

BIG MAC BATMAN

I had a dream a few days before seeing *Batman*, the blockbuster film that I've been waiting a year to see. The dream was that I had seen *Batman* and forgot that I had; the only scenes that I could remember were the ones on the television commercials.

After seeing the movie, I discovered that the dream was actually a prophecy. *Batman* is forgotten the moment you leave the theatre. This is not a solitary example, however.

In recent years, there has been a great number of Big Mac films, films that are good but immediately forgotten. This phenomena, what I call the Big Mac theory named after the great American burger experience, is like eating a Big Mac. You can see these films and know you've done it but you don't feel like you've accomplished anything.

I first noticed this phenomena upon exiting the 1985 movie *St. Elmo's Fire* when I caught myself thinking that another movie I wanted to see was *St. Elmo's Fire*. But wait, I just saw it. I did? Why can't I remember any of it? Why did this film, which looked so good in previews, not only leave me feeling cold, but also feeling empty?

Oddly enough, it is the really bad films this year that stay in the mind longer. I talk more about *Star Trek V* than I do about *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* or *Batman*. Even if you are left with a feeling of anger and resentment towards the filmmakers, you have had an experience (albeit, a negative one); these Big Mac movies leave you with nothing.

What is wrong with *Batman*? Well, the acting is quite wonderful. Jack Nicholson is great. Michael Keaton is a formidable Bruce Wayne and Caped Crusader. Even Kim Basinger, a glorified pornstar if ever there was one, is good. The film is fast and funny, with great special effects and neat gadgets.

Director Tim Burton has shown himself to be a true film craftsman. But, although stylistically dazzling with some great action scenes, Burton has yet to discover "tension." This film is a wet noodle of flash. Nothing builds up and it all falls flat after the initial blast of

the image. Like a treadmill, *Batman* takes you nowhere fast.

Another crucial problem with the film is that there is no logical progression of the story. There is not a singular coherent story line. *Batman* and the Joker kibitz around a bit and that's all. At least in the 1978 film *Superman* there was a central crisis that pulled the film together. Lex Luther was sending two nuclear missiles into the San Andrea fault, causing a major earthquake that would sink California into the ocean.

A central crisis is what *Batman* needs.

It appears that the reason for the Big Mac syndrome, however, is not the personal development of the characters. Each of the Big

Mac films lack the character development needed to produce a satisfying film.

Nicholson's Joker is developed, and he is the most salient feature in *Batman*. However, I have to really strain myself to think of a *Batman* scene. Not because Keaton lacked Nicholson's charisma or because of a lesser performance, but because the character of *Batman* is less developed than that of the Joker.

I liked the use of *Batman* as the Dark Knight, but no investigation into the psychology of the Dark Knight was attempted. The result is that the cinematic experience, which even in a turkey like *Star Trek V* is tangible and tactile, becomes just

flickering images on a screen.

Perhaps the Big Mac phenomena is intentional. I know I will see *Batman* again. I had a great time, from what I can remember of it. And I am sure that most people will go to multiple viewings. Is this a marketing technique studios use to increase attendance? Will leaving people just unsatisfied have them coming back? God, I hope not. This will be the end of cinema as an art form. Good movies can also be seen many times without losing their quality. You don't have to make an inferior

product to ensure return customers. It seems that *Batman* was intentionally made inferior.

Don't get me wrong, it is a fun movie. Quite enjoyable. But only for the entire 125 minutes that it runs. Coming out of the theatre, you may want to see it again right away. Not because it is really terrific, but because you feel empty.

that you missed something. Yes, you have missed something content.

HOT LEATHER BATMAN

by PAMELA JARVIS

I'm *Batman*. Translation for criminals: "I'm your worst nightmare."

Translation for bat-frenzied, mega-hyped audiences: the Bat is back. With a vengeance.

This fresh, new cinematic version of *Batman*, directed by Tim Burton (*Beetlejuice*), effectively destroys the myths and the image created by the ultra-campy, cult TV series and the caped comic book crusader. Michael Keaton's hero is a square-jawed, latex'n leather, unforgiving sort of guy. All this, plus he beds the heroine on the first date. Apparently Bruce Wayne, the alter-ego, has a much less complicated life without Boy Robin around. Holy liberation!

Keaton's eyes do all the talking. As *Batman*, his severe visage is anchored solidly by his marble chin. Bruce

We ponder *Batman's* motives and question Bruce Wayne's mysterious past during the movie. So does Vicki Vale, played by sultry Kim Basinger. The brainy Vale falls under the Batspell and turns quickly into a screaming teenie-bopper (she "likes bats," okay?).

The story unfolds in due time and all is revealed: the catalyst being the Joker's obscene plays for Vale's affections. It is a decidedly macabre drama: the world's first homicidal artist, as the Joker describes himself. Their nocturnal

struggle is symbolically offset by Miss Vale's white dress. Nicholson takes a brilliantly psychotic star-turn as the Joker. He draws on his similar roles as protagonist in *The Shining* and *Witches of Eastwick* and creates a comedic maniac, he is both lovable, in a weird sense, and lethally dangerous (the Smiley ads). You could quite literally die laughing. The Joker wins over the audience in the lighter moments. Likewise he attempts to convert the citizens of Gotham by false pretenses; he claims he is good, while *Batman* is a flying malice. However, he chokes on the very greed he feeds on in an

attempt to eliminate the Bat. In the end, Bat technology proves that he who has the most toys wins. Speak softly, wear black, and drive a Batmobile. Good prevails over evil, might over mirth. And, yes, the leather was marvelous.



QUESTION AND ANSWER

by HEATHER SANGSTER and ANDRE SOUJOURN

1. Why is *Batman* a bat?
2. What do you think Robin is doing these days?

Lisa Wilkins, MBA
1. Because he's nocturnal.
2. He's gone to carry on the Batman crusade in South America.

Felix Yuan, 22-month-old campus resident
1. Because the bat is a reflection of the true spirit of a capitalistic culture in these last years of the 20th century.
2. Cruising.

Steve Smart, Osgoode 1
1. Because bats fly and people are afraid of bats.
2. He's probably writing quotes for Ronald Reagan.

Suzanne Egan, Osgoode grad student
1. He wants a nice outfit to wear on the scene.
2. He's gone to law school.

BAT BLAH

As a news writer I rarely venture into the realm of film criticism, but as I saw *Batman* courtesy of Warner Brothers, I decided to apply my news reporting skills to this movie.

Batman — although a very good movie overall — leaves many questions unanswered to those not familiar with either the tv show or the comic book series — like me. I therefore have several questions: Why is *Batman* a bat? Why is there a cave under Bruce Wayne's house? Who is Alfred and how come he knows so much?

What happened to Robin? How did Vicki Vale find out who Bruce Wayne really is, and why is he not surprised to find out

that she knows? Also, the movie explains *Batman's* motivation, but what is the Joker's? Is it all just jealousy over Jerry Hall?

Although the movie is strong on effects and the acting is excellent, the lack of detail in the plot shows a disregard for those of us not already familiar with the history of *Batman*.

On top of it all, the batcoper really let me down. I thought for sure the Joker was going to get it, what with missiles and radar and all. How could such a sleek sophisticated machine come to such an embarrassing end?

Maybe I'm just being too curious, but I really want to know the answers. That is the sign of a good news reporter, isn't it?

Bats suffer from bad press," says Dr. Brock Fenton, Canada's leading bat expert, professor and chairman of York's biology department.

"Everyone thinks that they are blind and that they get caught in your hair and they carry rabies. This is all incorrect," adds Fenton, who is conducting "batwalks" at the Kortright Centre for Conservation in order to familiarize

"We offer people the chance to actually get out and meet some bats. We start around 8 pm with a slide show and a discussion and then we take out some little brown bats that north of the campus that we go to. We catch small ones because if they are small, they won't break the skin if they

"We hold the bats and people can come up and touch them. We put small lights on the bats and release them and people can see where they fly. We also have bat detectors which are instruments that pick up the sound of the bat so people can listen as well as watch the bats.

"People usually are quite interested in the program, but then again we're not dealing with an unbiased sampling of people. People that tend to go all the way to Kortright have more of an interest in the bats. There are a few people that can't cope with it all and don't go near the bats. But, you also get the people who, at the beginning of the evening, were not prepared to meet a bat but by the end of the night they do. We always have kids that want to know where they can get one as a pet. That's a reasonable indication that there is an interest in bats."

"Most people are concerned with bats and public health. We tell them that bats are susceptible to rabies but do not carry rabies. They are not dangerous. You may object to having them in your attic but they are not a health threat. Bats are less a threat to your health and well-being than cockroaches. They are more a nuisance in your home than a threat," says Fenton.

"I try to show people the good side of bats by telling them interesting information and anecdotes. For example, when a bat is born, it weighs 25 per cent of its mother's weight. We apply that to human terms and say if a woman weighs 100 pounds, she would give birth to a 25-pound baby. Most women in the audience can relate to that and people are usually impressed."

Another interesting fact about bats is their life span. "I can take my first year natural science students into the field and catch bats that are older than the students. Bats

live until over 30. An animal can weigh eight grams, the equivalent to a quarter and two dimes, and can live until 30," adds Fenton.

Besides familiarizing the public with bats, the program's general goal is to increase the interaction between the public and science world.

"Because the research is supported by grants from the government, which means it is supported by taxpayers, many scientists feel that it is very important for the public to get some idea of how the money is spent and exactly what is going on," says Fenton. "By doing this program, it gives us a chance to show York's flag, as it were, to the public and it gives the public a chance to see what scientists, biologists,

do."

When not organizing "batwalks", Fenton concentrates on his research at York. He has graduate students "scattered all over the place" from Texas to London, Ontario. The focus of the research is bat behaviour and ecology.

"We're interested in foraging, where bats go to eat, what they catch, how long it takes them. We're also interested in about how they use space and time. We have to have some how they roost, who they roost with. We're also interested in feeling for what kind of societies exist in these roosts. In that end, we are doing lab work to try and find out whether animals that live together are related."

Fenton employs the same genetic techniques used on humans to determine parentage in paternity suits to uncover familial connections among bats.

"We do blood tests and run them for enzymes and DNA fingerprinting. In our case, we never know who the father is,

but if we do our catching right, we can determine the mother and trace the bat's origin."

Fenton has two leaf-nosed bats hanging around his lab as well as smaller bats in cages that are used in experiments. Currently, Fenton is studying how bats deal with carrying pieces of food.

"Some bats always take their food back to a perch to eat it whereas others feed as they are flying around. What we're interested in is the ones that go back to perch and how carrying their food affects their flight. We take insects of different sizes and give them to the bat and the bat flies through a strobe camera arrangement. And then, you can use the strobe to view how the animal adjusts its flight as it's carrying heavier and heavier objects.

"We want the details of how the animal exactly moves its wings. Unlike birds, bats have to carry things in their mouths. Bats can't carry things with their feet because their wings are attached to their ankles. If you think of it in airplane terms, you are putting all the weight in the front so that, you would think, it would require some adjusting otherwise, the animals would crash."

"In the field, we put radio transmitters on the bats and then follow the signal from them. We try to follow them all night, every night and see what they do," says Fenton. He also monitors their body temperature.

"We find that for some bats to save energy, when it's cool, they allow their body temperature to drop and follow the outside temperature. But, it really appears to be a smart energy conservation strategy on the part of the bat."

Fenton has also written *Just Bats* which is a general information book about what else bats. "Anyone can pick it up and understand it," says Fenton.

Fenton's "batwalks" will take place July 13 and August 17 at the Kortright Centre for Conservation (near Kleinburg). For more information and tickets call 661-6600, ext. 256.