

‘The Dark Knight Returns’

A Comic Review by Rory Donohoe

Frank Miller's 'The Dark Knight Returns' is simply incredible. This is easily one of my favourite Batman stories, if not one of my favourite comic books period. Initially released in 1986, this tale of redemption, revenge and consequence sent a shock throughout the entire comic industry, and its influence is still apparent today. This story may have some flaws, but it's a hell of a read.

The narrative of ‘The Dark Knight Returns’ is a rollercoaster of events. After the death of his sidekick Robin, Batman hasn't been seen for eight years. After a string of crimes committed by Harvey Dent (Two-Face) and the 'Mutant Gang,' Bruce Wayne finally decides to come out of retirement. This version of the Caped Crusader is much older than we're used to seeing. He's well into his 50's and, because of that, Bruce is slower, heavier and overall not what you remember.

This is a very brutal depiction of Batman. At this point in his career he couldn't care less about his enemies, and he leaves them bloodied with broken bones. Bruce's extreme vigilante activity starts turning heads, and in seemingly no time, Superman is ordered by the president of the United States to take Batman down. This leads to an enthralling conflict between the two. The plot jumps around a lot, and you see the story from other people's perspectives besides Batman's. Personally, I thought that this added depth to some characters who maybe needed it.

Speaking of characters, this story is chock-full of them, and the focus on character adds a lot to the book. One of my favourite subplots was about Commissioner Gordon's final days on the force before retirement. Watching him still working and fighting off assassination attempts at 70 was very exciting. There's also a lot of emphasis put on the new Robin, 13 year-old Carrie Kelly. She sees a lot of gruesome things for her age, and it's clear that she's too young for this kind of heroism. However, she's a great asset to Batman, and the relationship between the two is quite compelling. Superman mainly appears in the final issue of the series but his internal conflict over Batman's actions quickly provided great depth to his character. They were both friends in the past, but in Superman's eyes, Batman had crossed a line. Other characters, such

as Alfred and Commissioner Gordon's replacement, Ellen Yindel, are also well written, but these three stuck out to me.

I don't have much comment to make on Two-Face. In my opinion, he was a fairly generic comic villain who served his purpose as a catalyst for Batman's return. The Joker, however, is a completely different story. This interpretation of him is cruel and twisted, which certainly makes for a more gripping narrative. He's most similar to Heath Ledger's Joker from the film 'The Dark Knight,' as he's not afraid to kill, and revels in torturing Batman mentally. It's a spectacle to witness, and their fight in the third issue will stick with me for a while.

The art in this book was truly ahead of its time. If you pick any other comic from the 80's, none of them look as good as this. Frank Miller also drew each issue, and the amount of detail in the characters alone is astonishing. It still holds up today, and some panels are iconic at this point. Colour-wise, it's striking, and you can always make out what's on the page, especially with characters' brighter colours contrasting with admittedly simple backgrounds. It's an extremely impactful art style.

I'd rather not go into the ending of the comic for spoiler reasons, but it is one of the greatest I've seen, and it sets up new potential stories. I know the book is over thirty years old at this point, but its timeless story is still relevant today, even though it was released in 1986.

In conclusion, I highly recommend this comic run to any fan of the Batman franchise or comics in general. Even if you don't read comics regularly, this is an excellent place to start. Also, it's available in the school library, that's how I read it!