



The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture

By Glen Weldon

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“A roaring getaway car of guilty pleasures” (*The New York Times Book Review*), Glen Weldon’s *The Caped Crusade* is a fascinating, critically acclaimed chronicle of the rises and falls of one of the world’s most iconic superheroes and the fans who love him—now with a new afterword.

Since his debut in *Detective Comics* #27, Batman has been many things: a two-fisted detective; a planet-hopping gadabout; a campy Pop Art sensation; a pointy-eared master spy; and a grim ninja of the urban night. Yet, despite these endless transformations, he remains one of our most revered cultural icons. In this “smart, witty, and engrossing” (*The Wall Street Journal*) cultural critique, NPR contributor and book critic Glen Weldon provides “a sharp, deeply knowledgeable, and often funny look at the cultural history of Batman and his fandom” (*Chicago Tribune*) to discover why it is that we can’t get enough of the Dark Knight.

For nearly a century, Batman has cycled through eras of dark melodrama and light comedy and back again. How we perceive his character, whether he’s delivering dire threats in a raspy Christian Bale growl or trading blithely homoerotic double entendres with Robin the Boy Wonder, speaks to who we are and how we wish to be seen by the world. It’s this endless adaptability that has made him so lasting, and ultimately human.

But it’s also Batman’s fundamental nerdiness that uniquely resonates with his fans and makes them fiercely protective of him. As Weldon charts the evolution of Gotham’s Guardian from Bob Kane and Bill Finger’s hyphenated hero to Christopher Nolan’s post-9/11 Dark Knight, he reveals how this symbol of justice has made us who we are today and why his legacy remains so strong. The result is “possibly the most erudite and well-researched fanboy manifesto ever” (*Booklist*). Well-researched, insightful, and engaging, *The Caped Crusade*, with a new afterword by the author, has something for everyone: “If you’re a Bat-neophyte, this is an accessible introduction; if you’re a dyed-in-the-Latex Bat-nerd, this is a colorfully rendered magical history tour redolent with nostalgia” (*The Washington Post*).

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

By studying Batman's fan base over the superhero's 80-year history, Weldon, a devotee himself, arrives at an interesting theory: the Batman brand exploded when marketers figured out how to appeal to both "nerds" and "normals." The key to Batman's survival has been his mutability. First appearing in 1939, he appealed to boys. A decade later, the censorship of comics pushed Batman underground, where he was picked up by rebellious teens; by the 1960s, pop culture, spearheaded by fan Andy Warhol, had transformed him into campy fare. These boys, teens, and men took from Batman's iconography their own definitions of what it meant to be male, and to be a hero, in distinctly changing times. (Female admirers are few, although Weldon does include them when he can.) Batman's competing identities threatened his future as a character and an industry. Over the last five decades, young artists from three media—print, TV, and film—achieved a synthesis of Batman iterations while reestablishing his core persona as a childhood survivor of violence who swears to avenge his parents' death by fighting crime. Comics began to reference the pointy ears and slick capes of the first comics, and nerd culture was born. Today Batman is grim but not nihilistic, obsessed but not crazy, and as a hero, he resonates. Weldon puts all this together in an analysis enhanced by beautiful color plates of Batman comics dating back to the hero's inaugural year. VERDICT A must for comics fans who will be first in line for a go at this dense but readable text.—Georgia Christgau, Middle College High School, Long Island City, NY

Review

"A roaring getaway car of guilty pleasures—film gossip, comic-book esoterica, hilarious tales of nerd rage. . . Weldon writes with humor and Day-Glo élan." —**Jennifer Senior**, *The New York Times*

"Smart, witty and engrossing." —*The Wall Street Journal*

"*The Caped Crusade* is a great read for those who are proud Gothamites, those less initiated, and those who flip the switch on the Bat-Signal in order to find themselves. . . .A sharp, deeply knowledgeable and often funny look at the cultural history of Batman and his fandom...both a page-turner and a Riddler Trophy." —**Chicago Tribune**

"Engaging. . . . What Weldon ultimately achieves here is a character and comic-franchise history that is itself flexible enough to become what the reader needs it to be. If you're a Bat-neophyte, this is an accessible introduction; if you're a dyed-in-the-Latex Bat-nerd, this is a colorfully rendered magical history tour redolent with nostalgia." —**The Washington Post**

"For fans of Gotham's Batman, this is the perfect book to pick up before you head to the movie. . . . Even casual fans will find themselves quickly turning pages to learn more about how our comic heroes affect and even shape our everyday lives." —**Bookish**

"[*The Caped Crusade*] accomplishes what so many supervillains, from The Joker to Bane, have long desired to do: pin down Batman and systematically dissect him. Weldon navigates Batman's history with an expert step...a winning mix of humor, and incisive social analysis. Even his footnotes are funny. Under that famous cowl, he sees ugliness, wonder, and the undercurrents of pop culture in all their conflicting glory." —**NPR**

"Writing a book about Batman is tricky. He is a cultural icon deeply meaningful to many because his story

touches on themes of loss, adversity and perseverance. Also, he is an implausible character who defies laws of physics and common sense every time he swoops on gun-blazing lunatics. Weldon successfully walks the tightrope, showing reverence for the character but keeping it fun." —**Associated Press**

"Excellent, insightful. . . .Weldon has crafted that rare jewel: a book of comics analysis that nerds and "normals" alike can enjoy." —**Publishers Weekly (starred review)**

"Sprawling in scope, yet written with breezy flair. . . .An enthusiastic, immersive, entertaining guide for both die-hard Batfans and curious onlookers." —**Kirkus Reviews**

"*The Caped Crusade* is breezy, insightful, and surprisingly moving. Glen Weldon is the illuminating, hilarious writer Batman deserves—and the one we need right now." —**DC Pierson, author of *The Boy Who Couldn't Sleep and Never Had To and Crap Kingdom***

"Simply put, *The Caped Crusade* is the best book I've read this year....Highly addictive reading, with just the right blend of comic book history and nerd culture analysis." —**Comic Book Herald**

"*The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture* doesn't read like a history book, and it's not just due to the author's fantastic storytelling. Weldon informs the reader of the history of Batman with a passion that can be found in any tried and true Batman fan and with a level of knowledge I've never encountered before. It is the book that Gotham City deserves, and I can't recommend it enough." —**ComicsVerse**

"Weldon, a critic for NPR, offers possibly the most erudite and well-researched fanboy manifesto ever." —**Booklist**

"There's no better time to stop, relax, take a breath and read NPR critic Glen Weldon's history of Batman...Because here, in these entertaining pages, you will discover that nerd rage over the Dark Knight is nothing new." —**Mashable (Geek Book of the Week)**

"[A] smart, engaging dissection of Batman's pulpy comic-book roots, his rise to campy '60s TV stardom, his takeover of toy shelves and his resurrection as the dark knight of the silver screen." —**Parade**

"Sinking into the pages of 'The Caped Crusade' is the next-best thing to debating who's the better Batman." —**Detroit Free Press**

"Anyone familiar with Weldon's frequent NPR appearances will delight in this book's near-perfect translation of his verbal and comedic sensibilities. Its tone is reverent and analytical, acknowledging the absurdities of Batman and celebrating its wondrous appeal in equal measure." —**DCist**

"Strikes a seemingly impossible balance in its own right, serving as both a reasonably concise crash course in the character's history and an astute pop-sociological analysis of what this all means. . . . It's at once brisk and breezy and exceedingly well researched and lovingly constructed, offering something for both nerds and 'normals' alike in a time when the nerds have won." —**Playboy**

"If you looked at Glen Weldon's utility belt, you'd find wit, humor & endless knowledge about Batman. Thankfully he's condensed that utility belt into a book where you will learn the origin, the ups, the downs and the sideways of one of the most iconic bat-based superheroes of all time." —**Kumail Nanjiani, comedian and star of HBO's Silicon Valley**

“This is the hero’s journey of Batman from a raw idea of a character to a cornerstone of pop culture. Weldon pulls the back the cowl and reveals us—creators, performers and fans—all collaborating to shape a modern myth that bends with the times to endure. Once I started, I kept reading every chance I got.” —**Jeff Parker, writer of BATMAN ’66**

"*The Caped Crusade* is seriously informed, daringly opinionated and endlessly charming...It's not just a book about Batman, its Nerd Culture's origin story." —**Guy Branum, host of Pop Rocket**

About the Author

Glen Weldon has been a theater critic, a science writer, an oral historian, a writing teacher, a bookstore clerk, a movie usher, a PR flack, an inept marine biologist, and a slightly-better-than-ept competitive swimmer. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The New Republic*, *Slate*, *The Atlantic*, *The Village Voice*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and many other places. He is a panelist on NPR's *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and reviews books and comic books for NPR.org. The author of *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography* and *The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture*, he lives in Washington, DC.

Users Review

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