

When I spoke to Gur Benshemesh, author of the mobster graphic novel *Silence & Co.*, he talked about rare it is for women to feature prominently in the genre. He blamed the insistence on sticking to classic narrative structure, in which women are either eye-candy, damsels in distress, or tools/obstacles to the plot. He's probably right, but as I've gone on in my line of work, I've come to a different angle on the issue. When we talk about mobsters and the like, we're talking about a pretty ruthless, violent group of people who'll sink to nearly any low to get what they want. Jimmy Brennan, the loan shark who opens *The Kitchen*, captures that attitude pretty well when he tells his wife, "So if someone disrespects you, even if it's just a fuckin' joke about your shoes, you fuck 'em up so bad no one'll ever crack wise again." It's pretty hard for women to survive among people like that, much less rise to the top. You can see that for yourself when Kathy Brennan goes out to collect on Jimmy's debts and runs into a wall named Franky. At first, his reaction is the usual sexist B.S., dismissing her demands out of turn with an impatient, "Lady, please just get the fuck outta here, okay? I ain' [sic] got time for this." When Kath presses on, he takes it to the next level with a decidedly not playful backhand. It's not pretty, but it does explain why you don't see women in fiction doing what Kath does. But maybe I'm not giving Franky enough credit when I say he's being sexist. The smack comes after Kath gets in his face, yelling, "Do you know who my fuckin' husband is--?" To which his response is, "I could give a fuck who your old man is. I ain' [sic] giving some bitch my money just 'cause she says so." The remark can be as easily addressed to an upstart man. In this field, just as in any other, you have to prove yourself. After all, Jack, one of Kath's relatives who tries to take Jimmy's place, also struggles with getting respect and ripped off—although you don't hear about him getting bitch-slapped.* Anyway, most women would back down after getting their face reddened by Franky's ham-fists, but Kath isn't most women. What plays out next is, to a degree, a feminist fantasy, in which Kath decides she is certainly not going to take that crap, pulls out a gun, and uses it to give Franky the full dose of his own medicine and then some. Up to this point, Kath's hands haven't been exactly clean. Even after Jimmy gets locked up, she's still collecting on his remaining loans, though she does it to support her boys. But messing up Franky is different; this makes her an active, willing participant in the family business, which means she'll have to face the consequences like anyone else. Kath is the most engaged character in the issue, but she's accompanied by sister Raven and the redheaded Angie, significant others to Johnny and Rob, respectively, Jimmy's right and left-hand men. The other two women primarily exist to show how exceptional Kath is, as Angie keeps her mouth shut for most of the scene and Raven displays how a woman would typically react to Franky's mistreatment: "Please, Kath, let's just go before things get worse." Still, it's Raven who bristles at the idea of getting shorted on what they're owed, and only Angie recognizes who they've just messed with: "Franky Costellano, Tony Castellano's brother! Raven, your fuckin' sister here just fucked up the brother of a made guy." Whatever misgivings Raven and Angie might have, they're all in it together, now that they've all been witnessed at the same time. Doyle's soap opera style is reminiscent of *Saucer Country's* Ryan Kelly, only less given to the slightly exaggerated expressions Kelly often gave to his characters. I'm not sure whether this is a good thing. Sure, the drama's a little more convincing that way, but it also lacks the emotional intensity a less realistic art style can offer. Overall, Doyle's work is a bit stiff and static, but visually striking for all that. Really, though, it's Bellaire impresses, using color to convey the series' period (looks to be the late 70s?) and mood. Although she departs from the usual dark, noir-ish hues of the genre, the quality of the lighting is hardly warm and friendly. Instead, it's harsh, menacing, laying bare the tension driving these women forward. -Minhquan Nguyen

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