

# Holy Dualities, Batman!

Playful and powerful, both hero *and* villain, [Zoë Kravitz](#) gets comfy with her inner freak and goes a round of cat and mouse with Batman. *Prrrrrrrrrr!*

by **Raelee Lancaster**

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**“W**e all love and identify with the villains just as much as we do the heroes in these stories,” says Zoë Kravitz. From Bela Lugosi’s 1931 rendition of *Dracula* to the fantabulous emancipation of Harley Quinn in 2020’s *Birds of Prey*, there’s no doubt that villains are a dynamic drawcard in mainstream cinema. The idea that every villain is the hero of their own story, and that every hero is inherently flawed, has become more prevalent in popular culture. *The Batman* is no exception.

Set two years into Bruce Wayne’s tenure as Batman, the gritty crime noir story follows the double life of Gotham City’s vigilante detective and his alter ego as a reclusive billionaire. Played by Robert Pattinson and directed by Matt Reeves (*Cloverfield*), this fresh take on the Caped Crusader is not the familiar crime-fighting DC superhero of old – at least, not yet – described instead as the “embodiment of vengeance”.

While Batman is the film’s title figure, it is his rogues’ gallery that enraptured the cast and crew. “You have John Turturro as this very understated crime boss, Carmine Falcone, and [Paul] Dano as a very intelligent Riddler who’s insanely scary,” says producer Dylan Clark. “You have Selina Kyle, who’s vulnerable yet manipulative, tough. She’s a very contemporary character, but she also feels like she has these archetypal ‘noir-ist’ elements. You’re like, *God, who is this woman? She’s amazing.*”

In *The Batman*, Selina Kyle – otherwise known as Catwoman, and portrayed by Kravitz – is a mysterious and ferocious cat burglar who wears motorcycle leathers and is “more at home with the city’s strays than its citizens”. This is on-brand for most depictions of Catwoman, who debuted in the spring 1940 issue of *Batman #1*, and has previously been portrayed on screen by Julie Newmar, Halle Berry and Anne Hathaway, among others.

Where Pattinson has been, in his words, a “massive fan” of the Bat-verse since childhood, Kravitz is not a big consumer of superhero movies. “But I think there was something about this world that was just so twisted, and everyone was a freak,” she says. “Oftentimes in my life, I felt like a freak, so I was very attracted to these people.”

One of the most intriguing aspects of Catwoman is her ability to exist in the liminal space between hero and villain. Canonically, Catwoman adds a grey area to Batman’s black-and-white worldview, allowing him to step out of the rigid boxes he’s placed himself in. What’s so refreshing is that she never struggles with this duality – an element that Kravitz relished. “You don’t know if she’s good or bad,” Kravitz agrees.

“Like a cat, you can never read her. There’s a reason we all love this character so much, and it’s really because of her playfulness and her power and the fact that she is independent and a survivor. It would be such a waste to not approach this character from a deep and complex place,” she says. “It’s such a fun way to work



THE CAT AND THE BAT

ROBERT PATTINSON RECLUSING AS BRUCE WAYNE



on things: to find ways to express what she’s feeling in a subtle way.”

This sense of internal conflict between good and bad is prevalent throughout *The Batman*. “When you try and break down all the individual characteristics of Batman, it’s an incredibly complex character,” Pattinson explains. “[Bruce Wayne] has decided that the only way he can get past the demons of his past is to become this character [Batman] which he truly believes is separate from himself.”

Clark agrees, calling Pattinson’s Batman “scary”. “He’s just coming into his own as the vigilante known as ‘The Batman’, but he doesn’t quite yet know what that entity is and what it should represent in society, and he’s not quite sure what these demons inside of him represent.

“Ultimately, Bruce is somebody who, because of his loss and because he’s not afraid to die, has never really allowed himself to love or be loved.”

One person who Batman has allowed in, however, is Catwoman. Their game of cat-and-mouse is notorious and their tempestuous on/off love affair is one of the most intriguing aspects of the Batman universe. They both have rough exteriors and flaws that end in the two fighting or unravelling – sometimes simultaneously.

“They draw so much strength from their own pain,” Pattinson says. “I mean, especially for Bruce, it makes him feel really vulnerable. Even though they’re very strong characters in lots of ways, they’re actually very, very difficult and fragile as well.”

Whether or not the romantic relationship between Batman and Catwoman comes to fruition in this film, the flickers of vulnerability humanise these characters. “I think it’s about us feeling out what this is, you

know?” says Kravitz. “Is this a partnership? Is this a friendship? Is it romantic? I really don’t think it’s clear. Just to have someone who we feel connected to enter our lives is a huge deal,” she explains. “Fate, whatever you want to call it, has brought us together. We need something from each other, and I think that those are some of the most interesting situations to watch.”

For Pattinson, a lot of Batman’s identity was tied up in his costume. “As soon as you put the costume on, you suddenly feel that you need to have such a solid foundation of the character you’re playing. Otherwise, you feel like an idiot in the costume. You have to really, really believe it.”

Public discourse around the batsuit – with its rippling abs and, historically, an obvious



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**ZOË KRAVITZ ON THE BATMAN**

codpiece – is typically fuelled by ideas of strength, power and agency, as linked to masculinity. The same cannot be said for Catwoman, whose get-up is usually gauged for sex appeal. As one of this film’s few women, Kravitz has fielded questions about her potential catsuit, whether it’s difficult to slip on and off – questions loaded with the same sexist voyeurism that has plagued her character for more than 80 years.

Though she appeared in *Batman #1*, “the Cat” wasn’t given the name “Catwoman” until *Batman #62* (December 1950), 10 years after her debut. It took another 18 years for Eartha Kitt to become the first Black woman to portray Catwoman, featuring in the final season of William Dozier’s campy *Batman* (1966-68) television series. At the time, this was seen as a controversial move, and Kitt’s Catwoman was the first not to be framed as Batman’s love interest, since interracial marriage was only legalised in all US states in 1967, and mixed-race relationships were

still largely frowned upon in many parts of the country. Moreover, for perhaps the first time on screen, her storylines became more character driven. And even though she had been a much-loved character for more than half a century, Catwoman didn’t get her own ongoing, standalone comic book series until 1993 – perhaps thanks, in part, to Michelle Pfeiffer’s cheesy yet enchanting portrayal in *Batman Returns* (1992).

For the most part, Catwoman as a sultry, unnamed cat burglar seems like bygone days. Still, tackling the live-action role requires a conscious balancing act between sexualised femme fatale, and feminist and cultural icon. “The idea of her being sexy, that’s a big part of Catwoman for a lot of people,” says Kravitz. “But what I find sexy is somebody comfortable in their own skin, somebody who knows who they are and isn’t afraid.” She adds, “I just wanted to make sure we didn’t fetishise her and create an idea or a victim.”

One way that Kravitz held onto the character’s autonomy – while also making Selina Kyle her own – was to ground Catwoman’s more fantastical traits. “I really don’t know how to work any other way,” she explains. “Because of the superhero nature, we see these characters from the outside in. Like, she’s sexy and she has a whip, but if that becomes the basis of who she is, it just doesn’t feel interesting. It doesn’t feel authentic.”

*The Batman* seems to understand that it is standing on the shoulders of giants. While honouring past legacies, it also introduces new perspectives. “Even though it’s been interpreted a multitude of ways, it does feel different,” Pattinson says. “It’s a very different tone. It’s actually kind of jarring when you first start watching it, but I think it’s really interesting and I think people will enjoy it – especially long-term fans.”

Kravitz seems similarly happy with the film that she and her fellow cast and crew have created. “The nerves don’t help, right? You have to just focus on what you’re trying to do.

“I tried to forget about, you know, the fans and the idea and the pressure and just think about what story am I telling,” she says. “Now, doing press and having an actual release date and all of that, it’s a little scary – and exciting.” ■

THE BATMAN IS IN CINEMAS NOW.

# 7 LIVES OF CATWOMAN



Julie Newmar (1966)



Lee Meriwether (1966)



Eartha Kitt (1967)



Michelle Pfeiffer (1992)



Halle Berry (2004)



Anne Hathaway (2012)



Zoë Kravitz (2022)