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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FRANK, BRUCE AND ME

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY AND DESIGN & COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

AND

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF FINE ART

DEPARTMENT OF PAINTING

BY

DERMOT HALLAHAN

MARCH 1990

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

List of illustrations 1	
Acknowledgements 2	
An introduction (of sorts) 3	
Chapter one	
'bit of a joke, really' [6
Chapter two (17
'Frank takes the world seriously, too' 2	5
Chapter three	5
Chapter four	2
Conclusion5	56
Bibliography 5	58

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig 1.1 Tarzan 1.2 Dick Tracy

- 1.3 Superman
- Fig 2.1 Phantom D .. Dead!
 - 2.2 'Crimnals are a superstitious, cowardly lot'
- Fig 3.1 'Your Choice, Gentlemen' (Batman)
 - 3.2 Batman with Robin
 - 3.3 'Keep the american eagle flying!
 - 3.4 'Your country needs you!
 - 3.5 E.C. Comics
 - 3.6 'Yes, Robin, live become a human fish'
 - 3.7 Coka Cola's white dynamic contour curve
 - 3.8 Batman's yellow moon.

Fig 4.1 Thor.

- 4.2 Gilbert Shelton's F.F.F.B.
- 4.3 Robert Crubnb's 'Mr. Natural'
- 4.4 Scenes from FRank Miller's Dark knight returns.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would like to thank Micheal Fitzgerald and Conor Foy for lending me some of the material and Leslie, a librarian in Trinity's Berkley Library for helping with some of the older books.

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2

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an introduction (of sorts)

I am Frank. I am lazy - shiftless. I am confused and unsure.

Frank is not my real name. The name Frank I am merely adopting as a pseudonym, primarily on technical grounds. Whenever I write things down; shopping lists, graffiti, letters, thoughts of any kind, I have this regrettable habit of getting personal. In much and the same way as the character 'spoilt bastard' of <u>Viz</u> comic screams 'me! me! me! me! me! a lot of the time, I tend towards the grossly self-indulgent. I find it easier to write objectively in the third person and so to this end I have come up with Frank.

There are many reasons why its Frank, and not dave or alan or tim. Frank, as a word in itself, means among other things; 'open or candid in expression; unrestrained, unminstakable. true! these qualities I admire; having made attempts to cultivate them for a number of years, in speech at least, if not in deed. Frank, as a name, is the informal form of Francis, as in St. Francis of Assisi. Ironically, thanks to the use made of it by the entertainments industry, the name Frank now conjures up (for me) images of a man with a heart and mind far removed from those of a saint.

And so, for the purpose of this thesis, or parts thereof, I will call myself. Frank. After Dennis Hopper's raving physcotic Frank Booth in the film <u>Blue Velvet</u>, after any number of Slyvester Stallone characters. the atest of which is Frank Leone, another lone-prisoner-fucks-the-system character (the film. <u>Lock-up</u> has yet to be released in Ireland, unfortunately) and finally, after erics brother, Frank, in Iam Banks Novel <u>The Wasp Factory</u> who, among other things, likes to burn sheep alive for kicks.

I must be a very sick person. I have often had a feeling that I would

prefer to be sick and deranged and do mad socially unacceptable things than to remain as I am, a neurotic, paranoid hypocondriac who, at the age of 22, still lives at home with his family and worries about the size of his penis.

This, I know, is not possible. I've seen <u>'One flew over the cuckoo's</u> <u>nest</u> ' I saw what happened to jack Nicholson at the end of that film. Fucking the system like that just doesn't work. And so I call myself Frank. He's my fantasy altergo. Pathetic, I know, but then ... I'm a pathetic kinda quy.

Bruce Wayne is aware that his actions as Batman would be socially unacceptable and for this reason he too makes use of a dual identity.

In the thesis (of sorts) which follows I hope to show you, luckless reader why I find Batman to be the most human, realistic and identifiable character of the much-maligned superhero genre with specific reference (eventually)to Frank Millers 1986 reading of the Legend that is - the Batman.

But first, a history lesson ..

4

introduction (of sorts)

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CHAPTER 1. The Birth Of The Superhero

In the introduction to his book <u>The encylopedia of superheroes</u>, ¹ Jeff Bovin attempts to define exactly what it is characterises the average super hero. Among the factors he considers essential are an alterego. A distinctive costume, a superpower of one kind or another and a tendency 'to work actively and magnanimously for the common good! A recognisable enough description to any one living in the late twentieth century, but up until the year 1929 the concept of comic book heroes, super or otherwise did not exist. The concept of comic book's didn't even exist.

The closest thing to the comic strip form as we know it was the 'Daily Strip' that appeared in most newspapers each morning. Classified by <u>The World Encylopedia of Comics</u> as ' a comic feature appearing across a daily newspaper page, usually in a horizontal arrangement of panels.'² These daily strips possessed many of the hallmarks of what we now consider comic strips - the sequential narrative, continuing characters, dialogue enclosed within the picture- but the majority of them only sought to extract a laugh from reader with the final panel. Some strips made use of adventurous settings (e.g. Felix the Cat in the jungles of Africa) but never for any higher purpose than to set off the familiar slapstick and buffoonery.

Roy Crane was the first to break away from the conventions of caricature and broad humour by introducing to his strip <u>Wash Tubbs</u>, the dashing figure of Captain Easy, soldier of fortune in 1929. A few months later Harold Foster's adaptation of Edgar Rice Burrough's novel, <u>Tarzan of</u> <u>theApes</u> and P. Nowlan ad R. Calkin's <u>Buck Roger's in the Twenty Fifth</u> <u>Century</u> completed the transformation. The adventure strip was born. (The adventure strip did not necessarily herald a total transformation of the comic strip; merely a diversification' a broadening of the medium's horizons). Harold Foster s beautiful illustrative style, which owed more to magazine illustration and figurative art than the likes of <u>Mutt</u> and Jeff, went a long way towards reducing the caricatured, big footed look of comic strips which up until then had seemed almost obligatory. (Fig. 1.1).

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By 1931 the great depression had taken a firm hold on America and a touch of realism was required to keep the readers interested. The paramount problems of the United States were listed as, in order of severity: Prohibition, Administration of justice, and Lawlessness. A more realistic hero was needed for the readers of america's newspapers; one who might give them hope in these lawless times.

Dick Tracy, created by Chester Gould in 1931 was one such hero, appearing for the first time in the October 4th edition of the Chicago Tribune. Dick Tracy was a hero 'created to meet the desperate need of the times.'³ As Gould once said in an interview: "I decided that if the police couldn't catch the gangsters, I'd create a fellow who would"⁴ Tracy's fictional origins were explained for the first time in the episode of Oct 12th 1931: The powerless witness of a hold-up in which his sweetheart, Tess Trueheart is kidnapped and her father murdered, Tracy joins the police force in anger and unrelentingly tracks down the criminals responsible for the act.

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Here contractors could not set to classified as signs the costs strip adventual of note locators and to adaptetions that existing novels and as such would to through ad with the concert of superpender in size. The submitted through the trees of strings and had to be his initial adverture of tests that to the cost of his initial adverture of tests that to the cost of his initial adverture of the trees of strings and the test of the sectors in the invest tests cost of the input find sectors in the invest tests cost of the operators of all criminals of the sectors of the threes of all criminals of the sectors of the transfer of all criminals of the sectors of the transfer of all criminals of the sectors of the transfer of all criminals of the sectors of the transfer of all criminals of the sectors of the transfer of all criminals of the sectors of the transfer of all criminals of the sectors.

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Note Tency, created by Cheeter Could in 1911 are one at or the first time in the October ath edition of the i Nick Iracy and a nera 'created to meet the desperate a 's Could once mate in an interview?" i hocided that soldon't catch the gravetness, l'durrente a 'stime and 'tot ional cliging were availabled for the first Line a (200 1901) he powerlass attrack of a hole curden with lace Emersael is bishopped and faithed in the solder for the average of heat finds and and the first is bishopped and faithed in the solder for the average of heat finds and the first in an and a sold of the first han a solder for the average of heat first and and the first is bishopped and ber faither and and and the first in and a sole of the first hand here is and the first of the average of the first and and first and the first of the average of the first and and first and the first of the average of the average of the first and and first and the first of the average of the average of the first and and first and the first of the average of the average of the first and and first and the first of the average of the average of the first and and first and the first of the average of the average of the average of the average and the average of the average of the average of the average of the average and the average of the average and the average of the average of the average of the average of the average and the average of the average of the average of the average of the average and the average of the average of the average of the average of the average and the average of the av While the poor, stylised artwork was rather a step back from Hal Foster's beautifully executed 'Tarzan' adventures, the gritty realism of the story made up for it (Fig. 2.2). The Dick Tracy strip was violent, brutal, often cruel and occassionally controversial. One of Gould's more memorable methods of getting rid of an enemy was when he had Tracy vapourize a villan by the name of Intro with a lazer canon Somebody asks Tracy where Intro is and Tracy replies "You're breathing him".⁵

And so, with the appearance of Dick Tracy, special agent', the idea of a peoples hero was firmly established as a staple of the comic strip. A hero who would protect the people and put right the things the readers themselves felt helpless to change. Before this idea could be elaborated upon in any manner, a more basic development was necessary in the method by ;which our heroe's daring adventures could be disseminated.

The Birth of the Comic Book

Up until the early thirties, the nearest thing to the modern comic book as we know it, had been compilations of previously printed newspapter strips (Richard Outcault's 'Yellow Kid' was being reprinted as early as 1897). In 1933, the eastern color publishing company (a leading New York firm involved in printing four colour comic sections for newspapers to be used as Sunday color supplements) began issuing comic books as promotional giveaways for their larger clients. The first of these was called <u>Funnies on Parade</u> ' and was used by the firm Proctor and Gamble.A salesman at the eastern color company, one Maxwell Charles Gaines (Subsequently regarded as the father of the comic book) noticed how popular these freebies seemed to be. He gathered together a new collection of newspaper strips which he called <u>famous funnies</u>, stuck 10 cents stickers on them and left them at some newstands to test the market. Sold out. America's first commercial comic book (the Japanese had published the first such collection in the 1920's).

-8-

Atte the poor, stylised acteors and ruther a step be resultfully executed 'larzon' adventutes, the exitiv rade up for it (Fig. 2.2). The Birk Fracy strip was often cruz and eccessionally contrivential. the of wrotable methods of getting rid of an energy was when copourize a villar by the numbe of intro with a larger of asks tracy where intro is and fracy replies "rau're bi

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When Donenfeld took over in 1937, he brought in an accountant, Jacob Liebowitz to act as his new publisher. Together, they went into the comic business 'with the attitudes of the garment industry - Piecework, Sweatshop, Assembly.'⁶ An awareness of this is important for it was exactly this attitude that made the companies fortunes while holding the development of the comic books themselves back for so long and keeping them from realising their full potential.

Leibowitz moved in fast. He arranged a meeting in December of 1937 with Jerry Siegal. That meeting resulted in Siegal and Shuster entering into a contractual agreement with D.C. comics (named after Donenfeld's first new title <u>Detective Comics</u>, launched in January of that same year). According to historian Steve Gerber, the contract arrived at through this meeting stipulated that

Siegal and Shuster would continue to produce 'Slam Bradley' and 'The Spy' exclusively for D.C. for two years.

That D.C. would be the sole owners of the material, that the creators would be paid

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Stephi and Shueter would continue to produce (Slog 8 other) and The Sov' erol sively for 0.0. for two years.

that 0.C. would be the sole owners of the

ten dollars a page of story and finished art for their troubles and that D.C. would have first option on acceptance of any new comic features that Siegal and Shuster might originate.⁷

Siegal and Shuster had just dug the first sod of their own grave. In 1938 Siegal took their creation of Superman to Donenfeld and Liebowitz. They had created him back in 1933 as 17 year old school friends and dragged the idea around to every newspaper syndication agency in the country only to have it universally rejected. D.C. accepted it and decided to use Clark Kent as the protaganist of their new title, <u>Action</u> <u>Comic</u>. Before Superman had even made his first appearance in public however, Leibowitz sent a release form to the two young men.

According to an article in Playboy magazine by Harlan Ellison, the release reads, in part, as follows:

I, the undersigned, am an artist or author and have performed work for strip entitled Superman. In consideration of \$130 agreed to be paid to me by you, I hereby sell and transfer such work and strip, all good will attached thereto and exclusive right to use the characters and the story, continuity and title of strip contained therein to you and your assigns to have and hold forever and to be your exclusive property.⁸

In agreeing to sell themselves to D.C. comics in this manner, Siegal and Shuster lost all rights to their own creation of Superman. Consequently guaranteeing the comics industry a state of permanent infancy for the next forty odd years.

Superman appeared for the first time in public on the front cover of

Action Comic 1 in June, 1938. Dressed in his now universally-familiar costume, he was depicted lifting a car over his head and ramming the front end into the side of a mountain. Based heavily on Philip Wylies 1930 science fiction novel Gladiator, Superman was a rather sumplistic shallow character in comparison. The gladiator obtains his superpowers after his timid hen-pecked father injects his pregnanat mother with a special formula in the hope that the child will not grow up a wimp also. Whenever the boy uses his superpowers he is labelled a freak and spends his days tortured by the fact that he doesn't fit in. A professor suggests he father a superhuman race. The gladiator wonders about the ethics of it all and goes to a mountain top to ask God for his help, whereupon he is struck down by a bolt of lightning. Siegal and Shuster would appear to have rejected the rather didactic tone of this story, plumming instead for the Superhuman, God-made-man angle. All the same, it caught on to such an extent that in a few short years, the concept of superheroics was positively rampant in its ubiquity.

What Siegal and Shuster did with Superman - whether they realised it or not at the time - was to turn the conventions of heroic adventure strips on their head. The characters of Tarzan and Buck Rogers were, as pointed out before, ordinary mortal human beings set in alien worlds as backgrounds for adventure. The phenomenal success of Chester Gould's Dick Tracy at the start of the decade had pointed to a need for some sense of realism to be brought to the adventure strip. Ironic then, you may think, that I should try to make the case for te superhero, one of the most fantastically unrealistic inventions of any 'literary' medium. The adventures of Superman, in contrast to those of Tarzan or Buck Rogers, were set in a universally recognisable locale - that of the imaginary city of Metropolis - a word which in itself is used to describe the main city of any country (fig 2.3). Superman's alter-ego 'Clark Kent', bundling cub-reporter with the 'Daily Planet' wa also given an image with which the reader could readily identify. According to Reitberger and Fuchs it is the tragedy of all superheroes that

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SUPERMAN, AS DRAWN BY WAYNE BORING. [HORN, MAURICE, 1976, P. 7

-12-



they have to live one half of their lives as normal humdrum moartals without being able to find fulfilment in that sphere.⁹

It is with this unfulfilled humdrum mortal that the reader first identifies, which in turn leads to the possabilities of identifying with the super hero.

The "little man" likes to project his wishful thinking into the shape of a big, strong man. Superheroes are no more than the expression and fixation of narcissistic aggrandisement; they show how the adolescent reader or the infantile grown-up sees himself in his dreams.⁹

The superhero half of Superman was the ultimate in Walter-Mitty-type fantasy. Written as he was, as a being from outer space, Siegal and Shuster were not restricted to creating another human hero at the peak of his physical and intellectual capabilities; they could create a God-made-man. Superman could fly; run at the speed of light; he possesses microscopic, telescopic, x-ray and heat vision; he has a superbrain which endows him with a phenomenal memory - he has, in his time, memorized the entire Metropolis phon book - and ... he's very strong.

Yes, you're right. the new 'super' hero <u>did</u> stretch all bounds of credibility; he <u>was</u> too fantastic for thoughts of his existance to be entertained by any one over the age of four; but he was also the virtual personifaication of the American dream. He stood for the hopes and dreams of all the desperate immigrants who had ever made their way to this 'New World'. America is made up in it's entirety of desperate immigrants; the only native Americans are the dispossessed Red Indians. Also he came at a time when after just emerging from a Great Depression it seemed the world was about to enter into a global war for the second

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they have to live one half of their lives an normal hundrem associals without being sole to find fulfilment in that sphere.

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The superhero's time had come.

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St. Personal, Bafabala and Millin, Walkarse, 1922. 6.121.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER ONE

- 1. ROVIN, Jeff, 185, p.IX (introduction)
- 2. HORN, Maurice, 1976, p.731
- 3. QUEEN, Ellery, 1970, p.XXI (introduction)

4. ibid.

- 5. COTTA VAZ, Mark, 1989 p.20
- 6. ELLISON, Harlan, 1988, p.174
- 7. ibid.
- 8. Ibid.
- 9. REITBERGER, Reinhold and FUCHS, Wolfgang, 1972, p.124

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Hupper In The Sates

bit of a joke really, this superhero business. Flying around in tights, doing good deeds just because thats what superheroes like to to. They only appear vacuous to us because we have become so much more sophisticated in these, the dying years of the 20th century and require a more realistic three dimsionality of our heroes. In 1938, the needs of the people were quite different, what with the rise in lawlessness and the prospect of a second world war coming so closely after the end of the first. Frank of course rather likes the idea of a two-dimensional hero. Frank appears rather unbalanced in his cynical attitude to life which is why, one would suppose, he still enjoys reading fantasy stories depicting the inevitable triumph of good over evil doesn't believe it in his heart of hearts but he can at least dream, can't he

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Chapter Two The Batman

Sad day for Frank.

Batman isn't an original creation. Always thought he was. Well, not original, as such - Bob Kane was only asked to create a new hero by the editors of D.C. As a direct consequence of Superman's success - thought of him as the first human superhero. The first so-called superhero driven by such human feelings as vengeance. He wasn't. The ghost-who-walks was the first.

The ghost-who-walks or <u>Phantom</u> as he was more properly known first as a daily strip for King Features Syndicate on Feb 17, 1936. Created by Lee Falk, the phantom is a mysterius hooded figure of justice. As the story goes, he is carrying on a long tradition of crimefighting, begun in the 16th century when the first phantom swears to devote his life to fighting evil. After finding the skull of the pirate who killed his father. Due to the hereditary nature of this crusade, the phantom is essentially not just a man but a legend. Feared by his enemies as 'the-ghost-who-walks'. He lives in skull cave and adopts the sign of the skull as his personal symbol; to instil fear and dread into the most vicious of criminals. He wears a dark hooded bodysuit, the design of which is based on the image of a certain avenging spirit, held sacred by the jungle natives.

Lee Falks's phantom, it can be seen, provisionally established quite a few superhero cliches, before they were to become enshrined in the statute books of comics by Siegal and Shuster's superman. The idea of vengeance; of a personal crusade against crime was not original. Chester Gould had started this with Dick Tracy in 1931. When each phantom died, his son would ceremoniously take over the role of phantom by, among other things, reciting the oath of the skull.

I swear to devote my life to the destruction of piracy, greed, cruelty and injustice, and my

which of a pole meality, this experiments dustments. Figbuing good deads just because thats what superheroses any appear scatters to us because we have because at apphisticated in these, the doing years of the 2000 approaches in these, the doing years of the 2000 approaches in these the bills of our borness. I approaches the second applies of each with the files in people were quite different, what with the files in a people were quite different what with the files inter. Frank of escend applies the idea of a rank appears refine (applience) is still entows reading fants inter the would approace, he still entows reading fants he inswitable triamph of good oner cell orean't belt files but he can at least theme, can't re-

sons and their sons shall follow me. 2

Each phantom was in himself written as an ordinary mortal human being. But by making the phantom's particular crusade an hereditary, never-ending one, Falk brought the idea of invincibility to the comic strip hero. The ideals of the phantom were immortal; the phantom was effectively invincible.

Another idea Falk brought to the developing concept of the superhero, was that of the symbolic costume. The shadow had used a dark cloak to symbolise his ability to cloud the minds of men. In 1936 he had, however, only appeared in pulp magazines and on a long running radio show. It wasn't until 1940 that the shadow was given a definative visual realization for the comic book version. Before the phantom, the clothes in which comic book crimefighters such as Dick Tracy, Buck Rogers or Flash Gordon were attired, had not been used for the purposes of symbolsim. The particular outfit worn by a character functioned merely as a device by which said character could be easily recognised. The advent of the phantom's bodysuit paved the way for a much higher degree of symbolism in comic book characterizations. As well as being dressed in a dark bodysuit, the design of which is based on a sacred avenging spriit, the phantom wears a leather gun belt with a death's head skull on the front. On his right hand he wears a death's head ring and on his left hand, a ring in the shape of the letter P. The imprint of the 'P' on a person's skin would signify that hereafter that person was protected by the phantom. The aura of myth and mystery created by Lee Falk and his use of symbolism was obviously a major influence on Bob Kane in his creation of Batman. (Fig 2.1)

Bruce, Bob and Batman

After the phenomenal success of Superman the editors at D.C. comics Inc. asked Bob Kane to come up with a new superhero along similiar lines.

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Bruce, Boh and Batman

After the physical success of Superman the militars

With the help of pulp fiction writer Bill Finger, Kane came up with Batman. First appearing in <u>Detective</u> 27 in May of 1939, the original dark knight wore a grey bodysuit, blue trunks, boots, gloves and cowl, with a black bat-like cape. A black bat symbol was featured on the chest of his costume. Acknowledging a wide range of influences; the avenging crusades of both Dick Tracy and The Phantom, the swashbuckling adventure of contemporary films such as <u>Robin Hood</u> and <u>The Mark of</u> <u>Zorro</u>, the dark cloak-and-dagger feel of 'The Shadows' pulp adventures and even sketches for a flying machine by Leonardo Da Vinci which Kane had found in a book when he was thirteen, Batman seemed to fit in quite well beside his predessessor, superman. He had the now obligatory alterego, the costume with which to strike fear into the hearts of the most vicious of criminals and the square jaw. But he was different, honest.

The very first Batman stories were set in New York. This was changed with the winter issue of <u>Batman</u> 4 in 1941 - a companion volume to <u>Detective</u> set up to accommodate Batman's ever expanding world - to the fictitious city of Gotham. Defined by Batman editor Denny O'Neill as

New York below fourteenth street after eleven O'Clock at night. Recognisably New York but with the emphasis on the grimmer aspects of the city. $\boxed{3}$

Batman's Gotham City served the same purpose as Superman's Metropolis. If the character's adventures are set in a real city (e/g/ Dick Tracy's Chicage) readers can suspend belief with such thoughts as 'I know that area. That sort of thing doesn't happen there' or worse: 'He wouldn't last five minutes in that part of town'. By making the setting fictitious yet recognisable at the same time, the reader is drawn into a world of fantasy, ironically making the story all the more believable. This is more or less where the similarities end.

-20-

with the help of only fighter white Shiffinger, Ko Refman. First scouring in <u>Detective</u> 27 in May aniginal dark intern ware a way brokenik. Shift the coult, with a birck hel-like core. A hirek bal symbol check of mis contines. Accounteding a size range o adventure of continuentary filles are an <u>Risin book</u> adventure of continuentary filles are an <u>Risin book</u> adventure of continuentary filles are an <u>Risin book</u> and some sketches far a fiying annine bit conscord had found in a book shen we was thirteen, But an an alteredo, the contage with which to strike feer internation attrices of criminals son the agains far internation had found in a book shen we was thirteen, But and the had found in a book shen we was thirteen, But and the had found in a book shen we was thirteen, But and the had found in a book shen we was thirteen, But and the had found in a book shen we was thirteen, But and the had found in a book shen we was thirteen, But and the had found in a book shen we was thirteen, But and the had the one take with which to strike feer into housest.

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Batesn's Kathen fity morent the order annotes an if the character's advectures are set in a real fi Coicege) reasers can exempted what with with the area. That sort of thing arean't moren there's heat five minutes in that part of town'. By some fictuities wel reconsistent of the same time, for world of farture, include the same time, for this is more or less where the cust'unities and On the most basic level there is the costume. Superman's costume is a lurid, patriotic red, blue and yellow. It is a daytime costume. It reflects the radiance of the blue Metropolis summer sky. The choice of colour was not made with the hearts of criminals in mind, but the hearts of the oeople.

When I'm needed, I'll wear this costume, and the world will know of ... Superman!.4

Superman is a people's hero first, criminals enemy second. Batman only ever went out at night. During the daytime, he stuck rigidly to his alterego of Bruce Wayne, carefree millionaire, inheritor of the Wayne fortune.

Off again, sir? Shall I fetch your tights? Never during the day, Alfred 5

The costume itself was designed with the night in mind, and the criminals who mmight be found there. In issue one of Batman (Spring 1940), the origin of the batman was told for the first time. On the second page of the story, subtitled 'who he is - and how he came to be!' Bruce WAyne, after deciding to become a vigilante, is searching for a disguise to suit his chosen crusade -

criminals are a superstitious cowardly lot, so my disguise must be able to strike terror into their hearts. I must be a creature of the night, black, terrible .. A..A.. (as if in answer a high bat flies in the open window!) A bat! That's it! It's an omen ... I shall

become a bat! (Fig. 2.2)

Superman, to my mind, has an ego problem. He designs his costume so that people will recognise him. Batman designs his so that criminals will fear him.

Batman is mortal. He can die. Just like you. Just like me. Just like Frank.

'Bruce Wayne run over by a bus! That would make a great headline. It would be good to see one of your favourite superheroes die, the same way as the little old lady down the road. Won't happen, of course. Batham's world, while it may seem dark and dangerous, is still essentially a world of fantasy; the product of a scriptwriters imagination. But by writing the character as an ordinary mortal human being, instead of some sort of God-made-man, the possability of his being killed is always there. This gave the early Batman adventures a far greater sense of danger and excitement than those of his fellow crimefighter in metropolis. In contrast, Superman's invincibility seemed somewhat fantastic and unbelievable. His powers became so immense, so fantastic in fact, that quite early on in his career, an achilles heel had to be developed. Introduced by Bob Maxwell for the Superman radio show, Kryptonite was announced as the one thing in the known universe that could kill Superman. Radioactive fragments of Superman's former home (the planet Krypton), Kryptonite was originally red in colour but soon settled for its permanent green hue.

And so, The Phantom was written as a mortal human being. Made invincible by the fact that his was an hereditary crusade, passed on from father to son' Superman was invincible, but had to be given a handicap to give him some sense of credibility; Batman was the only one of the 'Golden Age' superheroes made invincible only by his keen mind and strong body. Prior to his donning the cape of Batman Bruce Wayne had spent years studying criminology and had trained his body to physical perfection - 'until he (was) able to perform amazing atyletic feats!

In the most backs level there is the costance. Sup usid, potriotic red, blue and vellage. It is a da reflects the redress of the blue Mitropolie summer colour was not make with the hearts of criminals in of the decals.

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criminals are a suprestitions constant 100, as an disputer must be able to strike terror into their nearty. I must or a creature of the night, black, terrible . A.A.. (as if in ensure a high bat flire in the open window!)

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It was in Batman's motivation - an intrinsic part of the superhero's make-up - that he differed most strongly from the likes of that wimp in Metropolis Superman had his powers handed to him on a plate. The planet on which he was born was going to blow up so he was sent off in an experimental space rocket. Thanks entriely to the great difference in the gravities of the two planets, Superman finds he is endowed with superhuman powers on earth. In ' the origin of Superman ', told for the first time in 1948, his adoptive father is dying, it is his father's dying wish that his son use his 'amazing powers' to 'become a powerful force for good!' He tells the young Clark Kent that he must 'hide (his) true identity! They must never know Clark Kent is a .. a Superman!' As stated in an earlier version of the beginnings of the character, which appeared in 1939 in Superman 1

Clark decided he must turn his titanic strength into channels that would benefit mankind and so was created ... Superman, champion of the oppressed, the physical marvel who had sworn to devote his existance to helping those in need!

Superman never tired of gloating oabout his wonderous powers. Later on in the same story, he announces:

The threat's banished .. but the Talon's hirelings were slain by their own electrical apparatus! Only my super-physique saved me!

He strikes me as a rather smug individual. I can't find any real reason for him to take up this crusade. O.K. so it was his father's dying wish that he do this, but as soon as his father was dead, he could have decided what to do with his life. In reading some of his early adventures, it seems to me that there is no real motivation behind his great deeds. It's like he was being really nice. Nothing more.

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It was to battern's motived ion - an intrinsic part of moxe-up - that he differed most shores from the lik wetropolis Supremen had his covers varied to him on on which he was bern was doing to blow up on he was experimental space market. There is the the gravities of the two planets, superand finds he superimain powers on earth. In ' ine origin of Sec dying wish that his samue his 'social of Sec force for good? He tells the roing first tent is force for good? He tells the roing first tent is appeared in 1939 in Superan of the boundings of appeared in 1939 in Superan '

Clark decided he must turn his filtunic stemati into channels that would be after marking and a whe dreated ... Speirson, charpion of the opport sed, the physical carvel who and avant to devote his existence to beloing those is need of

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He strikes as a rainer and individual. I am for him to have up this orusude. S.L. as it was that he do this, but as soon as his fainer we can observed what to do with his life. In reacting and sometores, it seems is an that there is no real boost seams. It's inve he was noting really note. While seeking absolutely no form of personal gain whatsoever, - except perhaps a little public adulation - I, Superman, will save the world.

Batman has a real reason to fight criminals. He's not doing this for the public. Fuck the public. He's doing this for himself. An altogether more selfish, (human?) reason. Batman is on a vengeance trip. The reason the dark knight hates criminals is because, as a child, he witnessed the brutal mruder of both his parents as he returned home with them from a movie. Going back to that legend of the batman story which appeared in <u>Batman 1</u> spring 1940, an armed man steps out in front of the Wayne family and demands Mrs. Wayne's pearl necklace ...

'leave her alone, you! Oh...'
'You asked for it!' (A shot is fired)
'Thomas!' You've killed him. Help!
Police .. Help!'
'This'll shut you up!'

(The boys eyes are wide with terror and shock as the horrible scene is spread before him). 'Father ..Mother!..Dead! They're D..Dead'

A few days later the young Bruce Wayne swears 'on the spirit of (his) parents' to avenge their deaths and dedicate the rest of his life to a war on all criminals; his own personal war, after instigating such a brutal tragic envent as Batman's 'raison d'etre' Bob Kane ensured that Batman would always have an incentive to fight.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER TWO

- 1. HORN, Maurice, 1976, P.551
- 2. ROVIN, Jeff, 1985, p.221
- 3. COTTA VAZ, Mark, 1989, p.66
- 4. SUPERMAN, 1972, p.201
- 5. MILLER, Frank, 1988, p.88
- 6. COTTA VAZ, Mark, 1989, p.XIV (preface)

-24-

- 7. ROVIN, Jeff, 1985, p.20
- 8. SUPERMAN, 1972, p.201
- 9. ibid. p.21

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'leave her alone, but Un...' 'fou asked for if!' (A mut is (ired) 'founas'' You've killed him. Help! Police .. Help!'

(the boys eros are and with terror and shock as the hereible scene is sprend before his).

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Frank takes the world personally too. that is to say, events which take place around him are seen through his eyes as affecting him or not having any revelence whatsoever. Its a common enough complaint .. 'the tropical rainforests are not my problem. I dont use hairspray.' that kind of attitude. ;consequently, Batman is seen by Frank as a role-model. not an incredibly adult way of looking at life, admittedly but Frank doesn't care. he's only twenty two - he hasnt sorted himself out yet. he needs a rolemodel. even an unbalanced one. Frank remembers a time when he was asked by one of his friends whether he wanted to go home or go into town. Frank couldn't decide. he had spent so many years in art college or rather in his brain asking himself questions that he no longer had the ability to answer even the most elementary questions with a spontanious yes or no. Bob Kane's Batman did not seem to suffer from such self-destructive doubhts.

shipsond a finance was however, a rather one wided charactery on thericashy manual report to rate plantant to rid Cother City of with the hold wide, sincerey to bigs the presentential take of crime cod interpreter, the presentence of symmits case). Among the mythical interpreter the schicks's payche to which the tak series to ited to which were the schicks of our works and the Store Mayne/Stimes character, the schicks wire the schicks of our works and store with the removal transit and a series this schick is related the store with the tak series to ited to which were the schicks of our works and store with the removal transit and a series the schick of our works and store with the removal transit and presents in the schick of a removal there is a series with the company. Ited is a series that is a store 's removal there is a series with the removal transit and the best is a store of a removal there is a series of the series of the series of the series of the present is a store of a removal there is a store with the removal to a series is a store with the schick of the removal there is a store with the take the series of the schick of the series of the series

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One of the reasons Batman can be successful fifty years plus after his first appearance is that he has changed.

The essential myth has remained the same but it has adapted to the tenor of the times.

So says Deny O'Neill, sometime editor of Batman and detective comics in an interview with speakeasy magazine. Me, I'm not so sure. Admittedly Batman wouldn't have retained his populairity for over 50 years if the character had not adapted to the tenor of the times, but it is my belief that the so-called essential myth has beome somewhat blurred.

Thanks to the all-pervasive influence of televison and the fact that comics are still being read only by avery select, discerning audience being regarded in the main as juvenile trash - the image of Batman most prominently fixed in the mind of the general populace, is that of Adam West and Burt Ward hamming it up for all they're worth in the (albeit marvellously) tacky televison series of the sixties.

Hollywood's Batman was, however, a rather one-sided character; an hilariously earnest caped crusader pledged to rid Gotham City of all its dastardly villians; to stem this neverending tide of crime and lawlessness, (to paraphrase our dynamic due). Among the mythical elements of the dark knight's psyche to which the T.V. series failed to allude were; the schizoid nature of the Bruce Wayne/Batman character, the ordinary human mortality of our hero and above all the personal tragedy which gave birth to Batman's extraordinary crimefighting passion. It s this personal loss and the violent nature of the event which continually haunts Batman, obsesses him and consequently makes him appear so much more human than your average do-goody flying superhero.

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und of the remons Batana and be exceeded. fifty yours plus after mis first uppearance is that he has changed.

The summer of myth has remained the same but it has adouted to the herot of the tim

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A Journey Through Batmen

The first major alteration to the basic myth-that-is-the-Batman was the arrival of Dick Grayson, alias Robin the Boy Wonder. Robin's arrival came so soon after Batman's first appearance that it could be considered a major development in the general scheme of things. The repurcussions caused are so great however, that it must instead be looked upon as the first major blurring of the original concept.

Robin made his first appearance in detective 58 in April of 1940, a mere eleven months after Batman. He (Robin) 'was to relieve the gloom of isolation, demanding by his very presence that the bitter Batman become Batman's new foil was introduced to the more sympathetic, more human'. story thus: Real name Dick Grayson. As a member of the flying Graysons family acrobatic team, he witnesses the deaths of his parents as they practice their act. On learning that the so-called accident was actually the work of crime lord 'Boss' Zucco who had been menacing the circus for protection money, the young Grayson vows to avenge their deaths. Batman while seeking out Boss Zuco for reasons of his own, overhears Dick's pledge of vengence fearing for the boys safety, he takes him back to the Batcave. They go after Boss-Zucco together, Batman eventually taking Dick under his wing, as Robin, the Boy Wonder. Bob Kane, and Bill Finger - who was at this stage writing most of the stories - ensured that Robin was given a personal tragedy every bit as brutal and violent as the Batmans, so that the young boy's extraordinary crime fighting passion might be no less passionate than that of his mentors.

Two hands are better than one, it is said. I don't know. It has been argued that the bright red, yellow and green of Robin's costume served to lighten the general tone of the adventures, previously set by the long shadows of Gotham's night and the dark blue and grey of Batman's costume. It would appear that in creating this laughing, fighting young daredevil companion for the dark knight, the writers were voluntarily abandoning A Jeursey Freedoh Batmen

he first anion alteration to the heate estimated arrival of Dirk Kropson, alive Roain the Bay Monder name so aron after Baiman's first approxime that i a major development in the general achere of things coursed are so great homewar, that it must include to first major biering of the original concept.

woin and his first accurate in detective 30 in aleven months after Gifton. He (Rohin) have to reisolation, demanding by his very preserve that the area sympometic, some hamn's below's new latnearly second is team, he withouses the desire of really second is team, he withouses the desire of production some, the complete the second a production some, the complete the second a production some, the complete the second production some, the complete the hope safety is along of wergere footing for the hope safety is detected at the stand for the hope safety is floper - who was of this stand ariting and of the Ratema, so that the young bay's extraordinary of hoph he no less paramonic traded, every bit ac he hash he no less paramonic that the rate of histor to no less paramonic that the rate of histor to no less paramonic that the rate of the sector histor to no less paramonic that the first of the sector hash he no less paramonic that the first of the sector histor to no less paramonic than that of hes work

Two handle are notion than one, it is maid. I are argued that the oright red, willow and green it a highlass the general tone of the advantares, provi shadows of Cornes's might and the dark blue and a it would appear that in greating this langeling. the very essence of what made Batman so different from his peers. Robin's arrival coincided with the toning down of Batman's original rage and hatred of criminals and the adoption of a much higher moral outlook, in particular towards the sanctity of life. 'Use only the flat of your sword, Robin! Remember we never kill with weapons of any kind'.

It has also been argued that Robin provided an opportunity for some much needed dialogue, which indeed he did. But I am of the opinion that the character of Batman does not need dialogue. Not in his night-time crime-fighting incarnation. During the day, as Bruce Wayne he had Alfred his loyal butler to talk to as his confident. The writers should have got around the problem by introducing a few more close friends into Bruce Wayne's life; not the life of Batman. Vigilantes on personal vengence trips hve no need for talk. Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry is a man of few words, while Charles Bronson does not make use of a dancing boy companion in any of his 'Deathwish' movies. The ultimate in such no-talk all-action avenging crime fighers must surely be Slyvester Stallone, in, for example, his film 'Cobra', when as a cop who ignores red tape and lets things doe, he informs some poor ne'er-do-well -c'crimes the disease, and I'm the cure.' and yes I know, I'm mixing my media here. It s unfair to make comparisons between comic books of the 1940's with their youth-orientated sense of self censorship and ultra-violent vigilante films of the 1970's and 1980's. But my basic premise is sound. Robin the Boy blunder ruined Batman. He made him talk too much. He made him laugh; an worst of all put a smile on the dark knight's face. This regrettable change in tone can be seen quite clearly by comparing the visage of Bob Kane's original Batman to that of the same character a mere two years later.

'The Batman meets Doctor Death' (Detective comic =29, July 1939) was only the third ever issue featuring the Batman. Drawn by Bob Kane (Fig 3.1), the slits used in the original Batcowl to designate eyes are long, white and pencil thin. They are executed at what can only be described as an 'evil' angle. The long dark ears of the cowl follow more or less the Robin's unrivel coincided with the timing down of D and het od of originale and the emotion of a much in particular forence the experitty of life. Yune suord, Robial (homember we never bill with exactno

It has also been accord that Roin a visat a consected dialogue, which indeed as did. 5.4 i and the fination incarnation. Coming no dec. as Be drive-fination incarnation. Coming no dec. as Be his loyal buffer to talk to as his confider. In gob around the problem or introducing a few more wayne's lifer on the life of barman. Visiones trive inve to need for bife. Chint Larve of a the few words, while Charles Brosson foer not note of companion in any of his <u>(beamwish)</u> works. In stallone, in, for example, his firsts and and stallone, in, for example, his firsts and and of the and left thing doe, be unders and and here. If a under to make remersion of the atthe thing doe, be unders and and here. If a under to make remersion of the sector of the atthe thing doe, be unders and and and here. If a under to make remersion of the sector of the offer the sector of the offer the sector of the se

"Ine Matara areta Booton Death" (Detaoline conic me thred ever issue featuring the Galmon. Drun the alite used in the original Batcowi in deators and pendi thim. They are executed at most cen-'evil' angle. The long dark ears of the coal full same angle, coming to a point just above the top lip. The lower, visible
portion of the face retains the high-cheekboned and square-jawed look of
the supposedly good-looking Bruce Wayne (The draughtsmanship was very
crude by today's standards) but the mouth is positively grim.
Occassionally, in moments of silent, righteous pleasure, a line is used
to denote something of a smile but it is a grim smile.

By the appearance of the winter issue of 'Batman' in 1941 (No. Four) Robin had been Batman's companion for little over a year. The difference this 'laughing, fighting young daredevil' made to the countenence of the dark knight was startling (Fig 3.2). The ears on his cowl had shrunk tili they amounted to little more than token symbols. This in turn allowed the visible area f Bruce Wayne's face more prominance in relation to the portion hidden by the Bat-cowl, giving our hero a more human look. The long thin slits that had previously sufficed as 'eyes' were replaced by half-moon shapes, with the result that the vengeful, determined frown of old resembled more closely the wide-eyed look of a young school-girl. Most damaging of all, the sculpted cheekbones of Bruce Wayne, while still half hidden under the Batcowl, were now to be seen breaking into a fully rounded smile. The grim tight-lipped mouth was replaced by a perfectly white wall of all-american teeth. The end. Batman had lost it. He was now right up there with that other all-smiling peoples twit, Superman.

Bob Kane, Bill Finger and Kane's assistant, Jerry Robinson (who's style of drawing Batman quickly became definitive) were probably only answering to a perceived need for a lightening up of the general tone of the series. It must be pointed out once again; that personally motivated vigilantes work alone. They dont indulge in 'idle banter, they don't smile constantly and they don't have dancing, brightly-costumed little boys follow their every move, with the eagerness of a newborn puppy.

Robin would grow up, eventually leaving Batman to go to university. But that would not be until 1969. Before that, a lot more events would

-29-

name angle, coming to a pairs just answe bee top p position of the free relates the high-creckboned an the suppredix good-looking Brace Wayne (The dring cride by today's standards) but the work's is pair for more condity. In screen's of silent, righters due to denote compthing of a sails but it is a gring so

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sobre would grow up, eventually leaving Barant to that would not be until they. Seture that, a int



LEFT: DETECTIVE #29, ULY 1939 IN THE EARLY DAYS <u>BATMAN</u>. WENT TO WAR AGAINST CRIME AND DIDN'T PLAN ON TAKING ANY PRISIONERS. [COTTA VAZ, MARK, 1989, P. 11]

BELOW: BY THE EARY NINETEEN-FORTIES, THE ARRIVAL OF ROBIN CAUSED BATMAN' TO LOSE ALL HIS FORMER MANENOLENT CHARM.

HORN, Maurice, 1976, p.



-30-



conspire to further the damage done to Batman's original principles by the unfortunate arrival of the Boy Blunder.

Batman Goes To War

Thanks to Stegal and Shusters supremely limited vision and the shrewd business sense of Liebowitz and Donenfeld, comic book production in the nineteen forties was still the most blatently commercial of all graphic art forms. The direction taken by Batman and his contemporaries was dictated solely by perceived public demands or, to put it another way, what the editors thought the public demanded. In the early 1940's the American public was dictated to by events in Europe and the growing threat of global genocide. Batman went to war.

He had to. His adventures and those of his relatively small-time adversaries in Gotham City appeared very parochial and ultimately insignificant in comparison to the real-life holocaust taking place in Europe. Batman was soon busting Nazi spy-rings in Gotham city and making trips to significantly named places like Independence Hall in Philadelphia; promoting the idea of Buying War Bonds to help the war effort.

> Fellow Americans, you too can sign a declaration of independence. Independence from slavery ... For should the axis win, Americans will be slaves in Bondage!

Batman appeared with Robin on the cover of Batman 17 in July of 1943 astride a hugh golden eagle, accompanied by an escort of two military planes and exhorting the American public to "keep the American eagle flying! Buy war bonds and stamps!" (Fig 3.3). Earlier on in the year, our dynamic duo were depicted on the cover of Batman 15 firing a belt

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Throug to Stepsi and Shuster supremery limited vibusiness sense of itsbodity and D men aid, concnimeteon former and station is and b men aid of a set forme. The direction is an by Barana and his distated solely by perceived public desards or, to what the editors the opti the public desards of in American public was distated to by events in firon thread of global generide (stand and to war.

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Batmon appeared with Hobin on the cover of each astride a hugh golden eagle, accompanied by An e places and execting the American public to "Rem Flying! Buy war bonds and stampel" (Fig 1.3). our dynamic due were desirted on the cover of de





feed machine gun in a patriotic and determined manner at the unseen enemy with the legend 'keep those bullets flying! keep on buying war bonds and stamps!"

Using the pages of Batman to make patriotic morale-boosting speeches and promote the buying of war bonds was a positively subtle approach in comparison with that of Captain America. Created in March 1941 by Jack Kirby and Joe Simon, <u>Captain America Comic</u> told the story of how scrawny Steve Rogers, previously rejected for military service, drank a secret potion which gave him super-human abilities. In the great tradition of comic book plotting, the creator of the potion Dr. Abraham Erskine is assassinated by the Nazis, taking with him governmental hopes for a whole army of superpatriots. Dressed in his dazzling red, white and blue flag-inspried costumed as 'a living symbol of life and liberty' Captain America goes to war against the axis, quickly becoming the ultimate comic-book manifestation of wartime American patrotism. (Fig 3.4)

After the war, however, he lost a lot of his patriotic zeal. Created to capture the emotions of the American public during the war. Making the transition from fanatical Nazis to criminalal of a more parochial nature proved too much for Captain America and his adventures stopped for a while in May ;of 1949 after only 74 issues.

Batman too found it difficult to return to Gotham City and the joker after the patriotic intensity of his buy Bonds campaign. Formerly the darkest and most brooding of all the superheroes, even he had become, in the words of Julius Feiffer, 'Shrill'.

With the attendant decline in the population of the superhero many publishers went out of business. The inspiring heights reached by many superheroes during the war simply could not be matched by the cold turkey of the post-war years. William M. Gaines, son of M.C. Gaines saw the necessity for a move away from the fearless superpowered crimebuster
teed machine gam in a pricipite and determined man with the legend 'bacp trove pullets firing! weep as at any at

Using the pages of ducents to make particule monster promote the partic of ducents of option sectors. Leader the constraint with the sectors for all ducent and the Simon. <u>Contains sectors for all</u> sectors path and the sectors for all sectors path and the sectors for all ducent is assessed back or atting, the prestor of all for a whole any of sectors for the sector of all for a whole any of sectors for a living sector for a whole any of sectors for a living sector for a whole any of sectors for a living sector for a whole any of sectors of all for a shole any of sectors for a living sector for a whole any of sectors of a living sector for a shole any of sectors of all for a shole any of sectors of a living sector for a sector pool and the sector of the sector for a sector pool and the sector of all disate conte-pool and the sector of all sectors.

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genre and in 1950 began publishing his 'New Trend' line of horror, science fiction, crime and war stories. Some of the titles that Gaines put out spoke for themselves: <u>Crypt of Terror, Vault of Horror, Shock</u> <u>Suspense Stories, Haunt of Fear</u> etc. (Fig 3.5). While the artists of these stories were lauded in some quarters for the high quality of their work and their innovative use of graphic storytelling techniques, their gruesome and oftern gory tales displayed, in the words of Maurice Horn, 'A callous disregard for civilised sensitivities.' This trat, argues Horn,

> ...While acceptable, perhaps even desiarable, in formats designed for mature readers .. was certainly objectionable in a popular medium overwhelmingly aimed at children. It seemed like a sure way to bring censure to the comic book.

The seduction of the Innocent

By the early fifties, Gaines titles and the more crude excessive gore and violence of his imitators led to heavy public scrutiny. Senator Joseph McCarthy had launched his crusade against alleged communist infiltration of the federal government in 1950, exploiting the general feeling of paranoia that had emerged in post-war America. Four years leater, Dr. Frederic Wertham's book <u>Seduction of the Innocent</u> effectively added comic book reading to the list of unamerican a;ctivities. According to Wertham, the reading of such crime stories led to juvenile delinquency. Wetham's idea of a crime story was one in which any crime was depicted, conviently allowing for the inclusion of the innocent superhero in his arguements. The good doctor reserved a lot of his energy for attacks on Bruce Wayne and 'Dick' Grayson's obviously homosexual relatonship.

sometimes Batman ends up in bed injured and young

-35-

Robin is shown sitting next to him ... Batman is sometimes shown in a dressing gown. As they sit by the fireplace the young boy sometimes worries about his prtner: "something's wrong with Bruce. He hasn't been himself thses past few days". It is like a wish dream of two homo-sexual living together. Sometimes they are shown on a couch, Bruce reclining and Dick sitting next to him, jacket off, collar open, and his on his friends arm.

That he was in all probability a crank, mattered not one jot. The publication of Wertham's book led to the Estes Kefauver senatorial subcommittee hearings on comic books and later that same year, in an effort to avert outright abolition, the publishers set up the comics code authority, a self-regulatory body aimed at cleaning up some of the excesses of previous years. Among the rules laid down by the authority were

> policemen, judges, government officials and respected institutions shall not be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority. In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.

The code goes on to ban all scenes involving nudity, excessive bloodshed, attacks on religion or race and the depiction of crime as something from which any pleasure or profit might be obtained. Perhaps the publishers had a vested interest in keeping their comics narrowly focused and child-like? Eternally grateful for the naivete of Siegal and Shuster, the major comic book houses still ran their businesses with piezework, sweatshop mentalities. The artisits got paid for the work, while the publishers reaped all profits from trademarks and copyrights. By keeping their comics squeaky clean, they ensured themselves of the continued

Genre and in 1950 secon publishing his they lead ectence fiction, crises and war stories. Size of put oit tooke for themselves: <u>Evol of Terror.</u> Cuspense Stories, themt of Fear etc. (End 3.5) these stories were louded in some quarters for the work and their inputative ust of graphic efforted crussome and oftern gory tales displayed, in the back Hore.

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patronage of the parents, who were indirectly their best customers.

The crackdown of the fifties and subsequent comics code authority resulted in a lot of publishing houses folding, artists giving up - some, like Wally Wood of E.C. comics committing suicide - and Batman being sent on exotic missions all over the world in a move away from the characters original tone, the darkness and violence of which was not against the rules. In August 1955 Batman travelled back in time to solve an archeological riddle, in 1957 he was searching Siam for a life-saving serum in <u>around the world in eighty days</u> (Detective248, Oct.) and by 1958 he had gratuated to space travel, narrowly escaping death-by-fruit.-

A ... a brace of giant bananas .. plummetingfrom above! Clear out of here .. fast!- Ha, ha .. this is the end of the trail foryou, crimefighters!

Television was beginning to take hold as a medium of communication/entertainment, the Americans had begun tests on the first hydrogen bomb and in 1957 the world's first manmade satellite Sputnik 1 was launched by the Russians. The new emphasis on fantastic alien storylines was undoubhtedly seen by D.C. as a method by which Batman could cash in on the sci-fi fad while still keeping within the ;bounds of their own codes 'Guidelines'. The 'monster fad', so-called by editor Jack Schiff, continued to reach such ridiculous heights that in 1961, Batman was depicted on the cover of detective 287 exclaiming in exasperation 'Great Scott! another bizarre creature with a fanastic weapon!' See also Fig (3.6)

Pop Goes Batman

In 1964 Julius Schwartz, a comics editor previously responsible for reviving the concept of the superhero with his revamped version of flash for showcase comics in 1956, was ushered in to replace Jack Schiff in an

Rooin is above sitting cent to her ... base sometimes above in a dressing gove. As the by the fireplace the would bey susefined w spout his primeri "momething's wrong with i he hase't been himself these pest few days' is like a wish dream of two how-seveni the together. Sometimes they are snown on a co bruce recliming and Bick sitting next to at jecket off, collar open, and his on his firmeds arm.

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in 1966 Julius Schwartz, a coulde editor previous revising the concept of the superhero with nis for shortened in to



-38-



effort to arrest flagging sales of Batman and Detective comics. Bob Kane was no longer in charge of the overall finished artwork, and together with artist Carmine Infantion, Schwartz initiated Batman's new look bringing Batman back to Gotham, they streamlined the Batmobile, put an eleavator in the Batcave to replace the old winding staircase and most significantly enclosed the black ;bat symbol on Batman's chest in an elongated yellow moon shape. (the huge Coca-Cola Corporation, in realising that the very ubiquity of their product and the old Coca-Cola disc-shaped logo were beginning to make their product, if not invisible, then at least an all too familiar part of the American landscape, would use a similiar device, the so-called 'white dynamic contour curve' in 1970, in an equally sucessful effort to bring about renewed awareness of their product). (3.7) Schwartz's yellow moon (Fig3.8) gave renewed prominance to the black 'Bat' symbol, the relevance of which had become somewhat lost over the years, as the batman had developed from his dark knight beginnings into the two-dimensional smiling superhero cliche that was to cause the genre so much embarressment in the more enlightened years to come.

Such was the extent of this success, that it led directly to the development of the cult TV show <u>'The adventures of Batman</u> which appeared for the first time on ABC-TV in 1966. As already stated at the beginning of this chapter, hollywood'svision of Batman was, as worked out by executive producer, William Dozier, camp, hilariously earnest and so bad as to be brilliant. The plan worked. Lofty publica;tions such as <u>Life magazine</u> featured Adam West on their covers, dressed in his ridiculous ill-fitting Batman outfit and while the show was successful the comic books reflected the networks influence by turning Batman into a camp, lighthearted figure (Fig 3.9).

With the demise of the T.V. Show in 1969 a return to basics was called for. The character of Batman had by now been through just about as many different incarnations as seemed possible at the time. Any further changes in direction, without the necessary degree of thought and

consideration, would result in an irrevocable loss of character identity.

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FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER THREE

- 1. HANSOM, Dick, 1989, p.33
- 2. DANIELS, Les, 1971, p.12
- 3. COTTA VAS, Mark, 1989, p.53
- 4. Ibid., p.13
- 5. STALLONE, 19-
- 6. COTTA VAS, Mark, 1989, p.35
- 7. ROVIN, Jeff, 1985, p.-
- 8. FEIFFER, Jules, 1965, p.48
- 9. HORN, Maurice, 1976, p.-
- 10. WERTHAM, Frederic M.D., 1954, p.-
- 11. HORN, Maurice, 1976, p.749
- 12. COTTA WAZ, Mark, 1989, p.60
- 13. Ibid., p.63
- 14. Ibid., p.65
- 15. BAYLEY, Stephen, 1986, p.

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CHAPTER 4: THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

In 1986 a new Batman story appeared written and drawn by a ;young man by the name of Frank Miller. Originally put out in a series of four books/chapters, the story was quickly made available in a duluxe version comprising all four chapters bound together and printed on good quality paper with an introduction by much-respected comics writer, Alan Moore. This 'prestige format', as it is known in America, helped Miller's Batman achieve a level of critical attention ordinarily reserved for more prominent forms of popular culture such as rock music or cinema.

It was not the lush 'graphic novel' presentation that caused the stir however, but the perceived damage that Mr. Miller had done to the myth that had been - THE BATMAN. Actually, critics were divided in their opinion of <u>the dark knight returns</u>, Stephen King referring to it as 'probably the finest piece of comic art ever to be published in a popular edition'. Whatever one's opinion, Miller's vision of Batman succeeded in peeling away many of the layers of superhero silliness that had been accumulated by the genre over the years; more specifically it marked a return for the batman to his dark knight origins. Before any further comment on Miller's Batperson however, mention should be made of the events which led to such a landmark development in the concept of superheroics.

As early as 1961, Stan Lee, editor of Marvel comics had - with the help of artist, Jack Kirby - come up with his 'Hero with a problem' concept, in an effort to pump some life into the genre and escape some of its accumulated trappings. His character, The Hulk, based in part on Mary Shelley's '<u>Frankenstein's monster</u>' <u>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</u> and <u>Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde</u> while apearing evil, inevitably felt frightened and misunderstood, while Spiderman couldn't mend his own costume and often had girl-problems.

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The marvel world of superheroes was still however, a world in which any

CHAPTER AT THE DARK KATCHY RETURNS

In 1966 a new Barman story nopeared written and the name of Frank Hiller. Originally but and a books/abapters, the story was patrokly made avail comprising all four chapters bound together and paper with an introduction by much-respected com This 'prestige forest', as if is known in imerica achieve a lovel of critical attention ordinarily pressing of popular culture auch as cock

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the market would be superiorses was still hove

sense of reality could be conveniently suspended in the name of Action and Excitement. In times of need, frail and weak Dr. Blake would pound his magical walking stick on the ground, converting it instantly into an 'uru' hammer and himself into 'Thor' legendary Norse God of Thunder (Fig 4.1). These early Marvel characters were drawn by Jack Kirby whose epic style, while almost definitive in its rendering of superheroics, essentially disguised any sense of humanity Lee may have been attempting to write into his characters.

By 1969, with the demise of the Batman T.V. Show, the concept of the superhero had been twisted into something of a joke. Over 30 million viewers watched the original show each week from 1966 to 1969. A far greater audience than any comic book character could ever hope to demand. The success of the show ensured that Batman, in the eyes of the public, epitomized more than any other, the essential silliness of the comic book hero' it became apparent to the editors at D.C. that a major reappraisal of the character was necessary. Writer Denny O'Neill, artist Neal Adams and Julius Schwartz decided they could do no better than go back to the basics - 'Figure out what really constitutes this character.' in a major move, (Batman 217, Dec. 1969) Robin who was now seen as a good looking young man with a strong jawline all of his own, was sent off to Hudson university; Batman sealed up the old batcave under Wayne Manor, moving the entire operation to the heart of Gotham city. An anandoned subway station conviently located under the Wayne Foundation building

Oh-h. .no, Master Bruce! H-how will-er-we function as the crimefighers of old?

By becoming new-streamlining the operation.. By discarding the paraphernalia of hte past and functioning with the clothes on our backs ..the wits in our heads!





Jack Kirby, "Thor." [©] Marvel Comics Group.



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By 169, which the demiser if the deminicies of a surech to had een twicter into some thing of a viered at an the demiser twice into some thing of a dreater at the demiser of and and that of and the site deminicipant of the some and ther, the essential at solicative a solution and other, the essential at hero' if secore posterit to the editors at 0.0 define her her some control to the editors at 0.0 than do back to the control to the editors at 0.0 than do back to the control to the editors at 0.0 define her her solution and the solution at the active her her to back the control to the editors at 0.0 than do back to the control to the editors at 0.0 define her her her solution at a second of the solution and the solution at a second of the solution at the to back of the editors at 10.0 define her her the control to back at the solution of the solution at the solution of the editors at 10.0 define her her the solution at the solution of the active her her the solution of the editors at the control the solution at the solution of the solution of the control the solution of the editor of the control the total at the solution of the solution of the control the solution of the solution of the solution of the control the solution of the solution of the solution of the control the solution of the solution of the solution of the control the solution of the control the solution of the solution

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Even Batman's alter-ego Bruce Wayne is given a rebirth, changing from the idle-rich playboy to a wealthy and powerful, politically ambitious young man.

While Adams and O'Neil were attempting to bring some sense of relevance for the superhero genre - they went on to write a story for D.C. in which The Green Arrow's sullen young Assistant Speedy was depicted as a heroin addict - changes no less fundamental were taking place outside the mainstream industry itself.

Dr. Frederic Wertham's Book, <u>Seduction of the innocent</u> and the consequent establishment of the Comics Code Authority invariably sent many writers and artists underground. Historically beginning with Jack Jaxon's <u>God Nose</u> in 1963, the underground 'Comix' writers concerned themselves with tales of free love, perverse sex and in case of Gilbert Shelton's <u>The Fabulour Forry Freak Brothers</u>, the relentless persuit of illicit narcotic substances. Some writers such as Shelton and Robert Crumb (Fig 4.2 and 4.3) survived the summer of love to be absorbed into the (fringes of the) mainstream. A larger percentage of them, considering themselves ideal and individualistic of mind, dropped out through lack of self-discipline.

Denis Kitchen (an underground artisit with no such self-destructive idealogies) finding it difficult to deal with the flighty, often incompetent San-Fransisco-based underground publishers founded his own Kitchen-Sink Enterprises Inc. in 1970. Other like minded artists began producing their own comics and soon an independent network of comics was established, providing an alternative to the monopoly of the two giants and their ubiquitous superhero. With this ever-expanding range of comics, genres and titles and the more selective demands of the new communications-era comic-buying public, specialist comic shops or direct sales outlest such as Forbidden Planet began sprouting up all over Britain and America. The final nail in the coffin for D.C.'s and

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Even Bat an's aller and Druce Novne is given a ra idle-rich playboy to a wealthy and powerful, poli

While Addres and U well were attend ind to brind a for the supernero gents - they wint in to write a fine breen Artok's suffer your Assistant Scenty W addit to changes no best broam ntal ware thing as histrear industry itself.

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Marvel's monopoly came in 1981, when Jack Kirby, legendary creator of Captain America and The Fantastic Four took his leatest creation, <u>Captain Victory</u> to the independent Pacific comics. Disillusioned with the industries continued retention of all copyrights ad trademarks, Kirby's new contract stipulated that he retain all rights to his character of Captain Victory - whether original artwork or product merchandising. The first creator-owned superhero was born.

Which leads us invariably to Frank Miller. The main problem facing Mr. Miller was the same problem that would face any writer given the task of writing a new Batman story. For whatever reasons - good management, luck or sheer cult of personality - Batman is, with the exception of Superman, the only superhero character to have been continually produced since the industry was first started by Siegal and Shuster in 1938. He is a character 'whose every trivial and incidental detail is graven in stone on the hearts and minds of the comic fans that make up his audience' To alter any one of these details in any major ways to effectively wipe out that history.

O.K. So don't wipe it out. Rearrange it a little. Rearrange it a lot. Go back to the basics. Start again.

Frank Miller's Batman is split up into four books. In book one, <u>The</u> <u>Dark Knight Returns</u> we are introduced to Frank Miller's vision of Batman and his world.

Very first page. Millionaire Bruce Wayne is in the lead in the Neuman Elimination Race. 'The (computer) readings stop making sense. I switch to manual ... I'm in charge now and I like it'. Still the same idle-rich thrill-seeking Bruce, the perfect public persona of Batman, krelentless vigilante and defender of the oppressed. The front end of the car lurches, crashes, rolling over the finish line in a ball of flames. Bruce Wayne says an oft repeated line to himself - 'This would be a good death' - but he decides not good enough and bails out, Marvel's accessely case in 1991, when Jack Kirov, Captain America and the Fontastic Four fock his <u>Captain Victory</u> to the inducedent Paulic cast the industries continued intention of all central Kirby's new contract scinolated that he retain n character of Captain Victory - whether original i americancising. The first creator-area scorpho

Which leads is invariably to Frink Miller. The is will be was the name problem that wolk there south will use a new Sackan slopy. For chatever reacons or sheer cult of personality - Batian is, with the the only superbard character to have been continuindustry was first started by Siene and Shud er character 'whose every trivial and incidental daon the hearts on anals of the conic fame that ways alter any one of these details in any say of ways that history.

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It is made clear immediately that this particular Bruce Wayne has something of a deathwish. Two pages later it is made clear why. Batman has been retired for ten years (reason not given) and as a result Wayne feels he has no real reason to live. "I walk the streets of this city I'm learning to hate, the city that's given up, like the whole world seems to have.' Gotham itself is no longer depicted as the urban adventure playground it was in the 1940's with the giant advertising props such as typewriters, tea-cups and hockeysticks whih were a particular trademark of writer Bill Finger. Miller's Gotham, as well as being peopled by tortured souls such as Bruce Wayne, is overrun by a gang of teenage anarchists who go by the name of the 'Mutants'. It is while watching 'The Mark of Zorro' on television - cited here as the film Wayne had seen with his parents on the night of their murder - that Bruce Wayne finally surrenders to his need for te existance of Batman in his life

> The time has come You know it in your soul, For I am your soul ... you cannot escape me ...

There is too much in Frank Millers <u>Dark Knight Returns</u> to analyse in any great detail here.

I willlook specifically then at some scenes which include Miller's depiction of Superman in an attempt to illustrate his revisionist concept of the superhero.

The very first visual accutualisation of Clark Kent comes on page 14 of the third book, chapter entitled <u>Hunt The Dark Knight</u>. Kent is shown standing with one foot on a stone, chest out, chin up, overlooking a radiant vista of fauna and flora. Bruce Wayne, who is also present clearly regards Kent;s smug, god-like demeanour with disdain - 'There's

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It is made clear immediately that this particular complians of a contraction to one later it is fatured has been relified for ten yeurs (reason not "ayone feels he has no real reason to live. "I w "syme feels he has no real reason to live. "I w seems to have.' Cottarn it will is no langer depic seems to have.' Cottarn it will is no langer depic edventure playground it was in the 1940's with th particular tradework of writer all finger. Mu being peopled by toctured could such an Bruce Wa at the had seen with his parents on the new of the had seen with his parents on the new of the rei finally surrendors to his need for te existence finally surrendors to his need for te existence

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the very first visual scribulishton of fints the third book, shorter emilied heat ine first standing with one foot on a stone, chast out, c redient vista of fama and flora. Store Name clearly requests Kentra amo, god-like desernour just the sun and the sky and him, like he's the only reason it's all there'. Kent is given a physique resembling that of a god-like athlete; square jaw, unfeasibly broad shoulders and a height, it would seem, of some seven feet. Bruce Wayne in comparison, is shown here with the shrunken face of a sick, older man (politician Brian Lenihen's face after coming out of hospital springs to mind). The 'Real' superhero meets the living cliche, perhaps?

Superman, who had previously been asked by a viciously one-sided caricature of Ronald Reagan to have a word with Bruce Wayne, acknowledges the fact that the world has no room for superheroes. At least not visible ones. He gives the authorities his obedience and his invisibility. He stays out of the limelight and in return he is given a licence and allowed to live. But not Batman:

When the noise started from the parents' groups and the sub-committee called us in for questioning .. You were the one who laughed. That scary laugh of yours. "Sure we're crim; inals," you said. "We've always been criminals". "We have to be criminals".

It is clear here that Miller is on the side of Batman. There is a difference in his mind between the lack of real motivation present in cliched superheroes such as Superman and intensely personal crusade of the Batman. Miller has been quoted as saying:

Batman has to be a force that in certain ways is beyond good and evil .. our society is committing suicide bylack of a force like that.

As mentioned previously, this vigilante-speak was regarded in some quarters as meritorious of a danger-to-society classification. <u>The</u> Dark Knight Returns is, for all it's dangerous talk, still only a comic book. It makes the return for Batman to his original ideals as created by Bob Kane in a time when the world was ready to acknowledge it's need for a force 'beyone good and evil'.

In the final showdown between Superman and Batman - they have become enemies due to differences in their handling of a world that no longer considers itself in need of a superheroic force - Batman accuses Superman of being a patriotic, empty yes-man;

You've always known just what to say ... Yes .. To anyone with a badge ... or a flag ...

implying that Bruce Wayne won't necessarily say yes to anyone bearing the appropriate symbols of authority. He has become a fully-fledged revolutionary. At the end of the book he gathers the 'sons of Batman', together with Carrie Kelly, a thirteen year old girl who has taken the role of Robin, to plan his revolution. (During the course of the story, 'The Sons Of The Batman' are born out of the remains of the mutant gang. They bring to their war against crime the same psychopathic dedication they had previously reserved for committing them).

It begins here .. an army .. to bring sense to a world plagued by worse than thieves and murderers ..

You might wonder what this Batman would progress to if Miller was tempted to write a sequel; the dictatorship of a small country perhaps? Like I said, it's only a comic book. Miller's Batman is possible insane and quite definately obsessed but this is the way the character was orginally conceived and as such marks a welcome return to form.

I can't leave <u>The Dark Knight Returns</u> without mentioning some of the technical devices employed by Miller to produce this landmark vision of

tost the ser and the set and him, like re's the i there'. Sent is given a physical reaction is aquate par, unicrately other securizers and ener unes are feet. Brace by an in annarisan, is arranged face of a sick, older men (a lifterian B craing cut of hespital appines to mind). The living clicke, peranget

Superman, and had measures a second wood by a win contrasture of Ronald Honora to have a wort with the fact that the world has as rook for americal visible ones. He divertize advantice his obs invisibility. He stars out of the invitible wi liventbility. He stars out of the invitible wi

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It is diest here that Miller is on the side of difference in his and between the ince of teal cliched superherces such as Superann and intens the Detaun. Miller has been queted as saying

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As mentioned previously, this vigiliant acted quarters of meritarians of a conget-to-seciety Date inight Seturns in, for all it's desperau Batman. Varley uses the latest print technology to produce a dark-earth feel to Batman's world; a certain step up from the lurid four colour printing taht was previously regarded as obligatory; burnt sienna, raw umber and suchcolours are used to great effect. Particularly in the scenes at the city dump where Batman finally defeats the Mutant gang leader.

The constant newsflashes which run throug the four books off a grimly humourous view of a society gone mad;

The American hostages guild has declared a general strike, in response to treatment of their members in the recent Libyan incident.

The media is also used as something through which Miller airs some pro and anti vigilante arguements in an effort to provide the story with a more balanced point of view:-

The <u>council of mothers</u> today petitioned the Major to issue a warrent for the immediate arrest of the Batman, citing him as a harmful influence on the children of Gotham.

Another petition on the M:ayor's desk came from the <u>Victims Rights TAsk Force</u> demanding an official sanction of the vigilante's activities.

The revolutionary vigilante wims through in the end however, and it is with this reading of Batman that Miller leaves us.

book. It makes the return for Britan to his or by Gob Kane in a time when the envio war ready t far a force "beyone good and evilt.

In the final shouldwap between Superman and Batan anentes due to differences in their manifold of considers itself in need of a supermetor force of being a patriotic, empty yes-page

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FRANK MILLER'S APOCOLYPTIC VISION OF BATTMAN. THE SONS OF THE BATMAN, THE MUTANTS AND CARRIE KELLY (THE NEW ROBIN) ARE WITH HIM MILLER, FRANK, 1986, P. 30 (BOOK FOUR) -53-

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

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-55-

CONCLUSION

You have just been through the history of the super hero, as personified to to speak, by the character of the Batman. Exciting stuff, wasn't it.

I used the Batman for a number of reasons. First of all, as already mentioned elsewhere in this weighty tone, the Batman is, apart from Superman, the only character whose career has spanned the history of the industry continuously since it was started in 1939. His development mirrors that of the entire superhero genre.

More specifically I choose Batman because I like Frank Miller's reading of the character. It is his <u>Dark Knight Returns</u> that more or less started me buying comics. A lot of noise was made back in 1986 in comic reading circles when the book first came out, apparently. After doing my research for this project, I find it odd that the original Batman, as conceived by Bob Kane, resembles quite closely the character in Miller's books. It was due solely to commercial concerns that the character was twisted so badly out of shape.

For all the talk about Frank Miller's Batman however, there is one very basic factor that gives his Batman its comparitive sense of reality. It's not the pensive dialogue and the consequential lack of exclamation marks!!!! Nor is it the film noir look achieved by a combination of Miller's pencils, Klaus Janson's solid, blocky inks and the subtle palette of Lynn Varley, though these factors undoubtedly help.

The basic element that had been missing in the superheroe's world until the 1980's was simply one of time:

...the characters remain in the perpetual limbo of their -to-late twenties and the presence of death in their world is at best a temporary and reversible phenomenon.

Miller's Batman is old. He has been retired for ten years when the story begins. In the end he fakes his own death with the help of some chemicals:

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a lot to decade it old. To may been seen as for the rebrindent

a clumsy enough comic book cop-out but we'll let Mr. Miller away with it; he tells a good story.

People inside the industry itself have since cited this work as being a major step in the right deirection for the future development of superheroes in general; the only direction if they are to regain some of the revelence they lost after the golden age of comics and more specifically, Dr. Frederic Wertham's <u>Seduction of the innocent</u> in 1954.

This will presumably not be a problem for Frank Miller. He is continually working on a screenplay for the up-and-coming <u>Robo Cop two</u> film. He has finished with Batman. Time has come to the Batman.

Footnote: Moore, Alan, 1986, p.4.

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