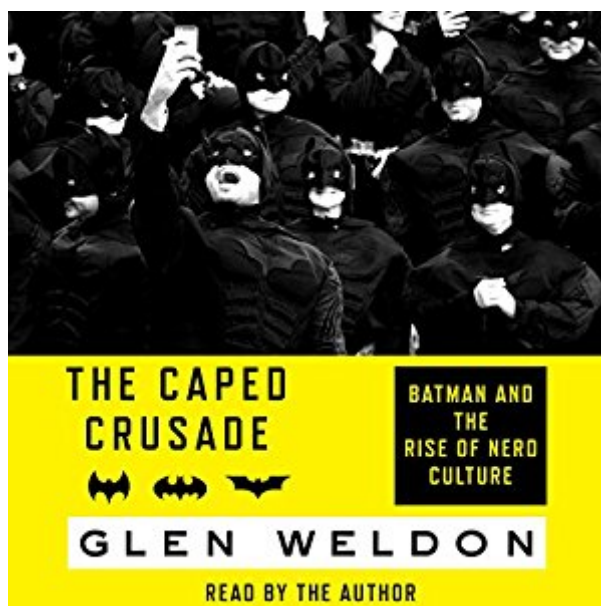


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# The Caped Crusade: Batman And The Rise Of Nerd Culture



## Synopsis

A witty, intelligent cultural history from NPR book critic Glen Weldon explains Batman's rises and falls throughout the ages - and 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; he's a bat-shaped Rorschach inkblot who takes on the various meanings our changing culture projects onto him. How we perceive Batman's character, whether he's 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. It's this endlessly mutable quality that has made him so enduring. And it's Batman's fundamental nerdiness - his gadgets, his obsession, his oath, even his lack of superpowers - that 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 its 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 Batman's 78-year cultural history and shows how he has helped make us who we are today and why his legacy remains so strong.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Glen 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.

I'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.

Glen Weldon is an author, critic, and effervescent panelist on NPR's "Pop Culture Happy Hour" who writes of the Batman phenomenon from the standpoint of nerds versus "normals" and 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. Weldon's 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 Batman's 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 Weldon's prose is to encounter this persona that Weldon projects on "Pop Culture." You either like it or you don't. It certainly seems appropriate in the context of superhero pop culture. I found Weldon's 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 Weldon's annotated bibliography, which follows the book proper.

Glen Weldon tackles the entire history of the BATMAN comic book, franchise serials/films, TV series, and pop cultural staple, all from the perspective of a gay fan—the very thing Dr. Fredric Wertham feared might happen! Weldon is a gracious, generous, candid, and erudite

guide into this universe, and it's a fun and informative read. Here's the book on BATMAN that should have been written and published long ago; we're in curious and expansive times for THE CAPED CRUSADE to land a mainstream publisher and release. This is the kind of writing that used to be relegated to fanzines (including the likes of AMAZING HEROES); now its a welcome addition to libraries and wider audiences. I covered some of this turf in my own book (TEEN ANGELS AND NEW MUTANTS: RICK VEITCH'S BRATPACK AND THE ART, KARMA, AND COMMERCE OF KILLING SIDEKICKS), but Weldon's book will reach a much bigger readership with far more authority, and deservedly so. RECOMMENDED!!!

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