

Batman as Monomyth:  
Joseph Campbell, Robert Jewett, John Shelton Lawrence, Frank Miller, Grant Morrison,  
Scott Snyder, and the Hero's Journey to Gotham

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## Chapter One: Batman as Monomyth

When *Detective Comics* number twenty-seven first appeared on shelves in 1939 and Batman entered the public consciousness, the idea of a costumed hero standing for truth and fighting for justice had already entered the minds of the American public. The year before, Superman appeared in *Action Comics* number one. The age of superheroes had begun, and with it came a new portrayal of one of the oldest stories mankind had ever told: the monomyth, or the story of the hero's journey. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, mythologist Joseph Campbell studied similarities between the stories of ancient heroes such as Odysseus and Aeneas, and in his 1949 work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he distilled the various religious and mythological traditions of the world into a pattern that he referred to as the 'monomyth,' the metanarrative of humanity. In Campbell's monomyth, "A hero ventures forth from the world of the common day into a region of supernatural wonder. Fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won. The hero comes back from the mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men" (23).

In America, the idea of a hero and the hero's role took on characteristics distinct from those of the traditional monomyth, forming what John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett call the 'American monomyth.' In the American monomyth, "A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisaical condition; the superhero then recedes into obscurity" (Lawrence and Jewett, "The Myth of the American Superhero" 6). The difference between the traditional and

American monomyths is that the traditional monomyth is centered on individuals who “depart from their community, undergo trials, and later return to be integrated as mature adults once again” (Lawrence and Jewett, “The Myth of the American Superhero” 6), whereas the American monomyth is centered on a community in harmonious paradise threatened by evil. The normal institutions of law and order fail to defeat the evil, but fortunately, a hero from outside the community arises to resist temptation, defeat the evil, and return the community to its peaceful condition.

### **Response to Lang and Trimble**

In their article, “Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow? An Examination of the American Monomyth and the Comic Book Superhero,” Jeffrey Lang and Patrick Trimble argue that prior to the publication of *Crisis on Infinite Earths* in 1986, the quintessential hero of the American monomyth was Superman. But, after the DC Universe was restructured post-*Crisis*, Superman no longer functioned as the American monomythic hero, and Lang and Trimble do not see another monomythic hero stepping up to take Superman’s place. However, because they wrote their article in 1988, they lacked the perspective of time to see that since 1986, Batman has both taken Superman’s place as the hero of the American monomyth and has become the hero of the classical monomyth. Lang and Trimble are necessary to this conversation because they point out the perceived absence of an American monomythic hero to replace Superman, but because they did not see the development of both the Superman and Batman characters, their work must be regarded as incomplete.

In their article, Lang and Trimble discuss Superman’s fall from the role of the American monomythic hero, but their article ends with despair that there is no

replacement to step into that role. Lang and Trimble assert that a desire to update Superman resulted in changes to his character that no longer classified him as the quintessential American monomythic hero. Prior to this change, Superman embodied what Richard Reynolds described as “A new kind of popular hero [...]: the self-reliant individualist who stands aloof from many of the humdrum concerns of society, yet is able to operate according to his own code of honour, to take on the world on his own terms, and win” (Reynolds 18). According to Lang and Trimble, “the editors changed Superman by changing Clark Kent. He’s still a reporter, but no longer simply mild-mannered. If anything, he’s the epitome of virility: he lifts weights. Women find him attractive—even Lois Lane does, though she would never say so to his face. Clark Kent is no longer an isolated, idealistic loner” (Lang and Trimble 171). This change draws Clark into society. By erasing his mild-mannered nature, writers can use him to address thorny political or social issues of the day as Clark Kent, rather than as Superman. Clark Kent becomes the main character. It is no longer Superman disguising himself as Clark Kent to blend in with humanity; it is Clark Kent dressing up as Superman to inspire social change. The hero takes a backseat to the disguise. Making Clark attractive to women, even Lois Lane, serves to further pull him away from the outsider status of the American monomythic hero. By becoming what society views as attractive, he becomes part of society. Further, Lang and Trimble argue, “Superman is no longer portrayed as all-powerful. He can’t push planets out of orbit, fly faster than the speed of light, and see all the way around the world. [...] This isn’t a Christ-like redeemer” (171). Because Superman is no longer all-powerful, there exists a possibility that he could be defeated. In the American monomythic tradition, the hero must be able to overcome threats that overwhelm the law

enforcement system of a community. He must be stronger, faster, and smarter than anyone he opposes, or otherwise he could fail. On the other hand, Batman's 'invincibility' comes from the fact that anyone sufficiently motivated can put on the Batsuit and take over the mantle.

But the most important change in Superman's character, according to Lang and Trimble, is that

his adoptive parents are still alive. In the original myth, the Kents were killed rather quickly and unceremoniously off-panel. The implication was [that] Superman had learned everything there was to know from them. In *Superman* volume two, the Kents are still Superman's moral center, and they're still preaching small-town American values. But their ideas—and consequently Superman's—aren't chiseled into their gravestones. They still grow and change. They give Clark advice on how to cope with his role as hero, reassuring him that his deeds are worthwhile. (171)

Instead of being forced to rely on what he has learned from the Kents and from Jor-El, his biological father, Superman now has mentors to turn to for moral guidance and emotional support. He is no longer self-reliant in the Emersonian sense. He can go ask his parents questions about right and wrong and how to handle situations. The American monomythic hero knows right and wrong from the beginning of the story. He does not need moral confirmation from anyone. He operates guided only by his own principles and his particular sense of justice. Lang and Trimble contrast the description of the traditional monomyth with the American counterpart, saying "the difference between the two is the difference between rites of initiation (the classical monomyth) and tales of redemption

(the American monomyth)” (Lang and Trimble 158). The classical, or traditional monomyth is about a person finding his place in society, whereas the American monomyth is about an outsider saving society from an evil that besets it (Lawrence and Jewett “The Myth of the American Superhero” 6). The difference here is that the hero of the traditional monomyth starts by being a member of society. The hero of the American monomyth is separate from society and enters the action of the narrative as an outsider.

The problem with Lang and Trimble’s argument is that they do not look more deeply at any other comic book characters for the monomythic hero, either American or traditional. They do not even consider that Batman could be the hero of any monomyth, and leave him among the pantheon of other characters. However, Batman fills this role beautifully. Since 1986, the very year in question, he has been the hero of both monomyths. Richard Reynolds describes Batman as embodying “a darker side of the Lone Wolf hero [...], a hero whose motivations and emotions are turned inward against the evils within society, and even the social and psychological roots of crime itself” (Reynolds 18). Whereas Superman deals with exterior threats to Earth, like meteors on a collision course with Metropolis, Batman deals with the very human sources of crime. Grant Morrison writes, “The stories in the Superman strips dealt with politics and injustice on the daylight stage of jobs, media, and the government, but Batman took the fight to the shadows: the grimy derelict warehouses and dive bars where criminal scum plied their trade beyond the reach of the law, but not beyond the range of a batarang or a leathery fist” (Morrison 23). Batman goes where the police will not in order to do the things the police cannot. The traditional monomyth ends with the hero returning to society after venturing to the world of “supernatural wonder” (Campbell 23). By contrast,



the American monomyth ends with the hero withdrawing from society and returning to his original position of isolation.

Writing in 1988, Lang and Trimble lacked the perspective of seeing the post-*Crisis on Infinite Earths* characterization of Superman and Batman develop. In fact, in their article, Lang and Trimble mention Batman only twice, both times in the same paragraph. Interestingly, the first time Batman is mentioned is in a list of other characters created around the same time as Superman and sharing similar plot patterns. Lang and Trimble write:

The list of heroes includes The Lone Ranger, the Shadow, Batman, Doc Savage, the Flash, Green Lantern, Plastic Man, and many more. As a culture, we have outgrown some of these figures and no longer find anything in the details of their own myths that reassure us or instruct us, and yet occasionally, old myths are brushed off and refolded into the needs of modern society. (162)

This list is significant because Lang and Trimble inadvertently establish one of the main ideas in this project: Batman stories share similar plot points to pre-*Crisis on Infinite Earths* Superman stories. In fact, Lang and Trimble themselves argue, “The American monomyth has never, and probably will never completely disappear from superhero comic books. For any comic book superhero, from 1939 to 1980, the formula works” (167). But, Lang and Trimble fail to consider that even superhero comics published after 1980 can portray the American monomythic hero. Their lament at the death of the American monomyth is really a case of Lang and Trimble not finding what they are looking for, because they do not look hard enough in other places for what they lost.

The question this discussion raises is this: Why Batman, specifically? Why not Green Lantern or the Flash? Why not Wonder Woman or Aquaman? What is it about Batman that makes him the best representative of these monomythic traditions? It comes down to a couple of fundamental truths about the Batman character: first, he is an everyman. In the traditional monomyth, the hero is an everyman possessing no special powers at the beginning of the story. The American monomyth does not depend on the hero beginning the story with no special powers, because having superpowers would serve to further isolate the heroic outsider, but in the traditional monomyth, the hero gaining power is symbolic of his coming to understand his place in society. The story of the traditional monomyth is at least partially about the hero receiving special powers and using them to save the world. In the American monomyth, society is threatened by an evil that the normal institutions of law and order cannot overcome; precisely because the hero is not a member of those institutions, he alone is capable of defeating the evil. Batman, unlike Green Lantern or the Flash, has no position in law enforcement. He is neither a police officer, nor a judge, nor an elected official; he has no duty that compels him to get involved when evil threatens Gotham City, he has no jurisdiction to fight crime, but he gets involved because he chooses to. He is an everyman character as in the Campbellian monomyth; though he is wealthy and extensively trained in combat, he has no superpowers. Further, unlike Aquaman who is the king of Atlantis and Wonder Woman who is princess of the Amazons of Themyscira, Batman has no standing in government—his own or a foreign nation's. He has no governmental backing for what he does. He is a human being, as mortal as they come, and yet he faces creatures and threats from the

depths of nightmares and overcomes them through his determination, intelligence, and preparation. This brings him closer to the everyman of the traditional monomyth.

In addition to being the everyman of the traditional monomyth by possessing no superpowers, Batman is also the outsider of the American monomyth, living in stately Wayne Manor, separate from the problems of crime and poverty in Gotham City. He travels into Gotham from outside the city, fights the villain, and returns to Wayne Manor. He is isolated from Gotham by geography as well as by socio-economic status. Bruce Wayne is wealthy—wealthy enough to finance a life-long crusade against crime, and wealthy enough to replace his state of the art equipment as often as it gets broken. Compared with the poverty-stricken areas of Gotham in which Batman operates, he is an outsider simply because he has never experienced that level of want. However, from a storytelling perspective, Bruce Wayne's wealth allows him to compensate for his not having superpowers. He needs high tech equipment because he is an ordinary human being. His everyman status comes from his lack of superpowers. He comes from a place where the great evil that threatens Gotham City does not reach him. Whereas Gotham City is threatened by crime and poverty, Bruce is separated from those threats by both wealth and geography.

### **Understanding Comics**

There are many arguments to be made in support of the claim that comic books are literature, including those in Rocco Versaci's book *This Book Contains Graphic Language* or in Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* and Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art*. Their point of commonality is their belief that comics can be treated as literature as much as any other work of fiction. The comics medium is unique compared

to all other forms of art in how it presents its narrative what Versaci refers to as a “unique poetics” (13). The comics medium, fundamentally, relies on both words and pictures in sequence. Scott McCloud’s definition of the term ‘comics’ reflects this reliance:

“juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (McCloud 9). This definition merits some explanation, and it is important to note that the word ‘comics’ refers to the medium; it is a plural noun that takes a singular verb: ‘comics is,’ not ‘comics are.’ In McCloud’s definition, ‘juxtaposed’ implies that the images in comics are presented side-by-side and are read in the same way. This differentiates comics from film. McCloud notes, “Each successive frame of a movie is projected on exactly the same space—the screen—while each frame of comics must occupy a different space” (7).

‘Pictorial’ suggests some level of resemblance between the image and what the image represents: a drawing of a face represents that person, for example. ‘Deliberate sequence’ is a vital part of the art form of comics. Where the images are placed on a page relative to each other determines how the story is read. In Western comics for example, as in Western languages, pages are read from left to right; however, in Japanese comics, pages are read from right to left. Hilary Chute argues in her article, “Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative,” “The weight placed on sequence here allows McCloud to track a prehistory including pre-Columbian picture manuscripts, the Bayeux tapestry, and ‘The Tortures of St. Erasmus’ (1460), among other seemingly unlikely cultural antecedents” (454). Because Eisner and McCloud focus on sequence in their definitions of comics, McCloud can argue that comics have existed since long before the written word (10). The part of McCloud’s definition about comics being ‘intended to convey

information' is interesting because it seems to include anything with images in sequence as a comic, for example the safety cards in the back of airline seats, which echo Eisner's definition, 'sequential art' (Eisner 1), in that any sequence of images can be classified as comics, but McCloud's definition has an added element of purpose in the concept of sequence. In McCloud's definition, the medium of comics is images deliberately put in a specific order to fulfill a specific purpose.

By the very nature of comics, much of the meaning is conveyed through images, and images are subject to the interpretation of the viewer, which means that what a comic means must, in some ways, be left up to the reader, which makes gaining a critical consensus difficult. On the other hand, in postmodern literature, a clear meaning is also difficult to come by due to the fragmentation of narrative. What a text means is ultimately left up to the reader. In Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros*, are the characters literally turning into animals, or is the playwright using a metaphor in order to make a point?

In addition to the subjectivity of images making critical analysis of comics difficult, the medium of graphic fiction has more in common with film than traditional literature in terms of word and image interacting with the audience. Thus it requires a different set of critical muscles than analyzing a novel does. Literary critics are trained to study words and how words convey meaning. In comics, the art in the panels is as important as the words on the page. As the medium of comics presents meaning both visually and through text, analyzing the art is vital to analyzing a comic holistically. This project will include panels or pages from the primary texts in order to more fully analyze how the creative team—the writer, the penciller, the inker, and the colorist, present their meaning.

In comics, the panel, the basic unit of a text, is, according to McCloud, “a sort of general indicator that time and space is being divided” (99). Functionally, the panel is a single image on a page (See Fig. 1). Moving further out, the exercise of defining the essential terms of the comics medium arrives at the intersection of form and content, form in the sense that the next largest image is a page, the physical or digital page of a comic book (See Fig. 2) and in terms of content, the next largest image is called a splash page. Most of the time, a page contains many panels, but occasionally, a single image takes up the entire page. That image is called a splash page (See Fig. 3). A single comic book in a sequence of other comic books is called an issue, just like a magazine or a journal (See Fig. 4). Many comic books fall into a series or a continuity with multiple issues combining to tell one complete story. That story is referred to as a story arc. Alternatively, a graphic novel is a comic book that tells a complete story that is not divided into issues (See Fig. 5). Many times, all the issues in a story arc are published in volumes (See Fig. 6). These volumes are called “collected editions” if they are published in hardback, and “trade paperbacks” or “trades” if in paperback.

Occasionally, such as with Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns*, a series or miniseries is published in what is called “prestige” format. These prestige format books are still called ‘issues,’ but the book itself is larger, it contains a longer story, and it is printed on higher quality paper. The collection of all the issues published in one series, for example, *Detective Comics*, is called a title; for example, the New 52 *Batman* title. Then there is an artist or a writer’s ‘run’ on a title, which is all of the issues the writer or artist worked on in a particular title, like Scott Snyder’s run on *Detective Comics*. Each title fits into all the other stories about those characters forming a ‘canon’ or ‘continuity.’

The collected continuities of all the characters published by a company like DC or Marvel combine to form that company's 'universe.'

Instead of exploring comics as a juxtaposition of words and pictures in his definition, McCloud devotes a later chapter to how the two interact. It is important to note that McCloud uses the word 'pictures' rather than 'images' in the context of interacting with words because the panels in which words and pictures interact are themselves images (98). McCloud calls the panel "comics' most important icon. These icons we call panels or 'frames' have no fixed or absolute meaning, like the icons of language, science, and communication. Nor is their meaning as fluid and malleable as the sorts of icons we call pictures" (98-99). McCloud argues that "as children, we 'show and tell' interchangeably, words and images combining to transmit a connected series of ideas. The different ways in which words and pictures can combine in comics is virtually unlimited" (152). These interchangeable combinations of words and pictures are how the comics medium conveys ideas. Ultimately, McCloud writes, "In comics at its best, words and pictures are like partners in a dance and each one takes turns leading. When both partners try to lead, the competition can subvert the overall goals" (156). The goal in comics is for words and pictures to each play to their strengths while at the same time negating their weaknesses in order to produce clarity.

### **The Literature**

In 1986—the same year that *Crisis on Infinite Earths* was published—Batman begins to take on the characteristics of the traditional monomythic hero in Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. This monomythic approach to Batman is later presented in Grant Morrison's 1989 graphic novel *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on*

*Serious Earth*. As a result of the events of the 2009 miniseries *Final Crisis*, Dick Grayson takes on the responsibility of being Batman. His time as Batman follows the same pattern of the Hero's Journey that Joseph Campbell describes. In 2011, DC Comics re-launched its entire lineup from issue number one, and during the five-year course of the main *Batman* title, Bruce Wayne is seemingly killed while fighting the Joker in a battle of mythic proportions called *Endgame*. *Endgame* highlights Bruce Wayne's position as the hero of the American monomyth.

In Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, Bruce Wayne functions as the hero of the traditional monomyth. The story of *The Dark Knight Returns* is the story of a man reclaiming his former role in society. Inasmuch as Batman is an outlaw, a vigilante, and a criminal, he is still part of the established order of Gotham City in this timeline. Bruce, by retiring, has failed to do his duty to Gotham City. In each instance, Batman is victorious where the Gotham City Police Department has failed, and he withdraws back to Wayne Manor and his self-imposed isolation. By facing these threats, Batman slowly reclaims his place in Gotham's society, finally fulfilling his role as the hero of the traditional monomyth.

In Grant Morrison's 1989 graphic novel *Batman: Arkham Asylum; A Serious House on Serious Earth*, the connections to the traditional monomyth are the most clear. By journeying to the supernatural world of the Asylum, winning a victory, and returning to dispense gifts to mankind, Batman fulfills the role of the traditional or classical monomyth.

When Dick Grayson operated as Batman, his character arc was that of the classical or traditional monomyth, and it shows that even a Batman other than Bruce



Wayne can function as the hero of the monomyth. Each of the stories about Grayson as Batman serve as elements of Campbell's hero's journey, for example, Dick receiving the call to take on the Batman mantle in *Battle for the Cowl*.

In Scott Snyder's 2015 story arc *Endgame*, a sequel to 2012's *Death of the Family*, part of the New 52 initiative, Bruce, once again in the cape and cowl, functions as the hero in the American monomyth. He starts the story as an outsider, the only one not infected by the Joker's gas attack, and the only one capable of developing an antidote. Both *Endgame* and *Death of the Family* directly reference the mythic nature of Batman and the Joker, but *Endgame* uses that mythic status as part of the narrative. In the story, the Joker wants to transcend death, and he wants Batman to join him in immortality so that they can continue their struggle for eternity. Bruce, on the other hand, wants to live out his allotted days and as Alfred puts it, "smile into the void" (Snyder 148). So in a way, as much as the plot of *Endgame* follows the plot of the American monomyth, Bruce develops as a character to the point that he rejects becoming mythologized so that the people of Gotham can continue to endure the seemingly constant cycle of destruction and rebuilding that Gotham inflicts upon them. As part of being the American monomyth, Batman also functions as Northrop Frye's hero of the 'quest-romance.' Frye writes, "We have spoken of the Messianic hero as a redeemer of society, but in the secular quest-romances more obvious motives and rewards for the quest are more common. Often the dragon guards a horde: the quest for buried treasure has been a central theme of romance since the Siefried cycle to *Nostramo*, and is unlikely to be exhausted yet" (Frye 193). The search for buried treasure aspect of *Endgame* comes into play in the finale when Batman seeks the cure for the Joker's gas attack, a mysterious substance called Dionesium, which

is located in a cave deep below Gotham. *Endgame* is ultimately a quest for the substance that can save Gotham, rather than simply a quest to redeem the city of its sins.

*The Dark Knight Returns* presents Batman as a monomythic character for the very first time. In *Arkham Asylum*, Grant Morrison presents the clearest example of Batman going on the Hero's Journey. During Dick Grayson's time as Batman, he shows that the monomythic aspect of Batman's character is not limited to Bruce Wayne and can apply to anyone who puts on the cape and cowl. And finally, in *Endgame*, Batman fulfills his role as the hero of the American monomyth.

## **Chapter Two: *The Dark Knight Returns***

Frank Miller's 1986 miniseries *The Dark Knight Returns* presents a retired Bruce Wayne trying to reclaim meaning in his life. In the story, Bruce Wayne is the hero of the traditional monomyth. This is the first time that Batman is presented in a mythic or monomythic context. Despite the fact that the story was published at the same time as *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, and had been published for two years before Lang and Trimble wrote their article, Lang and Trimble completely overlook this text in their search for a new monomythic hero in comics. In the story, Bruce is the individual learning, or in this case re-learning, his place in society, just like in the traditional monomyth.

### **Part One: The Call to Action**

In the traditional monomyth, the action starts when the hero receives the call to action. Christopher Vogler, in his book, *The Writer's Journey* writes, "The Call may simply be a stirring within the hero, a messenger from the unconscious, bearing news that it's time for change. These signals sometimes come in the form of dreams, fantasies, or visions" (100). In *The Dark Knight Returns*, the call to action comes in the moment when Bruce leaves after having drinks with Commissioner Gordon, ironically, to celebrate Batman's retirement. Bruce thinks, "As we part, Jim squeezes my shoulder and grins. 'You just need a woman,' he says. ... While in my gut the creature writhes and snarls and tells me what I need..." (12). This is the first mention of a 'creature,' a disembodied voice that manifests in the form of a bat, a subconscious drive that pushes Bruce to be Batman. This angry voice is primal and violent and animalistic, and it preys on Bruce's subconscious and prods him to come out of retirement. In *The Dark Knight Returns*, the creature is this messenger from the unconscious, which is connected in some way to

Bruce being Batman. It “writhes and snarls,” like a caged animal desperately wanting to be free. This creature plays on Bruce’s weakness at specific moments in order to gain its freedom. It has been locked up for ten years, and now it wants to be free. The creature demands release, and nothing Bruce says or does can keep it quiet. After his drink with Gordon, Bruce finds himself unconsciously drawn back to Crime Alley, the place where his parents were killed. This blunder, while seemingly a coincidence, reflects Campbell’s example of the call to action in the fairy tale “The Frog King.” Campbell writes, “Blunders are not the merest chance. They are the results of suppressed desire and conflicts. They are ripples on the surface of life, produced by unsuspected springs. And these may be very deep—as deep as the soul itself. The blunder may amount to the opening of a destiny” (Campbell 42). Bruce, unconsciously, wants to return to being Batman, and the call is the opportunity he needs. At first Bruce is not even aware how badly he wants to be Batman again, and it is only after he tries to refuse the call that he realizes how deep this desire is.

Later in the story, Bruce finds himself unconsciously walking down the stairs to the Batcave, where he is reminded of when he first encountered the creature. This walk down the stairs is another seeming blunder that reveals a suppressed desire to be Batman. Bruce thinks, “I was only six years old when [...] I first saw the cave... ..huge, empty, silent as a church [...]. And now the cobwebs grow and the dust thickens in here as it does in me-- --and he laughs at me, curses me. Calls me a fool. He fills my sleep, he tricks me. Brings me here when the night is long and my will is weak. He struggles relentlessly, hatefully, to be free” (19). This is the creature reminding him of his past life, a time when Bruce was powerful, strong, brave, and feared. Now, he is just an old man

trying to forget who he really is. Bruce's unconscious is the call to action: not just a call to be Batman again, but also a call to reclaim his identity. After Alfred finds Bruce in the Batcave, Alfred mentions that he did not know Bruce had shaved his moustache. This is Bruce revealing that he is unconsciously prepared to accept the call. After Bruce leaves the cave, he tries to ignore the creature's voice, but all his attempts are unsuccessful. Bruce tries to watch television only to find an airing of the Tyrone Power adaptation of *The Mark of Zorro*, the same film Bruce attended with his parents the night they were killed. Switching channels, Bruce comes across reports of the Mutant gang's latest crimes. The memory of his parents' deaths and the state of urban decay in Gotham push Bruce to the breaking point, and he escapes into the grounds of Wayne Manor. As Bruce runs outside, the creature says:

The time has come. You know it in your soul. For I am your soul... You cannot escape me... You are puny, you are small—you are nothing, a hollow shell, a rusty trap that cannot hold me— Smoldering, I burn you—burning you, I flare, hot and bright and fierce and beautiful— You cannot stop me—not with wine or vows or the weight of age (25).

This creature is unstoppable, it is implacable, and it is inescapable. Bruce cannot defeat it, so he has tried to restrain it these last ten years, but now that time is over. Bruce returns inside, still trying to ignore the call, but his hand is forced when he watches a bat crash through his window. It is time for the creature to be unleashed, and it is time for Batman to return. This is the moment when Bruce finally answers the call.

### **Part Two: Refusal of the Call**

In the traditional monomyth, the hero often resists the call to action. There may be

various reasons for his refusal such as prior commitment, a pure lack of interest in adventuring, or ill health. Campbell writes, “Often in actual life, and not infrequently in the myths and popular tales, we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered; for it is always possible to turn the ear to other interests” (Campbell 49). In *The Dark Knight Returns*, there is a reason that Bruce retired from being Batman in the first place. As much as the bat creature inside him wants to be free, Bruce has a legitimate reason for staying retired for so long: Jason Todd, the second Robin. The text does not give the reader any information about Jason, other than a few throwaway lines about “what happened to Jason” (Miller 12) and Alfred asking if Bruce has “forgotten what happened to Jason” (93). The implication is that Jason died while operating as Robin, and Bruce stopped being Batman out of respect for Jason’s memory. Bruce has ‘turned his ear’ to honoring the promise he made for Jason (Campbell 49). Campbell views the hero’s refusal as a negative, an abdication of agency in which the hero “becomes a victim to be saved,” but Vogler has a different understanding (49). Vogler argues that the “halt on the road before the journey has really started serves an important dramatic function of signaling the audience that the adventure is risky” (Vogler 107). For Vogler, refusing the call, at least at first, shows that the hero knowingly accepts the potential dangers inherent in the call, but Campbell argues that refusing the call stagnates the hero’s progress and divides his mind. In *The Dark Knight Returns*, Bruce’s refusal falls more into the Campbellian category rather than Vogler’s. Bruce does not want to return to being Batman, and as a result, his life stagnates into a cloud of alcohol-induced self-pity. In the story, while the creature guides him to the cave, Bruce’s conscious mind understands his actions to be reminding him of the promise he made to Jason. Because Bruce refuses the

call, his mind is at war with itself, one part of it committed to keeping his promise to Jason and the other part determined to answer the call. Bruce says, “[the creature] struggles, relentlessly, hatefully, to be free—I will not let him. I gave my word. For Jason. Never. Never again” (Miller 19). As much as Bruce’s inmost being wants to be Batman again, Bruce remains committed to the promise he made. The interesting aspect of this promise is that it is a good, correct, and appropriate reason for Bruce to no longer be Batman. However, he has received the call, and the call must be answered, promise or no promise.

In the traditional monomyth, the call to adventure supersedes any prior commitment. Campbell writes, “The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit” (Campbell 43). The ‘old patterns’ Campbell refers to can represent the patterns of childhood that must be put aside in order to reach adulthood, but they can also represent the priorities the hero possessed before he received the call. Because Bruce has received the call, answering the call becomes his higher purpose. But Bruce refuses. This refusal of the call to action puts Bruce in conflict with his inner self. Bruce’s devotion to Jason’s memory, while noble and meaningful, is actually holding him back from achieving his true calling. Bruce must become Batman again; otherwise he will remain at war with himself. In this scene, one of the panels shows the interior of the Batcave (See Fig. 7). In the cave, white cloths cover everything except a glass case containing Jason’s Robin costume. This means that every time Bruce enters the cave, the first thing that grabs his eye is a reminder of why he retired in the first place. This suggests that Bruce made a deliberate decision to not cover the case when he covered everything else. This decision to leave the case uncovered suggests that when

Bruce retired, he knew that he would need a conscious reminder of why. The fact that he felt that he would need a reminder in the future suggests that he needed a reminder then, which means that even at the start of his retirement, he felt the call. The irony here is that if Bruce really wanted to ignore the call, he would have ignored the cave as well. The promise that Bruce made to Jason is one of the ‘old ideals’ that Campbell writes about not being broad enough to encompass the hero’s full responsibilities (43). His commitment to Jason is a commitment to one person, while his commitment to Gotham is much larger. It is not that Gotham is more important than Jason’s memory, but Gotham is under a systematic attack that Batman needs to confront. The act of going into the cave, as much as Bruce would try to rationalize it, is the first step in accepting the call. Bruce’s going to the cave is similar to tearing open an old wound. The wound bleeds and it hurts, but it reminds him of the circumstances of the original injury. Simply by being in the cave, Bruce has opened himself up to the possibility of returning as Batman. The call has become too loud to ignore. Bruce, as Campbell describes, “is harassed both day and night, by the divine being that is the image of the living self within the locked labyrinth of [his] own disoriented psyche” (50). Bruce’s mind is at war with itself, being equally compelled to honor his promise to Jason as well as needing to protect Gotham. It is only through submission to the call that Bruce can be free of the creature’s influence. By refusing to heed the call to action, Bruce has trapped himself in a world of despair of his own making. Everything he has done since retiring from being Batman feels meaningless. Campbell describes a person who has refused the call as one whose “flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless—even though, like King Minos, he may through titanic effort succeed in building an empire of renown.



Whatever house he builds, it will be a house of death: a labyrinth of cyclopean walls to hide from him his Minotaur” (49). Bruce feels that his life is without meaning, hence his desire for a “good death” (Miller 13), when in actuality he is denying the very thing that will give his life meaning.

### **Part Three: Supernatural Aid**

Once Bruce surrenders to the call to action, the creature ceases to be a thorn in his side, and becomes an aide. Campbell describes the supernatural aid as a being that gives the hero some sort of object like an amulet or a talisman that allows the hero to overcome his trials. Campbell writes, “In fairy lore, it may be some little fellow of the wood, some wizard, some hermit, shepherd or smith, who appears, to supply the amulets and advice that the hero will require” (Campbell 59). Vogler refers to this stage of the Hero’s Journey as the ‘meeting with the mentor,’ and he describes it as “the stage of the Hero’s Journey in which the hero gains the supplies, knowledge, and confidence needed to overcome fear and commence the adventures” (117). In *The Dark Knight Returns*, the supernatural aid or meeting with the mentor is a bit different because the mentor is not a human being offering a physical object like an amulet, but is instead the bat creature offering renewed vitality and endurance. Once Bruce is back on the street operating as Batman, the bat creature gives the aging Bruce the vitality he possessed in his prime. Bruce says, “This should be agony. I should be a mass of aching muscle—broken, spent, unable to move. And, were I an older man, I surely would...but I’m a man of thirty – of twenty again. The rain on my chest is a baptism—I’m born again” (Miller 34). This image is the first full splash page in the story, and the image is that of Batman, returned, larger than life, swinging in on a Bat-rope from off-panel, reclaiming his place in society

(See Fig. 8). Because Bruce has accepted his role as Batman, the bat creature inside him grants him unnatural endurance and strength for a man his age. Because Bruce has accepted the call to action, the bat creature gives him the strength necessary to fulfill his role. Bruce frequently refers to how much more difficult things have gotten since the last time he was Batman; for example, he needs to use his legs to climb a rope (37), but because he has surrendered to the bat creature's call to action, he can still keep up even with criminals half his age. The bat creature's gifts go beyond physical abilities. Batman thinks, "In ten years I've never felt so calm, so right" (51). The bat creature grants him peace of mind even as he runs across a cable stretched between the two highest points in Gotham (51). Bruce has felt out of place ever since he retired as Batman, but now that he has returned, he feels right; he feels that he has finally come back to his proper place. His psyche, "disoriented" because of his initial refusal of the call, has become unified once more (Campbell 50). Because Bruce had at first refused the call to action, his mind was at war with itself. Bruce recognized the call to adventure for what it was and knew the correct response, but instead of fulfilling the duty that he knew he had, Bruce flees from it. This is the gift that the bat creature grants Bruce: the ability to be Batman again. And while he still experiences pain and he still has the ailments of age (Miller 51), he can overcome these physical limitations and defeat criminals much younger and stronger than he is.

#### **Part Four: Crossing the First Threshold**

In the monomyth, when the hero accepts the call to adventure and accepts the supernatural aid, he must cross the threshold into the supernatural world. Describing this crossing, Vogler writes, "The call has been heard, doubts and fears have been allayed,

and all due preparations have been made. But the real movement, the most critical action of Act One, still remains. Crossing the First Threshold is an act of will in which the hero commits wholeheartedly to the adventure” (127). Before the hero can cross, he must defeat the threshold guardian. The guardian of the first threshold defines the barriers between the ordinary world and the supernatural world. Further, Campbell writes, “Such custodians bound the world in the four directions—also up and down—standing for the limits of the hero’s present sphere, or life horizon. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown and danger” (Campbell 64). Functioning as Bruce’s threshold guardian once he accepts the call is a series of street criminals: bank robbers, muggers, pimps, and so on. These are the same type of criminals that Bruce faced when he first started out as Batman. This is significant because through the story, Bruce relives the progression of his career: first he battles street criminals, then he battles Two-Face, then Bruce battles the organized Mutant gang, then he battles his nemesis, the Joker, and finally, he battles the greatest threat he could ever face, Superman, or as the President says, “God [...] or the next best thing” (119). These street criminals are people the police could easily apprehend without Batman’s aid; they establish the “boundaries” that Campbell describes, except the criminals show the boundaries of modern criminality, the bottom rung of adversaries Batman will face rather than the boundaries of the ordinary world. Further, Vogler writes that the threshold guardians are “part of the training of every hero,” and in *The Dark Knight Returns*, the street criminals provide an opportunity for Bruce to reclaim his abilities as Batman (129). When he was in his prime, he would have been able to defeat these types of criminals almost without effort. From a practical storytelling perspective, Miller has to show that Bruce is physically still able to perform

as Batman. Given Bruce's age and the strains his career has placed on his body, it would not matter how willing he was to return to crime fighting if his body was not able to keep up. Thus the street criminals show him that even though he has been retired for a decade, he can still fight criminals half his age. Further, the street criminals Bruce faces when he returns as Batman show him that being Batman is still necessary, important, and possible. It is necessary because crime is still rampant; at the beginning of the story, Bruce finds himself where his parents died, and he despairs at how little things have changed (13). It is important because these criminals are preying on the innocent, and good people need help. And it is possible because these criminals act as a test to see if it is in fact possible for Bruce Wayne, as aged as he is, to operate as Batman. These street criminals represent the guardian of the first threshold. They "raise the banner of fear and doubt, questioning the hero's very worthiness to be in the game" (Vogler 111). Their role in the story is to determine whether or not Bruce still has what it takes to physically be Batman again. By fighting and defeating these street criminals, Bruce regains his confidence in his own abilities, and because he has received confidence from the bat creature, he can endure and withstand any challenges that oppose him in the future. Campbell writes that the supernatural aid, embodied in *The Dark Knight Returns* as the help from the bat creature, "represents the benign, protecting power of destiny. [...] Having responded to his own call, and continuing to follow courageously as the consequences unfold, the hero finds all the forces of the unconscious at his side" (Campbell 59). This confidence is not a once-and-for-all realization, however. Throughout the story, Bruce questions whether or not he is capable of overcoming the threats he is faced with. He still experiences the infirmities that come from being middle aged, but his confidence and the supernatural aid of the bat

creature allow him to stand firm in the face of his challenges. In the story, as injured as Bruce gets, he never retreats and never turns away from a fight. His confidence has been restored through confrontation with the forces that seek to oppose him.

### **Part Five: The Road of Trials**

In the monomyth, after the hero enters the world of supernatural wonder, he faces a series of trials. Campbell writes, “Once having traversed the threshold, the hero [...] must survive a succession of trials. This is a favorite phase of the myth-adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals” (Campbell 81). These trials are intended to prepare the hero for his ordeal. Vogler writes, “The most important function of this period of adjustment to the Special World is testing. Storytellers use this phase to test the hero, putting her through a series of trials and challenges that are meant to prepare her for greater ordeals ahead” (136). In *The Dark Knight Returns*, the trials that Batman faces not only include the street criminals, Two-Face, the Mutant Leader, the Joker, and Superman, but also the antagonism of the police and the media’s bias. Despite the fact that Batman is fighting criminals and helping to maintain order in Gotham, the police believe him to be a criminal himself, and the media paints him as a menace. The police, represented by Ellen Yindel, Jim Gordon’s replacement as Police Commissioner midway through the story, are aligned against Batman and try to apprehend him multiple times. Yindel’s first official act as Commissioner is to issue an arrest warrant for Batman on the charges of “breaking and entering, assault and battery, [and] creating a public menace” (116). At this point, the conflict between Batman and the police becomes openly hostile. During Batman’s first night back, while he is chasing a group of bank robbers working for Two-Face, he crosses paths with a rookie police officer and his veteran

partner. After Bruce subdues the bank robbers, the rookie tries to arrest him, but Batman tells the veteran to let Gordon know that Batman wants to speak with him. This amicable relationship between Batman and the police seems to be based largely upon Jim Gordon's position as Commissioner. Once Gordon retires, the relationship sours, and Batman is forced to fight police officers that get in his way. Whereas before, Bruce would go out of his way to avoid the police, once the police stand against him, he fights back and escapes every time.

### **Part Six: Atonement with the Father**

When the hero reaches the lowest point, or nadir, of his journey through the Special World, he comes face to face with his father, and the two are brought back together. In Campbell, this symbolizes "recognition by the father-creator" (Campbell, 211). In *The Dark Knight Returns*, Bruce does not confront his literal father, Thomas Wayne, but he does confront the bat creature that inspired him to become Batman, in a sense, Batman's creator. When Bruce returns to the Batcave from fighting the mutant leader, he is beaten, broken, and severely injured. He has tried to fight the Mutant Leader on the Mutant Leader's terms, matching savagery for savagery, and he has failed so spectacularly that an untrained girl, Carrie Kelley, has to rescue Bruce and return him to the Batcave. Once in the cave, Bruce descends beyond the space he uses for his headquarters and into the unmapped parts of the cave. There, he confronts the bat creature, and demands more of the bat creature's aid in defeating the Mutant Leader. This descent is what Vogler calls 'the approach to the inmost cave,' "where soon [the hero] will encounter supreme wonder[.] It's time to make final preparations for the central ordeal of the adventure" (Vogler 143). In the depths of the cave, Bruce thinks:

I'm not finished yet. ...And you're not finished with me. Then... something shuffles, out of sight... something sucks the stale air... and hisses. Gliding with ancient grace... eyes gleaming, untouched by love or joy or sorrow... Breath hot with the taste of fallen foes...the stench of dead things, damned things. Surely the fiercest survivor, the purest warrior... glaring, hating... claiming me as his own. (87-88)

This is the moment when Bruce changes; this is his moment of supreme wonder. He has a moment of epiphany wherein he reconciles the bat creature yearning for freedom with the old, broken man. After this, Bruce no longer addresses the weaknesses of age. Bruce acknowledges that he has a further role to play in events, and he demands that the bat creature aid him in his efforts. After this encounter, Bruce, while still injured, is able to easily out think the Mutant Leader and fight him strategically. Bruce's experience in the depths of the cave reconciles the two disparate parts of himself, Bruce Wayne and Batman. This is an embodiment of what Campbell referred to as the atonement with the father. The father figure in *The Dark Knight Returns* is the bat creature. It was the source of Bruce's primal fear that led to the creation of his alter ego. After this encounter, Bruce never interacts with the bat creature again; it has joined with him, and he has fully returned to operation as Batman. When Batman faces the Mutant Leader again, it is on Bruce's terms, and Bruce fights strategically, striking blows that nullify the Mutant Leader's superior strength, and outsmarting him by choosing the terrain, a muddy pit (100-01). Instead of trying to fight the way he used to when he was in his prime, Bruce fights in such a way that takes advantage of his greater experience while erasing the impediments of age. Because he reconciles the two warring parts of himself, the bat

creature and the old man, he can take full advantage of both sides instead of relying on one or the other.

### **Part Seven: Apotheosis**

In the traditional monomyth, during the final confrontation, the hero reaches a point of realization called apotheosis. In Campbell's writing, he describes the moment of apotheosis as "the moment when the wall of Paradise is dissolved, the divine form found, and wisdom regained" (Campbell 132). The apotheosis is the point of decisive victory, which symbolizes the moment at which the hero comes to a full realization of his place in the world. Vogler calls this moment 'the Ordeal,' writing, "Now the hero stands in the deepest chamber of the Inmost Cave, facing the greatest challenge and the most fearsome opponent yet. [...] It is the mainspring of the heroic form and the key to its magic power. [...] The simple secret of the Ordeal is this: Heroes must die so that they can be reborn" (155). In *The Dark Knight Returns*, Bruce realizes that to continue his war on crime, he must return to the shadows instead of creating a public spectacle. Isaac Cates writes in his article, "On the Literary Use of Superheroes; or, Batman and Superman: Fistfight in Heaven," "After a faraway nuclear explosion blacks out the power in Gotham, [Batman] recruits impressionable gang members into a vigilante militia and seizes control of the city; the federal government then sends Superman to remove him from power in a heavily foreshadowed final confrontation" (Cates 834). Lang and Trimble write that as the American monomythic hero, "Superman rises above the law," but in *The Dark Knight Returns*, Superman is a government stooge, doing the government's dirty work overseas without question (160). After Bruce restores order to Gotham, Oliver Queen, the former Green Arrow, visits Wayne Manor to speak to Bruce. They discuss Bruce's recent



actions, and Oliver is critical of the attention Bruce has brought to himself. Oliver says, “You’ve always had it wrong, Bruce... ..giving them such a big target. Sure, you play it mysterious—but it’s a loud kind of mysterious, man. Especially lately. You got to learn to make [them] work for you” (185). This conversation drives Bruce’s plan during the climax of the story. Bruce, through his conversation with Oliver, realizes that in order to continue operating as Batman, to spread the boon, he must return to the shadows in a convincing way. Because Batman has stopped Gotham from falling into chaos, and because the federal government was unable to do the same in other cities, the President sends Superman, who has only just recovered from radiation poisoning from the explosion, to apprehend Batman. Clark tells the President “I’m afraid he’ll never let me take him in alive” (185), and the stage is set. Bruce will refuse to compromise, and Clark will be forced to kill him if he wants Bruce to fall in line. In order to win, Bruce decides, based on his conversation with Oliver, to fake his own death using a special drug that mimics the symptoms of a heart attack and return to the shadows, returning to a quiet kind of mysterious. Oliver presents an alternative to Bruce’s loud and brash conflict with criminals. Oliver and Bruce disagree on the methods to use in the war on crime. Oliver favors working underground, not drawing attention to himself. Oliver says that after he escaped, “they’ve been covering for me. Just like they covered up my escape. Sure, they’d love to frost me... ..long as they can do it without admitting I exist. But you, Bruce-- --man, they have to kill you” (186). Oliver represents a way for Bruce to continue to operate as Batman without forcing the government’s and Superman’s hand. If he fakes his death, then Batman can continue to fight crime, and the government will not come after him. At the very end of the story, Clark attends Bruce’s funeral, and he hears

the drug wear off, but instead of resuming their fight, Clark winks at Robin and allows Bruce to continue to operate as Batman. Bruce says, “My timing wasn’t quite precise enough. Clark heard. That was the first thing Robin told me-- --when she dug me up. Not that it mattered. He’d have guessed sooner or later. He knows how good I am with chemicals. I was counting on what Oliver said, and with a wink-- --Clark proved Oliver right. He’ll leave me alone, now. In return I’ll stay quiet” (198-99). Because Bruce listened to Oliver, he can continue to operate as Batman without threat of government interference, which means that he can still fight his war on crime on his terms, sharing the boon of Batman’s presence.

### **Part Eight: The Ultimate Boon**

After the hero reaches the point of apotheosis, he receives the gift that he needs to take back to society. Campbell writes, “What the hero seeks through his intercourse with [the gods and goddesses] is therefore not finally themselves, but their grace, i.e. the power of their sustaining substance” (Campbell 155). According to Campbell, the gods give the hero the substance for eternal life. In *The Dark Knight Returns*, the gift bestowed to Bruce on behalf of the people of Gotham is Bruce’s continued presence as Batman, and Bruce receives the gift of his continued presence as Batman from, ironically, Superman. The president of the United States refers to Superman as “God [...] or the next best thing” (Miller 119). This connection between Superman and a higher power is significant because when Superman hears Bruce’s heartbeat through the ground at Bruce’s funeral, he has the opportunity to continue their fight, but he does not, because he understands what Bruce is trying to do. He realizes that the only way both of them could walk away is if Batman seemed to have died. This is the gift that Superman bestows: he

plays along with Bruce's plan to let Bruce remain active. In the classical monomyth, the gods give the hero the gift that can heal the land, like in the story of the Fisher King from the Arthurian legend. The gift in the Fisher King story is the Holy Grail, which heals the Fisher King's land as well as his injury. Vogler writes, "With the crisis of the ordeal passed, heroes now experience the consequences of surviving death. With the dragon that dwelt in the Inmost Cave slain or vanquished, they seize the sword of victory and lay claim to their Reward" (175). At the beginning of the story, Bruce wants to die because he feels that he has nothing to live for, but at the end of the story, he has renewed purpose. The world is growing more and more chaotic, and Batman is necessary to maintain order. More than anything, Bruce wants to be Batman, but his self-denial of that fact is what leads him to search for a good death. At the end of the story, Bruce has accepted that his presence as Batman is necessary to keep criminals afraid so that Gotham does not descend into chaos. After Bruce has his conversation with Oliver, not even the mass panic caused by the seeming impending nuclear Armageddon or a fight with Superman are able to stop him from operating as Batman. Bruce organizes the Sons of Batman into an army with which he imposes law and order during the chaos, and thus prevents Gotham from falling into complete anarchy like the rest of the country (186). Bruce thinks, "Maybe Oliver was right... all along... ..crazy as it sounds... ..You were ancient...nothing could kill you... ..but the war... ..it did not begin then... [...]

Somewhere in the endless night...like a bellow from a wounded bear... ..the answer comes... ..in one hour...at midnight... ..a grand death...this one you won't believe, Clark. My best trick" (Miller 187). Bruce has learned that as much as the world is the same as it was when he was in his prime, with criminals running around Gotham and the

police being unable to stop them, it has also drastically changed. Batman is still needed, but not as a headline grabbing figure garnering media attention and public debate.

Batman is more effective in this new world from the shadows, silent and invisible.

### **Part Nine: Crossing of the Return Threshold**

In the classical monomyth, before the hero can return to the ordinary world he must come to understand that the two worlds are one. Campbell writes, “The hero adventures out of the land we know into darkness; there accomplishes his adventure, or again is simply lost to us, imprisoned, or in danger; and his return is described as a coming back out of that yonder zone. Nevertheless, [...] the two kingdoms are actually one. The realm of the gods is a forgotten dimension of the world we know” (188).

Bruce’s realization of this fact, that what he wants most is to be Batman again, and that the worlds of ‘Bruce Wayne’ and ‘Batman’ are not separate at all, first occurs in the opening scene of the story when Bruce says that he is looking for “a good death” (Miller 12), and continues when the bat creature confronts Bruce in Wayne Manor. Bruce looks for a good death because he feels that a good life is out of his reach after retiring from being Batman. The bat creature exists in order to lead Bruce into awareness that becoming Batman again not only is what he really wants if he was brutally honest with himself, but also that being Batman will restore the meaning his life has lost. Campbell writes further, “the exploration of that dimension, either willingly or unwillingly, is the whole sense of the deed of the hero. The values and distinctions that in normal life seem important disappear with the terrifying assimilation of the self into what formerly was only otherness” (188). The prospect of returning as Batman is at first terrifying to Bruce. It literally keeps him up at night and robs him of his peace of mind until he finally gives

in; once he accepts the call, he realizes that far from being terrifying, being Batman is what he has felt his life has been missing. At the very end of the story, after Bruce has faked his death, he gathers the Sons of Batman, together with Oliver and Carrie, in the Batcave and begins to train them to continue his war from the shadows. As Bruce says, “We have years—as many as we need... Years—to train and study and plan... Here, in the endless cave, far past the burnt remains of a crimefighter whose time has passed... It begins here—an army—to bring sense to a world plagued by worse than thieves and murderers... This will be a good life... ...good enough” (Miller 199). By ‘killing’ Bruce Wayne, Bruce has reconciled the two seemingly separate parts of himself, only to find that they were not separate at all, just different aspects of one man. Instead of pretending to be Bruce Wayne, as he has for the last decade, Bruce has embraced the fact that he is and wants to be Batman. Frank Miller’s presentation of Batman as a mythic character established the precedent that other writers have followed.

### **Chapter Three: *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth***

Three years after *The Dark Knight Returns* was published, in Grant Morrison's 1989 graphic novel, *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*, Batman fills the role of the hero of the traditional monomyth most clearly. Contrary to Lang and Trimble's position that "Superman is the purest example of the twentieth-century American monomythic superhero," Morrison followed the example set by Frank Miller, and engaged with the monomythic aspects of Batman's character more directly (160). The plot follows the Hero's Journey described in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* bringing Batman face to face with the darkest aspects of himself and forcing him to question his place in society.

#### **Part One: The Call to Action**

The movement of the plot in the traditional monomyth begins with the hero's call to action. This is the impetus for the hero to leave the ordinary world and enter the world of supernatural wonder. In *Arkham Asylum*, the call to action is a literal phone call from the Joker inviting Batman into the Asylum. In the monomyth, the term "supernatural wonder" is not necessarily literal. A hero need not literally encounter ghosts and goblins to be in a world of supernatural wonder; the point of the Hero's Journey is that the hero leaves the world he is familiar with and enters a world previously unknown to him. In fact, Vogler simply calls the new world "the Special World" as opposed to the Ordinary World (10). "At heart," Vogler continues, "despite its infinite variety, the hero's story is always a journey. A hero leaves her comfortable, ordinary surroundings to venture into a challenging, unfamiliar world. It may be an outward journey to an actual place: a labyrinth, forest, or cave, a strange city or country, a new locale that becomes the arena

for her conflict with antagonistic, challenging forces” (7). In *Arkham Asylum*, the Asylum is the strange, unfamiliar world to which Batman travels. It is a world populated with figures grotesque like Clayface, animalistic like Killer Croc, powerful like Maxie Zeus, and fearsome like Scarecrow. Campbell writes, “Whether small or great, and no matter what the stage or grade in life, the call rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration—a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth” (Campbell 43). An example of this call to action would be “Theseus, when he arrived in his father’s city, Athens, and heard the horrible history of the Minotaur” (48). In the Theseus myth, the hero hears about a problem, and decides to get involved in order to stop it. Similarly, in *Arkham Asylum*, Batman hears about the riot and decides to get involved. During the Joker’s call, he threatens one of his hostages and taunts Batman by saying “We want you in here with us. In the madhouse. Where you belong” (Morrison 16). Batman’s conversation with Gordon after the phone call expresses Batman’s fear that the Joker is right, but Batman’s duty to protect the innocent, and his desire to finally confront the Joker’s taunt, compel him to enter Arkham and face his own insanity.

### **Part Two: Crossing the First Threshold**

Before the hero can enter the world of supernatural wonder, he must first face the Threshold Guardian. According to Campbell, the threshold guardian has two aspects: “the protective and the destructive” (Campbell 67). Campbell writes, “One had better not challenge the watcher of the established bounds. And yet—it is only by advancing beyond those bounds, provoking the other, destructive aspect of the same power, that the individual passes, either alive or in death, into a new zone of experience” (67). In *Arkham*

*Asylum*, the guardian of the threshold of the Asylum is the Joker. The Joker possesses the ability to kill Batman, if he chooses. This is the destructive aspect of the threshold guardian. The Joker's threat of executing hostages protects the inmates from anyone but Batman entering. Northrop Frye writes, "A quest involving conflict assumes two main characters, a protagonist or hero, and an antagonist or enemy" (Frye 187). In this context, the Joker is the antagonist; his actions directly oppose the hero, Batman. However, in another sense, the Joker is a representative of the actual antagonist, insanity. There is no direct physical confrontation between Batman and the Joker. At first, the conflict in the story seems to be between Batman, representing sanity, and the Joker, representing insanity, but as Batman wanders through the Asylum, he is forced to confront his own insanity and the insanity of everyone outside. The Joker is the ideal threshold guardian at this point in the story because he represents the limits of Batman's experience with insanity. The Joker stands at the entrance to the special world, and only by passing him can Batman begin his journey in earnest. In the monomyth, the world beyond the threshold guardian "is darkness, the unknown, and danger; just as beyond the parental watch is danger to the infant and beyond the protection of his society danger to the member of the tribe," and in the same way, beyond the Joker is the unknown, mysterious, and dangerous world of the Asylum (Campbell 64). In *Arkham Asylum*, this realm of "darkness, the unknown and danger" is created and conveyed through the art by Dave McKean. Paul A. Crutcher, in his article, "Complexity in the Comic and Graphic Novel Medium" writes, "The psychological warfare occurring in Arkham Asylum (between and within the characters) draws the reader into a rather inverted space, one McKean constructs partly by contrasting the world outside the asylum in rough and uncolored



pencils and inks, while the world inside is rich and textured (making the pseudo-reality or hyper-psychology of the asylum more “real” than the stark reality of the world outside it)” (Crutcher 62). At the beginning of the story, the Joker is Batman’s only reference point for madness, and Batman places him in the role of the other. Batman has an objective understanding of insanity: there is himself on one side, and there is the Joker on the other. From Batman’s perspective at the beginning of the story, two are clearly divided. After Batman returns from his journey through the Asylum, he possesses a different understanding of the nature of madness. In the story, the Joker forces Batman to endure a word association test (Morrison 41-42) and a Rorschach test (36). Before Batman can pass through the Asylum, he must appease the threshold guardian by playing his games. The Joker prepares Batman to enter the Asylum by forcing him to face his own psychological scars stemming from the deaths of his parents. By forcing Batman to face these insecurities, the Joker prepares Batman to receive the lesson that he will learn. If Batman had been confronted with the idea that sanity and insanity are intimately connected right from the start, then he would have rejected it immediately and not grown as a person. Instead, the Joker makes Batman more receptive to the Asylum’s lesson. The threshold guardian foreshadows the deconstruction of dualities that occurs at the moment of apotheosis. Campbell describes the threshold guardian as possessing two different aspects, “protective” and “destructive” (67). The Joker protects the inmates of the Asylum from being assaulted by the police, and he has the power to destroy Batman once he has crossed the threshold.

### **Part Three: The Road of Trials**

Once the hero has received the supernatural aid, has passed the threshold guardian and passed into the world of the unknown, he endures tests, meets allies, and faces enemies ultimately leading to his final confrontation with the great evil. These trials get more difficult as the hero progresses toward the great evil. Campbell writes, "Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials" (Campbell 81). In *Arkham Asylum*, Batman faces a series of criminals from his rogues' gallery: Clayface, (59-60), Scarecrow (63), Mad Hatter (65-66), and Maxie Zeus (71-74) on his way through the Asylum. Each of these villains is a trial that Batman must face. Batman must defeat all of them in order to reach the end of his journey. Each villain Batman faces tears away a bit more of his sanity because Batman is forced to recognize that, objectively, a man who dresses up like a bat to fight criminals seems just as insane as Maxie Zeus believing himself to be an incarnation of a Greek god, which both highlights the maddening influence of the Asylum, because not even Batman is immune, and puts Batman on an even playing field when he faces Cavendish, because Batman ultimately realizes that he is as insane as the prisoners in the Asylum. Prior to facing these trials, Batman is too strongly attached to the idea of the separation of sane and insane. These trials show Batman that, in the Asylum, sanity is not an asset, but rather an impediment to his goal. Through his trials, Batman learns that he must play by the Asylum's rules, and in the Asylum, the insane have the advantage. Just as the hero endures a transformation while in the world of supernatural wonder, Batman must give in to his own insanity in order to defeat Cavendish. The trials serve to prepare and purify Batman for his final confrontation with Cavendish. Because Batman faces and defeats these villains, he is able

to embrace his own insanity and can then move on to confront the riot's instigator, Cavendish.

#### **Part Four: Death and Rebirth**

In the traditional monomyth, the hero is transformed before facing the great threat. This transformation is the most difficult trial the hero faces before he confronts the great evil, and generally involves death and rebirth of some kind. Once the hero is transformed, he is able to defeat the great evil. In *The Writer's Journey*, Christopher Vogler writes, "Heroes don't just visit death and come home. They return changed, transformed. No one can go through an experience at the edge of death without being changed in some way" (156). In *Arkham Asylum*, Batman's confrontation with Killer Croc functions as this transformation. Batman's battle with Croc propels them both through the Asylum, culminating in Croc throwing Batman out of a window. Batman is able to save himself from falling to his death, and he climbs to the roof of the Asylum where he discovers, rather appropriately, a statue of St. Michael slaying the Dragon with a spear (See Fig. 9). As lightning flashes overhead, Batman is illuminated at the foot of the statue almost as a supplicant before the statue of his god while the text from Amadeus' journal reads, "And I cannot even pray." This quasi-religious moment in the story connects Batman fighting Croc to St. Michael slaying the Dragon, giving the entire fight a mythic scale. In Morrison's notes, he refers to the spear as the weapon of rationality (170). Batman takes the spear, jumps through a skylight, cape spread out behind him like the wings of an avenging angel, and recommences his fight with Croc (See Fig. 10). During the second stage of the battle, Croc is able to wound Batman in the side with the spear even as Batman pins him to a wall, symbolizing that in the Asylum,

Batman's greatest weapon, his rationality, can become the very thing that does him the most harm (See Fig. 11). In a note on his original script for the series, Morrison explains the mythic connections to this scene:

Killer Croc stands in for the Old Dragon of Revelations. The Dragon can be seen to represent primal chaos, the R complex lizard brain. The spear, the weapon of the rational intellect, is used to conquer the brute appetites of nature and man. St. Michael thus bound the dragon in Hell, just as Croc is bound in the cellars of Arkham. In Qabalistic numerology, Christ = Satan = Messiah, which is why Croc appears here in crucifixion pose, taking the place of Christ on this blasphemous cross. (170)

As Croc represents 'primal chaos,' Batman represents order, and he uses reason as his weapon, but his weapon breaks and impales both him and Croc. Northrop Frye describes a similar moment as "the *pathos*, or death, often the death of hero and monster" (192). This is symbolic of the fact that Batman's reliance on rationality is a hindrance in the Asylum, where the normal laws of rationalism and order break down. Croc wounding Batman parallels the wound Christ received on the cross, and it also represents Batman participating in what Frye calls "the point of ritual death" (Frye 179) (See Fig. 11). The hero suffers a grievous injury and is seemingly killed, only to come back possessing some secret wisdom. It is only after being killed that Batman can be transformed in order to face the great evil. In order to resurrect, Batman must first die. Northrop Frye writes, "In the St. George plays the hero dies in his dragon-fight and is brought to life by a doctor, and the same symbolism runs through all the dying-god myths" (192). This symbolic death wound serves, first, to implant a necessity for Batman to achieve the final

victory. His wound is potentially life threatening unless he makes it out of the Asylum and receives medical attention. This propels him with an even greater urgency toward the final confrontation. In order for Batman to receive medical attention, he must escape the Asylum, but the only way he can escape the Asylum is if he finishes his journey. He must go forward to return to where he began. Second, the wound weakens Batman's ability to do battle physically with the great threat, putting him at a disadvantage during the final confrontation and forces him to rely on his newfound understanding of the nature of insanity rather than his physical strength during the final confrontation. Instead of fighting the great evil on purely physical terms, Batman must use the knowledge that sanity and insanity are not as easily distinguished as he originally believed. However, his weakness makes it necessary that someone else defeats the great evil. Because Batman is incapable of defeating the great evil on his own because of his wound, someone else must save him. While Batman is fighting Killer Croc, in the parallel story of Amadeus Arkham, Morrison layers Amadeus' descent into madness on top of the images of Batman fighting Croc (77-85). Morrison writes, "Yet am I not the hero, the Man of Destiny? Have I not confronted the Great Dragon? Where then is my grail? My treasure horde? My final reward?" (Morrison 85). As Amadeus loses his mind in the flashback, and is reborn into his new life of insanity, Batman is grievously injured and finally arrives at the final confrontation.

### **Part Five: Apotheosis**

In the traditional monomyth, the hero reaches a point of realization called apotheosis. Campbell writes that apotheosis is a moment of reconciliation of dualities, specifically the duality of male and female. He claims, "The kabbalistic teachings of the

medieval Jews, as well as the Gnostic Christian writings of the second century, represent the Word Made Flesh as androgynous—which was indeed the state of Adam as he was created, before the female aspect, Eve, was removed into another form” (Campbell 131). Once Batman reaches the secret room inside the Asylum, he discovers that Dr. Cavendish has kidnapped Dr. Adams and is the instigator of the plot and thus the great evil of the story. Cavendish, wearing Elizabeth Arkham’s wedding dress, symbolically becoming the androgynous man, and wielding Amadeus’ razor, prompts Batman to read Amadeus’ journal in order for Batman to fully understand Cavendish’s motivations (Morrison 86). After reading about Amadeus murdering his mother and his obsession with binding the bat creature that tormented her, Batman struggles with Cavendish in order to save Dr. Adams. Reading Amadeus’ journal has given Batman the weapon with which Cavendish can be defeated: the knowledge that sanity and insanity are intimately connected. Interestingly, Northrop Frye notes that after St. George is killed during his battle with the dragon, he “is brought to life by a doctor” (192). The question, then, is: does Dr. Cavendish bring Batman back to life, and if so, in what way? The answer is that Cavendish gives Batman the ultimate boon, the knowledge of the connection between sanity and insanity. This does not restore Batman’s body, but it does alleviate Batman’s fear from the beginning of the story, when Batman wondered whether or not he belonged in the Asylum. However, Batman is at first unable to use this weapon, to turn insanity upon the insane. When Cavendish accuses Batman of being the bat creature that tormented Amadeus’ mother, Batman meekly protests that he is simply a man (91). While Batman has gained the wisdom required to win, and thus has received the ultimate boon, he still insists on trying to reason with Cavendish. Even though Batman has learned

that the only way to defeat Cavendish is to engage with him on Cavendish's level of insanity, Batman tries to cling to a semblance of sanity, and as a result of Batman's unwillingness, as well as the wound Batman sustained from Killer Croc, Cavendish is able to gain the upper hand. Batman's apparent defeat stems from Batman being unwilling to embrace his own insanity. As much as Batman might acknowledge the irrationality of dressing as an animal and fighting crime, he still understands it as being necessary. This mirrors the part of the journal immediately after Amadeus discovers his wife and daughter's bodies where Amadeus writes, "slowly, methodically, I put on my mother's wedding dress, and I kneel down in that nursery abattoir. It all seems perfectly rational; [...] perfectly, perfectly rational" (57). Batman clings to his rationality, despite knowing that it is not enough to help him defeat Cavendish. Because Batman cannot defeat Cavendish on his own, someone else must rescue him.

The moment of apotheosis in the monomyth is a moment where seeming dualities are deconstructed. In the climax of *Arkham Asylum*, there are several dualities being deconstructed: sane and insane, male and female, and rescuer and hostage. On the surface Batman goes to the Asylum in order to free the hostages, but what he learns in the Asylum is that the people outside the Asylum are the true hostages, hostages to their own sanity. Batman represents the duality of sane and insane, while Cavendish represents the duality of male and female, and Dr. Adams represents the duality of rescuer and hostage. The reconciliation of these dualities, especially the duality of sane and insane, is the apotheosis of *Arkham Asylum*, and the reconciliation gives Batman the wisdom and the experience necessary to finally escape the Asylum. In the deconstruction of sane and insane, Batman tries to reason with Cavendish by saying, "You're sick. You need help"

(97). But Cavendish rebuts, “I’m sick? Have you looked in a mirror lately? *Have you?*”

(97). Batman believes himself to be sane, but from an objective standpoint, Batman seems just as delusional as Cavendish. In the deconstruction of male and female, Dr. Cavendish takes on the role of the female by wearing the wedding dress. During the fight with Cavendish, Batman, the master of martial arts is overcome, and calls for help from Dr. Adams. Dr. Adams takes the razor that Batman had knocked away from Cavendish and uses it to cut Cavendish’s throat. Adams, who Batman had been trying to rescue, ends up rescuing Batman. In this sense, she is both the rescuer as well as the one who is rescued. It is important to note that despite Batman not being the one to dispatch Cavendish, Batman still wins a decisive victory, but it is a less literal sort of victory. Batman does not conquer a person, but because Batman conquers his incorrect understanding of sanity, he is able to move forward in his journey through the Asylum.

### **Part Six: The Ultimate Boon**

The ultimate boon in *Arkham Asylum* is the knowledge that there is a deeper connection between sanity and insanity than at first is readily apparent. Campbell writes, “The boon bestowed on [the hero] is always scaled to his stature and to the nature of his dominant desire: the boon is simply a symbol of life energy stepped down to the requirements of a certain specific case” (Campbell 163). In *Arkham Asylum*, this gift is the knowledge that every person is insane in some way and that the sanest people on the planet are the ones in the Asylum. At the beginning of the story, Batman worries that he belongs in the Asylum with all the insane. The boon of the story is that Batman belongs in the outside world, with the insane. Dr. Adams tells Batman, “The Joker’s a special case. Some of us feel he may be beyond treatment. In fact, we’re not even sure he can be



properly defined as insane. [...] It's quite possible we may actually be looking at some kind of super-sanity here. A brilliant new modification of human perception more suited to urban life at the end of the twentieth century" (Morrison 35). Dr. Adams suggests that the world at the end of the twentieth century is so irrational that in order to fully live in the midst of the irrationality takes a mind like the Joker's. This is the problem that Batman has come to the Asylum to solve.

This first hint of the melding of sane and insane provides development for Batman's character. At the beginning of the story, he is unable to accept this truth, but his experiences in the Asylum and what he learns about Amadeus Arkham force him to accept it. By hinting at the truth that Batman eventually comes to understand, Morrison can clearly show how Batman's experiences in the Asylum change him. By the end of the story, after confronting Cavendish, Batman finally understands that sanity and insanity are more connected than he was willing to accept before entering the Asylum. In the beginning of the story, Batman looks at the prisoners in the Asylum like the Joker and Clayface as something fundamentally different from himself, something that he feels he needs to oppose and resist at every opportunity. Every single conversation with the Joker at the beginning of the story is confrontational on Batman's part, for example, "Take your filthy hands off me!" (16). When Batman encounters Clayface later in the story, Batman is visibly repulsed by Clayface's appearance. When Clayface reaches out to him for help, Batman screams, "Don't touch me!" (60), and viciously attacks him. These scenes demonstrate that Batman views the inmates of the Asylum as different from himself and dangerous, possessing some sort of contagious aspect of their insanity; Batman seems to be afraid that he will be infected if he engages with them. At the end of the story,

however, Batman realizes that in many ways, he and they are not that different. When Batman returns to where he started his journey through the Asylum he interacts with the Joker and with Two-Face as equals. Instead of reacting to the Joker with hostility, Batman becomes an active participant in the Joker's game, even suggesting that they include Two-Face. He has moved past his belief that sane and insane are completely separate and has embraced his own insanity. On the way back through the Asylum, Batman asks Dr. Adams if she still has Two-Face's coin, which she does. She accuses him of intending to reverse all the work she has done freeing Two-Face of his obsession with duality. She asks what Batman intends to do, and he says, "Stronger than them. Stronger than this place. I have to show them. [...] Arkham was right; sometimes it's only madness that shows us what we are. Or Destiny perhaps" (Morrison 100). Batman acknowledges that understanding one's own madness is part of self-discovery, that to truly understand one's self is to understand the ways in which one could be considered insane.

### **Part Seven: The Magic Flight**

In the traditional monomyth, once the hero has received the boon, he returns to the ordinary world. If he travels with the blessing of Destiny, his way is clear and he is able to overcome all obstacles with ease. On the other hand, if he has stolen the boon, like Prometheus, he will be hounded back to the regular world. In *Arkham Asylum*, Batman's journey back to the regular world of Gotham is a flight of the first kind. Because he was freely given the boon, he passes through the remaining obstacle of the Asylum with ease. This obstacle is the Joker. In the same way that the Joker was the Threshold Guardian when Batman first entered the Asylum, he is also the final obstacle before Batman

crosses the second threshold. Campbell writes, “If the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron” (Campbell 170). Because Batman has been freely given the boon, the Joker is unable to stop him from returning to the ordinary world. Batman breaks down the doors to the Asylum and declares all the inmates free. The Joker replies, “Oh, we know that already. But what about you? Have you come to claim your kingly robes? Or do you want us to put you out of your misery like the poor, sick creature you are?” (Morrison 103). The question the Joker poses is a valid question. Batman has a responsibility to spread the boon to the rest of society, but he has the option of remaining in the Asylum. Campbell writes that some heroes decide to remain in the special world, and refuse the return (167). Batman responds, “Why don’t we let Two-Face decide what to do with me?” (104). Batman plays into the Joker’s game. He engages with the Joker on the Joker’s own turf. He turns the Joker’s madness on him. Because Batman has reconciled sane and insane, he knows that he can defeat the Joker if he just outplays the Joker at his own game. By appealing to Two-Face’s coin, Batman knows he has a fifty percent chance of survival, rather than relying on the Joker’s capriciousness to allow him to leave. Batman remembers that at the beginning of the story, the Joker gave Batman an hour to make it through the Asylum before he sent inmates after him, but was convinced to send inmates after only ten minutes. Batman knows that he cannot trust the Joker to keep his word, so he appeals to the Joker’s penchant for games to give himself a more reliable outcome, like the game of hide-and-seek that propelled these events. Batman hands Two-Face his coin, and Two-Face says, “If the unmarked face comes up,

he goes free. If it's the scarred face, he dies here" (104). Two-Face flips the coin and says that Batman is free to go. However, unknown to everyone, the scarred side came up. Two-Face, who here represents the benevolent hand of Destiny, breaks his own rule in order to allow Batman to leave. Because Batman has been freely given the boon, no obstacle can stop his return journey.

### **Part Eight: Crossing the Return Threshold**

In the monomyth, before the hero can finally return to the ordinary world he must cross a second threshold. As the confrontation with the great evil is about reconciling dualities, the act of crossing the second threshold is about reconciling the ordinary world with the world of supernatural wonder. Campbell writes:

[This] is the hero's ultimate difficult task. How render back into light-world language the speech-defying pronouncements of the dark? How represent on a two-dimensional surface a three-dimensional form, or in a three-dimensional image a multi-dimensional meaning? How translate into terms of 'yes' and 'no' revelations that shatter into meaninglessness every attempt to define the pairs of opposites?" (Campbell 188-89)

Ultimately, the hero's journey is not a journey for the sake of journeying. The journey from ignorance to enlightenment is ultimately about bringing the wisdom from the world of supernatural wonder back to the ordinary world in order to benefit mankind. This purpose is why the boon the hero receives is always a universal benefit, not just a benefit for the hero himself. As much as the hero's journey is about the hero travelling through a world of marvels, it serves the higher purpose of rescuing mankind. In *Arkham Asylum*, Batman's original goal was to bring the Asylum back into order with the outside world,

but by the end of the story, his goal has changed. Instead of putting the Asylum to rights, Batman brings the world into order with the Asylum. Batman's purpose now, having passed through the crucible of the Asylum, is to somehow explain to the regular people of Gotham, like Commissioner Gordon, for example, what he has learned. This is where Batman's role in the story ends. He frees the inmates, implicitly making them his messengers to spread the knowledge that sanity and insanity are intimately connected, and walks out of the story with a renewed responsibility to save Gotham and with a greater understanding of sanity and insanity.

## Chapter Four: Grayson Ascends

In 2009, Grant Morrison wrote a DC Universe altering story called *Final Crisis*. In the story, Darkseid, evil despotic ruler of Apokolips, takes control of a weapon that could threaten the entire DC Multiverse. During the effort to stop him, Darkseid seemingly kills Batman. In the wake of Batman's death, the original Robin, Dick Grayson, operating as Nightwing, under Bruce's specific direction, takes over the Batman mantle. Grayson's tenure as Batman, beginning in *Battle for the Cowl* and *Life After Death* by Tony S. Daniel, continuing through Grant Morrison's run on *Batman and Robin*, Scott Snyder's run on *Detective Comics*, collected as *The Black Mirror*, and Snyder and Kyle Higgins' *Gates of Gotham*, embodies the traditional monomyth described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Grayson becoming Batman is significant because it shows that the monomythic aspect of the Batman entity is not limited to a single individual. What matters is not who the person under the cowl is, but rather that when they put on the cowl, they become Batman. This is a clear difference from Lang and Trimble's article; they do not address the possibility that the monomythic aspect of a hero can change hands.

### Part One: The Call to Action

In the traditional monomyth, the hero receives the call to action. For Dick Grayson, the call to action is personified in Tim Drake, the third person to use the Robin persona. Vogler, in *The Writer's Journey*, writes, "The Call to Adventure may come in the form of a message or a messenger. It may be a new event like a declaration of war, or the arrival of a telegram reporting that the outlaws have been released from prison and will be in town on the noon train to gun down the sheriff" (Vogler 100). In *Battle for the*

*Cowl*, the call to action comes from Tim Drake at the Batcave while Dick looks broodingly at the Batsuit hanging on a glass enclosed display. The reflection of the cowl looming over Dick's face shows the conflict he feels (See Fig. 12). The image is a splash page, with three panels overlaid vertically on the left, cutting off Dick's body as he stares at the Batsuit. This symbolizes that Dick feels marginalized and on an unequal footing compared with Batman. The Batsuit looms over Dick as if it is looking down on him in judgment. This is Batman without the humanity of Bruce Wayne: the larger than life figure that strikes terror into the hearts of Gotham's criminals, and a visible reminder of Dick's inadequacy. The illumination in the display case comes from a source off the top, right-hand corner of the page, presenting the Batsuit, and therefore Batman as a somehow divine or saintly figure. At the level of Dick's knees, from off panel left, a word balloon reads, "He doesn't look happy in there" (17). This is the call to action. Dick is literally staring the problem, the absence of Batman, in the face, and he is offered the chance to do something about it. However, Dick is torn between keeping the life he has made for himself as Nightwing and taking on the life someone else created. This conflict is the overarching tension throughout Dick's tenure as Batman. He is in mourning for his lost mentor, and he knows he should take up the mantle, but he does not feel ready. Tim walks up behind him, and says, "He doesn't look happy in there" (17). Dick replies, "Maybe because he can see how we've let Gotham go to Hell" (18). This conversation is Dick's call to action. Tim is the herald of adventure that Campbell describes as "sound[ing] the call to some high historical undertaking" (Campbell 42). The 'high historical undertaking' is the role of Batman, Gotham's ultimate protector. Tim knows the pressure that the mantle entails, and he believes that Dick is the person most capable

of withstanding that pressure. Tim then addresses the elephant in the room, “It has to be one of us, Dick” (Daniel, “Battle” 18). The unspoken element of Tim’s statement is ‘so it might as well be you.’ Tim knows that he is not ready to be Batman (21), and he knows that without Batman, the city will continue to fall apart, so he encourages Dick to become Batman. Because Dick has worked with Batman the longest and is already operating as a hero in his own right, he is the clear choice to be Batman, despite his reluctance.

### **Part Two: Refusing the Call**

Even though Dick refuses, he is still the hero of the traditional monomyth, because refusing the call is an integral part of the hero’s journey. In the previous examples, the heroes have had reasonably good excuses for refusing the call. In *The Dark Knight Returns*, Bruce is too old, and in *Arkham Asylum*, Batman is afraid that if he goes into the Asylum he will feel a need to stay. In Grayson’s journey to becoming Batman, however, he does not have a good excuse, believing that he must live up to Bruce’s example, instead of trusting that Bruce would want him to be Batman in his own way. Campbell writes, “Often in actual life, and not infrequently in the myths and popular tales, we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered; for it is always possible to turn the ear to other interests” (Campbell 48). Similarly, Vogler writes that when the hero receives the call, he is “being asked to say yes to a great unknown, to an adventure that will be exciting but also dangerous and even life-threatening. It wouldn’t be a real adventure otherwise. [The hero] stand[s] at a threshold of fear, and an understandable reaction would be to hesitate or even refuse the Call, at least temporarily” (Vogler 107). According to Tim, “Dick is against taking on the mantle. The point of contention being that no one should take Batman’s place. But look at what’s happened to Gotham without



the Dark Knight. He was much more than just a crime fighter. He was Gotham's protector. Her guardian angel. And Gotham needs that back" (21). Dick does not feel that he can measure up to the way Bruce operated. Dick is terrified that he will fail because he is not as good as Bruce. Even when Alfred brings up the subject of "Master Bruce's legacy" (22), Dick refuses to even discuss the subject. The truth is: Dick simply does not want to be Batman. He is perfectly willing to continue operating as Nightwing, and he does not want the pressure of trying to live up to Bruce's example. For Dick, the call to adventure is unwelcome. He has built a life for himself separate from Batman, and he does not want to give that life up. But the call cannot go unanswered. Dick is so caught up in who he is not, what he is incapable of, and how he could fail that he never considers the fact that he might actually make a good Batman, or perhaps even a better one. Dick took much of his confidence from the fact that if he messed up as Robin and even as Nightwing, Bruce would be there to fix his mistake, usually with a stern lecture afterwards. But with Bruce gone, Dick feels that the burden of protecting the entire city has fallen on his shoulders, and he is not convinced that he can carry the weight. These thoughts and uncertainties are Dick's reasons for refusing the call.

Campbell writes that the hero who refuses the call is simply doomed to be forever divided, one part of him wanting to accept the call, and one part refusing (Campbell 49). Throughout the story, Dick thinks of reasons why he should not put on the Batsuit. But if he is so convinced he was unprepared or unworthy, then he would not feel the need to remind himself of that fact. His psyche is at war with itself. One side knows that he could be Batman, and the other highlights his inadequacies and failures. It takes an attack on the city, a confrontation with the imposter Batman, later revealed to be Jason Todd, the

second Robin, and nearly losing Tim for Dick to realize that he was already shouldering the burden, but he just failed to notice it because he was handling it so well. He was born to be Bruce's replacement. There is no one more capable or better suited to the task. Because Dick saves Gotham, stops a gang war, defeats Jason, and saves Tim, he realizes that he is in fact ready to be Batman. In the final pages of *Battle for the Cowl*, as Dick enters the Batcave and puts on the Batsuit, the colored internal monologue boxes change from being Nightwing's colors to Batman's, and Dick thinks, "changing is always harder to do than staying the same. It takes courage to face yourself in the mirror and look beyond the reflection. To find the you that you should have been. [...] [To change] into something unimaginable or even incredible... ..giving you the courage to embrace your birthright, your destiny, and finally realize... ..that you are Batman" (96-97). The fact that by this point Dick refers to his being Batman as his 'birthright' and 'destiny' is significant because it shows that he has realized that not only was he not unqualified or inadequate to be Batman, but also that he was meant to be Batman. By putting on the Batsuit, Dick has moved beyond his fear and has embraced his new identity as Batman. This is his acceptance of the call to action. Batman is dead, long live Batman.

### **Part Three: Crossing the First Threshold**

Because Dick has accepted the mantle of Batman, he begins to move more fully into the world of responsibilities that Batman inhabits. Before Dick can move completely into that world, he must face a truth: he is not Bruce Wayne. This is Dick's approach to the first threshold. Campbell writes, "the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the 'threshold guardian' at the entrance to the zone of magnified power. Such custodians bound the world in the four directions—also up and down—standing for the

limits of the hero's present sphere, or life horizon" (Campbell 64). Vogler's analysis of the threshold guardian reveals that occasionally, once the threshold guardian has been defeated or passed, the guardian becomes an ally to the hero. Vogler writes, "Sometimes the guardians of the First Threshold simply need to be acknowledged. They occupy a difficult niche and it wouldn't be polite to pass through their territory without recognizing their power" (129). In this way, Bruce Wayne's Batman is Dick's Threshold Guardian. He is Dick's benchmark for how Batman should operate, and in order to fully embrace being Batman, Dick must reconcile his version of Batman and Bruce's. Despite the fact that he accepted his role as Batman, Bruce and Dick have very different personalities, and they go about fighting crime in very different ways. Dick has to come to terms with the fact that he will not do things the way Bruce did them or would want them done, and he also has to learn that it is acceptable for his Batman to be different from Bruce's. Vogler writes, "The task for heroes is often to figure out some way around or through these guardians. Often their threat is just an illusion, and the solution is simply to ignore them or to push through them with faith" (Vogler 129). The hero does not need to defeat the guardian like the great evil of the ordeal, but he does need to acknowledge the role that the guardian plays. In order for Dick to fully become Batman, he has to make Batman his own. As much as he would like to do everything exactly the way Bruce did, it is impossible because of how different they are. In *Life After Death*, by Tony S. Daniel, Dick comes to accept that he is Bruce's heir, not Bruce's replacement. He learns that in order for him to truly be comfortable as Batman, he must put his own spin on the persona. At a crime scene, Dick asks Commissioner Gordon if he can examine some evidence, and Gordon says, "Batman doesn't need to ask my permission" (Daniel, "Life

After Death”). This shows that Dick is still operating as if he is a sidekick, still looking to someone else to make decisions and tell him what to do. Despite taking the mantle, Dick is still unsure of himself. He is still trying to figure out how he can honor Bruce’s legacy while still making the Batman persona his own. At the end of the story, Dick says, “I am not Bruce Wayne. But when lives were lost and the city was at stake... ..I did what Batman had to do. I acted as the Dark Knight. To the best of my abilities, I became him. And I succeeded. Not as Dick Grayson. And not as Bruce Wayne. But as Batman” (Life After Death). Dick conquers Bruce’s memory, the guardian of the First Threshold, by realizing that he is his own man and that he does not have to be Bruce Wayne in order to be Batman. Dick learns that Batman can be whatever he wants it to be. Through this realization, Dick steps more fully into the role of Batman. By the end of the story, he is no longer Dick Grayson pretending to be Batman; he is Dick Grayson, Batman. By reconciling his own version of Batman with Bruce’s Dick is able to move into full self-actualization as Batman and enter into the special world.

#### **Part Four: The Road of Trials**

Dick Grayson’s road of trials as Batman is depicted in Grant Morrison’s run on the *Batman and Robin* title. Dick, as Batman, teams up with Damian, Bruce’s son, as the new Robin. In the monomyth, as the hero moves closer to the ultimate confrontation with the great evil, he encounters tests and achieves “preliminary victories” (Campbell 90). Vogler writes, “The Tests at the beginning of Act Two are often difficult obstacles, but they don’t have the maximum life-and-death quality of later events” (Vogler 136). In *Batman Reborn*, Dick and Damian face off against Professor Pyg and the Red Hood and Scarlett. In *Batman vs. Robin*, they battle Simon Hurt and his 99 Fiends, as well as Talia

al Ghul, Damian's mother and the daughter of Ra's al Ghul, leader of the League of Assassins, as they try to solve a centuries old mystery surrounding Bruce Wayne's ancestors. In *Batman and Robin Must Die!*, Dick and Damian fight the Joker, finally defeat Simon Hurt, and welcome Bruce Wayne back from his sojourn through time. All of these enemies are the preliminary victories that give Dick the confidence that he needs in order to fully accept his role as Batman. By the end of *Batman and Robin Must Die!*, not only has Bruce accepted Damian as Robin, but he also allows Dick to remain the Batman of Gotham during the Batman Incorporated initiative to take the symbol of Batman global (Morrison, "Batman and Robin Must Die!"). The trials that Dick faces purify him of his doubt about being Batman to the point that when Bruce Wayne returns, Bruce allows Dick to keep the mantle. Because Dick has completely embraced the mantle by making it his own, when Bruce offers him the position of Batman of Gotham, Dick is confident enough in himself to remain in the cowl rather than returning to his role as Nightwing.

#### **Part Five: Atonement with the Father**

When Bruce returns, Dick assumes everything will go back to the way it was before Bruce got stranded in the past, but Bruce has other plans. This embodies the atonement with the father stage of the traditional monomyth. Campbell writes that when the hero meets the father, be it his literal father or the creator of the world, "The hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds the face of the father, and the two are atoned" (Campbell 125). Dick tells Damian, "I can go back to doing what I do as Nightwing" (Morrison, "Batman vs. Robin" 95). However, when Bruce does come back, he is impressed with the way Dick

has handled crime in Gotham as Batman as well as by how well he and Damian work together. Bruce says, “I want you two to stay together, as Batman and Robin, here in Gotham City. Like you said, Damian, ‘We need all the Batmen we can get’” (Morrison, “Batman and Robin Must Die!”). Bruce’s affirmation reconciles the two disparate aspects of Dick’s tenure as Batman; Bruce approves of how Dick has operated as Batman so far, and he encourages Dick to stay on as Batman. In the monomyth, when the hero reaches the lowest point of the journey, when he faces a major defeat, he gains “recognition by the father-creator” (Campbell 211). Bruce’s affirmation of how Dick has operated as Batman embodies this recognition, but despite Bruce’s encouragement, Dick has reservations about continuing as Batman. He says, “Bruce, look, I did what I could to fill in, but there’s only one Batman and we both know it” (“Batman and Robin Must Die”). While Dick accepts his role as Batman, it is always with the understanding that when or if Bruce came back, Dick would step down and Bruce would reclaim his mantle. Dick was prepared to go back to being Nightwing, but Bruce encourages him to stay on as Batman, in part because Damian worked better with Dick than he did with Bruce, but mostly because Dick was an excellent Batman, and Bruce had faith in him. After Dick says that there is only one Batman, Bruce replies, “No... Not this time. This time it’s bigger than that. I need you... Gotham needs you. The world needs us” (“Batman and Robin Must Die!”). Eventually, Dick finally agrees to continue as Batman, and his agreement signifies that he and Bruce have reached a mutual understanding; the father and the son accept each other as they are and their relationship is stronger than ever. Campbell writes, “For the son who has grown to really know the father, the agonies of the ordeal are readily borne; the world is no longer a vale of tears, but a bliss-yielding,

perpetual manifestation of the Presence” (Campbell 126). Further, Bruce’s presence restores the sense that the fate of Gotham no longer solely rests in his hands. The safety net represented by Bruce’s presence has returned. More than that, Bruce allowing Dick to train and work with his son as Robin speaks volumes about the trust Bruce has in Dick outside of fighting crime. Instead of taking Damian as his partner, Bruce chooses not to undo the work that Dick has done in reforming Damian from a potentially homicidally violent enemy to a trusted crime-fighting partner. Despite having only spent a few minutes with Dick and Damian as Batman and Robin, Bruce is immediately able to see the positive influence Dick has had on Damian and chooses to honor that by allowing them to stay together. Ironically, however, it is when presented the opportunity to continue working with Damian that Dick decides to continue operating as Batman. Dick understands that the greatest symbolic gesture of Bruce’s trust in him is that Bruce willingly gives up both the mantle that he invented as well as the opportunity to work with his own son.

### **Part Six: The Ordeal**

At the climax of the monomyth, the hero endures an ordeal that changes him. This ordeal frequently features some form of death and rebirth, but it always involves some kind of a struggle with a great evil. Vogler writes, “In some way, in every story, heroes face death or something like it: their greatest fears, the failure of an enterprise, the end of a relationship, the death of an old personality” (Vogler 155-56). This ordeal is depicted in Scott Snyder’s run on *Detective Comics*, collected as *The Black Mirror*. In the story, Dick faces a supervillain that symbolizes Dick’s opposite: the psychopathic James Gordon, Jr. While Dick is empathetic and emotionally healthy, James, Jr. completely lacks empathy

and believes that emotions are weaknesses. By defeating James, Jr., Dick shows that he can take the worst challenges that Gotham can throw at him and come out the other side better than he was before. Through his encounters with Junior, Dick takes what the city throws at him and remains fighting. Dick describes Gotham as having a hunger, “I’ve felt it many times myself, that hunger... ..the way Gotham will start pulling at you when it wants something, when it wants more... ..it’s been feeling like that a lot lately. Wild and strange, and most of all—hungry” (13). For Dick, Gotham is always demanding the best he can give it. He must be the toughest, smartest, fastest, bravest hero he can be, or he will get devoured. At the beginning of the story, he is unsure if he is capable of giving the city what it needs from him, but as the story goes on, he learns that not only is he prepared and capable enough to endure the city’s hunger, but he can defeat any monsters it throws at him, such as James, Jr., a clinically diagnosed psychopath, who wants to destroy Dick Grayson. Junior believes that “Gotham City is a city of nightmares. But not the way you think it is, Dick. [...] No, it’s a city of nightmares in the truest sense. Because what’s a nightmare if it isn’t a warning. A dream so scary it makes you think—makes you change your ways? A vision of you at your weakest” (260). He tells Dick, “This is a special place, Dick. It is a city of nightmares. And I’m yours. I’m the face you see in the glass. A man with no conscience. No empathy. Gotham made me to challenge you” (260). James, Jr. embodies what Vogler calls, “the archetype of the Shadow” (Vogler 163). Vogler describes the ordeal as “some sort of battle or confrontation with an opposing force. It could be a deadly enemy villain, antagonist, opponent, or even a force of nature. [...] A villain may be an external character, but in a deeper sense, what all these words stand for is the negative possibilities of the hero himself” (163). Dick’s battle



with Junior is the moment when Dick faces the worst that Gotham can throw at him, his opposite. Junior represents everything Dick Grayson is not, and his direct challenge presents the question of whether Dick has the inner fortitude to face the darkest truths about himself. Junior believes that emotions are weakness, so he preys on Dick's emotions and his trusting nature. Dick eventually defeats Junior, because as he tells Barbara, "James was right. I am a softie. And I do try to see the best in people... ..but that doesn't mean I'm stupid" (266). Dick learns that his emotions, the fact that he cares about people, and the fact that he has a great capacity for empathy are not weaknesses like James believed, and despite the fact that Bruce does not rely on his emotions to stop a criminal does not mean that Dick has to give up what makes him who he is. By facing and defeating James, Jr., Dick shows that he can face the very worst thing Gotham can throw at him. He has fully integrated his experiences as Batman into his understanding of who he is. He has reconciled his emotionalism with being Batman. He learns that his emotions do not make him weak, but rather that they are his greatest strengths. For the first time, he sees the Batman he could become, the same Batman that Bruce sees when he looks at Dick.

### **Part Seven: The Ultimate Boon**

The ultimate boon of Dick's tenure as Batman is Bruce coming back and launching Batman Incorporated. At a press conference, Bruce announces, "I've been financing Batman in secret for years. [...] Now I want to take that commitment further, with his help and yours... Ladies and gentlemen. Batman's war against crime goes global tonight. It's my great pleasure to introduce Wayne Enterprises' newest venture... ..and the beginning of a new era in the fight against crime" ("Batman and Robin Must Die!").

In the Batcave later, Bruce describes to his partners the idea behind Batman Incorporated: “Starting today, we fight ideas with better ideas. The idea of crime with the idea of Batman. From today on, Batman will be everywhere it’s dark, no place to hide” (“Batman and Robin Must Die!”). Bruce’s motivation for making his war on crime international is explained in scenes of him fighting members of an organization called Leviathan interspersed with discussions in the cave about each partner’s role in Batman Incorporated. Bruce will go on recruiting missions all over the world, enlisting vigilantes from various countries into his crusade to stop Leviathan, while Dick remains in Gotham as its protector with Damian. Bruce’s return revitalizes the Bat Family in their efforts to protect Gotham and gives them a larger goal to accomplish. Because Bruce’s focus has widened from solely Gotham City, Dick now has free reign to operate in Gotham the way he wants to, without needing permission or approval from Bruce. Having a group of people operating under the umbrella of the Batman name means they can stop more threats and save more people. This solution solves both problems: Dick wanting to remain as Batman while still respecting and being loyal to Bruce.

### **Part Eight: Master of the Two Worlds**

When the hero returns from his journey through the underworld, he gains the ability to freely pass between the ordinary world and the world of supernatural wonder. Campbell writes, “Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back—not contaminating the principles of one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other—is the talent of the master” (Campbell 196). For Dick, being master of the two worlds means that he is comfortable operating as either

Nightwing or Batman. He can operate as either identity. Instead of trying to decide if he should be Nightwing or Batman, Dick no longer feels the need to choose which identity is more natural. He has become the master of both the world of being Batman and the world of being Nightwing. The way Dick makes his decision involves an examination of Gotham's heritage. Dick's tenure as Batman ends at the conclusion of *Gates of Gotham* with the complete relaunch of all the series published by DC Comics into the New 52. Afterward, Dick goes back to operating as Nightwing, and Bruce returns to Gotham full-time. In Dick's last case as Batman, a peaceful night in Gotham is shattered when bombs set at three of the oldest bridges in Gotham explode. The culprit, Zachary Gates, has some strange connection to the architectural history of the city. This theme of history is paralleled in Dick's character development in the story. Dick is forced to confront his fears of inadequacy as someone who does not have a history in Gotham City. Early in the story, Dick says, "When I was Robin, I always thought I could be as good as Bruce was. But now... ..I'm standing in the rubble of his tower and I can't help but think—he would never have let it get this far" (Snyder and Higgins 53). Dick, despite taking over as Batman, still feels somehow inadequate. He wonders if he is up to the challenge of protecting Gotham's history. Later, in the Batbunker that Dick uses instead of the Batcave, he thinks, "Even as Tim explains what he found, I can't stop thinking about how much I rely on him. He's a better Robin than I ever was. He'll probably end up being a better Batman, too" (58). Despite carrying the Batman mantle, Dick still feels that he is merely a placeholder for someone else, with the three main candidates being Bruce, the original Batman, Tim, the better Robin, and Damian, the rightful heir to the title. As much as Dick feels at home in the mantle, he still views himself as an outsider and a

pretender. As the investigation nears its conclusion, Dick observes, “Like it or not, Gotham has royalty and they stretch back to the origins of this city. She protects her own-  
- --But if you don’t belong here, she’ll never keep you” (88). Dick feels that he does not belong in the cowl, and that he never will, which explains his fear of not measuring up to Bruce’s example. He is afraid that if he is not as good as Bruce, either Bruce will take the mantle back, or Bruce will give it to Tim or Damian. However, by the conclusion of the story, Dick’s opinions have changed. In a conversation with Bruce, he directly refutes his own statement about not measuring up. Dick says, “To be honest, the thing that scared me the most about becoming Batman was the chance the city might change me into you. But Gotham doesn’t change you. She just reveals things, whether you like them or not. And today she showed me that I can be Batman” (106-07). The fact that Dick says he ‘can’ be Batman rather than he ‘needs’ to be Batman or he ‘must’ be Batman shows that Dick views being Batman as an option, rather than an obligation. Bruce coming back to operate in Gotham just affirms Dick’s decision to return to being Nightwing. He has defeated the fear, the doubt, the uncertainty; he has gained the acceptance he needed only to learn that he did not actually need it, and he is ready to return to work as Nightwing a more complete person. Dick’s tenure as Batman shows that it is not the man under the mask that fulfills the role of the monomyth, but rather the Batman entity; anyone who wears the costume and claims the mantle can be the monomythic hero.

## Chapter Five: *Endgame*

Finally, in Scott Snyder's 2014 story arc *Endgame*, part of DC's New 52 initiative, Batman must face the Joker's most vicious attack on Gotham. This is Batman finally fulfilling his role as the hero of the American monomyth described in Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence's books *The American Monomyth* and *The Myth of the American Superhero*: "A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisaical condition; the superhero then recedes into obscurity" ("The Myth of the American Superhero" 6). With just a few modifications, this explains the plot of *Endgame* exactly: Gotham is threatened by the Joker; the Gotham City Police Department cannot defeat him; Batman emerges to renounce the Joker's temptation of immortality and cure the Joker's toxin; aided by fate, Batman's decisive victory restores Gotham to its paradisaical condition; Batman then recedes into obscurity. It also parallels aspects of what Mike Nichols calls 'the combat myth,' in his article "'I Think You and I Are Destined to Do This Forever,'" in which a god protects society from the threat of a chaos monster, usually depicted as a dragon. The cover to the final issue of the *Endgame* story arc portrays Batman as a literal Dark Knight, slaying the Joker, represented as a dragon (See Fig. 13). The story is a sequel to Scott Snyder's earlier story arc, *Death of the Family*, and deals with the Joker's revenge for the events therein.

### Part One: A Community in Harmonious Paradise

The first aspect of the American monomyth, according to John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, is "a community in harmonious paradise" ("The Myth of the

American Superhero” 6). According to them, “Tales of the American monomyth typically begin and end in Eden-like settings” (22). This concept of America as Eden goes all the way back to John Winthrop’s idea that America would become a “shining city on a hill” (“A Model of Christian Charity”). ‘Eden’ here simply refers to the fact that the communities in the American monomyth are places free of corruption. Gotham City in *Endgame* reflects the uncorrupted aspect of Eden, at least at first (22). At the beginning of the story, it would be difficult to see Gotham as a breeding ground for violent criminals, which is exactly the point. The Joker’s attack changes the citizens of Gotham from good, decent, hardworking people, to violent individuals driven to attack those they love. *Endgame* begins with Gotham City at peace, a rare occasion in Batman comics. The story starts in the daytime, the weather is bright and sunny, almost as an inversion of the ‘dark and stormy night cliché’ which is a feature of many Batman comics, and Bruce, Alfred, and Alfred’s daughter Julia are expressing hope for the future (Snyder 12). The images in this scene show the Gotham city center in bright sunlight, with no clouds in the sky, symbolizing that there is not even the slightest hint of anything bad happening, which is a set-up for the dramatic irony that occurs when the Justice League attacks Batman’s new base of operations.

Bruce is not working on a case at the moment, so he can afford to take the time to build new bases and update his equipment. Bruce even jokes with Alfred, showing just how relaxed he is. This is simply the calm before the storm, of course, but it bears noting that far from being the angry, driven, brooding avenger of the night, Bruce actually seems happy. Bruce says, “After everything the past year, I feel better being at the center of the city” (13). After all that has happened, Bruce has gotten to the point in his career that he

feels comfortable. Gotham in general seems to reflect this peace, and as Alfred remarks, “Look at it. The city will outlive us all. It gets younger, we get older” (13). Gotham is in a constant state of being rebuilt and renovated, a word that by its very definition means to be made new again. At this point in the story, Gotham is at peace, renewed, and untarnished by any supervillain, having finally recovered from the events of *Batman Eternal*, and nothing bad has happened to fracture that peace yet. In the opening sequence of the story, Bruce describes the construction of the Gotham Royal Theater, which was built just after the events of Gotham’s Zero Year. Bruce says, “The theater was part of a cultural reconstruction initiative, a second phase of rebuilding. The idea was, now that the city’s infrastructure had been repaired, it was time to rebuild Gotham’s arts facilities, bigger and better than before. To make them places where the people of Gotham could escape to and express their hopes and fears” (7). Even after the catastrophic events of Zero Year, the fact that the leadership in Gotham felt that rebuilding arts facilities was important is significant because it points to the indomitable spirit of the city itself. No matter what gets thrown at Gotham, no matter what attack or tragedy, no matter the hardship, Gotham will always come back, and can always be restored. This is the Gotham at the beginning of *Endgame*, rebuilt, restored, and ready to take on the next threat.

### **Part Two: Threatened by Evil**

The second aspect of the American monomyth is the intrusion of evil. Lawrence and Jewett write, “The action of the American monomyth always begins with a threat arising against Eden’s calm. [...] Paradise is depicted as repeatedly under siege, its citizens pressed down by alien forces too powerful for democratic institutions to quell. When evil is ascendant, Eden becomes a wilderness in which only a superhero can

redeem the captives” (Lawrence and Jewett, “The Myth of the American Superhero” 26). In the American monomyth, places of peace and order are always under threat, and this is also an aspect of the combat myth. Nichols writes that in the combat myth, “First, a monster--frequently a dragon or other reptilian creature somehow associated with water--arises to threaten the established cosmological and societal order” (Nichols). Almost immediately after Alfred discusses the perpetual youth and innocence of Gotham, the evil threat arises. The members of the Justice League attack, and while Batman is able to defeat them, the attack establishes the stakes for the coming story. Beings from Greek mythology and the lost city of Atlantis, humans with superpowers, a human with cybernetic enhancements, not to mention a seemingly omnipotent alien, have all fallen under the control of one man. The Joker manipulating the Justice League to attack one of its own shows just how seriously the Joker takes this confrontation. Lawrence and Jewett describe the threat of evil in the American monomyth as “the myth of an innocent public afflicted by evil foes from outside” (“The Myth of the American Superhero” 26). In *Endgame*, the fact that the Joker uses other people as his opening salvo, even the members of the Justice League, means that he has something even bigger planned for his actual attack. Under the Joker’s control, Superman brings an entire building down on top of Bruce’s new mechanized exosuit, which shows that the Joker has no qualms about killing innocent people, showing the great evil that threatens society. When the Joker’s actual attack comes, it is particularly vicious. The Joker’s toxin is described as being “resilient in a way... well, in a way that seems almost...unnatural. It’s virulent, fast acting, and seemingly unkillable” (Snyder 57). The virus is airborne, “micro drops of pathogen coated in resistant mucus disseminated into the air every time an infected



person coughs or spits or...” “...Laughs. Of course” (57). By infecting the Justice League so that they go after Batman, the Joker turns Bruce’s friends against him.

### **Part Three: Normal Institutions Cannot Defeat the Evil**

In the American monomyth, once the evil arises, it quickly overwhelms the normal institutions of law and order, making an extra-legal hero necessary to defeat it. Lang and Trimble connect this aspect of the American monomyth to Superman, saying, “He upholds the values of the law and the establishment while representing the best of personal freedom and anti-establishment feeling. Superman rises above the law. When he smashes into a criminal’s lair, no search warrant is needed” (160). The problem with Lang and Trimble’s argument here is that while no law enforcement organization in the world could stop Superman from violating a suspect’s constitutional rights, Batman places himself above the law, and the police frequently oppose him. Batman fills the role of an extra-legal hero better than Superman because the police could actually do what Batman does, but the law restrains them. Superman cannot truly ‘uphold the values of law and the establishment’ because he, fundamentally, cannot be considered under the jurisdiction of the law. If the police decide to enforce any of the laws that Superman breaks, Superman could literally annihilate them, and the very definition of jurisdiction is that it is the realm in which a law is enforceable. This definition in no way applies to Superman. Lawrence and Jewett discuss the 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* and the *Virginian* novels as examples of an evil that overcomes law enforcement and requires a “superhero” to stop it (Lawrence and Jewett, “The Myth of the American Superhero” 26). In *Birth of a Nation*, the Ku Klux Klan rides into town and rescues a damsel in distress from the hands of her African American kidnapper, and in *The Virginian*, the hero

advocates for a group of settlers to take the law into their own hands. Both of these examples feature heroes who either directly subvert law and order or who advocate for extra-legal solutions to the evil. In *Endgame*, the Joker is the intruding evil. His toxin is so powerful and so fast acting that the usual measures for dealing with an outbreak and a terrorist threat simply do not have time to become effective. Julia Pennyworth says, “the military, and the CDC, the police. They’re trying to keep it to these red areas, hold it at yellow. But it’s... I’ve never seen anything like it” (56). Later in the story, the toxin has become so widespread that even the doctors (63), nurses (63), police (50), and National Guard officers (87) whose job it is to combat situations like this, become infected. The civil, judicial, and military structures of law and order collapse, and only Batman can save the city. Commissioner Gordon says at the beginning of the attack, “It’s going to hell here, Batman. And fast. The military is about to lock us down. [...] They’re bringing in walls. Actual towering walls like something out of medieval times” (59). But even Batman’s own stores of Joker toxin antidotes are incapable of curing the disease. Alfred tells Bruce that the virus seems unkillable, but Bruce says, “Nothing’s unkillable. Not him, not it. I’ve created nearly a hundred cures for Joker toxins over the years. Antitoxins, antibiotics, steroids... How many have you tested so far,” to which Julia replies, “we tested all of them” (58). With all of Gotham descending into chaos, it falls to Batman to save the city. Because the city’s law and order infrastructure has fallen, someone not a part of the law and order infrastructure is the only person who can save the day.

#### **Part Four: A Selfless Hero Arises**

The fourth aspect of the American monomyth is that in order to defeat the evil that has overcome the normal institutions of law and order, a selfless hero must arise

from outside the community in order to restore the community to its Edenic state. The hero must be separate from the normal legal institutions because if he were a part of the institutions, then evil would not have been able to overcome them. If the institutions, such as the police or the government, could have stopped the evil before the hero became necessary, they would have done so. In the combat myth, “A hero/god [...] confronts the monster and defends the imperiled order” (Nichols). The Joker in *Endgame* represents the chaos monster of the combat myth and the selfless hero of the American monomyth is, of course, Batman. Batman sacrifices his life in order to get the cure for the Joker’s toxin to the infected people in Gotham, even staying as the cave containing the cure collapses. Bruce has an opportunity to escape with the cure, but if he tried, the cure might not reach Gotham. Because he values the safety of the people of Gotham over his own, he stays, knowing that even if he dies, he will have saved the city one last time. Once the Joker’s attack starts, Bruce races into the city, heading for the source of the attack, and giving no thought to his own safety. When Gordon hears that Batman is coming into Gotham, he tells him that the virus “leaves something of the person behind. It turns affection into hatred, something like that. Friends come after friends. [...] Given what people think of you, you’ll likely be the most hunted figure in Gotham, if you show your face” (60). Regardless of the obstacles against him or the threat he faces, Batman always runs into danger so that he becomes the target, not the people of Gotham. This is why the Joker is so focused on him, initially. Batman makes himself a lightning rod, so that the people of Gotham can live their lives in peace. Batman makes himself a target so that the villains of Gotham City focus their attacks on him rather than on the people of Gotham. A critical foundation for Batman’s selflessness is his lack of superpowers. If he could rely on

invulnerability, for example, going into a fight with a supervillain would not be courageous or selfless. He could not consider himself a hero if his heroism was rooted in the knowledge that he had a superpower that could keep him safe. This harkens back to what Lang and Trimble write about the American monomythic hero, using Charles Lindbergh and Babe Ruth as their examples, “They achieved their greatness through their own physical actions and by depending on an inherent native wit. The message was clear: as Americans, everyone has these innate characteristics and can also achieve social success” (159). Babe Ruth did not possess super strength, and Charles Lindbergh needed an airplane to fly, but according to Lang and Trimble, they were American heroes. Batman lacking superpowers does not negate his American monomythic hero status; in fact, it makes him more of a hero because he could be hurt or killed during his heroic actions.

In *Endgame*, the Joker attacks everything that Batman values, beginning with his city. As Alfred says after Bruce has been presumed dead following his selfless act of keeping the Joker occupied while Julia retrieves the cure from the cave, and Julia tries to understand why Bruce never took any inoculations to Joker toxin or the Scarecrow’s fear gas, “Batman could live forever. He could escape, but he doesn’t. He dies, just like every one of us, even though he doesn’t have to” (148). By deliberately refusing to be mythologized, Batman hopes to inspire the people of Gotham to be brave in the face of their everyday fears. Even after the Joker’s attack the people of Gotham come together and rebuild despite their loss. Batman fights these giant threats like the Joker and Clayface, and because he can face those threats, he gives the people of Gotham the courage to face the smaller threats that they face every day.

### Part Five: The Hero Renounces Temptation

In the American monomyth, after the selfless hero arises, he renounces some kind of temptation in order to carry out the work of redemption. This temptation can involve, but does not necessarily involve sexual renunciation, or the renunciation of romantic attachments, the idea being that the hero needs to be free to save the community again should another evil arise, and he cannot do that if he is bound to the responsibilities of a wife and family (“The Myth of the American Superhero” 36-37). In *Endgame*, however, the temptation Batman must renounce is not any sort of romantic desire or sexual urge, as there is not a romantic subplot, but rather the temptation of immortality. Resisting temptation means that the hero remains pure in order to defeat the great evil. In *The American Monomyth*, Jewett and Lawrence write that the hero withstands “all temptations,” indicating that sexual temptation is not the only temptation the hero faces (“The American Monomyth” 195). In *Endgame*, The Joker says, “I could have made you forever, just like you always wanted! [...] This could have had a happy ending! It could... have been... hilarious!” (140). The Joker’s Dionesium would allow Batman to transcend his humanity, and become something truly mythic, but as Alfred says in the final moments of the story, “Batman could live forever. He could escape. But he doesn’t. He dies, just like every one of us, even though he doesn’t have to. That’s his flaw. But it’s also his greatest strength. The very thing that makes him immortal” (147-48). Batman chooses to become immortal through the example he sets to the people of Gotham. He has no interest in physically living forever, but as long as Gothamites can look to his example for the courage to face their day-to-day struggles, Bruce is satisfied. Batman is a mythic character, but in Scott Snyder’s body of work on the character, Batman always

refuses to be mythologized. Batman always affirms his humanity. Even when he is offered the chance to transcend and become truly larger than life, he refuses, choosing instead to affirm the dignity of humanity. He recognizes that as much as Batman is made out of the grief and rage of a boy who watched his parents die, Batman is made for the people of Gotham; his mission is bigger than himself. His goal is to get the people of Gotham to say, "If Batman can defy and defeat the Joker, then I can endure the everyday hardships of my life." The responsibility of Batman is to be an inspiration to the people of Gotham, but in order to truly inspire them he must remain humanized. If he gave into the temptation of the Dionesium, he would always be separated from the people of Gotham. If he became unkillable, he would not be able to inspire others to courage. If the threat of death no longer held a sway over him, his bravery would lose its significance. The inspirational aspect of Batman's renunciation is that he must be offered immortality in order to renounce it. Being offered immortality and choosing to retain his humanity speaks volumes. Rejecting the power or the gift means that he is choosing to side with the people of Gotham, but without the offer, the choice loses its power. It matters more that Batman has the option but chooses not to take it than if he is never offered it.

### **Part Six: Aided by Fate**

In the American monomyth, because of the hero's righteousness, all of his efforts to defeat the evil succeed. Jewett and Lawrence write, "The purity of his motivations ensures moral infallibility in judging persons and situations. [...] The aim of the superhero is unerring, his fists irresistible" ("The American Monomyth" 195-96). Because of the hero's purity, and his total devotion to justice and righteousness, he succeeds where the ordinary institutions of law and order fail. The aid of Fate, as

Lawrence and Jewett describe, is simply a way to describe the fact that the hero always succeeds. Even when the hero is faced with unassailable odds, he still finds some way to win. In *Endgame*, this aid comes in the form of the presence of a deposit of Dionesium deep under Gotham that can cure the Joker's toxin (130). The fact that there is a hidden natural deposit of the very substance that Batman needs to save the city deep underground shows that even the natural world is bent toward helping Batman succeed. It is conceivable that there might not have been a deposit and that Batman's efforts would have been in vain. Bruce did not even know of Dionesium's existence until this story, so he could not have engineered a source of Dionesium in advance for this eventuality; it is a natural occurrence that just so happens to be in the perfect place for Batman to use in order to defeat the Joker. Therefore, some higher power, such as Fate, is deliberately tipping the scales in Batman's favor. It is only because of this intervention from a higher power that Batman is able to succeed. In the story, the stakes get progressively higher as the virus spreads to the point that the entire city is overrun with the infected, and the Joker has even managed to infiltrate the Batcave and steal Batman's trophies. Despite everything leveled against him, even the people he has sworn to protect turning on him, because the underground deposit of Dionesium exists, Batman still succeeds in remedying the Joker's toxin.

### **Part Seven: The Hero Wins a Decisive Victory**

In the American monomyth, the hero's ultimate purpose is to defeat the evil so that the community's Edenic state can be restored. Through an act of redemptive violence, the hero dying and taking the evil with him, for example, the hero wins a decisive victory. The hero fulfills his purpose through redemptive violence, winning a

decisive victory and stopping the evil before it can hurt more people. Jewett and Lawrence describe the American monomyth as secularizing “the Judaeo-Christian dramas of community redemption that have arisen on American soil, combining elements of the selfless servant who impassively gives his life for others and the zealous crusader who destroys evil” (Lawrence and Jewett, “The Myth of the American Superhero” 6). In the combat myth, “The god defeats the monster, [...] reestablishing order” (Nichols). In *Endgame*, Batman’s mission is to stop the Joker and cure his victims, but ultimately, the only way to finally stop him is for both Batman and the Joker to die. When Batman and the Joker land next to the pool of Dionesium after their fall through the caves deep under Gotham, Bruce knows that he is severely wounded, but he also knows that he has to keep the Joker from reaching the Dionesium so that the Joker cannot get healed. Batman plays the Joker’s game, telling him that he believes that the Joker is the Pale Man from Gotham’s history, a mysterious figure seen in photographs of various tragedies at different points throughout Gotham’s history that Batman discovered in the course of his investigation of the Joker’s toxin, but the Joker is uninterested, only desiring the Dionesium, which proves that the Pale Man was really just a myth. It also shows that the Joker does not actually want Batman’s affection but only the Dionesium to heal himself. While the Joker, severely injured, tries to crawl toward the Dionesium, Batman holds him back and says, “I need to tell you... I finally believe you. I see it. Right here, right now. You are the Pale Man. [...] [Y]ou had to show me. And I see! I see you don’t need a new dose of Dionesium. Of course you don’t. Because you’re him! But me, Joker. I’m dying. I’ll be dead from my injuries in minutes” (142). Because Batman knows he is dying, he realizes that if he dies, the Joker will reach the Dionesium, and there will be no one that



can stop him. Batman knows that the caverns are collapsing because of the Joker's explosives, and he restrains Joker until the cave collapses and blocks access to the Dionesium. His plans frustrated, the Joker gives up and lies down next to the dying Batman as the cave collapses completely. Batman's sacrificial death stops the Joker and saves the city.

### **Part Eight: The Paradisal Condition of the Community is Restored**

In the American monomyth, after the hero wins his decisive victory through his act of redemptive violence, the community is restored to its former Edenic state. Because the community begins the story in a state of paradise, and ends the story in a state of paradise, the evil becomes only a temporary interruption in the community's otherwise peaceful existence. In *Endgame*, after Batman and the Joker are seemingly killed in the cave collapse, Gotham has moved on and is starting to rebuild. Greg Capullo's pencils with Danny Miki's inks and FCO Plascencia's colors show a visual montage of ordinary citizens trying to put their lives back together. People are on crutches, and there are broken windows and rubble all around, but the people of Gotham are returning to their lives (See Fig. 14). People are helping each other clean up; it is every inch the "well-organized community whose defining trait is the absence of lethal internal conflict arising from its members" that Jewett and Lawrence talk about ("The Myth of the American Superhero" 22). The overall tone of the images suggests the calm after the storm. What is interesting about these panels is that there is no looting; no one is taking advantage of the chaos. The things the citizens of Gotham did while under the influence of the Joker's toxin seem to be aberrations in their normal behavior. Batman's sacrificial victory allows Gotham to return to its state of internal harmony without the threat of evil.

### **Part Nine: The Hero Fades into Obscurity**

As Batman is presumed dead in the last pages of *Endgame*, fading into obscurity seems not to fit the story; however, because of Batman's inspiration, someone else is able to step into Batman's shoes and try to protect Gotham. In the American monomyth, receding into obscurity is simply a way to show that the hero's work continues even after he has won the victory. Historically, the two endings of a story presenting the American monomyth are: the hero rides off into the sunset, or the hero gets married and remains in the community. Consider the ending to the original *Magnificent Seven* film: Yul Brynner and Steve McQueen ride off to have more adventures together, while the only other surviving member of the seven remains behind with the woman he fell in love with. McQueen and Brynner each fulfill the role of the American monomythic hero. The importance of the hero's wandering is that he remains an outsider. The hero's marriage would represent that there is a permanent solution to the problem of the evil because there is no longer any need for an extra-legal hero. Lawrence and Jewett point out that the American monomythic hero must be an outsider, but that outsider status is not required to come from the hero being a stranger. According to them, the hero "originates outside the community he is called to save, and in those exceptional circumstances when he resides therein, the superhero plays the role of the idealistic loner" (47). Bruce lives at stately Wayne Manor outside the city limits of Gotham, and thus separated from the problems in Gotham. He does not live in the midst of society for several reasons, not the least of them being his need to protect his identity, but he lives close enough that he can always be ready in case of another attack. Further, Bruce's "motivation is a selfless zeal for justice" (Lawrence and Jewett, "The Myth of the American Superhero" 47). In the American

monomyth, the hero leaves the community he has just saved and rides off into the sunset in order to continue the work of redemption for other people in other places. Batman however, has invested in Gotham. He stays close so that he can protect the city whenever it falls under attack. In the American monomyth, the hero is a drifter, moving from place to place, relying on Fate to send him where he needs to go to perform acts of redemptive violence, but Batman is tied to Gotham. This seems like a contradiction at first glance, but *Endgame* is different from most Batman stories. Usually, after Batman defeats the evil, he retreats back to the Batcave to await the next calamity which would indeed be the hero receding into obscurity, but *Endgame* ends with Batman presumed dead. So the question is, does death count as receding into obscurity? The answer is: sort of. In their analysis of the hero renouncing sexual or romantic temptation, Jewett and Lawrence mention the possibility of the hero passing “the redemptive torch to the next candidate” (“The Myth of the American Superhero” 37), which means that as long as there is a replacement redemptive hero prepared to enter the story and fulfill the redemptive work, then the original hero can either die or retire.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

Jeffrey Lang and Patrick Trimble's article, "Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow," explains the absence of a hero of the American monomyth in comic books. They observe the death of Superman as the death of the American monomythic hero. But Lang and Trimble failed to consider that Batman might be a replacement for Superman in the American monomyth because prior to 1986's *The Dark Knight Returns*, Batman had never been presented as the hero of any monomyth. Thus, to argue that Batman is the hero of the American monomyth, it must be established that he can function as a monomythic hero. *The Dark Knight Returns* established a precedent not only in terms of how comics themselves are presented and sold, but also in terms of how seriously Frank Miller took the material. He presented Batman with a depth of personality, and established genuine character growth. Further, he presented the story in a sober tone. Gone were the neon colors and Dutch tilts, and in their place was a story of a broken down old man overcoming his fears and returning to a life that he thought had left him behind. In 1989's *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*, Grant Morrison presents Batman as the hero of the traditional, or Campbellian, monomyth, travelling from the ordinary world to the special world, enduring tests and trials, being transformed, and experiencing an ordeal in order to receive a boon to save humanity. During Dick Grayson's tenure as Batman, the stories showed that Batman being a monomythic hero was not limited to the same character being under the mask; even a Batman who was not Bruce Wayne could go on the Hero's Journey. And finally, in *Endgame*, Batman fulfills his role as the hero of the American monomyth.

These monomythic interpretations of Batman are significant because myths reveal the values of a culture. When the American monomythic hero was Superman, this meant emphasizing the immigrant story: an alien comes to Earth, is raised by a kindly couple of hardworking Midwesterners and is instilled with values of hard work and integrity. As he begins to excel through his alien heritage, he moves to a city where his abilities can do the most good. Because he was raised not to take credit for his own good deeds in order to keep the focus on the deed rather than the doer, he develops a larger than life persona so that those who would take advantage of his honesty and humility do not scrutinize his normal day-to-day activities. This is the type of person that America was and the person it would like to believe itself to still be: hardworking, honest, always willing to help those in need, and uninterested in receiving the credit. And in some ways America is that person, but after the attacks on September 11, 2001, America changed. Instead of being the hardworking, honest, helpful neighbor, America suffered a horrific tragedy, and out of a feeling of powerlessness, America made a vow to rid the world of terrorism and dedicated all of its efforts to ensuring that no one else would have to endure that same type of tragedy again. This is the Batman story writ large. Batman as the American monomythic hero is important because Batman shows that a person or a nation can overcome great tragedy in order to help other people. Batman reflects America's darkness in a post-9/11 world. At the same time however, he demonstrates that a past trauma does not have to break a person and that by overcoming that trauma a person can become stronger than they were before. This is the ideal America would like to hold itself to, and it is why Batman continues to be so appealing: Batman is a flawed, human character who strives desperately to better himself for the benefit of his fellow man.

As scholarship on Batman, and superheroes in general, moves toward the future, a possible avenue of study might be to consider the extent to which the mythology of the superhero has influenced American society since the early twentieth century. What does it mean in a global sense for Superman or Batman to be these monomythic heroes? What does the American monomyth look like in a post 9/11 world? Is the American monomyth found in places outside the United States? Do other countries have their own interpretations of the work of the hero, and if so, what are they, and how do they reflect the American monomyth, and if not, why does America have a different monomyth than the rest of the world?

Appendix

Fig. 1. A panel. Art by Greg Capullo, Jonathan Glapion, and FCO Plascenia. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig. 2. A page. Art by Greg Capullo, Jonathan Glapion, and FCO Plascenia. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig. 3. A splash page. Art by Greg Capullo, Danny Miki, and FCO Plascenia. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig. 4. An issue. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig. 5. A graphic novel. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig. 6. A collected edition. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig 7. The Batcave. Art by Frank Miller, Klaus Janson, and Lynn Varley. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig. 8. The Dark Knight. Art by Frank Miller, Klaus Janson, and Lynn Varley. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig 9. The statue of St. Michael and the Dragon. Art by Dave McKean. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig 10. Batman resumes his fight with Killer Croc. Art by Dave McKean. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig. 11. Batman defeats Killer Croc, but is wounded. Art by Dave McKean. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig. 12. Dick Grayson contemplates becoming Batman. Art by Tony S. Daniel. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig. 13. The cover to the final issue of the *Endgame* story arc. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)

Fig. 14. Gotham rebuilds after the Joker's attack. Art by Greg Capullo, Danny Miki, and FCO Plascenia. (Image removed in compliance with copyright law.)



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