

# BATMAN: THE DARK KNIGHT: MASTER RACE

Frank Miller | Brian Azzarello  
Andy Kubert | Klaus Janson

In this third installment of the NEW YORK TIMES best-selling DARK KNIGHT series, Frank Miller (THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS) joins forces with Brian Azzarello (BATMAN, 100 BULLETS) to reexamine an aged Bruce Wayne in the fight of his life to save humanity from genocide. A Kryptonian army of nationalists believes they are the one true “master race,” and invades Earth to claim it as their new home, vowing to destroy all humans who don’t pledge their devotion to the army’s leader. Bruce Wayne unites with members of the Justice League, each of whom must overcome their own obstacles, to defeat an evil that would destroy the planet and people they’ve been entrusted to protect.

**THEMES** War, legacy, identity, racism, justice, humanity, loyalty, family, hope, allegiance, guilt, nationalism, genocide, mortality, duty, community

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- A recurring theme in the narrative is Superman’s affinity for humanity. How do you interpret Superman’s decision to help save humanity from a genocide at the hands of his own people? What arguments do Superman’s actions make about caring for and identifying with people who are not of the same race or nationality? In what ways does the text refute the concept of a “master race”?
- Lara’s turbulent relationship with her parents, Superman and Wonder Woman, is a central focus of the narrative. What is the narrative purpose of Lara’s tendency to self-identify at different times as either Kryptonian or Amazonian? Is the text more critical or sympathetic to Lara as she tries to understand her biracial heritage?
- Consider Carrie’s growth from Robin to Batgirl to Batwoman. What are some of the key differences in her character at each stage? What commentary do you think the book is making about traditional gender roles? How do you think traditional gender roles and societal expectations played into Carrie’s transformation?
- Analyze Lara and Quar’s army of nationalists’ bigoted behavior. What justifications do they give for this bigotry? How does the text introduce, develop and challenge the concept of nationalism?
- Batman’s physical powers dramatically fluctuate in this narrative. Analyze how these highs and lows are depicted by the artists. How do Batman’s moments of strength visually differ from his moments of weakness? Why might this be the case?
- Included in this graphic novel are nine tales further detailing the world of the Dark Knight. What do these character-centric comics tell us about the supporting characters, all of whom come from different worlds and backgrounds? Do they aid in humanizing, representing and individualizing these characters’ experiences? How so? How do you interpret each character’s sense of duty throughout the narrative?
- Analyze the role of technology in the narrative and Miller’s choice to have select supporting characters communicate through social media, TV and mobile phones. Why do you think Miller chose to feature caricatures of real politicians and media personalities as characters who communicate to the reader using technology?
- What are some of the story’s recurring visual motifs? How do they contribute to building some of its broader arguments? How would you describe Frank Miller, Andy Kubert and Klaus Janson’s artistic styles?
- What was your familiarity with Batman prior to reading this graphic novel? In what ways did this text support or disrupt your previous understanding of him as a character? What was most surprising about Miller’s depiction of him? If you’ve read the two previous Dark Knight graphic novels, how did Miller’s final message differ in this third book?
- How do Batman’s fears throughout the book relate to his own mortality and legacy? Why does fear affect Batman in such a visceral way? How does Carrie’s presence allay Batman’s fears and affect his concept of the “end”?



## BATMAN: THE DARK KNIGHT: MASTER RACE

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## ESSAY PROMPT

Lara's Amazonian and Kryptonian heritage and her struggle with identity and belonging is a central theme throughout the narrative. Her allegiances to the citizens of Themyscira, Krypton and the people of Earth are constantly brought into competition with one another. These competing identities and loyalties are a point of moral confusion for Lara that manifests in her rebelling from, and literally fighting against, her parents. What do you think is the text's primary argument about the relationship between one's nationality, identity and loyalty? How are the citizens of Themyscira, Krypton and Earth represented similarly and differently? What lessons do you think Lara has learned by the end of the book, when she's dressed in human clothing and asking her father to teach her about the joys of humanity?

## GUIDED CLOSE READING

The page to the right illustrates Batgirl and Commissioner Yindell's first interaction after they learn about the supposed death of Batman. This scene differs dramatically from Batgirl and Yindell's scenes at the beginning of the book when Yindell is questioning Carrie Kelley about the whereabouts of Bruce Wayne. This scene is pivotal in that it reflects upon the destruction of the war and questions the actions of heroes, while simultaneously showing hope for the future and a comradery between the two characters. Use the following prompts to help your students give meaning to the visual information on the page:

- Start with the big picture: How is this page organized? Pay attention to framing, borders, and the number, size and spacing of the panels. How does this particular layout enhance and help to effectively deliver the textual content? Does it differ from surrounding pages? Why is this significant?
- Now, study each frame individually. How does each frame command visual interest? Consider the artistic style of the page. Analyze color, perspective and framing. Are there any recurring motifs? Does any one in particular stand out immediately, or are they all given equal weight? Why do you think this is?
- Batgirl has her head bowed and turned away from the reader throughout most of this scene, whereas we get a rare close-up of Commissioner Yindell's face. How do you interpret this artistic choice?
- Compare this scene with Batgirl and Yindell's scenes together at the beginning of the book when Batgirl brawls with police officers and is questioned by Commissioner Yindell at the police station. What has changed about their relationship? How do you think the events of the narrative have changed each character individually? Do you think they've changed for the better?
- Do you think Batgirl believes her statement when she says "We're on the right side"? Use examples throughout the text to support your answer.

