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## Comics and Human Rights: Bitch Planet: Yes, All Women

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*Bitch Planet #1*

When [Bitch Planet](#) first appeared, everything from its Exploitation-Film style cover to its prideful 'Non-Compliant' catchphrase, highlighted it as a comic on a mission. [Kelly Sue DeConnick](#) and [Valentine De Landro's self-proclaimed feminist manifesto](#) quickly garnered attention, drawing compliments from across the community and amongst fellow creators. Fellow comic-writer [Gail Simone](#) cheekily tweeted "You guys don't mind if we quietly take over comics, right?" in reaction to the excitement. Though said partly in jest, this statement encapsulates the ground steadily being gained by female creators in the comic book world. What truly sets Bitch Planet apart, however, is the sheer diverse range of women represented within its pages and the seriousness with which their experience is treated.

Bitch Planet is the story of a female prison planet. In telling the story of the prison – colloquially known as Bitch Planet – the comic lays before its reader the experience of real-world women. As [Danielle Henderson](#) states in her article at the back of Issue #1, we already are on Bitch Planet. The women incarcerated for 'non-compliance' are suffering for a variety of recognisable sins – being too fat, being too out-spoken, not being sexually attractive or available.

On the first two-page spread the reader is confronted with the naked form of several women. Most notable – to any comic reader or consumer of mainstream media – is the form of Penelope 'Penny' Rolle. As Penny is introduced to the reader, the narration highlights what brought her to Bitch Planet: her gluttony. [Fat shaming](#) and body policing are prevalent in our society. Women who do not fit the 'acceptable' size and standards of beauty do not fit the norm; they are non-compliant. Moreover, books overwhelmingly depict beautifully slim women, so by depicting Penny in an unapologetic way – keeping her nude for the majority of the first issue, Bitch Planet strikes a massive point against real-world body policing that is reflected in the comic book industry.



*Bitch Planet #1*

Penny Rolle's introduction is a symbol of the book's commitment to representation. As [Nino Cipri argues, Bitch Planet](#)

*it showcases all kinds of women, of different races and body types and ages. During the intake for a batch of fresh prisoners, we're shown bodies that have rolls, scars, hair, and wrinkles. They're starkly contrasted with The Model, who towers over them: pale, wasp-waisted, and grinning cruelly. DeConnick and De Landro demonstrate the actual demographics of women's prisons, a place where women of color are disproportionately represented among the incarcerated population.*

The portrayal of women of colour in mainstream media is often left to background filler or tragic-victim stories. Popular women-in-prison storylines, such as *Orange Is The New Black*, tend to focus on the experiences of the white inmate. The exclusion of the bodies of women of colour serves to exclude and undermine their stories. It turns them invisible.

But on Bitch Planet, they are visible. And their visibility is deliberate. As Kelly Sue DeConnick explains [in an interview with Black Nerd Problems](#),

*I wrote a letter to Valentine [deLandro] and just asked him to make the deal with me that unless a character was specified as white, they would be of color.*

This visibility is also subversive. Issue one mainly focuses on the experiences of a white inmate, Marian Collins, thus mirroring typical women-in-prison tropes. Nonetheless a final page twist forces the reader to focus on the real protagonist of the story, Kamau Kogo, a Black woman.



Kamau Kogo

Claiming that a comic book is a feminist manifesto may sound like a bit much, but there is no other way to interpret Bitch Planet. What else can you call a book that ends its second issue with an essay by Black feminist writer [Tasha Fierce](#) on the misconceptions of feminism? What do you call a book that makes a commitment to publish such feminist essays in every single issue? This is a book that is serious about making women – all women – visible.

This commitment is symbolised in the book's most touching moment so far. Kelly Sue's tongue-in-cheek humour litters the back covers of Bitch Planet with fake adverts making stabs at the patriarchy. The back cover of Issue #2 featured a small, missed-connections style ad in the centre:

***Leelah. We didn't have to know you to love you. Find peace, our sister.***

This heart-felt note in honour of Leelah Alcorn, [a transgender girl who committed suicide late in 2014](#), drives home the love at the heart of Bitch Planet's purpose. It is an important work aiming to tell the story of all women – without apologising. It is a book that tells us that it is ok to be non-compliant; it is ok to be strong, to be big, to be a woman of colour and to take up space. By its stark and intentionally obvious parallels to today's battles, Bitch Planet insists upon the need to be non-compliant and imprints the message that all women deserve to be seen.

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