THE WORLD TODAY

IS A DANGEROUS PLACE, FILLED WITH VIOLENCE

INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE SCIVALLY CONDUCTED BY Michał CHUDOlŃSKI

MICHAŁ CHUDOlŃSKI: WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF BATMAN’S PHYSICAL APPEARANCE? IT IS SAID THAT IN THE BEGINNING HE WAS SUPPOSED TO WEAR A RED SUIT AND HAVE BLONDE HAIR...

Bruce Scivally: When Bob Kane first created Batman, his original idea was for a character in a red costume with a little black domino mask, the kind that Robin eventually wore. He went to his collaborator, Bill Finger, who suggested that instead Batman should have an outfit that resembled a bat, and that the colors should be black and gray. In comic books, the color blue was used for highlights on black, so it appeared that Batman’s costume might have been blue, as it would eventually become.

M.C.H.: WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT BILL FINGER? HOW DID HE CONTRIBUTE TO THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF BATMAN?

B.S.: Bill Finger was a former shoe salesman whom artist Bob Kane took on as a partner because Kane, though a passable artist, was not good at coming up with stories. Kane and Finger were collaborators on comic strips like “Clip Carson” for National Comics before they jointly created Batman. However, Kane was a much more savvy businessman than Finger, and Kane had it put into his contract with National that he would always be credited as the creator of Batman, essentially shutting Finger out. Over the next couple of decades, Finger – and other writers – came up with stories for Batman comic books, and a number of uncredited artists – called “ghosts” – drew the adventures, but Bob Kane got all the credit and all the glory.

M.C.H.: IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT DO THESE EVENTS IN BILL FINGER’S LIFE TELL US ABOUT AMERICAN SHOW BUSINESS? WHAT LESSON CAN WE DRAW FROM HIS EXPERIENCE?

B.S.: The huge success of the campy, comedic 1966–68 Batman TV show created an image in the public consciousness of Batman as a comedic character. Comic book enthusiast Michael Uslan was obsessed with bringing a version of Batman to the movies that would be more like the very first Batman comics, or like the comic book stories of the 1970s, in which Batman was a dark vigilante. Once he obtained the rights to Batman in 1979, he thought he would be able to land a movie deal immediately, but the studios couldn’t see any commercial potential in producing a movie based on a goofy 1960s TV series. Uslan kept fighting for his vision of Batman, commissioning scripts and approaching directors. It was only after he met with superstar producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters and partnered with them that he was able to get a movie produced that fulfilled...
his vision – ten years after he had first acquired the rights.

M.C.H.: **WHAT ROLE DID THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS PLAY IN TIM BURTON’S SUCCESS? WHERE ELSE DO WE SEE ITS INFLUENCE?**

B.S.: The graphic novel *The Dark Knight Returns*, from writer/artist Frank Miller, reinvented Batman in the 1980s, presenting a very dark and grim tale of a 50-ish Bruce Wayne coming out of retirement to fight crime. The incredible success of the comic books and paperback reprints helped pave the way for a darker, grittier interpretation of Batman in the movies.

M.C.H.: **WHAT CAUSED BATMAN RETURNS TO PERFORM SO POORLY?**

B.S.: The 1989 Batman movie was a masterpiece of marketing, becoming one of the highest-grossing films of all time. The sequel, released three years later, spent more time on the Penguin and Catwoman than on Batman, who seemed like a guest star in his own movie. One of the tie-in marketing partners was McDonald’s, who promoted the film through Happy Meals. However, when little kids who saw Batman on their Happy Meals then went to see the movie, they were given nightmares by the Penguin with black bile drooling from his mouth. Parents complained to McDonalds and Warner Bros., so the studio decided that for the third Batman film, they should get a director who would deliver a more kid-friendly film, and so they chose Joel Schumacher.


B.S.: Schumacher is often derided by Batman fans who sum up his two films with four words: “nipples on the Batsuit.” As I mentioned, Schumacher was under a directive from Warner Bros. to make the Batman films more kid-friendly and win back some of the corporate sponsors who bailed after Batman Returns. He succeeded in those tasks, but his second film, *Batman & Robin*, seemed more like a throwback to the 1960s TV series, and alienated many hard-core fans. Nonetheless, it was still financially successful. After critics slammed the film, Schumacher planned to make a much lower-budgeted, grittier Batman film, but the studio pulled the plug and began looking for another director to revitalize the franchise.

M.C.H.: **WHAT MADE NOLAN MOVIES A WORLDWIDE PHENOMENON? AREN’T THEY A LITTLE OVERRATED? THEIR PLOTS SEEM TO HAVE A LOT OF ILLLOGICAL TURNING POINTS, ESPECIALLY THE DARK KNIGHT RISES...**

B.S.: Christopher Nolan’s Batman trilogy was built on the premise of taking the character out of the fantasy worlds of Tim Burton and Joel Schumacher and thinking about how Batman would exist in the real world. At the same time, Nolan was heavily influenced by the James Bond films, especially *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, so the plots had some rather fantastic gadgery and action sequences. *The Dark Knight*, because of the death of Heath Ledger, became a cultural phenomenon, quickly becoming the second...
The highest-grossing film of all time. Consequently, expectations for the sequel were very high. Yet when the opening weekend of The Dark Knight Rises was marred by a massacre in a Colorado movie theatre, many people were put off from going to the film. Even so, it was still a blockbuster hit worldwide.

M.C.H.: What reviews did The Dark Knight Rises get from the audience and critics? What is your take on it?

B.S.: Critics mostly gave The Dark Knight Rises good reviews, but the film proved controversial among hard-core Batman fans. As with Batman Returns, it seemed to spend more time focusing on the villains than on Batman, and the plot seemed to be overburdened with twists that didn’t stand up to close scrutiny. For myself, I enjoyed the film, but felt it was a bit bloated. It certainly didn’t have the narrative gusto of The Dark Knight, though I think it is a better film than Batman Begins.

M.C.H.: Do you think Nolan’s legacy is going to have a substantial influence on other superhero movies? Or maybe it already did?

B.S.: The astounding success of The Dark Knight had a tremendous impact on comic book movies, which were once seen strictly as kiddie fare, but are now thought to be dark-themed adult entertainment. Even Superman, who represents goodness and hope, Batman is a character who represent revenge and our darker impulses. In the introduction to my book, I say that while Superman represents who we aspire to be, Batman represents who we are.

M.C.H.: What fascinates you most about this particular story? Are you interested in certain heroes, or is it simply all about the atmosphere?

B.S.: I was about 6 years old when the Batman TV show premiered. Prior to that, I was a big fan of The Lone Ranger and Superman, whose 1950s TV shows were then in re-runs. Around that same time, I began watching the old Universal Pictures horror films on television. So, by the time I was a teenager, I was already interested in pop-culture movies and TV and comic books. I also became a fan of James Bond films. I decided to try for a career in movies, and went...
to the University of Southern California after graduating from high school. I remained in Los Angeles, where I eventually became a co-producer of the James Bond special edition DVDs, creating all the behind-the-scenes documentaries. This led to John Cork and I writing the book *James Bond: The Legacy*. I enjoyed writing that book, so I decided to write a book about another childhood hero, and wrote *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*. While promoting that book, everyone kept asking when I was going to write a book about Batman, so I wrote “Billion Dollar Batman.”

**M.C.H.: Has Batman Influenced Your Life?**

– After spending three years researching and writing the book, I then went to various comic book conventions to promote it. In the course of researching the book, and appearing at the cons, I made a lot of new friends who are Batman enthusiasts.

**M.C.H.: Do You Think Batman Can Inspire People to Improve Their Lives, Help Others and Change the World for the Better?**

B.S.: To be honest, I would say that Superman and the Lone Ranger were more inspiring to me than Batman, since those characters were more “goody-two-shoes” types, and following their example taught me to be honest and upbeat. If I were influenced by Batman (or at least the current depictions of Batman), I’d be depressed and brooding and meting out punishment on anyone I felt had wronged me.

**M.C.H.: Are You of the Opinion That Batman Makes an Essential Part of Our Cultural Mythology?**

B.S.: The world today is a dangerous place, filled with violence. As a result, ordinary citizens often feel powerless. This, I believe, is what makes the superheroes so popular; we wish that, like Batman or Superman or Iron Man, we could be courageous and powerful enough to bring order to the chaos of the world.