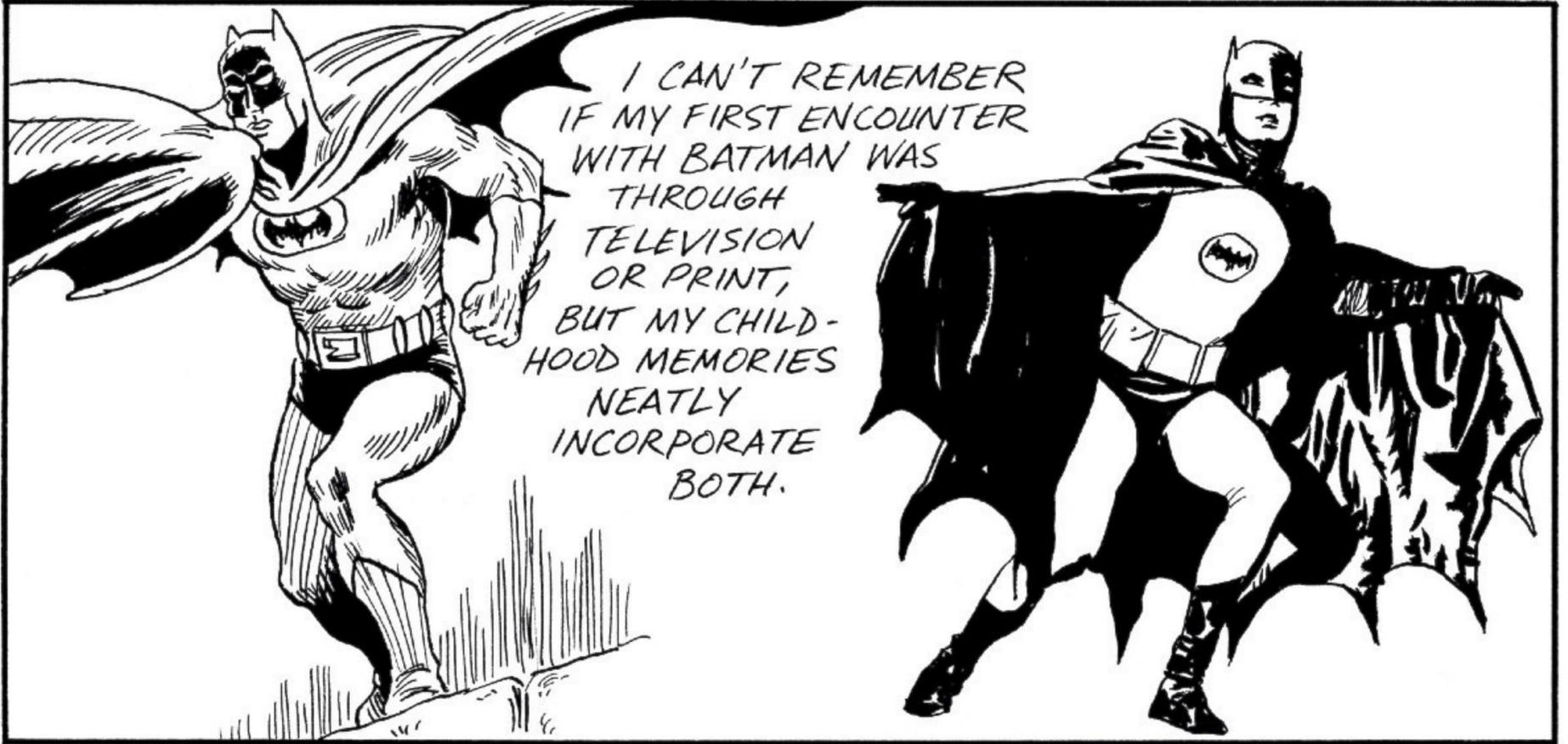


THE CAPED CRUSADER



I CAN'T REMEMBER IF MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH BATMAN WAS THROUGH TELEVISION OR PRINT, BUT MY CHILDHOOD MEMORIES NEATLY INCORPORATE BOTH.

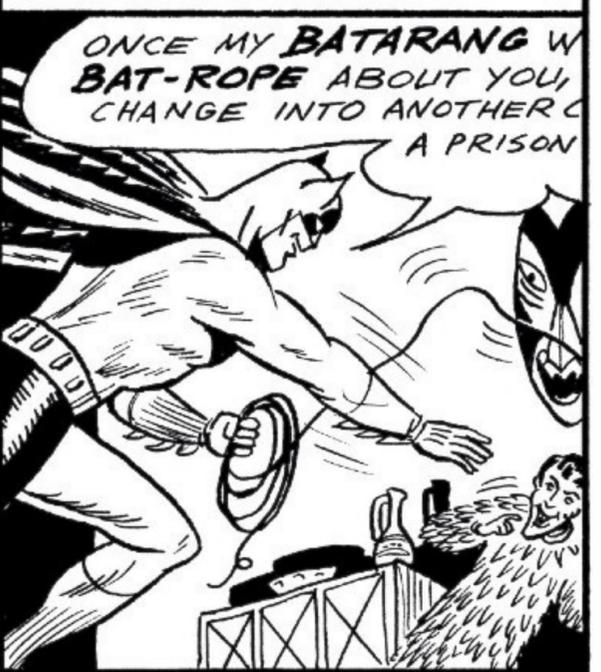
LIKE THAT ONE COMIC IN WHICH BATMAN AND ROBIN EXAMINE THEIR ENEMY'S BRUISES BY MOVING TO THE SIDE OF THE TV IN ORDER TO SEE HIS FACE FROM A DIFFERENT ANGLE.



I AM ALSO OF THE OPINION THAT THE ADAM WEST TV SHOW IS AN EXTREMELY FAITHFUL TRANSLATION OF A COMIC BOOK INTO LIVE ACTION.



PICK UP A BATMAN COMIC FROM THE EARLY 1960s AND READ IT OUT LOUD. YOU'LL SEE WHAT I MEAN.



IN ANY CASE, 1966, WHEN I WAS 6 YEARS OLD (A NICE TRIO OF SIXES, REMINISCENT OF THE ADDRESS OF DC COMICS AT THE TIME I DREW YEAR ONE.), WAS WHEN IT ALL BEGAN.



MANY OF MY DRAWINGS FROM THAT YEAR ARE OF BATMAN, INCLUDING MY FIRST PAGE OF PANEL CONTINUITY.



SO IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT AT THAT YOUNG AGE, I MADE A FATEFUL DECISION.



THE WEIRD CREATURE OF DARKNESS

FROM MOMOTARŌ TO MOSES, LITERATURE IS RICH WITH ADOPTED ORPHANS WHO, DISCOVERING THEIR OWN HIDDEN SPECIALNESS, GROW TO BECOME HEROES.



THIS ARCHETYPE-POPULAR THROUGHOUT THE WORLD-MUST RESONATE WITH OUR EARLIEST FEARS AND FANTASIES.



THAT'S WHY SUPERMAN IS A PERFECT EXPRESSION OF CHILDHOOD DESIRES.



IN DAILY LIFE, HE IS POWERLESS, INEFFECTUAL.

BUT IN SECRET, HE HAS THE ABILITY TO ACT, TO EFFECT CHANGE, TO SET THINGS RIGHT.



AS A BOY, I ASSUMED THAT HEROES (SUPER OR NOT) WERE "GOOD GUYS" BECAUSE THEY WERE **GOOD GUYS** - THAT IS, INHERENTLY GOOD FOLKS.



BATMAN'S ORIGIN, THOUGH, HAS ALWAYS HINGED ON **CIRCUMSTANCE**: NO MURDER, NO BATMAN.



(THIS CORE TENET HAS BEEN CHALLENGED, BUT NEVER TO MY KNOWLEDGE OVERTURNED.)

DESPITE HISTORICAL PRECEDENT, I'VE NEVER BEEN COMFORTABLE WITH THE IDEA OF **VENGEANCE** AS A HEROIC IDEAL.



WOULDN'T A "HERO" EMBODY MORE THAN THAT?

HERE'S WHAT FRANK TOLD **AMAZING HEROES** IN 1986:

"He's clearly a man with a mission, but it's not one of vengeance. Bruce is not after personal revenge... He's much bigger than that; he's much more noble than that. He wants the world to be a better place, where a young Bruce Wayne would not be a victim..."



"In a way, he's out to make himself unnecessary. Batman is a hero who wishes he didn't have to exist."



THE DYNAMIC DUO

BECAUSE OF THEIR SIMPLICITY, SUPERHEROES ARE EASY PREY FOR REVISIONISTS.

FIRST, LET'S REMEMBER THAT SUPERHERO COMICS WERE INVENTED FOR CHILDREN — BOYS, REALLY.

HERE'S HOW I SEE IT: WHEN BRUCE WAYNE WAS A KID, HIS PAMPERED, IDYLIC LIFE WAS SHATTERED TO PIECES.



IN 1954, DR. FREDRIC WERTHAM SAW IN BATMAN AND ROBIN'S RELATIONSHIP A CODED METAPHOR FOR HOMOSEXUALITY.

WERTHAM MADE THE FUNDAMENTAL MISTAKE OF EXAMINING THESE COMICS WITH AN ADULT SENSIBILITY — AND WITHOUT HUMOR.

SINCE THEN, HE'S BEEN TRYING TO PUT IT BACK TOGETHER.

IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE THAT HIS BEST FRIEND WOULD BE TWELVE YEARS OLD, BECAUSE BATMAN IS STILL A LITTLE BOY STUCK IN A MAN'S BODY.

IF THERE'S A "NO GIRLS ALLOWED" SIGN ON THEIR BATCAVE/CLUBHOUSE, IT'S BECAUSE GIRLS ARE ICKY.



THAT'S WHY CATWOMAN IS DANGEROUS — SHE REPRESENTS A MATURITY THE BOYS AREN'T READY FOR.

SUPERHEROES LIVE BEST IN THEIR OWN WORLD — A PREADOLESCENT WORLD.

WHILE AN INTERESTING EXPERIMENT, IT'S PROBABLY NOT A GOOD IDEA TO SHOE-HORN TOO MUCH "REALITY" INTO THE FANTASY REALM OF THE SUPERHERO.



(THE TV SHOW GOT A LOT OF MILEAGE FROM THIS DYNAMIC.)

... OOPS

EVER SINCE STAN LEE INTRODUCED ANXIETY INTO SUPERHEROES -

FAULT--ALL
FAULT! IF
Y I HAD
PPED HIM
EN I **COULD**
E! BUT I
T--AND NOW
CLE BEN--
S DEAD...

- NO, EARLIER, SINCE HARVEY KURTZMAN FIRST TRAINED A SATIRIC EYE ON THEM IN MAD -



- THE QUESTION, "WHAT WOULD SUPERHEROES BE LIKE IN THE REAL WORLD?" HAS BEDEVILED SUCCEEDING GENERATIONS OF COMICS CREATORS.



FRANK WROTE *THE DARK KNIGHT* IN A FORTISSIMO, OPERATIC MODE.



BUT HE RECOGNIZED THAT MY STRENGTHS AS AN ARTIST WERE MORE ATTUNED TO THE MUNDANE.

SO WITH *YEAR ONE*, WE SOUGHT TO CRAFT A **CREDIBLE** BATMAN, GROUNDED IN A WORLD WE RECOGNIZE.



BUT, DID WE GO TOO FAR?

ONCE A DEPICTION VEERS TOWARD REALISM, EACH NEW DETAIL RELEASES A TORRENT OF QUESTIONS THAT EXPOSES THE ABSURDITY AT THE HEART OF THE GENRE.



THE MORE "REALISTIC" SUPERHEROES BECOME, THE LESS BELIEVABLE THEY ARE.



IT'S A DELICATE BALANCE.



BUT THIS MUCH I KNOW:

SUPERHEROES ARE REAL WHEN THEY'RE DRAWN IN INK.

