

What is the nature of Gotham City? Does something so large, so sprawling, so massive even have a simple, unitary nature that one can define, that one can grasp? For most of the last seventy-five years, the answer has been at least tacitly "yes." Now, that nature has shifted over time, changing from author to author ever since Bill Finger first imagined this comic book shadow of New York back in 1939. It has grown and shrunk, lightened and darkened, but usually remained unstated. Scott Snyder, present scribe of Batman, is an exception to the tradition of reticence, as he has quite specifically defined the nature of Gotham City as a living entity, a violently paradoxical spirit whose multiple personalities manifest in the various costumed heroes and villains that walk through the streets and buildings and parks that make up the city's physical body. But light or dark, great or small, explicit or tacit, most authors over the past three generations or so have portrayed Gotham City as, in its essence, being inextricably bound to its most famous avatar, Batman. But not everyone has seen things this way. Sometimes, creators have dared to imagine a Gotham that isn't locked to Batman in an eternal dance of action and reaction. Sometimes they have seen a city that is more complicated than a single hero, or even than all its heroes and villains combined. Famously, Jeff Loeb and Tim Sale envisaged a metropolis of murkiness and layers, of complexity and treachery. Loeb's sprawling casts and labyrinthine plots revealed the war of hero and villain as just one aspect of Gotham, while Sale's powerful but primitive forms wedded to murky colors showed us a world that was fluid and opaque, not lucid and crystalline like the traditional comic book universe. Genevieve Valentine, Garry Brown, and Lee Loughridge reach back to this tradition in their Catwoman. Theirs is a Gotham of mystery and blur, of subtlety and complexity, of unclear forms and difficult balances. Batman is only one factor in this world, an enormously important factor to be sure, but still far from the uncrowned emperor of Gotham, even of Gotham's night. In this issue Selina takes dramatic action in her war against the Black Mask and the alliance he has assembled to oppose her and the Calabrese crime family she heads. With a combination of mercy and fierceness she sows dissent between him and his Falcone allies. With swift physical ruthlessness she eliminates Mason, her supposed treacherous brother. And with cold evaluation of political and strategic reality, she decides that a new player must enter the game, a force that can, at least in the short term, tip the scales in her favor. And so the Cat climbs into the Penguin's nest. This is a story of balance, of the kinds of balances Selina must maintain in her professional and personal lives, and the actions she must take to accomplish that perilous feat. The ultimate decision Selina makes, to urge her would-be lover to step out of the light so that she may take up the Catwoman suit once again, is a decision about balance. Selina is trying to preserve both Gotham and her own identity, to do what is best for her family and what is required by her duty. A certain Bat understands the difficulty of that all too well, and the respectful nod he shares with Catwoman in this book is as profound a gesture of empathy as anyone outside of his innermost circle ever gets. The post Catwoman #40 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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