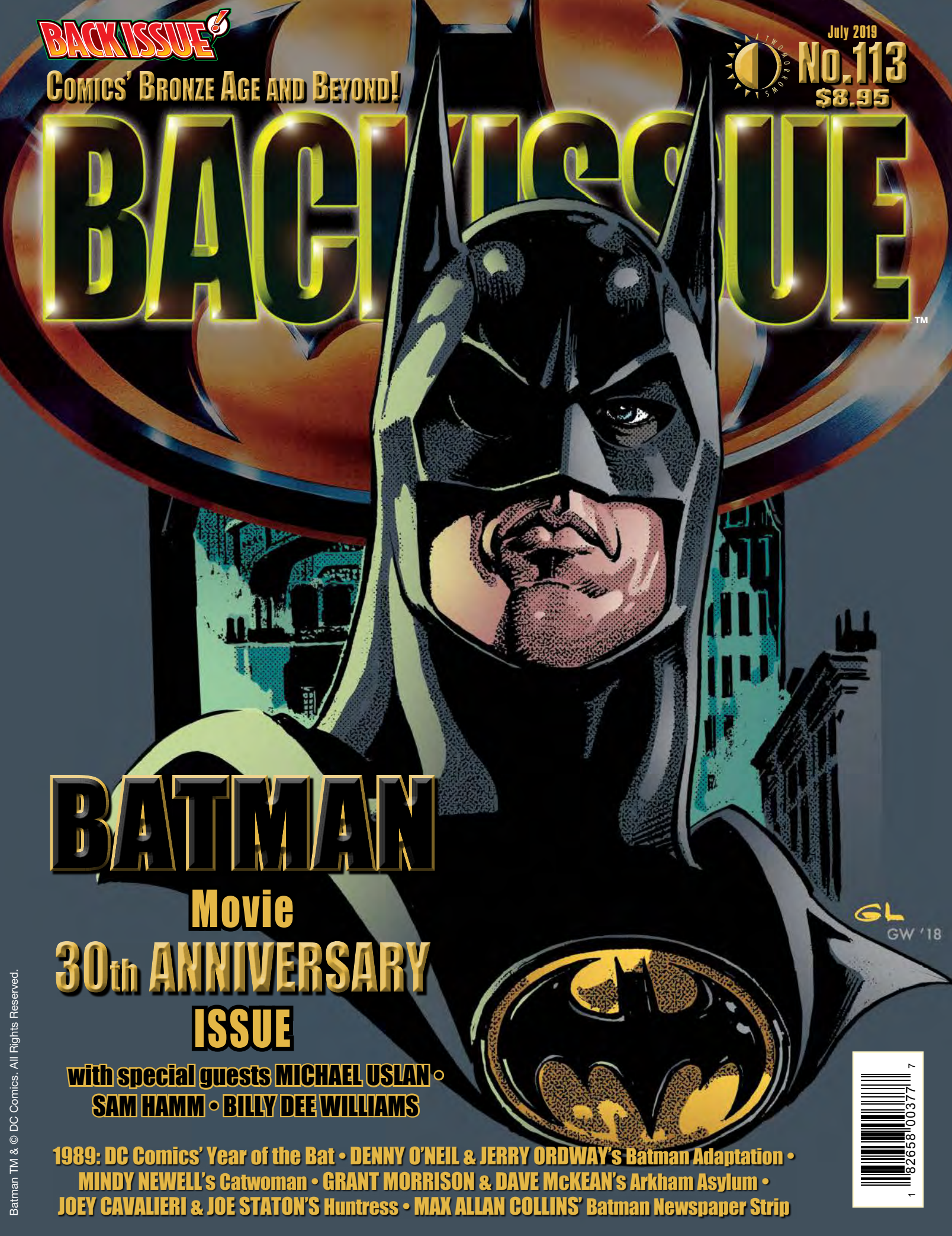
BACK ISSUE 6

COMICS' BRONZE AGE AND BEYOND!

July 2019
TWO MORROWS
No. 113
$8.95

BACK ISSUE™



BATMAN Movie 30th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

with special guests MICHAEL USLAN • SAM HAMM • BILLY DEE WILLIAMS

1989: DC Comics' Year of the Bat • DENNY O'NEIL & JERRY ORDWAY's Batman Adaptation • MINDY NEWELL's Catwoman • GRANT MORRISON & DAVE McKEAN's Arkham Asylum • JOEY CAVALIERI & JOE STATON'S Huntress • MAX ALLAN COLLINS' Batman Newspaper Strip

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Volume 1,
Number 113
July 2019

BACK ISSUE
Comics' Bronze Age and Beyond!

BATMAN™

MOVIE 30TH ANNIVERSARY

BATMAN CREATED BY BOB KANE WITH BILL FINGER

BACK ISSUE™ is published 8 times a year by TwoMorrows Publishing, 10407 Bedfordtown Drive, Raleigh, NC 27614. Michael Eury, Editor-in-Chief. John Morrow, Publisher. Editorial Office: *BACK ISSUE*, c/o Michael Eury, Editor-in-Chief, 112 Fairmount Way, New Bern, NC 28562. Email: euryman@gmail.com. Eight-issue subscriptions: $76 Economy US, $125 International, $32 Digital. ***Please send subscription orders and funds to TwoMorrows, NOT to the editorial office.*** Cover art by José Luis García-López. Printed in China. FIRST PRINTING.

"The 40th anniversary of our revolutionary 1989 movie, BATMAN™ which is celebrating its 30th anniversary. Confused? Good. Let's begin..."

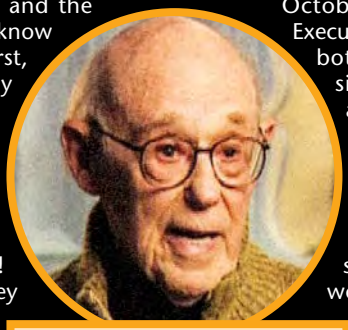
by Michael Uslan

Every classic superhero must have a secret origin. The same is really true for every classic superhero movie. The secret origin of the 1989 *Batman* movie that not only changed Hollywood and the comic-book industry, but changed the world as we know it, thanks to the genius of Tim Burton and Anton Furst, as aided and abetted by Danny Elfman and so many other brilliant, creative people, began on a cold night in January 1966.

I had been filled with unbridled anticipation for months leading up to this night. This was the premiere of the *Batman* TV series. When it finally unfurled, I was simultaneously thrilled and horrified by what I was seeing. It was in color! The sets were extravagant! The car was so cool! But then I slowly realized that they were turning Batman into a joke. The whole world was laughing at Batman, and that just killed me!

To place this in historical context, it's important to understand that at this point in time there was no other version or image of Batman in the mainstream media worldwide. This was the one and only way that audiences around the globe had ever and possibly would ever perceive Batman.

So that night, in the downstairs basement of our family home in New Jersey, I made a vow... much like Bruce Wayne once made a vow... except that my parents were safe upstairs in the kitchen. I swore that one day, somehow, someway, I would show the world the true Batman as created in 1939 by Bob Kane and Bill Finger—a creature of the night who stalked fascinatingly disturbed bad guys from the shadows—and would erase from the collective consciousness of the world culture these three new words, "Pow!" "Zap!" and "Wham!"



BENJAMIN MELNIKER

© DC Comics/Greenway Productions/20th Century Fox Television.

CUT TO

October 3rd, 1979: My new partner, legendary MGM Executive Vice President Benjamin Melniker, and I completed both a six-month negotiation with DC Comics and six months of working to raise money privately, and acquired the motion picture, allied, and ancillary rights to "Batman." I truly believed that when we went out to Hollywood, the major studios would line up at our doorstep, recognizing not only the potential for sequels, animation, toys, and games, but also that my vision for bringing Batman to the silver screen in a serious comic-book movie that would show the world for the first time a truly dark superhero, as Batman was created to be.

We were turned down cold by every single studio in Hollywood, as well as what then were called the mini-majors. I was repeatedly told I was crazy because "You can't make a serious comic-book movie," "You can't have dark superheroes," and "Nobody has ever made a movie based on an old TV series!" Of course, there were the one or two places that said that they would make a Batman movie with us, but only if it was the pot-bellied, funny Batman with all the "Pow!s" "Zap!s" and "Wham!s" I refused. I would go down fighting, but I would never allow a different vision for Batman to come to the movie screen while I still had any definitive say in the matter.

Thanks to Ben's friend, Peter Guber, and his associates, Neil Bogart and Barry Beckerman, Casablanca Records and Filmworks, backed by the financial resources of PolyGram, agreed in 1979 to develop the movie based on my vision.

MICHAEL USLAN

THE BOY WHO LOVED BATMAN

conducted by **Joe Stuber**
(excerpted from *Comic Book Central*)

In his 2011 memoir,* The Boy Who Loved Batman*, Michael Uslan *recounted his incredible life story, much of it revolving around his desire to bring Batman—the definitive Dark Knight Detective—to the big screen. Part* Wonder Years*, part comic-book adventure, this coming-of-age tale is an absolute must-read—whether you're a Batfan or not.*

I first met Michael in 2011 when his book tour made a stop at the Cincinnati Comic Expo. Full disclosure: Even though I was a rabid fan of the 1989 feature film, I was not completely aware of Michael's role in the production. And I certainly wasn't aware of his epic decade-long (and then some!) struggle to produce a Batman *feature film.*

His hour-long panel that day was an eye-opener. Michael's tale of convincing the Hollywood studio machine to back his version of the Bat was truly inspirational. It reignited in me the passion to launch my podcast, Comic Book Central. *One year into my show, I had the honor of welcoming Michael to celebrate the silver anniversary of his seminal comic-book film. Here are some excerpts from our Bat-chat, and we started off by going back to the beginning of Michael's love for comic-book characters.*

– Joe Stuber

JOE STUBER: ***What was your favorite Bat-toy or Bat-collectible as a kid?***
MICHAEL USLAN: Well, you've got to understand… I'm ancient! Back then, it was so utterly rare to find any kind of toy item that had anything whatsoever to do with comic-book characters. When I was growing up, the only thing out of comic books that made it to TV was *The Adventures of Superman* with George Reeves and *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle*. That was it, until the *Batman* TV series came on the air. It was a barren landscape.

The one comic-book toy I remember getting as a kid was a plastic "Superman in flight." And it had a little dropdown notch. You would place it on a big giant slingshot, pull it back, and you could have Superman soaring through the air. That was the one and only super-hero-related thing I found as a kid.

STUBER: ***Your book,* The Boy Who Loved Batman*, is a fantastic read. In it, you tell the entire story of how you brought the Dark Knight to the screen. And it started when you were a little boy!***

How old were you when you first became aware of Batman, and what was your fascination with the character?

USLAN: I was five when I first saw Batman [*Detective Comics* #236, Oct. 1956] in a candy store on the top of a rack. And to be honest, it scared me. I remember the cover. It had a picture of an armored assault tank version of the Batmobile. I wonder if *that* impression stuck in my mind for years!

STUBER: ***Yeah,* that *sounds familiar!* [*laughs*]**

USLAN: At age five, I moved away from that and searched for *Sugar and Spike*, *Richie Rich*, *Casper*, then *Archie*, and finally I really graduated into *Superman*. And the main reason for that was that Superman was on TV, and the comic books were safe and friendly. And it wasn't until I was a much more mature and sophisticated eight-years-old that I became a regular reader of *Batman*.

When I started reading every issue of *Batman*, beginning in 1959, that, for me, opened up a new universe. For mainly three reasons that I can recall.

Number one: Oh, my God, this guy has no superpowers, and he's a superhero! I could do this. I could be this guy. The sense of identification was something I could never find in Superman, or the Hulk, or some of the other characters.

Number two: His origin story absolutely, totally creeped me out. I mean, imagine being eight or ten and reading a story about your parents being murdered before your eyes, when you don't even stop to really think that maybe one day your parents won't be here. It was traumatizing! But, boy, did it hit me in the gut.

The third thing was—Batman had the greatest supervillains in the history of comics. And there's no way you can base the popularity and longevity of a comic-book hero on anything but the quality of his villains. And Batman shone in that. Maybe the added bonus was the car.

The Boy Who Loved Batman…
…helped bring him to the big screen, time and time again. Photo courtesy of Michael Uslan.

A Rolling Arsenal (left) Young Michael Uslan's captivation with the Batmobile on artist Sheldon Moldoff's cover to *Detective Comics* #236 (Oct. 1956) helped shape the design of Batman's wheels in 1989's *Batman* (right) and even more so in the movies that followed.

[***Editor's note:*** Next, Joe asks Michael about his original negative reaction to the Adam West *Batman* TV series, which premiered on January 12, 1966, during Michael's childhood. As Uslan writes in his "Off My Chest" guest column in this issue, he objected that the show made Batman a laughing stock and vowed to "erase from the collective consciousness of the world culture" that over-the-top interpretation of the Dark Knight. After retelling that story to Joe Stuber, he revealed that over the decades, his impression of the show changed…]

USLAN: Today, I absolutely embrace and welcome the show. Because now it is *not* the only cultural reference to Batman. Now, the world has seen the dark and serious Batman, they've seen the Batman animated show. It's good to have other versions of Batman that are kid-friendly. That can help bring children into the Batman world, so that as they grow older, they can then access the video games, the cartoons, and the movies. It's a good thing. It's also a good thing when every once in a while there's a pause on the dark Batman animated series and they do a *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* to appeal to kids.

[***Author's note:*** During the interview, we discuss Michael's donation of 40,000 comic books from his personal collection to Indiana University's Lilly Library. Uslan, at Indiana University, was the first instructor to teach an accredited college course on comic books.]

STUBER: ***Speaking of Indiana University, are you the coolest teacher ever?***
USLAN: I am the most out-of-the-box weird teacher ever.
STUBER: ***That makes you the coolest teacher ever.***

Let's talk about one of the greatest college courses in history, at least as far as comic-book lovers go. This is in the early '70s?
USLAN: Yeah, this was 1972. The College of Arts and Sciences had started an experimental curriculum department. If you had an idea for a course that had never been taught anywhere, and had the backing of a department on campus for it, you then could appear before a panel of deans and professors to pitch your course. If they accepted it, then you could teach it on campus for up to three hours a credit. So I used that opportunity to design a course on comic books, what would be the first-ever accredited college course on comic books.

And I came at it several different ways. One, primarily that comics are an American art form, as indigenous to this country as jazz, and were deserving of that recognition. Two, that comic-book superheroes were our contemporary mythology. It's all modern-day folklore, my theory being that the ancient gods of Greece, Rome, and Egypt all still exist today, except now they wear spandex and capes.

The Folklore Department agreed with me wholeheartedly. I then appeared before this panel of deans and professors in my Spider-Man T-shirt with a pile of Superman books under my arm, and the dean let me speak for two minutes before he cut me off and said, "Mr. Uslan, stop. I don't buy any of this. I read Superman comics when I was a kid. All they are is cheap entertainment for children. I don't accept anything about art, mythology, and folklore."

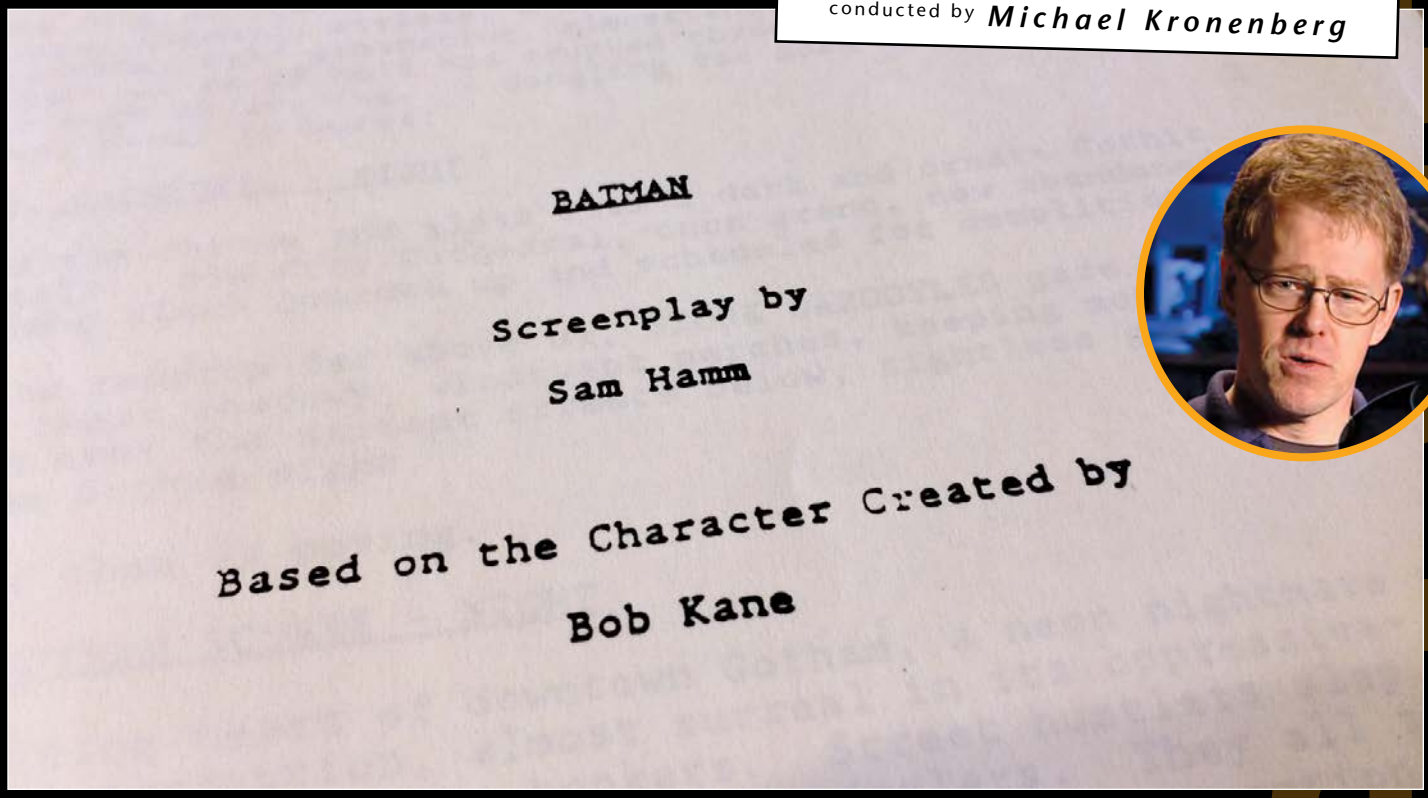
And in a life-changing moment where I could have bowed my head, picked up my comics, and turned around and walked out of the room, I looked at the dean and said, "May I ask you two questions?" He said, "Ask me anything you want." I said, "Are you familiar with the story of Moses?" And he looked at me like I was nuts and goes, "Yeah." I go, "Could you, very briefly, summarize for me the story of Moses?" And he folded his hands, sits back, and goes, "Mr. Uslan, I don't know what game you're playing here, but I can play this with you. Hebrew people were being persecuted. Their firstborn were being slain. A Hebrew couple placed their infant son in a little wicker basket and sent him down the river Nile. There he is discovered by an Egyptian family that raises him as their own son. When he grows up and learns of his *true* heritage, he becomes a great hero to the Hebrew people…"

I go, "Stop, dean. Thank you so much, that was great. You mentioned before that you read Superman as a kid. Do you remember the origin of Superman?" He said, "Of course! The planet Krypton was about to blow up. A scientist and his wife placed their infant son in a little rocketship and sent him to earth. There, he's discovered by the Kents, who raise him as their own son. When he grows up…" Then he stops, stares at me for what I will forever swear to you was an eternity, and says, "Your course is accredited." And that's how I became the world's first-ever college professor of comic books.
STUBER: ***What impact, if any, did Richard Donner's* Superman: The Movie *have on the process of your bringing Batman to the big screen?***

SAM HAMM

THE MAN WHO DROVE BRUCE WAYNE SANE

conducted by **Michael Kronenberg**



***Countless comic-book junkies like me looked forward with great anticipation to the 1989 movie,* Batman.** *We waited in long lines to watch it in the theater the day it came out.*

If you're a fan of the movie, then you know the name Sam Hamm. He wrote the movie's screenplay, and after the movie's phenomenal success he became one of the most sought-after young screenwriters in Hollywood. Sam also wrote the epic three-issue Detective Comics *(#598–600) story that marked Batman's 50th anniversary in 1989.*

Thanks to our mutual love of film noir movies, Sam and I became friends several years ago. I'm the graphic designer for the Film Noir Foundation and Sam regularly attends our big annual film festival in San Francisco, where he lives.

Here's our discussion about his experiences working on Batman *and his stint writing for DC Comics and working with editor Denny O'Neil.*

– Michael Kronenberg

THE *BATMAN* MOVIE

MICHAEL KRONENBERG: ***Tell me about the origins of getting hired to write the* Batman *script. Who specifically from the production hired you? Your previous screen credit had been working on the critically acclaimed movie* Never Cry Wolf.**

SAM HAMM: After *Never Cry Wolf*, I sat back and waited for the job offers to start rolling in, but oddly, they never did. Apparently the movie was not seen as a writer's showcase, even though all the wolf howls were carefully scripted.

So I wrote a spec comedy called *Pulitzer Prize. Pulitzer Prize* became the object of a brief bidding war between Warner Bros. and Columbia. Ultimately, Columbia bought the script, but in the course of the negotiations I became friends with a young Warners exec named Bonni Lee, and she somehow talked the studio into offering me a two-year overall deal.

One day, Bonni got stuck in a meeting that ran late. I was waiting in her anteroom with nothing much to do, so I began perusing the scripts on the projects-in-development shelf. Since I'd grown up a fanatical comic-book fan, the first title that caught my eye was *Batman*. The writer of that particular draft was Tom Mankiewicz, who had worked on several *James Bond*s and the *Superman* pictures, and as I pawed through the script I saw very quickly that Mankiewicz had used the first *Superman* as a template: opening with the hero as a child, taking us through his formative trauma, his years of practice and training, etc., until page 30, when the costume is finally unveiled. All very linear.

Which, of course, makes sense for Superman, because, let's face it, a whole planet blowing up is a pretty flashy opening sequence, and without it you've got so much to explain: How can this guy fly? Why do bullets bounce off him? Where did he get X-ray vision?—and so on.

Batman, on the other hand, is just a nut in a suit. You don't really wonder how he does what he does. You wonder why.

By the time Bonni was ready to see me I had completely forgotten about whatever project we were supposed to discuss. I wanted to know how I could claw my way onto *Batman*. She patiently explained that the

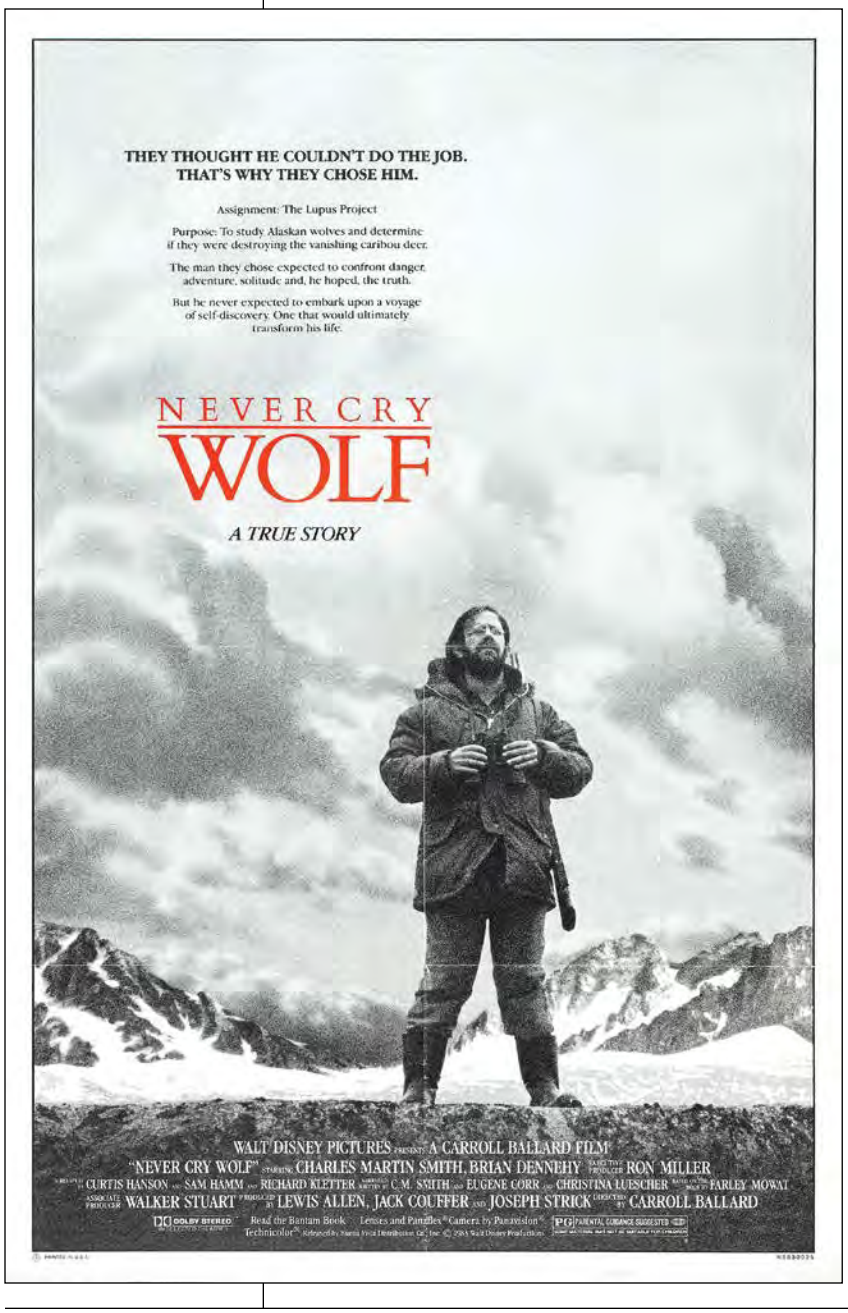
project had been kicking around for a while, that the studio had already rejected various "takes" on the material (period Batman, comedy Batman, etc.), and that the Caped Crusader was pretty much stuck in development purgatory, if not quite in development hell. The only promising news was that another Bonni protégé had recently been attached as director: a young weird guy, Tim Burton, who had scored a surprise hit with *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*.

For the next few months, whenever I met with a WB exec or anyone remotely involved with Guber-Peters [the production company], I would ask what was up with *Batman*. "I've got some ideas for that project," I explained 30 or 40 times. It got to the point where I didn't even have to ask the question. The moment I opened my mouth, some VP would pipe up: "Nothing new on *Batman*!"

All this time, although I didn't know it, Bonni had been working diligently on my behalf. She had already introduced me to Burton and we'd hit it off immediately. One day, after a meeting, she mentioned that Tim was hoping I might drop by his office before I left the lot.

Dances with Wolves

Sam Hamm's work on the film *Never Cry Wolf* opened Hollywood doors that led him to Warner Bros.' *Batman* film. Poster courtesy of Heritage (*www.ha.com*).



So I did. And he asked me: "Would you have any interest in working on this *Batman* thing?"

"Sure," I said, as nonchalantly as I could. I didn't mention that I had spent the last six months crawling on my belly like a reptile to get the job. And as soon as we started talking about Batman, I could see we were going to get along. "The weird thing about Bruce Wayne is he's this incredibly rich guy, but all he wants to do is put on a suit and beat up petty crooks," Tim said. "Why is that?"

"That's the picture," I said. "That's the mystery." You don't start with Batman's origin. You start with the Joker's origin. Batman is a mysterious vigilante: a shadow, a monster, a *rumor*. He may or may not exist, but he has the Gotham underworld in a panic. Which happens to be exactly the way he was introduced in *Detective Comics* #27.

By the time I finally left the lot that day, we had our basic character arc worked out. Batman is a guy who has made an extremely questionable career choice. What happens if he starts to go… sane?

KRONENBERG: ***In 1988, even though Frank Miller's* Dark Knight Returns *had been released and made an impact, there was great concern among comic-book fans that a potential Batman movie would be close to the TV series in tone. Your script was quite dark. Was this something you alone decided or did the producers also want a darker Batman?***

HAMM: As a kid, I was a religious viewer of the *Batman* TV series. Like the other kids in my neighborhood (average age: nine), I had no problem taking it seriously. I remember widespread consternation among my peers when the show was nominated for an Emmy as "Best Comedy." *Batman*? Comedy?!? All the magazines referred to the show as High Camp, but we were not up to speed on our [Camp essayist Susan] Sontag. We had no idea what they meant.

Of course, the show was downright dignified compared to the comics of the late '50s and early '60s. The first comic book I ever owned was a *Mighty Mouse* my uncle bought me when I was three, and the Batman stories I began reading a year or so later may have been a little "darker" than *Mighty Mouse*, but not by much. This, remember, was the era of Batwoman, Bat-Girl, Bat-Mite, and Ace the Bat-Hound. Typical plots? Bat-Girl steals Batman's thunder, or Robin ditches Batman to team up with the ominously named "Mr. Marvel." There were aliens and monsters everywhere. And weird transformations! In *Batman* #158, Ace becomes "The *Super* Bat-Hound!" ("Great Scott! Bat-Hound has acquired super-powers, and he's using them against us!"), a mere eight months after Robin became "Robin, the *Super* Boy Wonder!" in *Batman* #150, with similar results. Batman himself metamorphoses into "The Bizarre Batman Genie!" [*Detective* #322] and "The Colossus of Gotham City!" [*Detective* #292] prior to the final indignity, which comes in "The Story of the Year!" from *Batman* #147: "Batman Becomes Bat-Baby!" And yes, in case you are wondering, he continues to terrorize the underworld—as a toddler.

In '64, [editor] Julius Schwartz and [artist] Carmine Infantino took over the Batman titles and—largely, I imagine, as a reaction to what was happening over at Marvel—smartened them up considerably. But till then? *S---. Was. Ludicrous.* Looking back, I have a sneaking hunch that hardcore Batfans have always resented the TV show not because it lampooned the comics, but because it captured their inanity so accurately. [***Editor's note:*** For those wishing to further explore the evolution of Batman from his 1964 "New Look" through the 1970s, we humbly recommend the TwoMorrows book, *The Batcave Companion*, co-written by ye ed and ye interviewer.]

But I loved the series just as I loved those dumbass comics. I still love the late Lorenzo Semple, Jr., who created the series and who went on to write a handful

Billy Dee WILLIAMS

The Man Who Would Be Two-Face… But Wasn't!

interview by **Joe Stuber**
(excerpted from *Comic Book Central*)

BILLY DEE WILLIAMS

From Lando to Lawman

Crime-crushing D.A. Harvey Dent (Billy Dee Williams) is introduced to an adoring (and mob-weary) populace in *Batman*. In the inset, Williams as photographed in December 2016 at the Paradise City Comic Con.

There are so many cool things to love about 1989's* Batman *feature film. *Growing up in western Pennsylvania, I was stoked when I found out Pittsburgh's Michael Keaton was cast as Bruce Wayne. When the film premiered, we were all assaulted with one cool moment after another: "I'm Batman," the live-action origin (finally!), the cool Bat-suit, the cool Batmobile, the cool Batsignal! But the coolest moment of the film just might be the appearance of the actor who, for a quarter century at that point, proved he was always cooler than the other side of the pillow—**Billy Dee Williams**.*

From his Emmy-nominated performance in Brian's Song *(1971), to standout roles in* Lady Sings the Blues *(1972) and* Mahogany *(1975), to the Administrator of Cloud City (and eventual Rebellion General) Lando Calrissian in* The Empire Strikes Back *(1980) and* Return of the Jedi *(1983), Billy Dee was the screen's coolest cat long before the world heard of Samuel L. Jackson.*

In Batman, *Williams was cast as District Attorney Harvey Dent. And any Batfan worth their cape and cowl knew that meant one thing: Billy Dee Williams would eventually be flipping a coin as Harvey's evil alter ego, Two-Face!*

Alas, it was not to be. While rumors had the script for the Bat-sequel moving the character of Harvey Dent toward the dark side (much darker than the Dark Knight himself) for an eventual battle with the Bat in Batman 3, *Williams was nowhere to be seen in 1992's* Batman Returns. *Further flipping the script was the fact that acclaimed actor Tommy Lee Jones was cast as Harvey Dent/Two-Face (alongside Jim Carrey's Edward Nigma/Riddler) in 1995's* Batman Forever.

So, what happened? Different director, different direction. Batman Forever *director Joel Schumacher had directed Jones in* The Client *and wanted to bring the actor in to the Bat-franchise. In an interview published in* Imagi-Movies *magazine's September 1995 edition, Schumacher stated, "I always wanted Tommy Lee Jones. I didn't consider Billy Dee Williams for the role, because I think that Billy Dee Williams is a hero. I always see him like Clark Gable. I had just finished working with Tommy Lee Jones on* The Client *and I thought he would be a great Harvey/Two-Face."*

It didn't hurt that Jones was coming off a string of box office hits (including JFK *and* The Fugitive*), so that probably played into it as well. What we do know is that legendary actor Billy Dee Williams brought us the very first live-action version of Harvey Dent, helping to set the feature film world of Batman on firm Gotham City ground.*

I caught up with Billy Dee Williams last year for an episode of my podcast, Comic Book Central. *While our chat focused mainly on his time in the* Star Wars *universe, I did have a chance to ask him about "suit"-ing up as District Attorney Harvey Dent in Batman, and that dialogue is excerpted here for* BACK ISSUE *readers.*

– Joe Stuber

Pro 2 Pro

WAIT'LL THEY GET A LOAD OF ME: DENNY O'NEIL AND JERRY ORDWAY ON THE BATMAN™ MOVIE ADAPTATION

by John Trumbull

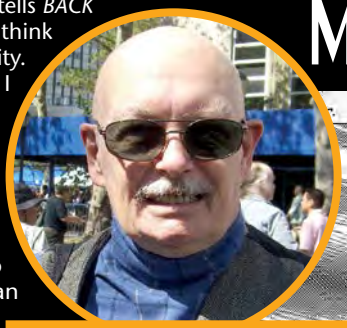
Thirty years ago,* Batman *was the sensation of 1989. The movie was a surprise smash at the box office, accompanied by a merchandizing blitz not seen since the original *Star Wars* in 1977.

One of the most important tie-ins to *Batman* was its comic-book adaptation, written by classic Batman scribe Denny O'Neil and illustrated by DC stalwart Jerry Ordway. And while the comic's origin is less mysterious than Bruce Wayne's transformation into the Dark Knight, its journey to the shelves was almost as perilous.

"THE PEN IS TRULY MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD."

The initial drafts of *Batman* were written by Sam Hamm, a screenwriter based in San Francisco. One of the first people to read the script was the then-new *Batman* editor Denny O'Neil, who says, "I don't remember if they gave it to me for approval or as a potential adapter. I ended up reading all but the last two [Batman] movie scripts for one reason or another. That was the cork out of the bottle, the first thing of its kind. I think that Mike Uslan ought to get credit for this big superhero boom, because he kept the idea of a serious Batman movie alive for about ten years, until the stars and planets aligned and he could get the thing made."

O'Neil was pleased with Hamm's screenplay, telling *Comics Scene* in 1987, "If Sam Hamm ever wants to write Batman comic books, he should give me a call. Parts of it are so well done that he almost makes me believe there could be a Batman and a Joker." Today, O'Neil tells *BACK ISSUE*, "I remember being impressed with it. I didn't think that we had anything to worry about in terms of quality. You can never tell how something will be received, but I had no reason to think that it would not be received well.



DENNY O'NEIL

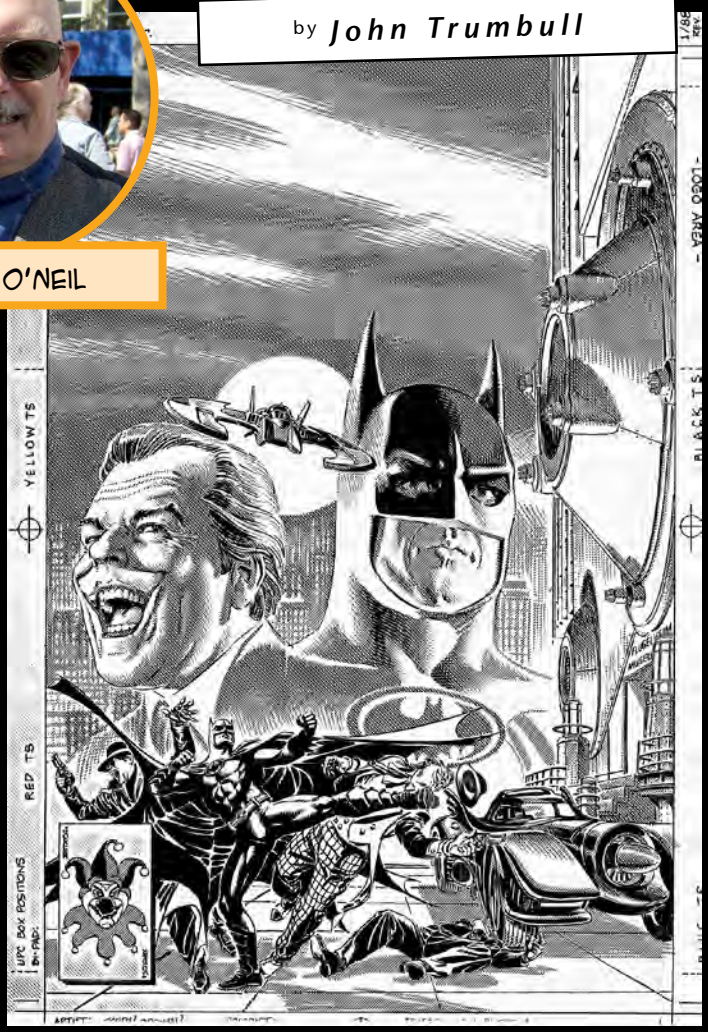
© Luigi Novi/ Wikimedia Commons.

"I got to know Sam Hamm pretty well afterwards. I ended up giving him some work. [***Author's note:*** During the Writers Guild strike of 1988, Hamm wrote the three-issue storyline "Blind Justice" in *Detective Comics* #598–600, illustrated by Denys Cowan, as covered elsewhere in this issue.] He was one of the guys who really knew the material. I'm told later that the San Francisco comic guys would meet once a month or something similar, and that Sam made himself a part of that group, so he really had a pretty deep interest in comics, as well as Batman. He didn't need much coaching from me or from anybody else. He really knew what the character was about."

O'Neil's professional relationship with Hamm eventually became a personal one, as well. "I probably didn't have any contact with him until after he wrote the script," O'Neil recalls. "Normally we did not have any contact with the movie guys. So he showed up with his lovely fiancée Trudy, and [my wife] Marifran and I went to dinner with them. A few months later, I was signing autographs in a San Francisco comic-book shop, and Sam and Trudy and their infant son at that point showed up. He got to be pretty close friends with Denys Cowan. So it was overall a pleasant experience."

"…COULD YOU TELL ME WHICH OF THESE GUYS IS BRUCE WAYNE?"

The *Batman* movie was the talk of comics fandom in the year leading up to its release. The film, long planned by executive producer Michael Uslan as a serious treatment of the Darknight Detective to counteract the campy TV show of the 1960s, became controversial when



Picture Perfect

Courtesy of Jerry Ordway, the artist's uncannily accurate Keaton and Nicholson likenesses on the original cover art to 1989's *Batman* movie adaptation from DC Comics.

TM & © DC Comics.

Michael Keaton, an actor known mainly for comedies like *Mr. Mom* and *Beetlejuice*, was cast as Bruce Wayne/Batman. Terrified that a comedic actor playing their hero meant that the movie would be a comedy, comics fans sent over 50,000 letters of protest to Warner Bros.

Although he had his initial doubts about Keaton, O'Neil tells *BACK ISSUE*, "I now know, from talking with Michael Uslan a time or three, what the logic of that casting was. It was not capricious. They had reasons for doing that, and almost everybody thought it was bad. Around the comic-book companies, we were gossiping about it. Clint Eastwood, who would've been terrible in the role, was one of the people mentioned. According to O'Neil, another actor considered was Steven Seagal, who had just made his first movie. [*laughter*] It's hard to imagine Seagal cashing his royalty checks for overacting. He's just extremely god-awful!"

Jerry Ordway, for his part, kept an open mind about Keaton. "Look, everyone in comics had a square-jawed actor in their perfect casting. I was totally cool with Keaton," Ordway says today. "I have always been happy to see people prove themselves. You can't be a good comedy actor without also being able to act, you know? Keaton was small and wiry, which is the perfect counterpoint to Christopher Reeve, who was the current Superman in people's hearts and minds. Honestly, Tim Burton was a bigger puzzle when he was first attached to direct the movie. But again, [then-DC Comics publisher] Jenette Kahn had a screening of [the Burton-directed] *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* for a lot of staff and freelancers, and it won most of us over. That also got me excited about Danny Elfman on the score." On Burton getting the director's job, O'Neil adds, "I think [Burton's] *Beetlejuice*, with the slight horror angle, probably did it. That's Hollywood think for you. The movies were very, very different, but, 'Oh, they're both about spooky stuff!' "

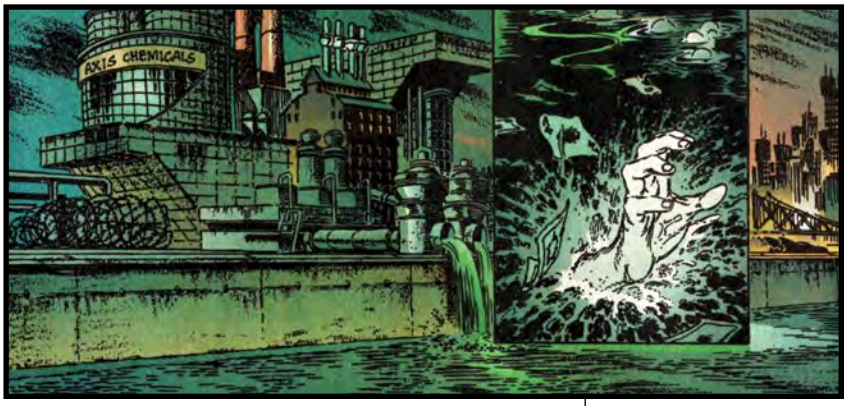
Regarding Jack Nicholson as the Joker, O'Neil says, "I don't think I had any problem with the Joker, and I still don't. I don't think he's the best Joker, but I think he's the second best. [My favorite was] Heath Ledger. I thought that was, leaving the comic-book angle aside, a brilliant performance."

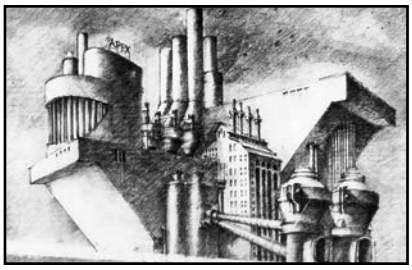
"GOTHAM CITY... ALWAYS BRINGS A SMILE TO MY FACE."

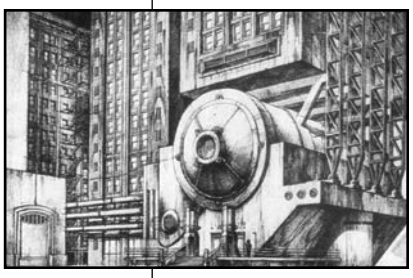
Batman was shot at England's Pinewood Studios between October 1988 and January 1989. Production designer Anton Furst and his team built approximately five blocks of Gotham City for the film, containing such locations as the Monarch Theater, the Flugelheim Museum, and the Gotham City Cathedral. It was one of the largest film sets ever built, taking up most of Pinewood's 95-acre backlot. Naturally, the *Batman* sets became a destination for several comics professionals, Ordway and O'Neil among them.

Jerry Ordway recalls, "I was a guest at a London comic show in October of 1988, and arrived the day after Jenette Kahn organized a tour of the Pinewood sets. Well, after the con, I spent a week in London, and Jenette got me an informal tour. It was pretty mindblowing to see the sets, and also visit the various departments, to see the costumes, props, and vehicles. That really made an impression." The visit strengthened Ordway's conviction to draw the DC movie adaptation, and he volunteered for the job when he returned to the states.

O'Neil visited Pinewood sometime later. "I had something to do in London, I think, the day they all went out there. But I went with Marv Wolfman and Marifran, and I went to that set, and I thought, 'These guys are the real magicians, because I'd swear that this is a real city!' " In addition to touring Gotham City, O'Neil got to check out Batman's ride. "I sat in the Batmobile," he says. "Since it was custom-made for a guy who was exactly my size, it was a real kind of trip to be in your car, because everything was the right size for you."







Gothic Architecture

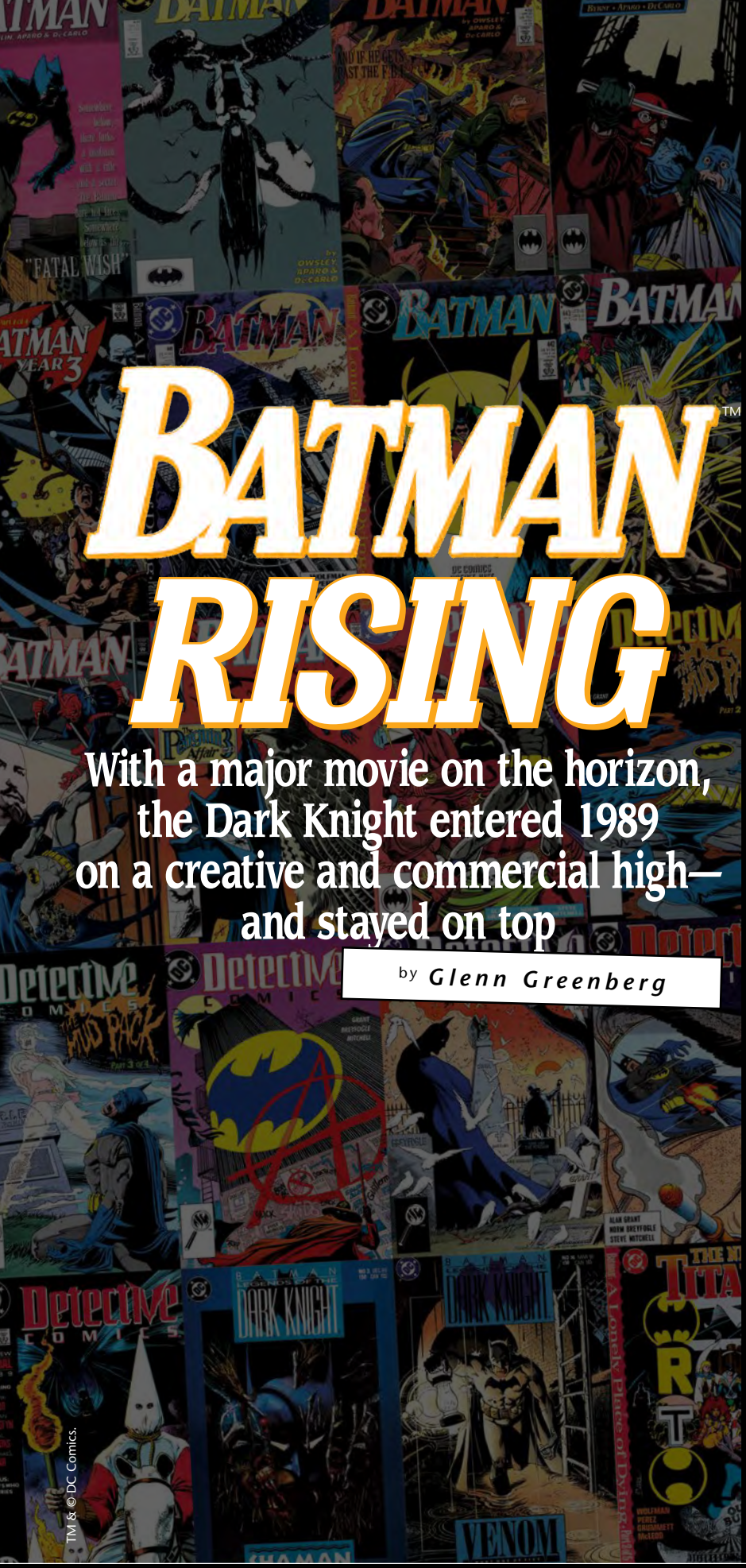
(top and middle) Panels from the adaptation showing Ordway's adeptness with rendering the film's elaborate sets… even when reference was limited. (bottom) It all started with production director Anton Furst's set designs.

"IT'S AN IMPORTANT JOB. I NEED SOMEONE I CAN TRUST."

By 1989, O'Neil had been editor of DC's Batman books for a couple of years, making him a logical choice to write the movie adaptation. "I think that had a lot to do with the fact that I got that job. I was considered to be the Batman expert in-house," O'Neil recalls. "And also… This is no longer true, but they used our material [in the movie] and they didn't pay us for it, and I think that some of the execs looked for ways to give us a little extra reward. One of the fanzines said that I used my influence as Batman editor to get this plum job, and no, I did not. I had never done that. That would be so against my own concept of my own virtue. I got it because Dick [Giordano, executive editor] gave me the job. And if your boss tells you to do something, you tend to do it. Dick was always very easy to work with. It was in no way an unpleasant job. The deadline was a little tight, but that's what they pay us for."

Recalling the script deadline as "more than a month and less than three," O'Neil explains, "That one had a very complicated marketing plan. My comic was supposed to come out at the same time as the novel and the same time as a BBC radio adaptation. So there was no wiggle room. All of those things had to come out the same day."

Time was also tight for penciler Jerry Ordway, who was juggling his regular assignments in addition to the movie special. "I recall working on *Adventures of Superman* during



FlashBacks

For Batman fans, 1988 had left a lasting mark, with the Caped Crusader starring in several stories that brought the character renewed attention and appraisal. "Ten Nights of the Beast" (*Batman* #417–420, Mar.–June 1988), by Jim Starlin and Jim Aparo. *Batman: The Cult* #1–4 (Aug.–Nov. 1988), by Starlin and Bernie Wrightson. *Batman: The Killing Joke* (May 1988), by Alan Moore and Brian Bolland, which went on to achieve near-legendary status—and which stirred up a storm of controversy that persists to this day, given its crippling of Barbara (Batgirl) Gordon by the Joker and its somewhat ambiguous and disturbing ending. Just as controversial, if not more so, was "A Death in the Family" (*Batman* #426–429, Dec. 1988–Jan. 1989), by Starlin and Aparo, which ended the year with the death of Robin—not Dick Grayson, of course, but his successor, Jason Todd, his fate sealed by the Joker and readers calling a 1-900 telephone number.

With top creators producing high-profile projects that sold in big numbers (all of which have been reprinted numerous times in the years since their original publication), and in some cases generated real-world headlines—the death of Robin in particular received major coverage in the media—DC's Batman line was inarguably on a major upswing, both creatively and financially. And the trend would only continue the following year—Batman's 50th anniversary—with a new direction, new creative talents, new supporting characters, the return of some familiar faces, a new ongoing series… and a big boost from a certain movie directed by Tim Burton and starring Michael Keaton and Jack Nicholson.

Entering his 50th year, Batman was flying high—though that flight initially hit some turbulence, which caused major course changes both in the books and behind the scenes.

BEYOND THE BOY WONDER

With "A Death in the Family," Starlin, who had been the regular writer on *Batman* since #414 (Dec. 1987), had managed to address and resolve an element of the Batman mythos that had bothered him for a long time, namely the very existence of Robin.

"I've always had trouble with [the idea of] Batman and Robin," he tells *BACK ISSUE*. "Here's this guy in gray and black who's fighting crime and he takes along a kid in primary colors—he's practically screaming out, 'Shoot the kid!' It just didn't make any sense to me. Maybe it made sense back in the 1930s, but in the 1980s, it was a different world. We knew about child abuse, and this was just plain child *endangerment*, as far as I was concerned."

Starlin's editor, Dennis O'Neil, was in full agreement with him on the matter of Batman's young sidekick.

"I thought Dick Grayson was perfectly fine as Nightwing," O'Neil says. "But I had always, as a reader, had problems with Robin, because it didn't make story sense. I don't expect these things to conform to real life. The Batmobile alone puts Batman in the realm of fantasy—you could not have that car in any modern city and not have people see where it goes every night. The idea of putting a child in terrible peril was not a good one. The idea of Batman in dark colors—that made sense, given who the character was. But putting his assistant in bright yellow and red and green didn't make any sense at all."

Starlin says that when he came on to *Batman* as the ongoing writer, he tried to leave Robin out of the stories as much as possible. "Denny eventually said, 'Oh, you've got to do one with Robin here,' and we did a couple

here and there before we did ['A Death in the Family']," he explains. "And Robin showed up in *The Cult* because I needed somebody for Batman to play off of. But I was never particularly a big fan of Robin."

So when it came to killing off the Boy Wonder, neither Starlin nor O'Neil had any real reluctance. "A Death in the Family" concluded with Robin dead and buried, the Joker missing at sea, and Batman grieving, bitter, and enraged. It was a fascinating moment in the character's history, a true turning point, signaling a new direction and a new tone. Starlin wrote the follow-up issue, *Batman* #430 (Feb. 1989), which shows the Dark Knight, now alone, carrying on with his war on crime and facing off against a deranged gunman. During this encounter, Batman finds himself reminded of a painful incident that occurred the night his parents were killed—an incident that ultimately led to Thomas and Martha Wayne crossing paths with Joe Chill, the man who murdered them. An incident that still causes Bruce Wayne to feel profound guilt.

JIM STARLIN

Kim Scarborough / Wikimedia Commons.

It was a powerful tale, and, presumably, a harbinger of what future stories in *Batman* would be like in this new, Robin-less world. Starlin says he had every intention to stay on the series, and that he was fully enjoying his collaboration with Aparo, who passed away in 2005. "It was terrific," he recalls. "Jim just did a bang-up job. He was a real pro. His craft and his ability to tell a story was first-rate. It was a different style from what I was going for in my drawings, of course, but I had a tremendous amount of respect for him."

But with *Batman* #431 (Mar. 1989), Starlin was gone, without warning—and he would never return.

FLYING AWAY

According to Starlin, the key reason for his abrupt departure was that Robin, while now dead, was far from forgotten, and he would continue to haunt the Batman books in a variety of ways.

"[DC's] licensing department hit the roof," Starlin says, explaining that the company's licensing executives had apparently not been aware that Robin was going to be killed off for real. "Somehow or another," he continues, "Denny on all the morning talk shows [discussing the story] got missed, and when the final book came out, they hit the roof and said, 'We've got all these pajamas and lunchboxes [with Robin on them]!' and immediately the blame game started getting played. I was the low man on the totem pole, so I took the hit for the fact that we'd killed off Robin, and within a couple months all my work at DC dried up."

Starlin suggests that DC used another project he was working on for the company—a four-issue, Prestige

Secret Origins

(left) Jim Starlin's tale in *Batman* #430 (Feb. 1989) retold the Dark Knight's origin. Art by Jim Aparo and Mike DeCarlo. (right) Marv Wolfman, with artists Pat Broderick and John Beatty, depicted the tragic tale of young Dick Grayson, the first Robin, in *Batman* #436's "Batman: Year Three" opener.

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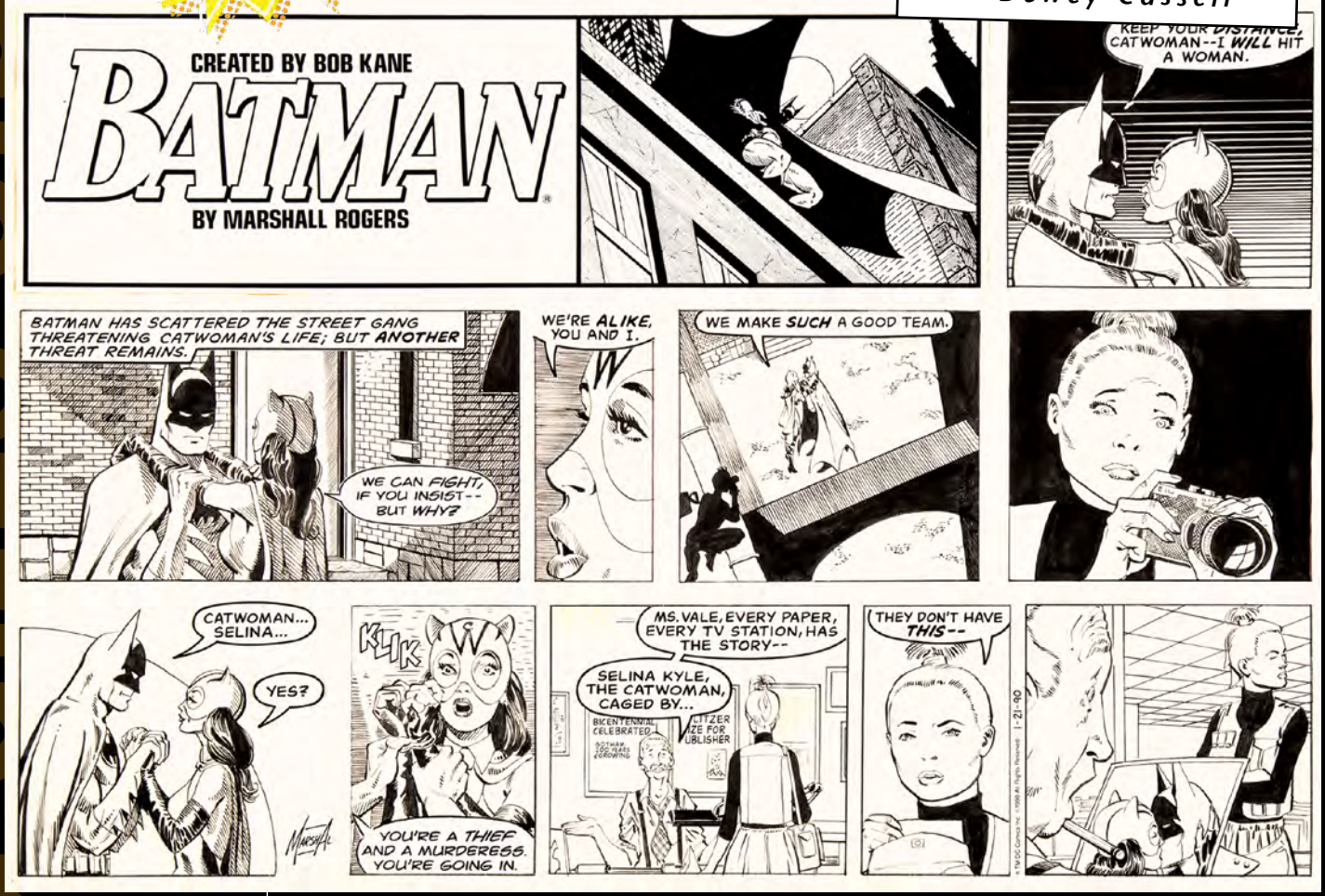
FlashBacks!

HOLY NEWSPRINT!

THE LAST BATMAN™ NEWSPAPER STRIP

by Dewey Cassell



Stop the Press! Who's That? Vicki Vale. And Catwoman. They like… Batman. And so do we, when drawn by Marshall Rogers. Rogers' final *Batman* Sunday strip, publication date 1–21–90. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*), via Dewey Cassell.

In our present era, 14 years after Christopher Nolan's first Batman film and over ten years since the inception of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, it is hard to remember that there was a time when superhero films were the exception rather than the rule. Such was the case in 1989, when the groundbreaking film *Batman* appeared in theaters, directed by Tim Burton and starring Michael Keaton in the lead role. Gone was the campy Caped Crusader of the '60s, replaced by a more serious interpretation, much like the character's evolution in comics.

Naturally, publisher DC Comics wanted to capitalize on the success of the *Batman* film, so they turned to another medium that would allow them to reach a broad audience, the newspaper. The idea of a Batman newspaper strip was not new. In fact, as chronicled in the book, *Batman: The Sunday Classics 1943–1946* (Sterling Publishing Co., 2007), the new Batman strip marked the fifth time the Darknight Detective has appeared in the funny pages.

The first newspaper strip series featuring Batman premiered in 1943, only a few years after the debut of the character in *Detective Comics* #27, and ran for three years in daily and Sunday papers, distributed by the McClure Syndicate. Writers for the first series, titled *Batman and Robin*, included Bob Kane, Don Cameron, Bill Finger, Jack Schiff, and Alvin Schwartz, with much of the dailies penciled by Kane and Sundays by Jack Burnley, inked by Charles Paris.

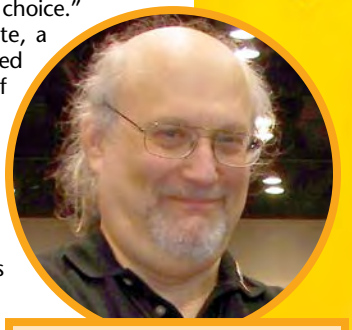
The second series was a short-lived Sunday-only strip also titled *Batman and Robin*, which ran in *Arrow, the Family Comic Weekly* in 1953. It was written by Walter Gibson, creator of the Shadow.

The third series started in 1966, the same year the classic television series began, and was distributed by the Ledger Syndicate. Titled *Batman and Robin the Boy Wonder*, the Sunday strips ran for three years and the dailies for eight years. Although credited to Kane, the strip was written by Whitney Ellsworth (and later E. Nelson Bridwell) and drawn successively by Sheldon Moldoff, Joe Giella, Carmine Infantino, and Al Plastino (with help from Nick Cardy.)

Strictly speaking, the fourth series was not a Batman strip, but rather one featuring the Justice League of America, under the title *The World's Greatest Superheroes*. Premiering in 1978, Batman appeared regularly in the early storylines, but less often over the next seven years as the focus shifted more toward Superman and his traditional supporting cast. George Tuska (and later

Jose Delbo) penciled the strip, which was inked by Vince Colletta (and later Sal Trapani). The strip was written by a series of comics veterans, including Martin Pasko, Gerry Conway, Paul Levitz, Mike W. Barr, and Paul Kupperberg. The Chicago Tribune/New York News (CTNYN) Syndicate distributed the strip.

The last in this long, distinguished line of Batman newspaper strips was named simply *Batman*. With the *Batman* movie a hit in theaters in 1989, the idea of a new comic strip in the same vein was not a hard sell. Mike Gold, the DC Comics editor who helped bring Batman back to the newspapers, recalls, "It was a fairly short period from the birth of the idea to its actual publication. I pitched it to [editorial executives] Dick Giordano, Paul Levitz, and Jenette Kahn at DC, and they green-lighted it. I approached the syndicate, starting with Creators. I never had to go to my second choice."



MIKE GOLD

Often when pitching to a syndicate, a sample set of newspaper strips is produced to illustrate the planned look and feel of the new feature. But no such step was required for Creators Syndicate because, as Gold notes, "They knew who Batman was: he was the dude in the movie who couldn't move his head but made hundreds of millions for nearly everybody except its executive producers (that's a *completely* different story)."

The choice of Creators Syndicate to distribute the new *Batman* strip was somewhat unusual, though, given that the previous DC newspaper strip that included Batman, which ended just a few years earlier, was distributed by the Chicago Tribune/New York News Syndicate. Gold explains his rationale: "CTNYN would have been my second choice. Of course, there was nobody there any longer from the *World's Greatest Superheroes* strip days. (I used to love hanging out at the Tribune Tower, which has got to be the world's most audacious building.) I went to Creators first because they were very proactive and I thought their sales force would do the best of the syndicates at the time, and they had the best (by far) position on creators' rights at that time." Other strips that have been distributed by Creators include *B.C.* by Johnny Hart and *Liberty Meadows* by Frank Cho.

Gold continues, "The benefit of going to CTNYN would have been the possibility of getting the strip into the *New York Daily News*, but by then the paper was in the process of being sold to British media magnate Robert Maxwell. At that time, Maxwell also owned *2000 AD* and Judge Dredd."

With the distribution deal in place, Gold recruited an exceptional creative duo to produce the new *Batman* strip, both of whom had previous experience with the Caped Crusader: Max Allan Collins and Marshall Rogers. Gold elaborates on his decision: "Marshall was on my very-short list of greatest Batman artists since the days of Jerry Robinson and Dick Sprang, and I still regard the Englehart/Rogers run as one of the high-water marks for the character. Al Collins—well, he knew Batman, he knew how to do newspaper strips and the difference between that audience and the tightly overwound circle of comic-book readers, and this was critical. The fact that both were good friends of mine is completely irrelevant."

The late-1970s' Steve Englehart/Marshall Rogers run of Batman stories in *Detective Comics* #s 471–476 is fondly remembered by fans and critics alike and, ironically, is said to have influenced the depiction of the character in the *Batman* movie. Englehart and Rogers teamed up again in 2006 for a sequel miniseries called *Batman: Dark Detective*. [***Editor's note:*** We covered *Dark Detective* way back in *BACK ISSUE* #10.] Rogers also drew a story arc in *Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight* and co-created the third iteration of the Batman villain Clayface. Rogers studied architecture at Kent State University, and that training was evident in the realistic backgrounds for which he was well known. When it came to the *Batman* strip, the amount of detail Rogers put into the artwork, especially the first couple of weeks, was extraordinary but time-consuming and, of course, largely lost when reduced and printed in the newspaper.

Max Allan Collins is a prolific writer, perhaps best known for his 1998 graphic novel, *Road to Perdition*, which was made into an Academy Award–winning film starring Tom Hanks in 2002. By the late 1980s, Collins was a veteran of newspaper strips, having taken over *Dick Tracy* from Chester Gould at the end of 1977. Collins was glad to get the *Batman* assignment, as he notes, "I'd been a big fan all through the '50s and '60s, since early childhood. I loved the TV show." He had also seen and liked the new movie "fairly well," with one exception: "I liked Keaton but didn't care for Nicholson. It was on the verge of being too dark for my tastes." He had previously written the *Batman* comic book, which helped pave the way for the strip, as Collins notes. "Though my work on the comic book didn't please

No Pow!s or Zowie!s Allowed!

(top) Color *Batman* strip ad from the *New York Times*, 1989, announcing the return of the Dark Knight to newspapers. From the collection of Dewey Cassell. (bottom) The strip begins. Courtesy of Andy Mangels.

CATWOMAN™ and Religion

Through the Eyes of Mindy Newell

conducted by **Steven Wilber**

MINDY NEWELL

*The entire landscape of DC Comics changed following the company-wide event, **Crisis on Infinite Earths**. With it, iconic characters like Batman and Robin were forever altered. The Dark Knight's regular romantic interest and long-time elusive nemesis, Catwoman, was no different.*

In 1987, author Frank Miller retold Batman's origin from the ground up in "Batman: Year One" [in Batman *#404–407, Feb.–May 1987, illustrated by David Mazzucchelli]. The world of the Caped Crusader became even darker than it was before.*

That meant plenty of changes for the Feline Femme Fatale. Now a former prostitute thanks to Miller's reimagining, Selina Kyle would become inspired by Batman to don a mask and costume of her own and became a scourge to whomever she felt worthy of her ire.

*Writer **Mindy Newell** took up the reigns of Ms. Kyle a year later (several years continuity-wise after "Batman: Year One"). She established Selina as the owner of a nightclub who still pursed her nocturnal activities as Catwoman. Following "The Tin Roof Club," Newell's and penciler Barry Kitson's four-part Catwoman "Showcase" story in August 1988's* Action Comics Weekly *#611–614, Mindy would continue writing Selina's exploits, but this time refocusing on her origin established in Frank Miller's original tale in a four-issue* Catwoman *miniseries (Feb.–May 1989). After renegading from her pimp Stan, Selina's sister Maggie, a nun in Gotham City, is kidnapped. Catwoman quickly finds her past colliding with her present to construct a future as a rogue for Batman. Newell's miniseries (with artists J. J. Birch and Michael Bair), collected as* Catwoman: My Sister's Keeper, *became an instant classic and redefined Selina Kyle's role in the DC Universe.*

– Steven Wilber

STEVEN WILBER: ***Mindy, let's go back to 1988… what was your involvement with DC Comics, and what was the environment of the publisher like at the time?***

MINDY NEWELL: Well, let's see… 1988 marked my fifth year working in the comics biz, having broken in through DC's New Talent Showcase program in 1983. [***Editor's note:*** That program's title for tyros, *New Talent Showcase*, was explored in *BACK ISSUE* #71.] Readers of my column at *ComicMix.com* will know that it was basically a "whim" that led me there—having read about the program in one of (the great, late) Dick Giordano's "Meanwhile" columns in the pages of a Superman comic, and being bored one rainy Sunday afternoon in 1983 and looking for something to do, I pulled my dust-covered portable typewriter out from under my bed and wrote a little story about a young couple expecting their first child, there's an accident involving chemicals and gene-splicing equipment at the research lab where they both work, and suddenly the woman has "powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men." But there's price to pay: She loses the baby. A few weeks later [DC's] Sal Amendola called me, and then a couple of weeks after that I was sitting at the desk of [DC editor] Karen Berger, starry-eyed and agog at what was happening.

Anyway, the five years since then hadn't completely changed me. I was (and am!) still "starry-eyed and agog" at everything that had (and has!) ensued since that rainy Sunday afternoon. So weird to think that I had not only met and worked with, but could call people like Karen and (the sorely missed) Len Wein and Mike Gold and Marv Wolfman and George Pérez and Neil Gaiman and John Wagner and Jill Thompson and Louise Simonson and Walter Simonson and Kim Yale and John Ostrander and so many other luminaries in the field my friends. I had met Harlan Ellison and Isaac Asimov and Norman Spinrad. Julie Schwartz, the editor who had taught a five-year-old girl that the sun was 93,000,000 miles from Earth through Superman stories and had opened up the possibility of parallel universes via "The Flash of Two Worlds" to a young dreamer, had assigned me a Superman story.

Whose Side is She On, Anyway?

Covers for Mindy Newell's four-issue *Catwoman* miniseries. Cover art by J. J. Birch (Joe Brozowski) and Michael Bair. (*BACK ISSUE* readers should check out *BI* #40 for additional coverage of Catwoman.)

Up to Her Old Tricks… and More

In *Action Comics Weekly*, Mindy Newell's Catwoman arc—presented under the publisher's venerable "Showcase" brand—transitioned Selina Kyle from Miller and Mazzucchelli's "Batman: Year One" to Newell's forthcoming harder-edged *Catwoman* miniseries. Shown here are the opening and closing pages to the first *ACW* chapter, from issue #611 (Aug. 2, 1988).

TM & © DC Comics.

To being asked to go to a convention and meeting people who were eager to meet me, who wanted my autograph.

WILBER: ***Sounds like a fun time to be working for DC Comics!***

NEWELL: Sure! There was s--- going on, and at times I was frustrated and angry and ready to quit… but who hasn't felt that way, no matter how they earn their money? But mostly I remember the mid-'80s at DC as being an amazing home to possibilities and new ideas about comics and what they could do. The "British Invasion," led by Alan Moore on *Swamp Thing*, allowed for a new creativity to blossom in everybody.

WILBER: ***You started writing Catwoman with a short story that ran through four issues of* Action Comics Weekly*. When (and how) did you become attached to Selina?***

NEWELL: I've always been intrigued by those who don't follow the rules of society; maybe it's a quirk in my own personality; or (and?) because of my own life experiences, I've often felt somewhat like the outsider looking in—for instance, though nobody ever believes this, because these days they'd never get away with it, I got kicked out of my local Girl Scouts troop because I was Jewish. And having moved to a new town when I was 13—the worst possible time in a girl's life to be the "new kid"—I was ostracized from high-school society for a very long time, so I was literally the outsider looking in; but though of course I didn't realize it at the time, and spent many a miserable hour crying into my pillow, it has proven to be a fruitful and valuable lesson to learn. You learn how to keep your thoughts to yourself, even when you're standing in the middle of a crowd, in the middle of a party, and being toasted for your wit. You learn to see the reality behind the bulls---.

So, of course I was attracted to Selena when I first met her in the pages of *Batman*. She was independent, snarky, intelligent, and beautiful. She went her own way. She made her own judgments. She made her own rules. "Eat s---," she said to the world. "You f--- with me, I f--- with you."

Yeah, okay, she was ostensibly a villain, one of the "bad guys," but there is something kind of thrilling about that, isn't there?

As to how I became attached to the actual project, Denny O'Neil, editor of the Batman line at DC, approached me about writing a *Catwoman* miniseries, although my memory is a little hazy on the particulars. I think he called me and said he wanted to have a meeting, and we met in Dick's [Giordano] office. I believe the idea of "testing the waters" with a story arc in *Action Weekly* was brought up then.

Of course, I was thrilled. Like I said, still starry-eyed and agog.

WILBER: ***What was your knowledge of Catwoman prior? Had you read Frank Miller's "Batman: Year One"? It came out a year before your* Action Comics *story; did it have any bearing on "The Tin Roof Club"?***

NEWELL: Jewel thief. "Bad" girl. An impossible-to-consummate relationship between she and Batman, the ultimate unmanageable love affair. Sure, I read it. Adored it. As I said before, the mid-80's was an exciting time at DC, when not only was creativity encouraged, but creators were allowed to play with these iconic characters. Writers were able to write "outside the margins" and artists, thanks to new print technology, were able to paint their palettes with every shade imaginable.

WILBER: ***You introduced Detective George Flannery, alluding to a past he shared with Selina. Was it always your intention to address Catwoman's origin following "Tin Roof"?***

NEWELL: Yes, it was. It was one of the things we discussed at the meeting. And since George—though he didn't have a name yet—would be an important link in the development of Selina from prostitute to jewel thief, it was decided that we first meet him in "The Tin Roof Club" story arc.

As to his character… although he sure didn't look it, in my head George Flannery was *Law and Order*'s Lenny Brisco (the late Jerry Orbach), a New York homicide detective who had seen it all and who, despite having more than a few of his own skeletons in the closet—alcoholism, a junkie daughter, an unsuccessful marriage or two or three, and a few affairs—still believed in the "rightness" of his job. And especially because of his own failure(s) with his daughter, George had a "soft spot" for Selina, an (almost) hidden paternal feeling for her—to maybe prevent what happened to his own kid from happening to her.

He gave her Ted Grant's card as a defensive measure, so that Selina would be capable of protecting herself on the streets of Gotham. Of course, it backfired, and became one more skeleton in his closet.

WILBER: ***Right. In "My Sister's Keeper," former Justice Society of America stalwart and heavyweight boxer, Ted Grant (a.k.a. Wildcat), has a cameo in and begins to train Selina. Whose idea was it to involve the character?***

NEWELL: I wanted to have Selina decide to learn martial arts and other forms of self-defense, and Denny suggested we use Ted Grant to keep it in the DC Universe.

WILBER: ***In the final chapter of "Tin Roof," Catwoman throws two would be assailants from a several-stories-high window. Was your Catwoman a murderer as well as a jewel thief?***

NEWELL: Is Selina amoral? My Selina is, and always will be, a much darker character than the way she has been portrayed recently. I always

BAT-LEGACY: The Huntress™

by Marc Buxton

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, fans of DC's stalwart Earth-Two champions the Justice Society of America fell in love with a character by the name of the Huntress. A fantastic hero that expanded the Batman mythos in ways tales featuring the Earth-One Batman could never explore, the Huntress, real name Helena Wayne, was the daughter of the Earth-Two Batman and the Earth-Two Catwoman. First appearing in *DC Super-Stars* #17 (Nov.–Dec. 1977) and created by Paul Levitz, Joe Staton, Joe Orlando, and Bob Layton, the Huntress thrilled fans in the pages of *All-Star Comics*, *Batman Family*, and in a popular backup feature in *Wonder Woman*. It's safe to say that the Huntress was a true legacy character and a small but fascinating part of the firmament of the DC Multiverse.

But nothing lasts forever.

THE LEGACY ENDS

Before DC's continuity-altering event *Crisis on Infinite Earths* changed everything, Helena Wayne was enjoying some of her best stories ever in those aforementioned *Wonder Woman* backups. Written by Levitz with art by Staton, these dynamic short tales established a noir tone that would influence the Huntress for decades to come. Well, it would influence the Huntress *legacy*, but alas, it would not influence Helena Wayne, because the reality amalgamation that was the Crisis erased huge portions of the DC Universe—including the Daughter of the Cat and the Bat. Now, there was no more Earth-Two Batman, so there was also no more Helena Wayne. It seemed the legend of Helena Wayne had come to an end.

Enter: Helena Bertinelli.

A LEGACY BEGINS

With Earth-Two no longer part of the DC reality, there was no place for a Helena Wayne, so two creators familiar with the original Helena were tasked with bringing a new Huntress into the Bat-fold. Aforementioned Huntress co-creator and legendary artist Joe Staton recalls," I was with the Earth-Two Huntress from the start in *All-Star*. Paul Levitz had written those stories and continued with the backups in *Wonder Woman*. The JSA Huntress had originally been created to be a confidante to Power Girl, so it was appropriate that they teamed up in the short stories… I remember that we had plans for a Huntress run in *Showcase* that would lead to a regular series, but that was all lost in the [DC] Implosion."

Sadly, students of DC history will never know what a solo Helena Wayne series could have been—but ironically, a solo *Huntress* series was part of DC's plans after Helena Wayne bid farewell to the mortal coil.

In a Feb. 2010 article entitled "The Huntress: The Daughter of the Bat and the Cat" published in *BACK ISSUE* #38 and written by Timothy Callahan, Staton revealed, "I think Paul [Levitz] realized that I felt my involvement with Helena had been abruptly cut short [by the events of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*], so I was always in line to be a part of any reworking of the character." Kevin Dooley, who served as assistant editor to editor Andy Helfer during the 1989 post-Crisis launch of the new *Huntress* ongoing series, agrees with Staton's recollections and tells *BACK ISSUE* that Staton's involvement in any Huntress reimagining was an absolute no-brainer. "There was never any question that Joe Staton was going to be the penciler," Dooley quips. "After all, he helped create the Helena Wayne incarnation with Paul Levitz, right? And who wouldn't want to work with the great Joe Staton?!"

With Staton aboard as the Huntress expert and keeper of the flame, DC turned to writer Joey Cavalieri to recreate a Huntress that was familiar enough to please old readers (and creators) but fresh enough to fit into the new DCU. "From what I know, Joey came with the complete package," Dooley tells *BACK ISSUE*. "An incredibly innovative

***Huntress* Cover Gallery**

Joe Staton's often-gritty covers to the post-Crisis *The Huntress* series always delivered drama and dynamism.

and talented writer. I was in on some of the embryonic meetings between Andy Helfer and him. It was great to see the two shoot ideas back and forth to make the title even better."

Yet, even though DC was about to begin the legacy of the Huntress anew through the fresh lens being crafted by Cavalieri, Staton went into the new *Huntress* series with a longing for what was lost. "I was around when Len [Wein] and Marv [Wolfman] were talking about tidying up the continuity and even doing away with Earth-Two," Staton recalls, "but I don't think it ever really hit me that they would have to dispose of Helena. I was certainly horrified when she was finished off in just a couple of panels, with a wall falling on her. I'm still annoyed by that." Indeed, Staton was angered by the fact his beloved creation was offed in a manner that made the multifaceted Helena Wayne a continuity afterthought—but ever the professionals, Staton and Cavalieri got to work to ensure that the new Huntress was as warmly received by the DC faithful as her lost Bat-predecessor.

A LEGACY DARKENS

In part, it was Staton's persistence that moved the powers-that-be at DC Comics to give the concept of the Huntress another go, albeit in a very different fashion. Staton relates, "I was around the offices fairly often and would nudge Paul [Levitz] that we needed to bring back the Huntress. Of course, he was too busy to be involved himself. I don't remember if Joey Cavalieri came in with the new concept or if he was selected, but he had good ideas."

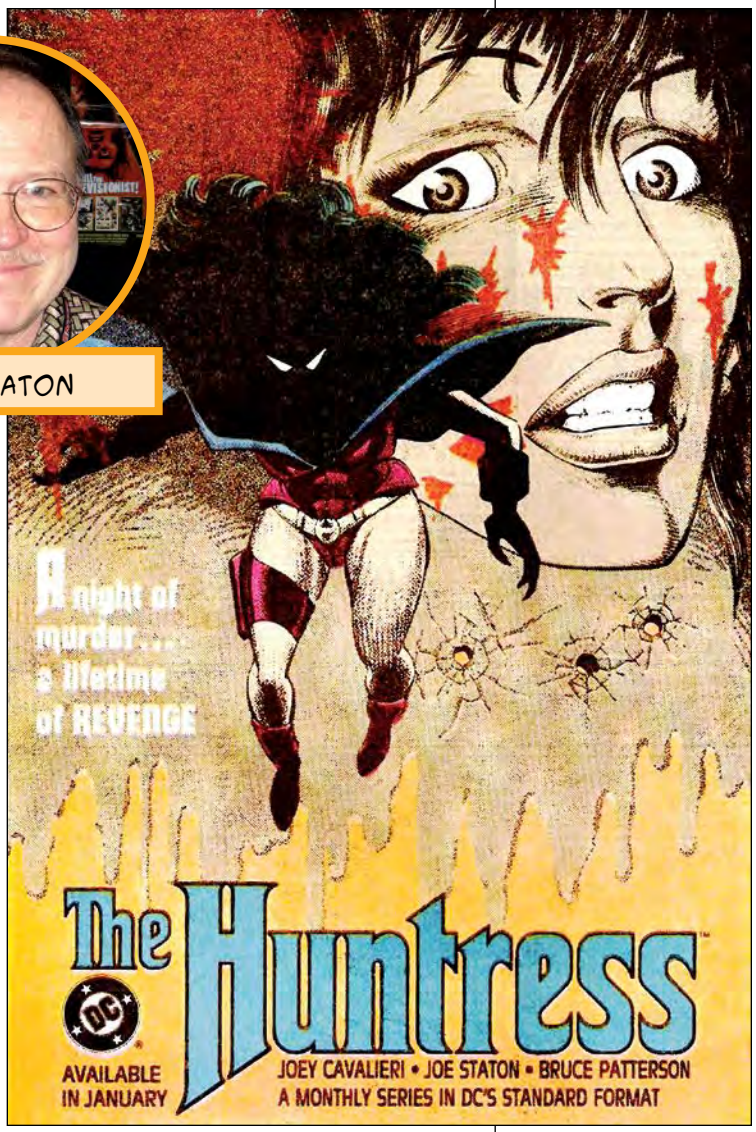
Those good ideas were on full display when the new Huntress debuted in *Huntress* #1 (Apr. 1989). This rebooted heroine took her visual cues from Helena Wayne, but that's really where most of the similarities ended. The Huntress was still the daughter of influence, but instead of following the legacy of the World's Greatest Detective from an alternate world, the newly minted Helena Bertinelli was the daughter of the city's toughest mob boss.

The first issue of the new Huntress opens with a gorgeous four-page silent sequence that establishes the street noir tone that would go on to define the series and the character for decades to come. Those four pages of the new Huntress saving a woman from being attacked not only establishes the Huntress as DC's newest street-level hero, it also establishes the urban blight that would be such a touchstone of the new *Huntress* series.

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.

"I remember a meeting at Andy Helfer's place, where we all went over the ideas," Staton tells *BACK ISSUE* regarding the new series' setting. "I don't recall if I had any specific suggestions. There was mention of a 'bridges and tunnels' mentality. Joey knew the city and wanted to show that." With the setting firmly in place, the other big initial change to the Huntress mythos was the name change to Bertinelli. Replacing the Wayne name was a huge deal, and there were some misgivings about the new moniker. Staton reveals, "I do recall that I wasn't pleased with Helena's last name being Bertinelli because there was a silly TV show with Valerie Bertinelli [*One Day at a Time*—***ye ed., TV junkie***], and I was afraid that would make it seem less serious. But Joey was right," jokes Staton. "Helena Bertinelli has outlived [the name of] Valerie Bertinelli."

After the alley rescue, Cavalieri and Staton begin to unfold Helena Bertinelli's new origin. Readers learn that her father is Guido Bertinelli, the head of a vast criminal empire. Via flashback, readers see young Helena's life as a mob princess. The creators do a great job crafting Helena as an innocent in the world of violence and crime. In comparing the original Huntress to the post-Crisis Huntress, Staton says, "Helena Wayne had the resonance of all the Earth-Two background, especially being the child of both Batman and Catwoman. Helena Bertinelli didn't have that background, but she did have the really twisted mob family and the awareness of the different areas of the city. There were some pretty intense sequences, including Helena's childhood abuse by one of the gangsters and the sequence of a gang murdering a mother and child."



Vixen of Vengeance

(top) The Earth-Two Huntress' *Secret Origin* was revealed in *DC Super-Stars* #17 (Nov.–Dec. 1977). Cover by Joe Staton and Bob Layton. (bottom) DC readers saw this *Huntress* house ad in titles published in late 1988.

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BEYOND Capes?

Remembering a serious House on a serious Earth

A RETROSPECTIVE OF GRANT MORRISON AND DAVE MCKEAN'S

a ARKHAM ASYLUM™

by Michał Chudoliński

A painted shell masking pseudo-intellectual posturing or a masterpiece of comic-book art with psychotherapeutic potential? After three decades, what is the legacy of a graphic novel that proved instrumental in the creation of the Vertigo imprint and the introduction of postmodernism into popular culture?

The year 1986 was the heyday of comics' British Invasion. Alan Moore and Frank Miller were deconstructing the superhero mythos, saving the stagnant and declining comic-book market. At the same time, the marketing term "graphic novel" allowed comics to catch a second wind that improved their sales. The possibilities seemed endless, with the editors open to even the most daring ideas. Anything could happen. As Jenette Kahn, then the president of DC Comics, said in conversation with Paul Levitz: "I did want us to be an innovator, but I wanted just as much that our creative talent got the rights that they deserved, and that they would have a financial stake in their creations. It's the economic side and the artistic side, and they had to go, somehow, in lockstep together. […] I don't think we start to see a second Golden Age in comics—or an Elizabethan Age—such fecund creativity without first making our creative talent believe they were stakeholders."

A MEETING IN LONDON

In this prosperous atmosphere Karen Berger, a young, talented editor, received a special task from Kahn: to recruit new British creators, as talented as Moore, the author of *Watchmen*. To do that, she would often visit London with other, more experienced colleagues, including artist and editorial director Dick Giordano. Their second excursion in particular proved significant, with two young men visiting their hotel suite for a meeting. One was Neil Gaiman, the future author of *Sandman* and bestselling fantasy novels. The other? A charmingly shy, though completely incomprehensible in speech, Scotsman.

"I'll tell you a funny story," said Berger, recalling her first meeting with Grant Morrison, in Greg Carpenter's *The British Invasion: Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Grant Morrison, and the Invention of the Modern Comic Book Writer*. "When I first met Grant, I was with Dick Giordano and Jenette Kahn. I had set up appointments pretty much every hour with different writers and artists in this suite that we had rented to meet people, and Grant was the last person we saw on one of the days, and Dick Giordano was very hard of hearing, actually. He wore two hearing aids, and when Grant came in, Grant started talking and he [Giordano] just took off his hearing aids and left the room. [*laughs*] He couldn't even read his lips. [*laughs*]"

At that moment, Morrison was considered a promising creator, largely due to his interpretation of the superhero as a pop star and celebrity in *Zenith*, a feature in the British anthology *2000 AD*. Among the writers working in American comics, he was one of the most open to high-culture influences and new experiences. As a playwright and member of a punk band, Morrison was aware of the significance of Beckett and other creators of the 20th Century canon at a time when many comic-book writers simply recycled ideas from the previous decades with little in the way of individual input. For those reasons, the editors were very surprised when to begin with, Morrison suggested bringing Animal Man back from obscurity and writing a psychological thriller set in a mental hospital and starring Batman.

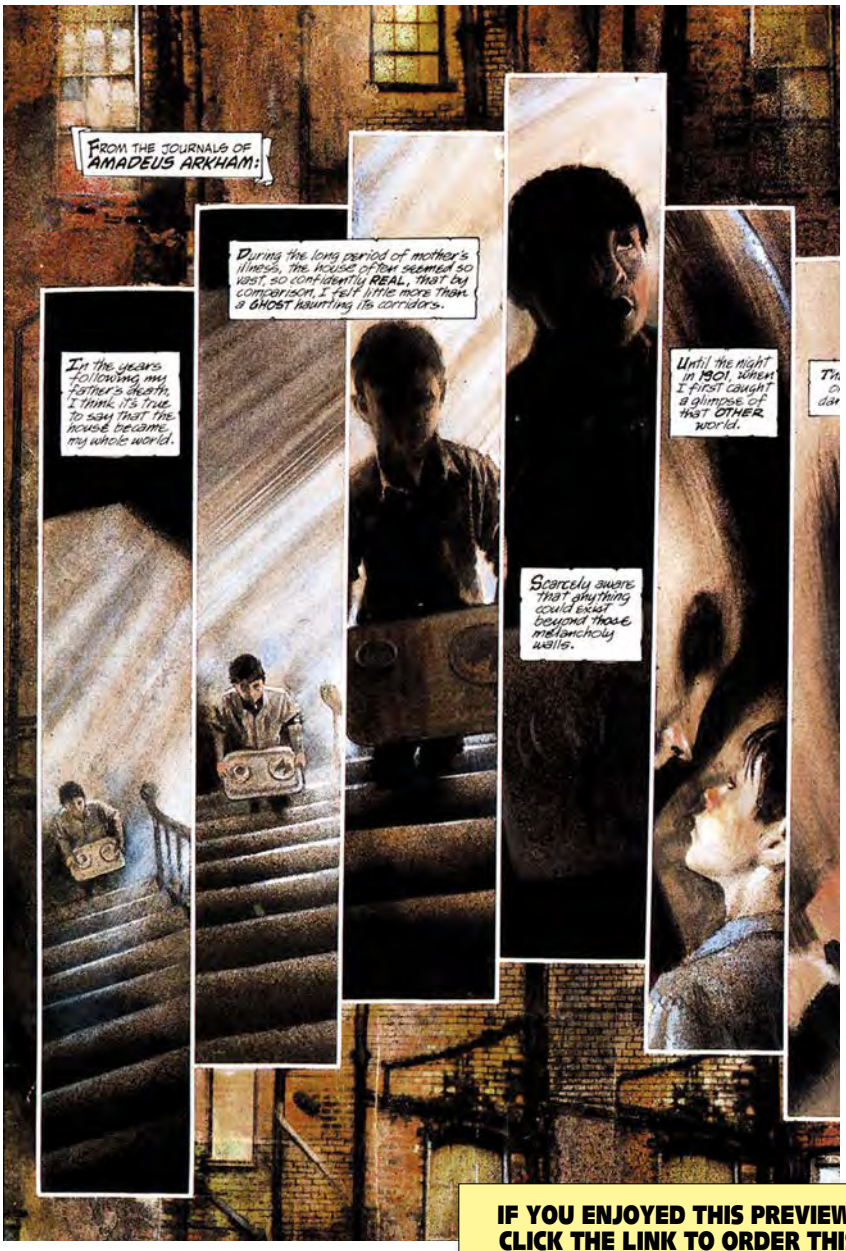
THE TIME OF PREPARATIONS

It wasn't easy for Morrison to convince the heads of DC Comics to accept his Batman idea or his artistic sensibilities, which were tinged with radical art and postmodernism. "They [veteran DC writers] had some fun, laughing at the pretentious writer," Morrison wrote in his annotations to the original *Arkham Asylum* script. The reaction of the old guard was not out of place, because Morrison's plans went completely against the trends the time. As Morrison wrote in his autobiographical book *Supergods*, he did not identify with at the grim superhero aesthetic popularized by Miller and Moore. Deeming it overrated, he decided to abandon the seriousness and brutality of demythologization in favor of a more oneiric aesthetic. The graphic novel's subtitle (A Serious House on Serious Earth), which alludes to a poem by Phillip Larkin, was meant to underscore the provocative dimension and European sensibility of Morrison's creation.

The book's concept underwent numerous changes. At the start, it was supposed to be 45 pages long and illustrated in a manner similar to *The Killing Joke*. In fact, Morrison wished for it to be drawn by Brian Bolland. In the end, however, nothing came of it. As Bolland admitted to me in an email in 2016, "I don't have any memory of being offered *Arkham Asylum*. I'm very slow, though, and probably wouldn't have been able to draw it in the allotted time." It can also be suspected that the editors at DC Comics were not particularly interested in a hyper-realist thriller set in a mental hospital, as it could turn out to be too intense and depressing for the reader. Thus the work continued. The comic grew from 45 pages to 64, full of symbolism and allusions to mythology and Jungian psychoanalysis. To complete the script, Morrison would induce delirium. He would write for 50 hours non-stop, then, at 4:00 a.m., delve into his dream journals to bring up his worst childhood nightmares.

ROBIN MUST GO

At some point, DC Comics sent the script to Dave McKean, a close friend of Neil Gaiman's, and offered him the position of the artist on the comic. Morrison wasn't enthused about this at first. He thought that McKean wasn't the right fit for this project, and the artist himself wasn't a big fan of superheroes. As he said in a 2013 interview: "I liked the scenery, a weird, dark asylum, like something out of *Alice in Wonderland*. When I was making this comic, I was very excited; I really enjoyed the meeting with Grant Morrison. I think Grant is a wonderful writer and personally I like him very much. I was very happy that he was ready to rewrite the script, and that he allowed me to change a lot of things to make this story much more symbolic than an ordinary tale of a man dressing up as a bat. It was my decision not to use Robin. I can barely understand the character of



Batman, but I am completely unable to under
character of Robin [*laughter*]. I was more inte
turning the main character into a symbol, a mythi
I was particularly interested in the idea of a
connection between man and animal. There i
primal energy in that, so I thought I should go t

McKean indicated in many interviews throu
years that Morrison had very detailed plans conce
use of symbols such as a fish, a clock, or a bat.
said that "Grant is a very thorough writer. His stori
the escapist dimension, always have a fascinatin
logical background. To that, I added a few things
interesting to me. I always do that when I draw.
what your goal is, but it's those small, intrigui
that make the journey interesting and challen

The creative partnership between Morr
McKean is thus characterized by Greg Carpenter
interview: "As the writer, Grant Morrison was fu
and seemed determined to cram as many as pos
one book—religious iconography, the Tarot, Got
sexual identity, literary allusions, and concepts
and madness. On the other hand, Dave McKean,
been assigned the project by DC, didn't ha