

# Deconstructing Batman

By: Vincent Plouffe

The Bat-Man first appeared in Detective Comics issue #27, “The Case of the Chemical Syndicate”, in May 1939, created by then 18-year old Bob Kane. Inspiration for the character was varied, including: the winged flying machine known as the ‘ornithopter’ designed and drawn by Leonardo Da Vinci, *The Mask of Zorro* silent film, and a mystery novel written by Mary Roberts Rinehart called *The Bat Whispers*.<sup>1</sup> Widely popular, the character has since appeared in hundreds of comic books, a large number of graphic novels, and several serials. The best remembered of these is the television series which aired from 1966 to 1969. It was produced for 3 seasons, totaling 120 episodes, and a feature film was also released in 1966, several months after the television show’s pilot was aired. It featured all of the same actors from the series.<sup>2</sup> Originally intended as a comical character, Batman himself often played a somewhat stiff and subdued role in his own stories, overshadowed by the outrageous villains which he faced. This changed with the creation of a graphic novel entitled: *Batman: the Dark Knight Returns*. As a result, the Batman character became a tragic anti-hero, inhabiting a nocturnal realm of gothic architecture, and treading the dangerous line between hero and vigilante. Suddenly, Batman faced the threat of becoming a villain himself.

Based on this revised character concept, the movie *Batman* was made. Premiering in June, 1989, the film had a budget of \$27 million.<sup>3</sup> By the end of its opening weekend, it had earned over \$40 million, and would go on to gross over \$250 million in the first year.<sup>4</sup> It was directed by Tim Burton, who had earned a reputation as a filmmaker specializing in dark and sinister imagery after working on such films as *Beetlejuice*, and *Edward Scissorhands*. The movie itself was filmed at Pinewood Studios, outside of London, whose lot encompasses over 95 acres. Production took over the majority of 18 sound stages, and involved the construction of a 400m long outdoor street set. It was the biggest set made for a movie shot in Europe since the filming of *Cleopatra* in 1960, and the whole set was built in five months. In regards to the scale of the production, Tim Burton offered the following response: “The characters in the movie are so extreme that I felt that it was important to set them in an arena that was specifically designed for them... The thought of shooting *Batman* in some New York location just did not feel right to me.”<sup>5</sup>

Architecturally, Gotham City was portrayed by production designer Anton Furst as a hybrid creation of multiple styles, including: early brownstone buildings, modern brutalism, gothic architecture, and Italian

<sup>1</sup> *Batman: Forever*, DVD Production Notes

<sup>2</sup> <http://batmanytb.150m.com>

<sup>3</sup> *Film Architecture: Set Design from Metropolis to Blade Runner*, pg.162

<sup>4</sup> <http://batmanytb.150m.com>

<sup>5</sup> *Film Architecture: Set Design from Metropolis to Blade Runner*, pg.162



*Batman* - Gotham City Skyline



*Batman* - Gotham City, street shot



*Batman* - Gotham City, street shot



*Batman* - Gotham City, street shot



*Batman* - Gotham City Hall

futurism, with a few hints of fascist design and art deco reserved for the somewhat low-key City Hall, Grissom Tower, Flugelheim Museum and Vicky Vale's apartment. Though he turned to the 1940s imagery provided by the original comic for inspiration, Furst's primary goal was to create a Gotham that was both believable and timeless. Special effects relied almost exclusively on models and miniatures, with a sporadic inlay of cell animation.<sup>6</sup>

The Batcave, Batman's lair and secret hide-out located in a series of caves beneath Wayne Manor, was built in studio D at Pinewood Studios and covered an area of over 18,150 square feet.<sup>7</sup> In this particular film, only a few shots of the Batcave were used, revealing little more than a staircase, a work console with a wide array of electronics and televisions, and a heavy duty crio-closet for the Batsuit. The most interesting shot of the set involves the parking spot for the batmobile, which was a flat circular space located on a cylinder of either rock or concrete, which appeared to be floating in a vast underground crevice. Furst "...transformed it into the foundation of Gotham City, a bit like *Phantom of the Opera*. There's something amorphous and boring to me about cave structure, but if you start having piles of the bottoms of skyscrapers coming through this great chasm in the ground, you can end up with an extraordinarily interesting set."<sup>8</sup>

The Axis Chemical factory, which is shown several times throughout the film, used internal shots taken at a 75,000 square foot abandoned power station near Pinewood Studios, as well as a miniature model copy for distant exterior shots.<sup>9</sup> Some of the control stations in the factory are extremely reminiscent of the factories and worker levels in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, with their gigantic panels full of obscure knobs, buttons, levers and dials. Otherwise relatively typical, as far as industrial buildings go, the factory can also be viewed as the point of origin for what would become a growing obsession, especially in the later Batman movies, with the use of bright and vivid colours contrasted against a dark and dingy background. Here it is provided by the bubbling vats and sprays of vibrant green acid, which ultimately results in Jack Napier's transformation into the Joker – who is himself a colourful contrast to the rest of the dark imagery in the film.

The high-rise building in which Boss Grissom's penthouse is located is a blend of architectural styles, with a hint of industrial motifs. Its interiors are almost entirely decorated with 1940s art deco, though that changes dramatically when the Joker moves in and transforms it into his new abode. It then becomes as chaotic as its new occupant, only providing any further sense of propriety when its owner attempts to do the same. Otherwise, it looks more like a slum apartment, littered with trash and discarded photographs and clippings.



*Batman* - Flugelheim Museum, art deco exterior



*Batman* - Vicky Vale's apartment



*Batman* - The Batcave



*Batman* - Axis Chemical Factory, exterior model



*Batman* - Carl Grissom's Penthouse

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, <http://batmanytb.150m.com>

<sup>8</sup> <http://batmanytb.150m.com>

<sup>9</sup> <http://batmanytb.150m.com>

Two famous historical buildings were used to represent Wayne Manor: Hartfield House (built 1607-12) and Knebworth Manor (c.1492). Both are located in Great Britain.<sup>10</sup> The interior is deliberately manicured to keep up appearances for Bruce Wayne's daytime persona as a jet-setting, reclusive and roguish bachelor, along with his able-bodied manservant: Alfred. This representative duality is tastefully composed, in subdued fashion, contrasting the Batcave and Wayne Manor, but allowing both to assume a sort of 'natural' and believable quality. Bruce Wayne himself is given that extra touch of human character, appearing more comfortable in the surroundings of Alfred's quarters than in the somber dining rooms of his own residence.

The film's climax features Gotham Cathedral as the setting for the final showdown between Batman and the Joker, which is a deliberate reference back to the cathedral featured in the final scene of Lang's *Metropolis*. One of the few clean-cut and entirely gothic pieces of architecture in the entire film, complete with gargoyles, the ancient appearance and symbolism of the cathedral lends extra weight to the ever-present theme of conflict between good and evil which is so much a part of the Batman mythos. Vastly out of scale, the cathedral towers far above the tallest of the overgrown skyscrapers in the city, again singling out its importance. Most appropriately, the building is abandoned, as Furst believed that "it really had to be a forbidding looking thing... as if it had been closed down because God had left the city years ago."<sup>11</sup>

*Batman: Returns* was released in 1992, again under the direction of Tim Burton. Though not as financially successful as the first film, it still earned an impressive \$162 million (unadjusted for inflation).<sup>12</sup> The plot, while still highly (some might say 'overly') complex, was beginning to break down with an overabundance of villains, which threatened to reduce the main character to the status of supporting cast. The character known as 'the Penguin' (Danny DeVito) had made his first appearance in 1941, based on inspiration provided a penguin logo on a cigarette pack.<sup>13</sup> Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer) had been introduced in the mid-1940s, and was intended as a combination of Jean Harlow and Hedy Lamarr (whom creator Bob Kane happened to be seeing at the time).<sup>14</sup> Both received dramatic re-writes as to their origins, and were taken several steps away from any earlier portrayals by the script. Max Shreck was a completely original character, created specifically for the film. He is a bizarre cross between Willy Wonka and Henry Ford, portrayed with an Albert Einstein hairdo. Ironically, the writers described his concept as that of the potential and truly terrifying evil of the seemingly consummate and respectable businessman



*Batman* - Wayne Manor, Exterior



*Batman* - Gotham Cathedral



*Batman* - Gotham Cathedral



*Batman: Returns* - Gotham City



*Batman: Returns* - Gotham Plaza

<sup>10</sup> *Film Architecture: Set Design from Metropolis to Blade Runner*, pg.164

<sup>11</sup> *Film Architecture: Set Design from Metropolis to Blade Runner*, pg.164

<sup>12</sup> <http://batmanytb.150m.com>

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

gone bad – perhaps the most sinister of foes, as they lurk unsuspected amongst the rest of us.

This sequel seems to take on an even darker persona than its predecessor, introducing a great deal of oppressive imagery, right down to references like the “czars of fashion”, Shreck’s invoking of the Reichstag fire, and the Penguin’s villains as the Red Triangle gang – which might be viewed as a reference to the red triangles used by the Germans in world war two to mark political prisoners and dissenters. Shreck’s tyrannical ambitions, and the Penguin’s psychotic desires certainly seem consistent with mention of such loaded references.

The architecture of Gotham city itself changes slightly in this second film. Though the general imagery of the first movie is still present, it is being supplanted by an increasingly geometric blockishness more in keeping with Russian constructivism than the formerly dominant trends of gothic and art deco – making the city appear even more like Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* than the first film had. Giant statues, which appeared sporadically, and on a limited scale, in the first movie, now become the more prominent. They appear in numerous shots throughout the film: as enormous worker figures in front of city hall, crumbling faces in the city sewers, or even just carved into building faces, supported by pilasters and columns, etc. Some even seem to take on rather interesting appearances, such as those at the Gotham City Hall of Records, which, with their high collars and sideburns, are distinctively Elvis-like. Another such figure appearing later in the film has a much more robotic quality, similar to the children’s cartoon *Transformers*. These modern gargoyles provide the link to the gothic origins of the city’s design, which is slowly being replaced by equally dark and foreboding, yet more contemporary, styles. Ironically, the cathedral that featured at the end of the last film is shown in the background, in several of the shots set in Gotham Plaza, and again as the penguin takes flight on his helicopter-umbrella, though its interior is never again used as a set. Instead, it is replaced by the winterland cathedral that is the Penguin’s underground lair (actually just the penguin exhibit at an abandoned zoo), which includes both pointed arches and ribbed buttresses. The paneled concrete of its wall surfaces are consistent with the ‘skyscraper foundation’ imagery that was used to portray the Batcave in the first movie. The industrial character of Gotham City itself is maintained by the continued presence of heavy ironwork that appears everywhere in the film, both on the exterior and interior of buildings.

Art deco style, including a ‘Felix the Cat’ head logo, is mostly used in the Shreck Building, which is a cross between a shopping mall and office tower, though it also appears frequently elsewhere in the film as a symbol of Shreck’s corruptive influence at work. The penthouse and executive boardrooms where Shreck conducts most of his business are some of the most colourful sets in the entire film, with the possible exception of Selina Kyle’s (i.e. Catwoman) all-pink apartment. There seems to be a continuing thread of corruption in ‘high places’ throughout all of the films,



*Batman: Returns* - Statue before city hall, reminiscent of *Metropolis*



*Batman: Returns* - Penguin’s icy, gothic cathedral-like, zoo lair



*Batman: Returns* - Gotham City Hall of Records, with giant ‘Elvis’ heads



*Batman: Returns* - Shreck Building, penthouse from exterior



*Batman: Returns* - Shreck Building, penthouse interior

referring both to the habit of villains for placing their bases of operation in penthouse lofts, as well as the towers of industry. *Batman: Returns* is often considered to be the darkest of the four batman movies – especially as far as themes are concerned – though the occasional contrasts are used to good effect. The placement of the Penguin’s bare, dark and dingy attic living space, during his foray above ground, is counter-played nicely with the presence of an upbeat, bustling mayoral candidate’s office, which gets slotted in directly beneath it. Not surprisingly, a black ironwork spiral stair connects these two spaces, and is an excellent representation of the twisted bridge that exists between Oswald’s manicured public persona, and the bleak and barren emptiness that truly lies inside him.

The Batcave set was completely re-done for the new film. In its revised state, it offers a much more open atmosphere, while losing none of its subterranean appeal. Unlike the first film, however, where only select shots were available, cutting from one location to the next obscured by stone, the open concept of this new Batcave allowed the director greatly increased cinematographic versatility. The result is a much more grandiose and imposing, yet cohesive feeling to the scenes which take place there. The slender outcroppings upon which the cave facilities are precariously perched maintain the air of imminent and lingering danger, essential to the character of the place.

Wayne Manor also underwent a significant change, using a completely different house for most of the shots, as well as using a model to provide exterior shots. Some of the additional minor architectural references throughout the film include a variety of cheesy headgears worn by the masked guests during Shreck’s masquerade ball. These include: the leaning tower of Pisa, Big Ben, and one that looks like a Doric temple front. The visual effects director for the film was Michael Fink, who would later go on to work on *Mars Attacks!* and the first *X-Men* movie. Bo Welch, who had already worked with Burton on *Beetlejuice* and *Edward Scissorhands*, was asked to takeover as production designer after Anton Furst committed suicide in 1991.

When *Batman: Forever* was released in 1995, it signaled radical changes to the traditional dark vision which had been established in the last two films. For starters, Tim Burton’s involvement was relegated to the role of executive producer. Joel Schumacher, already an experienced director with extensive previous credits (including *Lost Boys*, *Flatliners*, and *Falling Down*) took over Burton’s former position. Though considered an appropriately ‘dark’ replacement for Burton, Schumacher’s vision for Gotham City, as created by the new production designer, Barbara Ling, would start the pendulum swinging back towards the campy quality of the 1960s TV series. John Dykstra also joined the production team, in charge of visual special effects. His earlier work included both the original *Star Wars* movie and the *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. The role of visual effects, in general, would come to play an increasingly important role in this movie, as well as the next. *Batman: Forever* featured over 300 visual



*Batman: Returns* - Selina Kyle’s apartment



*Batman: Returns* - Penguin’s apartment



*Batman: Returns* - Penguin’s campaign headquarters



*Batman: Returns* - The Batcave



*Batman: Returns* - Wayne Manor

effects shots, though computer generated images were primarily used for the wide city shots.<sup>15</sup>

Significant changes were made to the cast, including Val Kilmer's replacement of Michael Keaton as Batman/Bruce Wayne. Two-Face (a.k.a Harvey Dent), played by Tommy Lee Jones, originally appeared as a character in issue #66 of Detective Comics, in 1942.<sup>16</sup> The character is actually shown shortly after his appointment as Gotham's district attorney in the first Batman movie, where he is played by Billy Dee Williams. How exactly he went from being black to white remains a mystery (or a glaring oversight.) The Riddler (a.k.a. Edward Nigma), played by Jim Carrey, appeared in issue #140, in 1948.<sup>17</sup> This latest film also featured the introduction of Batman's traditional sidekick: Robin, played by Chris O'Donnell. Robin (a.k.a Dick Grayson) first appeared in issue #38 of the comics, in April 1940.<sup>18</sup> By this point, the sheer size of the cast, combined with the ever-present, and increasingly less subtle play on the theme of duality, was starting to take its toll on the quality of the film. Batman himself, as the main character, was getting lost amongst the vast number of other subplots and storylines that were being forced onto the screen. Despite grumbling dissatisfaction amongst diehard Batman fans at the lack of dark character in the film, however, the movie still went on to gross \$184 million (unadjusted for inflation).<sup>19</sup>

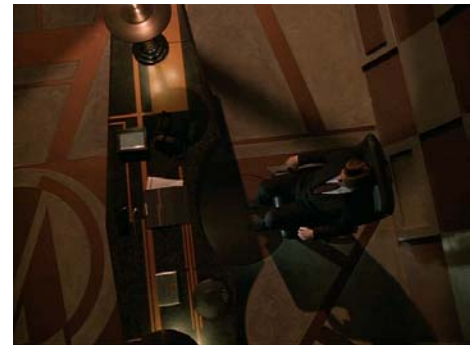
Architecturally, Gotham had undergone a dramatic transformation between the second and the third film. The result was a more datable cityscape, which could be more closely linked with the late 80s and early 90s. During the day, Gotham – which was now being portrayed on the larger scale using computer generated imagery (CGI) – retained a somewhat art deco/industrial character, though the limits of technology kept it blandly mono-coloured, in shades of tan and brown. At night, however, the city was transformed into a caricature setting of neon lights, billboards, and product logos. It was as if the electronic landscape of *Tron* and the 1950s had been mashed together, and superimposed over a city of soaring gothic spires, which could now only be seen in the vague shadows of the background. The cityscape was more reminiscent of the second level of the 2000 anime version of *Metropolis*, than the dark and brooding Gotham we were used to. Bruce Wayne's office is art deco, but has inlaid patterns that look like they might have come off of a circuit board, and the lab where Edward Nigma is first introduced features a window which is very reminiscent of the iconic 'death star' windows from the *Star Wars* films – no doubt inspired by Dykstra's involvement. Even The Riddler's brain-draining "box" looks like a 1950s blender with a lot of neon tubing and Plexiglas tacked on. The new batmobile looks like it's facing the classic



*Batman: Forever* - Neon Gotham



*Batman: Forever* - CGI Gotham



*Batman: Forever* - Bruce Wayne's Art Deco office



*Batman: Forever* - Wayne Enterprises, Death Star window

<sup>15</sup> <http://batmanytb.150m.com>

<sup>16</sup> *Batman: Forever*, DVD Production Notes

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> <http://batmanytb.150m.com>

dilemma of 1950s automobiles, layered with exceedingly oversized and useless fins and wings that flap around ridiculously during chase scenes. Glow in the dark paint, graffiti and brightly coloured scaffolding become the order of the day. Even the ever-present constructivist statues of the earlier films, which had already seen increased use in *Batman: Returns*, were once again carried forward, and exaggerated to the next level. The massive goliaths now replaced supporting columns, or even rivaled the scale of entire buildings. In one particular scene, Schumacher breaks with Burton's earlier decision, and clearly identifies Gotham City with New York by placing the Statue of Liberty out in the nearby water, where a helicopter crashes into it – shades of 9/11, anyone? The only alteration to the statue was the addition of the word "GOTHAM" in big shiny letters on the statue's crown.

Even cinematographically, the film seemed to have thrown its former integrity out the window, now zooming in on the butt-shots of the increasingly anatomically correct Batsuit. There's also the laughable scene where Dr. Chase Meridian (Nicole Kidman) uses the bat signal to lure Batman to the rooftop of the police station where she just happens to be waiting for him in a revealing negligee. How she got the keys (which Poison Ivy actually has to bother to steal from Commissioner Gordon in the next film), or ended up half-naked on a freezing rooftop past a building full of police, is anyone's guess. The whole scene might have been more believable if it didn't take place as the third scene in the movie, less than twenty minutes into the film. Even worse is the Dracula-like scene later on, where Batman sweeps onto the balcony of the scantily clad virgin – well... at least she was dressed in white.

Neo-classicism makes its first true appearance in this film, in the form of a new vision for Gotham City Hall, and the newly introduced Ritz Gotham Hotel, which does about as much good for the style as the Vittorio Emanuel III monument in Rome did, though it is probably done intentional. The Batman franchise has always made the wealthy elite appear to be either gaudy and inept, or totally corrupt, necessitating the existence of the hero. The stark white palette of these buildings contrasts sharply with the increasing use of colour elsewhere in the film. Begun with the clown-like appearance of the Joker in the first movie, the 'colourful' characters in the second film were the circus sideshow freaks, with their carnival-like accessories (including a miniature train). By *Batman: Forever*, we get a full-blown circus in town, complete with the addition of the 'Flying Graysons' whose performing outfits match the Robin sidekick suit from the 1960s TV series.

Many of the sets for parts of Gotham City, as well as the sixty-foot tall Batcave, the interior of Wayne Manor, and Two-Face's lair were all constructed inside the Longbeach Seaport Dome (a.k.a the Queen Mary Dome); a geodesic dome originally built to act as a hangar for Howard Hughes' Spruce Goose airplane. The Batboat scene leading up to the movie



*Batman: Forever* - Nygmatech, also the Riddler's island lair, sports a giant blender-like "box" brain-drain device



*Batman: Forever* - The Statue of... Gotham?



*Batman: Forever* - Gotham City Hall



*Batman: Forever* - The Ritz Gotham

climax was filmed nearby.<sup>20</sup> Beginning here, that Batman movies become increasingly dependent on sound stages for sets, rather than the use of real-life locations. The result is an even greater detachment from any sense of reality or normalcy, which the earlier films at least attempted to maintain on some level, producing an increasingly fantastic and fictional environment.

The Batcave itself undergoes yet another redesign, becoming much more of an enclosed space, and losing the imposing, teetering character of its last incarnation. Ironically, as everything else in the film is being blown up out of proportion, the Batcave does the opposite – at least until the Riddler literally blows it to pieces. One of the final locations to be introduced, which would appear again in the next film, was Arkham Asylum – where all of Batman’s captures foes get dropped off until they can conveniently escape again. A towering stone castle perched precariously on a high cliff, surrounded by ever-present storms and flashes of lightning and thunder, this gothic style miniature model is both reminiscent of earlier films, and the product of every imaginable cliché.

Whether the film was a reacting to fallout from Burton’s ‘too-dark’ approach in *Batman: Returns*, or it was a foray on the part of the new production team, the results are the same. Based on a plot with more holes than a block of Swiss cheese, generally poor acting, an unwieldy and overly large cast, and an increasingly campy, dated, and commercialized setting, it really isn’t surprising that the movie has been so thoroughly thrashed by critics and common viewers alike. Most, still remaining hopeful, were willing to brush it off as a bad egg, and look to the next installment for a return to better days. They would be disappointed.

*Batman and Robin* opened in 1997, and audiences finally spoke up for themselves. The movie had a budget of \$100 million and grossed only \$107 million (unadjusted) during its first year, and has been accurately dubbed the worst of the four films.<sup>21</sup> Rather than learning from the mistakes of the last film, it was as if returning director Joel Schumacher tried to see just how far afield he could take the Batman concept. Not surprisingly, Tim Burton had long since cut off any and all association with the film, and played no part in this last movie. Where *Batman: Forever* had too many characters to allow any of them to be fully developed, the even larger cast in *Batman and Robin* made it virtually impossible for any of them to be any more than caricatures. Take a script which has more puns and clichés than dialogue, add casting based on name and looks rather than relevant acting skills, throw in a plot which is so outrageously absurd that no one will want to suspend disbelief, and then undermine it all with a series of benign subplots which have already been worked to death in the last three films, or simply don’t work. There, in a nutshell, you have the synopsis of the film.



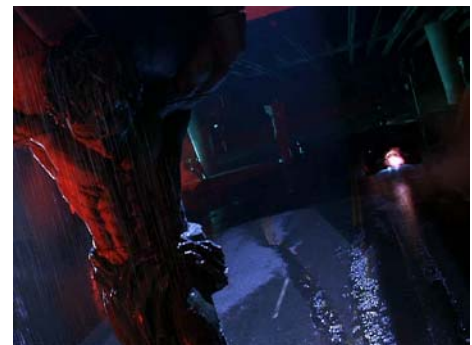
*Batman: Forever* - The Gotham Hippodrome (Circus)



*Batman: Forever* - The Batcave



*Batman: Forever* - Wayne Manor, rear



*Batman: Forever* - Infrastructure and Statuary start to blend

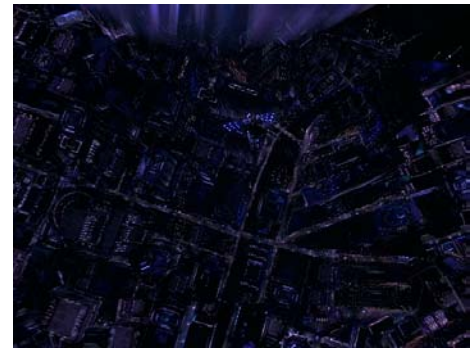
<sup>20</sup> <http://batmanytb.150m.com>

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

The villains for this last flick include Mr. Freeze (Arnold Schwarzenegger), who first appeared as a character in the 1960s TV series.<sup>22</sup> Paired up with him is Poison Ivy (Uma Thurman). Neither are particularly convincing characters, and their theme-matched sets, accessories and lackeys are simply too ridiculous to be believed, looking more like they were intended for packaging on a toy-store shelf than on the big screen. Freeze's "hockey team from hell" might even be worthy of the campy TV series, right alongside Catwoman's whiskers-wearing henchmen in tiger-striped jackets. Batgirl (Alicia Silverstone) is added to the Bat-family. The character originally appeared in issue #139 of one of the later batman comics (1961).<sup>23</sup> The theme of family was one of those many subplots referred to above. Normally, such a plot requires the audience to be able to relate to the on-screen family. How it is that Schumacher expected anyone to do so with a cobbled together group of crime-fighting super heroes who spend all of their time in adolescent rebellion (i.e. Robin), chemically-induced states of stupor or super-libido (thanks to Poison Ivy), living two lives without sleeping, toting an endless arsenal of expensive gadgets and weaponry, and always brilliantly making use of skills they have somehow seemingly accrued out of the blue, I will never understand. The whole thing just became too far-fetched.

Batman himself, now played by George Cluny, isn't up to snuff either as the caped crusader, nor as Bruce Wayne, compared to his earlier counterparts. He's too boyish; too relaxed and laid-back. Even Adam West, back in the 60s series, was the straight man in an otherwise ridiculously setting. Cluny simply doesn't fit the bill. Interestingly, even the batsuit has been altered once again, turning to subtle shades of dark blue rather than the previous black. Cluny appears nearly comical during close-ups where he wears the batsuit. The stunt work in the movie isn't even all that good. The wirework is too slow and unnatural. In the opening scene, Robin bursts through a set of double doors on his motorcycle, somehow leaving a Robin-logo shaped hole in the door behind him. After popping skates out of their 'Batboots', the dynamic duo go on to duke it out with Freeze's hockey-team rejects before riding a rocket into the upper atmosphere. All this, and we're not even fifteen minutes into the movie. Need I really say more?

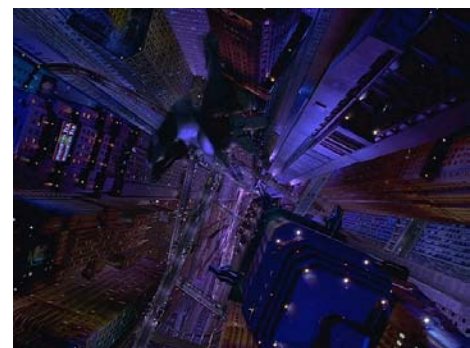
Set design varied between interior and exterior representations. While the interiors were created to a spectacular level of detail, the demands made by the script mandated that they appear more like stage sets, somewhat lacking in realistic character – which the earlier films had largely sought and accomplished. More impressive, however, are the exterior shots of Gotham city, which is depicted in greater detail than ever before. Clearly still a fictional space, the cityscapes offer wide views from both within and above, granting audiences a more complete view of the city as a whole, rather than just in isolated glimpses of a constructed set or models. John



*Batman & Robin* - Gotham City from above



*Batman & Robin* - Statues as infrastructure



*Batman & Robin* - Gotham City many layers, seen from above



*Batman & Robin* - Unfinished bridge, with city below

<sup>22</sup> <http://batmanytb.150m.com>

<sup>23</sup> *Batman & Robin*, DVD Special Features

Dykstra, who returned to once more take over supervision of visual special effects, took an even greater lead in this picture. With over 450 special effects shots (50% more than the last film),<sup>24</sup> *Batman and Robin* was practically turned over to the CGI department for creative control – as more than a few critics had speculated. Relying far more on computer generated images than before, the production team used 3D modeling for designing all of the sets. Additional special effects used miniatures, motion capture, stereopsis, and green screen technology.

Barbara Ling also returned to continue her work as production designer for the film. Her vision for Gotham was based on continued use of the constructivist style, though exaggerated to extreme proportions. All the high-rises were intended to be at least two to three times taller than those in New York City. In order to achieve this, thirty foot tall models were created, and then extended upwards using computer graphics.<sup>25</sup> This increased height is combined with a number of action sequences and chase scenes to provide a far more vertical sense of depth and quality to the city. Gotham, which featured elevated bridges and walkways in all four films, had thus far mostly been relegated to two rough levels of activity: the first was the ground-plane, the other was the level of penthouses and rooftops. In *Batman & Robin*, the gap between these two spaces, as well as the air above it, find far greater use than ever before.

The sets for the film occupied five full soundstages at Warner Brothers Studios, as well as re-using older sets (e.g. for Wayne Manor) which had been built at the Longbeach Seaport Dome for the last movie.<sup>26</sup> The exterior shots of Wayne Manor used the same building as was utilized in *Batman: Forever*. Some of the city shots are actually quite spectacular, including the elaborate, elevated bridges and those gargantuan statues, some of which are now fully integrated into the city's infrastructure. There is even a chase scene which extends out onto one of the arms of a gigantic statue. Gotham Observatory itself, used several times throughout the film, is cradled in the upraised arms of another such statue. The design of the observatory was based on the Palomar Observatory in San Diego.<sup>27</sup> Its exterior, like that of the Gotham Museum of Art also shown in the film, is clearly neo-classical, though the interiors of both buildings are distinctly different from their shells: the observatory has a mechanical art-deco style, while the museum has an exotic Egyptian-like look which is all that much stranger for being frozen during the scene where it features.

The Batcave set from the previous movie had been preserved, and was re-deployed in the Longbeach Seaport Dome, and then modified to suit the over-the-top character of the rest of the film – adding extra articulated supports, vehicular turntables, blue neon lights around every corner, racks of bat and robin suits, etc. If neon, fluorescents and glow-in-the-dark paint



*Batman & Robin* - Gotham Museum of Art, neo-classical exterior



*Batman & Robin* - Gotham Museum of Art, frozen Egyptian-like interior



*Batman & Robin* - Gotham Observatory



*Batman & Robin* - Wayne Manor

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> <http://batmanytb.150m.com>

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

prevailed in the last film, they positively dominate in this one – right down to Ivy’s flame-red hair, and Freeze’s sparkling blue skin, and glowing body armor. Even the Batmobile gets turned into a single-seat convertible, still sporting its two floppy fins.

Arkham Asylum is shown in somewhat greater detail than in the last film. The exterior shots are again produced using a CGI enhanced miniature model. Its gothic style, complete with Gotham-style high level bridges makes one think of the future images of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, from the Harry Potter films. Contrasting Arkham’s forbidding darkness is the more subdued neo-classicism of the Gotham Museum of Natural History, where the film’s early scenes take place. While the exterior is traditional Greco-Roman stone, however, the interior is a vividly coloured set of mixed Egyptian and jungle-themed origins.

The soundtracks and audio effects changed radically in style from the earlier to the later films. Danny Elfman, whose style is both playful and somber (e.g. Men in Black), composed the scores for the first two films. He was replaced by Elliot Goldenthal in the later films, whose style is far more grandiose, and thus probably more appropriate to the revised character of the films, as based on the ambitions of their creators. The later films also incorporated songs from popular artists, and the soundtrack released could more accurately be termed an ‘album’ rather than a score, as very little of their content featured in the film itself. Right down to the music, batman had wholly become a commercialized commodity.

Thus, we have in these four films a widely varying series of visions of the same world, taken from one extreme to the other. With rumours circulating of a fifth Batman movie under production, to be directed by Christopher Nolan, with a release date of July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, who knows where the future of the Batman movie franchise may lie? Will the pendulum swing back towards the darker themes? With *Batman: The Frightening* as a tentative title, and the Scarecrow set to be the feature villain, one can only hope that Warner Brothers has come to its senses, and will sponsor a return to earlier themes. Despite the increasingly campy character of the scripts across the four movies, the quality of the visions of Gotham provided to audiences has been steadily increasing – more notably with the exteriors than in closed sets. With the amazing leaps made in CGI and special effects over the last few years, the potential for a completely new and compelling vision of Gotham City certainly exists. If the Max Shrecks of this world can just keep their paws off of this one, it might also end up being a decent film at the same time.



*Batman & Robin* - The Batcave



*Batman & Robin* - Arkham Asylum



*Batman & Robin* - Gotham City freezes



*Batman & Robin* - Gotham City thaws

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