

Gotham City

The landscape setting for comic book stories is just as important as the heroes and villains. Superman has Metropolis and Batman has Gotham City. Over the years, different artists and writers have depicted the city in their own style and movies and television has put its own interpretation on the urban sprawl. It's agreed that New York was the inspiration for all the visualizations, with Gothic, Art Deco and Art Nouveau design influencing the architecture. The sets on the 1960s TV series were kitsch, whereas Tim Burton's movies show a very dark and brooding environment, full of menace.

No matter how the styles have differed, certain landmarks are constant in Gotham City. Bruce Wayne, the man behind Batman's mask, lives in the splendid pile known as Wayne Manor. It lives up to his millionaire status but also is the headquarters for his crime fighting enterprise. The Batcave is the secret location underneath the grand house, where the Bat computer and the Batcar reside. Batman and Robin slide down the fireman's pole to save time when rushing out to fight the baddies. Their escapades are aided and abetted by Alfred, the faithful butler. He appears to be the only staff, despite the size of the house he has to look after and his advancing years. When Bruce isn't in the Batcave, he is entertaining guests in his vast dining room.

Other landmarks include Arkham Asylum, the institution that houses the villains Batman has to deal with. Unfortunately, they have a bad habit of escaping. There is also the prison, Gotham Docks, the museums and the chemical works where the Joker met his awful fate. Then there is the Police Headquarters where Commissioner Gordon operates and the offices of the Gotham Gazette newspaper. Although the city is usually shown to be positioned on the eastern seaboard, the latest film, Batman Begins was shot in Chicago and shows many recognizable features from that city.

This location is not a relaxing spot to live in. In addition to the criminal deeds of the Joker, the Riddler, the Penguin and others, there has been an earthquake and a virus outbreak. Corruption has been rife in Gotham City and petty criminals lurk round every bad neighborhood.

The imposing buildings with their towers and buttresses lend an atmosphere to the stories. Batman fans his cape and moves effortlessly across the city. He knows every inch of the place having grown up there but sees it from the rooftops, knowing where all his enemies have their hiding place. Gotham City is a successful business center with a seedy underbelly.