

Perhaps I should've made a bigger deal over the revelation of Eiko Hisagawa as Catwoman's replacement, imposter, etc.—that moment did kind of come from out of nowhere—but I had a feeling Valentine would explain all in time. I can't imagine a writer who takes the trouble to incorporate historical references so smoothly into her writing would somehow neglect to develop that major a plotline. And here we are: a whole annual to walk us through it. Maybe because she has such a platform to tell her story, Valentine doesn't spell out Eiko's motivations. Instead, we get an overarching sense of Eiko's longstanding resentment against living a life she hardly has a say in. Her opening monologue is a thesis for the monotony and pressure of gangster living: "Doors will open for you. You return the favor by opening doors. ...You do what you're told. Those who work under you will do what they're told. You make careful preparations. And if your strategy's sound...nothing can interfere with your plans." Throughout the issue, Eiko uses her father's love of Go, a highly strategic game involving the capture of territory and outmaneuvering your opponent, as a metaphor for both their work and their dynamic. It's unclear if her father sees their relationship the same way, but he's winning, regardless. Eiko admits she's never won a game with him, and though she claims not trying to win is her own strategy, we see it's one where she still loses in the end. Catwoman, both the person and the concept, shows her a way to break that streak. In their first encounter, Catwoman disrupts the Hisagawas' plan—not enough to change the result, but enough to reflect poorly on the family, as Hisagawa notes with displeasure. Catwoman has always been a wild card for both Gotham's heroes and villains, someone who can cozy up to Batman yet play around with Harley Quinn and Poison Ivy. She can afford to remain in the middle because she doesn't actively court nor interferes with one over the other. But Eiko only sees half of that equation, the part where she can get in her father's way. She doesn't realize that Catwoman has that power only because it's applied incidentally, when it happens to coincide with her own goals. Neutrality is a convenient and protective place to be, but a lonely one as well. Maybe that's what Batman means when he tells Eiko not to wear the suit "until you know what it means," an echo of what Selina told her in Catwoman #36. Nonetheless, it's significant that he does call her 'Catwoman' in the end. It might not be a blessing, but it's inaction, which is pretty close. Besides sticking it to her old man, becoming Catwoman allows Eiko to carry out her own personal sense of honor and justice. As a Hisagawa, she could never repay a Son of Forster for warning her away from a Batman attack, nor would she be encouraged to ward off common criminals. As Catwoman, she can do those things, and moreover, act out against the pointlessness of her father's grabs for more power and territory. So she and Selina are much in the same position, each playing the role expected of them while undermining their own work in secret. The most outstanding flaw in the issue is Ken, a second cousin and possibly more to Eiko, who ultimately ends up an expendable pawn for her father. Valentine tries to portray him as an important figure in Eiko's story, but not once does he assert his own voice or personality while he's alive nor does he inspire much of a reaction from Eiko when he's dead. Maybe it's her natural reservedness, or maybe it's because Ken was a pawn of her own, someone she treasured as another secret victory against her dad. The art is fairly solid across the board, although sketchier at a few points than others. I personally prefer the sketchy parts myself, as it fits the new, pulpier Catwoman and looks far less generic than the other half of the art, which is more typical DC house stuff. The storytelling is fine, but unremarkable, rarely offering glimpses into the characters' interior than what the script provides and not always getting the most out of certain moments. The script suggests that Eiko is torn up over Ken, but all the art shows is a woman angrily pulling her sweater off. - For those who haven't read Batman Eternal, it's a useful primer on how Selina got to where she is...

Some Musings: - Since I stopped reading Batman Eternal, I appreciate the annual's little primer on events leading up to Selina taking over the Calabreses. - The Pillow Book, by Sei Shonagon, really is an excellent piece of work. I'd agree that it's just as useful as Sun Tzu's The Art of War. The post Catwoman Annual #2 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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