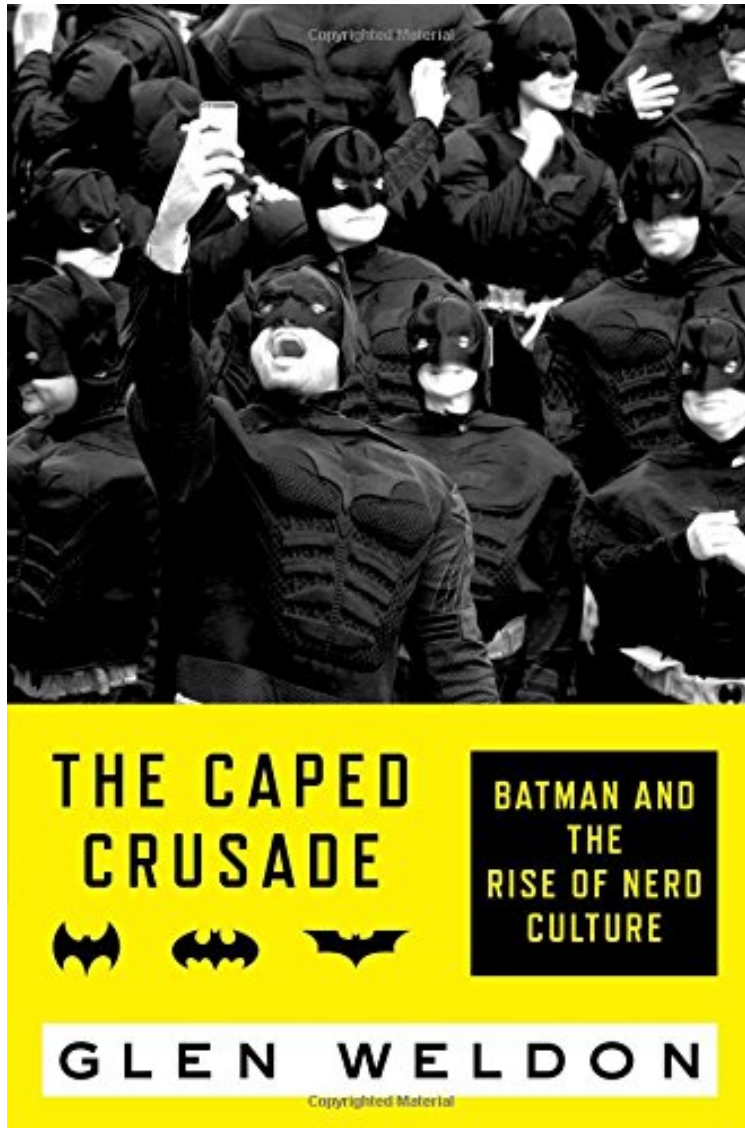


# The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture

Glen Weldon

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**Glen Weldon : The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture:

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Another Great Weldon BookBy CustomerGlen Weldon first wrote my favorite book to date on the history, real world effect, and many iterations of Superman. Now he has done an equally well researched and compelling book on Batman. Even the most deeply entrenched fans of the character are such to find new information on the lore surrounding the Batman in The Caped Crusade. Strong recommend.4 of 4

people found the following review helpful. Treadmill TreasureBy Wells MaineI've tried audiobooks at the gym a dozen times, and this is the only one I've gotten all the way through, the only one that made me look forward to the treadmill. It's Weldon's writing, for sure, which is a perfect blend of makes-you-feel-like-you're-learning-stuff prose and pretty good jokes that remind you that this is about Batman after all, and we can't take it too seriously (love that Weldon keeps reminding us that Batman is really just intellectual property owned and licensed by giant corporations). But I think what makes the audiobook so special (I own the hardcover too because...well, after listening for a week I decided I wish Glen Weldon would be my new best friend) is that Weldon reads it himself. For me, even author-read audiobooks are too slow and monotonous. I find myself either frustrated because I want the reader to go faster or bored and zoning out for long stretches. But Weldon's pacing and his pauses for punctuation (seems like a small thing, but it's not if you're on a treadmill for an hour), make it feel like a good friend is telling you a personal story. And your attention is held as you wait anxiously for the next section that requires Weldon to do an accent (his Grant Morrison alone is worth the price of admission). I don't always agree with Weldon's analysis; he's often dismissive of the movement that started in the eighties to take comics "seriously." Much of that movement he dismisses as a turn toward violence and realism, even when so much of it was an attempt to question what was unique about this art form and what areas of human experience it alone could wrestle with. But lots of his analysis is spot-on, particularly his thoughts on the narrative differences between superheroes in their natural comic book form and those same heroes forced into other forms, like movies and television.Overall, you really could not ask for a better tone for the subject (I teach a college class on comic books and American Culture, and I can say that most books on the subject take themselves entirely too seriously). And I very much appreciate how careful Weldon is to blend his very well researched history of Batman with his analysis. Brilliant book. Even better audiobook.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Nerds versus NormalsBy M. L. AsselinGlen Weldonauthor, critic, and effervescent panelist on NPR's Pop Culture Happy Hour writes of the Batman phenomenon from the standpoint of nerds versus normals cultures in the United States (and, presumably, beyond). His splendid book, *The Caped Crusade*, assumes that there is a nerd culture, such as that caricatured on the TV show *Big Bang Theory*, one, moreover, that is specifically focused on Batman, and what's more, that there are normals distinct from them. One might just as well as point to Batman fans (the word is a derivative of fanatic) versus those with a more casual interest in Batman, for, as Weldon points out, there is diversity in the opinions of both groups. Nonetheless, some generalizations can be made: the nerds have favored a dark, solitary, heterosexual, borderline (?) psychotic Batman, whereas the normals have been somewhat more tolerant of less dark, more family-friendly, even if sometimes more sexually ambivalent, Batman.Weldons device of nerds versus normals works well in treating this pop cultural phenomenon. He focuses on how these cultures defined the Batman idea over time. What might have been interesting would have been to have asked how Batmans changing image reflected who we were as a people over time. What did the original Batman fighting those who bilked the rich say about an America coming out of the Depression, and what does the ultra-violent Batman of today say about our uneasy society?This book is a romp through the decades of Batman from his first appearance in 1939 as a rich guy defending the rich right into this decade, in which Batman is, in print and on screen, more often than not the Dark Knight who fights shocking crimes against the city of Gotham, a superhero who revels in his badassery. After the camp Batman of the 1960s TV show, the nerds, who hated that unserious (or, rather, unseriously serious) depiction of the Caped Crusader, have gradually won the day as Batman embraces the nerds idea of him.Weldon, an articulate and amusing podcast panelist, writes the way he talks, which means he uses sometimes precious and quirky expressions like a bolus of gothy showbiz. To read Weldons prose is to encounter this persona that Weldon projects on Pop Culture. You either like it or you dont. It certainly seems appropriate in the context of superhero pop culture.I found Weldons book a pleasure to read. The nerds versus normals thesis aside, Weldon provides a terrific summary of the Batman phenomenon. Those curious to learn more about the various aspects of Batman will certainly be grateful for and delight in Weldons annotated bibliography, which follows the book proper.

A witty, intelligent cultural history from NPR book critic Glen Weldon explains Batmans rises and falls throughout the agesand what his story tells us about ourselves.Since his creation, 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 and gritty ninja of the urban night. For more than three quarters of a century, he has cycled from a figure of darkness to one of lightness and back again; hes a bat-shaped Rorschach inkblot who takes on the various meanings our changing culture projects onto him. How we perceive Batmans character, whether hes delivering dire threats in a raspy Christian Bale growl or trading blithely homoerotic double-entendres with partner Robin on the comics page, speaks to who we are and how we wish to be seen by the world. Its this endlessly mutable quality that has made him so enduring. And its Batmans fundamental nerdinesshis gadgets, his obsession, his oath, even his lack of superpowersthat uniquely resonates with his fans who feel a fiercely protective love for the character. Today, fueled by the internet, that breed of passion for elements of popular culture is everywhere. Which is what makes Batman the perfect lens through which to understand geek culture, its current popularity, and social significance. In *The Caped Crusade*, with humor and insight, Glen Weldon, book critic for NPR and author of *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography*, lays out Batmans seventy-

eight-year cultural history and shows how he has helped make us who we are today and why his legacy remains so strong.

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 "A roaring getaway car of guilty pleasures film gossip, comic-book esoterica, hilarious tales of nerd rage. . . . Weldon writes with humor and Day-Glo lan." 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 Gothams 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 s "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. . . . Its 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...Its not just a book about Batman, its Nerd Cultures 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-epet 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.