

Superman's Dark Side

Superman: The Unauthorized Biography by Glen Weldon, Wiley, 2013

There has been a trend in comic books over the past couple of decades, and more recently in movies based on comic books, to remake classic superheroes into troubled, violent, morally ambivalent characters who are in sharp contrast to the self-righteous and optimistic superheroes of the past. Writers have argued that these new characters are somehow closer in spirit to the original Golden Age characters and are therefore more true and pure.

However, while Batman may have had a bit of an edge in the 1930s, the idea of Superman as a brooding, conflicted figure – as he was presented in this year's *Man of Steel* – doesn't have much of a historical basis. As Glen Weldon illustrates in *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography*, the Man of Steel has always been a mutable character, a reflection of his historical context, and he still is. It just happens that we're in the mood for violent, troubled, ambivalent superheroes right now, and Superman has always been about giving us what we want.

Weldon's book is a step-by-step trip through Superman's history, from the character's introduction in Action Comics to the Bryan Singer-directed 2006 reboot movie, *Superman Returns*. There was nothing ambiguous about the earliest incarnation of Superman; he was wish fulfillment on the part of his two nerdy creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. He was a strongman who could do anything he wanted, and Siegel and Shuster obviously didn't think too much about his motivation or backstory. His origin story was vague and sketchy, something about space and science and superior racial evolution (a curious concept coming from two Jews during the rise of Hitler). During World War II, Superman was simply a hero, made to conquer the forces of evil.

After the war, when America didn't need heroes as much as it needed symbols, Superman became a shorthand emblem of patriotism and social stability, a protector of "truth, justice and the American way." He was still a one-dimensional fighter for right-



On Books

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teousness, even if there wasn't a clear and present evil for him to fight.

In the Silver Age of comic books in the 1960s, Superman became a caricature, clear evidence of how DC Comics was trying ever so hard to pander to the elusive youth market. The Man of Steel was surrounded by super children and super dogs, all-powerful monkeys and all manner of wacky new superheroes. He dressed up like a cowboy if he needed to, and he was willing to say "groovy" and "dig it!" Not until Christopher Reeve took on the role of Superman in the 1978 film did the Man of Steel begin to regain a bit of his dignity.

Superman's story is not a particularly coherent one, and unfortunately Weldon isn't able to unify the character's entire trajectory into one easily digestible narrative.

He moves through endless comic book titles, movie serials, radio shows, TV series and big-budget films, hitting all the important storylines and players. There's a lot of ground to cover, and Weldon covers all of it thoroughly, but the endless parade of episodes and issues, characters and actors is numbing, and it doesn't help that no one had a clear idea of where Superman was headed through the course of it all.

After the turn of the 21st century, superheroes were a dark bunch. Batman was sulking and murderous, Spider-man was angry and clumsy, Iron Man was irreverent and unstable. Superman was the last hero to come to the ambiguous anti-hero party, and when he finally got there in this year's Zack Snyder-directed *Man of Steel* (a milestone that Weldon doesn't reach in his book) the transformation ruffled the feathers of some fans.

The fact is, though, that Superman has always been exactly what we want him to be in the moment, and now he's proving that if we want him to be dark and brooding, he can do that, too.

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The '05's Welcome Addition

Review • Pad Thai



Dining Out

AMBER RECKER

Jon and I live in an historic neighborhood near Lakeside Park, just east of downtown Fort Wayne. Some call it the North Anthony neighborhood or the Northside neighborhood, others simply Lakeside. Jon and I have dubbed it the '05 (pronounced oh-five) and love it like a dear friend. We can't imagine living anywhere else, and because we care about our neighborhood and the quality of life of those who live there, we get excited when a new restaurant opens.

In early 2011, we were thrilled when Los Portales opened on East State, occupying a space that had been vacant for a few years. It was a family-owned Mexican restaurant that made its own tortillas and served superb horchatas. We thought it had real staying power, but, sadly, it closed not even a year after opening. Luckily, the space didn't stay empty for long. Pad Thai, coined as fine Thai and Burmese cuisine, opened in the space in late 2012.

Pad Thai's atmosphere is quaint and comfortable enough for a strip mall establishment. The new owners have done a nice job transforming it. The menu isn't extensive, but it does offer a variety of traditional Thai dishes, including the ever-popular Pad Thai. Want to know the best part? The menu contains pictures of most of the dishes, so those who aren't familiar with Thai and Burmese cuisine can get a preview of what to expect before ordering. On my first visit, I chose the dish that looked the best: Thai Beef Noodle Soup (\$6.95). Jon opted for Pad Thai with tofu (\$7.95).

The Thai Beef Noodle Soup was fabulous – full of thinly sliced beef, rice noodles, cilantro, scallions and bok choy. The broth was extremely flavorful with a hint of cinnamon giving it a heated, sweet taste. The dish also contained balls of fish, which I did not care for, but they were easy to eat around. This is the type

of dish I crave on chilly autumn nights.

Jon's dish measured up to classic Pad Thai dishes we've had at other Thai places in town. He especially enjoyed the extras available at the table – peanuts, pickled jalapeños and red chili – which let him make his dish as spicy as he likes.



Since our first trip to Pad Thai earlier this year, we've added it to our regular carry-out rotation and have fallen in love with Thai Grilled Pork with tamarind sauce (\$7.99). It's a



Pad Thai; Thai Beef Noodle

simple dish containing pork and rice, but the sauce makes it exquisite. Tamarind is a sticky brown pulp from the pod of a tree in the pea family and is used often in Asian cooking. In this case, it's mixed with fish sauce and scallions for a savory and tangy finish. The pork is served over sticky white rice

that complements it well.

Pad Thai is a welcome addition to the '05 neighborhood. Though seating is limited, it's a great place for a family lunch or dinner and even better for date night. Add it to your list of must-try restaurants. We've yet to have a dish we don't like.

Hours are 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Saturday and 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday.

THE GREEN ROOM - From Page 22

together after the show has been cast. Production dates are set for December 9-11, 2013. Those cast will receive monetary compensation provided they meet certain criteria. For more information, call director Paul Allen at 579-6277.

Brouwer stars in *The Black List*

Former Fort Wayne actor Mike Brouwer has continued his busy TV and film background career in New York City and can currently be seen on episodes of *The Black List* starring James Spader as an FBI agent. He will generally be sitting at a dual-monitored

computer helping to find the criminals Spader's character leads them to.

The Man Who Came to Dinner

Newlyweds Chris and Emilie Murphy star together in the play *The Man Who Came to Dinner* at the University of St. Francis beginning November 8 and running two weekends. Mr. Murphy plays Sheridan Whiteside, and Mrs. Murphy plays his assistant, Miss Maggie Cutler.

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SCREENTIME - From Page 22

starring newcomer Barkhad Abdi in a star-making performance, Catherine Keener as the perpetual Cool Old-ish Gal, and some guy called Tom Hanks who at one time in his career was a man-boy with a trampoline in his apartment. *Captain* tells the true story of Richard Phillips (Hanks) and the hijacking of his cargo ship by a group of Somali pirates. It's a very good story brought to life by very talented people. Should be good. Maybe even very good. Also out everywhere

is Robert Rodriguez's *Machete* sequel, *Machete Kills*, starring the guy who plays Machete (Danny Trejo) and a whole lot of women whom I suspect Rodriguez has crushes on. Along for the stylish ride are Michelle Rodriguez, Sofia Vergara, Amber Heard, Jessica Alba, Vanessa Hudgens, Lady Gaga, Alexa Vega, Cuba Gooding Jr., Antonio Banderas, Mel Gibson and Carlos Estevez.

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