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Angel City: Town Without Pity

Janet Harvey
Megan Levens, Illustrator
Nick Filardi, Illustrator
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Angel City: Town Without Pity takes 1930s noir style, sets the story in Hollywood, and makes one major change from similar tales—here, a woman is the hero.

Dolores Dare, a former circus performer and aspiring actress, now working as a mob enforcer, is dragged into a mystery when her best friend, Frances Faye, is mysteriously killed.

A murder to be solved, mob involvement, and Hollywood studios that might be complicit are not new subjects for fiction, but Harvey brings distinct elements to the fore, simply by looking through the lens of a woman protagonist. Dare—formerly Dorothy Dunkel—is a survivor, but with a different set of talents and circumstances than other (male) noir protagonists. Adding to the interest is the role of her right-hand man, a Japanese-American journalist named Joe Yoshimoto.

Without a trench-coated, hard-boiled detective to solve the murder, it's up to Dolores to untangle the web of greed and crime that snared her friend, and threatens to do the same to her.

Despite clever vérité touches like convincingly weaving real-life gangster Bugsy Siegel and a mention of publisher William Randolph Hearst into the story, the real treat here is getting the perspective of Dolores and Joe, a pair who represent the often-ignored background figures in many noir stories, now cast in leading roles.

Harvey's ear for dialogue is excellent, using 1930s slang like "rubes," "holy smokes," and "dollface" without overdoing it. Levens does a great job depicting Los Angeles during the Golden Age of Hollywood—hair and clothing, as well as architecture, all ring true—but she has a distracting habit of drawing short horizontal lines across the bridge of her characters' noses. Few escape this treatment, whether male or female, of varying age or ethnicity, and it immediately draws the eye, slightly diminishing the luster of Levens's otherwise outstanding art.

Harvey, who has worked in film and television in addition to comics, has created a story that would make a good movie; however, with a woman as the main character, the chances of that happening aren't good. Noir fans can take heart that *Angel City: Town Without Pity* exists to give a moody and compelling story the treatment it deserves.

PETER DABBENE (July/August 2017)

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