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Detective Comics #854, Low Moon, and Barack the Barbarian # 1

Since the recent “demise” of Bruce Wayne, many supporting characters within the Bat family are making hierarchical changes. The original Robin, Dick Grayson, is filling in as Batman and Bruce Wayne’s forgotten son, Damien, is the new Robin. However, emerging from Gotham’s shadow-covered alleyways is a new addition to this nocturnal club of protectors, Kate Kane as the Batwoman.

Detective Comics # 854 follows Kane as she searching for the new leader of an underground cult, who had tried to cut out her heart. Supported by her techno-wiz military father, Kane shoots off on her Bat-cycle to confront the new head of the underworld. This noir-revenge tale written by Greg Rucka is realized in vivid detail by J.H. Williams III.

Wearing a black suit with pale skin and flowing red hair makes Kane’s appearance akin to a different kind of creature of the night. But more unique than any vampire-influenced costume is Kane’s sexual orientation. Batwoman is a lesbian. The importance of Detective’s new heroine's sexuality, gender, and ethnicity (she’s also Jewish), would be a hollow milestone without Williams’s vivid art and Rucka’s taut story. With this first issue starring Batwoman, it is clear that Detective is entering an exciting new era. Time will only tell if readers are ready to follow this new breed of hero into the night.

On the cover of Norwegian cartoonist Jason’s new collection, *Low Moon*, are two animal-headed figures sitting at a lonely bar. Their pokerfaced stares, reminiscent of Humphrey Bogart or rather Buster Keaton, parallel each other, unaware of the larger existential plight they both project. A master of genre conflation, Jason inserts these expressionally-limited characters into whodunits, sci-fi B-movie scenarios and even westerns to create unexpected tales of loss. Jason's unique skill of meshing cut-out Hollywood genres with fleeting moments of missed opportunities is like a unique cocktail- Hitchcock with a dash of Woody Allen.

This collection, however, includes tales darker and pulpier than most Hollywood Noir: *Emily Says Hello* about a woman and a hired gun trade sexual favors for murder hits and *Proto Film Noir* follows a cave-man who sleeps with a housewife then repeatedly tries to kill her husband, who reappears after each murder. These surreal stories are brief experiments in narrative, with Jason crafting each twist and turn towards an abrupt and fatalistic end.

The title and core story of the book, *Low Moon*, is a fully-realized and inverted epic western. The sun-blistered setting is filled with the usual cast - the sheriff, gold-hearted-prostitute, small town teacher, the revenge seeker - and even an abrupt bar fight ensues, but Jason subverts the landscape and fills it full of deadpan humor and anti-climax. (The genre's perfunctory final pistol duel is replaced with a chess match.)

Low Moon is a slow-moving delight. Jason has crafted a perfectly executed yarn that is at once both familiar and bizarre. This collection is an exceptional entryway for reader still unaware of one of sequential arts greatest contributors. Jason followers should also be pleased to find the animal-headed characters still struggling against the genre's they've been confined to.

Barack the Barbarian #1 of 3 (The Quest for the Stimuli), is another comic set to take advantage of the current President's popularity. But unlike the get-rich-schemes of recent "Obamics" this is an entirely devoted current affairs spoof that at times reads like a fan-fiction love letter to President Obama. The synopsis: After strolling into Warshintun the lone brute Barack joins forces with the heroic Amazonian Hililaria to combat Red Sarah and the Evil Boosh. The novelty-laden humor wears thin quickly and is only recommended for the most devoted Obama comic book enthusiasts. Written by Larry Hama with Art by Chris Schons & Rachelle Rosenberg.