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Visual Communications

Batman: The Devil on an Angel's Mission

by

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Introduction

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American Superheroes, which evolved in the 1930s, owe their origins to ancient predecessors. Each of the characters has had earlier incarnations which come from mythological sources. It is probably no coincidence that those characters were rediscovered and adjusted to slot into contemporary society. The need for larger-than-life fictional heroes still seems to exist, even in a society which appears to be finding scientific answers at an astounding rate.

I doubt if it matters from which culture the sources are drawn, as there have been so many mythological links discovered between cultures as far apart as India, to Greece, to Germany. Each appear to have similar Gods and stories, yet under different guises. The result being that the archetype of a comic Superhero may be traced to a variety of mythologies, although they are generally compared to either Greek or Roman sources.

And so now, for example, we have Wonder Woman who is a descendant of Diana, daughter of Hippolyte, Queen of the Amazons. Or, as introduced in 1941 by her creator Charles Moulton, she is

as lovely as Aphrodite, as wise as Athena, with the speed of Mercury and the strength of Hercules, she is known only as Wonder Woman!

(Bellingham, 1989, p.8)

We also have Superman who is the Greek Achilles, or, alternatively Gilgamesh, or even, as proposed by John O'Sullivan in his NCAD Thesis, the Messiah himself.

All of the Golden Age comic heroes, which are still in existence today, can attribute their lasting life to their ability to retain their primary characteristics and soul, yet with the cunning to adapt to the ever changing whim of their masters, that is, the public. Approximately each decade, a swing in the economy, attitude or technology of society in general has no doubt had a significant influence on the popularity of the comic-book character.

This influence can be seen very clearly in the 1950s when Dr Wertham launched his book *Seduction of the Innocent*. His all out attack on comic-books in general, and his campaign which spanned America and also reached Ireland and Britain, suggested a direct link between juvenile delinquency and comic-

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books. This inevitably had enormous consequences on the comic-book industry, and, to ensure the \ of publication, characters like Batman were forced to conform to new and very conservative codes. The result was a massive drop in sales, and even the most popular characters like Batman and Superman have never managed to reach the sales previous to this period. Thus, the 1930s and '40s have become known as the Golden Age of comics.

Batman, one of the few Golden Age heroes who withstood this period, has, each decade, been reassessed and revamped, but never restructured. For the past fifty odd years he has played the alternate roles of Dark Avenger and Detective Extraordinaire in a variety of different mediums, all to accommodate the mood of the audience. The tactics which Batman cleverly employed to maintain a steady readership form only a part of what I intend to discuss and will be dealt with in chapter 6.

When Batman was created in 1939, he was given traits which would directly oppose Superman's. Batman is mortal; he was awarded no powers or supernatural strength; he is simply obsessed with fighting crime, and he stalks the darkest corners of the night to seek out his prey. He is a hero, but this can not be said of his ancestral past. The main objective of this thesis will deal with the question of archetype or original predecessors. As any mythologist will argue, our hero is "an idea or image that's part of everyone's psyche" (O'Neill, 1989 p.1) Look to the usual mythological sources to trace the origin of Batman and the search is unsuccessful. There are no creatures of the night, dressed to strike terror into their victims. His appearance can be linked to predators who have terrorised humanity throughout history. Hence, the Batman can easily be traced to the Vampire myth.

"Look at Dracula, squint a bit, and you see the Batman" (O'Neill, 1989, p.1) His relationship with the more demonic aspects of life has always been an intrinsic part of his existence. All the literature that I have read on Batman has made brief, passing comment on this element of his character, but has based its studies on other aspects of him, or rather, the psyche of his readers. The main concerns have sprung from the relatively recent public acclaim and status which Graphic Novels have gained. Batman's fiftieth anniversary, and *The*

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Dark Knight Returns have given rise to critical literature devoted to both him and comic books in general.

Most of the books generally deal with particular periods of his career, that is, the camp 'sixties television programme, or *Batman : The Movie* , or else they consist of an analysis on the ageing of his audience. The most useful information I came across, were the interviews with the actual writers, editors and artists of Batman, which I found scattered within texts of books. Naturally, they would have a more definitive knowledge of Batman, and it is to them, in particular Dennis O'Neill, (writer and editor for Batman since the '70s) that I must attribute my inspiration for delving into the darker aspects of the Batman.

In short, this thesis will be exploring the traits of Batman and how they coincide, both visually and psychologically, with the more villainous and devilish creatures which have terrorised humankind throughout the ages. I suppose it could be defined as a historical journey of Batman, back to the embryonic stages and, perhaps, even further.

This thesis shall also deal with the various relationships Batman has formed with Gotham City and its viciously theatrical underworld. His affinity with the Joker, widely accepted as his doppelganger, will also be discussed in depth. All of these influences merge to define the more complex aspects of the dual personality of Batman.

The concept upon which this thesis is based is not an original one, but to my knowledge it has never been explored in depth. That is, the concept has never really amounted to more than a few interesting remarks. Therefore, I feel comfortable in saying that the only unoriginal part of this study is the initial inspiration which, in turn, served as a catalyst for my own explorations.

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Chapter 1

Traits of a Nocturnal Avenger

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Fig 1.1 No hope in crime alley, Batman no. 457, 1976



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Fig 1.2 *The Legend of the Batman*, Batman, no.1, 1940



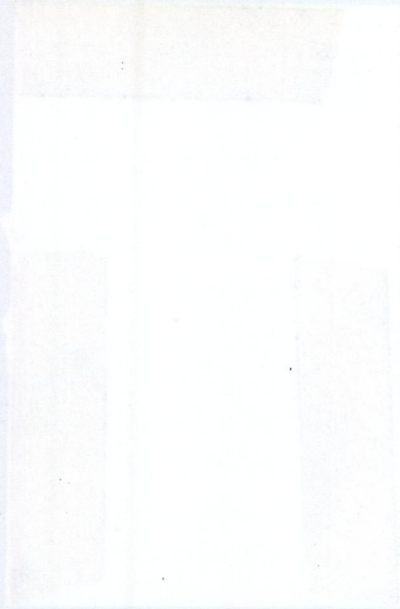
Due to the fact that only a few Superheroes from the Golden Age have endured the past 50 years or so, they can be seen as post-industrial equivalents of mythological folk-heroes. The spirit of Batman's character will now be taken into consideration. From his origins in 1939, he has been dubbed the "weird figure of the night", (fig 1.2) his "cowled shadow" prowling "through the night preying upon his criminal parasite". (Cotta Vaz, 1989)

The importance of continuity in storylines and within the traits and spirit of a character are a primary concern of the readers or fans. The unwritten codes which apply to how much a character can change must also apply to the Batman. His character may have been stretched to both left and right extremes during the natural course of time, but this has been merely to appease the temperament of society. However, the reason Batman exists will always remain constant, central to his being.

This chapter shall be an attempt to define the soul of Batman. Although he has played a variety of roles in the past fifty years (these being discussed in the final chapter), for the purpose of revealing his essence I shall try to ignore the medley of careers he has established. These may impinge on the ability to see what Batman's true character really is.

And so, what is it that compelled and forced a young, handsome millionaire to don cape and cowl and obsessively stalk in the dead of night? It is hardly a revelation, but Batman was born in a violently brief moment, forced helplessly to watch the callous, brutal murder of his parents when he was only a child. (eg. Fig 1.1) That one short, yet seemingly timeless, moment, is what makes the existence of Batman an extremely credible story. Any psychologist would agree that "he was permanently traumatised by the incident; he became compulsive. He was unable not to fight crime." (McCue, 1993, p.24)

The young, grief stricken Bruce Wayne then spoke those immortal



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Fig 1.3 The Legend of The Batman, Batman, no. 1 1940



their hearts." He must be a "creature of the night, black, terrible a...a" and then "a huge bat flies in the open window!" (Cotta Vaz, 1989) ; and so, that is why Batman is. (fig 1.3)

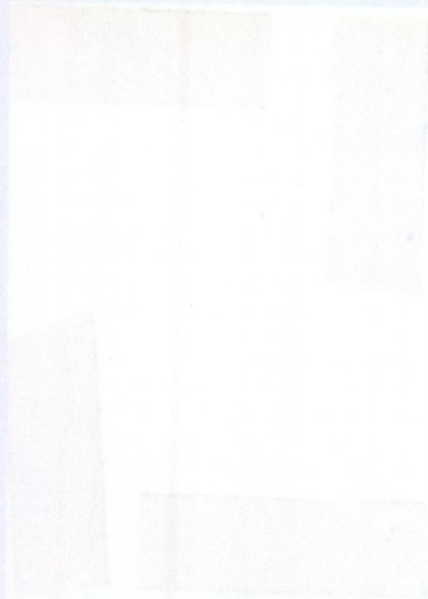
In keeping with the tradition of dual identities in the Superhero universe, Batman was also born from twin violence. The fictional reasons for his existence correspond with the real violence of the period in which he was created. The American world of the late 1930s was gripped with the fear of an impending war, and the added threat of lingering depression.

The fragile, nervous tensions which existed could so easily be ignited. One such event, which acted as a catalyst to create havoc, was Orsen Welles' *War of the Worlds*. The drama, which burst onto the airwaves in the form of a newsflash, warned of a martian invasion and was soaked up by a panicked society. 1939 was a year of complexities, and a time when people needed definitions, a simple divide between good and evil. Batman's world mirrored those conflicts in a universe uniquely his own, yet with the inner discord which was modelled on the reality of the time.

Batman's dark world did not ignore the existing apprehensions. Rather than fight fear with escapism, he chose to embrace the evils stalking in the dead of night and instill them with an almost superstitious fear, due to his appearance. The costume which was chosen as a disguise for the Batman "wasn't designed to make a fashion statement, but to strike fear into the hearts

words: "I swear by the spirits of my parents to avenge their deaths by spending the rest of my life warring on all criminals" (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.xiv) ; a grim promise which has yet to be broken.

After an intense fifteen years during which he "becomes a master scientist" and "trains his body to physical perfection", Bruce Wayne is ready to combat evildoers. To do so, he must have a disguise, one that will "strike terror into



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of the criminals infesting his home turf of Gotham City. (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.11)

With the conscious decision to fight fire with fire, and the righteous idea of "us versus them", Batman was "the perfect reaction to a dangerous, complex world that was closing in." (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.11)

By feeding directly on the temperament of a pre-war society, Batman too, satisfied his unquenchable appetite for consuming crime, in his "dark vampiric" costume. Batman was "a new dealer born out of the depression into a deathwish vigilante." (McCue, 1993, p.xi)

The Caped Crusader challenges and evades death. In contrast to this, Superman, who also owes his existence to the looming fears of war, deals with this ominous presence by creating a fantasy world which acts as an escape from reality.

A hero far less forbidding than Batman, Superman, with the powers and status of a God, is embraced by his metropolis public in a much less threatening world. Batman "inhabited a world where no one, no matter the time of day, cast anything but long shadows seen from weird perspectives, Batman's world was scary; Superman's never." (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.31)

Superman, smiling as he watches over a daylight Metropolis, needs no disguise to protect him. His brightly coloured costume serves as a beacon rather than a camouflage. In opposition to the Batman, Superman's true mask comes in the form of the glasses worn by Clark Kent. The real costume worn by Superman exists in order to protect his pretence as a mortal. Virtually indestructible, his guise as Clark Kent serves as a retreat from the public life of Superman, his real identity.

Due to the mortality of the Batman, his costume is worn out of necessity rather than luxury; a secret identity is imperative to his survival. His disguise, being of a more practical nature, is designed to camouflage him in the darkness and terrorise the criminal element of Gotham City. The full cowl, with pointed ears, and tiny slits for eye-holes, was shaped to cunningly conceal the contours of Bruce Wayne's face. The cape, one of the most effective aspects of the costume, enhances his bat-like qualities. "There's all kinds of trick things being done with the cape. You've never seen anything interesting

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Fig 1.4 A caper a day keeps the Batman at bay, Batman
no. 312, 1979



done with Superman's cape, it's basically just there. One wonders why he wears it." (McCue, 1993, p.112) (eg. Fig 1.4)

The other disguise which Bruce Wayne wears, in a very subtle way, is the mockery of his playboy personality. Just as no one would expect a floundering wimp to actually be Superman, so too, is it unlikely that a millionaire, idle playboy, bored with life, would be suspected of being the Batman. "He's hand-

some, he's rich....so he's not brave! Two out of three isn't bad these days!" (DC, 1988, p.218 -no.442, 1974)

Though both our heroes have survived the past fifty years, Batman has endured a more haunting mythos. The greatest advantage that he holds over the Man of Steel is his mortality. In a crimefighting career, this overriding weakness makes for potentially far deadlier and exciting adventures. The main appeal of Batman is his human flaws. "It is difficult to empathise with the God-like qualities of Superman, but an adolescent could fantasise about becoming Batman." (McCue, 1993, p.23) It was "through discipline and determination and commitment, he made himself into the best." (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.4)

While Superman used Superpowers which were constantly one step ahead of the advancing technology, Batman had his utility belt and a thriving technological system to back him up. Using his scientific research as an aid to survival, he keeps a vigilant eye on the underworld and ensures his array of gadgets are constantly updated. But it is not only his wonderful toys which keep him ahead of Gotham's criminals. Superman, because of his Superhuman abilities "presumably had a more advanced brain than ours;" however, "none of this is manifested in his thoughts or actions over the past fifty years." (O'Sullivan, 1993,) In contrast to this, Batman, through years of training, has mastered the art of deductive reasoning. With an "almost supernatural sense of intuition", as Jenette Kahn remarks, "he has an artist's purity and commitment to his art...he has incredible discipline, fire and ferocity in his commitment."

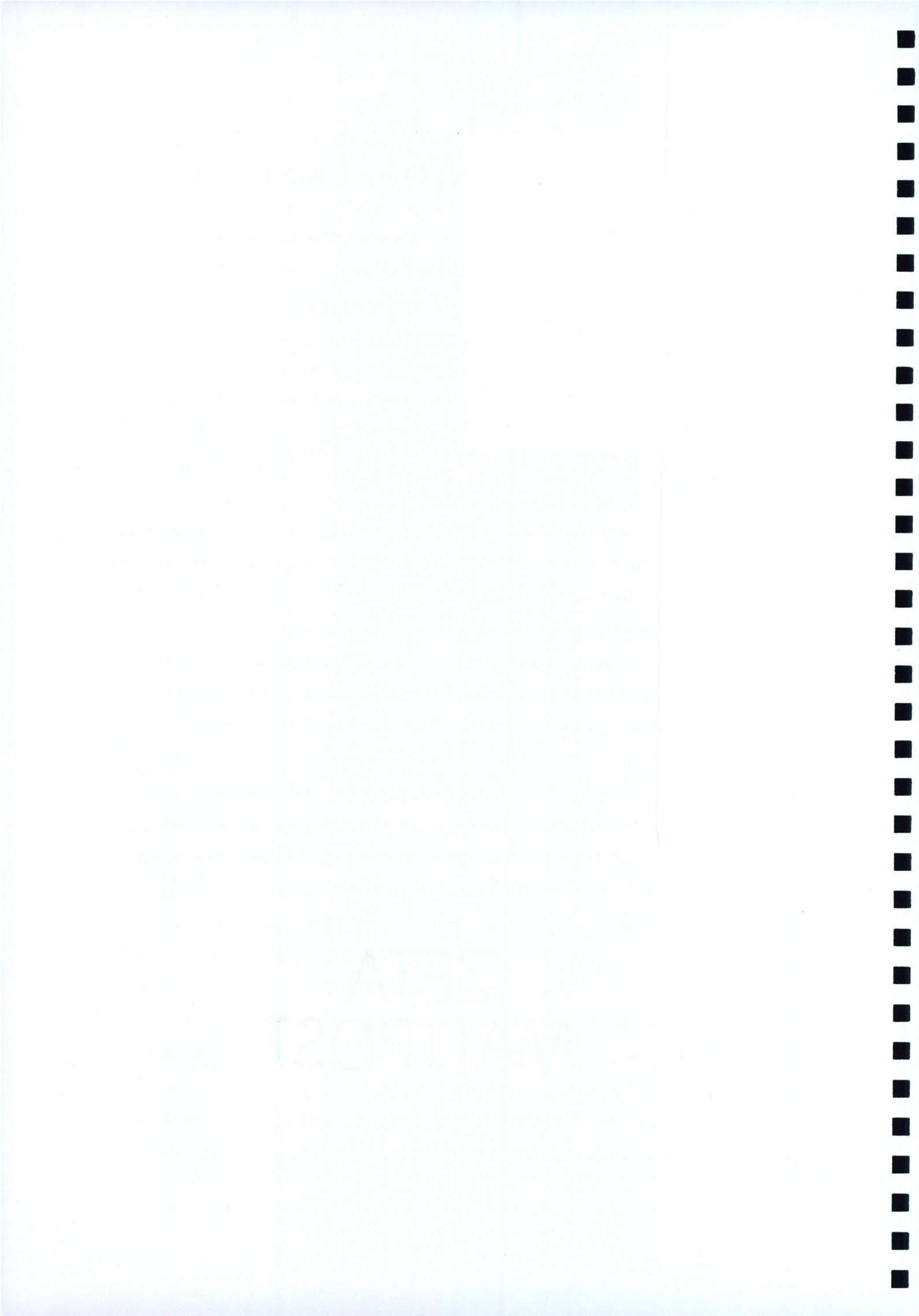


Fig 1.5 *The Batman meets Dr. Death*, Batman no.29, 1939)

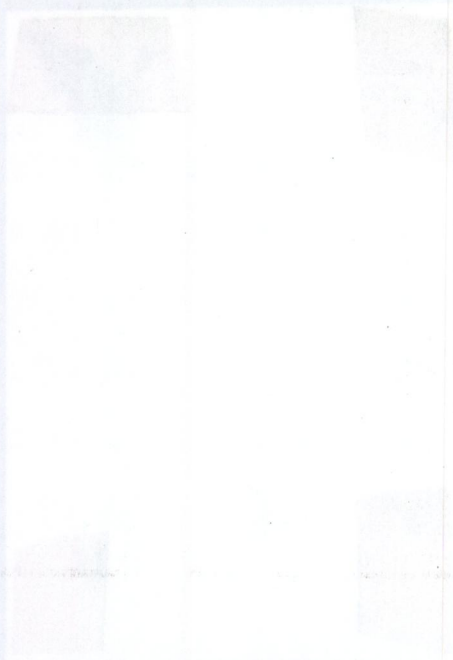


(Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.104) This ferocity must once again reflect back on the underlying obsessive nature of his character.

Keeping his emotions under strict control is a main concern of the Batman. He realises he is psychotic "and "allows his psychosis to be the dominating force in his life." (McCue, 1993, p.24) This control has not always been kept intact; when Batman was first introduced he made no qualms

about murdering his foes. (eg Fig 1.5) There were many rooftop dives dealt out by this menacing weird figure; Batman was not intent on taking any prisoners. In 1940, pumping bullets from a blazing machine gun focused on the henchman of Dr. Hugo Strange, Batman sneered, "as much as I hate to take a human life, I'm afraid this time it's necessary." (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.11) It was also in 1940, however, that the strict moral code that forbade Batman from taking a life was enforced. It was at this time, before the more sinister aspects of Batman became too entrenched, Robin the boy wonder was written into the series. The light hearted element he introduced had the equivalent effect of the comic relief scenes in Shakespearian tragedies. The terrible lust for vengeance which Batman sought, was calmed as Robin widened the character's appeal to a younger audience. It was also the introduction of Robin that made Batman refrain from taking a life. After all, "the trauma that made him Batman, had to do with a wanton waste of life. The same trauma that makes him go catch criminals will forbid him taking a life." (Pearson, 1991, p.19) Also, in 1941, the bombing of Pearl Harbour brought the United States into the war, "it might have been unseemly to have a rabid Batman running loose on the midnight streets of Gotham, serving as judge, jury and executioner." (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.12)

Batman has been known to lose his temper at times, however, although he has not killed anyone since that initial period in 1940. The full extent of



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Fig 1.6 The untold legend of Batman, Batman no. 2, 1980



Batman's inner conflicts can be seen in some of the rare examples of him losing control. (eg. Fig 1.6) For Batman to stray, like a madman, from his strict discipline, would take a loss to match the loss of his parents. In 1941, a bloody rampage ensued when Batman found Robin unconscious, and, in panic, believed him to have been murdered. It is through incidents such as this that the suppressed emotions of the Batman are violently released.

And so, we have the character and soul of the Batman. The myth of a hero takes generations, or decades, of agreement, and the essence of the Batman today, is still the same as it was in 1939. As was said in the beginning of this chapter, what created Batman will always remain constant; his eternal spirit.

In Batman it is a very ugly thing, it is taking parents away from a child: The most awful thing that can happen and that leads to this dark obsession. That man would not be a happy guy if we knew him and he existed. I don't think he is anybody I would like to hang around with. On the other hand, tonight I'm going to be walking home...at around about midnight, and I sure as hell would like Batman to be on the rooftops protecting me.

Dennis O'Neill (McCue, 1993, p.146)



Chapter 2

The Merging of Inspirations past

“So many different elements were plugged into the creation of Batman, it's amazing the character did not emerge as an amorphous oddity”

(Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.25)

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Although the idea of Superman is directly borrowed from mythology, he was modified to suit the twentieth century. So, being the first Golden Age Superhero, Superman can be said to be a more spontaneous creation. On the other hand, Batman was created for the sole purpose of competing with the former, therefore being a more deliberate creation.

Superman having proved to be such a successful phenomenon, DC (Detective Comics) then set about finding another such character who would equal his popularity. Bob Kane, working at the time as a stock comic-page artist, took it upon himself to take up this challenge. Superheroes were, during this period, being churned out at a rapid rate. All were imitation Supermen, and none were to last any noticeable amount of time. In response to this situation, Bob Kane made the conscious decision to create a character who would oppose all the traits of Superman and yet still be a hero.

I didn't want Batman to be a Superhero with Superpowers. He had to be original.

I knew DC wouldn't be interested if my new hero was close to Superman, so I made Batman an ordinary human being.

Bob Kane (McCue, 1993, p.24)

To create his hero, Bob Kane, who was 22 at the time, drew from a medley of influences which came from sources immediately available to him. There seems to have been no particular sequence to his train of thought, he just borrowed ideas from various characters which he personally had admired during his youth.

Being such a novel discovery, the new folk heroes had no definitive set of rules to which they had to adhere. There were, however, certain unspoken regulations which would affect their ultimate success. Those criteria would appear in the form of premeditated decisions related to the behaviour of the character. These would depend entirely on how the society of that period would react to particular attitudes. For instance, Batman, despite his terrifying costume, could not become involved in crime. He could work beyond the law, and bypass the web of red tape which hindered the police force, but his

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Front cover, Batmans first appearance, capturing a notorious gangster,
Batman, no. 27, May 1939



mission must be to successfully hunt law breakers. (Fig 2.1)

In the post depression years of the 1930's, the gangster, who had previously been considered a folk hero, was now looked upon with distaste in the present national mood. This period of history rejected a chaotic society where the gangster was immortalised as "a self-made man who was simply beating a corrupt system". (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.18) Hollywood responded by making Gangbuster rather than Gangster movies, thus stripping them of their previous romantic status.

This changing attitude was not led, as one would expect, by the police force, but by a member of the media. In 1931 Chester Goulding, cartoonist, decided that "if the police couldn't catch the gangsters" he'd "create a fellow who would." (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.18) With that, plain clothes detective Dick Tracy, was born. The simplistic concept of good guy beats bad guy became incorporated into a society which had become burdened with complexities. This notion became an essential criterion to which any self respecting hero had to adhere. Dick Tracy was a:

contemporary knight in shining armour, who was ready, willing and able to fight the criminal with, if necessary, the criminal's own weapons, to fight the toughs with equal or even greater toughness.

(Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.19)

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Acknowledged as an influence for Kane, Dick Tracy would not have been as effective had it not been for the added spice of a motive. He, too, had the bitter memory of murder and swore his oath to Tess Trueheart, his fiancée, whose father's murder he had witnessed. Filled with revenge, he joined the police force to combat crime.

Dick Tracy is considered to be one of the complex skeletons which contributed to the build up of Batman. Another character, who possessed similar traits to the former, but, like Batman, was also dark, masked and caped, was Zorro. Being an interpretation of Robin Hood, he embodied most of the elements which went to make up the essence of Batman. Zorro also had a fairly valid motive: "I heard tales of persecution. I saw my friends and frails, annoyed and robbed...and then I determined to play this game." Zorro, too, had the perfect disguise. Being of the wealthy upperclass, he "pretended to have small interest in life, so that men would never connect" his "name with that of the highwayman" he "expected to become." (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.18)

Zorro's public role as an aristocratic playboy, Don Diego, mirrors the pretence of Bruce Wayne, but there are added components. The concealed entrance in the grandfather clock which acts as Zorro's storage unit and secret exit, is a concept similar to that of the more complex Batcave. Both have a similar mysterious appearance; when Kane drew the first draft sketches of Batman, he had given him a mask the same as Zorro's, only concealing his eyes, rather than a full cowl which became the end result. Zorro was only most noticeably different in that good and evil, within his storyline, were too ambiguous for the tastes of the late 1930s. Batman, to comply with the gang-buster attitude of the late 1930s, must fight a purely criminal element. The audience would not have responded favourably if bureaucracy had been shown to be corrupt, as was the case in Zorro.

Each aspect of Batman's character is based on a pot pourri of popular heroes who sprang from the culture surrounding Bob Kane. Each aspect is in direct opposition to Superman. Batman can be easily identified with the above

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Fig 2.2 The man behind the red hood, Batman no. 168, 1951



characters, but the strongest idea which Kane drew from these, relates to the potent dose of motive which Batman was given. This gives his character added depth, for as we know, “vengeance

is a great reason” (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.25)

As the Dark Detective, Batman’s art of deductive reasoning (eg Fig 2.2) can be traced to Sherlock Holmes. This aspect of the character can also be attributed to the writings of Edgar Allen Poe, detective and horror author of the

Fig 2.3 Lithograph in the New York Mirror illustrating Edgar Allen Poe’s poem *The Raven*



mid 19th century. The similarities between (Fig 1.3 p.9) and (Fig 2.3) highlight this influence. One of his stories in particular, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, has been singled out as being a definite influence for Kane. The story revolves around a rather obscure train of thought which solves an otherwise unsolvable murder mystery.

Batman regularly displays a similar mentality in solving the most ridiculous and cryptic of crimes. His athletic and scientific prowess came from Doc Savage, the bronze-skinned adventurer, and also from the Scarlet Pimpernel. Just as the latter would leave a calling card signed with the star shape of the Pimpernel, so too would Batman leave the silhouette of a bat.

Having discussed the influences which gave Kane the inspiration for motive, and both physical and mental characteristics, the final attributes shall

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Fig 2.4 *The Living Shadow*, *The Shadow Annual*, 1942 Ed.



be discussed, that is appearance and attitude. The decision to make the character winged came from sketches he had made at 13 of Leonardo da Vinci's flying machine. He traced the outline of Superman onto the drawings and concluded that his character would have wings of some description.

Kane also cast his mind to a grim

hero from his youth, whom he had respected for his appearance and attitude: The Shadow. (Fig 2.4) This radio and pulp fiction character is, it has been suggested, first cousin to the Batman, his "very direct ancestor, both are cloaked, mysterious and violent." (McCue, 1993, p.147) Upon meeting the Shadow, in the 1973, (fig 2.5) Batman himself admitted "I've never told anyone this, but you were my biggest inspiration!" (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.151) And, on embracing the influence of this character, the cinematic techniques of film noir are incorporated into the Batman imagery and mythos.

Fig 2.5 *Who knows what evil*, *Batman* no. 253, 1973

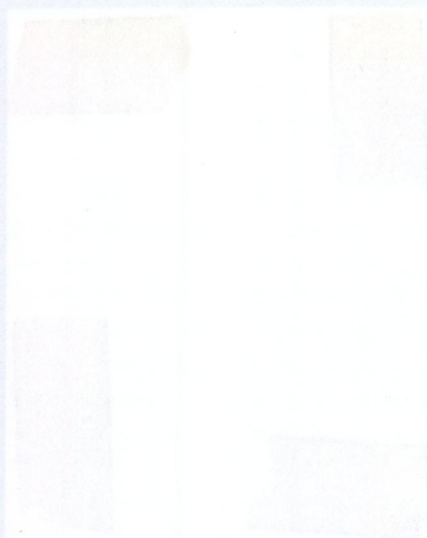


Its studied compositions of light and shadow, its creation of sustained suspense, and its dramatic use of the city... film noir seizes and penetrates a universal heart of darkness

Foster Hirsh (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.148)

As the dark Shadow, with slouching hat concealing his face and swirling cloak, vanishes into the long shadows, so too does Batman evoke this mysterious quality.

The Shadow brings Batman closer to his more sinister origins, and to the images which determined his bat disguise. *The Bat Whispers*, a 1931



remake of the silent film *The Bat*, captured the imagination of Bob Kane. Situated in an eerie and typically spooky house, Batman in this film, was an evil predator, a murderer dressed in a black cloak. He would announce the doom of his victims by shining a torch on a nearby wall; in the centre of the beam was the silhouette of a bat, similar to that of the Bat signal.

With all the necessary elements in place, Bob Kane and Bill Finger, (writer for the series) sitting outside a suitably Gothic setting, the house of Edgar Allen Poe, began to modify and perfect the creation. Bill Finger made suggestions that would refine the original sketches, and when the final drafts were presented to an anxious DC editor, the response was " it looks kind of mysterious and creepy...ok, we'll give it a try!" (McCue, 1993, p.23)

The ultimate decision to use imagery associated with the darker side of human nature resulted in the popularity of the character. However, bat imagery and the dark mysterious quality Batman revels in, goes back far beyond the childhood memories of Bob Kane. There has always been a niche in society for horror and the fear of darkness. Batman is our hero, but he is created from the anxieties of society, and attempts to fight the reality of the evils which live in the cities.

We have co-opted the grimmer archetypes, embraced them, declared them, with all their ferocity and relentlessness and inhuman competence, our allies
(O'Neill, 1989, intro p.2)

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Chapter 3

Predecessors of a Legend

Everything must have a beginning, to speak the Sanchean phrase; and that beginning must be linked to something that went before. The Hindus give the world an elephant to support it, but they make the elephant stand upon a tortoise. Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void but out of chaos.

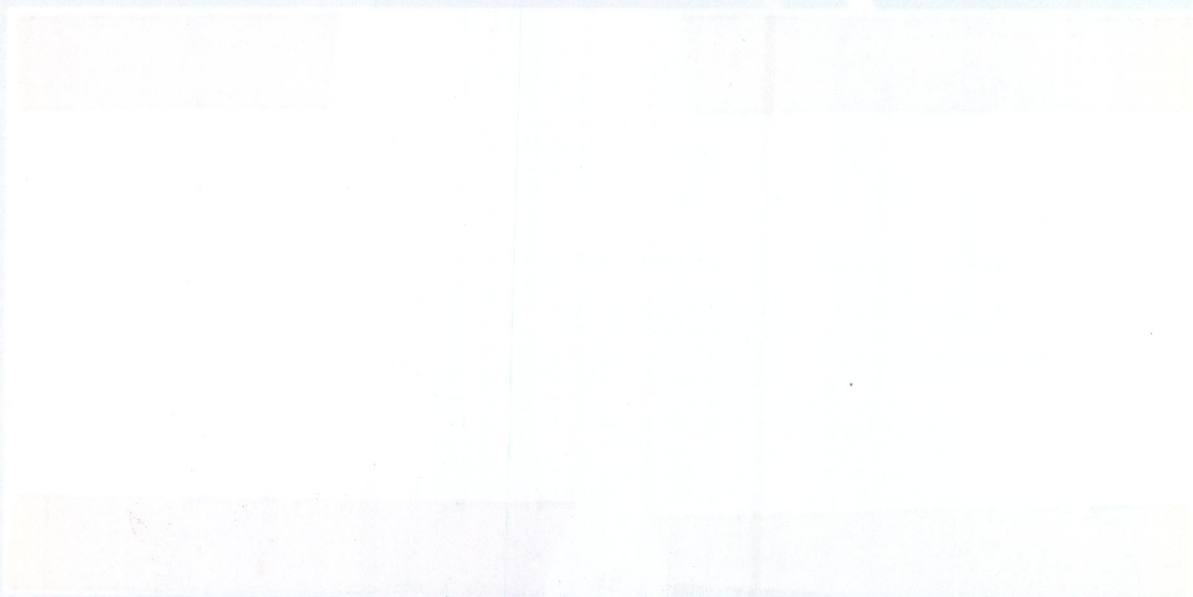
Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*, 1994, p.8)

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Fig 3.1 *The demon lives again*, Batman no. 244, 1972



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The ingrained ability of the human imagination to conjure up fantastic imagery of demons and devils has never ceased to exist. A characteristic of human nature seems to be the desire to frighten and thrill our peers. The visual interpretations of monsters, demons and devils which have occurred throughout history, have laid a groundwork for our own fertile imaginations today.

In mythology it is accepted that there seem to be unanimous links in the creation process which bond traditions, regardless of culture. The theory of comparative mythology has, since the 19th century, become a serious academic discipline and one of those links is the notion of what a demon or beast might look like, an idea which unites the most far reaching of legends. No matter the culture or country, the physical fusion of human and animal imagery is a popular feature of these creatures.

Fig 3.2 The Devil, detail from Christ in limbo by Freiderich Pachter



There are thousands of combinations and variations, the most familiar, like the Sphinx or the Centaur, become embedded in our own modern culture today. But even among the most universal of beasts, there exists discrepancies and diversity between the various regions. These are often evident in names or traits attributed to the creature, but there are also many physical deviations.

It is the general consensus that the Golden Age Superheroes owe their origins to ancient mythological sources. So, in accordance with this sentiment,

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Batman may also be a descendent of some previous beings. If we look to the usual sources of Greek and Roman mythology, we find no Gods who combine characteristics to form the Batman. However, if we study the beasts and demons, there are a number of creatures who physically resemble the Dark Knight. So, it seems that it is to the Lower-World that the Batman must venture to search for his possible lineage.(eg. Fig 3.2)

Quite a number of winged beasts exist among these fabulous contortions, but there is one species in particular which I came across that appeared to have the most in common with Batman. As is usual with these traditions, there is much fluctuation among various locales, with the creature being given different names and origins. The being is the Genii, or Jinn, and seems to be most popular in the Arabic regions.

Fig 3.3 The Devil, detail from the story of Job, by Francesco da Volterra



The Genii, in these ancient myths, can be either good or bad spirits, and are prototypes of our Christian Angels. They are messengers and agents to either God or the devil. In fact, in the book of Koran the devil was a rebellious genii, and took reign in the Lower-World after being banished from the heavens. This belief is remarkably similar to the fate of Lucifer in Christianity. (fig 3.3) Also, Satan, under the title of the Wendish Zart, strays from our popular image of horns, tail and goats feet appended to an

otherwise human form. He has been given an added feature to the ensemble, the wings of a bat, and he looks like an evil Jinn.

The Jinn, which are good, act as Guardian Angels. Protectors from evil spirits, they are invisible but omnipresent, and will always remain by man's side, for "he who has no God when he walks in the street, wears a headache like a garment." (Hamlyn, 1978, p.65) The evil Jinn, however, manifest themselves

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Fig 3.4 Evil Djinn, French illustration for *the Arabian Nights*, 1838



through disease and crime, and have no known motive. They are just bad spirits, like the "rising wind which casts darkness over the bright day." (Hamlyn, 1978, p.65) Of both types, the good is very similar in appearance as well as sentiment, to Angels. The Batman, however, is much more reminiscent of the evil Genii, although he lacks some of the characteristic features, such as lion's claws or pitch-forks instead of hands. However

Batman does possess pointed ears which are quite similar to the horns of the Genii.(eg fig's 3,4 and 3.5)

Fig 3.5 Evil Jinn, illustration to *the Arabian Nights*, 1838



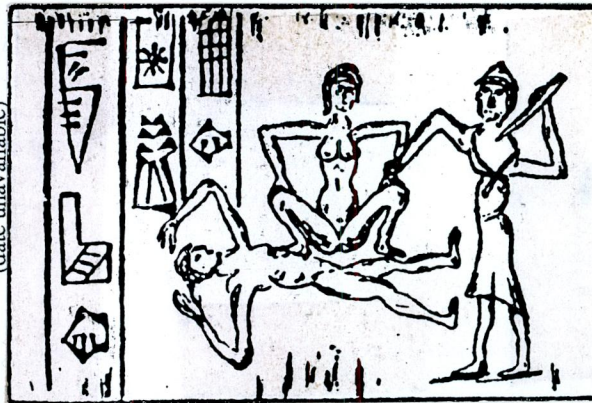
The proposal that these devilish winged spirits are connected to the mythos of Batman, through his ancestry, is obviously a tenuous one, a suggestion drawn from curiosity. There are probably plenty of other such creatures that our Batman could be likened to,

perhaps both in spirit and attire. The example of the Genii suffices to communicate the idea that Batman is consistent with the timeless human need to both fantasise and fear.

If the search is brought much closer to our own century, there is another batch of night creatures, more easily identifiable, with which our Batman has much in common. They are the undead vampires, whose blood lust is also a timeless phenomenon. Vampires most popularly identified with Bram



Fig 3.6 The earliest known drawing of a vampire on a babylonian cylinder seal (date unavailable)



Stoker's *Dracula*, have also been a part of human heritage for thousands of years. (eg Fig 3.6) Once again, these blood thirsty superstitions can be found in different regions and

periods, with wide diversity in there characteristics. Transmigration into animal forms is a usual trait. The vampire has been linked to numerous animals, usually the bat or the wolf. There is also, for example, the Japanese vampire; one of its forms being that of a huge cat which preys mainly on young girls

Fig 3.7 A japanese vampire in the form of a huge cat (date unavailable)



while they sleep. (fig 3.7)

The vampires, which directly concern the conception of Batman arise mainly from the success of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in 1897, and the surrounding popularity of the creature at that time. *Dracula* is accepted as being based on Prince Vlado, ruler of Valchia and parts of Transylvania between 1456 and 1477. The horrific facts surrounding his reign began with his impaling of French delegates for lack of respect, and then bathing in their blood for a week. (eg fig 3.8) In order to solve the states welfare problems he lured the

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Fig 3.8 15th century German woodcut of Vlad Dracula having a meal



vagrants of his streets to his castle with promises of food and money. He then killed them and the bodies were fed to his private zoo of wild animals. He justified his actions by saying "I bequeath to thee my kingdom without any beggars, orphans or cripples, whom I have spared further suffering in this world." (Haining, 1976, p.168) He would regularly drink blood, and towards the end of his reign, would kill women by biting through their jugular veins. The name Dracula came from his crest; it had a black dragon on a red back-

ground. Dracula was the Valachian for dragon, today the modern Romanian for this Dracula is devil.

Bram Stoker is not the only person to have written about Count Vlado, the first and most accurate account came from Russian Count Kuristinn, in 1482. Neither is Stoker the first to write about a vampire. (eg Fig's 3.9, 3.10 and 3.11) He was however, the first to combine both the facts of this real figure with the ancient vampire superstition, to produce a hugely successful novel. He was

Fig 3.9 The earliest known story featuring a vampire. This illustration is from an English translation, Legends of Terror, 1826



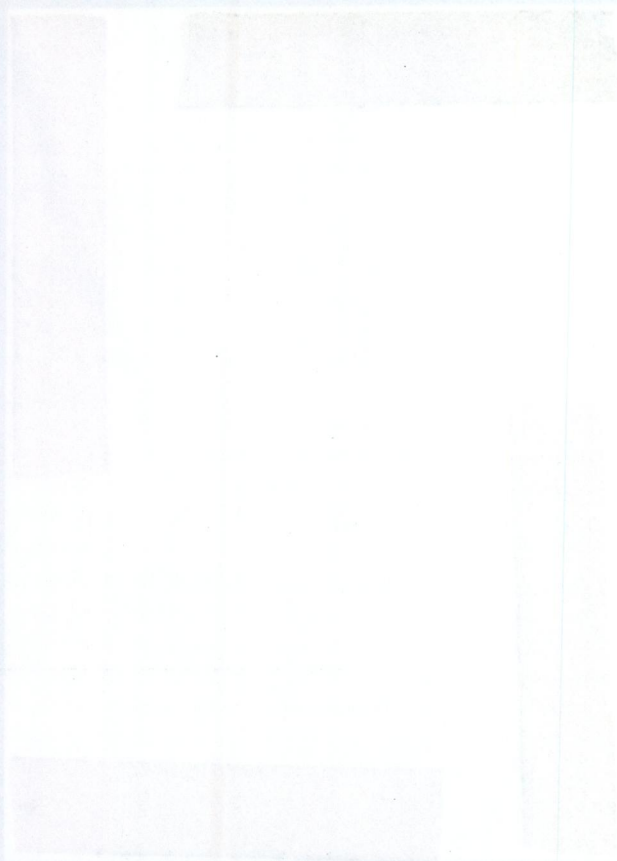
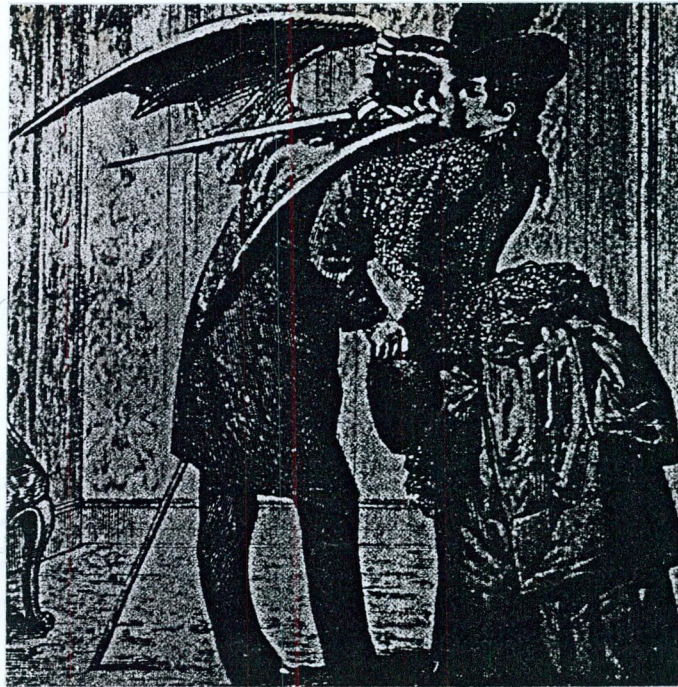


Fig 3.10 Illustration of a vampire from victorian magazine



also the first to take the vampire out of his traditional countryside setting and transport him to the city; this being of particular significance when it comes to the evolution of bat-men characters.

Fig 3.11 Illustration from *Vikram and the Vampire*: a series of exploits about seeking and capturing Indian vampires, 1870



comicbook. (Fig 3.12)

In general, the 19th century was a popular period for the vampire myth, and not only in regard to literary contributions. The British Penny dreadfuls, popular during the middle of this century, also featured the vampire. In 1847, *Varney the Vampire* terrorised and murdered his victims; his significance arises from the fact that the Penny Dreadful in which he featured were a forerunner to the pulp magazine; this in turn, a forerunner to the

Roughly 50 years after *Varney*, the pulp magazines began to introduce their own versions of the vampire. The immediate reason for their appearance

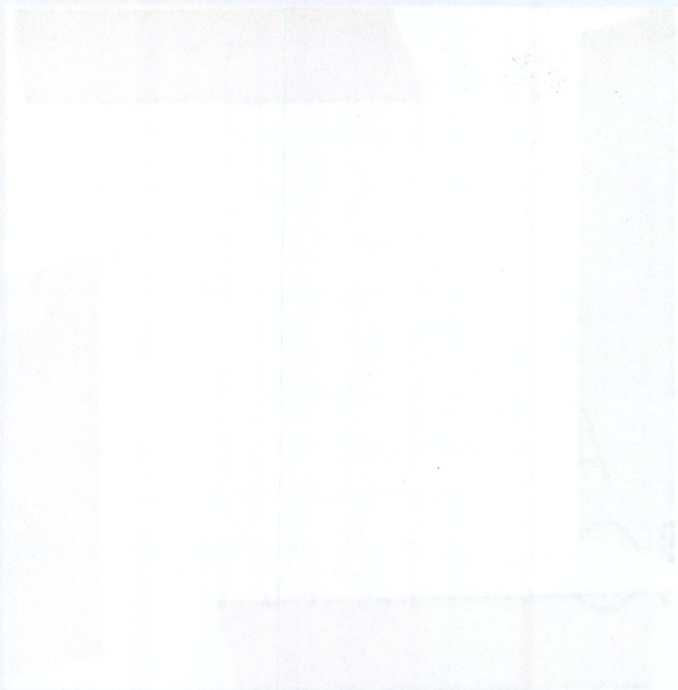


Fig 3.12 *Varney the Vampire*, this drawing is now a familiar film scene (eg. *Nosferatu*)



was due to the popularity of *Dracula*, for between 1899 and the 1930s, a new breed of vampires evolved. The bat, one of the accompanying creatures to the vampire mythos, became immensely popular, and was accepted as an almost universal symbol of the vampire. There were three important changes that happened at this

time. Firstly, vampires had now begun to inhabit the cities; secondly, the bat image had become the main symbol of the vampire; and thirdly, as shall be shown, vampires needed no longer to be immortal or undead.

In 1899, the *Human Bat* was introduced into the pulp magazine *The Funny Wonder*; "Blacker even than its surroundings", this "bat-like figure that

Fig 3.13 The first episode of *The Human Bat*, January 1907



gibbered horribly" (Haining, 1976, p.112) the *Human Bat*, not long after his introduction, was unmasked and there proved to be nothing supernatural about him. He is the first direct, yet evil, predecessor to the Batman.

Despite this revelation, the *Human Bat* continued for eight years, due to its popularity, and in 1907 was revamped, only to be given a new and novel slant (Fig 3.13). The title, author and costume all remained untouched, however, the *Human Bat*, completely reversed his role. Now, using the latest miracles of

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Fig 3.14 The first episode of The Silent Avenger, September 1912



Edwardian science, he had become an avenger of evil. Still possessing the ability to evoke "a cry of horror, frozen ere it could find utterance," the "strange unearthly figure" (Haining, 1976, p.112) was now on a vigilante mission. Now, only the time and place differentiated him from the unborn Batman.

Five years later, science was given a rest and the supernatural made a comeback. The *Silent Avenger*, (Fig 3.14) making his debut in the Penny Wonder in 1912, was also "a figure whose form once seen could never be forgotten." The *Silent Avenger*, alias John Power, was struck by lightning moments after being released from a ten year, undeserved prison sentence. He awoke to find he suddenly possessed a strange power, and pronounced himself dead: "from

Fig 3.15 The Flying Terror, 1917



this hour the Silent Avenger lives in his place. Let all who gather wealth unworthily, or spend it recklessly, beware, for ere night has fallen the Avenger will claim his first victim." (Haining, 1976, p.113)

The reign of British Bat-men vigilantes continued, and in 1917 the *Flying Terror* was unleashed. This time the creature came from space, hatched

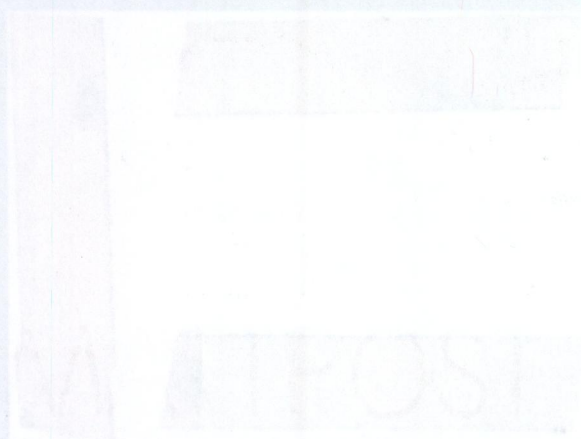
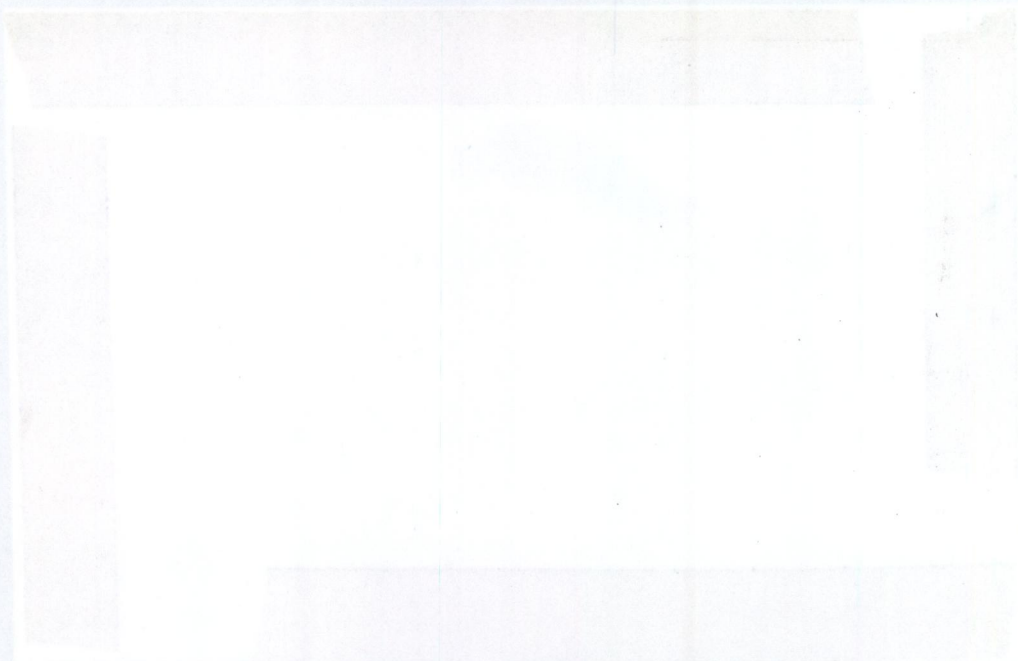
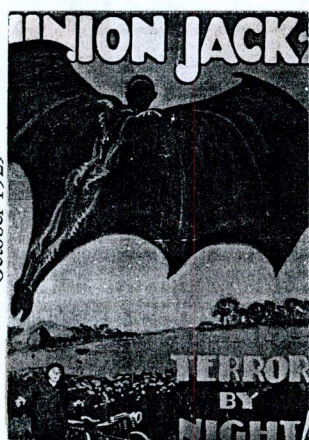


Fig 3.16 Man-Bat in Terror by Night, October 1929



from a meteorite which struck London (sounds like a muddled premonition of both Batman and Superman). "A strange weird man-like form, with out-stretched wings, it seemed, as it flew up and vanished," it was the menace to detective Gripton Court, the crime elucidator, and his intelligent boy assistant, Joe Sparks. (Haining, 1976, p.114)

In 1922, the *Human Bat* was resurrected in Jack's Paper, only to be unmasked as Fraser Burton, "in a weirdly-fashioned glider which he had no doubt invented and made himself." (Haining, 1976, p.114) The multitude of bats continued through the 1920s and '30s, with such fear-some characters as the *Grey bat*, or the man-bat from *Terror by Night* (Fig 3.16). And they persistently retained the element of shock and disbelief: "I knows what owls is like. I tell ye this thing was as big as you. With wings,too. Why I could see is legs. But it wasn't no human head! The things a devil!" (Hainings, 1976, p.114)

Fig 3.17 The Crimson Bat, 1932



p.115) And so, in 1939, using a "clever blend of Dracula and Superman,"(Haining, 1976, p.116) our Batman was created on the other side of the ocean.

Continuing in this popular fashion came the *Crimson Bat* in 1932 (Fig 3.17), and the *Avenger*, in 1935. Then the historic day arrived, the first vampire to appear in true comic book form, the *White Bat*: "Do not dare venture into these forbidden regions! Disobey at your peril!" (Haining, 1976,

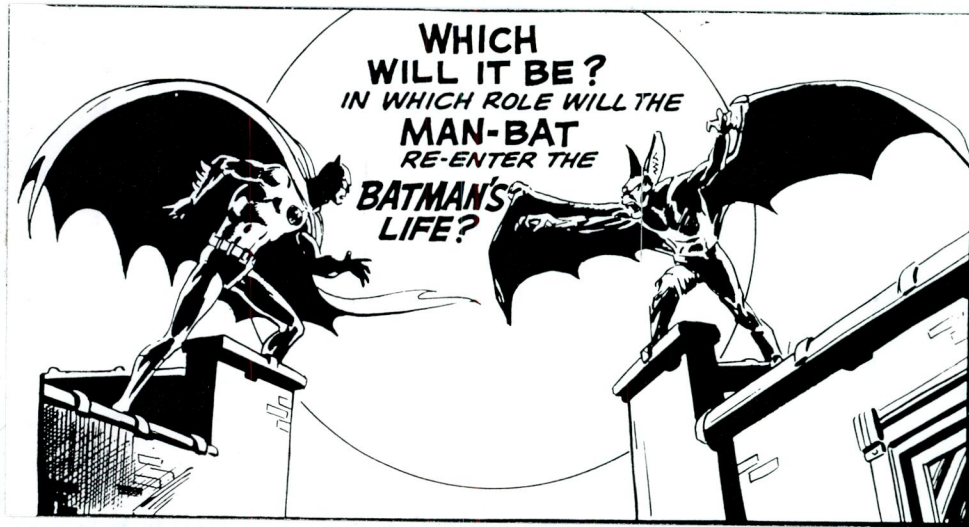
The Batmen which prevailed in the pulp magazines during this period

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fluctuated between being good and evil characters. They did, however, evolve directly from vampires, but their blood lusts took different directions. Whether Bob Kane knew of their existence or not, Batman is definitely related to these characters and, like some of them, he has crossed the fine barrier between good and evil to become avenger of the common man.

Fig 3.18 Challenge of the Man-Bat,



There are nine and sixty ways
to sing the tribal lays
and all of them are right.

Rudyard Kipling (O'Neill, 1989, intro)



Chapter 4

Where the Knight Prowls

“When is a man a city?... When it's Batman, or when it's Gotham?.. I'd take either answer. Batman is this city...that's why we're here. That's why we stay. We're trying to survive in the city. It's huge and contradictory and dark and funny and threatening!”

The Riddler (Pearson, 1991, p.187)

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Having seen how, visually, Batman's possible ancestry is more reminiscent of devils and vampires than Greek gods, his personality or character shall now be taken into consideration. This chapter shall deal with other elements of the Batman storyline which help to enhance his character. To stalk in the blackness of night lit only by an ominous full moon, the codes of survival demand that a predator must have a natural habitat, a feeding ground, providing a rich variety of prey. Gotham is that habitat and the numerous, fancy dressed lunatics, are the prey. The result has been a symbiotic relationship between our Knight and his game.

Batman's origin stemmed from the deeds of a low-life common breed;

merely ordinary muggers murdered young Bruce Wayne's parents, that night, in Crime Alley. When our hero became the Batman, and began to mete out punishment to the parasites that plagued the city, Gotham, and it's Underworld responded in an equally spectacular manner. (eg. Fig 4.1)

Batman had been in existence for a year, fighting normal, everyday,

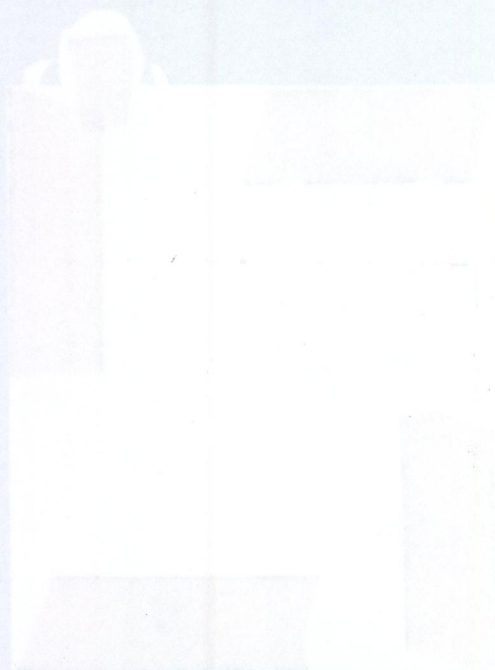
yet dangerous criminals, before any spectacular psychopaths appeared. It was obvious that, in order to maintain an interesting storyline, the criminals of Gotham must be made more entertaining. In 1940 the first of these lunatics, the Joker, was introduced, he however, shall be discussed in the next chapter. Nevertheless, Batman needed his Gotham City. Likewise, the flamboyant assortment of characters, which came to inhabit the city could not function without him. Batman was almost like a cure, which encouraged a more evolved and deadly disease.

The recurring costumed villains systematically alternate, with each

Fig 4.1 A victim of the Scarecrow; he has poisoned a crowd with a hypnotic fear of arachnophobia. *The autobiography of Bruce Wayne*, Batman no. 197, 1983

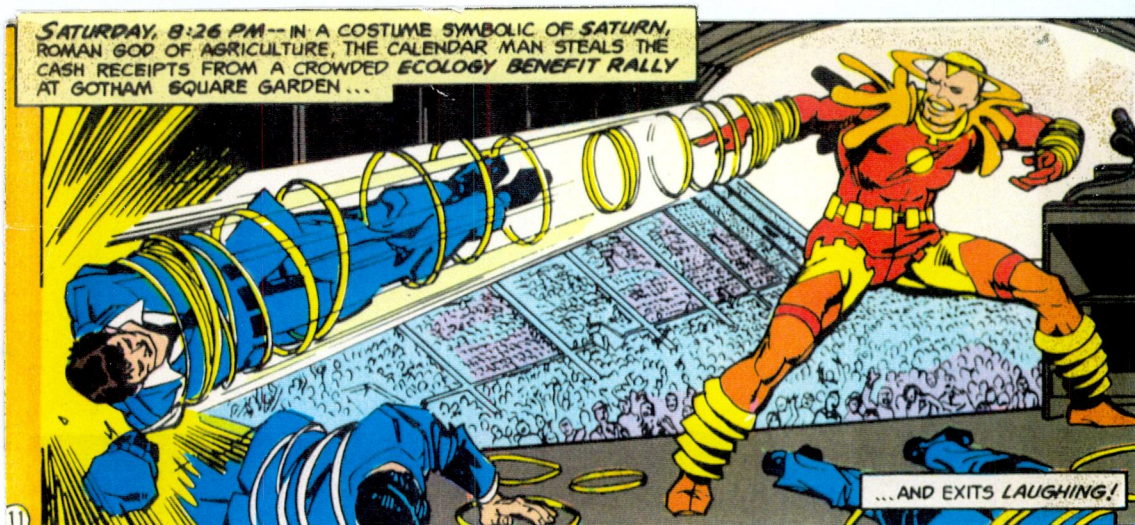


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Fig 4.2 A caper a day keeps the Batman at bay,
Batman no. 312, 1979



other, their fundamental role, that is, to challenge the Batman with theatrical flair. Their fantastic crimes would usually involve the theft of jewels or valuables which would appropriately suit their colourful personae.(eg.Fig 4.2) These characters distracted Batman from pursuing the more mundane but deadly drug dealers, muggers etc.

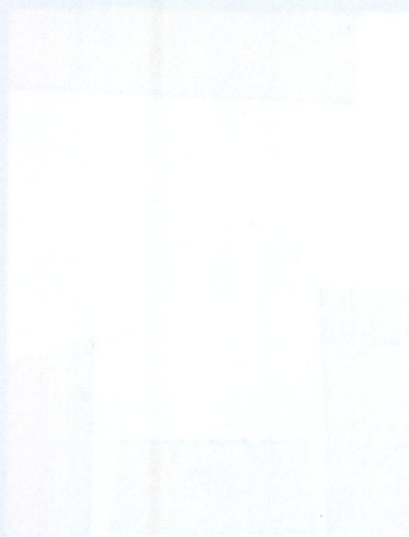
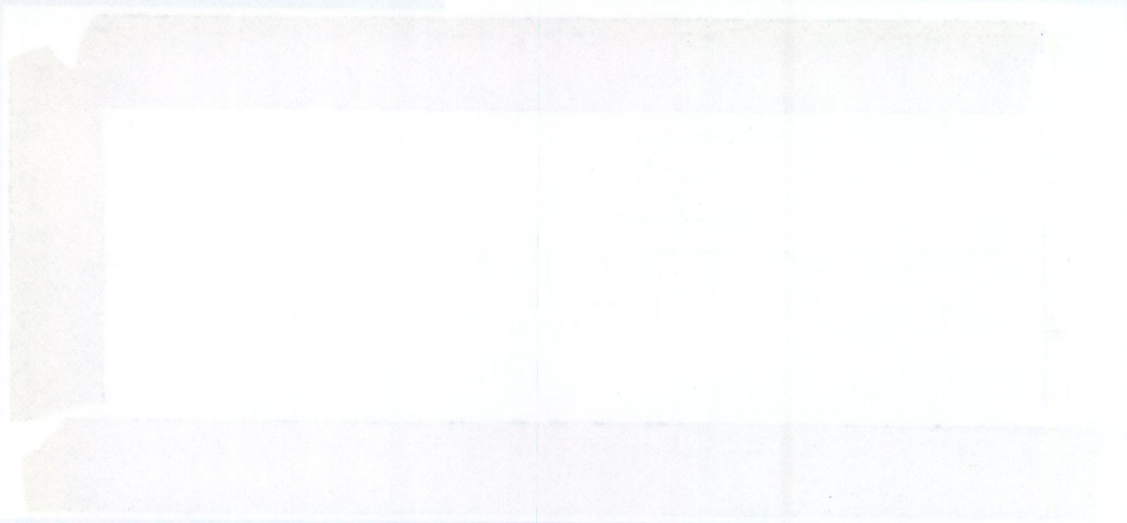
Fig 4.3 Batman versus the vampire part one, Batman
no. 31, 1939



The villains produce spectacular crimes and have no qualms about dealing out death; their Gotham city is as daunting as the New York it was originally based upon, and named after (Fig 4.3). In accordance with the rabid swelling of our own twentieth century cities, Gotham too, has been expanding its skyline. In the 1950s, Gotham, to

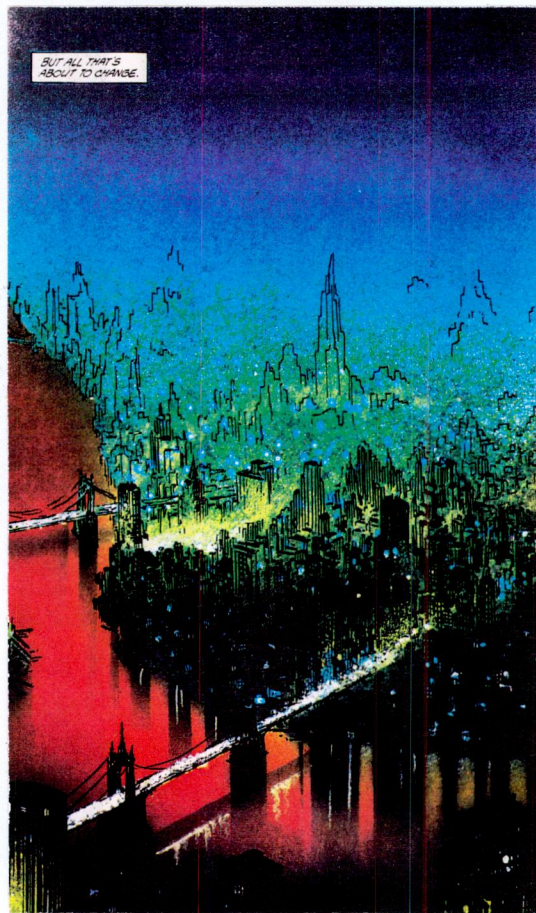
comply with the consumerism of its plastic people, was almost like "an extended urban playground, stuffed with giant typewriters and other gargantuan props," (Dark Knight Returns, intro) a phenomenon which lasted only as long as the falseness of that particular society.

Since that period, Gotham has rapidly become a far more sinister place. In a recent story, Commissioner Gordon confided "when I first came to Gotham, I thought this city couldn't sink any lower. Everyday proves me



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Fig 4.4 Gotham City, *The Cult*



wrong!" (Pearson, 1991, p.206)

Gotham has become "a monster sprawled along 25 miles of eastern seaboard, stirring and seething and ever restless. Eight million human beings live on streets that, if laid end-to-end, would stretch all the way to Tokyo." (DC, 1988, p.258, no.15, 1978) (eg. Fig 4.4)

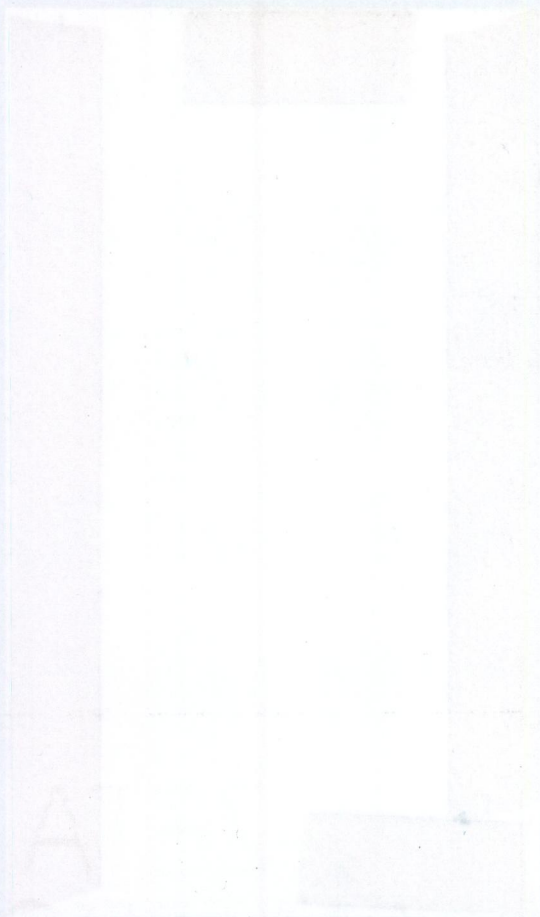
The decay of a city with an essentially ugly heart is what the Batman, and his enemies thrive on, and yet, are unable to comprehend. Gotham is becoming that "future world". The

one so often portrayed in science fiction movies and novels like, for example, *Blade Runner*, *Robocop*, *Judge Dredd* or *Terminator*. "Mythic figures in whom futuristic technology and medieval visions of hell have come together to form a nightmarish anti-utopia." (O'Toole, Dec 31 1994, p.3) In this world, communications and technological networks are advancing with such velocity that we lose control, and become the victims of the intelligent and greedy beings that we have given life to.

Gotham City, the city of tomorrow: stark angles, creeping shadows, dense, crowded, as if hell had erupted through the sidewalks. A dangling fat moon shines overhead.

(Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.185)

Science fiction predictions of the future tend to reflect a panicked version of what life presently represents. For example, looking to George Orwell's book *1984*, written from the perspective of 1948, it merely exaggerates the bad



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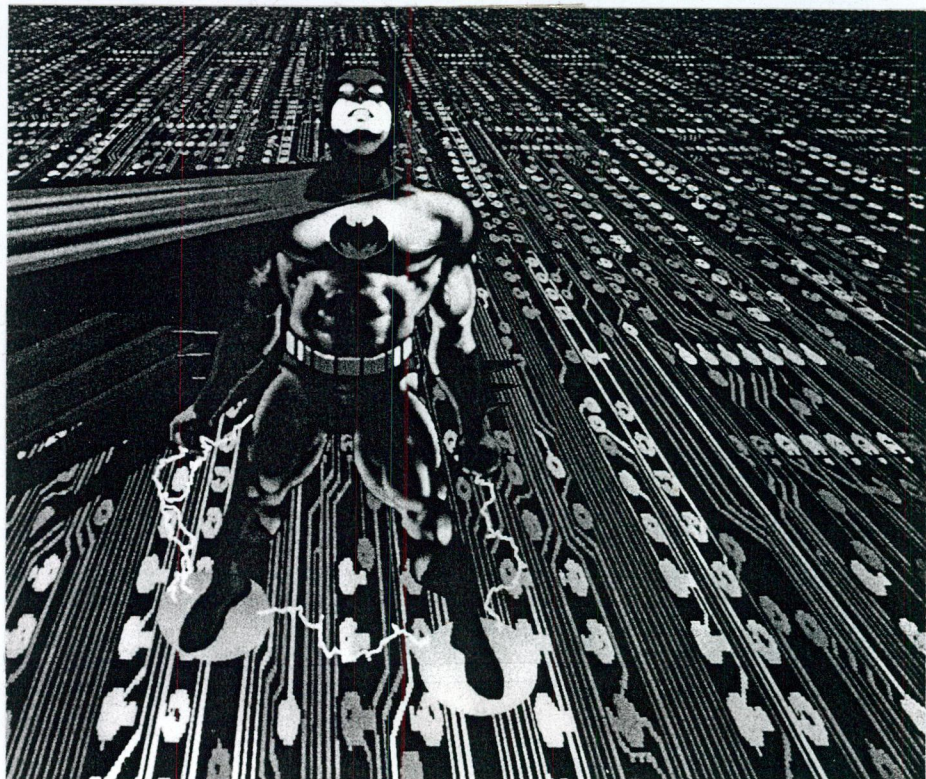
aspects of that time. We as a society, approaching our second millennium, are becoming more medieval in our apprehensions. The anxieties of our ancestors, which unravelled with the awakening knowledge surrounding the mystery of the planets, is similar to the lack of understanding we have, of our magical technology. We may know how to use the technology, but we don't understand how it works.

For all that we understand about many of the things that we use and consume, they might as well be the product of witchcraft or alchemy. In this sense, the more modern we become, the more medieval we feel."

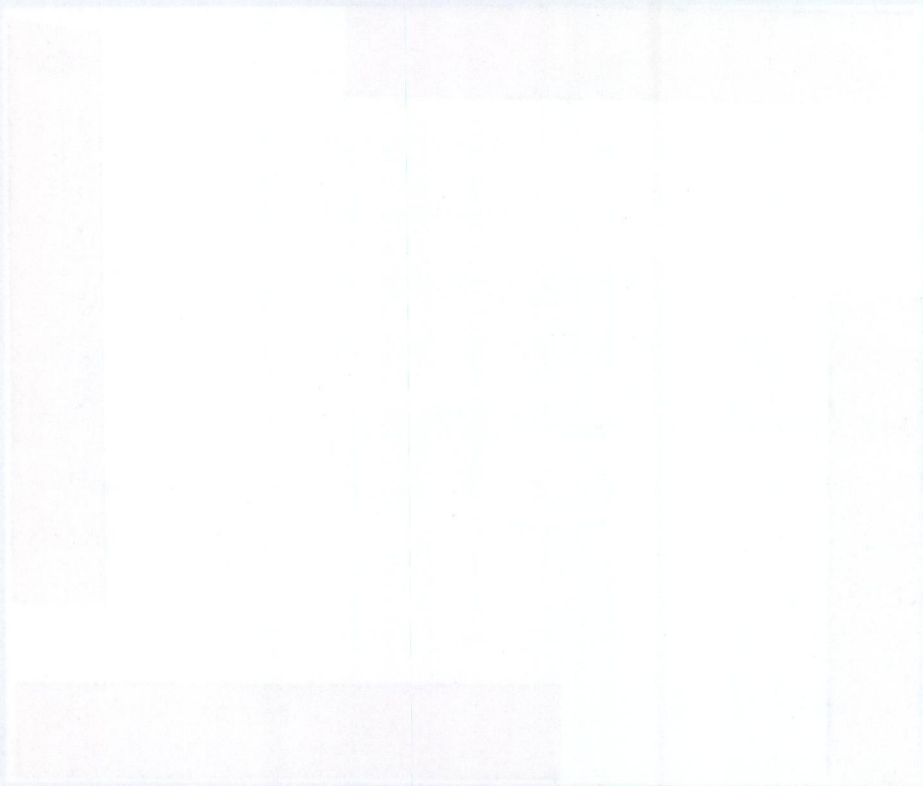
(O'Toole, Dec 31 1994, p.3)

This fear, of information technology, can be seen in any of the films mentioned above, but more relevantly, was the subject of a recent Batman

Fig 4.5 A computerised Batman fighting crime in the system of Gothammegatropolis



graphic novel, *Gothammegatropolis* (Fig 4.5). This computer generated story, written by Pepe Moreno, is set far into the future. In the story, Batman, before his death, wrote himself into the cities supercomputer circuit network, the system, in order to continue his crime fighting mission. He was now combating



computer viruses designed, for example, to invade secret government files.

This concept may seem farfetched, yet if we look to the reality of our own world, it is easy to see that this future world is actually based on the world today. For example "the global turnover in foreign exchange dealings passing through invisible electronic networks, at \$1 trillion a day is greater every hour than the entire Irish GNP for a year." (O'Toole, Dec31 1994, p.3) The idea of Batman as a computer programme tracing hackers is a highly believable one, especially in the recent light of the "world's most wanted computer hacker", Kevin Mitnick, being arrested in February 1995. Among other computer frauds, he was wanted for breaking into military defence computers. The successful US nationwide electronic manhunt puts the fictitious story of Gothammegatropolis into a different perspective.

There have been many fictitious cities and worlds created which imitate reality in an exaggerated and pessimistic way, and Gotham city is one of these. It has been suggested by Dennis O'Neill that Batman, being descended from devilish creatures, is a reaction to the cynical view we have, (according to the fictitious books and films mentioned earlier) of big forbidding cities. He believes that "it might be easier to co-opt a devil than believe in an angel." (O'Neill, 1989, intro) If Gotham is an essentially real place, then how do we view, the absurd figures which "glue" our Knight to "a mad merry-go-round". (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.154) Maybe these exist to mock the distress of the reality, by introducing ridiculous elements. After all, "true evil seldom announces itself so loudly!" (Pearson, 1991, p.204)

The endless list of villains like Clayface, Catwoman or Calendarman, introduce a weird, fantasy element, into an essentially ugly place. The preoccupation with materialistic wealth these psychopathic rascals indulge in, serves to divorce them from any hope of reality. Meanwhile, the true evils which embody the stark city of Gotham, that is, the drug dealers and murderers, who crawl in the black shadows, are ignored. The criminals who engage much of the Batman's time, are separated from the grim Gotham city surrounding them.

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As Henri Duccard has suggested,

While Batman busies himself with petty thieves and gaudy madmen, an abyss of rot yawns ever wider at his feet. He's a band-aid on a cancer patient. I am of course no moralist but this Batman, I think, has a poor understanding of the world.

(Pearson, 1991, p.210)

This is a valid statement, but, for the purpose of maintaining an entertaining comic-book, they probably provide a far more exciting storyline than drugs or prostitution would. If Batman was to deal with that "abyss of rot"

Fig 4.6 Bruce Wayne after witnessing his parents murder, *To kill a legend*, Batman no. 500, 1981



every week, the stories would be far too depressing. Although these theatrical madmen draw the themes back to fantasy, the underlying essence of a gruesome reality is evident, through both Gotham city, and the violent reasons for the existence of Batman. (Fig 4.6)

And so, as Batman proved to be the catalyst which caused these villains' creation, so too would his

death cause their departure (eg. Fig 4.7), As a pondering Calendar man muses

Fig 4.7 The upset reaction of the Catwoman when she fears she has killed Batman, *The Jungle Cat Queen*, Batman no. 211, 1954



"Could it be that I actually respect the Batman - and look forward to our periodic contests?" He concludes, "of course it could, and if I were to kill the Batman - red letter day aside, the rest of my days could well be blank boxes! With the Batman dead, would I have any reason to live?" (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.159)

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Each of the cast of villains, from Two-face to the Sparrow, has a specific modus operandi, an ultimate challenge which could range from the ridiculous to the sublime, but which would reflect what they are. While Scarecrow will consume and control people's worst nightmares, the Penguin's ultimate desire may be to steal a rare, exotic songbird. It is part of the wonderful game they play with their mentor, knowing that the sleuth, called Batman, will eventually figure out who the perpetrator is by the seemingly subtle signposts they leave.

As with everything in the Batman universe these characters must have a reason for becoming whatever they did, a fate which has been maliciously twisted. Like the riddler, who claims:

maybe it started by cheating in a school history test, photographing a jigsaw puzzle...maybe I was a carnival Barker. E. Nigma, the Puzzle King, conundrum champion; wizard of quiz...maybe I decided to turn my talents to crime, maybe I wanted to match wits with ...the Batman, for the glory...the fame...the bucks!
maybe that isn't it at all!

(Pearson, 1991, p.192)

The reason they exist is for Batman, and:

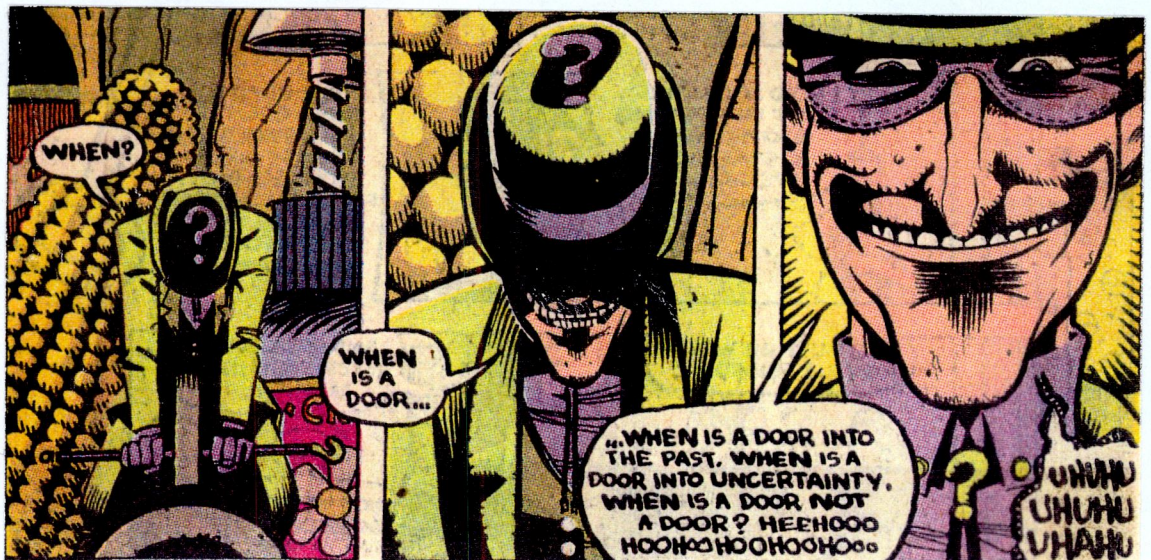
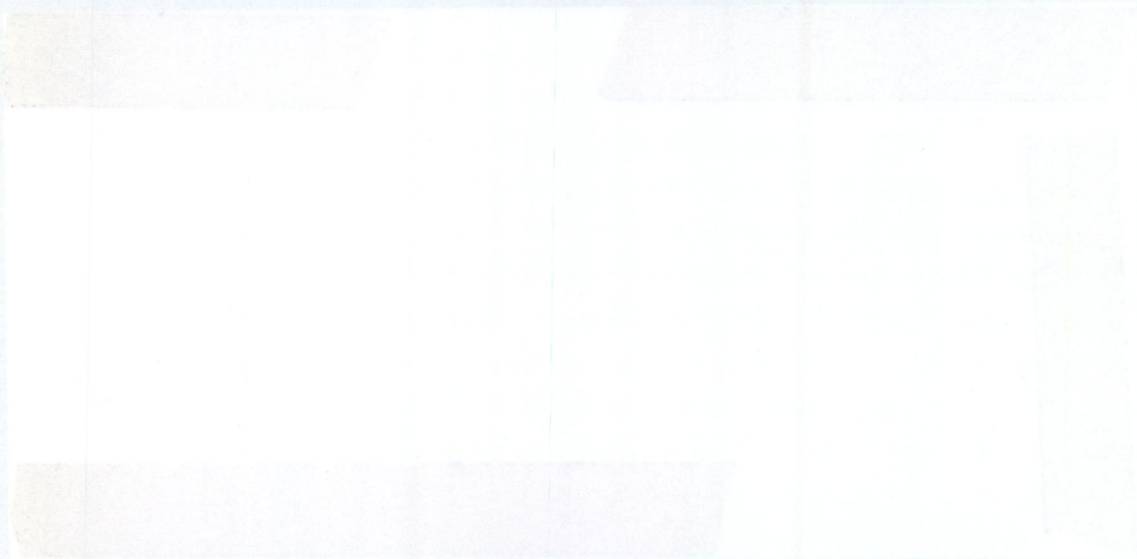


Fig 4.8 The Riddler, on a speech about origins, *Secret origins special* Batman no. 1, 1989

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Like naughty children, who tempt the wrath of a stern, demanding father, they seek only to shock him by the enormity of their transgressions. It's the moment of acknowledgement they crave.

(Pearson, 1991, p.204)

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Chapter 5

Doppleganger to the Harlequin of Hate

“You had a bad day once, am I right? I know I am. I can tell...you had a bad day and everything changed. Why else would you dress up like a flying rat?”

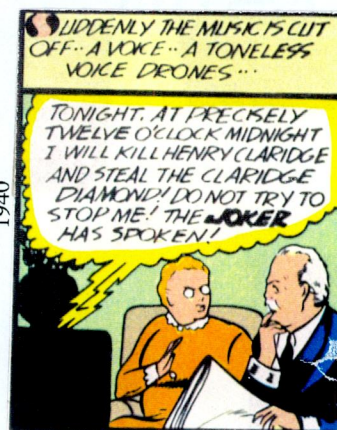
The Joker (The Killing Joke, 1988)

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Crazy crimes for crazy times, Batman created the niche for absurdities. In a haphazard world which mirrors our own world, but with exaggerated realism, if Batman is to challenge the underworld, an villain must evolve to counteract him. The evils of Gotham lie not only in the black shadows of dark alleys; on the contrary, this is the habitat of our Dark Knight. No, there is one true evil that stalks Gotham City and who is renowned for announcing the hideous with frivolous flare. There can be only one monster that I can possibly mean, that is the Caliph of Clowns, the Master of Macabre Mirth, the Joker, Batman's most perfect enemy.

What cruel destiny, or twist of fate, unleashed this madman on an already doomed city? An unpredictable beast, the Prince of Pranksters can be the harmless conjurer of cunning antics, or a psychopath "who kills...Just because!" (McCue, 1993, p.25) Even our Avenging Angel is unable to penetrate the nonsensical and illogical manner in which he operates. As he admits, "how do you second guess a madman?" (DC, 1988, p.264) Having battled each other in gloriously inventive misdemeanors and murders, a certain affinity bonds the two men; yet it is the Joker who will always have control Batman's sanity. As a driven lunatic, the Harlequin perfectly compliments Batman's obsessive search for control and order.

Fig 5.1 The first episode featuring the Joker, *Batman versus the Joker*, Batman no. 1, 1940



When, in 1940, with the introduction of the Joker he announced his act of theft and a murder on a crackling wireless, his fate was intended to be doomed at the end of that brief episode (Fig 5.1). On reflection, however, Kane and Finger realised how perfect a character he was, and restructured the ending of the story. The Joker then became the first of the many recurring criminals of the Golden Age comic world.

Along with the introduction of this grinning madman came the potential to further enhance the multi-faceted personality of Batman. His crusade

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was to frequently become "an amusement park ride - but with a homicidal bite." (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.165) There is no order in the chaotic world of the Joker, yet order is what the Batman consistently craves. Ironically, it was the existence of the Batman that caused the Ace of Knaves to evolve.

The physical origins of the Joker can be traced back directly to the Batman. In the disguise of the Red Hood, upon being apprehended by the Caped Crusader, the Joker jumped into a vat of chemicals to escape the grip of Batman. (Fig 5.2) But when he found his way through an underground vent and emerged to the surface, "augh, I'm stinging, itching, my face, my hands...something in the water? Oh Jesus, it burns!" (the Killing Joke, 1988) He had been transformed into the Joker and

Fig 5.2 The Red Hood escaping from Batman, *The Killing Joke*



"looked like an evil clown" (DC, 1988, p.63)

The facts surrounding this event, however, have been subject to many changes. In one case he was a lab technician in the chemical plant and decided to don the Red Hood, steal \$1million, and retire just as suddenly. In the case of *The Killing Joke*, he was a retired lab worker and unemployed comedian, and was trying to scrape some money together for his wife and unborn child. The day before he was to don the Red Hood for a gang of notorious criminals, the sick humour of fate intervened. His wife died in a freak accident, electrocuted while testing a baby bottle warmer.

The only definitive explanation for his insanity is the appearance which fate dealt out to him (Fig 5.3). But does it matter? as the Joker has decided "sometimes I remember it one way, sometimes another...if I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice! ha-ha-ha!" (The Killing Joke, 1988)

There is obvious convenient flexibility in continuity for script writers, so the vat of chemicals story is of course only one of the vehicles for the intro-

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Fig 5.3 The Joker trying to identify with Batman
The Killing Joke



duction of the Joker. The Batman's existence created the necessity for an equally matched enemy. Simply, they need each other to survive. To the Crime Clown, life is an eternal game; his only playmate, the Batman. "Who else could appreciate

the bizzare genius of his acts?" For the Batman, "who else could truly test him?" In a "world of passionate, binding opposites", Batman and the Joker become a "ying yang duality". (Pearson, 1991, p.199)

Dependent on Batman to relieve an otherwise monotonous life, the Joker devises dramatic and eventful traps to ensnare his foe. Their confrontations do not always favour the Batman, however. The Joker has had the Dark Knight at his mercy a number of times, yet is reluctant to end the fun.

His life is mine...I can crush the breath out of him...effortlessly! I can at last, triumph! ...But such hollow victory! It was mere luck that caused my attack on him to succeed! ...I'd always envisioned my winning as a result of cunning..at the end of a bitter struggle between the Batman and myself, him using his detective skills and me employing the divine gift men call madness!

(DC, 1988, p.175, no.251, 1973)

Equally, if Batman were to kill the Jester, he would gain no personal satisfaction. If he were, however, to succeed in rehabilitating the Clown, we would probably see the retirement of the Dark Knight. But to tame the devil would be an impossible task, "no, it's far too late for that. Far too late." (The Killing Joke, 1988) (eg. Fig 5.4)

Opposite sides to the one coin, they both confront yet depend on each other's existence. The Joker is what the Batman could easily have become. Each is obsessed by evil; what separates them is the routes they chose, to

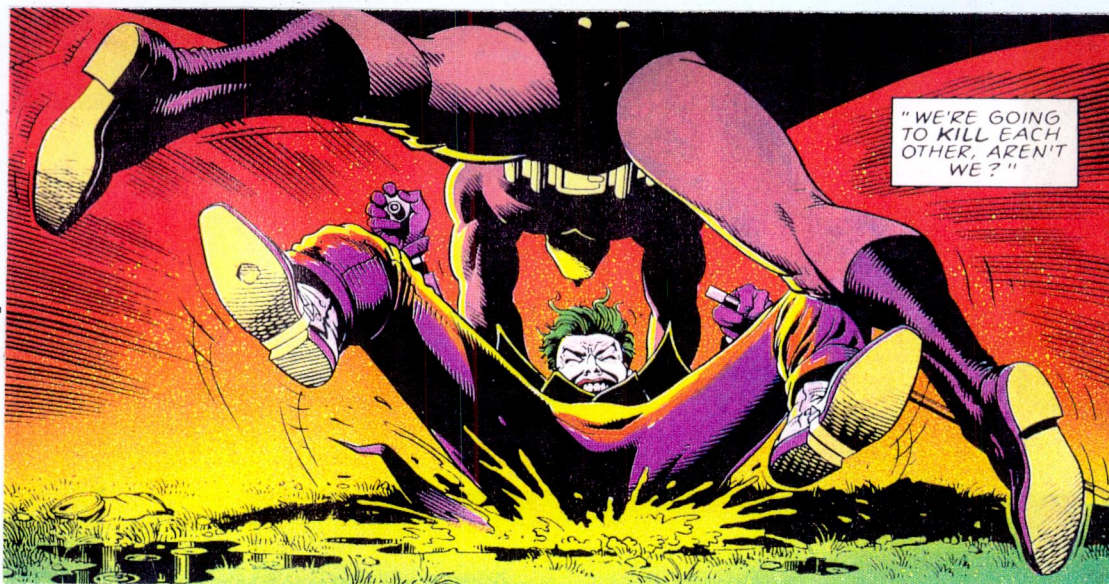
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Fig 5.4 Confrontation between Batman and the Joker *The Killing Joke*



combat or confront that "black awful joke the world was." (The Killing Joke, 1988) Together, they seem to blend into one super-intelligent being, split by a schizophrenic personality.

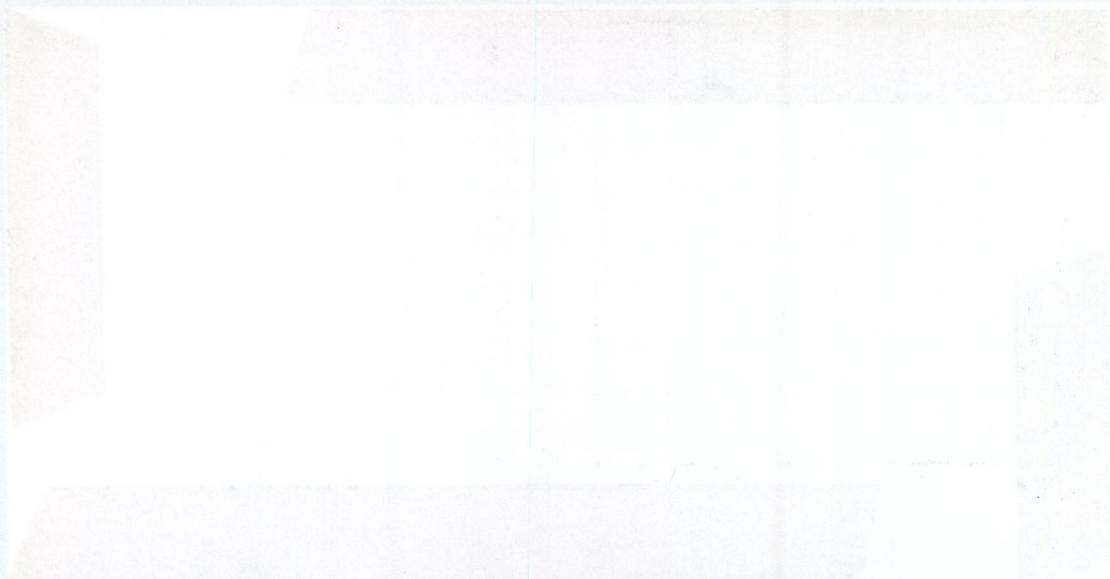
What is quite interesting about these characters and how they complement each other, is some of the similarities and ironies they share. Each is equipped with such wonderful toys, the Joker constantly competing to grasp the lead on the Batman's technology. What the Batman possesses, the Joker must copy, but fashioned in a style uniquely his own. Joker's utility belt, for example, consists of such oddities as expanding cigarettes and itching powder capsules. Both then add their name or motif to each of their gadgets as if to enforce their identity.(eg Fig 5.5)

That identity lies ultimately in their chosen, or enforced, attire. We are

Fig 5.5 The Joker making a getaway in his Joker mobile after stealing an antique clown mask from a museum, *The Last Ha Ha Ha !* Batman no. 3, 1975



aware of the reasons which gave birth to each character and how fate chose each of their careers. Bruce Wayne wished to terrorise the underworld whilst the Joker realised his "new face could terrify people," (DC, 1988, p.63 no.168, 1951) The Joker became the clown, with green hair, rouge red lips upturned to



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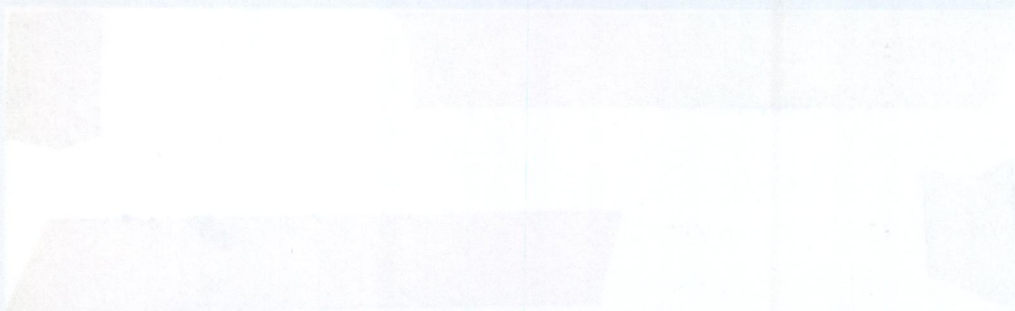


Fig 5.6 The Joker before he murders everyone in this audience with his modified laughing gas, *The Dark Knight Returns*



give a grin and chalk white skin. Fulfilling his role as a jester, he donned the colourful robes of his assumed character and embraced the innocent toys of a clown (modifying them into fatal weapons). After all, he was the butt of a very twisted joke.

"All it takes is just one bad day to reduce the sanest man alive to lunacy." (The Killing Joke, 1988) Almost with mocking irony, the stereotyped roles of each costume have been dramatically reversed: the clown, an image which should evoke the memory of fun and childhood innocence; the bat, of Gothic visions of vampire's thirst for blood. What each man represents has been swapped, confusing and combining their alter egos in a visible manner. (eg. Fig 5.6)

If modern society has accepted its deepest fears of night to produce an ally, then perhaps the joker and his satirical costume represent "the original ecological disaster from which the spirit of demonic appetite could be released: a true creature of the urban, industrialised, western world". (McCue, 1993, p.xi)

The Joker is definitely "a beautiful counterpart to the Batman's single-mindedness." (McCue, 1993, p.25) But what of the increasing speculation as to the sanity of our hero? In *Arkham asylum*, when his mentality is questioned by the Joker, Batman's response to Commissioner Gordon is uncertain:

Sometimes...I question the rationality of my actions. And I'm afraid that when I walk through those asylum gates...when I walk into Arkham and the doors close behind me...It'll be just like coming home."

(Arkham Asylum, 1988)

The ambiguity of Batman's mental health is also denied by editors at DC. They argue that Batman is definitely not mad. The "tragic chance" that

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Fig 5.7 the Joker on his throne *The Killing Joke*



"touched" Bruce Wayne caused him to be "transfigured by rage." It is merely "fashionable these days to claim that the Batman is, in his own way, as crazy as the Joker." (Pearson, 1991, p.199) (eg. Fig 5.7)

And yes, Batman is fulfilling his obligations to his new, older and more inquisitive audience; one which requests deeper penetration into the character's mind. But Batman is merely doing what he has done for the past 57 years to survive, that is, letting the general mood swing of society dictate his destiny.

It is difficult to determine if Batman is as crazy as the Joker or not. He is definitely obsessed, driven by an easily identifiable rage and lust for vengeance. He lets his obsession become his life and keeps his anger under control. Maybe he is not mad, but if he really existed he would definitely be locked up in a lunatic asylum. On the other hand, however, his doppelganger, the Joker,

may be damned, but he's comfortable in his hell. He knows his own darkness is just a deeper shade of the shadows 'normal' people pretend don't exist

(Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.167)





Chapter 6

When The Knights get Darker

“The Superhero is an affront to the common man... an insult to the talents and capabilities of the common man to cope with the world as he finds!”

(Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.176)

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Due to the level of communications and technology in the 20th century, the leisurely pace of ancient myth making has invariably quickened. Our modern folklore is subject to an impatient and volatile audience. What will be the subject of debate today, "will be forgotten tomorrow, only to be rediscovered as nostalgia a few weeks later." (Cota Vaz, 1989, p.12)

For our Batman to endure, he has had to remain constant yet flexible. He must mature in the fashion expected by society, but must also remain faithful to the soul of his existence. The constants in Batman's world can be seen through the relationships he has come to depend on since the 1940s.

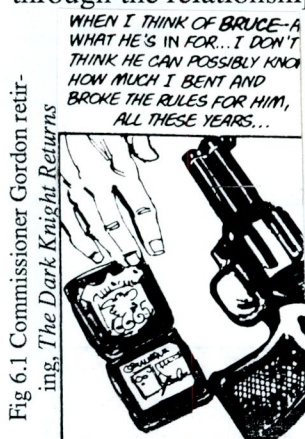


Fig 6.1 Commissioner Gordon retiring, *The Dark Knight Returns*

There is Alfred Pennyworth, faithful butler and armature detective, who shares our knowledge of the secret identity of Bruce Wayne. We also have Commissioner Gordon, who has been bending the rules of bureaucracy lest they hinder the work of Batman. (Fig 6.1) There are the innumerable amount of costumed lunatics who have been provided with a reason for "robbing, pilfering, purloining, spoiling and otherwise looting the city of Gotham by various and sundry ingenious devices!" (The Penguin, DC, 1988, p.46) Then there is Gotham City, that decaying landscape which is furnished by an abundance of black shadows which comfortably envelop our Dark Knight.

We have the Batman's evil doppelganger, the Joker, whose "crazed opposition sets up a narrative tension which pulls the Batman's persona to extremes, driving him to the edge of dissolution." (Pearson, 1991, p.197) And, the antidotes to that insanity are the various Robins which have teamed with our Batman to lighten the infernal depths of his obsession.

If these have been the cardinal characters which have provided a constant in Batman's universe, then the flexible components must manifest themselves through his performance in different times and through various media. This allows for "extreme character refraction, and the Batman may be stretched thin to the point of invisibility." (Pearson, 1991, p.188)

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Fig 6.2 Front cover, Batman no. 15, Feb / March 1943



With his conception in 1938, the Batman played the role of Darknight Detective, grim, violent, and for a brief period, murderous. This role continued for a few years, during which he advertised war bonds (Fig 6.2).

In the 1950s he became "this sort of benign scoutmaster who would walk down the streets of Gotham City in broad daylight." (Cotta Vaz, 1991, p.3) These conservative times of cold war McCarthyism

were reflected in the comic world in the form of Dr. Werthamism and his book, *Seduction of the Innocent*. Batman was put on trial by Dr Wertham and his

Fig 6.3 The Trial of Bruce Wayne, Batman no. 57, 1950



campaign (see introduction) for his questionable relationship with the Boy Wonder. (Fig 6.3)

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Batman began to venture further from the boundaries of realism to other dimensions. (Fig 6.4) In a science fiction setting he battled aliens and monsters which were

nudged over to prepare him for the status of popular icon of the 1960s. The television series stamped a regrettable identity on Batman for the non comic-book reader (Fig 6.5). It featured:

Adam West delivering outrageously straight-faced camp dialogue while walking up a wall thanks to the benefit of stupendous special effects and a camera turned on its side

(Moore, 1986, intro)

But, like canned spaghetti, it's not supposed to taste like the real thing. The

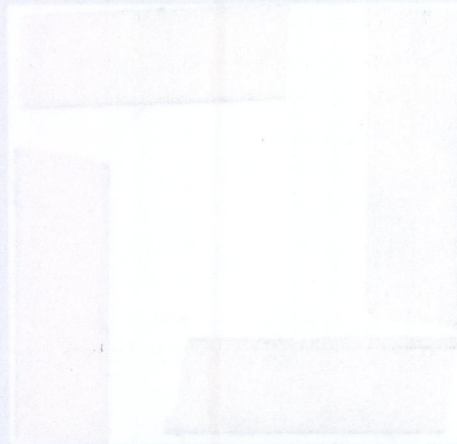
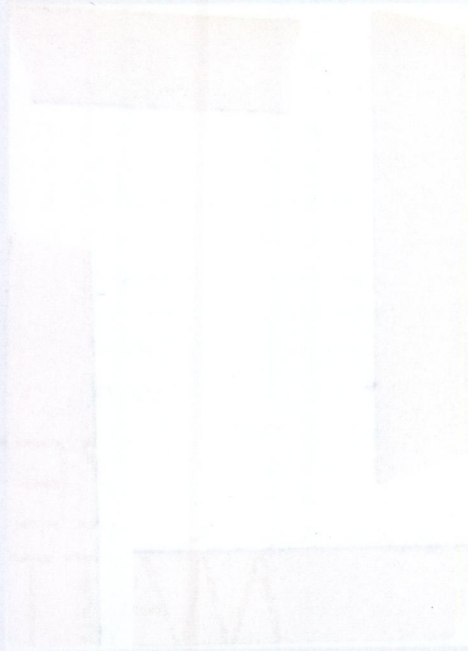


Fig 6.4 Batman on an alien planet, Robin dies at dawn, Batman no. 156, 1963

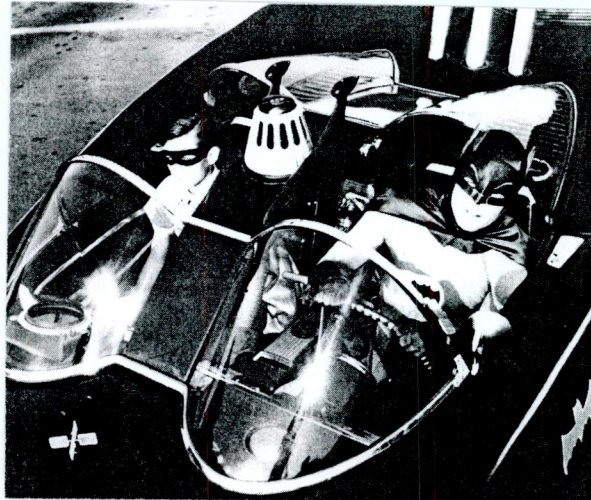


Batman show was not really Batman, just a passing interpretation.

The 1970s saw the introduction of writer Dennis O'Neil and artist Neal Adams. Their function was to reassess a waning

Batman and resuscitate him. Looking to his sombre origins, they took him back to the vicious Dark Knight, yet with an added dimension. Batman became

Fig 6.5 1960's Television series Batman

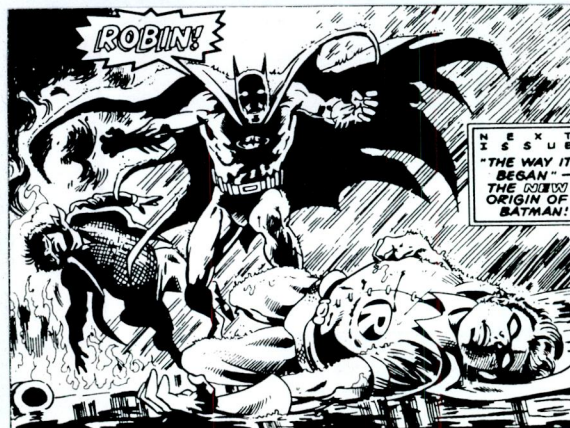


more realistic and a dose of soul-searching was applied to give more depth to his character. That reinvention has been the most enduring of all the Batmans characterisations, and since then, the Dark Knight has been getting darker.

Since that resurrection,

the Batman universe has become too big, unstable and uninviting for our hero to be able to cope. Having lost the help of Dick Grayson,(Robin) due to time (He grew up, joined the Teen Titans and became Nightshade), Batman rescued juvenile delinquent Jason Todd and employed him as Robin in 1987. This

Fig 6.6 Batman discovering Robin dead, The Mad Hatter flips his lid, Batman no. 573, 1987



Robin proved to be an unpopular asset for the Batman and was, in a blaze of publicity, murdered at the hands of the Joker.(Fig 6.6) (Robin's fate was placed in the hands of the fans and a telephone vote.)

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It was not only within the scripts that Batman became more realistic, but also within the artwork. Neal Adams prides himself in saying “if Batman existed, he’d have to look the way I draw him.” (O’Neill, 1989, intro)

In the 1970s there was an underground revolution within the comic world. Underground comics had always existed in the USA, but towards the end of the 1960s, the revolt against the 1950s code had become more widespread. The code said “no sex” or “no violence” so the underground took these to extremes, and with the increase of their popularity, came the emergence of fandom specialist shops. “The underground shattered the tradition of comics as decisively as American jazz shattered the classical European musical idiom.” (Sabin, 1993, p.171) As with any underground movement, the ideas of these increasingly popular adult comics were bound to rub off, in a milder fashion, on the mainstream comics.

You just weren’t supposed to read comics after puberty... but then the industry caught on that if they added a bit more sex and violence, they could hang onto readers for a lot longer.

(Sabin, 1993, p.62)

And so, to follow suit, Batman too (despite the reputation of the very recent TV programme) switched extremes from being a camp pop icon to being a very realistic and emotional man. (Fig’s 6.7 and 6.8) In the 1970s Batman, comics and readers all matured, in the 1980s, the public caught on. It is widely accepted (as can be seen from media hype towards the end of the 1980s) that comics grew up in the 1980s, but as I have briefly shown, it had happened in the previous decade. What happened in the 1980s was that,

Fig 6.7 The Demon lives again, Batman no. 244, 1972



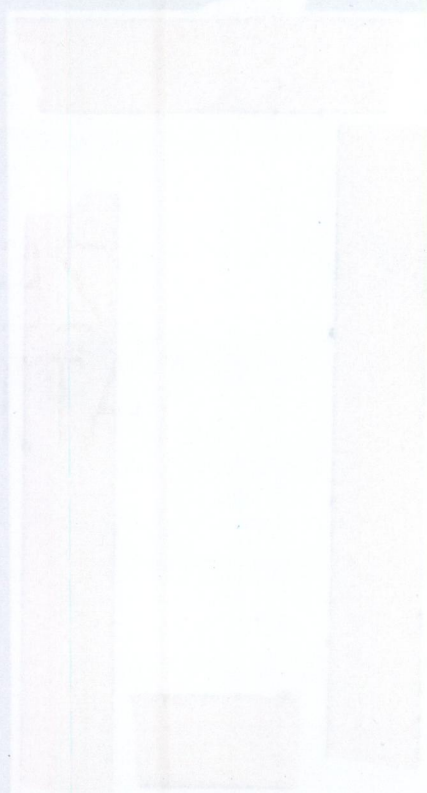
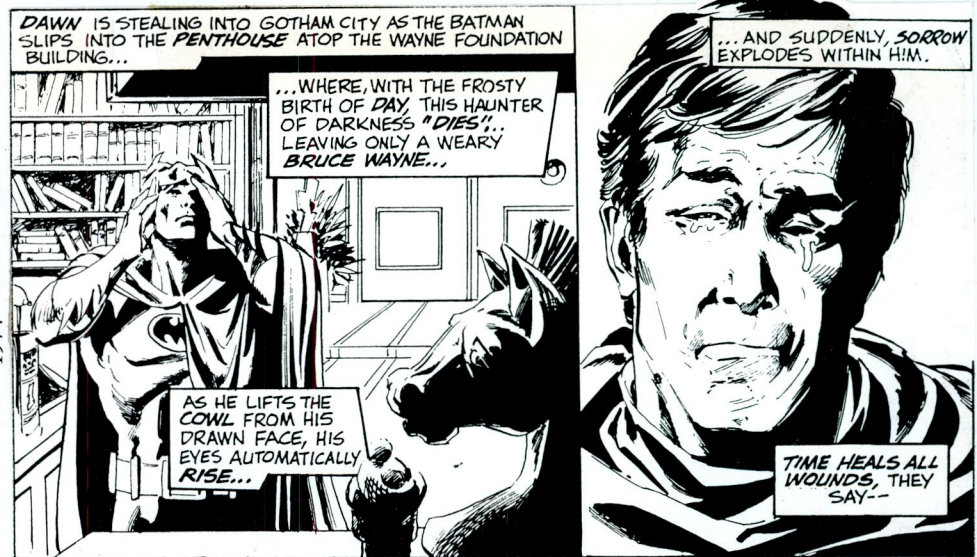


Fig 6.8 *Night of the stalker*, Batman no. 439, 1974



with the increase of specialist shops like Forbidden Planet, the price, level of artwork and reproduction, and length of the comic book had both increased and improved.

It was the Graphic Novel which originated in this period, and one of the leaders in this particular development was Batman. *The Dark Knight Returns* was one of the first of these novels (the only other two being

Fig 6.9 *Leader of the Mutants, The Dark Knight Returns*



Watchmen and *Maus*) and the move in this direction has brought the Knight to the darkest stage of his career yet.

The Dark Knight Returns highlights the two main advances the 1980s had on the Batman storyline. Firstly he has aged; Batman has come out of a ten year retirement period to save Gotham from the mutant nazi gang (Fig 6.9). He has become very bitter and sadly reflects on how empty his life has become. Secondly, Batman is not the only one who has become more cynical;



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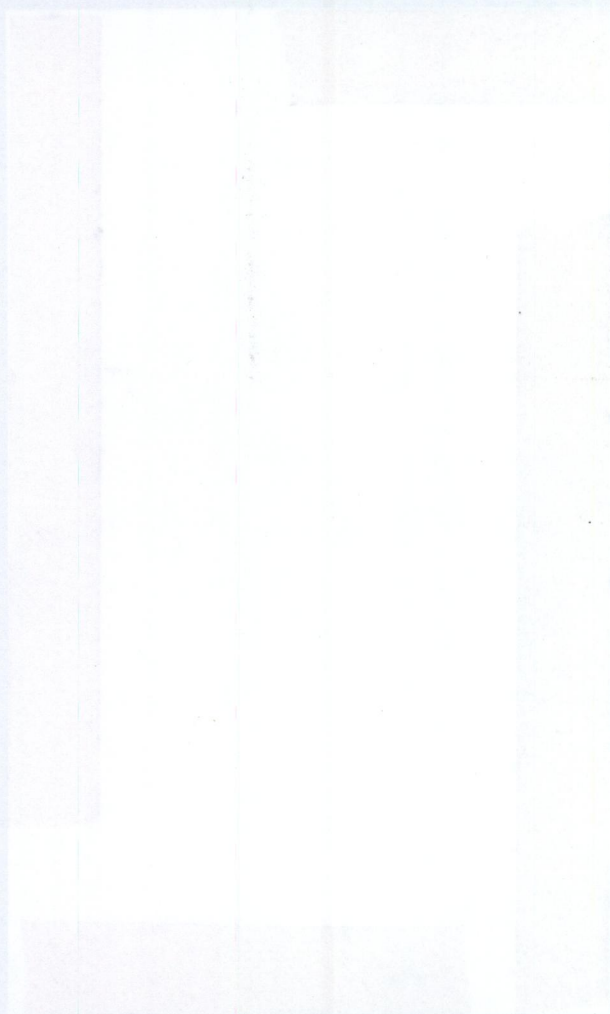
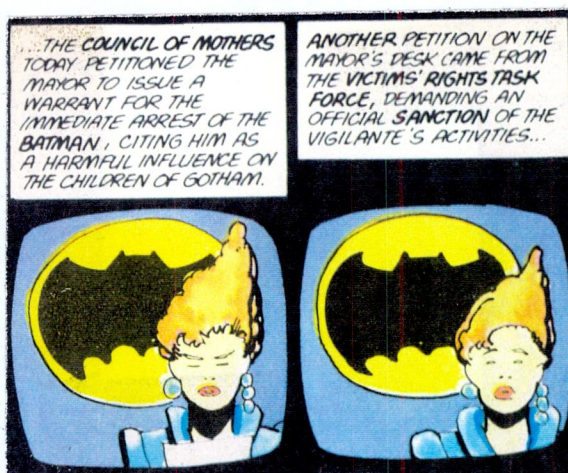


Fig 6.10 Gotham news, *The Dark Knight Returns*



the new generation of Gotham remembers him vaguely as a name or legend and is not impressed with the re-emergence of vigilantism. (Fig 6.10)

Both these themes run throughout the 1980s and more recently, towards the end of the

80s, the sanity of Batman has also been questioned. This, and his relationship with the Joker was looked at in the last chapter, so altogether, the Batman of the 1980s, is seen to be far more disturbed than has ever been shown before. To

Fig 6.11 Batman leaving Gotham, *The Cult*

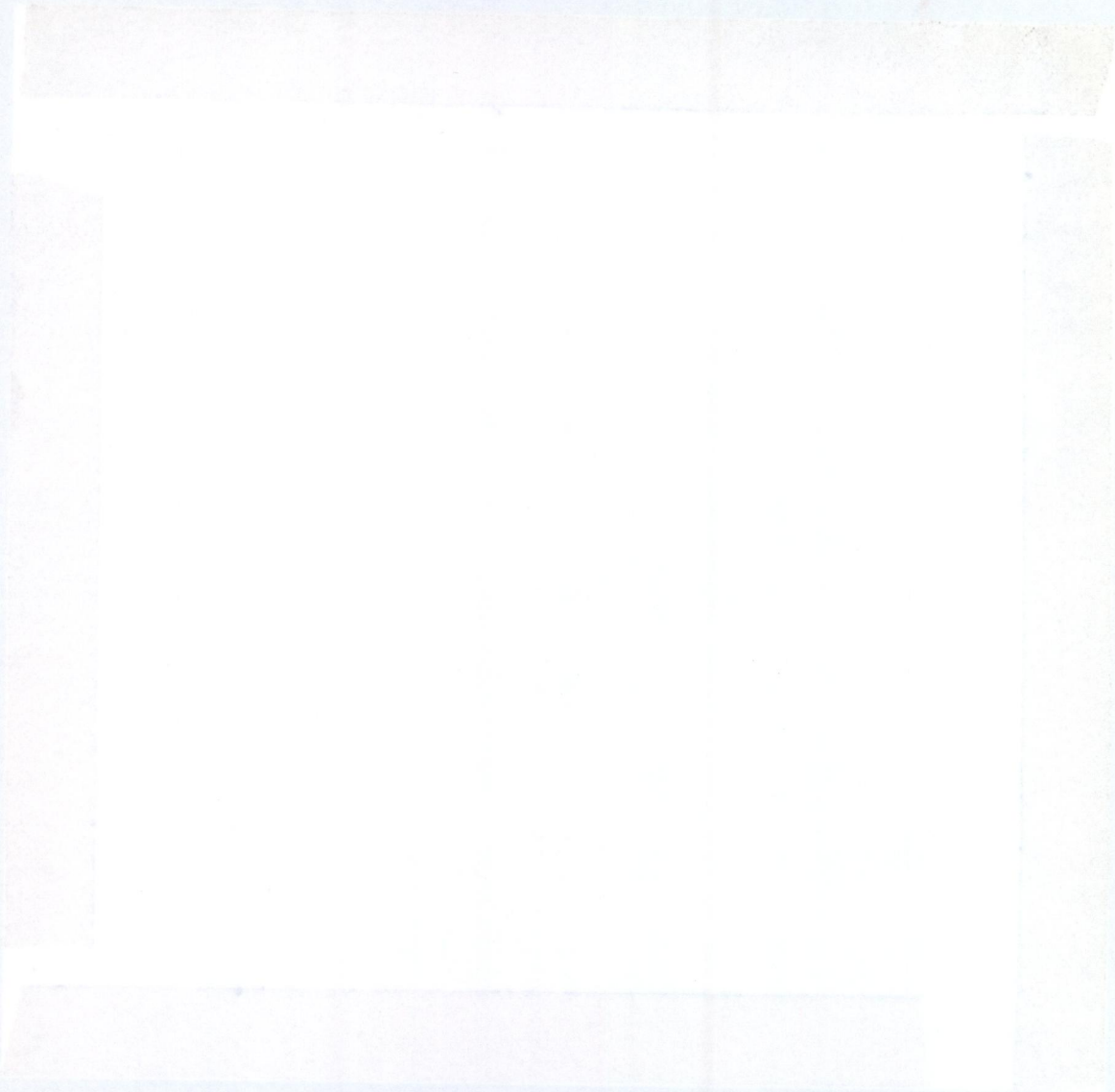


add to it, due to death of Robin in 1987, Batman has had to bear the burden of fighting crime on his own, and "each year the struggle grows more demanding, more complex, more and more mechanised." (Cotta Vaz, 1989, p.1990) A brooding, disillusioned Batman has finally come to the realisation that he has accomplished practically nothing (eg Fig 6.11) He can only isolate minute incidents of significance, but overall, his efforts amount to

mere surface wounds. His world has become a malignant haven cursed with infectious evils, and he knows he will never attain his dream for a utopia of justice. "Justice is blind, blind as a bat!" (DC, no.600, 1989) (Fig 6.12)



Fig 6.12 Blind Justice Batman no. 600, 1989



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Conclusion

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Within this thesis there has been one main discussion which has been presented in two categories. The first dealt with Batman's appearance and the second with his personality. The objective has been to compare Batman with demons and suggest evidence to support the idea that his ancestry comes from the dark side of the human imagination. As with anything fictitious, there can be no definitive answers to a proposal of this kind.

In the first and second chapters I merely produced the facts available to me; firstly his character, based on 56 years of existence, was revealed. Secondly, the acknowledged sources that influenced Kane to create him were shown. In the third chapter, however, I have attempted to compare the appearance of Batman with various demons. This chapter is based on the theory by, in particular, Dennis O'Neill, that Batman's archetype comes from devilish sources; I researched this idea and produced some supportive evidence. The creatures I have shown do bear some physical resemblances to Batman, although it cannot be denied that he, unlike these demons, is a good character.

With reference to the vampires, these similarities really only concern him after the publication of *Dracula*. This novel seemed to stamp an identity on the vampire which is still evident today. The dark, cloaked appearance of the vampire became almost gospel, and also, the very strong link with the bat was enforced at this time. It is this genre of vampire, rather than the innumerable myths previous to it, with which Batman has most in common. In both sentiment and character, Batman has undeniable connections with the British pulp magazine vampire and bat figures. I am presuming that Bob Kane knew nothing of these characters as there is no evidence to suggest this in any of the books about Batman. If this was the case, it is very interesting how, at roughly the same period in time (30 years isn't particularly long) the same unusual idea was developed on different sides of the ocean.

The second stage of the thesis concerns his personality and how he has reacted to the various relationships he has formed in the past 56 years. We can see how he looks evil, but there is also ambiguity in his character. In chapter 4 I showed how the costumed villains introduce a lighter element into the comic boo, yet the underlying theme running through the stories connects back to the

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violent reasons for the existence of Batman. Gotham city also reflects this dark undercurrent; it is a very evil place. In chapter 5, his ying yang relationship with the Joker is discussed. Both were created from a vicious event yet both directed their anger in opposite ways. They compliment each other because they are both so obsessed. Batman may do good deeds but he is definitely a troubled man; this is easy to understand when reminded that he witnessed his parents brutal murder. He has a complex personality and is not a "good, decent" hero if compared to Superman.

In the final chapter I reviewed, briefly, the different roles he has played throughout his existence. The one which has lasted the longest, that is , roughly 25 years, has been the darkest. Looking at any of the stories written during this period, the suggestion proposed by Dennis O'Neill is a valid one; that is, Batman is "the devil on an angel's mission." (O'Neill, 1989, intro)

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Fig 6.9 (p.54) Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*, 1986

Fig 6.10 (p.55) Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*, 1986

Fig 6.11 (p.55) Starlin, *The Cult*, 1991

Fig 6.12 (p.56) Blind Justice, no. 600, 1989

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