

also made his debut in Batman #1). In particular Catwoman became a prototype for the good girl / bad girl character type, those alluring and often noble female criminals whom the heroes can't seem to resist, torn between mutual attraction / admiration and upholding the letter of the law. There have been many versions of

her living as a thief while occasionally thwarting other criminals herself or alongside Batman, with whom she has had a necessarily unconsummated romantic flirtation for years. As Robin once said, "Holy Heartbreak!"

This is Catwoman's first shot at an ongoing series, though she did star in a mini-series detailing her revised origin some years ago. She fits into a solo series surprisingly well. Though a criminal adventurer she adheres to a certain code of honour, and her tiny altruistic streak shows through in her adoption of a runaway teenage girl who reminds her of her own beginnings ("It's my nature to take in strays," she says). These qualities, along with her confidence and intelligence, make her a surprisingly likeable and in some ways admirable character who just happens to make her living from thievery. Her independent spirit, ambition, and pride make her one of the stronger, more compelling comics heroines, and her aggressive (albeit illegal) attainment of self-empowerment makes her a peculiar sort of feminist role model.

These qualities, along with Catwoman's violently capricious nature, are ably conveyed by series writer Jo Duffy. One of the comics' few female writers, Duffy manages to explore all the facets of Catwoman: ambition, greed, pride, playfulness, self-confidence, lack of inhibitions, violence, cunning, compassion, maternal instincts, rebelliousness, daring, and fierce independence. What emerges is a picture of a strong, noble, but violently volatile woman, as unpredictable as her feline namesake. Characterization is the writing's strong point, the key characters being Catwoman backed by a supporting cast including Arizona (her hero-worshipping adoptive "daughter") and Leopold (her chain-smoking criminal associate and assistant, described by her as "everything I like in a man...weak and venal, cowardly but brilliant...he agrees with  
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Catwoman's origin and motivations over the years, the one common theme throughout them being that of an abused woman who finds liberation and her fortune as a master cat burglar. In the last official retelling some years ago she was an abused ex-prostitute named Selina Kyle who, inspired by Batman, takes on a costumed identity to disguise herself (hers being inspired by her love of cats), thereafter making