



## Batman: City of Crime

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**Batman: City of Crime** David Lapham , Ramón F. Bachs (Illustrator) , Nathan Massengill (Illustrator)  
Dave Lapham, the acclaimed creator of the ultra-gritty noir series *Stray Bullets*, weaves a startling story of the Dark Knight facing an unspeakable crime. As he tries to shut down a drug ring that's turned deadly, Bruce Wayne must contend with a wayward 14-year-old who's getting dangerously close to Gotham's underworld!

## Batman: City of Crime Details

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## From Reader Review Batman: City of Crime for online ebook

### Oliver Flores says

My comic book-buying dollar has been stretched out pretty thin as of late; not only is the economy still in the gutter, I'm coming off a ten-year layoff period on comic books, so I have a lot of catching up to do. Though random catching-up has been a fun ride so far--filled mostly with pleasant surprises and a few shocking disappointments, it's helped to save time and money by doing a little homework on material that has been out there for a while now. Well, until recently it has, anyway...

Sheesh, after reading so many venomous online reviews for David Lapham's Batman story arc, "City of Crime" (DETECTIVE COMICS, 2005), not only was I prepared for the worst, for a while there I went so far as to hold off from reading the storyline entirely. Reporting feelings of being hopelessly lost in and frustrated by the sprawling plot and the convoluted nature of the storyline, stressed-out readers not only sounded downright angry at but frightened by "City of Crime". I mean, these readers simply could NOT understand why certain characters, such as the Penguin or Mr. Freeze, were even DOING in here, much less why anyone should even care about this grim mess. Those readers who actually DID enjoy the story felt that the whole thing was ruined by the ending, which was apparently beyond unforgivable. Others felt that the story was too dark, even for Batman. Lapham's greatest sin of all, however, was writing a 12-issue storyline that didn't seem to affect official Batman continuity whatsoever!

Whoa. At the time, I had just come off of Grant Morrison's traumatizing "Superman and the Men of Steel", so I took many of these reviews to heart. And yet... I remained intrigued by "City of Crime". I mean, not only were the solid writing talents of David Lapham involved in a Batman book, but I also kept wondering how a Batman book could be too dark these days. In what sense, exactly? Had people already forgotten about "The Dark Knight Returns" or something? Alas, if it hadn't been for eBay, where I stumbled onto a "City of Crime" auction that I just couldn't say 'no' to, I would have probably never exposed myself to what turned out to be one of the most intriguing and rewarding Batman storylines that I have ever read. Shame on you, my fellow online comic book readers, shame.

On the surface "City of Crime" is a supernatural detective mystery centered on the disappearance of an underage girl who might be involved in a sinister "adoption-ring" that not only threatens to involve every level of Gotham society but which also promises to expose the most fearsome of Batman villains to come along in a while. At heart, though, "City of Crime" isn't so much about Batman solving a compelling mystery (and it is compelling), as much as it is about Bruce Wayne coming to terms with The Batman's increasingly complex role as both Gotham City's Dark Knight and its prodigal son; as it explores core Batman themes, such as fear, identity, and parents, the tone of "City of Crime" is reflective, elegiac, even meditative, all of which perhaps explains why this tale seems arbitrary and trivial to readers hoping for something more eventful in the way of a storyline that alters Batman's "official" continuity.

But if it's a mistake to read almost ANY literal connections to official continuity, it's also wrong to form too many connections among the story's events themselves, be they those among the various characters or in their spectral connections to the story's central dramatic mystery, which is meant to remain elusive--even at story's end when it is finally solved. "City of Crime" is a study of individuals drowning in private grief, futilely striving to escape personal hells in which their personal demons have become interchangeable with those of others, including those of very evil men like the Penguin and Mr. Freeze. Therein lies one of "City of Crime's" most subversive qualities: this new evil that threatens to overwhelm Gotham once and for all has not taken root among Gotham's criminal-set, but among its "normal" citizens, of whom Bruce Wayne is still very much a member. Indeed, as The Batman closes in on the source of this new evil, the storyline doesn't so much move forward as much as it spreads, like a widening pool of still-warm blood in which Bruce Wayne's

frightened--and frightening--face, is now more clearly reflected than that of the demonic bat.

As such, the real story of "City of Crime" effectively begins when Bruce Wayne is approached at an upscale party by an underage girl who might be covertly reaching out for help, or simply looking for some temporary form of escape herself from some private hell of her own. A repulsed Bruce Wayne, however, cynically dismisses the attentive young girl's artful manner as a studied form of sexual solicitation. When the girl soon goes missing, then, The Batman becomes obsessed with locating her whereabouts as other eerily similar-looking girls also turn up missing or dead. Always arriving too late to save the day, however, Batman spends most of his time here picking up the pieces, as it were, in the process learning increasingly dark and frightening things about his fellow citizens and about the man beneath the mask.

Speaking of which, though I was underwhelmed by the art at first, laid over Lapham's heavily-paneled layouts, Ramon Bach's chiseled and muscular pencil work is effective at conveying the increasing tension and unease with which Bruce Wayne bears the burden of The Batman's unceasing and hopelessly rigid (see: arrogant) moral code: Like Gotham City's "normal" citizens, Bruce Wayne has grown too hardened in his fear, petrified, if you will, uncannily mirroring the elemental horror of a Gotham City that has grown too vast, too robust--and literally crawling with monsters at this point (beautifully rendered), as a stony hardness has started to deaden the man beneath the mask. Bruce Wayne, not The Batman, is now in danger of becoming the true face of the monster.

And yet, The Batman is not the only one forced to confront his personal demons throughout the course of this labyrinthine story. Indeed, though nowhere near as, uh, tenacious or ghastly in its intentions as his YOUNG LIARS series, Lapham's "City of Crime" is nonetheless designed to test the reader's endurance: with each new increasingly grim clue and discovery that he doles out, Lapham skillfully undermines what the reader is prepared to accept not only in a Batman comic but in comic books in general, daring the reader to give up on this challenging and progressively dark mystery every step of the way. Indeed, in "City of Crime" Lapham forces the reader to ask: Has Gotham City finally fallen beyond redemption? High-tailing it out of town or collapsing into a sobbing heap of confusion and self-pity, the Penguin and Mr. Freeze certainly seem to think so. Heck, as he struggles to impose the sign of The Bat back onto a city that might have grown too chaotic and corrupt for even him to control, The Batman himself spends the core of this story struggling to answer this very question.

Heavy stuff. And yet, also similar to his YOUNG LIARS series, Lapham's heaviness in "City of Crime" at times comes dangerously close to caving-in on itself. For instance, too much time is dedicated to unfolding the story's themes through dense, ominous, and sometimes ponderous narration and not enough through actual conflict in active character or story beats, which leads to my real issue with "City of Crime": the story's length.

At 12 issues, Lapham's sprawling and drawn-out plot IS stretched out a bit too thin, in particular at around the midpoint, when the story plunges the reader deeper into Gotham City's social strata. Though refreshingly ambitious in its scope, this deeper look into Gotham City's socio-economic reality not only dilutes the slow-burn intensity with which the plot is meant to be building at this point, it also needlessly challenges the reader's dedication to a surprisingly literary and complex story that requires sustained focus (and repeated readings, I suspect). Elemental and patently slippery, "City of Crime" could have packed even more punch at 10 issues, maybe even at 8.

Alas, don't be scared away, fellow reader. True, part of Lapham's agenda in "City of Crime" is to challenge and shock the jaded reader with material that has grown grotesquely violent and numbingly dark, post-Frank Miller (not to mention in 800 issues and counting of Batman pummeling criminals on the streets of Gotham within the pages of DETECTIVE COMICS, alone). Yet "City of Crime" is not anything if not a deliciously entertaining read--and a darkly humorous one too. What's more, one of Lapham's great accomplishments here is that the story's ending actually lives up to its hugely compelling set-up; though morally elusive and

emotionally grim, story-wise and thematically Lapham's resolution of the story's central dramatic mystery is also darkly satisfying, re-establishing the Caped Crusader as Gotham's Dark Knight, just when he was in danger of becoming another masked madman chasing his tail all over a city of crime.

Final verdict: despite the pitch black darkness that pervades (and, at times, obfuscates) a story that is meant to resonate in complex literary terms, you will be hard-pressed to put this one down--yes, even at 12 sprawling issues. Lapham is on his game here, doing what he does best, namely build meticulous labyrinths which compel the reader to keep flipping pages, despite every gruesome and grotesque detail of sad and sordid tales that might reveal more about their characters' personal demons, and about the reader's, than they do about any other horrifying mystery at hand. Highly recommended.

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### **Adam says**

I am going to say on this review something I rarely say about comic books. It was too dark. It was full of crime and murder and went to really dark places but usually I am ok with that. But there didn't seem to be any kind of real redemption for anyone in it. Batman doesn't even get to the bottom of the mystery very effectively and in the end he doesn't accomplish his goal. Turns out it is a goal that is not accomplishable anyway. And there is way to much violence towards women and children for my tastes. I think they could have still had that in there but done it in a different way and maybe it would have been ok. Also they really needed to explain more about what "The body" was. The appearances by the Ventriloquist and Freeze were good but the Penguin just looks whiney in the whole thing. I hope in the next one I read the hero of the book actually gets to be a hero in it.

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### **Gayle Francis Moffet says**

Save me from over-winded, melodramatic caption boxes and victimizing young women in order to create enough manpain for Batman to go out and go to the edge of his sanity yet again and prove how tough and heroic he is while constantly going on about how he can never save the city.

This is my very least favorite interpretation of Batman. It was just a fucking slog of "My mission is so hard. Look how hard it is. I am full of manly angst and pain about my mission. Oh, I can't deal with my feelings, and oh, I can't save everyone, and I'm so gritty and heartbroken all the time."

For fuck's sake, Bruce, if you hate the work that much, just move out of town, already.

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### **Mark says**

Just too dark... I'm getting old & tired of wading through the dark Dark Knight schtick.

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### **Patrick says**

Dark and brooding. Not an upbeat story by any means. Takes a little while but you do get sucked in and want to find out how it ends.

## Brandy says

I always believed that, if a non-superhero writer could write a good Batman story, it would be David Lapham of *Stray Bullets* fame. His dark, gritty noir style, everyday-meets-crime-fiction kind of stories--I really thought he'd be a good choice.

This book proved me wrong. It's not awful, but the story is convoluted and complicated (and I'm not just whining *it's too harrrrrrrrrrd! I'm a girl!!*)--there are too many red herrings and dead ends, too many twists and turns, to really keep track of in a story. I'm left with the impression that Lapham was trying too hard to write episodes that would become a full story, once his 12 issues of Detective Comics were done. It just didn't work.

The art was pretty good, though, so it gets 3 stars instead of 2.

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## Rory (Nightwyrn) says

I'm at a loss to understand a lot of the previous reviews on this book. It's dark and gritty, very well-written, and loaded with some serious brooding art. This may seriously be one of the best Batman stories I've read.

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## Eva Ebert says

Very much on the depressing side. A lot of this comic deals with the people that Batman doesn't save, because he wasn't in time or wasn't in the right place. And the people he does save are left worse for wear, scarred and broken.

The real villain in this story is Gotham, the city itself. A city where angels fear to tread. The body, a secret organization of shapeshifters, infiltrating all the high places, (like the Owls from New 52) are just tools wielded by the city.

The art is really good but without drawing attention to itself. Every image just works.

I'm knocking off one star for the fact that the story seems to get out of hand. Some important plot threads are left hanging in the end. Not all the questions are answered or perhaps it would be more correct to say that not all the important questions are asked, by Batman. Too much is left unsolved, something which seems out of character for the worlds greatest detective.

But overall a bleak but very engaging comic, that I wouldn't hesitate to put on my list of essential Batman reads.

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## Ronnie Jones says

It was ok. Full review For City of Crime here

## **Bearded\_Brewer says**

Visually stunning. The artwork on this was really something to see. I was really excited when I started this, because the panels just jumped out at you. Very dark, but intricate. The story however, was weak. Using the term weak is me trying to be polite. I'm still not entirely sure what happened or why, and it's not because of the story's complexity.

My recommendation: stay away. There are too many good Batman stories out there to waste your time on this one. Pick it up in the bookstore and flip through it to see the artwork and then buy something else. Cheers!

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## **stratospherus says**

IMO one of the best Dark Knight stories from the past decade. It's dark, surreal and relentlessly grim tale. If the DC had taken off CCA seal of approval. Lapham presents a very gritty, noirish vision of Gotham, if not entirely hopeless.

Batman fails to save a few innocent people, only to find himself entangled in world of supernatural beings, known as "The Body". Cynism presented here might not appeal to everyone who enjoys in Caped Crusader adventures - Batman as protector of Gotham, failing to save lives and then lamenting about that would surely be frowned upon those who look for something positive. But for me, this suits perfectly for superhero like Batman. After all, he is ordinary man, with no superpower, but with endless stream of resources and sheer will. In my youth, I idealized the character, but that image of him started slowly to tarnish. Also, several moments are hard to swallow, such as dead pregnant teenage girl, burned to death. Or a dead dog lying on the street, in where no one seems to pay any attention to him.

I must recommend the artwork here. It is beautiful, detailed and frames are well pieced together. It makes Gotham City equal part of the story as the characters who inhabitate it.

As with the novel Red Harvest I read recently, this one also has a number of twists and red herrings. And the narrative constantly shifts and pages are crowded with grists of dialogues and monologues. Without that, City of Crime would be ideal 5.

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## **Jenifer says**

I know I'm the odd-gal out on this, from reading other reviews, but I thought this novel was awesome! It's a dark graphic novel with an artsy feel to it - another reviewer described it as "film-noir", which I feel is an appropriate analogy. The story was convoluted and confusing at first, but I truly felt as if I was trying to solve the mystery with Batman, understanding his mind while he tried to understand the minds of the criminals he was pursuing. The picture certainly become more clear at the end, and the journey is quite exciting. The nature of the story and the artwork lent a bit of a nightmare quality to the book, which I really appreciated. I couldn't put this one down! This is certainly a very underrated chapter in the Batman tale.

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## **Michael says**

Man, I bet this story was a bitch to read as a monthly - this was definitely paced as a novel, with long, slow-burn sections - tons of mood, sometimes at the expense of actual detail.

In some respects, I feel that the villain - the Body - was underdeveloped (not as a person, which was not important to this particular villain, but as a movement/threat possessing some quantifiable goal), but I was completely engrossed by the atmosphere and characterization of the city. Lapham really hit a home run with the full issue he spent detailing the life of the Hill and its residents, setting the stage for exactly what Batman had to infiltrate to find answers.

On some level, I felt that certain elements didn't come together completely - how Batman found certain answers, the "horror" sequence at the hospital and the cause of it, and - as noted earlier - the Body's reason for existence. Nevertheless, Lapham crafted a powerful, moving, truly desperate tale of Gotham City.

Ramon Bachs' linework was very nice, and working over Lapham's layouts was an inspired choice. Nobody paces these noir sequences better than Lapham.

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## **Beatrix Tung says**

Finally something that feels like classic Batman. Had nearly given up on Batman comics before this. Lapham writes darkness very well.

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## **John says**

David Lapham is a master of crime & noir, so I thought he'd make a great fit for Batman. In fact, he's a bit too dark and downbeat. The story is pretty muddled and often doesn't make much sense, choked out by lots of verbose and overwrought narration. The end result is just depressing. Not a lot of fun, this.

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