



BATMAN

AND

PSYCHOLOGY

A DARK AND STORMY KNIGHT

TRAVIS LANGLEY

FOREWORD BY MICHAEL USLAN INTRODUCTION BY DENNIS O'NEIL

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BATMAN

AND PSYCHOLOGY

A Dark and Stormy Knight

TRAVIS LANGLEY



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For Rebecca, Alex, and Nicholas from everything I am today.

For my parents, Lynda and Travis Sr., from the kid who never goes away.

Acknowledgments

My Bat-Family

If I start naming everybody who ever helped me love Batman, I'll never stop. How far back do I go? To my mom who read me comic books when I was small? To Neal Adams whose art, by making Batman stories look so much more eerie than TV had led me to expect, motivated my preschool self to learn to read? To editor Bob Schreck and writer Kevin Smith, whose work reignited my habit of subscribing to monthly comics? Then how about more artists—Jim Aparo, Dick Giordano, Sheldon Moldoff, Irv Novick, Marshall Rogers, George Roussos—and writers, editors, actors, directors, still more artists ... ? The long line of creative individuals who have kept our hero patrolling Gotham in print and on screen never stops, and I do thank them all.

This book begins one summer when *The Dark Knight* was packing audiences into movie theaters when I read the book *Superman on the Couch*, in which Danny Fingeroth observed¹ that mental health professionals had written nearly nothing about comics in the fifty years since psychiatrist Fredric Wertham attacked the comic book industry; and when my son Nicholas went to San Diego Comic-Con to collect data for Matt Smith's ethological research² (no, not the Matt Smith who flies a TARDIS). Accompanying Nick there because I wanted to see their group's research presentation, I looked around Comic-Con, I watched thousands of people bustling about in an environment that celebrated their passions, I met scholars writing on many comics-related topics, and it all came together for me: I needed to study comic book fans, and I needed to write about Batman.

Evan Gregory of the Ethan Ellenberg Literary Agency brought me to Wiley, Connie Santisteban, John Simko, Rebecca Yeager, and the whole Wiley team. When you're writing a book about Batman, you take it as a good sign when you learn your literary agent named his dog Bruce Wayne. My wife Rebecca, a licensed therapist, helped me think through the therapeutic issues. My older son, Alex, thought I should organize my chapters around the villains—hence my compromise, my Case Files featured foes. Artists Marko Head and Nick Langley created illustrations, including those at the beginning of every chapter, and I can't thank DC Comics V.P. Jay Kogan and Rights & Permissions Manager Thomas King strongly enough for the images from DC Comics/Warner Bros. publications. I must thank my first readers (Rebecca and Alex), second readers (Action Flick Chick Katrina Hill, Christopher Daley, Marissa Nolan-Layman, David Manning), supportive friends like Bruce and Kath Smith and GeekNation.com's Clare Kramer and Brian Keathley, and a twitpal legion. Chris Spatz and Ralph McKenna at Hendrix College and then Terry Christenson, Arnold Gerall, Barbara Moely, my great mentor Ed O'Neal, and others taught me all kinds of psychology at Tulane University so I couldn't misrepresent it here for you.

I've been fortunate to teach at a university that respects and supports comics scholarship. Communication professor Randy Duncan paved the way before me through his years of teaching *Comics as Communication*, guiding Henderson State University's comic book club, and building our library's Stephen R. Bissette Archives and graphic novel collection, which houses plenty of Batman titles thanks to librarians like Lea Ann Alexander. English instructor Eric Bailey helped me access key television episodes from decades-old master prints. Dean Maralyn Sommer, Undergraduate Research Chair Martin Campbell, John Hardee, Millie Bowden, Lecia Franklin, Carolyn Hatley, Linda Mooney, and Erma Johnson have helped our students and myself travel to conventions where we've collected

interview and survey data for our ongoing ERIICA Project (Empirical Research on the Interpretation and Influence of the Comic Arts).³ Those students impress me all the time: Erica Ash, Tommy Cas, Carly Cate, Summer Delezen, Robert O’Nale, Ashley Pitcock, Justin Poole, Nikki Robertson, Thom Sepe, Jarod Shurtleff, Nicole Smith ... they keep coming. Working in a department full of people both respect and like—supportive and dedicated colleagues Aneeq Ahmad, Rafael Bejarano, and Par Williamson—is truly a blessing, and words cannot convey the depths of my gratitude to our department chair, Todd Wiebers, for many reasons, not the least of which has been letting me teach courses like *Comics & Psychology*, *Psychology in Film*, and one titled *Batman*.

With Peter Coogan, once upon a time, Randy Duncan co-founded the Comics Arts Conference: San Diego Comic-Con’s scholarly conference-within-the-con. Helping them and current CAC chair Ka McClancy organize the conference has been a privilege, and we all owe a huge debt to Eddie Ibrahim, Sue Lord, Gary Sassaman, and others who run SDCC and WonderCon. Mark Walters (Dallas Comic Con), Ben Stevens (Sci-Fi Expo), Lance Fensterman (New York Comic Con), and more con organizers created valuable opportunities for me.

One of the highlights of my year every summer lately has been conducting Comic-Con panels on the psychology of Batman together with fellow psychologist Robin Rosenberg and *The Dark Knight Rises* executive producer Michael Uslan. Great people have joined us along the way—like writer Len Wein (creator of Lucius Fox, Swamp Thing, and Wolverine), psychologist Andrea Letamendi, actress Le Meriwether (*Batman: The Movie*’s Catwoman), journalist Nerdy Bird Jill Pantozzi, neuroscientist Paul Zehr (author of *Becoming Batman*), and comic book legend Denny O’Neil (the man who wrote the first comic books I ever read).⁴ It’s hard to imagine how we’ll top that first time when *Batman* TV star Adam West, “The Laughing Fish” scribe Steve Englehart, and artist Jerry Robinson, whose achievements include creating the Joker with Kane and Finger, helped us discuss the Joker’s psychopathy.⁵ Nina West Tooley, James Tooley, Fred Westbrook, and Jens Robinson helped tremendously with that. Adam had never previously met Michael or Jerry in person. Since then they’ve each commented on how enjoyable that historic day turned out to be; Michael covers it in his autobiography, *The Boy Who Loved Batman*. While I have additional reasons for thanking every individual mentioned above, I must again thank two important and gracious human beings in particular: Michael Uslan for contributing this book’s foreword and Denny O’Neil for the introduction. It is an honor, sirs.

Jerry Robinson’s gone now, but I remain forever grateful to him. Hired in his teens to work on the art a few months after Kane and Finger created their masked avenger, Jerry contributed much to the mythos and brought those early days to life for me. He was always a warm and considerate man who spent as much time asking about me, my work, and my opinions as he spent answering my questions. I’ll never get to meet the late Bob Kane or Bill Finger. We can’t chat about their creations. I can’t watch them greet fans, hear them recount anecdotes from their amazing lives, or thank them for everything they set in motion and all that their legacy has meant—not face-to-face anyway. This book is more than my answer to a question the man who played my childhood hero once asked me, as you soon see. It’s my heartfelt “thank you” to Bob and Bill. Jerry too.

Batman creator Bob Kane’s headstone. Photo by Lynda M. Langley.



Notes

- [1](#) Fingeroth (2004), 22–23.
- [2](#). Smith, Pustz, Langley, Andrada, Catalfu, Combs, Geranios, Moran, & Stover (2007).
- [3](#). Duncan, Langley, Langley, Smith, Poole, Head, O’Nale, Ash, Sepe, Cash, Hill, Cate, Langley, & Fingeroth (2008); Langley, Duncan, Langley, Poole, Sepe, Head, Langley, Hill, Cate, Shurtleff, & O’Nale (2008); Langley (in press).
- [4](#). Langley, Rosenberg, Meriwether, Pantozzi, & Uslan (2011); Letamendi, Rosenberg, Langley, & Wein (2011); O’Neil, Uslan, Cash, Langley, Rosenberg, & Zehr (2010); O’Neil, Zehr, Langley, Letamendi, Rosenberg, & Bruen (2011).
- [5](#). Rosenberg, Langley, Robinson, Englehart, Uslan, & West (2009).

Foreword

BY MICHAEL USLAN

Recently, *The New York Times* took DC Comics, the comic book industry generally, and Batman specifically over the coals for what they claimed might be an insensitivity toward all the supervillains like the Joker, Two-Face, the Scarecrow, and Catwoman, whom they apparently saw less as “villains” and more as mere victims of assorted types and degrees of mental illness.⁶ Concerned psychiatrists and psychologists, it seems, feel that comic books denigrate these poor souls as “dangerous,” “evil,” and even “lunatics,” mix-matching in the process such clinical appellations as “psychotics” and “schizophrenics” with “costumed crazies” and “homicidal maniacs.” Some psychiatrists and psychologists argue that the comic book supervillain stereotypes promote shameful generalizations that continue to cause every new generation of comic book readers to fear or mock these afflicted and misunderstood antagonists.

Particularly targeted by these critics is the comic book institution known as Arkham Asylum (the word “asylum” no longer being a politically correct term of art) and the references to its patients as “inmates” (the latter word also no longer politically correct). The panels of the stories visually depict scenes of these afflicted victims sitting in barred cells (the word “cells” no longer politically correct in this context), wearing straitjackets or shackles (the word “straitjacket” no longer politically correct). Comic books are accused of ratcheting up bias, prejudice, and fear against the Joker and his compadres. Indeed, these psychiatrists and psychologists now see Batman as more of the bad guy than the so-called supervillains he opposes. They give no credit to the Dark Knight for his decades-long non-use of butterfly nets (while not specifically mentioned in the article, I’ll venture to guess that the term “butterfly nets” is also no longer politically correct) to corral his opponents who break out of Arkham seemingly every Wednesday the new comic books go on sale.

Left to right: Comic-Con panelists Robin Rosenberg, Michael Uslan, Travis Langley, Adam West, Jerry Robinson. Photo by Alex Langley.



The bipolar opposite of this rather sensationalistic approach to Batman and the comics with all the trumped-up charges against the Caped Crusader is the scholarly and insightful book you now hold in your hands. Superherologist Travis Langley is a university professor and an eminent scholar on the psychology of comic book superheroes and their real-life fans. *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight* represents the culmination of his professional journal articles, chapters, blogs, many convention panels, and lifetime of contemplating the nature of heroes both factual and fictional, especially the one who guards Gotham. His professional credentials, mixed with his love for com

books and the character of Batman, create a fascinating, entertaining, and educational read. What makes Batman tick? Are superheroes with secret identities schizophrenic? Is Batman neurotic? Psychotic? And are Batman's rogues gallery of supervillains truly *not* rogues or supervillains, but rather victims of a heartless society who are in need of better understanding and far more compassion than shown to date by the Gotham City Police Department, Batman, Robin, Superman, and even the entire Justice League of America? Find your nearest couch, lie down, and let Dr. Langley explain it all.

Michael Uslan
Gotham City
2011

* * *

Michael Uslan is a comics scholar, writer, and filmmaker experienced in taking on one Goliath after another. To get approval to teach the first course on comic book folklore at any accredited university, he asked a university dean to recount Superman's famous origin and then pointed out that the dean had just described the story of Moses. Michael has written some of our most enduring heroes' comic book adventures (*Batman*, *The Shadow*, *The Spirit*, *Archie*), but is best known for bringing our hero to the big screen as executive producer of every Batman movie since the 1980s—originally another giant battle because studio executives at the time had trouble believing audiences would want a serious Batman.

Note

[6](#) Bender, Kambam, & Pozios (2011).

Introduction

DENNIS O'NEIL

Let us agree, here at the beginning, that Batman does not exist—not, anyway, as you and I exist. You can't filch his Social Security number, you won't meet his third cousin at a party, you'll never follow him into a polling place, and you'll never press his flesh, even if you spend your midnights lurking on rooftops.

So no present-tense, living-and-breathing, genome-bearing reality for the Dark Knight. But although he is not real, he does have a reality, a kind of reality he shares with mythology, folklore, legend, imaginary friends, and (let us lower our voices) maybe even a deity or two. What I'm suggesting is that Batman is not just a fictional character. Oh, he is that, and once he was nothing more. But not now.

I learned of this somewhat disconcerting reality years ago when, as the editor of Batman comics, I presided over what became known, in the Batman office of DC Comics, as the telephone stunt. What happened was, we had a character—Batman's second sidekick and the second junior hero to be called "Robin"—whom we didn't much like. We suspected that a lot of readers shared our feelings. What to do? Overhaul his personality? Send him to some distant clime? *Kill him*? Ah. Kill him. We conjured up the telephone stunt. Our writer, Jim Starlin, put the kid into a situation that could do him in. We then gave the readers three days to decide Robin's fate: call one phone number and he lives to fight another day; call another and *requiescat in pace*.

Three days and over 10,000 calls later, the nays had it. R.I.P. Boy Wonder.

Then the aftermath: big reaction; lots of reporters and interviews and broadcasters and journalists and fuss. And I realized that I had been thinking of my job as producing fiction for a publishing backwater—comic books—and that I was wrong; my job was being in charge of postindustrial folklore. Batman (and Superman and Wonder Woman and maybe a few others) had been around so long, in so many media, that they were embedded in our collective psyches. Even folk who hadn't read a comic in years—even those who *wouldn't* read comics—knew, at least dimly, who these characters were and had some amorphous feeling for them.

None of which changed my workday: plots and cover copy and manuscript editing and long, long meetings.... you know, publishing stuff. Nor did it change what Batman was to me: a great vehicle for storytelling. But I now knew that he had something of the mythic in him. Like mythic heroes of old, he reflected the values of his time, though those values weren't constant, and that was good—that allowed him to retain popularity for, as I write this, 72 years and counting. He evolved. The essence of what his creators, Bill Finger and Bob Kane, brought to the party in 1939 hadn't changed much: the nocturnal vigilante endlessly and symbolically avenging his parents' murders; an origin tale stark and simple and primal and, I submit, perfect. But virtually everything else *did* change over the decades: costumes and supporting cast and crime-fighting gadgetry and the kinds of crime fought and the kinds of villains who perpetrated the crimes.... The range of stories appearing under the Batman logo went from farcical to macabre, while always being a Batman. Not *the* Batman—there is no *the* Batman—but a Batman, one appropriate to whatever was contemporary.

This plasticity not only kept Batman commercially viable; it allowed different writers and artists

interpret him according to the dictates of their own experience—the world outside their windows. also allowed him to be more than a mirror; he could be a receptacle, too. Writers could pour into him a lot that was happening in their consciousness and maybe even more that was happening in the subconscious: what they learned, what they knew, what they didn't know they knew.

Not deliberately, of course. No comic book writer sits down and creates a psychological profile of a character before writing a line of dialogue. But our characters are human—what else could they be? Granted, these are not real humans—I gently remind you that Batman does not exist—but *depictions* of humans: greatly simplified, exaggerated, caricatured versions of we mortals. They represent what hundreds of writers and artists over a half-century thought and felt and believed about who and what we are, and it's a safe guess that most of that thinking and feeling and believing occurred subconsciously. But it did filter into the fiction.

The history of comic book superheroes encapsulates, in brief, easily digestible form, the history of storytelling. The first tales our hunter-gatherer forebears told were apparently simple reactions to the bad noise in the sky and the other ugly events that tormented the clan and, after tens of thousands of years and enormous evolution, resulted in the metafictional productions of the postmodernist. Similarly, the first comics presented simple good-guy-versus-bad-guy melodramas. We knew the good guy was good because he—almost always a “he”—conquered the bad guy, who was bad because his actions incurred the good guy's disapproval. It was all plot-driven, with characterization either ignored or expressed by the occasional foible, speech pattern or—yes!—even a funny hat or two. Then, gradually but pretty darn briskly, creative people learned how to tell stories in this odd medium and publishing requirements altered to allow longer stories, and those things resulted in great sophistication on the parts of both writer and reader. Writers could put a lot into Batman and his ilk, consciously *and* subconsciously, and they were still allowed the occasional funny hat, too.

Suddenly, while some of us were looking the other way, comics, like jazz and movies before them, had attained full parity. They were respectable—they were An Art Form.

And a well-credentialed professor with a gratifyingly lucid prose style and a sense of humor wrote a book about the psychology of Batman. (You may have noticed it in your hands.) It is a terrific book. It explores the psychological implications of Batman's various incarnations, in print and on screens both large and small, and in the process gives us a pretty thorough biography of Batman, his friends, and his enemies, and demonstrates the kind of reality Batman enjoys. Not a literal reality (we agreed that Batman does not exist, remember?), but a way of existing in people's heads that extends past fiction into the realm of postindustrial mythology. I know of no word that exactly defines this kind of myth, but when somebody gets around to creating one, they may very well use Travis Langley's book as a reference.

Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight performs another task and performs it better than anything I've encountered before. It serves as a witty and absolutely clear introduction to the psychology, especially clinical psychology.

Batman-who-does-not-exist (we do have to keep reminding ourselves of that!), in the incarnation I'm most familiar with, is, like his predecessor Sherlock Holmes, fairly disdainful of the liberal arts and soft science sections of the library. But he'd read this book. He'd have to, wouldn't he?

Dennis O'Neil
Crime Alley
since 1938

Writer and editor Dennis O'Neil, in addition to his award-winning work weaving humanity and social consciousness into the adventures of heroes like Green Lantern, Green Arrow, and Iron Man, has been one of the most prominent custodians of the legacy Bob Kane and Bill Finger began. With artist Neal Adams, he restored Batman to his darker roots after the campier stories of then-recent years. Denny's work with the Dark Knight has included creating characters like Ra's and Talia al Ghul, overseeing the editing of all Batman titles, and novelizing the motion pictures *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*.

Beneath the Cowl

Who Is Batman?



Adam West once asked me if I thought Batman was crazy. *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight* is my answer.

Since his debut in 1939's *Detective Comics* #27, Batman has thrilled billions across the globe over time, and through a multitude of media. Of the world's three best-known comic book heroes—the brawler, the spider, and the man from another planet, a trio of orphaned boys—he's the one who works by night, needs a car to get him into town, and is the most mortal. He's the superhero with no superpowers, the one we can most easily believe might inhabit our world. While his secret identity is the most fantastic of the three, one charmingly handsome billionaire living in a grand mansion on top of a vast cave versus two nebbishy newspaper employees, that fantastic wealth helps us accept his masked identity as something that feels real. Someone has to pay for those wonderful toys. The real world has more people known to be superrich than superpowered. Batman is the hero even adults can envision existing in real life, with less suspension of disbelief. Even though he has opportunities few people enjoy, Bruce Wayne hails from a city, not a mythical island or distant world, and he builds himself into a hero through training and hard work—no radiation, secret formula, or magic ring required. His origin is tragic and brutally believable. It taps the most primal of our childhood fears: a family outing twists into tragedy when a mugger guns his parents down before his eyes.

His films among the highest-grossing in history, this character has starred in more movies and television series, both animated and live-action, than any other comic book hero. Why does this brooding vigilante, this tormented soul who stalks the streets looking for trouble, dressed like a vampire, fascinate us so? Duality and obsession, his enemies' and his own, fill his stories. His enemies reflect and distort facets of himself. He's smug, he's sly, he's so intimidating that he can enter a room full of people who can fly, read minds, cast spells, or run faster than light, and yet they're the ones daunted by him—and that's what we love. Strong and smart, unfettered by fiscal limitations or anybody else's rules, he brings a deep wish of ours to life. Batman's the part of us that wants to scare all of life's bullies away.

In creating bright, shining Superman, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster caught lightning in a bottle. One sleepless night, Jerry conceived “of a character like Samson, Hercules, and all the strong men I ever heard of rolled into one—only more so.”¹ Jerry and his artist friend Joe drew inspiration from divi-

heroes throughout the ages to create not just Superman himself, but the very concept of the costumed superhero. They made the meme. They launched modern mythology.² Superman became an immediate hit. On the heels of that first caped hero's success, publishers scrambled to concoct more. Superman publisher hired young cartoonist Bob Kane to generate their next costumed do-gooder.³ Ahead of all the upcoming Superman imitations, Kane and his collaborator Bill Finger pulled not from the superhuman figures who'd inspired Jerry and Joe, but instead from the dark mystery-men of silent movies and pulp fiction, most notably Zorro and the Shadow, extraordinary men but men nonetheless. Where Superman drew his might from Earth's sun, Batman found his in a city's darkness.^a Jerry and Joe played with the bright and impossible; Bob and Bill expanded that meme by adding the coin on the other side, the dark and improbably possible.

Nobody today gets to read that first Batman story without already knowing that the vigilante and the puzzling authorities will turn out to be the bored rich boy who spends his time, up until the final panel, as Commissioner Gordon's literary foil, a sounding board to whom Gordon can voice his thoughts—no more than we might scratch our heads over a classic Robert Louis Stevenson novel because we can't figure out mild-mannered Dr. Jekyll's connection to that lout Mr. Hyde. We know the name and the face of the man behind the mask, but what lurks behind the face? The question "*Who is Batman?*" strikes deeper than Batman's cowl, Bruce Wayne's façade, or any name he chooses to use. It's a *why* question packed with *why*: Why does he fight crime? Why as a vigilante? Why the mask, the bat, and the underage partner? Why are his most intimate relationships with "bad girls" he ought to lock up? And why won't he kill that homicidal, green-haired clown?

Does Batman have bats in his belfry?

Right to left: Bat-Films executive producer Michael Uslan, *Batman* television actor Adam West, and psychologist/superherologist Travis Langley discuss Batman and the Joker at San Diego Comic-Con International. Photo by Alex Langley.



Notes

- [1.](#) O'Neil (2008), 1.
- [2.](#) *Action Comics* #1 (1938).
- [3.](#) Kane & Andrae (1989).

^a "The first light had cast the first shadow."—Grant Morrison (2011), 26.

Which Batman?

“Will the real Batman please stand up?”

—message on a Joker playing card in *The Dark Knight* (2008 motion picture)



Before we can analyze the character, we must define our parameters. Before we can explore the question of *who* along with all its *whys*, we first must consider *which* Batman we mean.

Even though Batman originated and endures as a comic book character, most of us first met him on TV. From the time I was a toddler, Adam West was the live Batman. I also watched the *Cape Crusader* in Saturday morning cartoons, pitted Batman and Robin toys against the Joker in his green plastic van, and, wearing a towel cape and black gloves, played like I was Batman. Voiced by Olan Soule, a more serious (though still upbeat) Batman teamed with Superman, Wonder Woman, and Aquaman to form an undersized Justice League, the original *Super Friends*, on Saturday morning. Those television versions set me up for some big surprises when I finally got to read the comic book darker stories for myself.

A generation later, my sons knew Batman best through *Batman: The Animated Series*. My older son, age eight when that show began, had known Batman from other media, but memory is a funny thing and the cartoon burned its way backward through time as if it had retroactively gotten there first. He remembers that as his earliest Batman even though he knows this cannot be right. My younger son discovered Batman more like I did, as a preschooler unbothered by details like the fact that Batman didn't really exist, which may be why, of the two boys, he became the bigger Bat-fan. His enthralment started with *Batman Returns* toys that came out months before *Batman: The Animated Series* debuted; however, the most powerful impression seared into his young mind—for him, where Batman begins—was the edited-for-TV *Batman Returns* Batmobile breaking away parts of itself so it could speed through a narrow alley. His previous passion for toy cars locked onto that vehicle. Batman amazed him, and so did his toys.

Knowing that the man in the costume is a Six Flags performer doesn't reduce the child's awe over meeting Batman in person. Photo by Travis Langley.



Screen History

1940s Serials

Batman's screen history starts with the Columbia Pictures serial *Batman* (1943), starring Lew Wilson and Douglas Croft as the first live-action Batman and Robin four years after the character's comic book debut. In the days when a typical Saturday for many meant sharing a communal experience in the seats of their local theaters, watching a full-length feature plus newsreels, cartoons, and comedic short films starring the Three Stooges or Our Gang, and at least one chapter of a film serial, *Batman* was new, not something they'd all known their whole lives. Through one cliffhanger after another for 15 weeks, they watched the Dynamic Duo fight American hoodlums, Japanese agent D. Tito Daka, and Daka's mind-controlled "zombie" slaves.

Fear is a recurring element in Batman's stories, but one fear in particular shaped this serial's creation—*xenophobia*, exaggerated fear of foreigners or strangers. Anti-Asian sentiment was not new to America during World War II, and the depictions and descriptions of the Japanese in this serial were overtly racist. The serial's narrator tells us that buildings in the city's Little Tokyo district have sat empty "since a wise government rounded up the shifty-eyed Japs,"¹ referring to the U.S. government's 1942 relocation and internment of over 100,000 American citizens and residents of Japanese ancestry into War Relocation Camps in the wake of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.² No such relocation occurred for any of German or Italian descent, only for those whose ancestors came from the Axis alliance's Asian member. "Daka, the sinister Jap spy," with his "twisted Oriental brain," embodied the Japanese alien that many feared still lurked in America, having somehow avoided getting rounded up—a point driven home when Batman tells Daka, "We've been searching for you ever since you killed those two agents assigned to your deportation!"³

The serial nonetheless contributed to Batman's mythos. Just as *The Adventures of Superman* radio program added Jimmy Olsen, Perry White, and the deadly Kryptonite to the Man of Steel's life, the

Batman serial gave the Dark Knight his Batcave,⁴ its entrance through a grandfather clock, and a leaner butler, Alfred, who sometimes helps the heroes in the field. A better written if more poorly acted sequel followed, 1949's *Batman and Robin*, free of the racist propaganda. Both serials did well at the box office, and yet the 1950s saw no new Batman on screen, perhaps because scathing critiques like Fredric Wertham's 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent* incited a backlash against comic books. A 1965 theatrical reissue of the *Batman* serial, presenting all 15 half-hour chapters in one marathon showing, proved successful enough that it paved the way for new Batman cliffhangers, this time on TV.⁵

Batman (1966–1968 TV Series, 1966 Motion Picture)

“Some days, you just can't get rid of a bomb.”

—Batman (Adam West), *Batman: The Motion Picture*

The unintentional campiness viewers enjoyed in the re-released 22-year-old *Batman* serial inspired deliberate camp when executive producer William Dozier and writer Lorenzo Semple Jr. brought ABC a television series comedic enough to make adults howl and straight enough for kids to enjoy hero derring-do. TV had depicted *Superman*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *Tarzan* with no less earnestness than their original source material. Among superhero shows, *Batman* was something new. Actors who could deliver the silliest lines straight-faced proved critical to the series' success. Dozier explained actor Adam West “that it had to be played as though we were dropping a bomb on Hiroshima, with that kind of deadly seriousness.”⁶ West became their square, hard-nosed Batman. Adults got the joke, kids got a kick out of seeing heroes fight bad guys, and it worked as intended.

The show rarely ventured into any overt psychological issues. “We were superficial,” Adam West has remarked, “what did we know?”⁷ Even when it did, the deliberate farce had no need for accurate depiction of mental illness or its treatment. Mind control popped up in several episodes, in no way resembling any real-world hypnosis or brainwashing techniques. In one episode, the Siren's voice compels Bruce Wayne to sign his fortune over to her and then jump off a building;⁸ in another, the Sandman makes Robin activate the machine that will kill Batman if the Caped Crusader doesn't escape that week's cliffhanger.⁹

After Bruce Wayne makes the Joker a vice president of the Gotham National Bank as part of a plan to expose the clown's counterfeiting,¹⁰ Commissioner Gordon decides the millionaire playboy has lost his marbles and has him committed. A straitjacketed Bruce escapes, rolling with the fall out the back of the Anti-Lunatic Squad's van. The story ends with a doctor giving Bruce a clean bill of health and pronouncing that the tumble from the van has knocked some sense back into him, thus restoring his sanity. The doctor's method for testing soundness of mind baffled me even as a child: He taps a reflex hammer to Bruce's knee.¹¹

Despite all their antics, none of this Batman's enemies are ever labeled criminally insane. The flamboyant felons escape from Gotham State Prison, not Arkham Asylum. The most psychologically relevant story element, in terms of long-running characterization, is the curious condition of King Tut (see Case File 2–1: King Tut).

Batman (1989 Motion Picture)

“A lot of people think you're as dangerous as the Joker.”

—Vicki Vale (Kim Basinger)

Fifty years after the character's comic book debut, director Tim Burton brought us a cinematic Batman who operates from the shadows. Executive producer Michael Uslan wanted Burton to base this one on the first year of Batman's *Detective Comics* stories (pre-Robin) plus adventures later separately written by Dennis O'Neil and Steve Englehart.¹² The popularity of Frank Miller's then-recent four-part graphic novel *The Dark Knight Returns* indicated that fans might be ready for dark Batman tales. Burton added his own flair: For the first time, we saw a neurotic Batman and an awkward Bruce Wayne. Although the movie did have a few odd bits of camp (remember the scruffy news anchors?), the strangest humor came from the Joker and suited his nature.

The script took a noirish approach and made Batman more believable by surrounding him with a noirish city. Burton's Gotham City looms, described in Sam Hamm's script as "if Hell had sprung up through the pavements and kept on going." Burton and production designer Anton Furst looked at New York and "decided to darken everything and build vertically and cram things together and then just go further with it in a more cartoon way," Burton explained.¹³ "It has an operatic feel, and an almost timeless quality." The creators of *Batman: The Animated Series* adopted these principles as well. "This neo-Expressionistic, Germanic city"¹⁴ with its Gothic architecture gave us an environment that *needed* Batman. He and his city go together. Each helps us believe the other.

Another important contribution Burton's film added was the Voice. As Batman, actor Michael Keaton dropped his voice, making it deeper and rougher, which helped us accept that people wouldn't recognize Batman as Bruce Wayne—on this one point, no suspension of disbelief was required. "Bruce Wayne is a man about town, a luminary, so people know his voice. So I came up with the idea of dropping his voice down," Keaton explained, "as Batman it comes from a lower thing that he drops down into, a place he has to reach to become a quasi-vigilante."¹⁵ The comic book stories themselves now refer to Batman affecting a gruffer voice when costumed.¹⁶

In Burton's vision, Bruce Wayne spends his days sleep-deprived, his awkwardness no act. Instead of following the traditional depiction of Batman as formidably fit, physically as well as socially, Burton chose to humanize Bruce Wayne by making him weak. Auditioning one muscle man after another for the role, Burton had found himself unable to picture someone who already looked like an action-adventure hero deciding to dress up like a bat. Once he envisioned a weaker man wearing the costume in order to transform himself, the concept came together. "We just took off from the psychology of saying, 'Here's a guy who doesn't look like Arnold Schwarzenegger, so why's he doing this?' He's not trying to create an image for himself, he's trying to become something he's not."¹⁷ Burton's Batman wears the costume as armor, a bulletproof exoskeleton that confers the power and strength he otherwise lacks. "He does it because he *needs* to, because he's not this gigantic, strapping macho man. It's all about transformation."¹⁸

While Burton's Bruce Wayne transforms back and forth between Batman and Bruce, psychopath Jack Napier makes one irreversible transformation from a menacing, grim-faced gangster who kills for practical reasons into a cackling, clown-faced master criminal who kills for the dark humor of it all.^a

Batman Returns (1992 Motion Picture)

"Sickos never scare me. At least they're committed."

—Selina Kyle (Michelle Pfeiffer)

For the sequel, Burton wanted to bring in Catwoman—to him, Batman's most interesting antagonist after the Joker—while studio execs insisted on using the Penguin, whom they saw as Batman's

number-two foe, so this film wound up with both. “You could find the psychological profile of Batman, Catwoman, Joker, but the Penguin was just this guy with a cigarette and a top hat,” Burton said of the challenge to characterize Oswald Cobblepot, the Penguin.¹⁹ The profile did not gel until Burton gave the character another layer that would tie him into the motion picture’s theme: duality.

In this sequel, Batman and Catwoman each have dual identities, their light and dark sides. Bruce and Selina, two uncomfortable, uncertain, unhappy people who can each walk unassumingly in daylight and transform into their confident, assertive counterparts by night. When all other party guests chat and dance at a masquerade, milling about in their costumes and masks, Bruce and Selina each arrive in formalwear, respectively tuxedo and gown, no masks other than their civilized fronts. “Selina, don’t you see?” Bruce tells her toward the movie’s end, right before he tears off his mask. “We’re the same. We’re the same, split right down the center.”

In *Batman Returns*, the dark side is animal nature: the bat, the cat, and the chilly little bird. Unlike Bruce Wayne and Selina Kyle, who don animal outfits, Cobblepot was born a “freak” with flippers instead of hands. Whereas they decide to become nocturnal animals, he endeavors to become a man who can step into the light, except he tries to do so through trickery and without relinquishing his beastly nature.

In both of Burton’s Bat-films, Bruce Wayne is distant, the villains steal the show, and the love interests hold our attention. Vicki Vale and Selina Kyle give us perspectives we follow through the course of each story. Though conscious of complaints that the Joker stole the first movie and that the second film showed Batman too little, Tim Burton felt these criticisms “were missing the point of the character.... This guy wants to remain as hidden as possible and as in the shadows as possible and unrevealing about himself as possible, so he’s not going to eat up screen time by these big speeches and doing dancing around the Batcave.” However sound Burton’s reasoning may have been, those criticisms reflected one possible advantage that comics have over film—text, in the form of thought balloons and narration, that can let us get inside a character’s head.

Batman Forever (1995 Motion Picture)

“I’ll bring the wine. You bring your scarred psyche.”

—Dr. Chase Meridian (Nicole Kidman)

When Tim Burton decided to help produce but not direct the next film, director Joel Schumacher arrived with a lighter, brighter vision of a grand Batman movie filled with spectacle and flash, although it did have its edge. The film explores Batman’s origin in more detail than did the previous films. *Batman Forever* is partly “a retelling of the origin story in a way that attempts to take a little bit closer look at the psychology of Bruce Wayne and how he became older Bruce Wayne,” according to screenwriter Akiva Goldsman.²⁰ Witnessing the murder of Dick Grayson’s acrobat family makes Bruce reflect on his own beginning.

Bruce (Val Kilmer): Just like my parents. It’s happening again. A monster comes out of the night, scream, two shots. I killed them.

Alfred (Michael Gough): What did you say?

Bruce: He killed them. Two-Face, he slaughtered that boy’s parents.

Alfred: No. No, you said, “I.” “I killed them.”

Bruce, having consulted with criminal psychologist Chase Meridian about the mysterious stalker leaving riddles at Wayne Manor, tells her he has never remembered much about the event.

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