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BATMAN
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Improving the Foundations: *Batman Begins* from Comics to Screen



Julian Darius

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Introduction

Upon its release, the verdict on *Batman Begins* was overwhelmingly positive: fans and critics alike declared it not only a fine film in its own right but the finest Batman film ever made.

This was no small feat. While the previous Batman film franchise ended in the late 1990s, after the poor critical reception of 1995's *Batman Forever* and the near universal condemnation of 1997's *Batman and Robin* (both directed by Joel Schumacher), we must remember the success of Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman* and, to a lesser extent, 1992's *Batman Returns*. 1989's *Batman*, in particular, won critical acclaim and is fondly remembered. It helped launch Tim Burton's career into super-stardom, spurred merchandising success for the character, and brought many new readers to comic books. Not to mention the two Batman movie serials produced by Columbia Pictures in the 1940s,[1] the campy 1960s Batman TV show that spawned a theatrical film in 1966, and the various animated versions of Batman, including straight-to—DVD movies and 1993's theatrically-released *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*. Yet Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* has not only been hailed as superior to all of these films but is likely to remain the definitive cinematic look at Batman's origins – if not the definitive Batman origin in any medium – for some considerable time to come.

Batman Begins also spawned a certain sequel – one that redefined the comic-book blockbuster movie. Most fans and critics praised 2008's *The Dark Knight* as superior in turn to *Batman Begins*, and it more than doubled the original's box office take. A lot of factors contributed to this success, but one was certainly the respect accorded *Batman Begins*, which sold briskly on DVD and attracted large audiences when aired on cable. *Batman Begins* built the foundation for *The Dark Knight*, and the original did the hard work of establishing the characters that the second film could then use in a more explosive, unfettered storyline.

But *Batman Begins* isn't just the forerunner to *The Dark Knight*. It's arguably the superior of the two: a more controlled film than its more popular sequel. More than any other cinematic appearance by the crimefighter and his supporting cast, *Batman Begins* carefully grounds Batman in reality, painstakingly establishing the character in a realistic milieu and in a story featuring a classic three-act dramatic structure. It may not be as *fun* as *The Dark Knight*, but it remains a major film in its own right.

Given all of this, it is just and right that we should take the time to examine the film and its comic-book inspirations. Screenwriter David S. Goyer offered his expertise as a comics fan to director Christopher Nolan. Goyer had actually written comic-book scripts for DC Comics (including issues of *Starman* and *JSA*); he had also written and directed motion pictures based on other comics properties, including the trilogy of films about the Marvel Comics vampire hunter Blade. (When *Batman Begins* premiered, he was also working on film treatment for the DC character Flash, though this failed to pan out.) Faithful in spirit to the Batman mythos of the comics, *Batman Begins* succeeds in large part because of its knowledge of the 70 years of writers and artists who had worked on Batman in the past, slowly refining the character and his origins. Several elements, from Bruce Wayne's corporate role to his public persona as an irresponsible playboy, were widely familiar to comics readers as essential parts of the character, yet had never been seen on film. Deeply resonant critical arguments about super-heroes, long familiar to comics readers, also find a place in the film (such as when Gordon in the conclusion talks of "escalation" and predicts the emergence of eccentric criminals in response to Batman's presence). Yet despite all these borrowings, from the literal to the thematic, *Batman Begins* wisely does not require any previous knowledge of Batman.

This book analyses *Batman Begins*, paying particular attention to the comic-book material that the film borrowed or changed. For the uninitiated, this book may serve as a guide, opening up the world of the Batman comics in an approachable way. Those already familiar with Batman will find many details about the comics' ties to the film that they didn't know or realize.

But analysis in this book isn't strictly limited to the film's connections to the comics. This book takes the movie apart, looking at how it works. *Batman Begins* is a precise bit of machinery, and every part has meaning within the whole. Those parts were fashioned after comic-book models, but it's how they fit together that most distinguishes the film. And all readers, regardless of their knowledge of comics, will benefit from a consideration of the film's structure and its many thematic (and even philosophical) resonances.

Using this Book

There are times, in the following pages, in which I will criticize as well as praise certain elements of *Batman Begins*. No film (nor any other work of art) is perfect – and that discussion, even including debate about these imperfections,

aids our understanding and appreciation.

In places, I have had to condense description of other texts to save space in a book that is, after all, about *Batman Begins*. This simply isn't the place to recount every single comic-book story showing Batman battling the Scarecrow, for example. My apologies in advance to those whose favorite stories are omitted.

In the scene-by-scene annotations that follow, I have divided the film into acts and scenes – and sometimes even sections of scenes. These divisions are, to varying degrees, arbitrary. After all, the term “scene” comes from theatre and, as applied to cinema, is not at all precise. My own such divisions of the film are not intended as definitive, but rather as necessary and convenient references.

On the Second Edition

I first wrote this book in the summer of 2005, immediately following the film's release. I had originally envisioned a much smaller work, something around 80 pages. The book grew into more than twice that size. It was published in time for the film's DVD release, probably the first time in history a critical book on a film appeared so quickly.

Since that time, Sequart has grown considerably, and its books have become more sophisticated. This second edition has a new cover, a smoother look and feel, interior illustrations, and a substantially revised text. The chapter on *Year One* has been the most expanded, and the text is thus able to include references to Nolan's masterful film *The Prestige* (made between *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, and also starring Christian Bale and Michael Caine), to *The Dark Knight* itself, to changes in the Batman comics since 2005.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to those who facilitated my initial feverish writing during the summer of 2005, when I was somehow also teaching college, studying, doing other writing, and dealing with a crashed computer. Sequart staff member Mike Phillips, without whom this book and much of Sequart would not exist, was also essential. So too, for her emotional support during that initial writing, was Nancy Bernal. Thanks also to Richard Bensam, the finest editor I have ever had, for his immense help on this second edition.

I would also like to deeply thank my parents, Dr. Peter and Rev. Anne Bukalski, who supported me financially and emotionally during the writing of this book

and to whom this book is dedicated. This book remains special to me because, while it was not my first book, it was my first on a cinematic subject. Everything I know about film, I learned from my father, a film professor of some distinction who walked me through *Citizen Kane* and any number of other films as I grew up. He also conveyed to me the love of the medium that he acquired as an underprivileged child in cold Wisconsin. His mother died when he was very young, and his father seemed impossibly distant (snapping his newspaper to stand upright between them when his son asked him a question) before dying himself. His funeral had been a surreal experience, filled with people my father hadn't known. In those days, they didn't kick you out at the end of the film and you could stay to watch the same film, again and again, if you liked. That boy, cared for by his teenage sisters, could escape for a few cents into the movie theatre and lose himself studying these films. If he shares something of the orphan experience with Bruce Wayne, it took my young father not to Bhutan but to distant California, where he knew no one, and UCLA's then-fledgling film program, which he had learned about from a bulletin board. I knew this boy as a depressive but deeply loyal and supportive man struggling to be a better father to me than his father had been to him. He conveyed to me his profound love of film and learning – and I acquired my own love for comics, which were disdained by the academy as film had been in my father's youth. This book, uniting comics and film to address themes of fatherhood and making one's self, seems uniquely suited to this familiar mythology. By way of confessing my own bias, we are always our father's sons.

Finally, I also wish to thank the reading public, who made the book a success and permitted this second edition. Few writers have such a luxury. Support from fans, of both Batman and *Batman Begins*, has made this book – and this dream – possible.

Batman's Comic-Book Origins, Appropriation, and *Year One*

Before all of *Batman Begins*'s other comic-book inspirations, the whole idea of exploring Batman's origins in full-length form comes most directly from *Batman: Year One*, the graphic novel written by Frank Miller and illustrated by David Mazzucchelli. But while *Year One* is often cited as an influence on the film, it's also important to look at the depictions of Batman's origins that preceded it. Such an examination points out how comic-book writers appropriated past stories, expanding upon them according to the standards of the times, often improving them, and filling in gaps or accounting for retroactive addictions to the mythos. This process, common whenever a character or property is handled by many different writers over a long period of time, is a longstanding feature of American comics – and reached a particular creative peak with *Batman: Year One*. But *Batman Begins*, in turn, participates in the same process of appropriation, borrowing bits and pieces from various stories in order to make something that is, in turn, longer, larger in scope, more internally logical, and more coherent as a single narrative.

When Batman first appeared in *Detective Comics* #27 (May 1939), he didn't even get an origin. Readers didn't necessarily demand origin stories at the time: it was the simply coolness of the character and his fantastic stories that pleased. Less than one year earlier, Superman was introduced by a single page describing his infant flight from the doomed planet Krypton and his arrival on Earth; on the following page, Superman was presented already in action with no further delay.

This is not to say that major elements weren't already present in Batman's first appearance, as written by Bill Finger and illustrated by Bob Kane. The very first panel depicts millionaire Bruce Wayne and police Commissioner Gordon. But Batman simply shows up without explanation to confront the story's criminals. The six-page story ends with the revelation that Bruce Wayne and Batman are one and the same. This was enough on which to hang a story without needing to explain what motivated him, how he trained to become Batman, or how he put together the Batman costume.

Detective Comics #33 (November 1939)

Batman's origin wasn't explored until a two-page introduction in *Detective*

Comics #33 (November 1939), the character's seventh story. In this version of the origin, most of the later elements were already present: a young Bruce Wayne watches his parents gunned down while "walking home from a movie." In the first of three panels depicting the mugging, the mugger even tries to take a necklace from the neck of Mrs. Wayne (she lacks a first name here), an element that would be developed later. The young Bruce then dedicates himself to fighting crime, and there's no reference to him having any caretaker during these years. Bruce is seen training himself, both scientifically and physically – although he does so in a more domestic setting than his later world travels. The sequence concludes with the adult Bruce inspired to invent the Batman identity when a bat flies through his window, seemingly in response to his wish for some image that will strike terror into the hearts of criminals, "a cowardly and superstitious lot."



The seventh Batman story ever published begins, without explanation, with Batman's origins. While many elements of later versions are already present (right down to Mrs. Wayne's necklace), note the cruelty of the unnamed assailant in this first version of the story. From *Detective Comics* #33 (November 1939). Art by Sheldon Moldoff and Bob Kane. Copyright © DC Comics.

The origin, written by Finger and drawn by Kane with the help of Sheldon Moldoff, occupies only a page and a half before shifting into an unrelated Batman adventure penned by a different writer, Gardner Fox, in which the Caped Crusader battles a dirigible that fires red beams to collapse buildings. The brief origin rushed and simplistic, in ways common to the era. Of particular note is the cruelty of the unnamed man who guns down the Waynes, as well as

their active response to the mugging (especially compared to some later versions). When Thomas Wayne resists the mugging, his armed assailant not only guns him down but says, “You asked for it!” So too, as Mrs. Wayne calls out for the police, does the killer speak as he fires into her, saying, “This’ll shut you up!” The mugger’s dialogue seems straight out of the controversial crime comics of the 1940s, and the cavalier attitude of the killer adds to the sense of violence. Bruce cries, but it’s not his trauma that’s the focus: it’s the brutality of *crime*, and the young Bruce dedicates himself not to preventing such tragedies but to “warring on all criminals.”

It’s hard to believe, but those two pages provided the first draft for not only *Batman: Year One* but *Batman Begins*. As primitive as they are, those two pages essentially comprise much of the story that *Batman Begins* would tease into a feature-length film: Bruce Wayne loses his parents, trains while growing up, and becomes Batman. *Batman Begins* adds much, of course, including an opponent for Batman to fight who flows logically from those origins. But the roughest of outlines is already there, published in an era when a character’s origin didn’t rate a full story, let alone a full movie.

Batman #47 (June-July 1948)

The next depiction of Batman’s origin came in a story appropriately titled “The Origin of Batman,” appearing in *Batman #47* (June-July 1948). Despite the promise of the title, this origin flashback by Finger and Kane is no longer than the previous version. In fact, it’s clearly modeled on the first, right down to the page layout. The final images are actually redrawn versions of those in the earlier story. This time around, however, the origin story isn’t shoehorned into the opening of an unrelated story. Instead, in a rather smart move, the flashback is triggered by Batman recognizing the same criminal who gunned down his parents years before. The overall story is thus about Batman finally solving the case that started him on his crusade: the murder of his own parents. The man responsible, here named Joe Chill for the first time, is ultimately killed. In a nice twist, it’s other criminals who murder Chill – out of anger that Chill’s actions *created* their nemesis, Batman.



In this retelling of the Waynes' murders from *Batman* #47 (June-July 1948), the young Bruce is far more confrontational and the shooter far more sympathetic. Note the influence of surrealism in the final panel, with eyes that could come straight out of a Salvador Dali painting. Art by Lew Schwartz,

Charles Paris, and Bob Kane. Copyright © DC Comics.

This version of Batman's origins tones down the violence considerably, owing to DC's continuing shift towards "kid-friendly" stories amid consistent popular condemnation of comics as corrupting the nation's youth. The killer, Chill, is also presented far more sympathetically, owing not only to the tonal shift but to his characterization in the story; he's no longer a brutal cypher. While he still quips as he kills Thomas Wayne, he doesn't even shoot Martha Wayne (who's

given a first name, this time around). Instead, she dies of a heart attack. He's also stopped in his tracks by Bruce staring angrily at him, and he trembles in response to the boy's enraged glare. Bruce, meanwhile, is granted more interior space and agency; he even gets to speak angrily to the killer at the scene of the crime.

Young Bruce's pledge to his dead parents is also softened: it's now about "justice," rather than "aveng[ing]" – about "fighting," not "warring on," criminals. Again, no caretaker is shown and Bruce trains scientifically as well as physically, with no mention of travelling to do so. This time, however, the space given to physical training is exaggerated to a full third of the page. The decision to adopt the Batman costume is essentially unchanged from the original, except for a final word balloon, there to connect the flashback to the surrounding story, in which Bruce pledges to one day catch his parents' killer.

While a clear case of straight appropriation of an earlier story, this version doesn't hesitate to make changes. Even though it occupies the same amount of space, one could argue that the story was already adding complexity. This is particularly true with the Waynes' killer, who was simply there to fulfill his narrative function in the original. This version not only gives him a bit of characterization but wraps the story around him.

Detective Comics #226 (December 1955)

The 1950s was a rather silly time in U.S. comics, the full flowering of the "kid-friendly" tone already underway at DC in the '40s. This led to campy but creative stories with few attempts at realism. By this time, Batman had acquired a youthful partner named Robin, first appearing in *Detective Comics* #38 (April 1940). Formerly the youngest member of acrobatic family "the Flying Graysons," young Dick Grayson was orphaned when a gangster extorting money from their circus killed Grayson's parents. Investigating the crime, Batman made the boy his legal ward, rigorously trained him, gave him a garish costume, and took him along as a partner in the war against crime. The addition of a young boy to the series was intended to promote greater reader identification among the young audience, as well as giving Batman an excuse for exposition, for explaining his feats of deduction and his strategies against villains.

A few years later, DC Comics began publishing tales about Superboy, detailing the childhood exploits of Superman himself when he was a boy. No obvious equivalent was found in Batman's youth, but that doesn't mean DC didn't try to

find one. Case in point: "When Batman was Robin," from *Detective Comics* #226 (December 1955).



Batman reveals that, in his youth, he was briefly the original Robin. The cover of *Detective Comics* #226 (December 1955). Art by Win Mortimer. Copyright © DC Comics.

The story, scripted by Edmond Hamilton and drawn by Dick Sprang and Charles Paris, is almost entirely a flashback, spurred by Batman receiving a Robin costume in the mail – one that Batman curiously says is older than Robin himself.

This spurs Batman to recall how young Bruce Wayne always had a penchant for detective work. While his parents were conveniently away one summer, Bruce decided to stalk his idol, the famous police detective Harvey Harris – on the theory that stalking a detective unseen is the best way to persuade him to train you. (One wonders how Batman would have responded in a similar situation!) Bruce doesn't want Harris to object that detective work is too dangerous for a kid (a concern which seems not to have troubled him in his own adulthood when adopting and training Robin), so he creates a garish red, yellow, and green costume (logically enough, since he's trying to remain unseen). After Bruce saves Harris from a trap (by – no kidding – pushing a giant bell off a roof), Harris agrees to train the young man... out of fear the boy will otherwise venture out on his own and endanger himself. It's Harris who gives the boy the name Robin. But Harris has a secret plan: while pretending to go along, he'll figure out this Robin's identity and notify the boy's parents.

The only point of the story is the novelty of showing readers a young Batman playing the role of Robin, but it's remarkable how poorly this proto-Robin mirrors the current one. Dick Grayson wasn't an ambitious would-be detective like young Bruce at all. Instead, Grayson fell into Batman's care after his own parents were killed. Harris is reluctant to take a boy as a partner, but Batman is the active party in adopting and training Robin. If anything, the depiction of this proto-Robin points out the contradictions inherent in the whole Batman-Robin relationship.[\[2\]](#)

As the flashback continues, Harris investigates a protection racket targeting valuable collectibles. Along the way, Harris is also investigating his Robin's identity, probing for clues. Occasionally, these combine nicely, as when Harris has Robin call a list of wealthy collectors that includes Thomas Wayne. Ultimately, of course, the crook is captured – and Bruce proves his worth, getting Harris to admit that he's "a good partner." With the case solved due to Harris's detective work, Bruce agrees (almost without motivation and in contrast to his earlier attitudes) to stop being Robin, even going so far as to surrender his costume to Harris. Young Bruce thinks that he has triumphed, however, by surviving the case with his identity still a secret.

But the arrival by mail of Bruce's old Robin costume, in the present, proves that young Bruce was mistaken. Harris has died and left instructions that it be mailed to Bruce Wayne along with a letter that explains how he figured out Robin's identity: he deduced that Bruce was wealthy (from, of all things, the

style of Bruce's sewing of the Robin costume itself) and simply saw that Bruce dialed Thomas Wayne's phone number without reading from the provided list. Before his death, Harris followed Batman's career, knowing full well that it was Bruce behind the mask. Harris ends the letter by saying that Bruce has grown to become, as Batman was by then known, the world's greatest detective. Bruce has a good chuckle about how Harris was actually better for having been the only person to figure out Batman's identity through detective work.

It's a charming but silly story, one that doesn't even bother mentioning that Bruce created the Robin name and costume based on his youthful experiences.

This story was never intended as an attempt to seriously enrich or develop the origin story of Batman. Instead, it simply demonstrates certain tropes common to DC Comics in the 1950s. The inversion of adult and child roles was a popular theme; likewise the tendency towards multiple iterations of popular characters. Superman begat Superboy, Supergirl, and even Krypto the Superdog. Wonder Woman would be joined by counterparts Wonder Girl and Wonder Tot (yes, a baby). Batman and Robin opened the door to Batgirl, Batwoman, Ace the Bat-Hound, and the extra-dimensional imp Bat-Mite. Various bizarrely—colored versions of Batman and Superman abounded, whether simply different costumes or side effects of Kryptonite.

For our purposes, it's important to note that "When Batman was Robin" provided an early insight, however campy, into Bruce Wayne's training. His parents were still alive during this training, but a story focusing too closely on the aftermath of their murders would have been out of place in the 1950s, an era when Batman ventured out with Robin in broad daylight with big smiles on their faces. But for the first time, we meet a character who trained Batman in his youth, and the story hinges on that figure from the past reentering Batman's adult life – something the comics would not do again, in a more straight-laced fashion, for decades.

Detective Comics #235 (September 1956)

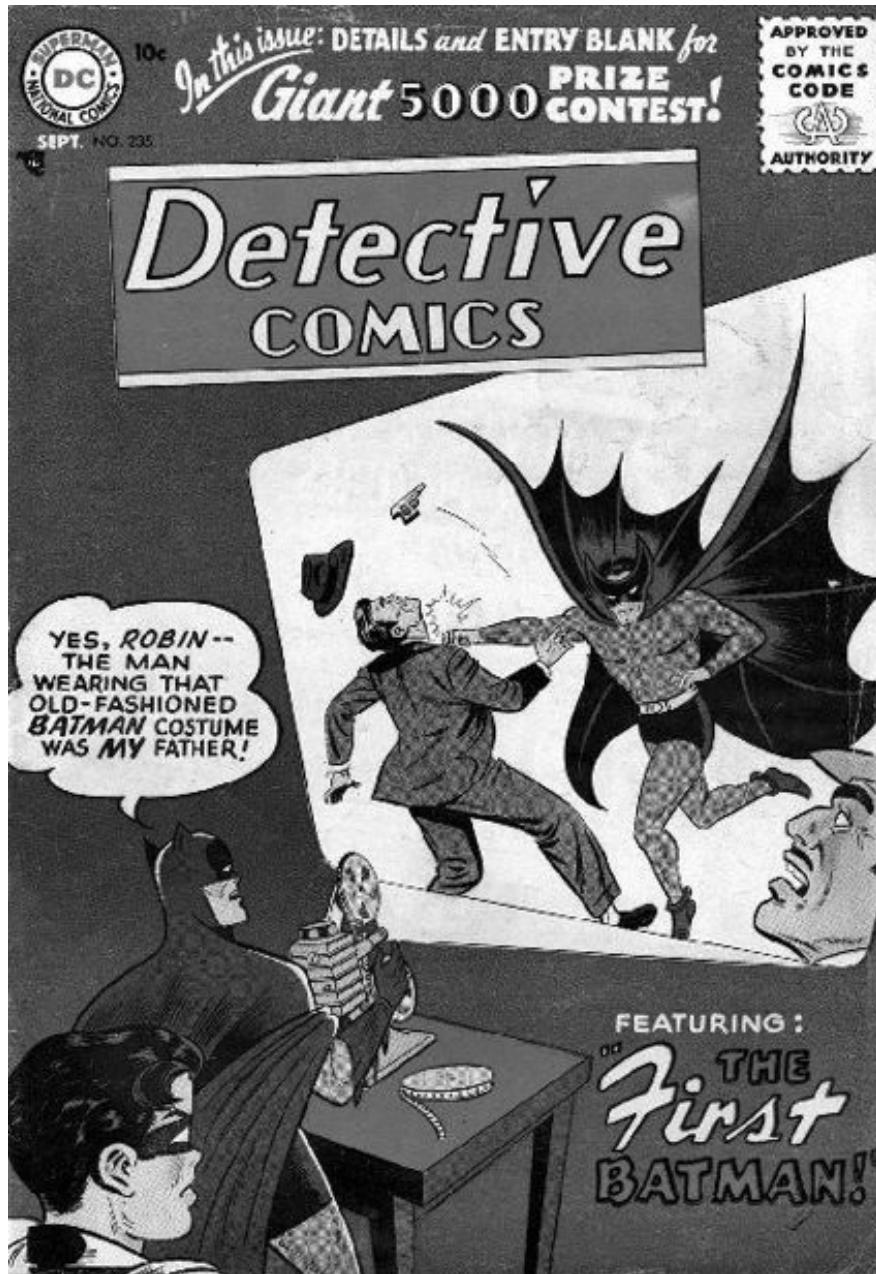
The classic "The First Batman," originally printed in *Detective Comics* #235 (September 1956), appeared less than a year after "When Batman was Robin," a sign that DC was now more willing to mine Bruce Wayne's early years, so long reduced to a few panels, for material. In many ways, "The First Batman" mirrors "When Batman was Robin" and should be understood as a response to that earlier story: here, again, a new prototype of a current character is revealed.

This time it's a prototype of Batman himself, one that carries far more dramatic weight, and the story even bothers to describe how this prototype fits into and expands upon the current Batman's origin.

What makes the story truly successful, however, is the fact that it integrates a prototype story, in the mold of "When Batman was Robin," with a redux of the earlier "The Origin of Batman," which revealed Joe Chill as the murderer of Batman's parents. In fact, when those two stories are read together, it's fairly clear how "The First Batman" is a simple combination of the two. Despite this simplicity, it's the meshing of these two plots – either of which would be revelatory on their own – into a single story that makes "The First Batman" work.

As the tale opens, Bruce Wayne discovers among his father's effects what seems to be a primitive Batman costume, featuring stiff batwings and a domino mask including bat-ears. A conveniently-discovered film reel and Thomas Wayne's diary fill in the blanks: Thomas wore this costume to a masquerade ball, winning first prize and being called "Bat-Man." Thomas even promised to give the outfit to his admiring son Bruce when he was older. Learning this, Bruce realizes that his own invention of Batman wasn't spurred only by the bat flying though his window but also by an unconscious memory of his father's costume. While somewhat preposterous, this retroactive change to Batman's origins offered a certain poetry: the son imitates the father without knowing it.

The parallels to "When Batman was Robin" are remarkable. Discovery of an old costume triggers the plot. While the earlier story didn't include a film reel, its cover did – and given how unnecessary the film reel is to the plot (the diary by itself would serve just as well), it's pretty clear that the cover to *Detective Comics* #226 served as the inspiration. Even the diary parallels Harris's letter at the end of "When Batman was Robin."



Batman learns that his father was the original Batman. The cover of *Detective Comics* #235 (September 1956). Art by Sheldon Moldoff. Copyright © DC Comics.

But it's also interesting to see how "The First Batman" improves upon its predecessor. While Batman's unconscious memory is pretty unconvincing, at least the story bothers to connect the old costume with the current one. While a "Bat-Man" costume is pretty unconventional, a masquerade ball is a better motivation than young Bruce conjuring up a Robin uniform to avoid his idol telling his parents. Moreover, Thomas Wayne, a man who was previously a cipher, serves as a far more resonant predecessor than a young Bruce, whose

earlier interest in crime-solving would seem to negate his being motivated by his parents' murders.

It's at this point in the story that "The First Batman" shifts from another "precursor" story to another "Waynes' murderer" one. That masquerade ball was interrupted by gangsters looking for a doctor to remove a bullet lodged in their leader, Lew Moxon, who is hiding from the police. Despite resisting, Thomas, a medical doctor, was abducted to heal Moxon. Knowing he wouldn't simply be freed afterwards, Thomas again fought back, this time defeating Moxon and his crew. Moxon was arrested and sentenced to ten years. Ten years later, notes Thomas's diary, he ran into a newly-freed Moxon on the street, and Moxon promised revenge. The diary ends there, and Bruce realizes that the murders at the hands of Joe Chill were actually ordered by the mobster Lew Moxon. Batman is thus put in the position of once again investigating his parents' killer.

That investigation is complicated by the fact that the gangster suffers from amnesia, stemming from a car accident shortly after the Waynes were killed. Batman plans to arrest Moxon while wearing his father's old "Bat-Man" costume, a move depicted as more whimsical and sentimental than angry and bitter – as it obviously would be in real life. Seeing Thomas Wayne's old costume, however, jogs Moxon's memory, and the mobster is so frightened that he runs out in front of a truck.

Like Joe Chill before him, Moxon doesn't survive the tale. Obviously, neither Chill nor Moxon were considered as serious, potentially recurring villains: the point was to tell a single story, and the dramatic potential of having the murderer of Bruce Wayne's parents as one of Batman's villains either never occurred to anyone or, more likely, seemed just too dark at the time. Instead of a new villain, the one lasting result of this story would be a trophy case, on permanent display in the Batcave, containing Thomas Wayne's original "Bat-Man" costume.[\[3\]](#)

Whatever the successes and failures of "The First Batman," what's most relevant to us is how each story builds on the prior ones, evolving into better and more resonant forms over the years. Paying attention to past stories, each writer is able to steal what works from his own predecessors, improving the execution in the process. For our purposes, this process of appropriation is important because it will culminate in *Batman Begins*, which borrows voraciously from the comic-book stories that preceded it.

Batman #208 (January-February 1969)

Batman's origin had never explained who cared for young Bruce after his parents' deaths. It just never seemed a concern.

Many people think that Alfred the butler always played this role. In fact, Alfred Pennyworth originally arrived at Wayne Manor only after Robin had joined Batman. This was true from Alfred's introduction, in *Batman* #16 (April-May 1943), all the way until the mid-1980s.

Another caretaker figure appeared after DC decided to replace Alfred with a woman, in order to lessen the possibility that people would interpret Bruce Wayne's relationship with Dick Grayson as homosexual. In *Detective Comics* #328 (June 1964), Alfred dies saving Batman and Robin. In that same issue, Dick's maternal aunt Harriet Cooper shows up. But after Alfred rejoined the comic in *Detective Comics* #356 (October 1966), Aunt Harriet was phased out, making her final appearance as a regular character in 1968. Like Alfred (until the mid-1980s, that is), this caretaker figure also had no role in caring for the newly-orphaned Bruce.[\[4\]](#)

Just who had been Bruce's caretaker during those years wasn't resolved until "The Women in Batman's Life," appearing in *Batman* #208 (January-February 1969). The issue consisted mostly of reprints organized around a framing sequence devised by writer E. Nelson Bridwell and narrated by a never-before—seen pleasant old lady named Mrs. Chilton. At the end of the issue, Bruce and Dick arrive at her house, spurring a new flashback to Batman's origin.

In this version, the murder of Bruce's parents goes largely unchanged. The story virtually repeats the version from *Batman* #47 (June-July 1948), in which Joe Chill doesn't kill Martha Wayne, who dies of a heart attack instead, and finds himself haunted by the young Bruce's stare. But while the content is familiar, the artistic style has been radically updated at the hands of artists Gil Kane and Jack Abel. The gangster look of previous versions is now totally gone, and Joe Chill more closely resembles a secret agent of the swinging Sixties, including dramatically windswept hair. The panel compositions also employ dramatic camera angles that seem almost inappropriate to the solemn subject matter. We actually see Joe Chill shooting Thomas Wayne from between Martha's legs, which sport high heels and pantyhose. To be sure, the artwork isn't the best: young Bruce looks much older when his parents are killed, and there's almost no sense of setting to the shooting. But it's a very different artistic take on the

origin – one understandably discarded but all the more interesting for its missteps. While it seems silly in retrospect, it clearly marks a shift away from the wisecracking 1950s and towards a more sophisticated style.

For our purposes, what's most interesting is what follows the shooting. This time, Bruce narrates that his Uncle Philip had been made his legal guardian. We're shown that, the day after the shooting, Philip coolly introduces Bruce to his housekeeper, Mrs. Chilton. Philip says he travels a lot for work, though the story never elaborates, and he seems particularly eager to dump his *freshly orphaned* nephew into the hands of his poor housekeeper.

Mrs. Chilton, far from bitter, now takes over the flashback. We're then given another version of Bruce's promise to fight crime, only this time Philip Wayne and Mrs. Chilton are actually standing back and watching. She then narrates more new information: that Bruce found time, apparently during his training, to go to college – and to graduate with honors, of course, becoming a star college athlete to boot. There's no mention of his training as such, and the reader is left to imagine that it may well have occurred within the college environment. (There's just something wrong with imagining Batman as the guy next to you in the college gymnasium, as if that's all it would really take.) Like the depiction of the murder itself, one can understand why this version of Bruce's training period didn't prove as influential as others.



A particularly dramatic re-staging of the Wayne murders, followed by the new revelation of who took care of the orphaned Bruce. From *Batman* #208 (January-February 1969). Art by Gil Kane and Jack Abel. Copyright © DC Comics.

But the story has another curveball to throw – and it’s not that she knows Batman’s identity. (She *does*, of course, since she *narrated the issue*. She makes this knowledge explicit in the ending, but that’s not the twist.) Bruce and Dick quickly leave, and Mrs. Chilton contrasts how proud she is of Bruce with how poorly her own sons, Joe and Max, turned out. Before getting involved in crime, they changed their names to Chill. That’s right: Joe Chill’s poor mother,

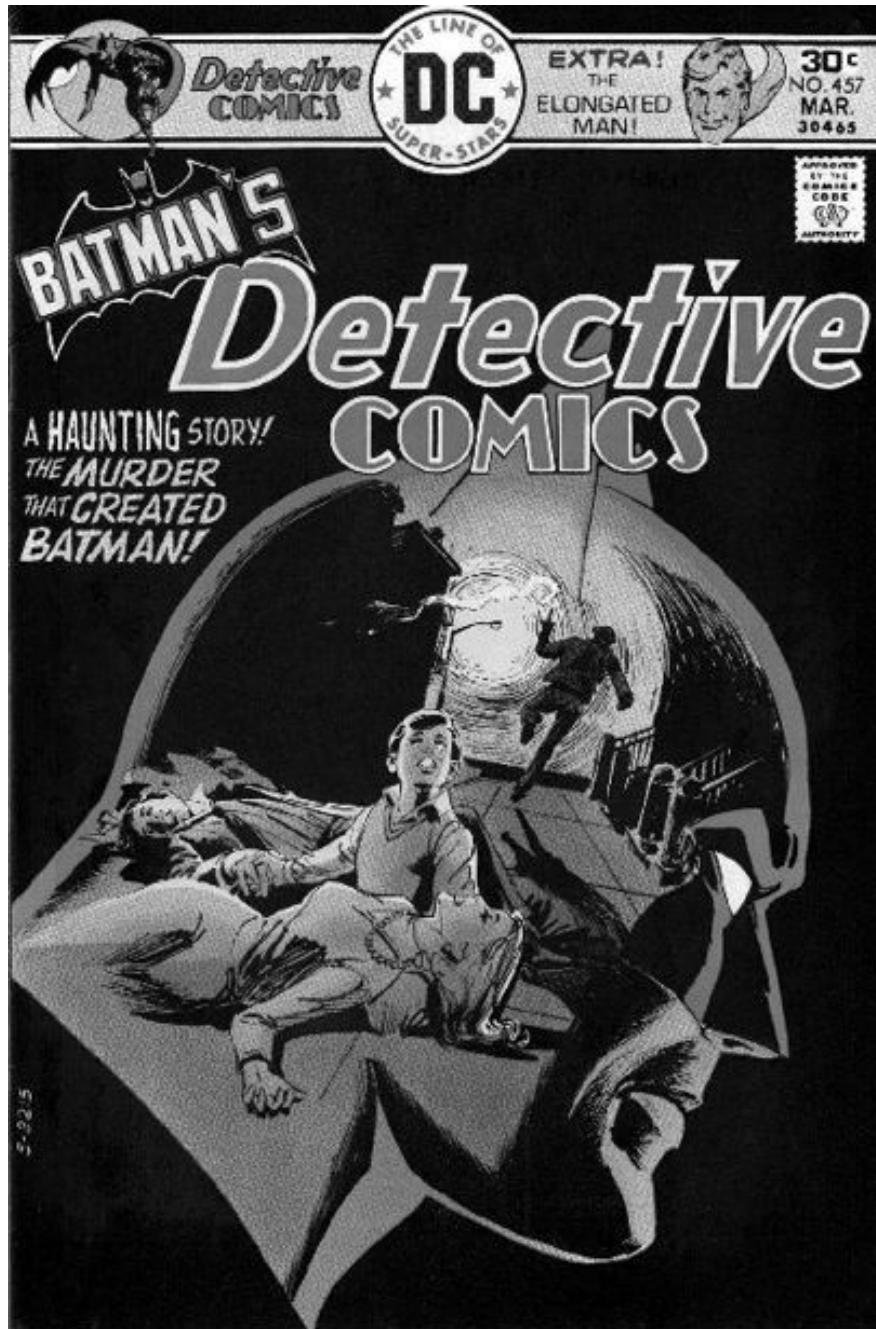
in a particularly unsatisfying twist of fate, was the housekeeper of Bruce's uncle, who ended up secretly raising her son's victim. Max Chill had fought Batman recently and been accidentally killed. Mrs. Chilton ends the issue crying for her two boys, seemingly more for their criminal failings than their deaths.

Not much was ever made of Mrs. Chilton and Uncle Philip, and the story could easily be forgotten. But it does finally attempt to address the unresolved matter of Bruce's upbringing after being orphaned. The story also addresses Bruce Wayne's education. While the story's answers are not altogether satisfactory, at least it responds to the questions.

Detective Comics #457 (March 1976)

Another major retelling of Batman's origins came in the classic "There is No Hope in Crime Alley!", appearing in *Detective Comics* #457 (March 1976). By '76, Robin had been sent to college, allowing Batman to operate mostly on his own and contributing to a return to Batman's "classic" darkness. Just as the gangster aesthetic of Batman's 1939 origin gave way to the campy 1950s, the incommensurate stylishness of the 1960s gave way to the maturity of the best 1970s Batman stories – including this one.

And the increasing sophistication of comics in the 1970s is fully visible, under writer Denny O'Neil and artist Dick Giordano, right from the start. The cover and first page feature an image appearing within a profile of Batman's head, a sophisticated composition, and the opening captions are filled with literary adjectives and the kind of little details that characterize a neighborhood.



Batman's origin gets a far more sophisticated cover treatment, with emphasis upon young Bruce, in silent but profound mourning over his parents' bodies. In contrast, the fleeing murderer seems almost irrelevant. The cover to *Detective Comics* #457 (March 1976). Art by Dick Giordano.

Copyright © DC Comics.

Like other stories updating Batman's origins, this one hinges upon a related mystery in the present: just where does Batman go on the same night every year? An irritable Batman dismisses Alfred's inquiries, then heads to Crime Alley, a side street known for its violent crime. He first intercepts some thieves

as they strip a car. Though Batman lets them go, having scared them straight, he lashes out violently when he inquires about one Leslie Thompkins and one of the hoods replies by insulting her. Obviously, Batman has some affection for Thompkins, though she had never been seen previously.

Batman next prevents a particularly violent crime – one that would have been completely out-of-place in a Batman story until the 1970s. A mugger with a knife not only menaces a man with no money – “You ain’t gonna take my last *dollar*? I need it to *eat!*” – but seems intent on carving up his victim for pleasure as much as a punishment for having tried to run away. A full page is devoted to Batman beating the man down, demonstrating the expanded storytelling of the era, in which scenes that would have taken a mere panel in earlier stories were allowed to breathe. Batman’s subsequent remarks to the victim typify the social consciousness of 1970s comics: asked why a great international detective like Batman would waste time with such low-level crime, Batman replies, “to you, the loss of a *dollar* is more important than the loss of *thousands* to a *banker!*”

Batman inquires again about Thompkins and eventually tracks her down – as she’s about to be mugged for the revenue she’s helped raised at a charity fair. Incredibly, while she refuses to surrender the money, she sympathizes with her assailants, who she presumes have fallen on tough times, and she even offers to write them a personal check. As Batman intervenes, his newly violent tendencies are on full display: he says that he hopes they choose to play tough. One of the muggers draws a gun and, stuttering, threatens to “snuff” Batman. Batman walks right into the gun, then erupts into violence, incensed that someone would “*dare*” to raise a gun to him there.

This time around, it is actually Batman’s violent rage that triggers the flashback to his origins. The flashback is handled in a unique artistic style, separating it from the rest of the story. It’s told entirely in captions and entirely without borders (around either captions or panels), so that the whole flashback flows naturally, almost mirroring a flood of memories. Additionally, the flashback uses only a single color, making the sequence reminiscent of black-and-white, a device often used to suggest the past. The only color used is a soft blue, which looks like it flows out of the color of Batman’s costume, thematically linking the unfolding events to the formation of Batman and grounding this in sorrow, or “feeling blue.”

Because the flashback has no word balloons, the dialogue can’t be compared to past versions. But there are a few important additions to the story, besides

O’Neil’s literary voice. The narration dates the flashback to “21 years ago this very night” and “this exact spot,” explaining Batman’s odd annual behavior as well as his rage about the mugger pulling a gun. Joe Chill (though he’s never named) now fires twice, implying that Martha Wayne did not die of a heart attack – as had been canonical ever since *Batman* #47. This isn’t the only reversion back to the darker, original version from *Detective Comics* #33: Bruce doesn’t yell at the killer, who’s not depicted as regretful. Instead, Bruce emits only a “*silent scream*” and, later, “endless sobs.” The lack of sympathy in Chill’s portrayal may be attributed to the unimportance of the killer, this time around.

But the final twist comes as Leslie Thompkins arrives on the scene. In contrast to the police and reporters, who ignore the crying boy, Thompkins kneels beside him and comforts him. While minor compared to the addition of Thompkins, it’s worth noting that the artwork depicts her as much younger than in the present, another sign of the heightened realism of the era.

It’s the elderly Thompkins who pulls Batman out of his rage and stops the flashback. “You’ve hit him *enough!*” she tells Batman. She reveals that he comes to see her every year on this night, but she doesn’t understand why. Batman’s explanation is considerably dark: he says that visiting her is “a *memorial*,” a reminder not only of who he is but of his “probable *end!*” For Batman to contemplate his own violent demise was barely thinkable at the time, let alone in earlier eras.

As for Thompkins, she explains that seeing the Waynes’ murder inspired her to prevent such crimes, which is why she’s devoted her life to ministering to the neighborhood around Crime Alley. She even conceptualizes the Waynes’ murders in terms of the crying boy it left behind: it’s not the murder that inspired her but rather the “child whose parents were *murdered* in front of his eyes!”



The Waynes' murders are retold, this time returning more to the 1939 original in several respects, albeit with the addition of Leslie Thompkins. It's important to note that the original is colored with a palette made entirely of blues, outside of Batman's yellow chest symbol. From *Detective Comics* #457 (March 1976). Art by Dick Giordano. Copyright © DC Comics.

It's clear that Thompkins has been inspired by the murder to fight crime in her own way, making her an intriguing double for Batman. But whereas Batman turned to masked violence against crime, she has turned, in response to the same event, to charity, sympathy, and compassion. Perhaps we can attribute this to her focus on the survivor's pain, whereas Bruce Wayne himself focused on the

criminal and his own slain parents. Batman's outlook is consequently Manichaean, divided between good and evil, heroes and villains. Thompkins sees the greys, and her compassion for the wounded boy who took his pain and used it to make Batman, is touching to readers who have never imagined that someone was there for Bruce in his defining tragic moments. But her optimistic, socially acceptable response to tragedy also parallels the well-adjusted, smiling Batman of the '50s and '60s. It's as if O'Neil shifts these elements into Thompkins, further accenting his Batman's grim, driven, even potentially psychotic nature.

The irony of all of this is that, while readers are accustomed to thinking of Batman's quest as affirming Thomas Wayne, Leslie Thompkins implicitly has another view. Batman may see her, in his Manichaean perspective, as one of the good guys, but *she* would see *him* as having given into the violence that caused his own pain. She makes this explicit when she tells Batman that she "live[s] for the time when you and you and your kind will be *unnecessary!*" Batman reply all but admits that she is right – that he participates in the violence she seeks to end. His social consciousness again comes to the fore as he kisses her kindly on the forehead, telling her that she's not only "the hope of [the supposedly hopeless] *Crime Alley*" but "maybe the *only* hope our tormented civilization has *left!*"

The story ends, at the dawn of the following day, as Alfred attempts to serve Bruce breakfast and finds him, still in his Batman costume, asleep in a chair. What's curious, as Alfred notes, is that Bruce is smiling. While cementing Thompkins's role in comforting young Bruce, this smile also suggests something deeper: that her idealism represents also a hope for Batman, who we've seen erupt into uncontrolled violence.

It's a masterful story, however occasionally purple in an era when literary comics writing was just coming into its own. The story manages to question Batman's psychology and his entire mission in fundamental, perhaps irresolvable ways. This is more than just a great Batman story, however: the dynamic it establishes about the proper response to tragedy and violence not only underlies most super-hero stories but also real-life ones. Humanity may thrill to fiction about Batman and revenge movies, a love that goes back to the revenge plots of Shakespeare and also much of classical tragedy. But, in the real world, non-violent examples of social reformers, like Ghandi and Martin Luther King, held out the possibility of a better way.

Besides its resonance, “There is No Hope in Crime Alley!” is a stunning example of comic-book appropriation. The whole mystery of Batman’s annual excursions and Thompkins’s identity recalls the similar story structures used to explore and redefine Batman’s origin ever since *Batman* #47. Thompkins’s role as a caretaker figure after Bruce was orphaned recalls Mrs. Chilton and Bruce’s uncle Philip. The flashback to the murder, while newly stylish, is no longer than past such flashbacks, and it similarly serves as the thematic center of a related story that adds to the Batman mythos. But, much like *Batman Begins*, “There is No Hope in Crime Alley!” appropriates both content and story structures selectively, making changes in the process and incorporating the existing material into a new whole.

While Thompkins isn’t shown to know Batman’s identity in this story, she isn’t clearly shown to be ignorant. Subsequent stories would reveal that she *did* know, and she would confront Batman more directly about his violent ways. But for all of her potential as a counterpoint to Batman, as another crusader born the night the Waynes were gunned down in Crime Alley, she has never been so compelling a character as she was in this, her first story.

The Untold Legend of the Batman (July-September 1980)

In 1980, DC placed Batman’s origin in the brightest spotlight then possible, employing a newly-invented type of comic: the mini-series, intended from the outset to be published for a predetermined number of issues before concluding. The year before, DC had introduced this format with a mini-series called *World of Krypton*, recounting the history of Superman’s long-lost homeworld. For the first Batman mini-series, editor Paul Levitz and writer Len Wein devised an extended retelling of Batman’s origin as well as those of his supporting cast. The end result would be a kind of primer on the character, something anyone could read and know all about Batman’s world.

The Untold Legend of the Batman would appropriate all amendments and additions made to Batman’s origin over the years, wrapping them together into a single coherent narrative. While only the first issue concerned Batman’s origins, with the latter two devoted to his supporting cast, the entire story would be held together – in the tradition of past Batman origin stories – by a framing sequence, set in the present, in which Batman investigates a mystery related to his origins.

The three-issue mini-series was written by Len Wein and was initially to be illustrated by John Byrne, penciler on Marvel’s top-selling *The Uncanny X-*

Men. Byrne dropped out after one issue, however, and DC brought in legendary Batman artist Jim Aparo to finish the first issue's artwork and complete the series.[\[5\]](#)

As a further marketing device, the mini-series was also released in a special “audio edition,” including a shrunken copy of each issue with an audio cassette featuring a spoken performance of the text. Later, the whole mini-series was collected as part of a program reprinting recent popular stories, printed in black-and-white and repaginated to fit the dimensions of a mass market paperback (thereby extending the page count) to be sold in supermarkets and anywhere paperbacks were sold. In many ways, these collections prefigured the comic-book trade paperbacks that would transform American comics publishing in years to come.

The first issue (July 1980) is worth particular examination for its ravenous appropriation of material from all the previously discussed stories: everything from Harvey Harris to Leslie Thompkins is included. The framing sequence not only borrows the structural device employed in the previous stories, where some mystery in the present triggers a flashback, but actually offers the entire mini-series as a kind of sequel to “The First Batman” from *Detective Comics* #235, published nearly a quarter century earlier.

The series opens in the present, as Batman receives a package in the mail containing the shredded remains of the prototype “Bat-Man” costume his father had once worn. Of course, this costume had been on display in the Batcave ever since the story in which it first appeared. Investigating, Batman finds the costume gone from its case, replaced by a threatening note. Obviously, the villain responsible not only knows Batman’s identity but seems determined to strike at Bruce’s most cherished memories.

As in “The First Batman,” the prototype costume triggers a flashback in which Thomas Wayne, wearing his “Bat-Man” garb, defeats Lew Moxon after being kidnapped by his goons for his medical services. This time we see a young police lieutenant named James Gordon among the officers who take Moxon into custody – a further embellishment upon the original tale and the first time Gordon is connected to Batman’s origin. Another embellishment comes as Thomas Wayne is shown testifying against Moxon. As in the original, Moxon threatens revenge after his release from prison – and Joe Chill, acting under Moxon’s orders, soon kills the Waynes.

As the flashback continues, it turns to the issue of Bruce's caretakers, appropriating material from both 1969's *Batman* #208 and 1976's *Detective Comics* #457. Both Leslie Thompkins and Alice Chilton, still Uncle Philip's housekeeper, are incorporated. Mrs. Chilton is confirmed as Joe Chill's mother – a fact Alfred knows but Bruce does not.

Bruce dedicates himself to fighting crime in familiar fashion. He's shown both studying and training, echoing the depiction of both scientific and physical training that goes back to 1939's *Detective Comics* #27.

As the flashbacks continue, they shift to the material recounted in 1955's *Detective Comics* #226, wherein Bruce disguises himself to learn from police detective Harvey Harris, who dubs the disguised Bruce "Robin." Even more than the original tale, this retelling emphasizes how much Bruce learned from Harris.

Bruce's college years are considerably expanded from the very short version shown in 1969's *Batman* #208. Bruce studies criminology, intending to be a police officer, but changes his mind after learning, in a law class, that justice and the law are not the same.

Now intent on becoming a vigilante, Bruce lacks a symbol until a bat flies through his window, repeating the inspiration used ever since 1939's *Detective Comics* #27.

The flashbacks now jump ahead to the present-day sequence from 1948's *Batman* #47, in which Batman confronts Joe Chill only to have Chill's criminal compatriots kill the murderer for having created Batman.

Next comes another sequence derived from *Detective Comics* #235, in which we see Batman discovering his father's prototype costume and journal, revealing the role of Lew Moxon in ordering the Wayne's deaths. As before, Batman confronts the amnesiac gangster in his father's prototype costume, jogging Moxon's memory before Moxon runs in front of a truck and is killed.

This concludes the first issue's flashbacks, bringing them full circle, since those flashbacks begin and end with material borrowed from "The First Batman." This material blends nicely into the framing sequence, in which the shredded prototype costume triggers the flashbacks.

The second issue (August 1980) is less crucial for our purposes, since it focuses on Batman's cast, although it does demonstrate the same process of

appropriation. The issue begins with Batman lashing out against an informant while seeking information about the shredded costume. Robin has to intervene to bring the violent Batman to his senses.

This triggers a flashback of Robin's own, in which Robin's origin is recalled. Subsequent events in Robin's life are recounted, including his departure from Wayne Manor to attend Hudson University. At this time, Bruce and Alfred relocated to a penthouse in downtown Gotham City, building a new Batcave to go along with it. Robin's flashback concludes with Alfred summoning him home out of concern for Batman, which brings the flashback up to the present day.

The next flashback belongs to Alfred, who recalls his involvement helping refugees during World War II, before becoming an actor in the war's aftermath. But he makes a promise to his dying father, who was Thomas Wayne's butler, on his deathbed: following the family tradition, he journeys to the U.S. and becomes Bruce's butler, eventually learning about their double lives and becoming Batman's butler as well. Many of these details have been canonical since Alfred's first appearance in *Batman* #16 (April-May 1943) or his revised origin in *Batman* #110 (September 1957).

As Batman considers which villain might have stolen and shredded the prototype costume, he recalls the origins of the Joker and Two-Face.

The second issue ends with Robin suggesting that they visit Commissioner Gordon for help. But the Batmobile, upon starting, sounds an alarm and explodes as everyone dives for cover. While no one's hurt, another threatening note is found in the Batmobile's wreckage.

The third issue (September 1980) continues the exploration of Batman's supporting cast. When Robin calls stunt driver Jack Edison to order a replacement Batmobile, we learn the racer builds vehicles for Batman because the hero once saved his life when his own car burst into flames.

After Batman visits Gordon, Gordon recalls the evolution of his own relationship with Batman. Just as the first issue showed a newly-orphaned Bruce Wayne crossing paths with a young then-Lieutenant Gordon, the series now shows Batman's first encounter with Gordon for the first time. Batman left notes on bound criminals until he met Gordon, whereupon Gordon pulled a gun on the vigilante. Batman responded by talking about how they were alike in their hatred of criminals and pursuit of justice. When Gordon insisted on the law,

Batman insisted on his own need to operate outside of it. Finally, Batman demonstrated his sincerity by inviting Gordon to pull the trigger if he didn't believe both men were on the same side. Gordon hesitated, then lowered his gun and shook hands with Batman instead of shooting him. All of this was new to this story, substantially weaving Gordon into Batman's origins.

Gordon also recalls how his daughter Barbara became Batgirl, inspired by Batman.

After canceling his appointments, Bruce Wayne receives a call from his corporate associate Lucius Fox, who recalls their first meeting and how Wayne helped Fox advance through Wayne's corporation. Fox was the most recent addition to Batman's supporting cast, having been created by Len Wein and artist John Calnan in *Batman* #307 (January 1979), and his flashback brings readers up to the contemporary status quo.

In the conclusion, Bruce discovers that the culprit behind his recent travails is none other than himself. Temporarily deranged by the aftereffects of a warehouse explosion and subconsciously hating how his Batman identity has ruined Bruce Wayne's life, he had shredded his father's prototype "Bat-Man" costume and mailed it to himself, also planting a bomb in the Batmobile ignition. Falling into hallucination, he sees his father clad in the old costume. This is then revealed to be no hallucination but none other than Robin in disguise, seeking to reason with Bruce and shock him back to sanity. The ploy seems to work and Batman is restored to his senses but needing some time alone. The mini-series closes with Batman looking out over his city.

The Untold Legend of the Batman is certainly no masterpiece. Perhaps owing to its intent as a general-audience primer on the character, its tone feels lighter than "There is No Hope in Crime Alley!", despite appearing over four years later. Its conclusion comes off more as a silly plot twist than as a deep indication of Batman's unstable mental health, and the sophisticated compositions and literary writing of "There is No Hope in Crime Alley!" is absent here. At the same time, the mini-series demonstrates comics' growing narrative ambitions, as they apply to Batman's origin.

For our purpose, the first issue of the mini-series is the most relevant, putting together elements from all previous Batman origin stories into a single, modified, longer, syncretic tale. But even the second and third issues demonstrate the process of appropriation and incorporation of previously-

established backstory into a larger whole elaborating on Batman's origins. As comics became more sophisticated in storytelling technique, multi-part storylines became more common. Comics also became more aware of their own history, since they were increasingly produced by creators who had begun as fans, including author Wein and editor Levitz. For all its faults, the mini-series meshes all the previous snippets of Batman lore into a single epic, one including the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents, information about the killer, the larger world of gangsters to which that killer belonged, episodes from Bruce's training, and a present-day case connecting back to his origins. While the tone may be different, all of this should strongly recall *Batman Begins*.

The Dark Knight Returns (February-June 1986)

While not a Batman origin story, the first issue of Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (February-June 1986) contained a couple of strikingly influential flashbacks to Batman's origins.[\[6\]](#) Written and penciled by Miller with inks by Klaus Janson, *The Dark Knight Returns* was a four-issue prestige-format mini-series that told a particularly dark version of Batman's future. In the first issue, Batman returns after ten years of retirement, then defeats the newly-released Harvey Dent, a.k.a. Two-Face. Subsequent issues would see Batman battle a violent street gang known as the Mutants, the police, the Joker, and finally Superman – amidst a backdrop of nuclear tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union that ultimately results in a nuclear detonation.

Before emerging from retirement as Batman, the now-aged Bruce Wayne has a nightmare recalling a moment from a time when his parents were still alive, involving his pursuit of a fleeing rabbit into a rabbit hole. This image strongly evokes *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the highly influential 1865 children's classic by Lewis Carroll.[\[7\]](#) Bruce's recollection thereby evokes the beginning of a fantastic journey into a surreal world, a journey Bruce will also make - in his case, leading to him becoming Batman.

As Bruce's nightmare / flashback continues, he falls into the rabbit hole, plummeting to the ground and wounding his knee. He has inadvertently discovered the network of caves that would later include the Batcave. The cave is filled with bats, who fly around him, horrifying him. After they clear, he sees a single bat who seems altogether supernatural, described as an ancient, unretreating warrior. Whether or not this last part happened or is simply part of Bruce's nightmare is unclear, but Bruce clearly identifies it with Batman, who

seems to live, like some kind of demon or caged animal, inside him.

While it would later become a part of *Batman Begins*, the discovery of the Batcave had never been shown before and was a new addition to Batman's origins.

The next significant flashback occurs as Bruce sits drinking, watching late-night TV. *The Mark of Zorro* comes on the television, leading Bruce to recall his parents' murder, which followed their attendance at a Zorro movie with Bruce.

[8] Bruce recalls how he "jumped and danced" in the streets, imitating Zorro – a nice embellishment upon the original story. After his eye catches the silhouette of a bat against the moon, he feels his father gripping him strongly and turns to face a gun. While the presence of a bat might be seen as over the top, such evocative details as his father's grip were unknown to the story until this sequence.

The actual shooting takes place not in a single panel but, as if in slow motion, over whole pages of tight, little panels. Thomas Wayne raises his fist to the mugger, who squeezes the trigger. The shell casing ejects from the gun and seems to hover in mid-air. Thomas's hand suddenly grips Bruce tightly, then falls. In the commotion, Martha falls towards the shooter, and her pearl necklace gets entangled in his arm. In *The Dark Knight Returns*, she is depicted for the first time as wearing glasses, which get knocked off in the collision. The killer's hand still entangled with her necklace, he twists his wrist to level the gun at her chin. The necklace's band strains, then breaks. He fires, and the pearls begin to fall.



The shooting of the Waynes unfolds over a series of panels, as if in slow motion. From *Batman: The Dark Knight* #1 (February 1986). Art by Frank Miller and Klaus Janson. Copyright © DC Comics.

What's remarkable about this version isn't just that it is given so much detail and allowed to unfold over a great deal of space. While Martha's necklace was referenced as long ago as Batman's first origin in 1939, Miller transforms it into an icon resonant with trauma. Indeed, the necklace was never explicitly made of pearls and had never been depicted as being broken nor its pearls as falling.

Miller repeats this motif later in the story, evoking it as a kind of shorthand for Bruce's trauma – a resonance that it has had ever since. To this day, a single panel showing pearls falling in a Batman story is enough to instantly evoke all of Bruce's unreasoning trauma.

It's also remarkable that, unlike past flashbacks to the murders, this one is intercut in very complex ways with the main narrative. At one point, Miller breaks the 16-panel grid that he has established to divide a tier of panels twice as much, creating a sense of claustrophobia as Bruce repeatedly changes the channel, his teeth gritted in horror, only to find that violent crime is being reported on channel after channel. Later, a symbolic image, itself split into numerous panels to represent Bruce's psychic fragmentation, depicts Bruce outside and battered by a wind strong enough to topple a nearby statue. Bruce showers, speaking to the beast within him that wants him to become Batman again, even as the flashback panels continue – as if Bruce cannot control his traumatic memories.

The whole sequence concludes with Bruce looking outside his window into the pitch darkness, symbolically echoing his own inner darkness. Another, shorter flashback starts, this one to the bat that inspired Bruce's creation of the Batman persona (or, if that persona lives within him, merely his *costuming* of that persona). Unlike past depictions, the bat doesn't fly through an open window but crashes through a closed one, exploding through the glass and shattering it, evoking both violence and Bruce's shattered psyche. The bat, with yellow eyes and an open mouth, seems as supernatural as the one Bruce seems to remember when he fell into what would become the Batcave. While the bat crashes through the window only in flashback, it's this image that ends the sequence. Implicitly, just as that bat inspired Batman, remembering it so vividly has inspired Batman to return.

While not a story about Batman's origins, *The Dark Knight Returns* made major and lasting contributions to those origins and their depiction. The discovery of the Batcave is entirely new, as is the importance of the pearls during the shooting and how the bat that inspired Batman crashed through the window. Indeed, these sequences are so influential that many miscredit them to Miller's *Batman: Year One*, which was concerned more directly with Batman's origins.

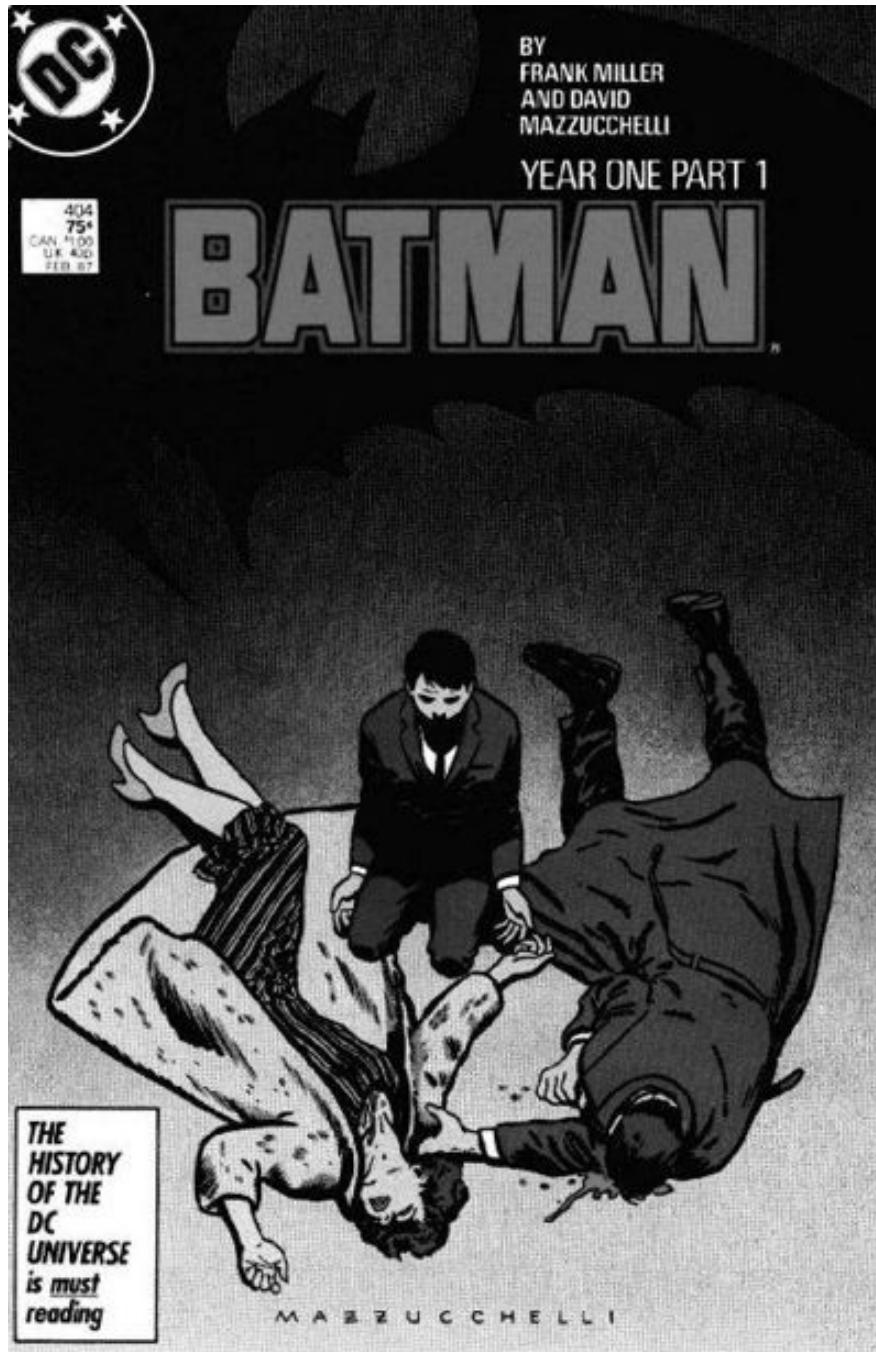
Year One (March-June 1986)

Conceived as a celebration of DC Comics' fiftieth anniversary, a 12-issue mini-

series called *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (April 1985 - March 1986) prompted widespread changes across the publisher's entire line, in an effort to simplify backstories that had become increasingly convoluted over the decades and to bring their primary characters more in line with what was seen as their classic original forms. Superman's entire history was restarted and significantly altered by John Byrne; Wonder Woman was similarly restarted by George Pérez. While Batman did not receive a similar wholesale reboot and the ongoing plotlines in his comics were allowed to continue more or less untouched, his origin and early years (as well as those of Robin) would all be significantly revised in a succession of issues that were allowed to interrupt those ongoing plotlines in both *Batman* and *Detective Comics*.

Celebrated creator Frank Miller was commissioned to create a new Batman origin story, which would be serialized in *Batman* #404-407 (February-May 1987) and illustrated by David Mazzucchelli. The storyline, entitled "Batman: Year One,"[\[9\]](#) would be the companion to Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, which was then considered in continuity. In turn, DC would directly follow "Year One" in *Detective Comics* with "Year Two" (*Detective Comics* #575-578, June-September 1987), telling an unrelated story set in Batman's second year, and in *Batman* with a few issues reintroducing Jason Todd, who had become the second Robin some years after Dick Grayson left the role to eventually become known as Nightwing.

Perhaps most importantly, following the critical and commercial success of *The Dark Knight Returns*, Batman's monthly stories suddenly became *much* darker in emulation of Miller's aesthetic choices. Throwbacks to Batman's sillier years such as giant props continued to appear, as did occasional ironic endings featuring the smiling heroes. But these elements now appeared alongside darker and more violent ones, such as particularly brutal serial killers.



The stark cover to *Batman* #404 (February 1987), an image of mourning, announced that this first chapter of “Year One” would be quite different from past Batman stories. Art by David Mazzucchelli. Copyright © DC Comics.

As important as it is to understand what *Year One* is, it's also important to understand what it *isn't*. To begin with, it is not a syncretic retelling of all previous origin stories, as was *The Untold Legend of the Batman*. And for all of *Year One*'s influence, it really isn't the story of Batman's origins; the *Untold*

Legend mini-series does that much better. *Year One* is a story of very limited scope, dealing solely with the first calendar year in which Batman operated. Viewed in terms of Batman's first published origin story in *Detective Comics* #33 from 1939, the entirety of *Year One* is an expanded version of the last four panels, in which Bruce, having already trained, decides to disguise himself, draws inspiration from a bat flying through his window, and becomes Batman. The story begins with the wealthy playboy Bruce Wayne's return to Gotham City after training elsewhere, and it ends with the beginning of his relationship with police Lieutenant James Gordon. While the story isn't syncretic in terms of content, it is in terms of characters: it is as much about Gordon, Catwoman, and Gotham City itself as it is about Bruce Wayne.

Despite its limited scope, *Year One* would make major changes to past Batman origins – changes that would become canonical for all future stories, superseding the stories that inspired it. Even the aspects that went relatively unchanged would become best remembered from the version presented in *Year One*. We'd never seen Wayne return to Gotham to begin his mission there, nor all of these details of forging his Batman identity. We'd seen Wayne's parents murdered, but never so cinematically. And while we'd seen a bat inspire Bruce Wayne before, it's the version in *Year One* that most remember.

The Gotham of *Year One* is run by mob bosses, and the story's genre is closer to crime than to super-heroes. Unlike *Batman Begins*, Ra's al Ghul and Scarecrow aren't featured. Catwoman, however, is. This Catwoman isn't the costumed super-hero with whom comics readers were familiar, nor the version who would be seen in the disastrous Halle Berry film *Catwoman* released in 2005, just months before the premiere of *Batman Begins*. The Catwoman of *Year One* was an impoverished prostitute who took to the streets after seeing Batman in action. In keeping with the air of heightened realism of the narrative, her costume, such as it was, was not spandex tights but merely a leather S/M outfit.

The story begins with two arrivals in Gotham: one is James Gordon, then a police lieutenant, whose fresh transfer to the city retroactively eliminates his prior involvement with a young Bruce Wayne following his parents' murders, previously seen in *The Untold Legend of the Batman*. Wayne's return to Gotham on the same day implies that he has been training elsewhere.[\[10\]](#) The narrative informs us that Bruce is now 25 years old and has been absent for twelve years.[\[11\]](#) Such an extended period of training abroad had no precedent in Batman lore. While these years aren't depicted in *Year One*, they owe their

existence to this story.

Later that day, Wayne is shown at his parents' gravestones, reminiscent of past origin stories in which he pledged to fight crime at the same site. That scene, however, would have occurred far earlier, and is only metatextually evoked here. In fact, the scene is only given a single, silent panel, brilliantly depicted by Mazzucchelli not only in black-and-white but in total black and total white, without any greys.

Most of the first issue occurs in the span of a single evening, as Bruce sets out to fight crime for the first time. He still has not invented the Batman persona and disguises himself more conventionally in working clothes rather than superheroic garb, affecting a prominent facial scar. He fights with pimps and prostitutes in Gotham's seedy East End, but he winds up knifed, bleeding, and barely able to get home. Never before had Bruce been shown fighting crime prior to inventing the Batman identity, and never before had Bruce been shown to have been so bad at it. He's utterly a human being, a far cry from the almost supernaturally unbeatable Batman he will become.

It's the end of the first issue that connects to previously-established material. A wounded Bruce Wayne sits bleeding in a chair, unwilling to ring the bell that will summon Alfred to help him. In narrative captions, Bruce speaks to his dead father, asking how he will combine all the elements he's assembled to truly fight crime. Some element is missing, something that will "make them afraid." Bruce waits for an answer from beyond, willing to die (by not calling for Alfred's help) if he doesn't receive one. If people tend to bargain with God, a frustrated Bruce is willing to resort to extortion.

On the penultimate page, we once again revisit the murder of Thomas and Martha Wayne in flashback. If 1976's "There is No Hope in Crime Alley!" represented an artistic quantum leap forward from past depictions of that event, this one is yet another. Following the lead of O'Neil and Giordano a decade earlier, Miller and Mazzucchelli likewise eschew word balloons and place the emphasis on narrative captions and simple images. This time, the recollection is considerably more minimalistic, reflecting Mazzucchelli's artistic style.[\[12\]](#)

The flashback begins not with the murder itself but with the three Waynes watching the Zorro movie (here identified specifically as *The Mark of Zorro*) that preceded the murder. Bruce recalls the killer as having "frightened, hollow eyes and a voice like glass being crushed." As in "There is No Hope in Crime

Alley!”, the killer (again unnamed) shoots both Wayne parents; Martha’s heart attack makes no return to continuity. Nor does young Bruce’s angry words and his staring at the killer. Instead, Mazzucchelli delivers an artistic *tour de force*: the two gunshots are juxtaposed in two panels, side-by-side and stretching across a full tier. Both images are in black-and-white, not only recalling the earlier shot of Bruce at their graveside but evoking the flash of gunfire. The child is shown kneeling by their corpses, bathed in the light of a streetlamp. His eyes are shown in close-up without tears, recalling the “silent scream” referenced in “There is No Hope in Crime Alley!” and suggesting all the determination that would make him Batman was already present. Interestingly, the pearls, which Miller made so important in *The Dark Knight Returns* as to become iconic, are present only on Martha’s neck: if the mugger asks for them, it’s not mentioned, and the necklace doesn’t break (as seen in *The Dark Knight Returns*).

The close-up on young Bruce’s eyes provide a transition back to the present, and we begin the final page with the adult Bruce’s eyes in a parallel panel. A bat then crashes through the window, much as seen in *The Dark Knight Returns*, and alights upon the bust of Bruce’s father. Bruce recalls seeing it somewhere before -- a reference to his childhood flashback in *The Dark Knight Returns*. The bat appears as a sign to Bruce, as if his prayers have been answered, and Bruce decides to “become a bat,” echoing the line used as far back as *Detective Comics* #33 in 1939. Of course, Bruce’s perception of this “sign” is influenced by the fact that he’s suffering from blood loss, as suggested by his halting, ellipse-filled narration. His prayers answered, Bruce rings the bell for Alfred.



The familiar murder is stylishly retold with minimal captions. The penultimate page from *Batman* #404 (February 1987). Art by David Mazzucchelli. Copyright © DC Comics.

That final page, in fact, is a masterful retelling of the single panel in *Detective Comics* #33, as well as subsequent retellings, in which the bat flies through the (there open) window. Miller and Mazzucchelli have managed to make sense of what was a rather unbelievable convention in Batman's origin: that a remotely sane man wanting to fight crime would, when a bat flies through a window, decide to "become a bat." Without contradicting Batman history in any major

way, *Year One* renders this moment believable through a combination of several elements. Most crucially, Bruce is not in his right mind, having lost so much blood. Additionally, Bruce is already looking for a sign to direct him. While this seems convenient, *Year One* has already dramatized Bruce's frustration following years of training and his first, unsuccessful outing as a vigilante, and it is in this psychological state that he demands some kind of sign. Finally, outside of the effect of blood loss, Miller undermines Bruce's basic sanity by having him speak to his dead father. This combines with his extreme determination, not only in training but immediately after his parents' murders, to give the reader the impression that Bruce, while not outright insane, is certainly not psychologically normal. All of this combines to make a declaration as ridiculous as "I shall become a bat" actually believable.

The rest of *Year One* is of less direct importance to us, but a few scenes are worthy of note here. Batman makes his first outings while Gordon struggles with his wife Barbara's pregnancy. In one of Batman's first adventures in costume, he battles three petty thieves on a fire escape. One of the criminals heads over the edge. Batman grabs him, saving his life, but the other thugs use the opportunity to batter Batman. He wins the fight without the man falling, but he refers to himself as a "lucky amateur."

Police Commissioner Loeb is uninterested, despite Gordon's requests, in devoting the effort necessary to catch Batman. His attitude changes when Batman attacks his mansion with grenades in order to send a message that he's out to end the commissioner's corruption. Batman similarly assaults mob boss Carmine Falcone, a.k.a. the Roman. He's also shown working with District Attorney Harvey Dent.

Batman resists Gordon's attempts to lure him out through staged muggings and the like – until he sees a homeless woman in real danger. The police open fire immediately, wounding him in the leg. The shot is painful, and Batman's outfit looks like little more than pajamas – emphasizing not only his vulnerability but the crudeness of his earliest months. With Batman cornered in an abandoned building, the police *bomb* it using a police helicopter – a bit melodramatic, perhaps, but a sign of the extent of Gotham's corruption.

This also is the occasion of a brilliant sequence in which Batman, trapped in the rubble, battles armored cops sent to finish the job. Despite his clever tactics, Batman is shot again, this time in the arm. He uses a high-frequency device to call bats from the caves beneath Wayne Manor, providing sufficient distraction

to permit his escape.

The incident marks the turning point in Gordon's attitude towards Batman. Although he will continue to investigate, he's troubled by the homicidal actions of the police – and the knowledge that Batman, in contrast, was only trapped because he exposed himself to save an innocent's life. Gordon comes to consider Wayne the prime suspect, and Bruce is forced to create an alibi using his wealthy playboy persona. Gordon, burdened by the endemic police corruption and worried about his unborn child, begins an affair with his female partner, Sarah Essen. Because Gordon is married but can't help his love for her, she agrees to a transfer in order to end the relationship.

After one of Falcone's thugs named Skeevens is captured, Harvey Dent uncharacteristically lets the man go – in order, it turns out, to be intimidated by Batman. This is particularly telling, since Dent has not only worked with a vigilante but used him to intimidate a suspect. In due course, Skeevens agrees to testify against corrupt policemen, blowing the lid off their corruption. Commissioner Loeb intervenes, trying to blackmail Gordon with pictures documenting his affair with Sarah.

In a clever sequence, Gordon's parallel investigation into Batman leads him to question Bruce at Wayne Manor. Bruce performs his playboy routine to the hilt, sipping champagne while lounging with a scantily-clad woman he cannot introduce because he doesn't know her name and "she doesn't speak any language *I* know." Questioned about his whereabouts, he has Alfred produce his datebook full of famous and beautiful women. Gordon recognizes that Bruce is acting but remains uncertain whether he's Batman.

It's how far a man like Bruce might go to protect his secrets that prompts Gordon to tell his wife of his infidelity. This undoubtedly painful conversation is not shown. But given Loeb's attempt at blackmail, Gordon is willing to jeopardize his marriage in order to continue probing police corruption. Later, when someone calls his house to tell her, a resigned Barbara calmly says she already knows. Barbara soon gives birth to a son.

At the climax of the story, Mazzucchelli's artwork is particularly good at conveying Gordon's desperation, communicated almost exclusively through visuals, when crooked police kidnap the Gordons' baby son in a last-ditch effort to stop the investigation. After a chase, the child is dropped from a bridge. A helmeted Bruce Wayne, not in his Batman costume, rescues the boy and hands

him over to a relieved father. Gordon remarks that he's "practically *blind* without my glasses," which have fallen off in the commotion, and tells Bruce to go before the police arrive. It's not clear whether Gordon's lying. We suspect he can see it's Bruce Wayne standing in front of him and is actually saying that he won't betray Bruce by revealing his identity. Supporting this belief, this marks the end of Gordon's investigations into Batman.

An epilogue narrated by Gordon explains how the police corruption case has succeeded, implicating Commissioner Loeb. A vindicated Gordon now waits for Batman to arrive, calling him "a friend." His narration reveals the occasion for their meeting: someone who "calls himself the Joker" has threatened to poison Gotham's reservoir.

None of these scenes, while masterful, were appropriated from past material. They do, however, demonstrate just how much – and how well – subsequent creators can *expand* upon existing material. This expansion also demonstrates the same focus on telling a longer, more complete version of Batman's origins, a tendency also seen in *The Untold Legend of the Batman*. It's just that the focus is very different, this time around.

Year One would exert a profound influence in comics – and not just over Batman. In fact, *Year One* started a subgenre within super-hero comics: the long-form exploration of a character's origins (and the term "Year One" has even become a generic signifier for this subgenre).

For Batman, many works would claim to continue *Year One* in one way or another. The series entitled *Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight* was launched in 1989, initially focused on telling stories from Batman's early years. Most notable, however, is *Batman: The Long Halloween*, written by Jeph Loeb and illustrated by Tim Sale. Those creators, who have also written other tales set in Batman's earliest years, saw *Year One* as beginning a transition from Gotham as a corrupt city run by mob bosses to Gotham as a haven for costumed crazies, as seen in most Batman stories set in the present day. This understanding would be crucial to *Batman Begins*.

Yet, despite how expanded Batman's origins were for *Year One*, that story begins with Wayne's return to Gotham. Bruce Wayne's youth and training are almost entirely omitted in favor of telling the tale of Batman's first year. For example, the most famous depiction of the young Wayne falling into the cave beneath his family's mansion comes not from *Year One* but from Frank Miller's

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns.

As we shall see, the direct borrowings of *Batman Begins* from *Year One*, while substantial, are actually part of a tapestry of references to the comics, appropriated and refined by the film. In fact, the story of *Year One* fuels the film's second act far more than the film's first or third. But there are a number of tonal connections between *Year One* and *Batman Begins*, both of which have been celebrated for adding realism to the character.

One of these tonal connections is the emphasis upon Bruce Wayne. Film reviewers have remarked upon how previous Batman films had focused on the villains: most felt that Jack Nicholson as the Joker, for example, overshadowed Michael Keaton as Batman, a pattern repeated with Heath Ledger and *The Dark Knight*. It's harder for creators to focus on Batman, especially given the creative temptations of his very colorful and eccentric villains. Both *Batman Begins* and *Year One* are notable for making not Batman but Bruce Wayne their central character: both stories are his, as we watch him evolve in his newfound role as masked vigilante.

To this end, it helps that the villains of *Batman Begins* are Ra's al Ghul and Scarecrow. Viewers unfamiliar with Batman apart from the previous films or the '60s television series would have no idea who these characters were, and thus they would not carry the expectation of more familiar eccentric villains. The film goes so far in emphasizing Bruce Wayne that it seems to marginalize the villains – and while this would seem quite a loss in the case of colorful foes such as the Joker or Two-Face, it feels less an affront with the more subdued Ra's al Ghul or Scarecrow.

“The Man Who Falls” (1989)

Following *Year One*, several origin stories borrowed from its imagery and its mention of Bruce Wayne having travelled and trained abroad. One would exert particular influence over *Batman Begins*: “The Man Who Falls,” from the 1989 collection *Secret Origins of the World’s Greatest Super-Heroes*.^[13] Written by Dennis O’Neil with art by Dick Giordano, reuniting the same creative team responsible for “There is No Hope in Crime Alley!”, “The Man Who Falls” would again appropriate past material and expand upon several sequences in the process.

The story is organized around the recurring motif of falling. As Batman perches, ready to swoop down upon criminals, the narration contemplates the possibility

that he might slip and fall. This prompts a flashback to young Bruce Wayne discovering what would become the Batcave, adapted from *The Dark Knight Returns*. Here, however, Bruce doesn't chase a rabbit and the hole, through which he falls, seems to be covered by some old rotten wooden boards. Bruce is horrified by the bats, as he was in the earlier version, but there is no singular, almost supernatural bat as in *The Dark Knight Returns*. After rescuing the wayward child, Thomas Wayne is depicted as cruel, calling his son an "idiot" and emphasizing his disobedience in running off alone. Martha is sympathetic to the traumatized Bruce, who asks, "Mommy, was I in Hell?"

The idea that Bruce "watch[es] others fall" spurs a flashback to the murders, depicted silently with heavy visual borrowings from *Year One*. Bruce is then depicted as having forged letters allowing him to travel while still a boy, after which he attends college and consorts with the homeless, learning from both. The narration suggests that he quits several colleges and is pained at not having found love as his classmates have.

Bruce moves to Washington, D.C., where he joins the F.B.I. despite poor marksmanship and lacking a college degree. He stays at the job for only six weeks, which teach him – along with various skills – that he cannot "operate within a system." It's only after this that he journeys abroad, first to Korea.

Bruce enters a Korean temple where he trains under the temple's master, Kirigi, only to be dismissed less than a year later when Kirigi announces he has nothing more to teach Bruce except to let go of his pain – a process he says will take 20 years. In France, Bruce meets Henri Ducard, but the two part ways when Ducard commits an assassination.

Having "studied with, or at least spoken to, every eminent detective in the world," Bruce begins working with Willie Doggett, trailing a criminal named Tom Woodley – until Woodley slays Doggett. After causing Woodley to fall off a cliff, Bruce survives exposure to the elements only through the aid of an Indian shaman wearing a bat mask, who claims Bruce has "the mark of the bat."



The murder of Bruce's parents is again retold, this time in a pale imitation of the sequence from *Year One*. From *Secret Origins of the World's Greatest Super-Heroes* (1989). Art by Dick Giordano.
Copyright © DC Comics.

Each of these mentors had been introduced in Batman stories appearing almost simultaneously with this story: Kirigi in *Batman* #431 (March 1989), and Ducard in Sam Hamm's "Blind Justice" storyline in *Detective Comics* #598-600 (March-May 1989). (Both stories will be discussed later, in commentary on Ducard's first appearance in the film.) The sequences with Willie Doggett and the Indian shaman come from O'Neil's own "Shaman" storyline, from *Batman: Legends of*

the Dark Knight #1-5 (November 1989-March 1990).

Bruce is then shown returning to Wayne Manor, then fighting crime without a costume, the image for which is redrawn from *Year One*. When the bat crashes through his window, however, he's not delirious as seen in *Year One*. Yet this is still the turning point – the moment it all comes together. All that's left, in the 16-page story, is to show Batman putting on his costume and then leaping from his perch at the beginning of the story, reiterating the theme of falling.

This story was given to Nolan by DC as he was formulating his plans for the movie. While Nolan's film ignores much of the story, its central motif did show up in the film's own falling theme, as evident in Thomas Wayne's dialogue after Bruce falls into the cave and Alfred's repetition of this dialogue later in the film. For this reason, the story was collected in *Batman Begins: The Movie & Other Tales of the Dark Knight*, a comics collection offered in conjunction with the film.

Before we can begin addressing specifically how *Batman Begins* borrows from *Year One* and other comic-book stories, however, we must turn to his cinematic predecessors – particularly, to earlier attempts at filming the hero's origins, which paved the way for Nolan's treatment.

Unproduced Attempts to Film Batman's Origins

Batman Begins was, in fact, preceded by other attempts to dramatize Batman's origins, both on film and on television. In 1999, one production company proposed a weekly series about the boyhood of Bruce Wayne prior to assuming the Batman identity. However, following the success of the 2000 *X-Men* film, the feature film division of Warner Bros. shifted its attention to developing a new Batman movie instead. Frank Miller, writer of the original *Year One* comic-book storyline, wrote a particularly liberal screenplay adaptation of his comics story. Larry and Andy Wachowski, of *Matrix* fame, authored their own proposal for such a film.

Ultimately, however, director Christopher Nolan chose to go his own route, ignoring these past attempts. The *Batman Begins* screenplay, originally authored by David Goyer and later modified by Nolan, bears no sign of having been influenced by these earlier attempts. In particular, the emphasis upon Batman's training, his painstakingly depicted construction of his costume, and his villains are all unique to *Batman Begins*.

Nonetheless, in considering *Batman Begins*, it is both useful and interesting to consider these alternate versions – if only to see in what ways they are both different and similar. The similarities often reflect direct borrowings from the comics; the differences often reflect different emphases or one version's departure from the comic-book source material.

Batman Triumphant

Before turning to Batman's origins, Warner Bros. had initially planned a fifth installment in the previous Batman series. Joel Schumacher, director of 1995's *Batman Forever* and 1997's *Batman and Robin*, was to have returned for a third film, tentatively titled *Batman Triumphant*. Mark Protosevich (*The Cell*) was tapped as screenwriter. George Clooney was set to return as Batman, with Chris O'Donnell returning as Robin. Shock jock Howard Stern was rumored to be in the running to play Scarecrow, in what would have been the character's first appearance on film (instead of *Batman Begins*).

Harley Quinn, created by Bruce Timm for the 1990s animated TV show, would have also appeared in the film. That character, who had proven enormously popular and would subsequently be introduced into the comics, was a female

psychiatrist who fell in love with the Joker and became his sidekick. The film's version would have made her the Joker's daughter, incidentally recalling the female character Harlequin from Batman comics, who originally called herself "the Joker's Daughter."[\[14\]](#) In conjunction with this character, the Scarecrow's fear gas would have caused Batman to hallucinate that the Joker had returned, allowing a return for the popular villain despite killing him off in Burton's 1989 film. Whether Jack Nicholson would have returned for the role can only be speculated.

Batman: DarKnight

In the wake of the commercial and critical embarrassment that was *Batman and Robin*, however, *Batman Triumphant* was scrapped. Warner Bros. reportedly then planned a lower-budget sequel based on a new pitch made in 1998 by Lee Shapiro and Stephen Wise to Warner V.P. Tom Lassally. In a rather stupid attempt at being clever, this version was to be titled *Batman: DarKnight*, a "cool" riff on how Batman is known as the Dark Knight (rather than a reference to *The Dark Knight Returns*). The studio reportedly planned a darker, more serious tone for the film, which would have focused more on character in accordance with its lower budget.

The conceit of the proposal was that it advanced the main characters for the first time in the series. Bruce Wayne had retired as Batman, feeling that he had lost his edge – that criminals no longer feared him, perhaps a sly acknowledgement of how the series had gone askew and become less dark. A similarly retired Dick Grayson would have gone off to study at Gotham University and find himself in Bruce's absence.

DarKnight kept the Scarecrow from *Batman Triumphant*, although he was supposedly closer to the comic-book version than the version seen in *Batman Begins*. This Scarecrow, a.k.a. Dr. Jonathan Crane, would have been a professor of psychology at Gotham University as well as Arkham Asylum's resident psychiatrist. He also would have been obsessed with fear, which was, like *Batman Begins*, to be a theme of the film.

While keeping the Scarecrow, *DarKnight* would have ditched Harley Quinn and the hallucinated Joker from *Batman Triumphant*. In their place would have been Man-Bat, a kind of inverse double for Batman, more bat than man. Man-Bat, a.k.a. Dr. Kirk Langstrom, first appeared in *Detective Comics* #400 (June 1970). A scientist who studied bats to create a formula intended to give humans bat-like

sonar, Langstrom tested his serum on himself, only to find the formula worked too well: it gradually transformed him into a humanoid version of a bat.

The movie's Langstrom would have been a colleague of Crane's at Gotham University. Crane would have accidentally triggered Langstrom's transformation, and Langstrom would have struggled painfully with the monster inside him even as he menaced the citizens of Gotham City, playing into the theme of fear. He would also be motivated by a desire for revenge against Crane, blaming him for his transformation. Warner Bros. is said to have been particularly taken with the characterization of Langstrom.

While Crane spurred Man-Bat, Man-Bat would in turn spur Batman to come out of retirement. Mistaking Man-Bat for Batman, the public would have turned on the retired vigilante, providing the impetus for Batman to return and clear his name by stopping Man-Bat.

As the plot unfolded, Dick Grayson would have been put in Arkham Asylum, where he would have been abused by Crane. Of course, Batman and Robin would ultimately defeat the villains, returning to action in Gotham – perhaps symbolically righting the franchise's course.

Within a few months of their pitch, Shapiro and Wise had reportedly completed a first draft of the script. At this point, Joel Schumacher was still signed to direct the film, but he dropped out of the project a few weeks after the draft was completed. Warner Bros. replaced Schumacher with Andrew Davis. Davis had directed the movie-quality Batman commercials for On Star's car service. These commercials featured the Batmobile, a Batman who never unmasked, while Alfred was played by Michael Gough, the same actor who had done so in the four previous films.

While casting rumors circulated, the film languished in development, in part because competing ideas for the franchise were circulating in the Warner Bros. offices. In fact, *DarkKnight* was only officially cancelled in late 2000.

Batman Beyond

In 1999, the animated Batman TV show then running morphed into *Batman Beyond*, a sequel / spin-off about a young man years in the future who takes up the role of Batman, mentored by a now-elderly Bruce Wayne. As reported in October 1999, Warner Bros., eager to find a new direction for the film franchise, thought a live-action version of *Batman Beyond* might be a way of

reinvigorating the film series.

By January 2000, the TV show's creators, Paul Dini and Alan Burnet, were brought in to write the script. In the following months, Boaz Yakin (*Remember the Titans*) was brought in as director. By August 2000, he was working with Dini, Burnett, and Neal Stephenson, noted (post)cyberpunk author. Reportedly, a first draft of the script was completed.

But the project soon fell apart, reportedly because Yakin wanted a much darker, cursing Batman. The problem with this wasn't how far it diverged from the all-ages *Batman Beyond* TV series but rather that such a film would receive an "R" rating, limiting its audience.

Through all of this, *Batman: DarkKnight* officially remained in development. But these two ideas weren't the only ones competing for the franchise.

Darren Aronofsky's Batman Movie

Publicly apologizing for *Batman and Robin*, Schumacher sought the opportunity to redeem himself and win the opportunity to direct another film in the series. Accepting the cries for a less campy sequel, Schumacher proposed that the new film adapt *Batman: Year One* from the comics. Warner Bros. reportedly liked the idea, but decided on the artsy Darren Aronofsky (who had previously directed *Pi*) as the director. The fact that Aronofsky had only directed films with a much lower budget (especially compared to Schumacher) was actually an advantage for him, since Warner Bros. still desired a lower-budget film in the wake of 1997's *Batman and Robin*.

However, Aronofsky stated to the press that he would rather adapt *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, casting Clint Eastwood as the aging Batman and filming in Tokyo. While such statements illustrate how tentative the project was at this point, they were written off by most as a sign of the director's eccentricity: he and the studio were reportedly still leaning strongly towards a version of *Batman: Year One*.

These plans, however, would soon clash against the WB network's plans for a series starring an 18-year-old Bruce Wayne – plans that seem to have been considerably more developed than Aronofsky's.

The Aborted Bruce Wayne TV Series

In mid 1999, agents for writer Tim McCanlies reportedly approached Tollin-

Robbins Productions with a pitch for a new TV series. Said to star a J.F.K., Jr. type, an American icon whose parents had been killed, the story would see the protagonist struggling with his family's inheritance, aided by a grandfather-like figure and one policeman. According to legend, only at the end of the pitch was the protagonist revealed to be Bruce Wayne. Tollin-Robbins Productions liked the idea and took it to the WB network, owned by Warner Bros.

Tim McCanlies prepared a series bible outlining the pilot, the first season, and a five-year plan for the show in various levels of detail. The pilot was to begin with Bruce Wayne's return to Gotham just days before he turns 18. The series would see Bruce increasingly move towards becoming Batman – planned as the final moment of the final episode.

Bruce's battle for control of his family company, which seems to be wrecking Gotham rather than helping it, would begin immediately with the pilot episode. The city's police force would be corrupt, much as in *Year One*, and would feature both the corrupt Flass and the pure Gordon. Gordon's daughter Barbara, who became the original Batgirl in the comics, would appear. Harvey Dent, Gotham's District Attorney before becoming the villain Two-Face in the comics, would appear as Bruce's best friend, a rich kid studying corporate law. Harvey's sister Susan would be created for the show as a teenage love interest for Bruce. Comics' Vicki Vale, also seen in 1989's *Batman*, would have been a TV gossip reporter and another love interest.

Younger versions of Batman's later villains would also make appearances. Jack Napier, who would later become the Joker, would have appeared as an angry comedian. Selina Kyle, comics' Catwoman, would have appeared as well. A psychology student named Harleen Quinzel would also have been seen – apparently to later become Harley Quinn, the celebrated lover of the Joker invented for the 1990s Batman animated show and later brought into the comics themselves.

One episode would even have featured Clark Kent, a 16-year-old from Smallville, Kansas, in Gotham City for a convention of high school journalists. Bruce Wayne would have tried unsuccessfully to get away from the farmboy Kent – a kind of in-joke for those knowing that Clark Kent would become Superman.

Of course, Wayne would gradually take steps on the road to becoming Batman. He would visit Arkham Asylum to study criminals, an increasing fascination.

He would bring martial arts experts to Wayne Manor, perfecting his own skills. Racing motorcycles, Wayne would learn to appreciate anonymity as he raced along the city streets. As he learns to race cars and fly planes, the public would think him merely a rich kid interested in extreme sports. Regaining control of his company, he would appropriate its new technology for his own use. And WayneCorp would win a bid to build the F.B.I.'s criminal database, giving Wayne back door access to the F.B.I.'s files.

Near the end of the first season, Wayne would have discovered a cave beneath Wayne Manor and begin transforming it into a secret hideout. Once he had decided to battle criminals, he would make short-lived attempts at being a Gotham City policeman and an F.B.I. agent. By the end of the series, Wayne would have decided to fight crime a less orthodox way: by becoming the costumed Batman.

By the end of 1999, rumors were circulating of a new "Young Bruce Wayne" WB show. The network was said to be "thrilled," seeing the show as its next big hit, to be paired with the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* spin-off *Angel*. Casting rumors began to circulate.

But behind the scenes, the WB network and the Warner Bros. film studio were engaged in a turf war over the Batman franchise. In light of the studio's plans to have Darren Aronofsky direct a film adaptation of *Batman: Year One*, the ability of the two developing projects to avoid contradictions was very much in doubt, and most felt that one would have to be given priority. In January, the TV show was officially put on hold, pending a decision.

Reportedly, it was the success of Marvel's *X-Men* in July 2000 that sealed the TV show's fate. *X-Men* grossed \$54 million in its opening weekend, and superhero comic-book properties were suddenly seen in a new light by Hollywood. Batman's film prospects simply outweighed all other considerations.

In September 2000 the WB network announced *Smallville*, a series depicting the exploits of a young Clark Kent in his home town before taking on his adult role as Superman. Michael Rosenbaum, Lex Luthor on *Smallville*, was even rumored to have been considered for the role of Harvey Dent in the abortive Bruce Wayne series.[\[15\]](#)

Smallville became a success both on TV and, later, on DVD. With the series a hit, its creators Alfred Gough and Miles Millar proposed to do *Bruce Wayne* as a companion series. They were denied along grounds similar to those used to stop

the prospective series the first time around – and it didn’t help that, by then, the Aronofsky film was further along in pre-production.

A Batman-related series created by Tollin-Robbins Productions did in fact appear on the WB network in 2002: *Birds of Prey*, loosely based on the DC comic about a group of female crime-fighters linked to Batman continuity. The original comic teamed the former Batgirl, now wheelchair-bound but still active as the computer expert Oracle, with Black Canary, daughter of a costumed heroine from the 1940s and herself a longtime associate of Batman, plus a rotating assortment of other characters. The TV series was set in a near future after Batman has retired, and saw the daughter of Batman and Catwoman teaming up with the former Batgirl to fight crime and the plots of evil psychiatrist Dr. Harleen Quinzel in New Gotham. The series wasn’t supposed to include Batman, but it got away with occasional references – including a flashback sequence showing Batman battling the Joker in the pilot episode. The series was a failure, however, and wasn’t renewed after its original 13 episodes.

Those who regret the demise of the projected Bruce Wayne TV series argue that telling Batman’s origins simply takes longer than an hour or two of film. The whole idea of the TV series would be to show the character progressing slowly over years. For fans, there is a certain joy to imagining the hundreds of hours of Batman material the series might have represented.

On the other hand, *Smallville* has received somewhat mixed praise, and the WB (which merged with UPN to become CW in 2006) was frequently mocked for its reliance on hackneyed teenage romance. There would almost certainly have been a number of embarrassing moments in all that footage, and not every fan trusted the WB with a young Bruce Wayne. The great appeal of films in the wake of free television has long been quality – a fact that the precision of *Batman Begins* only emphasizes.

However one feels about the aborted *Bruce Wayne* series, it’s certainly an interesting footnote to the story of *Batman Begins*.

Frank Miller’s Year One Screenplay

Late 2000 seems, by all accounts, to have been a turning point for the languishing Batman franchise. It was then that both *Batman: DarKnight* and the live-action *Batman Beyond* were cancelled, with Warner Bros. focusing on a *Year One* adaptation to be directed by Darren Aronofsky. In all likelihood, this was a direct response to the success of the film *X-Men*, which similarly ended

discussion of the *Bruce Wayne* TV series. If Marvel could turn the X-Men, who had never before appeared on film, into nothing less than cinema gold, properties like Batman and Superman, with their successful cinematic histories, simply couldn't be allowed to languish in development.

With Darren Aronofsky still attached as director, Frank Miller produced a screenplay entitled *Batman: Year One*. Miller and Aronofsky found that their respective visions for the film weren't completely in harmony, and the two ended up exchanging several script revisions. The vision that ultimately emerged seems to have been closer to Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* than to previous versions of Batman. Aronofsky also told *Cinefantastique* magazine that the film was to be a period piece set in the 1970s and that he aspired to capture a cinematic feel similar to *The French Connection*. One can understand why Aronofsky thought of Clint Eastwood, star of the *Dirty Harry* films, as a possible Batman when he considered adapting *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*.

Miller's screenplay keeps many aspects of the comic-book *Year One* and even adapts a few scenes fairly directly. The script notably retains Catwoman and her origins as a whore – if anything, the script's version of Catwoman increases the sexual content, including some rougher dialogue in scenes with her pimp and her possession of sadomasochistic tools more reminiscent of Miller's subsequent *Sin City* work than his *Year One*. She later meets Batman as he rescues her in the Batmobile: when he fails to react as a bullet tears through his shoulder, the script notes that she's "a little turned on." She soon explains that she's never met another real man. In fact, Catwoman gets the last shot of the film – as she finishes a cat burglary.

As in the comic-book version, Gordon is a more important character than in *Batman Begins*. In the screenplay, we first see Gordon with a gun in his mouth – though his wife's calls to come to bed apparently change his mind. A subsequent scene between Gordon and his wife suggests some debate over raising children in Gotham, echoing a plot thread in the 1995 David Fincher film *Se7en*. Gordon is next seen applying for a transfer out of Gotham City, but Commissioner Loeb threatens Gordon's wife. News of his wife's pregnancy interrupts him with his gun in his mouth a second time. All of this clearly represents an intense heightening of the stresses on Gordon in Miller's original comics version of *Year One* and stands in contrast to the much more stable Gordon who would eventually appear in *Batman Begins*.

In Miller's script, Gordon then goes into a house alone to save a baby taken hostage, rescuing the captive as much from Loeb's police force as from the gunman – a scene adapted fairly directly from the comics version. In the script, however, this scene inspires Bruce Wayne (watching the scene on TV) to become a vigilante. While having a tougher Gordon inspire Wayne makes sense, using screen time economically and rooting their later relationship, no such early connection between the two men has been seen elsewhere. Moreover, the gunman in this scene seems taken from the more violent, insane world of *The Dark Knight Returns*: he mutters in a frighteningly incoherent manner while holding the gun inside the child's mouth and the child against his chest so that, if he fires, he will kill them both.

Later in the script, Gordon takes his wife out to a nice dinner and sees Loeb openly talking with a criminal. In response, Gordon goes over Loeb's head – to Mayor Noone, who clearly feigns agreement with Gordon. Disregarding Noone's advice to stay low, Gordon begins amassing evidence on police corruption – which he narrates in voiceover as a “Corruption Log.” Next, in another scene borrowed from the comic version, Flass leads a group of policemen in beating Gordon. After a scene in which Loeb meets with Mayor Noone, confirming Noone's corruption, Loeb puts Gordon on the Batman case to keep the cop busy.

Gordon questions Harvey Dent, Gotham's Assistant District Attorney (not yet risen to become head District Attorney), about Batman – just as he does, briefly, in the comics version. After his office and apartment are ransacked and his Corruption Log is stolen, Gordon is placed under more pressure by Loeb to catch Batman. Much as he does in the comic-book version of *Year One*, Gordon stages muggings in an attempt to entrap Batman.

Batman is later forced into a supposedly abandoned building as the police arrive. Just as in a scene in the comic-book version, the police drop a bomb on the building. In Miller's script, an escaping Batman slips Gordon microfilm of the Corruption Log (which, having been stolen by Loeb, was claimed in turn by Catwoman) and hard evidence against Loeb. This evidence leads Dent to make his first corruption arrest.

After a warning from Batman, Gordon beats Flass for information, then drives hurriedly home, concerned for his wife Ann's safety. He finds some cops loading the pregnant Ann into an SUV containing Loeb himself. Gordon shoots most of the cops but suffers a shot to the stomach in the process. He then

confronts Loeb alongside Batman, whose mask has been torn off. After Batman saves Ann from Loeb, Gordon claims he can't see without his glasses – exactly as he does at the end of *Year One* in the comics, though the comics version occurred after Batman rescued Gordon's infant son, not his wife. This nice twist in the comic-book version, implying that Gordon knows Batman's identity, comes off as more overt in the screenplay – and is absent from *Batman Begins*.

As the script winds down, Loeb faces criminal charges as Flass turns state's evidence – just as he does at the end of the comic-book version. But Gordon isn't seen in the last few pages – a major change from the comic-book version, to which *Batman Begins* remains closer in this regard.

But while the script is in some ways closer to the comic-book version of *Year One* than is *Batman Begins*, the script departs from *Year One* – and even the Batman mythos – in certain surprising ways.

Most dramatically, the adult Bruce is introduced as living not in Wayne Manor but in Gotham's East End, the city's ghetto where Catwoman got her start in *Year One*. (This recalls an alteration Miller made during his second stint writing the Marvel Comics series *Daredevil*, where he dramatically ended the character's career as a prosperous and successful Manhattan lawyer and transplanted him to living in obscurity in lower-class Hell's Kitchen.) Bruce lives with a very large, middle-aged black man named Little Al – shockingly, the screenplay's version of Alfred. Little Al, we soon discover, promised his father (Big Al), who apparently found and informally adopted Bruce as a boy, that he would raise Bruce as a son. Later in the screenplay, Little Al hints that he served in Vietnam as a combat medic, giving him the needed skills to heal Batman when he returns home wounded.

Throughout the film, Bruce writes letters and speaks to his dead father about his growing rage and need for a sign to suggest his direction. He begins the film plagued by nightmares of his parents' murders. Early in the film, Bruce even seems to be hallucinating. At times, his dead parents are drawn into the scene itself. He seems less insane by the end of the script, after Batman has given Bruce a way to vent his rage.

When he steps in to save Selina Kyle, who will later become Catwoman, from assault by a corrupt policeman, Bruce is knocked unconscious by Selina. She leaves him to awaken beside the corpse of her slain assailant, forced to flee the arriving police (much like Marv in *Sin City*) while believing himself the possible

murderer. Bruce then decides to begin a war on crime, inspired by Gordon's words after the incorruptible cop speaks with reporters. He breaks open a wooden box in his possession since he was taken in by Big Al – a box containing Thomas Wayne's signet ring. Bruce starts his war by hunting down Selena but quickly gets sidetracked beating up muggers, skinheads, and drug dealers.

After a close bar fight, Bruce reads books and buys supplies. When he next attacks criminals, he wears hockey equipment. Like his idea of a war on crime, Wayne gets the idea for his Batman identity from television: watching a news report on his vigilantism, a reporter speaks of the mark left by Wayne's signet ring as a bat-shape. She calls the vigilante "Bat-Man" and even delivers the famous Batman line (not used in *Batman Begins*) "criminals are a superstitious and cowardly lot." As Bruce smiles, thanking his father for the inspiration, we shockingly see that "he's missing all his front teeth." He then assembles his new tools, including steel dentures spraypainted white, a hockey mask spraypainted black, leather gloves with *razor blades* in the lining, and various chemical concoctions. His workshop becomes his Batcave, where he stores his Batmobile – a souped-up Lincoln Continental. In keeping with the tone of the script's low-class Batman, the car's been outfitted with a school bus engine (though we never see it assembled).

During his ensuing bloody war on crime, Batman encounters Catwoman and attempts to turn her in to the police for murdering the corrupt policeman. Catwoman explains that, after Bruce was unconscious, her pimp arrived and killed the man. She recognizes him by his eyes and knows his identity. She then gives him Gordon's log, which she stole from Commissioner Loeb.

When Batman approaches Gordon with the Corruption Log, wishing to help, Gordon springs a trap and chases Batman into a supposedly abandoned building, which (as previously noted) the police bomb from a helicopter. Batman hides in a partially collapsed chimney, exploding outward at a police SWAT team sent in to make sure he's dead. Instead of summoning bats as he does in the comic-book version and in *Batman Begins*, he escapes through Gotham's network of underground tunnels.

A recovering Bruce and Little Al (who clearly has come to understand that Bruce is Batman) see a TV report on the missing Bruce Wayne, but Bruce refuses to claim his inheritance, calling his war on crime his true heritage. Bruce then intervenes to help Gordon save the policeman's wife Ann from Commissioner Loeb – but Batman's mask is torn off in the process. Batman

saves Ann and departs, but not before carving a “Z” into Loeb’s face – a reference to *The Mark of Zorro*, the film he saw with his parents just before their murder.

In the script’s final pages, Bruce claims his inheritance and Wayne Manor between scenes. The world apparently thinks he’s been pursuing education in Europe. We briefly see Little Al visiting the estate, enjoying the posh surroundings.

The screenplay also features Arkham Asylum, absent from the comics version of *Year One*. Gordon visits there to talk with the head of the asylum about Batman’s psychology. The asylum is run by Patricia Holcomb, rather than Jonathan Crane (as in *Batman Begins*). As Gordon arrives, we see “a young, very pale man” who “has green-ish hair” – an obvious reference to the Joker. But while the comic-book version of *Year One* ends with a scene in which Gordon refers to the Joker at large, as does *Batman Begins*, the screenplay has no such scene.

More subtly, the film script borrows from *The Dark Knight Returns*, including the interspersing of TV news programs that ironically juxtapose important commentary on the narrative with sports coverage and the like.

While Miller is famous for making Batman more violent, particularly in *The Dark Knight Returns*, the Bruce Wayne of *Year One* never seemed so psychotic. Bruce’s violence in Miller’s screenplay goes further than *The Dark Knight Returns*, however. In one sequence, Miller notes that “Bruce tears into the skinheads with all the joy of a child on Christmas.” Even the bat-like mark left by Wayne’s signet ring in criminals’ flesh is referenced as “the mark of the Bat,” recalling the gang members who choose to follow Batman in *Dark Knight*, while also evoking the classic comic strip hero the Phantom and his skull-faced signet ring. Later, as Batman kicks a criminal in the crotch, he expresses joy at a criminal resisting because it gives him the chance to use violence. While Batman spies on the mayor and the police commissioner in a corrupt meeting, he prepares to toss a *hand grenade* into the room. He stops because he hears Catwoman also snooping around, but he still runs over some guards with his Batmobile and then uses the grenade’s explosion to cover his escape. When he stops Loeb’s kidnapping of Gordon’s wife in an SUV, he does so exactly as Marv does in the first *Sin City* graphic novel – by jumping and kicking through the front windshield. He soon tosses a knife deep into Loeb’s eye. Bruce is so hardcore that he stitches his own wounds.

This violence extends to Catwoman as well: we see her cut razor blades into claws that she glues to her fingernails. Indeed, this violence seems to apply to the city as a whole, which seems to go beyond *The Dark Knight Returns* and is more aligned with Miller's later work. *Batman Begins* pales by comparison. For example, a man named Sanchez seems to traffic in imported women from all over the world – who he keeps malnourished and crawling on his floor, presumably used for sexual purposes. He tosses them potato chips. Batman stabs him in the throat: “Instant tracheotomy,” Miller sardonically notes. When the police bomb the supposedly abandoned building in which Batman hides, we see burning homeless people inside the building as Batman flees, battered and unable to help them.

Interestingly, given that *Batman Begins* borrowed the idea of a tank-like Batmobile from *The Dark Knight Returns*, Miller's script makes the Batmobile a spruced-up Lincoln Continental. Where *Batman Begins* borrows from *The Dark Knight Returns*, Miller's own screenplay does not – and vice versa.

Twice while talking with Dent, Gordon calls Batman a “terrorist” – recalling Miller's use of the same attribution in *Batman: The Dark Knight Strikes Again*, his sequel to *The Dark Knight Returns* with a very different tone. Of course, in the wake of 9/11, such a reference would not likely go over well with the American public.

I certainly don't wish to suggest that there's nothing promising about Miller's screenplay. Bruce's lack of his family resources as he starts his career adds something to the character. Indeed, the script arguably demonstrates the power of the super-hero who lacks super-powers but still strikes out against crime *better* than more traditional versions. As the subsequent commentary will suggest, Bruce Wayne's wealth and Batman's vigilante mission have always been at odds, and writers have to provide justification for a son of privilege becoming an urban creature of the night. Miller largely dodges the hard work of dramatizing this, of making it believable. Instead, Miller abandons Wayne's background in favor of heightened violence and realism, depicting Wayne as lower-class, even down-and-out. In some ways, the script can read as a guidebook for how to become such a vigilante – complete with a reference to *The Anarchist's Cookbook*. It almost seems to beg viewers to take to the streets themselves, providing a road map for how to do so.

While this may illustrate the tensions within the Batman character, the end result simply isn't Batman. In some ways, it's more like Marvel's character Punisher.

Batman may be seen as the quintessential super-hero without super-powers, but such a departure from his traditional background seems an injustice to the character. The screenplay's vision of Batman is a compelling and a vital one, one arguably more logical than the normal Batman formulation – and a bolder depiction of a super-hero vigilante with a generalized war against crime. But it's just not Batman, and fans would have been vocal in saying so. Batman fans would certainly not have tolerated such a high-profile project making such fundamental changes to the character – nor its reinvention of Alfred as Little Al. Most fans of the comic, for all their admiration for Frank Miller, would likely feel grateful to get *Batman Begins* instead of Miller's *Year One* screenplay.[\[16\]](#)

The collapse of this film has been the subject of some gossip and was included in the book *Tales from Development Hell* by David Hughes. Reportedly, the film got as far as storyboards, completed in 2003. Most speculate that Warner Bros. wasn't happy with the script and the direction the film had taken, including how much it had departed from the source material.

The Wachowski Brothers' *Year One* Proposal

This doesn't mean that Warner Bros. wasn't considering other options during this time. One possibility was to replace Darren Aronofsky with Larry and Andy Wachowski, while keeping *Year One* as the studio's intended subject.[\[17\]](#) The brothers drafted a proposal for a different film entitled *Batman: Year One* that stayed close to the comic-book original. Reportedly, their treatment was abandoned in favor of the Wachowski brothers directing the two *Matrix* sequels, *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*, produced simultaneously.

It shouldn't be surprising that the Wachowskis would draft such a proposal: several elements of *The Matrix* were borrowed from comic books and the brothers sponsored the creation of original comics based on *The Matrix* (originally published online though later collected in print form). In addition, the Wachowskis parlayed their *Matrix* money into creating the comic-book publishing company Burlyman Entertainment. The Wachowskis have subsequently produced the film *V for Vendetta*, adapting the classic graphic novel by Alan Moore and David Lloyd.

The Wachowskis' proposal begins directly with the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents after seeing the film *The Mark of Zorro* – closer to the comics than the opera seen in *Batman Begins*. Bats, presumably symbolically, fly overhead as a police officer arrives on the scene, aiding the transition as we jump forward

some 20 years. Bruce Wayne, 28 years old, returns to Gotham after years of training abroad – apparently not shown or shown briefly, again more in line with the comics than *Batman Begins*. Bruce quickly takes to the streets in black clothes and a hockey mask, but is wounded and flees into an abandoned building. There, shaken and bleeding, he is frightened by a bat – thereby inspiring his assumption of the Batman identity. This represents a change from the comics, where such a scene always occurred at Wayne Manor, as it does in *Batman Begins*. The proposal calls for the opening credits only at this point in the film, suggesting how brief this prelude was supposed to be.

Two months later, Gordon saves three girls from a “maniac” – a scene lifted from the comic-book *Year One* and mirrored in Miller’s screenplay (though the Wachowskis have made one child into three, apparently heightening the stakes). Commissioner Loeb doesn’t seem pleased, and he apparently orders officer Flass off—screen to beat Gordon – another *Year One* reference. But, unlike *Year One*, Batman interferes and saves Gordon.

We then meet Selina Kyle, thus retaining Catwoman from the comic-book *Year One*. But now, instead of being a prostitute, she starts out as an animal activist, breaking into a laboratory in order to free cats from “genetic study” and fighting with “scientists.”

Gordon then preps a task force to catch Batman – another scene fairly lifted from the comics version. Officer Sarah Essen, with whom Gordon has an affair in the comic-book version but who is dropped from both Miller’s script and *Batman Begins*, is preserved in the Wachowskis’ proposal – although Gordon does not have an affair with her. Gordon questions District Attorney Harvey Dent about being Batman – a scene in both the comic-book version and Miller’s script. But like the comics and unlike Miller’s script, Batman is seen lurking in Dent’s office – already in some secret collusion with Dent before befriending Gordon.

Adapting the comic-book version fairly directly, Gordon and crew corner Batman in an abandoned building and the police drop a bomb from a helicopter, prior to sending in a SWAT team. As in the comic-book *Year One* but unlike Miller’s script, Batman calls in a swarm of bats to provide a distraction for his escape. Selina Kyle is then shown making an outfit, inspired by the Batman – again closer to the comic-book original than Miller’s script.

Batman, Catwoman, and Gordon all meet at Commissioner Loeb’s residence – where Batman fights Catwoman, then saves her from Gordon. Gordon tells

Batman that he knows the vigilante's not bad – making Gordon more sympathetic to Batman, a move strangely out-of-line with both the comic book and (especially) Miller's script. Batman leaves behind a piece of his costume that features the Wayne Enterprises logo, leading Gordon to question Bruce with officer Sarah Essen – another scene in the comic-book original, complete with Wayne acting drunk, but found in neither Miller's script nor *Batman Begins*. While leaving the Wayne Enterprises logo on Batman's costume is sloppy, and this plot device is not used in the comic book, Batman is still a beginner. But this new way of justifying Gordon's interest in Wayne detracts from Gordon's detective skills.

As in *Batman Begins*, we see Bruce creating the Batcave in the caverns beneath Wayne Manor – though his boyhood fall into the cave is apparently not shown. This is an interesting and logical extension of the comic-book original, which featured no such scene. Even Miller's screenplay had more construction of the Batcave, even if it was in Gotham's East End instead of under Wayne Manor, and one may well believe the comic-book original defective in this regard.

In another scene adapted from the comic-book original, Catwoman and Batman appear at mobster Carmine Falcone's penthouse – culminating with Catwoman scratching Falcone's face. Falcone then meets with Loeb – making the corruption shown in the comic-book *Year One* more overt, though less so than the heightened corruption of Miller's own screenplay.

In the conclusion, Falcone and his goons kidnap Gordon's daughter and Batman intervenes. In the comics version and Miller's script, of course, it's the police and not Falcone who attack Gordon's family at the end – though Miller's script has Commissioner Loeb do so himself and has Gordon's wife as the loved one in jeopardy. Apparently trying to tie the Catwoman thread into the conclusion better than the original, it's Selina Kyle who defeats Falcone in the climax. Batman and Gordon merely find the mobster, marginalizing them in a way that may have raised objections. And, while there's a crash on a bridge in the climax, characters don't go careening off of it into mud as they do in the comic-book *Year One*. His daughter safe, Gordon lets Batman go, as he does both in the comic book and in Miller's script – though Batman doesn't lose his mask in the Wachowskis' proposal as he does in those other two versions.

The epilogue takes place at the end of the year, like both the comics version and Miller's script. Instead of Gordon merely referencing the Joker's attempt to poison the city's reservoir, as in the comics' *Year One*, the Wachowskis call for

us to be *shown* that madman cruising around in a speedboat. While he's never called the Joker, unlike the comics' version, we do see "a large, evil grin." Instead of Batman merely promising to intervene, as in the comic-book version and in *Batman Begins*, he's *shown* arriving – another move towards the visual. The film, or at least the Wachowskis' proposal for one, ends there.

Ironically, the proposal retains a number of elements that Miller rejected in his screenplay. Most notably, Bruce Wayne and Alfred do not suffer from the changes they are subjected to in Miller's screenplay. On the other hand, if Miller's script exaggerates the violence from his comic-book original, the Wachowskis' proposal sanitizes the morality – particularly in the case of Gordon. In the proposal, Gordon seems far more sympathetic to Batman from the start and never has the affair with Essen that is so important to his characterization in the comics. The proposal does give us a little more of Batman formulating his costume and headquarters than the comics original, but nothing near as much as *Batman Begins*. Moreover, Batman seems everywhere – intervening in scenes in which he made no appearance in the comics version.

Superman Vs. Batman

Another alternative to Aronofsky's project was *Superman Vs. Batman*, intended to kick-start both the Batman and Superman franchises in one fell swoop. One can certainly understand the appeal for Warner Bros., which probably thought fans would appreciate seeing both heroes (and their villains) in a single movie, getting double the characters for their money. A new Superman film had gone through several permutations in the 1990s, and, with the Batman film series stalled, the studio saw the opportunity to combine the two franchises for maximum effect.

The idea of combining Superman and Batman in a single story has long roots in comics, echoing the comic-book series *World's Finest*, which told stories teaming the two characters.[\[18\]](#) But fans don't tend to appreciate an arbitrary combination of heroes any more than they do when too many villains are shoehorned into a super-hero movie: they'd generally rather see a movie that is faithful to the characters and their stories – or, failing this, at least has a distinctive and unique artistic vision. To add insult to misunderstanding, the plot for *Superman Vs. Batman* diverged radically from the comics.[\[19\]](#)

The project was reportedly pitched by Andrew Kevin Walker, best known for having written *Se7en*, in August 2001. The idea had already circulated for years,

as both the Batman and Superman franchises languished, but it was Walker's pitch that got the ball rolling. Wolfgang Peterson, known for action and disaster movies such as *In the Line of Fire* and *The Perfect Storm*, was tapped as director. Walker wrote a draft, but Warner Bros. was unsatisfied with it, hiring Akiva Goldsman to do a rewrite. Goldsman's rewritten script is dated 21 June 2002 and deviated wildly from the comic-book source material.

The premise, at least in Goldsman's draft, is that Bruce Wayne has been retired as Batman for five years – an idea taken from *Batman: DarKnight* (which in turn drew it from *The Dark Knight Returns*). This time around, the reason is his own personal demons. Dick Grayson, Alfred, and Commissioner Gordon are all dead – virtually unimaginable to fans. This version would also have had no connection to past Batman films, since it featured the Joker still alive.

For his part, Clark Kent has recently divorced Lois Lane and is mired in depression. While Clark had never married Lois in the Superman movies, the two had wed on TV's *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* in 1996, an event mirrored in the comics. The *Superman Vs. Batman* version, however, would have ignored all past continuity.

Bruce would pull himself out of his funk through a relationship with Elizabeth Miller – another slight to fans, since this character was entirely new. The two wed, with Clark (who is friends with Bruce in this continuity) serving as best man. But the Joker would have killed Elizabeth during the Honeymoon.

This would have caused a rift between the two heroes, as Clark holds Bruce back from taking revenge and Bruce blames Clark for Elizabeth's death. It also would have brought Batman out of retirement, leading to his clashing with Superman. The divorced Clark would have returned to his hometown of Smallville, where he would woo another love interest: his traditional hometown girl, Lana Lang. Ultimately, Superman and Batman would have united, after they learned that the entire plot to split the heroes had been spurred by Superman's arch-foe, Lex Luthor.

In the second half of 2002, with a revision of the script completed, director Wolfgang Peterson went about casting the film. Inspired by Tobey Maguire's turn as Spider-Man (in the 2002 movie), Peterson sought actors who could depict both emotion and the fun of being a super-hero. Casting rumors for both heroes circulated and included Johnny Depp, Colin Farrell, and Jude Law. Josh Hartnett was even offered the role of Superman.

Christian Bale, who had tried out for the role of Robin for 1995's *Batman Forever*, was approached to play Batman. Because Aronofsky's *Year One* script was still in development, Bale was told that Warner Bros. didn't know which film would go ahead but that he was wanted for the role of Batman in whichever film got made. Bale reviewed both scripts and preferred Aronofsky's project.

The studio initially disagreed with Bale's assessment, setting dates for *Superman Vs. Batman*'s production and release: filming would start in early 2003 and run five or six months, with the film set for a summer 2004 release. Aronofsky's project would have to be shelved, as it didn't make sense to have two competing versions of Batman in theatres. Not long after scheduling the movie, however, Peterson left the project in favor of the Brad Pitt vehicle *Troy* (2004). A new director would have to be found if the project was to continue.

Internal politics at Warner Bros., however, made sure that the film was killed before a new director could be found. The studio not only had a competing script for Aronofsky's *Year One* film but also a script by J. J. Abrams (of *Lost* fame), known as *Superman: Flyby*, that would reboot the Superman franchise with a new origin story that also diverged widely from the comics.[\[20\]](#) Peterson had actually been sought to direct Abrams's script before that project was put on hold in favor of *Superman Vs. Batman*.

With Peterson's departure, however, certain Warner Bros. executives were reevaluating the decision to put that Abrams script on hold, especially since it was liked by some and the script for *Superman Vs. Batman* had received mixed reviews. Putting *Superman Vs. Batman* on hold in favor of *Superman: Flyby* also had the advantage of allowing Aronofsky's Batman project, which was pretty well advanced, to move forward. When the dust settled, *Superman Vs. Batman*, then in preparation to begin filming, was instead on hold, in favor of the two solo origin films.

But the real reason for this change wasn't just that the two solo films were superior in quality. It was also that Warner Bros. could make more money with two franchises than a team-up movie that might or might not succeed.

Especially in the wake of *Spider-Man*'s stellar success at the box office, relaunching major characters like Batman and Superman in a single movie just smacked of defeat.

Ironically, neither *Superman: Flyby* nor Aronofsky's *Year One* project would ultimately be made. Warner Bros. moved forward with both. In September

2002, Warner Bros. hired Brett Ratner (of the *Rush Hour* series and, later, *X-Men: The Last Stand*) to direct *Flyby*. Ratner started casting, but found great difficulty finding the actors who were both right for the part and who would agree to a three-movie deal – he planned on directing two sequels if *Flyby* did well. In March 2003, Ratner dropped out of the project, citing casting difficulties as well as fights with producer Jon Peters. Warner Bros. replaced Ratner with the director known as McG, and he went through his own casting process only to drop out as well.[\[21\]](#) He was replaced, in July 2004, by Brian Singer, who instead opted for an approach that obliquely continued and paid homage to the Richard Donner's 1978 film *Superman*, and the result was 2006's *Superman Returns*.

Meanwhile, Aronofsky's Batman project went forward. As previously mentioned, storyboards were completed before that project also fell apart. Warner Bros. quickly responded, in January 2003, by hiring Christopher Nolan to replace Aronofsky as director.

Joss Whedon's Year One Proposal

Before hiring Nolan, Warner Bros. entertained a pitch for a different version of the *Year One* project from writer-director Joss Whedon, most famous for *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and beloved by many comics fans.[\[22\]](#) Information about Whedon's pitch has been scant, but he spoke about it in August 2008, in an interview with MTV following *The Dark Knight*'s box-office success.[\[23\]](#)

While Whedon said that his *tone* was similar to Nolan's, his version was “a bit less epic” and “more in Gotham City.” Whedon’s comments suggest that he would have omitted Bruce’s period of travel entirely, instead keeping Bruce Wayne in Gotham during the film.

Whedon’s version departed further from established Batman stories, however, in his choice of foe. The story would have featured a new villain, one in the mold of Hannibal Lector. As in *Batman Begins*, the main villain would be tied to Bruce Wayne’s training: Bruce would have visited Arkham Asylum to study the criminal mind with this brilliant but deadly criminal.

Whedon has expressed personal involvement in the story, saying, “I get very emotional about it, I still love the story. Maybe I’ll get to do it as a comic one day.” He also expressed no hard feelings towards the man who won the job, saying that he’s a fan too – one who liked *Batman Begins* and was eagerly anticipating *The Dark Knight*.

Batman Begins Begins

Director Christopher Nolan was intrigued by the idea of telling Batman's origin and liked that the story would allow a focus on Batman's humanity, grounding the film in reality. Nolan received a few comics from the studio, but said that he didn't read the earlier proposals and scripts: "I was aware of the fact that Aronofsky and Frank Miller had collaborated on a script, and I gather it was a pretty faithful adaptation"[\[24\]](#) – an utterly incorrect assumption that helps argue for Nolan's truthfulness.

Nolan sought a screenwriter who was knowledgeable about the comics and found David S. Goyer, hired a couple months after Nolan. The only problem with Goyer as screenwriter was that he had already been signed to write and direct *Blade: Trinity*, the third movie for the formerly obscure Marvel property. Still, Goyer found the time, and he began meeting with Nolan to discuss the film.

One of Goyer's major difficulties was Nolan's demand that the villain in the film's third act must relate to the first act. That the first act would show Bruce Wayne's past and training was obvious enough, especially after the studio gave Nolan the short origin story entitled "The Man Who Falls," notable for its depiction of Bruce Wayne's wandering and training. Also obvious was basing the second act upon *Year One*. But Nolan wanted a blockbuster-style third act, complete with a threat upon all of Gotham City – a climax Nolan thought fitting to the character. Based on the comic-book versions of these three acts, there was no obvious way to interrelate them. "It was the thorniest issue we grappled with," Goyer recalled, "not making it seem like they were two separate movies. We'd already done a draft or so before that happened."[\[25\]](#)

The two decided quickly that Batman's mentor in the first act would become the third act's villain. The second act would feature a different foe who would *seem* like the main nemesis until the mentor's return, and this second-act foe would need to be tied to the main nemesis in some way. Deciding upon the film's villains would therefore have to come next.

It was Goyer who solved the problem and came up with the specific foes. Nolan wanted someone who wouldn't overshadow Batman, a criticism of the four previous films. He related Batman to James Bond: "I think the best of the Bond movies have... memorable villains, but Bond is always the center of the movie. That's never been in dispute."[\[26\]](#) Responding to this, Goyer proposed the

international criminal mastermind Ra's al Ghul, the Batman foe first introduced in a memorable story by writer Denny O'Neil and artist Neal Adams in *Batman* #232 (June 1971). Nolan wasn't familiar with Ra's al Ghul, but the character appealed to him as a sort of 1970s James Bond villain. Ra's al Ghul could serve as Bruce's sole mentor, collapsing several such figures in the comics into a single character, only to return as the film's climactic villain. Scarecrow would seem to be the major villain in the second act, but this would only be a ruse before revealing the true villain.

Nolan and Goyer visited DC Comics in New York to run their ideas past the publisher. Of particular concern was using Ra's al Ghul as Batman's mentor during the hero's training period, as well the burning of Wayne Manor. "We wanted their stamp of approval and to know if there was anything we were doing that was dramatically altering the canon," Goyer recalled.[\[27\]](#) It was a smart move: movies praised as honoring their comic-book source material had reaped favorable press as well as box-office success; other films that strayed more radically from the comics had received bad press and flopped. Hollywood had realized the importance of keeping the fans content. As the director and screenwriter explained their decisions, they found DC supportive.

Goyer produced a draft of the screenplay in quick order, but there wouldn't be much time for revision. Goyer's duties on 2004's *Blade: Trinity* called him away, and so the script was left to Nolan to tweak. Nolan would telephone Goyer about changes and casting, getting advice and the perspective of someone familiar with the comics.

In pre-production, Nolan worked with the storyboard artists. The storyboards, to Nolan, were mostly useful for him to show other people as a visual description of what he had planned – something that could only be communicated verbally with much difficulty. When it came time to shoot, however, the director reportedly rarely referred to the storyboards. Nonetheless, the film stayed remarkably close to those same storyboards – because they expressed the director's intentions, which he knew well.



Nolan's style of direction contrasted with the way Hollywood expected big-budget blockbusters to be filmed. He refused to use a second unit – another crew shooting secondary, less critical footage while the director shoots simultaneously – because he wanted to enforce his vision of the film rather than parse through copious footage shot by someone else for material he wanted to keep. Moreover, Nolan eschewed computer-generated special effects, preferring to use stuntmen and elaborate sets in order to keep a realistic feel for the film.

Warner Bros. was very supportive, according to both Nolan and Goyer. Despite Nolan's somewhat unconventional choices, the company was convinced it needed a new direction for the film and the franchise. It was, as Nolan has said, a wonderful opportunity – not only to play with a major franchise and the big budget that comes with it but to do so with more artistic freedom than most directors would have in such situations.

Act One: Flashbacks and Training

The first part of *Batman Begins* juxtaposes sequential flashbacks to Bruce Wayne's youth with his later training under Ra's al Ghul. The flashbacks and the main sequence interact masterfully, suggesting answers to questions posed in the other narrative.

Compared with the screenplay, the film as released radically consolidates the two narratives. The screenplay calls for five separate flashback sequences and five present-day sequences. The film as released consolidates these into three of each, combining a few scenes but cutting little of substance. While the screenplay ably interweaves the additional narrative jumps, the relative narrative simplicity of the released film may well be seen as an asset, keeping viewers unconfused.

It is worth noting in this regard that director Christopher Nolan brought to *Batman Begins* a particularly strong background in non-linear narrative cinema, having made his name with 2002's *Memento* – a film in which each sequence occurs *prior* to the previous one, yet certain mysteries still “unfold.” Nolan subsequently wove several timelines together in 2006’s *The Prestige*.

DC Logo: The DC logo, accompanied by drawings of Batman, precedes the film proper.

This was the first cinematic appearance of the new DC logo. The former company logo, known as the “DC Bullet,” had been created 30 years earlier by the legendary graphic designer Milton Glaser – perhaps best known for his ubiquitous “I [heart] NY” logo – and was retired in May 2005, not long before the debut of *Batman Begins*. The new logo, dubbed the “DC Spin,” was designed by Josh Beatman to stand out on various products besides comics – befitting DC’s status as an entertainment company responsible for video games, toys, films, and other merchandise. The change was controversial at the time, receiving mixed reviews from fans.

While the new logo was included in this film, there was not time to include it in all the film’s materials. The *Batman Begins* movie posters, for example, still included a tiny version of the old DC logo in their indicia.

The logo appears to assemble out of individual dots. While these dots recall computer pixels, suggesting digital technology, they have an added resonance in

comics. Until the 1980s, color was achieved in comic books through the use of Benday Dots in primary colors, overlapped to create a limited palette of shades. The same effect may be seen in the pop art of Roy Lichtenstein. While the dots in the DC logo sequence are of only one color, they nonetheless invoke this heritage.

The drawings of Batman that accompany the logo were drawn by Jim Lee, one of the most popular American comic-book artists at the time. After winning fans for his art at Marvel Comics, Jim Lee became one of the co-founders of Image Comics, actually a conglomeration of independent studios, in 1992. Although initially co-creating titles such as *WildC.A.T.s* for his Image studio, WildStorm, Lee soon stopped illustrating comics. After Lee sold WildStorm to DC in 1999, his contract with DC allowed him the time to illustrate again, now on high-profile titles. Lee illustrated the blockbuster 12-issue storyline “Hush” in *Batman* from a script by Jeph Loeb. With writer Brian Azzarello, Lee then illustrated the top-selling, though less successful, 12-issue storyline “For Tomorrow” in *Superman* – which concluded in March 2005. July 2005 saw the debut of a new high-profile series with the formidable title *All-Star Batman and Robin, the Boy Wonder*, illustrated by Lee from scripts by none other than Batman luminary Frank Miller. The inclusion of Lee’s art in *Batman Begins* just one month before the first issue of the new series provided remarkable synergy. However, the brevity of the artist’s work appearing in the film did cause a bit of disappointment among fans, especially since many had been led to believe the beloved DC Bullet had been changed partly to create more dynamic introductions to DC Comics films.

Thematic opening sequence: Screeching bats assemble into a larger bat-like shape.

Given Hollywood’s increased penchant for prefatory sequences announcing the various companies involved, this thematic sequence blends easily with those that precede it. This could add an element of surprise, as viewers realize that the film has indeed started. A sense of surprise could also enhance the overall effect of the brief sequence: to announce Batman’s return to cinematic greatness.

This sequence also substitutes for opening titles – which the film simply omits, an increasingly common practice with action movies. Here, however, even the film’s *title* does not appear until the closing credits – a move Nolan repeated on *The Dark Knight*. It’s as if the film can’t wait to get into the meat of the story, as if the words “Batman Begins” shouldn’t appear on screen until Batman has

already begun.

Act 1, Scene 1 (Flashback Sequence 1): A young Bruce, while playing with a girl named Rachel, falls down an abandoned well into what we later see to be part of a cave beneath the Wayne estate. The shaft has the look of an old well, boarded up at its top. Below, lying wounded in the darkness of the symbolic underworld, the boy is attacked by a swarm of bats, screeching as they flap against his body.

While Batman long had a cavern headquarters known as the Batcave beneath Wayne Manor, his youthful discovery of the cave was never depicted until Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*.[\[28\]](#) The film's version is quite similar, though the film switches the rabbit hole into an old well. The film version thus loses the allusion to *Alice in Wonderland* and the slightly bizarre, otherworldly resonance it provides, but it gains realism in exchange: after all, the film is decidedly *not* otherworldly.

While Goyer certainly knew *The Dark Knight Returns* well, Nolan has stated his own inspiration for this sequence came from its retelling in "The Man who Falls," first printed in 1989's *Secret Origins of the World's Greatest SuperHeroes*.



An old Bruce Wayne dreams of falling into the cave under Wayne Manor while still a child – a sequence never seen before. From *Batman: The Dark Knight* #1 (February 1986). Art by Frank Miller and Klaus Janson. Copyright © DC Comics.

Rachel, who is new to *Batman Begins* and has never appeared in the comic books, is also the only character created solely for the film. Nolan claimed that he and screenwriter Goyer created the character to “represent the life Bruce Wayne might have if he weren’t tied into his destiny of having to create a very

dark alter ego through which he helps people.” To represent the life a driven male protagonist might have lived through a woman is a classic maneuver, recalling the James Bond film *You Only Live Twice*. In this reading, a woman might symbolize domestic bliss – or even the idea of sexual utopia.[\[29\]](#)

It’s noteworthy that, while playing with Bruce facilitates his fall, she’s not necessary to the scene. In the comics, Bruce seems to be playing alone when he falls into the cave. Rachel’s presence makes Bruce’s childhood a less lonely one – seemingly at odds with the film’s darkness. Yet her presence establishes Rachel’s character from the start, placing her in some ways at the fore of the film, and her character thus represents something very dark indeed: Bruce’s lost childhood.

As Bruce and Rachel play, they run into a greenhouse. In Batman comics, greenhouses and plants in general often signal the presence of Poison Ivy, a villain tied to plants and whose kiss kills. She is of course not present here, and the greenhouse may be seen as symbolic of growth and early life.

Rachel shows Bruce an arrowhead, and he runs off with it. It is while he runs with it, saying “finders keepers,” that he falls down the abandoned well. The arrowhead has not been seen in the comics, but it has strong thematic value, representing the buried dead of the land – which correlates nicely to Bruce’s obsession with his dead parents and his family’s ties with Gotham City. In the United States, especially in rural areas, American Indian arrowheads are still frequently unearthed, and several Batman stories in the comics have suggested a former Native American presence on the site of Gotham City and Wayne Manor.

Symbolically, Bruce can be said to have fallen into the cave and experienced the horror of the bats in response to his theft of the arrowhead from Rachel. The human brain has to guard against such conclusions in real life. The Latin phrase *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, roughly meaning “after something, therefore because of it,” is today considered a logical fallacy. But humans, and especially children, naturally make such associations: if clouds obscure the sun after someone utters a curse word, it can indeed seem like a “sign.” Priests and missionaries have long exploited this, claiming divine responsibility for natural effects. In narrative, such correlations can often be read symbolically. Thus, characters who sin in some way are often punished in unrelated ways – perhaps most typically in horror movies where teenagers who have sex later get killed. Director Nolan previously invoked this idea in *Insomnia*, in which Al Pacino’s character dies after violating his ethics. In *Batman Begins*, we can only imagine

how much Bruce has made such a correlation, blaming himself and his theft of the arrowhead for his fall. Perhaps this influences Bruce's blaming himself for his parents' death, his later feeling that he's not a good person, and even his hatred of criminals.

According to the script, Bruce and Rachel are both eight in this scene. As noted above, Bruce was six when he fell into the cave, as depicted in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. The film thus places the fall into the cave that much closer to the Waynes' murders, better connecting the two.

Act 1, Scene 2 (Present Sequence 1), Part 1: As we cut to the present, we first meet the elder Bruce Wayne as a prisoner in a camp where, during a meal, he is attacked by other prisoners, defeating them before being pulled away by guards.

This is the first scene in which we see Christian Bale. Bale is Welsh and naturally speaks with an accent, which he has to repress when acting.[\[30\]](#) Born in 1974 to a family with deep roots in show business, Bale starred in Stephen Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun* at the age of 13. Reportedly, Bale screen-tested for the role of Robin in 1995's *Batman Forever*, losing out to Chris O'Donnell. Had he landed that part a decade earlier, he would almost certainly have been considered ineligible for the later role. Bale subsequently won considerable acclaim for his portrayal of serial killer Patrick Bateman in 2000's *American Psycho*.

Bale was actually chosen for the part of Batman back in 2002, beating out his closest competitor, Jake Gyllenhaal. At the time, Nolan had not been hired and the film was still to be directed by Darren Aronofsky, with a completely different script. Bale did other work while waiting for the Batman film to enter production.

After a few other roles which did not perform well at the box office, Bale won attention for his portrayal of Trevor Reznik in 2004's low-budget psychological thriller *The Machinist*. Bale famously lost 60 pounds in just a few months and went without sleep to portray the emaciated, insomniac character. He had reportedly wanted to lose more weight but was forbade by both the director and his doctor. He said that the role helped him cope with his depression, and it led to comparisons between Bale and classic method actors like Robert DeNiro.

As shooting of *Batman Begins* neared, with Nolan now at the helm, Bale was still thin from his role in *The Machinist* and had to bulk up for the part, gaining 100 pounds in six months. He seems to have been driven to play the definitive

Batman, repeatedly saying that the character didn't previously have a definitive portrayal akin to Christopher Reeve's version of Superman. Reportedly, his trailer even had "Bruce Wayne" on the door instead of Bale's name. Struggling especially with the character's Batman persona, Bale read various Batman comics to help understand the character.

Bale stated that his role as serial killer Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* was the character closest to his portrayal of Bruce Wayne. Based on the novel by Bret Easton Ellis, Bateman is a wealthy Wall Street yuppie so obsessed with status that he feels jealous of someone else's business cards. In a satire of the excesses of the Reagan Eighties, Bateman goes on to murder graphically – or to fantasize about doing so. The novel, sometimes pornographic, sometimes extremely violent, was considered in such poor taste that its publisher, Simon & Schuster, refused to publish it and forfeited a six-figure advance, leading to widespread controversy and a big success for its new publisher, Knopf. It is credited for helping to introduce "serial killer chic" and as a major work of transgressive literature.

Besides their names being one letter away, Bateman might not initially seem to have much in common with Batman: one is a serial killer and the other explicitly doesn't kill. Bale has explained the connection in terms of Bruce Wayne's intensity, seen even in his first adult appearance in the film. This was crucial to the character, as conceived by Bale and Nolan. Nolan has agreed, calling Bruce Wayne "damaged goods": Christian manages to make him funny and charming, and there is a good sense of humour there, but you never forget what happened to him as a child... I felt that you would be able to look into Christian's eyes and believe he had the determination and self-discipline to recreate himself as a superhero... whoever was going to play him, you'd have to look into his eyes and see that fire. And Christian has that in real life." [\[31\]](#)

Bale said that he conceived of the Batman persona as a savage beast, a true alter ego to Bruce Wayne: "Batman is his hidden, demonic rage-filled side" – one Bruce Wayne struggles to control. The Batman persona is "capable of enacting violence – and to kill – so he's constantly having to rein himself in." [\[32\]](#) This goes a long way to explaining Bale's acting choices, particularly his snarling voice as Batman. It also demonstrates just how dark this version of Batman is, despite avoiding some of the violent excesses of Miller's *Year One* screenplay. The character obviously has much more in common with his foes than with more well-adjusted characters; despite committing murder, the villains can actually seem saner or more restrained than the hero.

Following *Batman Begins*, Bale took a minor role in Terrence Malick's *The New World* (2005). In 2006, Bale reunited with director Christopher Nolan and co-star Michael Caine for *The Prestige*, a brilliant adaptation of the novel by Christopher Priest. The film pitted Bale against Hugh Jackman, famous for portraying Marvel's Wolverine, as competing magicians. Bale's character represented the lesser showman but the more devoted and intense of the two magicians. Bale reflected this in his acting, ignoring Nolan's request not to read the original novel (in order to better focus on the screenplay) and throwing himself into researching his role. In 2007, Bale appeared in *I'm Not There*, a film about Bob Dylan also featuring Heath Ledger, who would play the Joker in *The Dark Knight*. The same year, Bale costarred with Russell Crowe in the Western remake *3:10 to Yuma*, before returning to his role as Batman in 2008's *The Dark Knight*. In 2009, he starred as John Connor in *Terminator: Salvation*, demonstrating his comfort playing leading roles in movie franchises. During the filming of that film, Bale exploded at a grip on set, again demonstrating his famous intensity. His tirade circulated widely online, even being remixed as a song.

According to the script, Bruce is 28 in this scene, though this is not noted in the film.

Whereas the comics have depicted Bruce Wayne travelling the world in training prior to becoming Batman, he had never been shown imprisoned as we see him in the film. This change seems to suggest that the Wayne of the film is more directionless, whereas in the comics Wayne typically seems to be self-consciously training. This is cemented by Bruce Wayne's beard. The character has only rarely been depicted with facial hair – and then only at moments of extreme stress and only in the comics. In the comics, a mere five o'clock shadow on Bruce Wayne's face, as he works to crack a case on his Batcave computers, would be enough to indicate his having entered a particularly obsessive mode. The surprise of Bruce Wayne's dejected, bearded state is enhanced by the fact that we do not necessarily expect to see an elder Bruce Wayne at this point at all: upon first viewing the film, we do not know that the preceding flashback scene is a flashback and may well expect the film to proceed in linear fashion, following Bruce Wayne from childhood to his adulthood as Batman.

Peter Sanderson has pointed out that Bruce's imprisonment may be self-inflicted, a way of punishing himself: It seems to me that previously, because of his sense of

survivor's guilt, Bruce was directing his rage not simply against Chill but against himself, leading to his self-destructive behavior. Ending up in the Chinese prison was like punishing himself for his supposed failure to save his parents. Ducard instead shows Bruce how to turn his anger outward towards his enemies.

[33]

Sanderson's psychological interpretation is supported by Bruce's fighting skills: one suspects that he could break out of the prison, if he really wanted to escape. Bruce certainly seems directionless, adrift without a purpose, and perfectly content to stay in prison.

The jail in which we first meet the present-day Bruce Wayne is apparently in Bhutan, as noted in the script and other production materials. This is not clear in the film, though the Asian guards wear uniforms sporting the red star emblem of a Communist nation. Bhutan is a tiny landlocked Buddhist kingdom northeast of India and south of China. The wealthy Bruce is hiding in an incredibly impoverished nation. The entire nation's annual budget is approximately the cost of *Batman Begins*, around \$150 million.[34] Bruce is dead to the world, virtually off the map.

The man who initially attacks Bruce in the camp calls himself the devil. This seems to play into Bruce's feelings about criminals but also connects him to Ra's al Ghul (who we will shortly meet), whose name translates from Arabic as "the Demon's head." [35]

The jailyard fight that follows not only adds a bit of action to the early portion of the film, but demonstrates Bruce Wayne's already considerable fighting skills. The fight also helps characterize Wayne, showing his raw capacity for violence, later shifted to his Batman persona.

Act 1, Scene 2 (Present Sequence 1), Part 2: In prison, Bruce is visited by a man calling himself Ducard and claiming to work for one Ra's al Ghul. Ducard not only knows Wayne but offers him a direction after what seems to be Wayne's aimless global wanderings: to join the League of Shadows, a group of vigilantes run by al Ghul. Ducard reveals that Wayne will be released the following day and tells Wayne to carry a blue flower to the nearby mountaintop, should Wayne be interested.

This scene marks the first appearance in the film of Ducard, played by Liam Neeson. Neeson won an Oscar for his role in *Schindler's List* and appeared in a number of films not long before *Batman Begins*, including 2004's *Kinsey* and 2005's *Kingdom of Heaven*. His other credits include 1999's *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*. It's notable that Liam Neeson is known for

playing mentors – in fact, he did so in both *Star Wars* and *Kingdom of Heaven*. This baggage was a major point of debate in his casting, but Nolan and others finally decided that it would help deceive the audience – since Ducard ultimately goes from mentor to villain.



Bruce Wayne recalls first meeting Henri Ducard in Paris during Bruce's years of traveling and training. From *Detective Comics* #599 (April 1989). Art by Denys Cowan, Dick Giordano, and Frank McLaughlin. Copyright © DC Comics.

Henri Ducard has appeared in the comics but remains a lesser-known character –

particularly in comparison to Ra's al Ghul. Ducard first appeared in Sam Hamm's "Blind Justice" storyline, running in *Detective Comics* #598-600 (March-May 1989). Hamm, screenwriter of Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman*, had been invited to produce a storyline for the Batman comics – an early bit of synergy between comics and films. The story was noteworthy for focusing on Bruce's years of travel and training. In a plot twist reminiscent of Earle's machinations in *Batman Begins*, the story reveals that Wayne's company engaged in illegal experiments on homeless people, and Bruce's signature was forged to give the experiments corporate approval. As Bruce prepares for a very public trial, he recalls some of his training but is unable to defend himself fully, lest he reveal that he is Batman.

As depicted in that storyline, Ducard was a surprising former mentor – an opportunistic French detective. Bruce Wayne is typically depicted in the comics as having trained under multiple martial artists and detectives, though very few have been given names or remained important in Batman's ongoing narrative. Hamm's storyline played on this point, giving one such mentor a name and having him resurface in the present. Because of their shared past, Ducard knows Batman's identity. He later reappeared in the comics to train Tim Drake, Batman's third Robin. He had never before been connected to Ra's al Ghul, however.

While the film's take on Ducard and Ra's al Ghul compresses several mentor figures, Batman's mentors during his training abroad haven't usually been depicted as so evil. In a notable exception, *Batman* #431 (March 1989) depicts Batman fighting some ninjas connected to the League of Assassins. Because his opponents know an obscure martial arts technique, Batman realizes that one of them men who trained him prior to becoming Batman must have trained these assassins too. The issue ends with Batman going to North Korea to confront his former trainer, a man named Kirigi. Batman considers the "possibility that I'd come to be a disciple of one of the very people I'd sword to destroy!" As Batman's thoughts continue, he makes it clear that Kirigi isn't a villain, though he did train some. Kirigi explains that he makes no moral judgment about those he trains: "After all, I did not question *your* motives when *you* came to me." Batman, then dealing with the recent death of Jason Todd (the second Robin), turns and walks away, saying, "Perhaps you *should* have."

Ducard's appearance in the film contrasts dramatically with those of the prisoners and the guards. The script takes pains to point this out, calling him

“distinguished, in a well-cut suit and a tie.” Ducard’s clothing helps to separate him starkly from the lowly conditions in which Bruce finds himself, and this helps enhance the allure of the new direction Ducard promises.

But Ducard is distinguished in another way: in contrast with all but Bruce, he is clearly a Caucasian. Although Ducard’s origins are obscure in the film, the script notes that his voice is European. While the actor Liam Neeson is Irish, in the comics, as previously noted, Ducard is French.

Ducard’s power over the guards – as seen not only in his ability to enter the prison but also in his knowledge that Wayne will be released the next day – is not entirely explained. Like knowing Wayne’s name, this is just part of his mystique – a mysterious knowledge more connected in the comics to Ra’s al Ghul than Ducard. This is perhaps appropriate, given the revelations of the third act.

The pronunciation of Ra’s al Ghul’s name in the film differs from its pronunciation in his appearances on the animated TV show. On that show, the character’s first name was pronounced as if it were “rayz” – with a hard “a” sound. In the film, the name is pronounced as if it were “rahz” – with a soft “a” sound. Comics are a printed medium, so no standard had been made clear. Dennis O’Neil, who created the character, meant the name to be pronounced “rahz” (as it is in the film), but the “rayz” pronunciation subsequently became dominant in comics circles. The script suggests that Goyer and perhaps Nolan originally intended to use the dominant “rayz” pronunciation; it prints the villain’s name as with long vowel marks above both the “a” in “Ra’s” and the “u” in “Ghul.” The filmmakers subsequently reversed themselves to honor Denny O’Neil’s original intent, although they knew many fans would consider this a mistake.

In the comics, the organization run by Ra’s al Ghul is known as the League of Assassins, not the League of Shadows. It would be harder to justify Bruce Wayne joining a group of assassins, after all. This name change also reflects the shadowy, covert nature of al Ghul’s organization, which – though menacing – is not shown committing assassinations in the film. Indeed, the organization is less explicitly evil in the film than in the comics. Though assassination isn’t necessarily bad, depending on who’s assassinated and why, “shadows” certainly sounds better than “assassins.” This whitewashing may be seen as analogous to that of Magneto’s “Brotherhood of Evil Mutants” in Marvel Comics: Magneto, like Ra’s al Ghul, sees himself as doing good, but his organization was named in

the 1960s when comics villains were more obviously villainous. Though the League of Assassins was named in the 1970s, perhaps the same applies.

The League of Shadows also evokes psychologist Carl Jung's archetype of the shadow, representing the instinctive and irrational part of human nature. The shadow is counterpoised to the self, which for Jung represents unified consciousness. Thus, Bruce has to defeat his Jungian "shadow" to find his true "self," which can achieve his goals as Batman. Calling the group the League of Shadows thus ties it with Bruce Wayne's own heroic journey.

On the other hand, a crucial allusion is lost in the name change. To name a group the League of Assassins evokes the legend of the 11th-century Persian leader Hassan-I Sabbah and his cult of Hashshashin, who gave rise to the modern word "assassin" through their targeted killing of religious and political foes. The Venetian explorer Marco Polo wrote about the Hashshashin, describing rituals in which new initiates were drugged to create the illusion of dying, only to awaken convinced that the power of their leader had brought them to Paradise. Modern scholars question the accuracy of this legend, suggesting that drugs played no part in the initiation and the name actually derived from the leader's name, i.e., "followers of Hassan." Whatever the reality, the legend is strong: the Hashshashin are sometimes described as the Arab equivalent of Europe's Knights Templar, both groups being secretive and active in the Holy Land at the time of the Crusades. Connecting Ra's al Ghul to the legendary Hassan gave the character an extra layer of menace and antiquity. However, the Ra's al Ghul of *Batman Begins* is not distinctly Arabic, so the loss of this extra resonance is at least consistent.

More on Ra's al Ghul himself can be found in a moment, when he makes his first appearance by name in the narrative.

Bruce laughs at Ducard's offer, dismissing his plan as no more than becoming a vigilante. Ducard draws a distinction between a vigilante, who can be locked up, and a symbol. While Ducard sees a symbol as part of a group, Bruce will transform this notion into an individualistic one. The debate over whether Batman is a vigilante, long known to fans, will later be echoed by Alfred. Whether Batman is indeed a vigilante, and Nolan's perspective on the matter, will be discussed in commentary at that point.[\[36\]](#)

In terms of the comparative mythology of Joseph Campbell, who attempted to track the journey of the hero throughout world culture,[\[37\]](#) Ducard represents the

hero's "call to adventure." This represents a transition between the normal world, in which Bruce's parents were killed and he found himself traumatized and adrift, and a strange world characterized by heightened powers, obviously represented by the League of Shadows and their seemingly magical skills. The hero either accepts or refuses the call, though his refusal is usually followed by recantation and acceptance. Bruce accepts; his subsequent quest for the blue poppy and his training under Ducard represents what Campbell calls the "road of trials" that follows acceptance of the call. More on how *Batman Begins* mirrors Campbell's outline of the hero's journey will follow, particularly as Bruce rejects Ducard and returns to Gotham.

Act 1, Scene 2 (Present Sequence 1), Part 3: The adult Wayne is dropped from a prison truck and abandoned. He picks one of the blue poppies Ducard mentioned. Wandering through a Himalayan hamlet, the locals scorn a hungry Wayne. Wayne climbs the mountain, making his way to a building high on the summit. He enters. In the dark interior, he approaches an Asian man, understood to be Ra's al Ghul. Surrounded by minions who look like ninja, Ducard battles Wayne, who is exhausted from the climb, and seems to knock him unconscious.

In the screenplay, this scene and the previous one were divided by flashback scenes of Bruce being pulled out of the cave. The film's version helps the scenes flow into one another and prevent jarring the audience with too many cuts from the present to the flashback narrative.

The blue poppy that Bruce picks will have resonance later in the narrative. It is used to produce the smoke that causes Bruce to hallucinate during his trial before Ra's al Ghul, and it later will be revealed as an ingredient in the fear toxin that will cause Batman and Gotham so much trouble, further tying the film's acts together.

The people of the hamlet are depicted as superstitious, or at least wary of an obvious outsider. They may be afraid specifically of the League of Shadows, having perhaps seen them passing through or even formally intimidating locals. Such a fear of the League of Shadows is suggested later by their different response to Wayne on his way down.

Climbing a mountain has long had mystical, soul-searching implications. In literature, consider Petrarch's "The Ascent of Mount Ventoux" – an account of his 1336 climb of the mount but also a parable of spiritual discovery considered

an important work of the Italian Renaissance. In comics, consider Frank Miller's own depiction of the ninja Elektra during his seminal run on *Daredevil* (later collected in *The Elektra Saga*). There, Elektra was memorably shown to have climbed an icy mountain as part of her actualization as a ninja killing machine. The Elektra example is particularly appropriate, given the involvement of both Frank Miller and ninja, who are part of the film's depiction of al Ghul's group.

Ra's al Ghul holds a special place in Batman's extensive rogues gallery. Many of Batman's classic villains go back to the early 1940s – if not to 1939, the year of Batman's debut. Even many lesser villains still appearing today, such as the Scarecrow, were introduced around that time. Ra's al Ghul did not debut until 1971, but he's been seen regularly ever since and has become as integral to the hero's legend as any of the foes who are decades older.

Ra's al Ghul – Arabic for “the demon’s head” – was first introduced by writer Dennis O’Neil and artist Neal Adams in the pages of Batman #232 (June 1971). Adams had previously been the artist on a title called *The Brave and the Bold*, where Batman teamed up with various other DC characters. There, Adams gained favorable attention by subtly altering stories so the action better suited his idea of Batman; for example, if the script called for a scene to be set in daytime, Adams would draw it taking place at night. Starting with “The Secret of the Waiting Graves” in *Detective Comics* #395 (December 1970), the team of O’Neil and Adams began in earnest their efforts to eliminate the broad humor and camp elements which had come to dominate Batman comics (particularly following the popular television series of the late Sixties) in order to create a more serious vision of the character that, while modern, hearkened back to the earliest Batman tales. To this end, Batman needed a more formidable opponent, free of comedic elements or a colorful outfit. The debut of Ra's al Ghul in “Daughter of the Demon!” exemplifies their approach to the character and his mythos.



The first page ever to feature Ra's al Ghul, who enters Batman's life in an unprecedented way – by showing up in the Batcave. From *Batman* #232 (June 1971). Art by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano.
Copyright © DC Comics.

As the story opens, a message is delivered to Bruce Wayne announcing that Robin has been kidnapped – and his captor clearly knows the dual identities of both heroes. As he begins the hunt for his captive partner, Batman is further shocked by the unexpected appearance, in his own Batcave, of a mysterious gentleman calling himself Ra's al Ghul and his servant Ubu. Ra's explains he

has deduced Batman's other identity by tracking what wealthy individual had purchased over the years all the equipment Batman would need.[\[38\]](#) Ra's has reason to intrude on Batman's privacy: his daughter Talia, whom Batman met in a previous issue, has been abducted under the same circumstances as Robin. Someone has struck at two of the world's most powerful and capable men; now they must join forces to rescue their respective heirs.

There follows a globe-spanning search for Talia and Robin by Batman and Ra's, accompanied by Ubu. The trio face numerous threats along the way, each of which Batman overcomes while the other two hang back. Finally, in the snowy Himalayas, Batman reaches the captive Robin. He then reveals various clues that indicated Robin's captor was none other than Ra's himself. Ra's then admits the reason for his elaborate charade: a test of Batman's prowess to see if the hero was worthy to marry the demon's daughter, Talia, and assume leadership of his vast organization – committed to restoring the planet's ecological balance through radical action. Of course, Batman declines, but he is left shaken.

O'Neil and Adams built a series of stories around the Batman / Ra's / Talia triangle, during which we would learn the depths of feeling Batman and Talia held for one another, as well as Talia's fierce loyalty to her father. Ra's was revealed to be 600 years old, thanks to his possession of the Lazarus Pit, a chemical bath that restored his life at periodic intervals – at the cost of temporary rage-filled insanity. The Lazarus Pit allowed Ra's to return and plague Batman time and time again. In subsequent years, O'Neil and other writers would continue to play off this dynamic, with Ra's menacing Gotham City half for revenge and half in hope the caped detective would someday relent, marry Talia, and assume the mantle of Ra's himself.[\[39\]](#) Ra's right-hand servant, Ubu, went through many incarnations and was revealed to be a title rather than a single person.

The early days of original hardcover graphic novels in the late 1980s and early 1990s saw a series of three graphic novels featuring Ra's: 1987's *Son of the Demon*, 1991's *Bride of the Demon*, and 1993's *Birth of the Demon*. Clearly, the saga of Batman, Ra's, and Talia was seen as epic stuff deserving this special format.

The first, by writer Mike W. Barr and artist Jerry Bingham, is the most notable. It saw Batman and Ra's team up to fight a common foe: Qayin, a terrorist with a weather-controlling satellite. But Ra's hates Qayin for personal reasons: Qayin

killed Melisande, Talia's previously unknown mother. Joining Ra's camp, Batman sees the massive numbers who belong to Ra's organization and lives comfortably with Ra's and Talia. He grows to accept his role as the demon's second-in-command and his love of Talia, who he lives with as her husband – the two having been married against Batman's will in an earlier episode. While the three are drinking together, above scores of henchmen, Ra's observes, "You know, we spent much time in *opposition*, when we really make better *allies*." Raising his Stein as Talia continues to fondle his chest, Batman toasts: "May we *remain* so, Ra's." The two men clearly have much in common, and Batman tells Talia how happy he is – for the first time in his life. What's more, Talia announces that she's pregnant.

It all unravels, of course. Giving us a glimpse into exactly *why* Batman must remain unhappy in love, he decides to give up adventuring – including the pursuit of Qayin, the killer of Talia's mother. Talia promptly announces that she has miscarried, freeing Batman to again team with Ra's and defeat Qayin. Batman and Talia's relationship cannot be repaired, and they part ways. But in the epilogue, occurring nine months later, the child of Talia and Batman is adopted at an orphanage where the baby was abandoned. The story soon came to be considered as semi-apocryphal and not part of regular Batman continuity, though the 1996 mini-series *Kingdom Come* and its 1999 follow-up *The Kingdom* – both set in an alternate universe – depicted the son of Batman and Talia grown to adulthood and using the name Ibn al Xu'ffasch, Arabic for "Son of the Bat."

Four years later, the graphic novel's follow-up – *Bride of the Demon*, also written by Mike W. Barr, this time illustrated by Tom Grindberg – was less successful. The following year's *Birth of the Demon*, written by Dennis O'Neil and illustrated by Norm Breyfogle, studied Ra's origin. There, Ra's is shown as a capable but pathetic figure – one who could have become a Batman-like hero, had a powerful prince not ruined his life.

The comic-book Ra's has evolved subsequently. In the 1996 "Contagion" crossover of the Batman-related titles, Gotham City faced a horrible plague that decimated its government and its population. Later that year, in the somewhat shorter "Legacy" crossover, Batman discovered Ra's had been responsible for the plague. The Batman villain Bane, famous for breaking Batman's back in 1993's "Knightfall" crossover, now occupied the role of Ubu. The story saw the various Batman-related heroes combine efforts to defeat Ra's once again.

The story of Ra's al Ghul changed most notably, however, in the nine-issue *Batman: Death and the Maidens* mini-series (2003-2004). The tale introduced Nyssa, another daughter of Ra's.^[40] Nyssa's mother was a Jewish peasant woman in Russia, impregnated and abandoned by Ra's in the 1770s. Nyssa subsequently found her father, joining him and killing his enemies at his side for years until they parted ways. Later, Nyssa's descendants were all killed and Nyssa herself spent the Second World War in a German concentration camp from which Ra's refused to free her. In the present, she befriended her sister Talia – only to kill her over and over, resurrecting her each time in Nyssa's own private Lazarus Pit. Meanwhile, Ra's al Ghul is dying because Batman has destroyed his sources of immortality. In return for disclosing the location of another Lazarus Pit, Ra's offers Batman a concoction allowing him to meet his dead parents mentally, by which he learns they disapprove of his career as a vigilante. But Nyssa arrives along with Talia and kills Ra's, whose body is burned. Nyssa becomes the new "demon's head" of her father's organization, while Talia rejects Batman and sides with her sister.

Talia soon became a capable DC villain in her own right, serving as a core member of a society of villains (called simply "the Society"), run by Superman's arch-enemy Lex Luthor.

Timed to the release of *Batman Begins*, DC offered *Year One: Batman / Ra's al Ghul*, written by Devin Grayson with art by Paul Gulacy and Jimmy Palmiotti. This two-issue prestige format series revealed that Batman's destruction of the Lazarus Pits caused their life-giving energies to back up beneath the Earth, temporarily granting the citizens of Gotham City immortality despite sometimes critical injuries. Batman ultimately solves the problem by opening a new Lazarus Pit within the Batcave. The possibility of Ra's resurrection is played with throughout the series, though it never occurs – and Batman's chooses the Batcave because it would allow him to defend against anyone trying to use the Pit to bring Ra's back to life.

In 2006, celebrated writer Grant Morrison began his run on *Batman* by introducing a son of Batman and Talia, here an arrogant and somewhat spoiled pre-teen named Damian. Morrison admitted to the comics trade magazine *Wizard* that he had not read the 1987 graphic novel *Son of the Demon* before writing his own story, leading to discrepancies between the two.

Batman #666 (July 2007) features an adult Damian Wayne having taken the mantle of Batman in a quasi-apocalyptic future following the death of his father.

Morrison also masterminded “The Resurrection of Ra’s al Ghul,” a late—2007 crossover among the Bat-titles in which the spirit of Ra’s al Ghul searches for a new body, initially focusing on his grandson Damian (over the objections of the boy’s mother) before claiming the body of his disowned son Dusan instead. In 2009, following the apparent death of Batman in Morrison’s *Final Crisis*, Dick Grayson (the first Robin) became Batman’s replacement, with Damian at his side as the new Robin.

Although Ra’s had never been seen on film before *Batman Begins*, he had been seen on the various DC animated TV series starting in 1992. The best of these appearances was his first, the two-part “The Demon’s Quest” – a fairly literal adaptation of Ra’s first appearance from *Batman* #232. Ra’s also appeared in the spin-off animated Superman show, done in the same style, and Talia even appeared in *Batman Beyond*, the similarly—stylized later Batman animated incarnation.

There are several differences between the Ra’s of the comics, as described above, and the Ra’s of the film. Of course, this is complicated by the revelation, later in the film, that the Ra’s seen earlier was merely a decoy and Ducard is actually Ra’s. The Asian Ra’s, played by Ken Watanabe, is closer to the comic-book original than is Ducard, played by Liam Neeson.

In the comics, Ra’s al Ghul is of unknown racial origin, though he is apparently Arab, as suggested by his Arabic name as well as the name of his organization: the League of Assassins (as noted earlier, a reference of the medieval Arab organization “The Assassins”) [\[41\]](#) He has wild grey (sometimes blended with black) hair on the sides of an otherwise (sometimes mostly) bald head. The film’s Ra’s sports hair on the sides of his mouth, starting just below the mouth and running straight down his face.

In the film, Ra’s looks like a Fu Manchu type – an Oriental leader of a sinister conspiratorial cult. The type is named after the fictional character created in a series of novels by Sax Rohmer. Dr. Fu Manchu was an Asian, played as Chinese when adapted for film, committed to the destruction of Western civilization or the “White race.” [\[42\]](#) The character’s baldness also suggests that the film’s Asian Ra’s al Ghul is a Fu Manchu figure. Fu Manchu was so distinguished by his long moustache that this style of facial hair has become known as a “Fu Manchu.” While the moustache is absent in the film, its remnants may be seen in the vertical strips of hair that the Asian Ra’s sports. In the comic-book adaptation of *Batman Begins*, the Asian Ra’s does wear his

traditional moustache.



While the Fu Manchu figure is now recognized as a racial stereotype, stereotyping Asians may seem less risky than stereotyping Arabs. Ra's al Ghul may have been created to play off the rise of Arab terrorism against the West in the 1970s, though in the character's defense his environmentalist motivation went beyond simple exploitation. Far worse Arab stereotypes, often terrorists, appeared in film and comics throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[\[43\]](#) However, in the wake of September 11, such stereotyping has become politically incorrect and a cause for protest. A historically rare response to such an attack, the official line has been that Islamic terrorists are the targets of the War on Terror, not all Muslims and not all Arabs; such care has not always been exercised by those who still fail to distinguish between Arabs, Muslims, and terrorists. Keeping Ra's al Ghul even implicitly Arab would have been seen as offensive in a way that it didn't in the 1970s.

The Asian Ra's al Ghul in the film is played by Ken Watanabe, who was nominated for an Oscar for his role in 2004's *The Last Samurai*. His slight screen time in *Batman Begins* brought some criticism from critical admirers of his talents, but it is worth noting that this helped misdirect viewers on two levels. First, his death could surprise, a minor version of Alfred Hitchcock famously killing off Janet Leigh in *Psycho*. Second, Watanabe's status might cause viewers to suspect that he would return later in the film – a notion overturned even as it is apparently fulfilled. While *The Last Samurai* was criticized by some as racist – largely because the focus remains on the white character (played by Tom Cruise), who becomes a master samurai – no such criticism was directed at *Batman Begins* for Watanabe's brief role.

The film's version of Ra's differs from that of the comics in ways that go beyond his ethnicity, appearance, or the name of his organization. Most importantly, the Ra's of the film lacks Talia, who has been so critical to his portrayal in the comics. If the Ra's of the film has children, they are neither seen nor suggested. The Ra's of the film similarly lacks his manservant Ubu – Ducard is cast in this role in the film, at least until Ducard claims to have been Ra's al Ghul all along.

Crucially, the Ra's of the film does not possess the Lazarus Pit that artificially extends his life. It is worth noting, however, that the film doesn't make this clear immediately – and in fact plays on some of the audience knowing this aspect of the character. The references to Ra's organization having sacked Rome and Byzantium, among other cities, playfully hints at Ra's immortality – though it ultimately suggests only the age of his organization. Removing Ra's immortality helps render *Batman Begins* a more realistic narrative: one can more readily find credible a secret society than actual immortality. "We felt that the main challenge of this film was keeping everything grounded and believable," Goyer said. Including the Lazarus Pit, he added, would upset this intention. But, crucially, Goyer liked the idea that not showing the Lazarus Pit didn't mean it didn't exist: "you could view it either way," he said.[\[44\]](#)

Both the comics incarnation and the film's show Ra's as the head of a large secret organizations that (despite different names) seek to obliterate large populations. But the motivation has changed. Though both speak of restoring "balance," the comics Ra's is essentially an eco-terrorist, out to eradicate a large portion of humanity to halt our depredation of nature. In the film, he seems a sort of puritan, out to eradicate cities that have become morally corrupt. Both motivations are obtuse, but the film version is more limited in scope – focused on the city as the villain's basic target rather than the world. The film's version seems to prefer radical surgery to remove moral tumors, while the comic-book version has traditionally been more grandiose. This too may be seen as adding to the film's realism over its comic-book precedents.

Though the Ra's of the comics has many minions, frequently willing to sacrifice themselves for his cause, those minions are not so clearly based on the Japanese ninja. As in the comics, they seem to be drawn from various races and nations. Perhaps to emphasize this, further distancing the film from any charges of being anti-Arab, we prominently see blacks among al Ghul's henchmen.

During the battle between Ducard and Wayne that ends this scene, Ducard

identifies Bruce as a skilled martial artist. It's not clear in the film precisely when Bruce learned these skills, other than sometime during the period of his exile from Gotham between the end of the flashbacks and the first present-day scene. As previously stated, the Bruce of the comics had a number of mentors who trained him over this period, including most of the world's top martial artists.

During the fight, Ducard specifically identifies Bruce's martial arts as Tiger Crane and Ju Jitsu. Tiger Crane is a form of Kung Fu (or *gong fu*) and itself a combination of the tiger and crane styles. Ju Jitsu (or Jujitsu, Jujutsu, or Ju jutsu) is a Japanese form of unarmed martial arts known for immobilizing and joint-locking along with the familiar punching and kicking.

The scene ends with Ducard asking an unconscious Bruce what he fears – echoing the film's most obvious theme. But it also helps the film transition into the next flashback, which begins with young Bruce scared of the bats he saw in the cave. Such transitions by spoken narrative or central image, while longstanding in cinema, were popularized in comics through the work of writer Alan Moore, particularly in *Watchmen*, written by Moore and illustrated by Dave Gibbons. Importantly, *Watchmen* is credited, along with *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, for creating the darker, more realistic school of superheroics sometimes known as “revisionism.”

Act 1, Scene 3 (Flashback Sequence 2), Part 1: Continuing directly from the previous flashback, Thomas Wayne pulls his son Bruce up from the well and takes him into Wayne Manor.

In the screenplay, this scene was placed between Bruce meeting Ducard in the prison and Bruce's subsequent release. The film streamlines the two narratives, reducing the number of cuts from one to the other.

Young Bruce's rescue from the cave has not been previously seen in the comics or on film, though he is briefly shown with his parents *after* being rescued in the previously-mentioned “The Man Who Falls.”

That Bruce is taken inside the manor, instead of a hospital, is addressed in a brief exchange between Thomas Wayne and Alfred. This is the first time either are seen in the film, and both are playing their quintessential roles: Alfred, the loyal family butler; Thomas, the doctor and protector of his son. These roles will be discussed in more detail when Thomas Wayne comforts the traumatized Bruce and shows him the pearl necklace.

Despite seeming able to superficially treat his wounded son here, Thomas Wayne's profession as a doctor is far from obvious at this point in the film. Later, on the train on the way to the opera, Thomas says that he works at a hospital. Still later, when Bruce returns from college, he will recall playing with his father and his father's stethoscope.

In the comics, Thomas Wayne's medical career is often less important than his role as philanthropist. Thomas's role as a doctor both complements and contradicts Bruce's later attempts to "heal" Gotham City of its criminals – but Bruce does so through violence, a kind of desperate surgery at best. Medicine may seem a strange profession for someone already rich, who might well be less inclined to put up with medical school and years of lowly residency work. After all, whatever good Thomas Wayne might have done by learning and practicing medicine might have easily been accomplished by using his money to train and employ other doctors. Then again, we all need something to do.

This is the first time Alfred is seen in the film. In the comics, Alfred Pennyworth was first introduced in "Here Comes Alfred!" from *Batman* #16 (April-May 1943). In that story, Alfred, then depicted as an overweight man quite at odds with his later appearance, arrives at Wayne Manor from England and insists on becoming Bruce Wayne's butler. Alfred's father, Jarvis Pennyworth, had been Thomas Wayne's butler "for many years," but Alfred had forsaken "the family calling to be an actor," recanting his decision only in a deathbed promise to his father. In a nice little nod to the then-ongoing war in Europe, Alfred recalls his long trip to the U.S., including having his ship torpedoed and spending "a fortnight adrift on a life raft!"

Bruce and his young ward, Dick Grayson, accept Alfred but immediately worry about him discovering their secret identities. Alfred soon does exactly that, stumbling upon the entrance to the Batcave. He also helps to solve a case for Batman, if only through sheer luck. Alfred, it seems, fancies himself a detective – so readers get to laugh at how he represents chance rather than detection. In the end, Alfred pledges loyal silence about his masters' identities.

Alfred would continue to be played for laughs in subsequent appearances, trying to be a detective but catching criminals only by accident. He even received a brief feature of his own, appearing in ten issues. His appearance was modified into his more familiar thin and mustached form to match the look of William Austin, who played Alfred in the 1943 Batman movie serial. So, in *Detective Comics* #83 (January 1944), the overweight Alfred went to a health resort and

grew a mustache.

His last name was first given as Beagle in *Detective Comics* #96 (February 1945), but it was later changed to Pennyworth – which has stuck ever since. In the film, Alfred’s last name is never given.

Alfred’s arrival at Wayne Manor was revised in “The Secret of Batman’s Butler,” from *Batman* #110 (September 1957). In a flashback, Alfred doesn’t discover the Batcave by accident – and he’s never shown in his original, obese form. Rather, months after his arrival, the already-mustached Alfred hears Dick Grayson’s voice calling out for him from behind a grandfather clock. Moving the clock, Alfred finds Robin holding an injured Batman on the stairs leading down to the Batcave. Given this extraordinary situation, Batman’s wounds are exceptionally light: having been hit on the head in a fight, he fell unconscious upon returning to the cave. Bruce trusts Alfred completely, and he soon cares not only for Bruce and Dick but for Batman and Robin as well. He even notes how dusty the Batman’s trophies are and is shown on a ladder, dusting the giant mechanical Tyrannosaurus Rex kept by Batman as a memento of his adventure on “Dinosaur Island” in *Batman* #35 (June 1946).

A series of amusing recollections follow, each showing how Alfred made himself useful over the years. When Bruce’s friends arrive for a surprise birthday party, Bruce is out saving a life as Batman. Alfred knows that Batman and Robin will change before coming up from the Batcave. So Alfred suggests turning out the lights to better surprise Bruce, then quickly closes the grandfather clock entrance behind his masters – thus saving their identities from being discovered. Another recollection is a throwback to Alfred’s earliest days as comic relief: Alfred sews inflatable costumes, which he thinks would help if his masters fall into water. But they look puffy and ridiculous, and Batman complains about how they restrict his movement. They come in handy, however, as decoys to float down a river and distract that night’s criminals. In another recollection, Alfred again helps hide Batman’s secret identity when Vicki Vale does her best impression of Lois Lane and asserts that she’s certain Bruce Wayne is Batman. Alfred drives around with a dummy of Bruce Wayne in the back seat – the same dummy he uses to fit Batman outfits. With Batman beside her, the suspicious Vicki Vale sees the dummy and is fooled.

But the story hinges around Alfred resigning, the occasion for all these flashbacks. It develops that Alfred has always worried about a man named Noyes. Just after being taken on as butler, Alfred was accosted by Noyes, who

offered to pay him for information about Bruce Wayne's comings and goings. Alfred, of course, refused vigorously – but, after discovering Batman's identity, he worries that he might have inadvertently said something and offered the criminal a clue. Years later, when Alfred spots Noyes outside the Batcave, his worst fears are realized. Finishing his resignation letter, Alfred gets an idea and poses as Batman, which gives us the funny visual of Alfred in Batman's costume. Encountering Noyes in the Batcave, Alfred explains that *he* is Batman and that Bruce Wayne knows nothing about his double life. Noyes then reveals that he's actually Batman in disguise: reusing the false identity he used years ago to test Alfred's loyalty. So all ends happily with a jovial Silver Age laugh.

The role of Alfred might seem trivial – and often has been in the comics, where he isn't seen in most Batman stories. In fact, Alfred was even briefly killed off in the 1960s. Yet Batman writers have often defended him as essential to the Batman formula. For many, he is Batman's rock – the person Batman can count on above all others.

The comic-book Alfred has considerable medical skills and has often had to patch up his employer in the Batcave after damaging jaunts as Batman. This trait is not shown in the film.

In the film, Alfred is played by veteran British character actor Michael Caine. Caine earned Academy Awards for his roles in *The Cider House Rules* and in *Hannah and Her Sisters*. He was also nominated for an Oscar for his performance in *The Quiet American*. Caine was Nolan's first pick for the role and one of the first actors cast. He would later appear in Nolan's *The Prestige* (2006). Caine's memorable portrayal of Alfred helps underline the character's importance in the film.

Michael Gough played Alfred through all four previous Batman films, even as the role of Batman shifted actors. Gough thus provided a limited continuity among the somewhat disjointed films. In this respect, he is much like James Bond's gadget master Q, portrayed by Desmond Llewelyn in a total of seventeen Bond films between 1963 and 1999, during which time five different actors played the lead role.

An upset Rachel is briefly seen on her way back into the house, and Bruce reaches out to her as Thomas carries her past. Near her, a woman apologizes to Thomas and begins to say that she's told Rachel a number of times to play safely. The woman seems to be an employee of the Waynes, and the script notes

that she's the housekeeper.

More importantly, the script notes that she's Rachel's mother – which goes a long way towards explaining her presence at Wayne Manor, a presence later scenes will suggest was routine. In the film's opening flashback scene, we imagine her perhaps a playmate of Bruce's from school – one imported by his parents to the Manor to keep Bruce entertained. Since the film does not make clear that Rachel's mother is the Waynes' housekeeper, we can only guess at the origin of their relationship.

Act 1, Scene 3 (Flashback Sequence 2), Part 2: Thomas Wayne comforts Bruce, then shows him a pearl necklace that he's bought for his wife.

This scene combines two scenes from the screenplay. In the first, Alfred comforted Bruce directly after the fall into the cave. That scene continued directly from the previous scene, in which Thomas Wayne rescued Bruce. Thereafter followed the present-day scenes, in which the adult Bruce was released from prison and first encountered Ra's al Ghul. After Bruce was knocked unconscious by Ducard, the flashbacks continued with a scene in which Thomas Wayne comforts Bruce, who can't sleep due to his fear of the bats he encountered. Thomas then showed Bruce the pearl necklace he intended to give his wife.

The film as originally released thus combines the two scenes in which Bruce is comforted. The one with Alfred is left out entirely, though some of his dialogue is now given to Thomas. The idea of Bruce being unable to sleep gets short shrift, making it seem as if Thomas is comforting his son more directly after rescuing him from the abandoned well.

Not much is lost in this change, which does avoid the redundancy of having two scenes in which Bruce is comforted. Thomas comes off better, though Alfred's relationship with the young Bruce gets sidelined in the process. Because the screenplay has Alfred, not Thomas Wayne, comforting Bruce directly after the fall, it was Alfred, not Thomas Wayne, who first asked Bruce "Why do we fall?" The fact that it's Alfred who comforts Bruce in the screenplay suggests the closeness of Alfred in contrast with Thomas's distance, and it was likely for this reason that the change was made. Not much is lost in terms of depicting Bruce as having been traumatized by his encounter with the bats.

Alfred's relationship with Bruce, prior to his parents' murder, has changed in the comics. Alfred has often been shown arriving at Wayne Manor only after the

Waynes' murders – to care for the newly orphaned son as something of a family friend. While Alfred is generally the closest to Bruce in the comics, Bruce in the comics is notoriously distant, frequently pushing people away.

Thomas Wayne, on the other hand, is frequently depicted as a kind of emotionally distant father – especially suggestive of the fathers of America's Vietnam—era children, who typically had to deal with emotionally distant fathers in a far more emotionally open era. In "The Man Who Falls," after Bruce's rescue from falling into the cave, Thomas Wayne yells at Bruce, calling him an "idiot," to Martha's dismay. Obviously, the contrast between that story and *Batman Begins* could not be clearer. But even without the changes made in depicting the aftermath of Bruce's trauma, the next few flashback scenes render Thomas a far closer, attentive father than he has generally been in the comics. More on this aspect is offered in commentary to those scenes.

It's worth noting here, however, that one story depicts Thomas as not only distant but actually abusive. *Batman* #430 (February 1989) has a flashback sequence in which Thomas Wayne batters young Bruce. Although the story suggests that this was the first time Thomas hit his son, child abuse serves as a theme for the issue and Batman's narration is *obviously* modeled after that of child abuse victims. The story, written by Jim Starlin with art by Jim Aparo and Mike DeCarlo, has been ignored ever since.[\[45\]](#)



Thomas Wayne hits his son after being badgered to play catch. This page is one of several with a parallel layout, and the flashback panels done entirely in yellows (except for the actual murders, which are colored in reds). From *Batman* #430 (February 1989). Art by Jim Aparo and Mike DeCarlo. Copyright © DC Comics.

That story has another twist, albeit a ham-fisted one. Bruce responds by angrily wishing his father were dead. To make up for striking the boy, Thomas chooses to take young Bruce out to see a movie. That movie, of course, was the Zorro movie they saw the evening Bruce's parents were murdered.[\[46\]](#)

Fascinatingly, Batman's anguish over his parents' deaths is thus implicitly tied

to his psychological response to his father's abuse, which we may conjecture is some mix of guilt (at feeling responsible for the abuse and for having caused his father's death) and resentment (at his father for hitting him but also for leaving him). This actually helps to characterize Bruce Wayne and motivate his decision to become Batman, but these implications weren't followed – not because they had any problem with Bruce being psychologically troubled but probably because Batman's creators and readers didn't care for a Thomas Wayne who hit his son, even that one time.

"Why do we fall?", Thomas asks young Bruce in this scene. The answer is *so that we may get up*. It's a question and answer that will be repeated later in the film, and it has particular resonance with "The Man Who Falls." Despite being largely forgotten by comics fans, DC considered that story sufficiently important to give it to Nolan, who considered it his second major point of reference, after *Year One*. The conceit of the story, as suggested by its title, is its framing of Batman's origin and subsequent career as a series of such falls.

As previously noted, *Batman Begins* compresses the time between young Bruce's fall into the cave, and his encounter with the bats there, and the Waynes' murders. That the murder follows closely upon the fall is suggested here by the pearl necklace. The two events' closeness is later enhanced by Bruce being scared by bat-shapes on stage at the opera, suggesting the trauma of his fall is still fresh when his parents are murdered. We'll discuss the pearls that Thomas Wayne has purchased in a moment, as we deal with the murder of Bruce's parents.

Act 1, Scene 3 (Flashback Sequence 2), Part 3: The Wayne family travels on the elevated train, which runs through Wayne Tower. Thomas explains he had the train built to help people.

Thomas Wayne's philanthropic actions are described here, but his philanthropic spirit is even more pronounced. He speaks of "people less fortunate than us" and of giving something back to Gotham. At this point, he's almost a caricature of a good rich person.

Dr. Thomas Wayne was not important in the comics for quite some time and remains most important for his death. While he has generally been characterized as a good man, he has never been as much of an epitome of the philanthropic visionary as he is shown in the film – a change arguably for the better.

But we learn more than this about Thomas Wayne. He says that he works at a

hospital, the firmest suggestion yet that he is a doctor. And he reveals that he doesn't run Wayne Enterprises personally, instead leaving the business side to those he modestly calls "better men." Both are in line with his usual portrayal in the comics.

Although Thomas Wayne does not say so here, we later learn from Lucius Fox that Wayne Tower is not only the central hub for the city's elevated rail system, but also houses the city's waterworks and electrical power system – all, apparently, part of Wayne's philanthropic efforts to improve life in economically depressed Gotham.

Thomas Wayne's infrastructural and architectural restructuring of Gotham City is so extensive in this film that he might qualify as a "city mastermind" type. In American comics, this type has been seen in Dean Motter's celebrated *Mister X* and *Terminal City*. In European comics, this type has been seen in the successful French series *Les Cités Obscures*, by François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters. The "city mastermind" type can be prone to insanity, but they appeal to comics' visual nature – allowing an entire city to exude the sometimes eccentric vision of a single designer. Ironically, given this change in Thomas Wayne's character, the film's Gotham is decidedly less eccentric than previous cinematic versions. Consider 1989's *Batman*, which saw Gotham as full of gothic architecture, including a towering cathedral used in the film's climax.

In the comics, Gotham City has had several incarnations over the years, but few have seen such a seemingly advanced elevated train. Superman's Metropolis, however, has sometimes been shown with futuristic elevated trams – and the typical contrast between Gotham and Metropolis (mirroring that between Batman and Superman), is that Gotham is dark and grimy whereas Metropolis is bright and futuristic. Summing up the dichotomy, Frank Miller has said that "Metropolis is New York in the daytime; Gotham City is New York at night." In the movie's defense, Wayne's train and tower are exceptions to the grimy rule – and, as we shall see later in the film, the train has deteriorated and is now covered in spraypaint.

In Frank Miller's *Year One* screenplay, Little Al shows Bruce a system of tunnels beneath the city, explaining, "Back in the day, Wayne Corp[.] built a lot of the infrastructure for Gotham City – water systems, electrical, sewers." The building also included a train system, though it would seem to be more of a subway system than the elevated trains seen in *Batman Begins*.

Act 1, Scene 3 (Flashback Sequence 2), Part 4: The Wayne Family attends an opera. In the darkened theatre, frightened by bat-like figures on stage, Bruce asks to leave. Emerging into a dirty alley, Thomas claims that he simply got bored with the opera, covering for Bruce. When a mugger strikes, Thomas Wayne complies calmly and politely – but both he and his wife are shot, leaving young Bruce to cry over their bodies.

The death scene has been depicted countless times, but never so memorably as in the flashbacks in *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Year One*. The most interesting change here is that the family attends the *opera* before being killed: in the comics, it has traditionally been a *movie*. That film tends to be a Zorro film – a reference to Zorro having partly inspired the creation of Batman. In the first chapter of *Year One*, it was *The Mark of Zorro*. In the silent flashback version from *The Dark Knight Returns*, only “Zorro” is visible on the movie theatre’s marquee, though the older Bruce Wayne’s memory is triggered by a television broadcast of *The Mark of Zorro*.

The change from movie to opera is particularly interesting. The opera allows the convenient use of bat-figures as living beings on the stage, something film would not allow. Opera, even more than film, often involves plots with mistaken or disguised identity – and it is theatrical, often involving masks. Furthermore, in versions where the characters exit a movie, they sometimes are shown to cut through an alleyway, a perhaps awkward narrative device. The use of the opera house’s side exit seems a slightly better alternative, and side exits on movie theatres are somewhat rarer and certainly more rarely used. Moreover, the movie theatre’s neighborhood doesn’t look too good: in fact, the alleyway is dubbed Crime Alley in the comics, a name either given after the infamous Wayne shooting or a preexisting name for a frequent violent location. The rich Waynes can seem out of place in this setting. In the film, the opera house and its neighborhood don’t seem quite as threatening, and the more socially—conscious Waynes of the film seem more likely to walk among the city’s underclass, as seen by their use of the public transit system their own money founded.

But most importantly, the change from movie to opera has interesting class implications. The Waynes wouldn’t dress up to go to a movie, but do so to go to the opera – the image of young Bruce with their bodies visually signals the family’s wealth much better. Movies are a popular medium, whereas opera is distinctly elitist, and it’s interesting that the Waynes of the comics are typically depicted as more elitist yet go to a movie, while the more socially—conscious

Waynes of *Batman Begins* attend an opera. The film's Thomas Wayne might not be more conflicted in terms of class, but he seems a more consciously —crafted figure in this regard: he is a philanthropic social engineer who even rides his own public transportation system but who nonetheless dies in a suit while attending the opera.

These class implications may also be read as applying to the film itself. Batman's roots may come from the adventures of pulp heroes such as Zorro and the Shadow, but *Batman Begins* seeks to elevate the character to the status of fine art — just as comics are being elevated to the status of literature and are increasingly taught at American universities. Both movie and opera sequences may be read as homage: Batman comics typically aspire to be swashbuckling adventures, to be as entertaining on the page as pulpy films like Zorro; *Batman Begins*, however, has operatic, classical pretensions. And this shift to opera also reminds us that the whole concept of the masked alter ego, as well as that of the adventurer, is ancient in origin — far older than the pulps that directly inspired the character Batman. Moreover, that concept was at home in fine literature and theatre, until relatively recently.

In a 29 October 2008 interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Nolan explained two reasons for the change from movie to opera.[\[47\]](#) The first seems to be that showing “a character in a movie watching a movie” pulls the viewer out of the action; “it creates a deconstructionist thing that we were trying to avoid.” This seems to do with avoiding metafictional tension and with the needs of translation between media. But second, Nolan and Goyer wanted “to remove Zorro as a role model. We wanted nothing that would undermine the idea that Bruce came up with this crazy plan of putting on a mask all by himself.” Substituting an opera could thus serve the additional function, in Nolan and Goyer’s tight script, of “cement[ing] that idea of fear and symbolism associated with bats,” as well as enhancing the operatic feel “that seemed to work on screen.”

Nolan volunteered this explanation in the context of explaining why his Batman shouldn’t meet Superman or other superheroes, as Warner Bros. had hinted it might want and as Marvel’s own films had begun doing. Citing his Batman’s realism would have been enough: anyone with super-powers would be out-of-place in Nolan’s Gotham, as he had already explained regarding his choice of villains. But instead, Nolan emphasizes Batman as self-made man: If you think of *Batman Begins* and you think of the philosophy of this character trying to reinvent himself as a symbol, we took the position — we didn’t address it directly in the film, but we did take the position philosophically — that superheroes simply don’t exist. If they did, if Bruce knew of Superman or even of comic books, then

that's a completely different decision that he's making.

Nolan is quick to point out that the Joker, in *The Dark Knight*, imitates Batman's "theatricality," but "the premise we began with is that Batman was creating a wholly original thing. To be honest, we went even further than the comics on this point."

But of course, Bruce doesn't come up with the idea "of putting on a mask all by himself" – in the film, his own psychological history motivates him, as well as the example of Ra's al Ghul. For Nolan, the point isn't really that Bruce has no "role model" – it's that he has no Zorro as an example. And in this, Nolan seems to be pointing to the opera scene as a touchstone, hinting that *Batman Begins* actually takes place in a somewhat altered reality. It's not that young Bruce happens to attend an opera instead of a Zorro film. It's that there *is* no Zorro in this universe. Or any other pulp heroes. Or superheroes in comics or other fiction. If comics exist, they must explore other genres, like the pirate comics in *Watchmen*. But Nolan isn't keen to explore this alternate reality, as *Watchmen* did. That would detract from his emphasis – which isn't an alternate history but Bruce Wayne's creation of himself as a symbol. In this, he's aided by the fact that we're accustomed to fiction existing within parallel universes, implicitly with their own history of fiction: there are no Superman comics, TV shows, or movies in a Superman film, nor do we expect them or wonder how history would be different without them. And Nolan's right: movies that cite their own alternate history of fiction can sometimes feel strange, leading us to distracted thoughts about that alternate history instead of following the characters. But at the very least, understanding this aspect of *Batman Begins* sheds light on Bruce's journey – and on Gotham's dejected corruption, since its citizens have no masked crimefighters with which to escape.

The specific opera seen here, as the script notes, is Boito's *Mefistofele*. Based on Goethe's *Faust*, *Mefistofele* was the only opera of Arrigo Boito (1842-1918) – though the man wrote libretti for other composers and failed to complete other operas. Upon the debut of *Mefistofele* in 1868, the opera provoked riots and was closed under orders of the police after a mere two performances. Boito revised the opera, severely cutting its length. This revised version became a great success and is still occasionally performed today. Besides the opera's costumes occasioning Bruce's flashback to the cave's bats, the Faust story resonates with the film. Faust's deal with the Devil suggests how Bruce's frightening persona (depicted as demonic in Crane's hallucination) is inspired by his encounter with

Ducard. Invoking Faust also hints that this inspiration comes with a price, foreshadowing the reckoning seen in the movie's climax.

The notion that the Waynes leave early due to Bruce's fear is also new to this version. In the comics, it seems as if the Waynes have finished their movie before they leave – in some versions, young Bruce is gallivanting in the streets afterward, mimicking Zorro. That Bruce encouraged his parents to depart sets up Bruce's later feelings of guilt and may be seen as an improvement upon the comic-book original. And as previously noted, Bruce's fear at the opera house helps to further connect his fall at Wayne Manor, and his resulting fear of bats, with his parents' murder.

More profoundly, it also adds to the murders' sense of randomness, placing the killings in a vortex of contingency and circumstance. In real life, such incidents are typically filled with "if only"s: various little decisions that, had they been different, might also have changed the ultimate outcome. The mugger's economic and psychological circumstance must also be considered, as well as the happenstance of his location at the moment in question – something Falcone will reference when Bruce confronts the gangster. Thomas's gift of a pearl necklace, and the mugger's insistence on taking Martha's jewelry along with the couple's money, must also be considered in this context. Real events exist within a web of contingency, leaving us to ponder, in the wake of trauma, how many ways things might have been different – or, perhaps, the unfathomable randomness of personal history.

One of the most noticeable changes in the film's death sequence is visual. In *The Dark Knight Returns*, writer-artist Frank Miller had the culprit pull and break Mrs. Wayne's pearl necklace, sending pearls falling in slow-motion close-up. The symbolism is clear enough: pure white pearls, representing innocence, falling in the dirty alleyway like Wayne's parents. Subsequent to Miller's work, this isolated image has become so powerful and dominant as to serve as a form of shorthand for the Waynes' murders and Bruce's primal tragedy.[\[48\]](#)

While Thomas Wayne has shown Bruce the pearl necklace in the previous flashback, the pearls are comparatively minimized or understated in the film's death sequence. Most notably, the film does not feature the slow-motion close-ups of the pearls falling. The script, while not calling for such a slow-motion insert cut, does mention the pearls several times during the death sequence.

Interestingly, it is the pearls that lead directly to the shootings. The mugger

demands jewelry as well as cash from the start, and he had already taken Thomas's wallet when he persists for the sake of the jewels. While Martha wears other jewelry, including rings, the pearl necklace can symbolically be seen as causing the Waynes' death. This dovetails nicely, given Thomas having shown Bruce the necklace earlier, with Bruce's subsequent guilt and feeling of responsibility for the tragedy.

In contrast with the film's visual de-emphasis of the pearls, the film's isolated image of young Bruce holding his parents bodies *does* echo a classic image from the death sequence. The image was perhaps never more memorably depicted than by David Mazzucchelli in the first chapter of *Year One*, both in that story's flashback and on the cover of *Batman* #404 (February 1987).

Thomas Wayne's passivity in the wake of a mugger is not new, but other versions have been presented. In the earliest Batman origin stories, Thomas isn't passive at all: he decries the mugger before being shot, and the shooting is even depicted as a response to his words, with the killer saying that the bullets will shut Thomas up. In *The Dark Knight Returns*, Thomas begins to raise a fist before being shot. Other versions are silent, making it harder to tell if Thomas resists, at least verbally. Frank Miller's *Year One* screenplay explicitly shows Thomas resisting, and the Wachowskis' proposal for a film version of *Year One* did as well. Thomas's passivity here, however, will be played upon by Ducard in later dialogue.

"Don't be afraid" is the last thing the dying father says to his son. Thomas Wayne is not typically given any dying words in the comics. The film's screenplay does not permit them either. His dying words in the film serve to accent the rather obvious theme of fear and help to characterize Thomas: even in death, he acts compassionately and lovingly towards his young son. As previously mentioned, Thomas Wayne has not previously been so extensively characterized in such a positive manner.

We'll discuss the Waynes' killer later, when he is paroled. It is worth pointing out here, however, that he seems singularly uncomfortable with his role as the Waynes' mugger. The script is even more explicit in this regard than the film. It introduces the mugger by describing him as "shifting uneasily," "skinny," "hungry," and "desperate" – supporting his claim at his parole hearing. The gun, seen here and in later brief flashback cuts, trembles in the mugger's hand. The script notes that he looks "saddened" after the shooting and that he "cannot bear the boy's gaze." This is, as we will see, quite at odds with the mugger's

depiction in the comics.

While the Waynes' killer was originally depicted as cold and callous murderer, the version of the killings in *Batman* #47 (June-July 1948) had him stammer, shaken by young Bruce Wayne's angry gaze and words. Later depictions would vary, though many would repeat this element.

It's worth noting how well the death scene is done. The acting, including both Thomas Wayne and young Bruce, is exceptional. And the musical score, which includes stirring vocals at this point, heightens the pathos.

Act 1, Scene 3 (Flashback Sequence 2), Part 5: The media clamors for information from the police about the shooting. Inside the police station, a policeman named Gordon comforts the young Bruce Wayne before Commissioner Loeb arrives. Loeb tells Bruce that they've caught the killer.

The comics have typically not focused on young Bruce's interactions with police after the shooting. The most notable exception is the classic "There is No Hope in Crime Alley!", from *Detective Comics* #457 (March 1976), but that limits the depiction of the insensitive cops to a single panel. Showing that Bruce receives no comfort from the police department, as seen there and in *Batman Begins*, further helps motivate Bruce's later decision to act as a vigilante.

The media attention given to the shooting, however, is perfectly in line with its depiction in the comics. The Waynes, as both the film and the comics make clear, were well-known Gotham personalities, and their shooting was a major news story. The script even calls it "the crime of the decade" in conjunction with the media's coverage – a phrase that recalls the media's salacious coverage of scandalous trials, such as O.J. Simpson's murder trial in the 1990s.

James Gordon first appeared right along with Bruce Wayne in Batman's very first appearance in *Detective Comics* #27. In fact, he appears in the very first panel of that story, socializing with Wayne. In that story, he was already police commissioner. It wasn't until 1980's *The Untold Legend of the Batman* that Gordon was seen before his rise through the ranks, as he was subsequently in both *Year One* and *Batman Begins*.

Gordon's past was not examined in any significant depth until *Batman: Year One*, in which Gordon was newly transferred to Gotham in the wake of an unspecified scandal just as Bruce Wayne returned there to start his career as Batman. The film's choice to make Gordon the one policeman who understands young Bruce's pain helps explain Batman's later trust in Gordon – a major coup

for the film. On the other hand, it means that we have to understand Gordon's resistance to corruption as having gone on a long time – which might seem less realistic.

Gordon is played in the film by Gary Oldman, long renowned as a character actor known for playing evil or dark characters. The upright Gordon marked a change in this respect. But Oldman continued his chameleon-like approach to the look of his characters, adopting Gordon's mustache and glasses with the Gordon of *Year One* as his model.

The script notes that Gordon is 29 in this scene. After Bruce returns to Gotham, we will learn that Gordon has achieved the rank of Detective, so he is probably a rookie cop here. Commissioner Loeb brushing Gordon away, while it certainly comes off as insensitive, could thus be understood in part as a function of their vast difference in rank.

For those familiar with Batman comics, Commissioner Loeb might seem a nod to Jeph Loeb, the screen and comics writer responsible for such Batman stories as *The Long Halloween* and "Hush," but corrupt Police Commissioner Gillian B. Loeb was featured in *Year One* long before the writer became known. Whereas Loeb is black in *Batman Begins*, he is an elderly white man in *Year One*.

In the screenplay, Loeb seems more derogatory to Gordon, briefly chastising him before dismissing him with the words "Outta my sight." Loeb is similarly villainous in *Batman: Year One*. In Miller's *Year One* screenplay, a crazed Loeb is the main villain of the piece. The film softens his character considerably. Later, in both the screenplay and the film, he is shown having compassion for the victims in the Narrows – perhaps suggesting that, while he is corrupt and not particularly sensitive to young Bruce, he isn't a bad guy.

Loeb's telling Bruce that the police have caught the killer seems to be his own attempt at comforting the boy, much as Gordon had just tried to do. But whereas Gordon emotively connects with the boy, saying "it's okay" like a surrogate father, Loeb's words come as a cold comfort. Bruce, alone without his parents in the bustling police station, needs a surrogate parent – a fact Gordon seems to intuitively understand. Whereas Bruce will later worry about justice for his parents' killer, it seems far from his mind as a scared boy, suddenly alone in the world.

Act 1, Scene 3 (Flashback Sequence 2), Part 6: At Wayne Manor, Mr. Earle of Wayne Enterprises tells Bruce that the company will continue. Later, Alfred

assures an upset Bruce that his parents' deaths weren't the boy's fault.

Focus on the Wayne company has previously been the domain of the comics, largely unseen in previous Batman films. But *Batman Begins* seems to have done the comics one better, setting up Earle's (mis)management of the Wayne company. Richard Earle is a character newly created for the film, described in Goyer's script as 47 years old in this scene. His words here to Bruce are conciliatory, though less than warm. The extent to which Earle is or is not a "bad guy" will be the subject of later commentary.

Richard Earle is played by Rutger Hauer, known for iconic roles in films such as *Blade Runner*. In 2005, Hauer also appeared in the film adaptation of Frank Miller's *Sin City*, playing Cardinal Roark.

While the comics have occasionally played to the notion of Bruce blaming himself for his parents' deaths, it has rarely been so explicit as in this scene. The dominant focus has instead been on Bruce's anger and rage.

Alfred says that only the killer was to blame – and calls the killer "that man." We may speculate to what extent Alfred's words here and Bruce's rejection of his own guilt (at least consciously) contribute to Bruce turning his hurt into rage – first at the killer, then at all criminals. In other words, Alfred's words here unintentionally help motivate both Bruce's intent to murder his parents' killer and his subsequent career as Batman.

Alfred's intent, of course, is merely to comfort a wounded child. This is a deeper observation than a mere irony of motivation: it reflects how children can take minor comments from adults and, misinterpreting those comments (sometimes subtly), in some ways base their lives upon such misinterpretations. Indeed, Thomas Wayne's words on the train may be understood in this light as well.

Act 1, Scene 4 (Present Sequence 2): Ducard trains Bruce Wayne, apparently under the guidance of Ra's al Ghul. Ducard's lessons include ninja-inspired theatricality as distraction and, as seen in a swordfight over ice, the importance of one's surroundings. While training, Bruce sees a murderer imprisoned by the League of Shadows. Ducard claims that he himself lost his wife but found comfort in vengeance.

As we cut back to the present, Bruce is narrating the story of his parents' deaths to Ducard. This transition is new to the filmed version and was not in the screenplay.

As previously stated, in the comics Wayne trained under multiple detectives and martial artists, not simply Ducard – and Bruce never trained under Ra’s al Ghul. The conclusion of this sequence foreshadows Wayne’s rejection of vengeance and of Ra’s, leading nicely into the next flashback – which shows why vengeance is not an option for Wayne.

For those familiar with Batman’s costume, particularly as it appears in the comics, the gauntlets used in this scene to catch sword strikes will be instantly recognizable for their similarity to Batman’s gloves, typically depicted as having the same small wing-like flares. For these viewers, it is not difficult to guess that Batman will later employ the gauntlets seen here as part of his costume. This is the first time, however, that those wing-like flares have been depicted as hard, let alone useful in blocking swords. Traditional designs seem to use these flares as little more than decoration. This change may be seen as another move towards realism, or at least practicality – and this corresponds nicely with the film’s strategy of making the character serious instead of campy so that Batman makes logical and narrative sense.

The film’s weaponizing of Batman’s flared arm decorations is a case of function following form. This is often the case in superhero comics, where aesthetic considerations often overrule logic. It may also be seen in Batman’s other tools, which routinely incorporate bat-shapes. Batman’s batarangs, seen in the film but never called as such, are obviously in the shape of bats. Most versions of the Batmobile feature tail fins that, while looking cool, serve little function. A more extreme example of this might be the Batwing seen in 1989’s *Batman*: while it looks very cool, even providing a nice bat-symbol when silhouetted against the moon, the shape is certainly not one an engineer would naturally use when designing such a vehicle. *Batman Begins* consciously avoids these kitschy elements, and the few such cases it retains – such as the batarangs – make realistic sense. In other words, the film unites function and form better than past incarnations of Batman, in either comics or movies.

Ducard’s instruction in distraction and theatricality early in this sequence will obviously be taken to heart by Bruce and employed in his vigilante career – as Ducard himself will later note. Much of Ducard’s advice here motivates Bruce’s creation of Batman – though, like Alfred’s words of comfort to Bruce, the effect is other than the intended one. Ducard’s instruction (later in this sequence) about minding one’s surroundings will similarly be employed in the film’s climax – as Batman will note in some of his last words to Ducard.

The murderer in this scene has no equivalent in the comics and is established here for the sake of setting up Bruce's subsequent initiation, during which he is told to kill the murderer. In fact, it hardly makes sense that the League of Shadows would cart a murderer up the Himalayas merely to execute him, and we see no other such prisoners. Given this, we may speculate that the League of Shadows has brought the murderer to the group's monastery headquarters purely for the sake of later testing Wayne.

The screenplay does not introduce the murderer until a later scene, after the following flashback sequence. That scene, which mostly featured Bruce continuing to train, was compressed into this one in the film as released. As with the early scenes showing Alfred and Thomas consoling young Bruce, this compression seems to eliminate redundancy. In the screenplay, the murderer's presence triggers more dialogue about justice and revenge – leading Ducard to question whether Wayne came to sympathize with criminals during his years of wandering. This set up the next flashback, which focused on Wayne's wandering and living the criminal lifestyle. That flashback is simply combined with the previous one, following directly from Bruce running to the freighter, in the actual film.

On the ice, Ducard blames Thomas Wayne for failing to confront his mugger. Politically, Ducard seems here to express an extreme form of libertarianism, in which people are accountable for themselves – including their own protection. While Bruce defends his father as untrained, Ducard's criticism of Thomas Wayne may well contribute to Bruce's later decision to fight Gotham City's desperate conditions in a manner that differs remarkably from his father. More on the two Waynes' differences and similarities will be offered in commentary on later scenes, particularly around the fire that destroys Wayne Manor.

Later, while warming up, Bruce says that Ducard didn't know Thomas Wayne. It's worth noting that this may or may not be true. Ducard doesn't confirm or deny, but we later find out that Ducard – or Ra's al Ghul – was already attacking Gotham City economically during Thomas Wayne's later days. Even if Ducard did not know Wayne personally, nor ever met him in the course of that previous attack upon Gotham, Ducard undoubtedly knew of the famous Thomas Wayne and his campaign against Gotham's poverty. While perhaps not lying, Ducard hides his knowledge of Gotham City and Thomas Wayne. In the comics, neither Ducard nor Ra's al Ghul knew Thomas Wayne.

We have no reason to doubt Ducard's word that he lost his wife or took

vengeance for that loss. Indeed, given Ducard's general truthfulness, it is probably true. Moreover, Liam Neeson certainly portrays the loss well, looking off and down when speaking of his wife and his pain. If true, this certainly enhances Ducard's position as a counterpart for Bruce, one representing a path Bruce did not take. However, Bruce has already rejected vengeance. He simply hasn't yet understood the implications of this rejection – that he cannot ultimately follow Ducard or Ra's al Ghul.

A note about production: the scene of Wayne and Ducard fighting on the ice was one of the first to be shot – on a real glacier. Word spread that the glacier, threatened by another one to the north, might collapse, and a debate ensued as to whether filming should continue. While the film was not stopped, the actors would later talk about how this added tension to their performances. Nolan, however, was no stranger to shooting on ice: one of his previous films was 2002's *Insomnia*, which takes place in Alaska and features icescapes prominently.

Act 1, Scene 5 (Flashback Sequence 3), Part 1: Years after the murder of the Waynes, Bruce Wayne returns home from Princeton and reveals that he plans to quit college. He rejects his father's heritage and even Alfred, prompting Alfred to respond angrily. Alone in his dead father's master bedroom, Bruce recalls his father and reveals a gun.

Whereas prior flashbacks have followed one another closely in terms of time, this one jumps forward several years from the previous flashback. According to the script, Bruce is 22 in this scene.

Though Alfred mentions Princeton specifically in this scene, conversation between Bruce and Rachel in the following scene suggests that this is hardly the first Ivy League college Bruce has left.

The comics have occasionally depicted Bruce's abortive college career, though Bruce's college days have gone almost entirely unexplored and are rarely mentioned in Batman stories – so much so that even avid Batman readers may be forgiven for not knowing whether Bruce ever attended college at all. Consider the aforementioned "The Man Who Falls," which Nolan considered his second major point of reference after *Year One*. There, Bruce is briefly shown to have studied at several universities but left them all, bored and troubled inside.

The depiction here of Bruce's abortive college career is more directionless than it has been depicted in the comics – on the rare occasion that it has been depicted

at all.^[49] Bruce's response to Alfred in this scene suggests that Princeton kicked Bruce out rather than Bruce deciding to leave – as the comics have typically suggested when they dealt with Bruce's college career at all. This shift in tone, towards a more directionless Bruce, helps justify Bruce's actions later in this flashback sequence, particularly his intention to kill his parents' murderer. It also helps establish why Ducard and Ra's al Ghul would be so seductive.

Bruce's disdain for Wayne Manor and his saying that he would like to pull it down foreshadows the mansion's destruction in the third act. It also has interesting implications on Bruce's responsibility for that destruction, as will be discussed later.

Despite his pleading, Bruce seems to accept the master bedroom that Alfred has prepared. It's there that Bruce recalls his father playing with him as a young boy. The use of a stethoscope in the brief flashback is the closest the film comes to showing us Thomas's medical profession. Such intimate flashbacks are rare in the comics and unknown in previous Batman films. They are most welcome here, particularly as this one helps show Thomas's profession, otherwise only indirectly referenced in dialogue.

Bruce having a gun would immediately strike the character's comic-book readers as out-of-character – or even as a profanation of the character. The character's relationship to guns will be addressed later, when Bruce attempts to use the gun seen here. For now, it suffices to point out how Bruce revealing it in his dead father's bedroom should strike us as especially profane, given his father's profession as a sworn healer. Indeed, the symbolic contrast between the two objects – gun and stethoscope – could not be clearer.

Act 1, Scene 5 (Flashback Sequence 3), Part 2: In the kitchen, Wayne talks with Rachel. Now an intern at the District Attorney's office, she understands that he has returned for the parole hearing of Joe Chill, his parents' killer. While Bruce doesn't want to hear it, she explains that, in exchange for his early parole, Chill will testify against mob boss Carmine Falcone, with whom Chill shared a prison cell.

In Batman comics, Joe Chill has largely been a cipher, quickly eliminated – as was the case in his very first appearance in *Batman* #47 (June-July 1948). Fleeing Batman, Chill seeks refuge with other criminals, explaining that Batman hunts him as the killer of Batman's own parents. Angry with Chill for effectively creating Batman, the other criminals murder Chill – doing what

Batman could not bring himself to do. Of course, they conveniently do so before Chill can tell them the identity of that child who became Batman.

Detective Comics #235 (September 1956) then revealed that Chill had not killed the Waynes at random but did so under orders from racketeer Lew Moxon, who blamed Thomas Wayne for his conviction. Moxon died in that issue, though he has appeared subsequently.

Chill has not always been depicted as the Waynes' killer, however. Tim Burton's 1989 film *Batman* had the Waynes killed by a petty hood named Jack Napier – who later rose in the underworld only to be transformed into the Joker. This was reduced the number of characters while also heightening Batman's personal conflict with the Joker (much as *Batman Begins* would similarly fold Ra's al Ghul into Batman's origin so as to unite the first and third acts of the film). For a time during the 1990s, Batman comics even called the identity of the killer into question, in the belief that not knowing who killed his parents adds to the Batman mythos – suggesting that Batman effectively ventures out each night to catch the unknown killer and sees that killer in every criminal's face.

The adult Rachel is played by Katie Holmes, who rose to public attention for her role on the TV teen drama *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) and had previously appeared in the films *The Ice Storm* (1997), *Wonder Boys* (2000), and *Phone Booth* (2003). A number of critics who praised the film and its actors singled out her performance for derision.[\[50\]](#) Ironically, she was probably the most talked about actor in the film because of her budding romance with actor Tom Cruise and conversion from Catholicism to Cruise's controversial religion, the Church of Scientology.[\[51\]](#) Despite retiring to be a mother, Holmes has continued her film career, most notably in 2005's *Thank You for Smoking*. Of all the characters returning for *The Dark Knight*, hers was the only one recast. The script notes that she, like Bruce, is 22 in this scene.

This scene contains the film's first reference to Carmine Falcone, a minor character from the comics. Falcone was introduced in *Year One* as Gotham's dominant mob boss during Batman's early days, before the city became a haven for costumed criminals. In *Year One*, Falcone doesn't seem to have done jail time. Joe Chill did not appear in *Year One*, and any association between him and Falcone is new.

Bruce's resentment over Chill's parole echoes popular sentiment. Grieving families often tearfully oppose acquittals and paroles – and, on occasion, the

entire justice system. The American system of jurisprudence was established to protect the rights of the accused, not the rights of victims, but that system has increasingly created victims' rights – such as the right of people testifying as rape victims to protect their identity from the public. Some other systems of jurisprudence, such as France's, more explicitly guarantee certain rights to the victim. While violent crime has lessened in the United States, media coverage of it has risen – leading to frequent outcries against the justice system. Political conservatives especially seem to decry the justice system for paroling violent criminals.

Act 1, Scene 5 (Flashback Sequence 3), Part 3: Bruce's appears at Chill's parole hearing. Chill has served 14 years for the killings, and he states his remorse. District Attorney Finch stresses Chill's economic circumstances. Called upon to speak, Bruce walks out.

The size of the parole hearing, with few people present, contrasts starkly with the media attention lavished upon the Waynes' murders. This further enhances the sense that the justice system has forgotten about the Waynes, at least now that the media's attention has died down. At the very least, it adds to our sense that the legal decision is the product of a small group of elite persons. But, as we shall soon see, the media is covering the parole in force. Why they are not in the courtroom remains unclear, though they could have been barred by court order, as sometimes happens in real life.

The presiding judge is Judge Faden, a secondary character who will be seen later. Faden actually had a greater role in the screenplay than in the released film. As we soon discover, he is on Carmine Falcone's payroll. Faden has not been seen in the comics.

Finch is also new to *Batman Begins* and will also be seen later in the film. His first name will later be stated as Carl.

Chill's sympathetic depiction here goes beyond the words of District Attorney Finch. As the script notes, he seems nervous and looks to have aged poorly during his 14 years in prison. This sympathetic characterization even extends to the murder scene, as discussed above.

The screenplay actually makes Chill seem a bit more sympathetic than the film does. In the screenplay, when it's Bruce's turn to speak, Chill turns around but "has to look away." In the film, he is never shown looking back, though he does seem nervous, as if scared to confront Bruce.

Such a sympathetic characterization of Chill is, as already briefly suggested, largely unprecedented. Classically, Chill was merely an unimportant thug. Hardly an isolated criminal, he cavorted with other such criminals. Hardly working-class, he was never shown to have a job other than his criminal activities.[\[52\]](#) The Chill of *Batman Begins* seems equally unimportant, retaining the drama of the Waynes falling in an act of random violence. But suggesting sympathy for Chill helps us to understand how the socially-conscious Thomas Wayne might not have wanted vengeance for his murder.

There's an interesting political layer to the depiction here of Chill and Bruce. Chill's sympathetic depiction comes off as liberal, to the extent that liberals in the Untied States tend to be more concerned with prison conditions and more inclined to believe that poverty and lack of opportunity lead to crime, given the individual's limited options. Bruce, on the other hand, is cast in the conservative role, visibly seething in his seat as Chill stands and speaks to the court. In the comics, the political implications of Batman have long been discussed. Frank Miller's depiction of Batman in *The Dark Knight Returns* has been called fascistic. In focusing on punishing criminals, instead of improving the conditions that may contribute to crime, Batman can appear a radically conservative figure – even as he sympathizes with the poor and his stories are written, predominantly, by liberals. More discussion of Batman's reputed fascism can be found as Wayne Manor burns and we consider the ways in which Bruce both follows and opposes his father.

Act 1, Scene 5 (Flashback Sequence 3), Part 4: Outside the courtroom, Bruce waits among reporters and prepares to shoot Chill with a concealed gun. Before Bruce can do so, however, Chill is gunned down by a minion of Falcone. Rachel and Bruce depart in her car, and Rachel reveals that Falcone bribed the judge to get Chill in the open. Bruce endorses the killing and shows Rachel the gun; she reproaches him, saying his father would have been ashamed of him. Leaving the car, Bruce tosses away the gun and goes to visit Falcone.

Chill being gunned down by other criminals echoes his fate in the comics, as previously discussed. Falcone's involvement, however, is new to the film. This further connects the narrative threads, borrowed from different comics stories.

The shooting comes as a surprise in the film. More accurately, the fact that Bruce *isn't* the shooter surprises us because of the way the sequence is cut. When Chill is shot, the screen has Bruce in close-up, and the juxtaposition of tight shots makes it briefly seem as if Bruce *has* shot Chill. Then we pull back

and see that a previously unseen woman is the actual culprit, adding to our sense of randomness and confusion.

At first, the shooting may appear to be a convenient out – a way to make Bruce a killer in his heart, yet keep him from actually doing the deed and thus hijacking the narrative. Rachel’s explanation in the car, however, not only makes sense of the shooting (since Chill was going to testify against Falcone) but makes the incident a further indication of Gotham’s corruption. That explanation may actually be some combination of known fact and conjecture. Though the killer claims credit for Falcone, we do not see how Rachel knows Falcone bribed Judge Faden to make the hearing public. Moreover, she states that the District Attorney didn’t understand Faden’s decision, meaning he didn’t know of the bribe. This bribe is thus probably her conjecture, especially given how soon her words follow the shooting – there has not been time for new information to come to light.

Bruce’s near use of a gun here has a special meaning in the Batman mythos. In fact, it is a dangerous move for a Batman story to even *dare* give him a gun. In *Detective Comics* #327 (May 1964), the first of Batman’s periodic redefinitions, his costume was changed so that the black bat on his grey chest was replaced with a smaller black bat within a yellow oval – what came to be called the “new look” Batman.[\[53\]](#) In that issue, Batman briefly wielded a gun. While Batman has often used grappling guns and the like, his use of an actual firearm produced scores of angry letters. After all, Batman was supposed to hate guns because of his parents’ death. The “new look” stuck; Batman’s use of guns, on the other hand, was quickly abandoned.



Batman briefly wields a gun, seemingly pointing it at the criminals in the page's final panel. Reaction against this element of the story was so great that Batman would never again use a firearm – preferring instead to continue using grappling hooks and other devices. From *Detective Comics* #327 (May 1964). Art by Carmine Infantino and Joe Giella. Copyright © DC Comics.

While Bruce Wayne isn't yet Batman in this scene, understanding this history helps to underscore the remarkable depiction of a late adolescent Bruce Wayne prepared to shoot his parents' killer. Bruce is truly lost, as Ducard said in his first scene. Understanding Batman's history with guns allows us to see Bruce's tossing away the gun as a rejection of any subsequent use of such weapons – in keeping with Batman's comic-book history.[\[54\]](#)

Bruce's discussion with Rachel here echoes the political implications of previous scenes. In claiming that the justice system is broken, Bruce echoes popular sentiment – particularly conservatives' tendency to rail against criminals. Rachel, on the other hand, argues for the difference between justice and vengeance. She goes further, pointing out conditions in Gotham and arguing that they are "creating new Joe Chills every day."

She is right, of course, that Thomas Wayne would have strongly sided with her. So too, we are led to believe, do the film and its makers. Bruce's tossing away the gun would seem to be an implicit recognition that Rachel is right – but, as we shall see, he does not change entirely. Indeed, his entire career as Batman, in as much as it represents taking justice into his own hands, may be seen as a mutated and less lethal form of the radical action that he intends here, in response to an unsatisfactory justice system.

Finally, Rachel asks Bruce "what chance does Gotham have when the good people do nothing?" This echoes the widely-known saying "all it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing," which exists in numerous variations and is commonly (probably erroneously) attributed to Edmund Burke.

Act 1, Scene 5 (Flashback Sequence 3), Part 5: Bruce visits Falcone, who draws a gun and taunts Bruce, claiming that such a pampered son of privilege cannot understand the real world.

Falcone is essentially the third villain of the film, after Ra's al Ghul / Ducard and the Scarecrow. (Earle is somewhat arguably the fourth.) His status as one of the movie's villains is cemented by this scene. Like Ducard, Falcone will play a role in Bruce's development – spurring Bruce's decision to travel the world and gain real power for himself.

Falcone is played as distinctly Italian, as delineated by Falcone's ethnic accent. Italian mobsters, especially since Francis Ford Coppola's 1972 film *The Godfather*, have become a stereotype, however rooted in reality. In response, Italian-American groups frequently protest the stereotype. The successful HBO cable TV series *The Sopranos* not only featured Italian-American gangsters and received such criticism, but actually incorporated this criticism into some episodes. Notably, the film's Falcone is somewhat calmer than many incarnations of the Italian gangster stereotype.

Carmine Falcone is played by Tom Wilkinson, a veteran actor beginning in the 1970s. He appeared in the hit British film *The Full Monty* (1997), *Shakespeare*

in Love (1998), and *In the Bedroom* (2001), for which he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor. Not long before *Batman Begins*, he appeared in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004). He subsequently appeared in *Michael Clayton* (2007), for which he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor, and in the HBO mini-series *John Adams* (2008).

The populous nature of the club helps to illustrate Falcone's power. Judge Faden, who decided Chill's parole, is present, even this soon after Chill's murder. This confirms Faden's corruption, as suggested by Rachel, as does his lack of response when Falcone has his thug hit Bruce. Neither Falcone nor Chill seem to have much fear of being caught, though Faden shows understandable discomfort at Bruce's presence; the script calls for him to eye Bruce nervously.

Falcone's statements that Bruce doesn't really understand desperation again illustrate the class dynamic that has often been a tension within the Batman mythos. Falcone essentially says that Bruce's trauma doesn't mean he understands *suffering*: Bruce is still a spoiled rich boy. Put simply, Falcone is right: the same wealth that provides Batman's equipment ironically suggests that Bruce Wayne might realistically enter therapy and *truly* live the irresponsible playboy lifestyle, even if only as a psychological escape. Rich superheroes only originate from a narrative convenience: they need their wealth to have such wonderful toys.

It takes a great deal to justify a rich kid becoming Batman, but the film does its work admirably. Dramatizing Bruce Wayne's sense of loss and rage – most pointedly through having him nearly kill Joe Chill – helps to explain his choice, as does Thomas Wayne's social commitment, passed on to his son. But Bruce's impotence in this scene, in the wake of Falcone pulling a gun on him and having him roughed up, cannot be discounted as part of Bruce's motivation: for all his wealth and rage, Bruce can do nothing. In the face of real-world threats like Falcone, Bruce Wayne is impotent – Batman will not be.

In a number of ways, Bruce's encounter with Falcone aids Bruce along the road to becoming Batman – beyond making Bruce feel impotent. Falcone says Bruce only *feels* he has nothing to lose: Bruce hasn't thought of Rachel or Alfred. Falcone is clearly aware of Bruce Wayne's life, almost as if he had been spying on Bruce – perhaps in preparation for Bruce's presence at the trial. The threat to loved ones is the classic justification for superheroes wearing masks to conceal their identities. Ironically, it is Falcone who points out the importance of this protection.

More directly, however, Falcone's claim that Bruce doesn't know what it's really like to be down and out helps motivate Bruce's immediately subsequent choice to run off and live amongst the poor and criminals. In fact, Bruce's first act after leaving will be to talk to a homeless man – a new occurrence for him, as far as we know. Moreover, Falcone says that Bruce would have to travel a thousand miles to escape the Wayne name – and Bruce will, almost in direct response, travel far more than a thousand miles.

While we know Thomas Wayne didn't beg for his life as Falcone describes, it is unclear whether he really has heard this tale directly from Chill. Falcone may simply be trying to upset Bruce. If Chill really told this tale, that would somewhat undermine our ability to believe in Chill's rehabilitation – though the film ultimately leaves the decision to us. Despite the brief screen time given Chill, he's hardly the cardboard character we might expect. Moreover, it's unclear whether Bruce himself remembers enough of the shooting, or trusts his memory enough, to know that Falcone isn't telling the truth. This further helps illustrate Bruce's impotence and helps provide ammunition for Ducard's verbal attack upon Thomas Wayne as not resisting his killer enough.

Act 1, Scene 5 (Flashback Sequence 3), Part 6: Outside, Bruce gives his expensive coat to a homeless person, then runs off towards a freighter on Gotham's docks – apparently to stow away and head for parts unknown.

Bruce Wayne's conversing with the homeless person is hardly out of character – at least for Batman. Batman has often disguised himself as a homeless person (in *The Dark Knight Returns*, as well as other stories). Moreover, in the aforementioned "The Man Who Falls," a young Bruce Wayne is shown warming himself among the homeless during his abortive college years.

In the film, we have not seen Bruce talking with the likes of the homeless before. Bruce seems to do so in direct response to Falcone's accusation that Bruce doesn't understand those who really suffer. This foreshadows Bruce's living amongst criminals, as briefly seen in the next flashback.

After giving the homeless man his money, Bruce tosses his wallet into the homeless man's fire – symbolically destroying his old identity. But Bruce only doesn't burn his coat when the homeless man says he wants it. If we doubt that the coat is also tied to identity, Bruce's dialogue suggests that people might mistake the homeless man for the missing Bruce Wayne, simply because of the coat.

Bruce's charity towards the homeless man is the closest we see him come to acting like his philanthropic father – and he does so in a cavalier manner, as a way of shedding his rich and privileged identity more than as a way of helping the man. Bruce's path, ultimately, will be quite different from his father's.

Bruce's stowing away on the freighter comes off as an impulsive response to his conversation with Falcone. This is in line with the film making the young Bruce more directionless, as seen throughout the film's first act. In the comics version of Wayne's training period, he seems much less impulsive – already closer to Batman, if you will, than a shattered Bruce Wayne. In the film, Wayne's journey better echoes the archetypal voyage of self-discovery, an experience strongly associated with American identity. Bruce runs to the ship not to begin his training but to find himself.

Act 1, Scene 5 (Flashback Sequence 3), Part 7: A wandering Bruce steals food to survive, associates with criminals, and travels the world.

In the screenplay, this flashback sequence was separated from the previous one by a brief sequence in the present. That sequence featured more shots of Bruce training, including his first sight of the murderer he will later be called upon to execute. The film combines those elements with the previous present-day sequence, creating more of a rapid montage of Bruce training. In the screenplay, Bruce and Ducard's conversation about the murderer lead Ducard to accuse Bruce of sympathizing with criminals, leading nicely into this flashback showing Bruce living among them.

This flashback sequence is not only shorter than previous ones and covers far more time, but is also distinguished by the fact that Bruce and Ducard narrate over it throughout. Previous flashbacks sometimes open or close with such narration, acting as a bridge between the present and the past. This strong narrative presence serves to ground this flashback more in the present, helping the flashback to blend nicely with the present-day narrative.

The settings seen during the flashback include, according to the script, an African port town (where Wayne steals food), London (where Wayne acts as a lookout for a car thief), and Shanghai (where Wayne is arrested). Besides briefly establishing the extent of Wayne's travels, the sequence suggests that Wayne has learned foreign languages along the way: he speaks to the Chinese arresting officers in fluent Mandarin, according to the script.

That Wayne is caught participating in the theft of Wayne Enterprises property is

humorous, suggesting Wayne is right in his assertion that he's not a criminal. In the theatre, the revelation of the Wayne Enterprises logo dependably elicited laughter. But this also reflects the comics: beginning in the 1990s, writers have occasionally mentioned Batman stealing from Wayne Enterprises in order to obtain equipment that might otherwise be tracked back to Batman – an alternative to Bruce ordering mass quantities, as seen in this film. In both film and comics, then, stealing from one's own company doesn't count as theft – and can even be convenient, particularly for Batman's writers.

The sequence brings the flashbacks up to the beginning of the present narrative, which began with Wayne in prison in Bhutan. How he got there, after being arrested in Shanghai (at least according to the script) goes unexplained.

Act 1, Scene 6 (Present Sequence 3), Part 1: Drugged, Bruce Wayne confronts a box of bats and bests Ducard while blending in and out of a wall of ninja.

A number of elements here seek to tie up the film's first act as it nears conclusion.

First, Ducard crumbles the blue poppy that Bruce brought up the mountain, lighting it to make the smoke that disorients Wayne. Even before Wayne rejects Ra's al Ghul and the path his mentor represents, the destruction of the blue poppy symbolically draws Bruce's visit to the monastery to a close.

Second, the smoke not only disorients Bruce, but triggers a few flashback images. While hardly long enough to count as a flashback in their own right, these images summarize and cap off the film's earlier flashback sequences, preparing us for the end of the first act and its flashbacks.

Third and most obviously, but also perhaps least successfully, the bats that explode out of the wooden box recall the film's first scene and serve to indicate that Bruce Wayne has finally conquered the fears generated then and through his parents' death.

The sequence in which ninja blend in and out of each other can be confusing, but is masterfully done. The ninja form walls and move in unison, and all – including both Wayne and Ducard – are dressed identically. Ducard slashes Wayne's sleeve, making him instantly recognizable. Wayne thus slashes other ninja's sleeves, leading Ducard to attack the wrong person – thus allowing Wayne to get the drop on him. The music builds, successfully adding tension to the scene.

Ninja were an extremely popular fixture of American popular culture in the 1980s, including films like the *American Ninja* series. In the early 1980s, before ninja were popular, celebrated Batman writer Frank Miller employed them in the pages of Marvel's *Daredevil*. While ninja have not especially been connected with the Dark Knight, they have a relatively long tradition in American comic books – particularly those of Frank Miller. The secretive Japanese martial arts figure has never left American popular culture but is generally confined to pulp fiction. That said, this sequence in *Batman Begins* stands as one of the finest in its use of ninja, who historically *did* specialize in theatrics and deception, reportedly blending into the night with great discipline much as they do here – or as Batman does near the end of act two (discussed below).

Act 1, Scene 6 (Present Sequence 3), Part 2: Having passed the test and overcome his fear, Bruce is told to execute the murderer seen earlier. Refusing, he escapes, battling Ra's while the building burns. As Ra's apparently dies under the collapsing roof, Bruce jumps from the building with an unconscious Ducard.

While most of this sequence is invented for the film, Ra's often uses antiquated weapons and has had swordfights with Batman before – much as the Asian Ra's al Ghul fights Bruce Wayne with swords here.

When the Asian Ra's al Ghul speaks in a foreign language, as noted in the script, the language used is Urdu. Urdu is spoken today by an approximate 104 million people in about 19 countries, the most prominent of which are India and Pakistan.

Ducard's translating of al Ghul's apparent orders helps to cement the idea of him as al Ghul's second-in-command. So too does al Ghul's speaking dominantly in accented English, never suggesting that Ducard is anything less than an underling. Though Ducard will later be revealed as the real Ra's al Ghul, the film leaves his relationship with the Asian Ra's al Ghul open to some dispute. This will be the subject of some notes at the time of Ducard's revelation.

Speaking English with a thick accent, the Asian Ra's al Ghul explains that Wayne will be leading the League of Shadows to Gotham City – in order to destroy it, "like Constantinople or Rome before it." Wayne will indeed return to Gotham, but to save it from its corruption instead of destroying it as irredeemable. Yet again Wayne is taking his cues from others, just as he did from Falcone before setting off to consort with criminals the world over.

Bruce knocks Ducard unconscious perhaps too quickly for plausibility, not only because doing so in real life is generally not as easy as in fiction but because Ducard has already shown himself to be a masterful enough fighter to avoid such a devastating hit. But the move allows us to focus quickly on the Asian Ra's al Ghul – making Ducard's later revelation that he *is* Ra's al Ghul all the more surprising. The fight that follows between Bruce and the Asian Ra's is convincing and certainly does not *feel* like anything other than a battle with a major foe. On the other hand, Ducard has already said much about theatricality and deception.

In knocking out Ducard, Bruce says that he is only doing “what is necessary,” echoing the words Ducard has just spoken. This will become a trope within the film, as Bruce repeatedly parrots the words Ducard spoke to him. Just as here, however, Bruce will repeatedly choose to interpret those words differently.

It is worth noting that, while Wayne rebels in order to spare the murderer, it is not altogether clear that the murderer survived the fire and explosions that destroy Ra's al Ghul's headquarters: the murderer is never shown to have escaped. Moreover, ninja bodies lie strewn throughout the building, suggesting that Wayne's actions may indeed have caused death. Perhaps, however, we should recall the distinction Wayne makes in the film's climax between committing murder and killing indirectly or through inaction.

Moreover, Ducard has a point in criticizing Bruce's notion that the murderer deserves a trial. After all, who indeed can justly try the murderer, especially in the wake of bureaucratic corruption? Bruce may well come off as idealistic, but the risk of idealism – naïveté – is not ignored here. On the other hand, it is hard not to agree with him, especially given that the murderer looks up pathetically, making him somewhat sympathetic – ironically, much like Joe Chill.

Bruce's decision to rebel is particularly interesting in terms of Joseph Campbell's “monomyth,” in which heroes answer a “call to adventure” and proceed down a “road of trials.” As previously mentioned, heroes sometimes refuse the call, though they usually recant (allowing them to become a hero after all). Bruce accepted Ducard's call. *Batman Begins* throws a monkeywrench into the usual procession of Campbell's “monomyth” by having Bruce apparently refuse the “call to adventure” immediately *after* he has completed the “road of trials.” As the film will soon reveal, however, Bruce only *appears* to refuse the call: he does go on to be a hero, simply refusing the particular heroic adventure offered by Ducard. The film thus plays with longstanding heroic

archetypes while also twisting them, as many of the best heroic stories do. The gift or “boon” the hero receives, typically at the end of the “road of trials,” often results in some kind of self-knowledge. In this case, the boon Ducard intends is prominent membership in the League of Shadows. The boon Bruce receives, however, is his own direction, tied with his antipathy towards killing and his own understanding of Ducard’s advice. In other words, Bruce bestows the boon upon himself.

In superhero comics, characters frequently come back from the dead – sometimes delighting fans of those characters, but often upsetting fans who seem to demand ever-increasing realism of their superhero narratives. For readers familiar with the genre, the apparent death of Ra’s al Ghul is somewhat suspicious. This is only accented by the history of the character, whose use of his Lazarus Pit in the comics allows him to return from the dead with supernatural regularity. Suspicions that Ra’s has survived, however, are not limited to knowledge of the comic books. After all, Ra’s – one of the two villains of the piece – seems to be dying rather early in the film. And such resurrections are hardly limited to comics books.

Of course, Ra’s *does* return during the film – when Ducard reveals that he was Ra’s all along. This satisfies our narrative expectations even as it upsets them: Ra’s returns, but not in a way that upsets the realism of the piece. In this too, the film seems to take pains to enhance the darkly realistic aspects of Batman’s history.

Act 1, Scene 6 (Present Sequence 3), Part 3: Bruce and an unconscious Ducard slide down the ice towards a great drop – but Bruce rescues Ducard right on the edge.

The mountain drop has a certain symbolic value: Bruce is literally “on the edge,” tested more than ever before. But the threatened fall also recalls Bruce’s fall into the well as a child, as well as the previously-mentioned comic-book origin tale “The Man Who Falls.”

Cinematically, Bruce’s rescue of Ducard works masterfully – and not only because of the majestic drop. When Bruce catches his claws in the ice, we really feel his pain as his sliding body snaps to a stop – and as he pulls Ducard up. It’s a marvelously realistic moment, quite in line with the film’s later depiction of Batman’s early career.

Act 1, Scene 6 (Present Sequence 3), Part 4: After carrying Ducard down the

mountain, Bruce Wayne leaves him with a local old man.

The old man with whom Bruce leaves Ducard is the same one who told Bruce to turn back on his way up the mountain. It's not altogether clear why he seems to have changed his attitude towards Bruce, outside of his apparent recognition that Bruce has succeeded – and his antipathy towards the League of Shadows.

Wayne's bowing to the old man signals his cultural sensitivity, presumably acquired during his travels. It likely contrasts with the way the League of Shadows has treated the local peasantry – as suggested by their attitude towards the group. But it also signals the end of the film's first act – which ends, nicely, with a bow.

With this, the first act of the film is complete.

While there is no separation in the film between this act and the next, it is worth noting how well this first act serves as a narrative entity in its own right. This act is obviously marked by its juxtaposition of flashbacks from Bruce Wayne's youth with the present-day narrative showing Wayne training – a structure not used in the rest of the film. The first act also has its own climax, complete with a cataclysmic fire, as Wayne (apparently) confronts Ra's al Ghul. Wayne dropping Ducard off with the villagers serves as its dénouement.

If the film stopped here, it would be a short but capable action-thriller. This fact is important for understanding the film's structure, but is also particularly worthy of note in a superhero film. This superhero movie, however, is so removed from the conventions of that genre that it contains within it a short action-thriller, itself at service of the greater, ostensibly superhero narrative.

Act Two: Becoming Batman

We've seen Bruce Wayne train, and we've seen the childhood that formed him. Now the flashbacks and the present narrative merge as Bruce returns to the mansion and city of his childhood. With this, the second part of the film begins. By its end, Bruce will have stepped out as the Batman – and begun forming himself into a legend.

The second act also establishes the adult Bruce Wayne. In a very real sense, the subject of this act is not only the character's transformation into Batman but also his transformation back into Bruce Wayne, privileged son of Gotham. It is here that Wayne reconnects with Alfred, his family estate, and his company – all while secretly building the Batman persona.

Bruce's wandering and training occurs in a kind of liminal state, or a state of suspended identity: he is no longer the Bruce Wayne of Gotham, inheritor of his father's wealth – which he has explicitly fled, entering a life of limited crime instead. Bruce Wayne is more than legally dead: that identity is symbolically dead as well. But Bruce is also not yet Batman.

As Wayne flies back to Gotham, he immediately seems partly false, even to Alfred, because he conceals all that he has experienced. He cannot fully communicate his life-altering adventures during the seven years he was missing, then dead, to Gotham. Indeed, he is not seen communicating at all – while we assume he later shares at least some of what happened with Alfred, based on their closeness, this is never shown.

Critics frequently noted that Christian Bale was better as Bruce Wayne than as Batman. The strength of Bale's performance as Bruce Wayne reflects the script's increased emphasis on this side of the character. In the comics, Bruce Wayne is often seen as the alter ego of Batman, not the other way around. This has often been seen as a defining characteristic of the character: in many Batman stories, Bruce Wayne is never even seen. This mirrors fellow DC character Superman, whose mild-mannered Clark Kent persona is typically seen as a false character assumed by the super-powered alien. Superman masquerades as a human for love, to maintain his connection with humanity, and as a plot device.^[55] Similarly, Batman, driven obsessively to fight crime, is typically seen as the real character – one who *plays* the playboy Bruce Wayne, frequently as *a mask for* and occasionally as *an asset to* his real focus: his

mission as Batman.

Batman Begins does not ignore this dynamic. Wayne is just as driven as Batman. He always seems to be *acting* the part of Bruce Wayne, at least when not around Alfred or, at the end, Rachel. But in the film, he seems to also be acting when Batman – lowering his voice, for example. In the comics, Bruce Wayne sometimes seems far less comfortable with Alfred, ignoring him or barking orders with a grim and determined face – the face of Batman without the mask. There, Bruce Wayne often seems a distraction. In the film, in which Bruce Wayne is given more space and thus humanity, the real persona seems to be a particular *version* of Bruce Wayne – the one seen in quieter moments, surrounded by insiders. Both Batman and the *public* Bruce Wayne seem to be alternate personae. Both are public displays, one as idle and superficial as the other is determined and serious. The reality, as seen in the *private* Bruce Wayne, is somewhere in-between. In other words, whereas the comics version of the character generally is understood as having two personas, the version in *Batman Begins* seems to have three.

Despite this difference between the comics and the film, the Bruce Wayne of the film is closer to that of the comics than previous film versions of the character. In fact, this was one element that most pleased comic-book readers about the film. Wayne's playboy act, his playing the slightly dim and rather self-indulgent man who inherited his money and often doesn't seem to appreciate it, has barely been glimpsed in past films. Moreover, Wayne's role in his parents' company – or even the source of his parents' wealth – has only been hinted at. While these elements often don't appear in Batman's comics stories, they remain essential parts of the comics readers' understanding of Bruce Wayne. Their minimization in past films may be explained by the exigencies of feature film narratives, which typically must simplify or compress characters, when adapting stories from other media, for the sake of keeping a film to around two hours. That these aspects of Wayne's character are not once again marginalized or excluded – that they in fact are shown and shown well – not only delighted readers of Batman comics but also the general moviegoing audience, who found that the fun playboy sequences balanced Batman's seriousness.

Act 2, Prologue: Alfred arrives to pick up Bruce Wayne on a Wayne Enterprises corporate jet. During the trip, Alfred reveals that Bruce – who has now been gone seven years – has been declared legally dead.

Presumably, Bruce has contacted Alfred and instructed the butler to bring a

plane to Bhutan. It's not entirely clear *where* in Bhutan he has found an airstrip or how such arrangements were made between Bruce, Alfred, and the airstrip's owner.

This is the first we've seen of Alfred – or any Gotham character at all – in the present.

Throughout this scene, there are a number of signs that Alfred's been through a lot with Bruce. We must remember that Bruce has come and gone before, as suggested when he returned from college. That was the last time he came home: it's been a while, this time – seven years, in fact, as Alfred points out here.

Wayne looks disheveled, especially in contrast with the posh interior of the plane.

When Wayne tells Alfred that he's going to show Gotham that the city doesn't belong to criminals and to the corrupt, he's parroting Ducard. Wayne further echoes Ducard when he speaks of the need for a dramatic symbol to inspire Gotham. These instances should be taken as further evidence of how Wayne has led his life in reaction to others – including both Falcone and Ducard.

Alfred takes Bruce to mean the creation of another persona, though it's not altogether clear that Bruce doesn't take his cue from Alfred – Bruce doesn't confirm that he's already thinking along such lines. Alfred immediately understands the need for such a persona in order to protect Bruce's loved ones – unknowingly echoing Falcone's earlier words when Bruce confronted him. It's entirely possible that Bruce connects the two statements, consciously or not, and that Alfred's words here inspire the creation of Batman.

In terms of Joseph Campbell's "monomyth," after receiving their gift upon completing their "road of trials," heroes often choose to return to the ordinary world they left in order to answer the "call to adventure." This scene obviously reflects this return to the ordinary world, though it lacks the challenges that sometimes accompany heroes on this journey. Returning heroes typically use their gift, which is often tied to personal insight, in order to improve the world, a stage called the "application of the boon." This, of course, corresponds with Batman's mission. While Bruce didn't face trials to return to his ordinary world, he will face trials in figuring out just how to apply his insight into the persona through which he will aid the world.

Alfred reveals some details about Thomas Wayne in dialogue with Bruce here –

details not shown in the first act's flashbacks.

First, he reveals that Wayne's philanthropy nearly bankrupted the company. Ironically, Earle's machinations have returned the corporation's wealth – wealth Bruce will subsequently use to aid his campaign as Batman.

Second, Alfred suggests that Thomas Wayne failed to save Gotham but that his murder shocked many into action. There's an obvious irony here: Thomas Wayne may have failed as a social crusader, but he succeeded as a martyr.

Alfred also reveals that Earle has had Bruce declared legally dead in order to liquidate his holdings and take the company public. Presumably, this move was only recently made, since (as we soon discover) the public offering hasn't yet occurred.

Such public stock offerings, particularly since the 1990s, have become major news stories. From Google to Martha Stewart, such offerings of formerly private companies have summoned great amounts of capital.

In the comics, Bruce Wayne was never declared legally dead during his training period. When he returns to Gotham in the beginning of *Batman: Year One*, it's a media event – but there's no sense that, despite his long public silence, anyone thought him dead. Despite this, Wayne's training was an isolated experience and his being declared legally dead makes complete sense, arguably improving upon the comic-book originals.

Central to the realism of Wayne being declared legally dead is understanding that he hasn't been in contact with Alfred at all during his travels abroad. Alfred and the young Bruce Wayne are typically depicted as having been a bit closer in the comics, mostly as a result of young Bruce not being quite as troubled as he is seen in the film. Given this change in Bruce Wayne's character, his being declared legally dead may be seen as a logical repercussion of Bruce's lack of communication and his distance from Alfred. Indeed, if Bruce has been in contact with Alfred at all, we should criticize the film for implying otherwise.

Bruce's legally dead status also serves a narrative purpose. Earle has been running Wayne Enterprises in Bruce's absence, and he has taken liberties that Bruce would not have allowed: not only becoming a publicly traded company but moving into the armaments business. This will allow Bruce to work with Lucius Fox and gather equipment for Batman, without suggesting Thomas Wayne would have had any part of manufacturing weapons. This situation will also allow Bruce Wayne's triumph in the film's third and final act, paralleling

Batman's defeat of Ra's al Ghul – recovering control of his own company.

According to the script, the Wayne Enterprises plane is a Gulfstream G5.

Cut Scene: Judge Faden exits Falcone's club with a girl, going to his limo. In disguise, Bruce takes incriminating photos of the two.

In the screenplay, this act's prologue is directly followed by the scene in which Gordon refuses a bribe from Flass. That scene was moved to a later position for the film as it was released, bringing it closer to Bruce's visit to Gordon's office. This scene, which was cut from the film entirely, was thus the second one after the prologue.

Not much was lost in the cutting. The scene essentially establishes Bruce's leverage over Faden, the judge who presided over Joe Chill's parole hearing and who is in Falcone's pocket. Faden, already a minor character in the script, is rendered even more so in the film as released. This might help viewers follow the film, given that it features a rather large cast, even without Faden. Despite the cut, the leverage Bruce obtains over Faden will be referenced later.

In the cut scene, Bruce disguises himself as a homeless person in order to take the photos. As previously mentioned, Bruce Wayne / Batman has disguised himself as a homeless person in the comics. It is far less conventional for him to take blackmail photos, however. Wayne has not yet created Batman, and his first strike against corruption in Gotham feels rather sleazy – though not entirely out-of-character, at least with his later modus operandi.

Indeed, the real effect of the cut, it may be argued, is to keep Batman above the salacious act of taking incriminating sexual photos, which hardly seems the act of a noble hero. Those same photos remain in the film nonetheless, seen briefly but serving a function within the plot. The audience is left to imagine Batman taking them – which, ironically, might invite even more salacious imagined scenarios.

The cut scene also has implications for Faden's character. In the years since Bruce's departure, Judge Faden seems to have slid even further into depravity: he has not only continued his corrupting relationship with Falcone but now appears to be regularly enjoying women at Falcone's club. Falcone treats Faden almost as a nuisance, as if Faden's sexual trysts have gotten out of hand.

It's also interesting that the cut scene has Bruce start cleaning up Gotham by targeting Faden – the judge who paroled Joe Chill, the man who killed Bruce's

parents. Wayne almost undoubtedly has singled out Falcone as an early prime target, but Faden would seem an early and easier stepping stone on the way to the mobster.

A homeless man (a real one, as opposed to Bruce's disguise) in this cut scene is the same man to whom Bruce gave his coat, on the night he left Gotham. While the coat was nice then, as their dialogue indicated, it's likely not so nice after seven years of use. While including that homeless man would have nicely connected Bruce's return to his departure, it may have been somewhat unrealistic: the homeless man's life seems to have continued in roughly the same state for seven years, even using the same coat. He will be seen again as the film progresses, so his cut appearance here makes little difference. Like Faden, however, his minor role is made even more minor by the cutting of this scene.

Act 2, Scene 1: In court, psychologist Jonathan Crane testifies in favor of a criminal's need for admission to Arkham Asylum instead of a prison stay. The state, represented by Rachel Dawes, opposes the motion but loses. Rachel challenges Crane for having offered a similar recommendation in other cases involving the criminal employees of Carmine Falcone. Rachel's boss, Carl Finch, warns her against challenging Falcone. And Bruce Wayne watches incognito.

In the script for the film, this was actually the third scene following this act's prologue. The first scene, featuring Gordon, was moved to a later position. The second scene, featuring Judge Faden, was cut. This change helps to get into the main action of the second act directly after Bruce's return to Gotham.

Just as the previous scene reestablishes Gordon and the police, this scene reestablishes Bruce's childhood friend Rachel and the city's criminal justice system, including District Attorney Finch. This is the same Finch who earlier argued for Joe Chill's parole.

Since her shared childhood with Bruce Wayne, Rachel Dawes has risen to the position of Gotham's Assistant District Attorney. She was previously seen as an intern with the District Attorney's office in the flashbacks leading up to Wayne's departure from Gotham – seven years earlier, in terms of the film's chronology. Nonetheless, her position as Assistant D.A. may be questionable, given her age. Her meteoric rise in the D.A.'s office may be criticized not only for its plausibility but as an exemplar of Hollywood's propensity for casting young

actresses in positions of professional accomplishment they would be unlikely to achieve at such an early age. Her rapid success also raises questions similar to those raised by the incorruptible Gordon's long stay on a corrupt police force: how has a woman of her ethics risen to the position of Assistant District Attorney – and managed to remain so naïve about the power of the city's organized crime?

The scene's conclusion hints at a deeper relationship between Finch and Rachel. When Finch warns Rachel against pursuing Falcone and Crane, their dialogue strongly suggests something deeper between the two. When the naïve Rachel asks Finch how he could seemingly capitulate to such corruption, Finch replies that he cares more about her than about catching Falcone. His tone and their physical closeness suggest that Finch's feelings for Rachel are amorous in nature. She responds to this by saying, "That's sweet, Carl. But we've been through all this..." – suggesting intimacy through her tone and the use of his first name, despite their professional relationship. "We've been through all this" further implies that he's voiced his feelings before. Their intimacy is made clearer by the fact that she kisses him on the cheek. It's unclear whether they had a relationship that ended or, more likely, she has declined to have a relationship.

Though subtle, the scene suggests Rachel's inability to find a relationship in the wake of her childhood love of Bruce Wayne. If true, this would suggest she's been holding a candle for Bruce through all his years of wandering – and that they both feel they would have wound up together had Bruce's parents not been murdered.

On the other hand, reading the scene as suggesting a past relationship between Carl Finch and Rachel Dawes has some different implications. Such a reading might still suggest her inability to get over Bruce Wayne, though it would suggest an increased willingness to *try*. On a more sinister note, it might also suggest an explanation for Rachel's meteoric rise in the District Attorney's office: perhaps she slept with her boss, then broke up with him and agreed to keep it quiet to avoid destroying both their careers. Even if their relationship were never consummated, Finch's feelings for Rachel might still help to explain her rise at such a young age to the position of Assistant District Attorney for a major American city. One would still suspect that such a rise would trigger alarms among their colleagues, though in a city as corrupt as Gotham such rumors would be a drop in the bucket.

Whatever the underlying truth, the romantic tension between Rachel and Finch helps foreshadow Rachel's relationship with Harvey Dent in *The Dark Knight*. Whether Rachel tried a relationship with Finch and it didn't work or Rachel rejected Finch outright, her motivation might have been the same. We may assume she didn't reject him from to avoid a workplace relationship, given her later involvement with Harvey Dent. She may find herself attracted to Finch as her boss – both Bruce and the D.A. are powerful men – but finds he lacks Bruce's idealism, a failing Harvey Dent doesn't share.

In the comic-book version of the Gotham D.A.'s office, Harvey Dent was always Gotham's D.A. Finch was invented for the film. Other filmmakers might have chosen to cast Dent as Gotham's D.A. in *Batman Begins*, setting up his role in *The Dark Knight*. In fact, Tim Burton made the same decision in 1989's *Batman*, which included Billy Dee Williams as Harvey Dent, who crusades against Gotham's mobsters. But Burton chose not to make Two-Face a villain in 1992's *Batman Returns*, and scenes featuring Williams as Harvey Dent were cut from that film. Despite having a different skin color, Tommy Lee Jones played Harvey Dent / Two-Face in 1995's *Batman Forever*, making Dent the only character in the series, besides Bruce Wayne / Batman, to have been played by multiple actors. Nolan and Goyer chose not to follow Burton's path because the filmmakers felt they didn't have room in the script to do Harvey Dent justice. Nolan doesn't like to plan sequels ahead of time or to set up elements for later films to exploit, and the failure of Burton's attempt to do so may show the wisdom of Nolan's approach.

The comic-book version of *Year One* featured Harvey Dent in only a few brief sequences, but later comics stories set during Batman's early career would integrate him into the early framework of Gotham, bringing him into Gordon's secret early relationship with Batman. *Batman: The Long Halloween* is particularly notable in this regard, and is actually framed around the triangle of Batman, Gordon, and Dent. Over the course of the story, however, Dent becomes Two-Face – another eccentric villain in a city transitioning from mobsters to costumed criminals.

Frank Miller expanded Dent's very minor role from his original comics version of *Batman: Year One* in his screenplay adaptation of the story. There, Dent first appears as Gotham's Assistant District Attorney, opposing the corrupt Commissioner Loeb just as Gordon does, yet the two are not initially aware of one another.

Jonathan Crane, who appears for the first time in the film in this scene, is played by Cillian Murphy. While an excellent actor, Murphy was barely known at the time for having starred in the acclaimed horror thriller *28 Days Later*. He also starred as a psychopath in 2005's *Red Eye*, released about two months after *Batman Begins*. He returned for a cameo in *The Dark Knight*, and Nolan cast him in his 2010 film, *Inception*.

Readers of the comics will immediately recognize the name of the psychologist in this scene as being that of the Scarecrow's alter ego. A bit of history of that character may be of help here, particularly in terms of understanding how the comic-book character differs from his appearance in the film.

The Scarecrow first appeared in "Riddle of the Human Scarecrow" from *World's Finest Comics* #3 (Fall 1941), written by Bill Finger and illustrated by Batman creator Bob Kane and Jerry Robinson. The Scarecrow was psychology professor Jonathan Crane, a phobia specialist with unorthodox teaching methods – such as pulling a gun in class and firing it to excite his students' fears. After overhearing his colleagues ridiculing his dress and calling him a "scarecrow," Crane decided to adopt a costumed persona and call himself the Scarecrow – in order to steal enough money to keep adding to his beloved library, where all his salary seems to be going, and buy decent clothes. So, essentially, we may blame inadequate university professors' salaries for this particular super-villain (a message school boards and college boards of directors ought to hear loudly and clearly).



After firing a gun into a potted plant as a demonstration to his students, Jonathan Crane's old clothes are mocked by his fellow professors, spurring his decision to become a criminal. From *Batman* #189 (February 1967). Art by Sheldon Moldoff (ghosting for Bob Kane) and Joe Giella. Copyright © DC Comics.

Things only get worse for Crane when the university fires him for his aforementioned in-class gunplay, leaving Crane to devote himself to being the Scarecrow more fully. But, of course, Batman and Robin soundly defeat him, helped along by the Scarecrow's theft of some rare books.

In this first incarnation, Scarecrow didn't have the fear gas for which he was later known – he just used a gun instead. And he wasn't afraid of hand-to-hand combat with Batman and Robin, as he would later appear.

The villain was never popular and appeared only a few times in the 1940s. He was brought back in 1967's "Fright of the Scarecrow," written by Gardner Fox and illustrated by Sheldon Moldoff and Joe Giella, in *Batman* #189 (February 1967). Since the Scarecrow had not appeared for some time, the 1967 story begins by retelling the character's origin in three pages. This time, he explicitly chooses the Scarecrow costume not only as a symbol of fear, by which gangsters make the money he equates with respect, but also as a symbol of poverty – making the Scarecrow almost a socially-conscious villain.

That story introduces the villain's famous fear gas. When Batman and Robin are sprayed with it, they suddenly become afraid of falling. Robin hangs onto a tree branch, despite being mere inches off the ground. Batman, thinking that he's about to "fall into a bottomless pit," desperately grips the same tree's trunk.

From this point forward, the Scarecrow would reappear more consistently, though he would never become a major villain.[\[56\]](#)

Like Ra's al Ghul, Scarecrow had not appeared on film before *Batman Begins*, although he was slated to have been in the fifth film of the franchise before Warner Bros. decided on a version of *Year One*. He had, however, appeared in animated television. The first was in 1978's *Challenge of the Superfriends*, produced by Hanna-Barbera. That show featured a team of DC super-heroes, based on DC's Justice League of America but calling themselves the Superfriends, frequently battling their opposite numbers in the Legion of Doom, a team of super-villains. Needing 13 members, the show's creators resorted to second-stringers like the Riddler as well as the Scarecrow – though his role wasn't very prominent. As the TV show morphed into other incarnations (such as *Super Powers*), the Scarecrow would occasionally reappear. Assorted versions of the Scarecrow would also appear on the multiple incarnations of the Batman animated show begun in 1992.

The Jonathan Crane of the film differs from his depiction in the comics in several respects. Most basically, he is not a psychiatrist employed in the professoriate but at an insane asylum. This change loses the film little, except perhaps some sympathy for the character. It also has some resonance with the comics: the men who run Gotham City's infamous Arkham Asylum have often

been characters in their own right, and more than one of them have themselves gone insane – most notably in “The Last Arkham,” the comic-book story that introduced Zsasz.[\[57\]](#) Through his role at Arkham, the film’s Jonathan Crane may thus be seen as a conflation of multiple characters in the Batman mythos.

The Scarecrow of the film also differs from most of his comics appearances. Whereas the Scarecrow’s outfit was first depicted as little more than a bag over his head, as he is seen in the film, subsequent appearances would give him a full-body costume that mimicked the scarecrows of corn fields and the like.

Cillian Murphy’s thin build reflects that of the comic-book character. Of course, that character’s thin build only existed, when combined with his shabby clothes, to justify his colleagues calling him a scarecrow – a justification no longer needed. Nonetheless, the actor’s build helps emphasize the character’s bookishness. While the Scarecrow is the film’s second major villain, he hardly looks imposing – what’s frightening about him isn’t the man but the mask and his fear gas.

The bald criminal at whose hearing Jonathan Crane testifies here is named, in passing, as Mr. Zsasz. In the comics, Zsasz is the name of one of Batman’s more obscure villains – a serial killer who carves a line into his flesh for every victim (putting a diagonal line through four others in the conventional fashion). That such marks cover his body and his personality is so predisposed to murder make him a particularly frightening Batman foe.

Zsasz was introduced in “The Last Arkham,” running through the first four issues of *Batman: Shadow of the Bat* (June-September 1992), written by Alan Grant and illustrated by Norm Breyfogle. That story is notable in regards to *Batman Begins* for other reasons, as noted elsewhere in this text.

The screenplay spells the character’s name Zsaz.

Act 2, Scene 2: In Wayne manor, a stray bat seems to trigger Bruce Wayne’s return to the cave into which he fell as a child. He finds it more expansive than he could have imagined and seems to note its possibilities.

The bat in the manor has its precedents in the comics, but none more memorable than the bat that appears to Bruce Wayne at night and smashes through a window at the end of the first issue of *Year One*. Other versions of that scene go back to Batman’s first origin story in *Detective Comics* #33. This scene in *Batman Begins* clearly substitutes for the broken window scene. The screenplay makes this rather clear, concluding the sequence by noting that Bruce now

“knows the symbol he must use.”

Year One minimizes Wayne’s creation of the Batman costume, which seems to be made simply of fabric, not high-tech materials as seen in *Batman Begins*. In fact, the next time we see Wayne in the comics version after his encounter with the bat, he is already wearing the Batman outfit. No scene shows Bruce returning to the cave beneath Wayne Manor and exploring it, much less making his costume there. *Batman Begins* is much more expansive, interpolating a great deal to render Bruce’s creation of the Batman costume more realistic. On the other hand, in *Year One*, Bruce performs his first act of vigilantism without a costume, instead using a disguise, and *Batman Begins* omits this liminal, realistic stage.

The dilapidated greenhouse on the Wayne property seems to symbolize Bruce’s lost innocence. The greenhouse was seen in the film’s opening, green and full of life. It was inside the greenhouse that Bruce took Rachel’s arrowhead, running off with it and falling down the abandoned well into the cave beneath Wayne Manor. That Wayne here passes the greenhouse on the way to the well further connects this scene to the opening sequence.

The cave is intended to seem expansive, and the script describes it as “limitless black” – nicely resonant as the inner sanctum and secret home of the dark vigilante Batman.

Relatively new to the cave’s depiction here is the inclusion of water. The sound of water increases as Bruce ventures inside, and we see what the script describes as “an underground river.” In the filmed version, this river has become a stream with a small waterfall in the background. Later, as Batman returns to the cave in the Tumbler, he will do so by jumping the vehicle through a great waterfall – which this scene helps to establish. A canal was previously included in the Batcave seen in 1995’s *Batman Forever*, where it provided access for aquatic vehicles.

The cavern is a crucial symbol in literature and mythology. It often represents a hidden interiority, a secret internal part of characters or their souls. The water recalls emotion, and emotion certainly runs deep in Bruce’s damaged psyche. Both cavern and water are sometimes tied to magic.

Of course, the cavern is also rich in Freudian resonance, representing the vagina and womb. Flying rodents explode from the cave’s entrance when Bruce finds it as a child, arguably symbolizing the boy’s perception of the vagina as a

frightening, dirty place – if not as a site of supernatural horror. Bruce doesn’t enter the cave until he is an adult, suggesting sexual maturation. The cave’s abundant water might represent vaginal lubrication and / or amniotic fluid. And Bruce certainly crafts the cave into a kind of womb – a safe place to hide as Batman, protected from his deep emotion and childhood-rooted grief and guilt.

On another level, we may read all of this as sublimation. Though Batman has had various girlfriends, he traditionally seems incapable of forming a lasting relationship with a woman. While Bruce lost both parents, it’s his dead father who is the focus of his fixation. Indeed, Batman was criticized by Frederick Wertham in the 1950s as having a homosexual relationship with his boy sidekick Robin and living in a homosexual bachelor pad with the boy and Alfred. In the 1960s, Batman comics killed off Alfred and replaced him with the middle-aged Aunt Harriet, supposedly to avoid such charges. Even if we read Batman as merely homosocial, as more concerned with male relationships and concerns than with women, Batman’s domination and crafting of the cave may be seen as sublimation for the absence of female influence in his life.[\[58\]](#)

Act 2, Scene 3: In Falcone’s club, Falcone says he’s bringing in shipments for Crane, Crane says he’s working for someone else who is coming to Gotham, and the two discuss removing the idealistic Rachel Dawes.

While not particularly memorable, this scene gives the viewer a good deal of information.

Falcone’s statement that he’s bringing shipments to Gotham for Crane helps to establish the later scene (at the end of this act) in which Batman interrupts these shipments at the dock. The statement also helps establish the third act, in which we see that Crane’s shipments are used in his fear serum and we discover that his boss, who’s coming to Gotham, is none other than Ra’s al Ghul.

Most directly, however, the scene establishes the pair’s awareness of Rachel Dawes and their desire to eliminate her. A later scene shows Falcone meeting with Flass to discuss the hit. The attempt on Rachel’s life will occur at the end of this act, during the same night that Batman foils the shipment at the docks. In the third act, Rachel’s meddling will lead Crane to attack her in Arkham Asylum, leading Batman to rescue her again – leading to the film’s memorable chase scene. But it’s important to note that it’s the shorter first attempt on Rachel’s well-being that results from the discussion here.

At the end of this scene, Crane says that he doesn’t want to know Falcone’s

plans for Rachel – leading Falcone to give Crane a look of “thinly disguised contempt,” according to the script. Falcone responds, “Yes, you do,” suggesting that Crane has a closeted sadistic side. This suggestion resonates with Crane’s origins as a psychology professor and his role as Arkham Asylum’s head psychologist. He comes off as a bit of a prissy intellectual, involved with mobsters like Falcone but not wanting to know too much about the gory details. We might want to take Falcone’s insight into Crane’s sadism seriously, given Falcone’s ties with prostitution. This interpretation casts a new light on Crane later driving Falcone insane, which not only reveals a certain sadism but may be seen as Crane silencing the man who understands his perversion.

Act 2, Scene 4: Bruce returns to Wayne Tower, talking with acting president Mr. Earle. Earle reveals that the company will shortly be going public, and Wayne reassures Earle that he has no interest in running the family business. Wayne does want a job working with the Applied Sciences division.

Before Wayne arrives, we see Earle presiding over a board meeting. A man named Fredericks complains about the company’s involvement in arms manufacturing, arguing that Thomas Wayne would not have approved. Earle dismisses the comment, saying that Thomas Wayne’s been gone for 20 years. Shortly thereafter, Earle adds that “Thomas Wayne wouldn’t have wanted to take the company public, either, but that’s what, as responsible managers, we’re going to do.”

Later, when Bruce talks with Earle, Earle appears cautious and immediately points out that it’s too late to stop the company’s public offering – as if he suspects Bruce, now revealed not to be dead after all, will want to reclaim the business. Wayne quickly defuses the situation by volunteering that he has no desire to run the company and wants to be merely another employee – which seems to relieve Earle considerably.

This scene helps to establish Earle as a bit of a villain, especially given that he was seen only once previously, comforting the young Bruce, assuring the child that the company would be there when he came of age. It’s unclear whether Earle was intending, even then, to take the company in another direction or whether 20 years of running the business slowly corrupted him. In any case, this scene makes his present status clear enough, aided by his appearance of guilt upon suddenly meeting the returned Bruce Wayne. If we have any doubt as to whether Earle should be read as a villain, his treatment of Lucius Fox (as revealed shortly) should clinch the matter.

But, while Earle may structurally play the role of a minor villain in the film, he doesn't seem truly villainous. Yes, his vision for Wayne Enterprises is different from that of Thomas Wayne. But a line he speaks here is key: he sees himself only as a "responsible manager" – a businessman. He is no more or less villainous than other heads of corporations, arguably perhaps no more than capitalism itself. It's his job to watch the bottom line, after all, and there's no suggestion that the company's actions, however unsavory, are illegal.

Earle's abuse of Wayne Enterprises, and his subsequent ousting by Wayne, may be seen as ironic. After all, it is only because of his moving the company into armaments that Wayne can easily acquire his Batman equipment. Of course, something of this same relationship exists between Batman and Ducard as well, given that the training he provides and his notion of a war on crime ultimately help form Batman. Super-heroes are often reactionary figures: villains typically drive the plot, while heroes must simply react – and many heroes' origins share a similar dynamic.

It's worth pointing out, in relation to Earle's corruption, that the years prior to *Batman Begins* had seen a series of corporate scandals. The most prominent were Enron and WorldCom, both of which suddenly went bankrupt after it was revealed that their accounting books had been cooked in collusion with the corporate accounting firm Arthur Anderson. These were thought to be extremely rich companies, and their bankruptcies stripped thousands of their pensions while details surfaced of the heads of these companies living high on the hog. In the years following *Batman Begins*, banking scandals based on bundling mortgages as investments would send the U.S. economy into severe recession.

When Bruce arrives, we are treated to a delightful interlude of sorts between Bruce and Jessica, Earle's assistant. The assistant has her head down at her desk, not bothering to even look at Bruce until Bruce mentions his name. Suddenly, she's all smiles. When Earle emerges from the board room, Bruce is teaching her how to swing a golf putter, his arms snugly around her hips, showing her his technique. Wayne abandons her to head off with Earle.

While humorous, the scene establishes Bruce's sex appeal – based more on his wealth, it would seem, than his looks. The scene also sets up the later, even more amusing scene in which Bruce heads out on the town with two gorgeous girls. While this scene is more subtle, it also establishes Bruce as a bit of the trivial playboy: Bruce seems equally willing to distract a corporate president's

attractive secretary as to quickly abandon her when Earle appears.

It's worth noting that this suggests that Wayne's playboy act isn't *entirely* a put-on. The later scene with the two girls seems a response to Alfred's prompting Bruce to expand his cover story to include bruises acquired as Batman. There's no such excuse for this scene. While Bruce is certainly, to some extent, already crafting his public persona, his pursuit of Jessica appears at least in part instinctive.

Bruce's interchange with Jessica recalls James Bond's seductive exchanges with Miss Moneypenny. If anything, the scene between Bruce and Jessica outdoes those Bond scenes, which are primarily verbal: Bruce's seduction of Jessica, using the putter as a prop, feels utterly natural yet goes beyond Bond's verbal innuendo. This is only one of the many resonances between James Bond and *Batman Begins*, as we will see.

Wayne requests a job in Applied Sciences, which Earle says is "perfect" in the script: from Earle's perspective, Wayne has just voluntarily exiled himself to the company's Siberia where Earle had previously exiled Lucius Fox. The film as released omits this malevolent line, and Earle comes off much better than in the script, saying only "welcome home" to Bruce (a line not in the script). Wayne seems to be playing the superficial rich kid, simply curious about Applied Sciences; of course, though it's not made explicit, Wayne is already interested in garnering technology from the division – he's consciously seeking the equipment he will need for his campaign against crime in Gotham.

Act 2, Scene 4 Intercut: In Finch's office, Rachel learns of Wayne's return.

In the script, this brief scene occurs after Bruce's meeting with Earle. In the film as released, it occurs *between* Bruce's interruption of Earle's board meeting and Bruce's private conversation with Earle. Placing the scene with Rachel in the midst of two scenes with Bruce and Earle interrupts the flow of the two scenes in Wayne Enterprises. The move, however, does make it seem more natural that the board suddenly disappears: we simply assume that time has passed and Earle has dismissed them or excused himself.

It may strike some as curious that Rachel has to learn of Wayne's return from her boss. The surprise is that Bruce hasn't called her. For those familiar with the comics, the surprise would be that Rachel hadn't already learned of Wayne's return from media coverage. Even in the film, this might raise some eyebrows: the murder of Wayne's parents garnered major press, as did the killer's parole

hearing, so we may well wonder why the press has seemingly become uninterested in Gotham's first family.

But Rachel has to learn somehow. She won't be seen again in the film until Batman rescues her from Falcone's goons, near the end of this act. She won't see Bruce again until she sees him cavorting on the town with two girls. In that scene, she mentions that she's heard of his return.

Act 2, Scene 5: In Wayne Enterprises' Applied Sciences division, Bruce meets Lucius Fox, who says that he helped Thomas Wayne build Gotham's train system and was on the company's board before being deposed by Earle and reduced to managing technological dead ends. Bruce secures a grapple gun and a nearly bulletproof survival suit, claiming he'll use it for spelunking.

In the screenplay, the scene in which Rachel hears of Bruce's return occurred just prior to this, presumably occurring during the time it took Bruce to walk downstairs to the Applied Sciences division. Because that transition, from meeting Earle to meeting Fox, involves a change of location, the viewer understands that time has passed and is not troubled by the cut from one scene to the next. The cut from Earle emerging from his board meeting to that of Earle meeting with Bruce, however, is more ambiguous in terms of its shift in location. The scene with Rachel thus serves a transitory purpose there that it did not serve in the script when placed between Wayne's talk with Earle and his arrival in Applied Sciences.

Unlike Richard Earle, who is new to the film, Lucius Fox has been an important – if rarely seen – character in the Batman comics of recent decades. The character was first introduced in *Batman* #307 (January 1979) by writer Len Wein and artist John Calnan. His original role in the Batman mythos was to run Wayne's non-profit charitable organization, the Wayne Foundation, but he has since been elevated to C.E.O. of Wayne's overall company, Wayne Enterprises. Originally, Lucius was not shown as having a clue about Bruce Wayne's alter ego. Over the years, he was given dialogue revealing he knew Wayne's trivial playboy persona to be an act, and he sometimes encourages Wayne to hide his talents less. Exactly how much the comics version of Lucius suspects about Batman has been the subject of some speculation, but the two share a certain sense of trust that Wayne doesn't share with many.



Lucius Fox first appeared on this page, though he wasn't the focus of the story. The image of Fox on the third panel here, thoughtfully holding his glasses, reflects the character as well as Morgan Freeman's portrayal. From *Batman* #307 (January 1979). Art by John Calnan and Dick Giordano. Copyright © DC Comics.

Lucius Fox also appeared on various animated Batman TV shows, beginning in the 1990s.

There are some changes between the comics version and the movie version. In the comics, Fox doesn't seem to have the same backstory with the company, and

Wayne traditionally didn't acquire weapons though Fox, who is more of the C.E.O. figure that Fox becomes at the end of *Batman Begins*. Moreover, the Lucius Fox of the comics does not have the same connection to Bruce's father, Thomas Wayne. This change further helps to characterize Thomas Wayne's good nature and also helps viewers accept Lucius Fox without devoting precious screen time to additional characterization.

Nolan spoke about how Batman acquires his tools and the resultant changes made to Lucius Fox: We wanted to connect Bruce's assembling the tools to become Batman with the process of trying to reclaim his father's legacy and take Wayne Enterprises back into more positive directions. Lucius Fox helps Bruce in his quest to become Batman without ever knowing exactly what Bruce's specific mission is. There is a wonderful unspoken understanding between the two men.

The trust between Wayne and Fox will be made clearer in later scenes – particularly when Fox says that, while he doesn't want an explanation for the tools Wayne borrows, Wayne shouldn't think that he's an idiot. But that same trust is already on display in this scene – particularly at its end, when Wayne asks Fox not to tell Earle about the borrowed equipment and Fox says that he considers the equipment Wayne's anyway. In trusting Fox not to reveal the borrowed tools, Wayne takes Fox into his confidence, and Fox's agreement seems rooted in their shared love of Wayne's departed father. At the same time, Wayne clearly *hasn't* taken Fox into his confidence – as evidenced by Wayne's cover spelunking story. Already in evidence, then, is the careful play of trust and discretion that characterizes the Wayne's relationship with Fox.

Fox is played in the film by Morgan Freeman. Freeman won an Oscar earlier in 2005 for his role in Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby*, but he had been nominated for an Oscar for his parts in *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Driving Miss Daisy*. He also starred in the film *Se7en*, considered a modern classic. Freeman is celebrated as one of Hollywood's finest character actors, known for cutting his own dialogue because of his ability to convey messages through his eyes and body language – though he keeps more closely to the script in *Batman Begins*. Because Freeman has played so many wise, elder characters in films, the audience is probably conditioned to like and to trust him. This contrasts sharply with the casting of Liam Neeson, who has often played mentor figures but is here cast as a mentor-turned-villain.

It is worth noting that the comics version is also African-American, having been introduced in late 1978, when having a black character as a corporate leader was more noteworthy. Morgan Freeman's casting thus does not represent a change

in race as with many adaptations (e.g. Alicia Masters in the film *Fantastic Four*, released just a month after *Batman Begins*). The script notes that he is African-American, adding that he is 52 years of age.

Although the Batman of the comics – as well as television and previous films – procures his equipment through his family wealth, he has only occasionally done so through his company’s shelved experimental products. While this makes a certain sense, the film may be criticized as taking this plot device too far: Wayne Enterprises seems to possess almost limitless mothballed technologies, far beyond what we might expect, even of a company that produces armaments. Although Fox lists “environmental applications” and “consumer products” as being among his division’s many prototypes, we don’t see any of those. Moreover, the company’s military technologies seem remarkably perfected and preserved, despite their having been scrapped.

Other rich super-heroes have more traditionally used their companies as sources of technology. The most prominent of these is Marvel’s Iron Man, whose alter ego is Tony Stark, an ingenious scientist who is also the head of an armaments company.

The grappling gun and armored suit that Wayne acquires in this scene have their own histories with the character. Batman has long used grappling hooks, but it was the 1989 movie that popularized his use of a grappling gun – for quite some time in the comics, anything resembling a gun was considered off-limits for Batman, although he now uses grappling guns and the like.

The armored suit was a gradual development in the comics. Though Batman’s costume had featured gadgets, such as his utility belt, from the character’s beginnings in the comics, his suit was long seen as little more than fabric. The 1960s TV show, in which Batman clearly wears nothing more than a thin layer of spandex, wasn’t out of touch with the character’s comics depiction in the 1950s and early 1960s. Particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, stories occasionally and increasingly showed Batman’s costume as involving some sort of padding or insulation to protect him from electrical attacks, as his suit does in *Batman Begins* when Rachel hits him with a Tazer.

As with many aspects of the Batman mythos, Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* may take some credit for altering how readers and creators considered the function of Batman’s costume. Near the conclusion of the first book, Batman is shot in the chest, only to reveal an armor plate underneath the

torn fabric. Referring to his chest insignia of the time – a small bat symbol inscribed in a very bright yellow oval – Batman asks in narration, “Why do you *think* I wear a target on my chest?” This made sense of a genre element (Batman’s super-hero chest emblem) for the first time, cleverly suggesting it had been designed to draw fire toward a spot he kept armored and away from his unarmored face.

Batman Begins does the comics one better, showing that the armored costume was developed as a complete unit for combat by Wayne Enterprises, rather than leaving readers to assume that Batman created it himself or slowly enhanced it over the years. This helps to render Bruce Wayne’s vigilantism more realistic, minimizing the risk that even an expert fighter would face upon actually fighting crime on the streets. The film is also praiseworthy for defining the strength of the armor from the start: Fox explains that it’ll stop a knife and a bullet, unless it’s “a straight shot.” Such a definition is an improvement over the comics version, which tends to leave the armor’s level of protection ill-defined, allowing various writers to depict it as stronger or weaker as stories dictate. In the comics’ defense, however, it’s worth pointing out that this is a logical result of the armor’s organic evolution through years of monthly publication under different creators.

The film also provides a brief but adequate explanation as to how this technology works. In the script, Fox calls the grappling gun pneumatic, explaining how it could fire with such force. The film has changed this to “gas-powered,” which is just a layman’s equivocation for the term “pneumatic.” In both script and film, Fox calls the grapple magnetic, explaining how it could attach easily to various surfaces – often a logical problem in the comics (and other media), leading to scenes in which a grapple improbably swings perfectly around some distant object. Fox describes the gun’s rope as composed of a “monofilament tested to 350 pounds,” helping to explain how such a tiny rope could hold so much weight. Fox says the armor features a Kevlar bi-weave and reinforced joints, helping to explain its strength: Kevlar is used to make bulletproof vests.

Act 2, Scene 6: Wayne installs lights in the cave, which connects to an old dumb-waiter in the southeast wing of the mansion. Bruce paints his old gauntlets and prepares to order the cowl from a company.

Nolan expressed the importance he placed on showing the construction of Batman’s costume. In interview, Nolan contrasted this with the approach taken

elsewhere, as in 2002's *Spider-Man*: I really enjoyed the first forty-five minutes of *Spider-Man*, and it got to the bit with the costume and I just thought... they just took the leap into the fully-fledged costume. I felt that[,] because we were determined to tell the story in a realistic way[,] we had to bite the bullet... I've never seen that done before, explaining the origins of the costume [59]

Nolan isn't the only critic to point out the ridiculousness of that montage sequence in *Spider-Man*, in which the young Peter Parker draws various versions of the costume and suddenly ends up with a finished product.

In this scene, Alfred is still well-dressed, despite being in a dank cave. When Bruce reentered the cave after returning, he also did so in good clothes. Now, however, he sports somewhat more casual wear. This would seem to suggest that this scene represents Alfred's first visit to the cave. Alternatively, it could represent Alfred's somewhat more stogy nature.

Despite the pains taken, in this scene and others, to show Bruce's construction of the cave and of his costume, especially compared to previous Batman stories, exactly how Bruce and Alfred got a portable power generator into the cave goes unexplained. The device looks heavy and would be difficult for two men to lift. Moreover, the only entrance to the cave that they know about at the time is through the abandoned well, through which the generator is too large to fit. We may hypothesize that the pair assembled the generator on site, but that is mere conjecture.

Alfred explains the presence of the dumb-waiter lift, clearly leading down into the cave – which means that someone knew of the cave's existence. According to him, Bruce's great-grandfather participated in the Underground Railroad – a network of anti-slavery activists who secreted escaped slaves to the North. Alfred hypothesizes that the caves were used for this purpose, making this stop on the underground railroad literally underground. Presumably, the dumb-waiter was installed at the time.

Bruce's ancestry beyond his parents went many decades before being depicted or referenced in the comics. It has only been since the 1980s that such stories, typically depicting those ancestors as heroic, have appeared.

The dumb-waiter entrance strongly recalls the various secret passageways to the Batcave that have been seen in the comics and in other media. The most classic such device is a grandfather clock that opens to reveal a passageway of some sort, but many such devices have been used. In fact, it almost seems a test of a Batman writer's ingenuity that he invent a new means of traveling from inside Wayne Manor to the Batcave.

The waterfall Wayne discovers here was previously suggested by the underwater river, or minor waterfall, previously seen in the cave. If that river suggested strong emotion, secreted within one's inner being, the waterfall might suggest a great outpouring of emotion. As a literal waterfall, however, it will later serve as the Tumbler's method of returning to the cave. Beyond the waterfall, then, is the abyss over which the Tumbler jumps.

The script describes the waterfall as "liquid light" when a "mesmerized" Bruce reaches out to it. Along with Wayne installing lights, this scene suggests a growing brightness in the darkness of Bruce Wayne's life.

The gauntlets that Bruce spraypaints black here are, of course, from his training with Ducard. Less obvious, however, is that they *are* Ducard's: the script notes that they are bronze and earlier noted that Ducard used bronze gauntlets, while Bruce used silver ones. This is a subtle gesture but one that further suggests how Bruce's mission as Batman is really an extension and modification of Ducard's own war against crime. Though Bruce rejected Ducard and his apparent master, Ra's al Ghul, he would seem to be honoring his former mentor by using that mentor's own gauntlets.

The idea of Bruce ordering Batman's cowl in pieces and in bulk so as not to attract attention, and even then doing so only through a dummy corporation, is new to the film. Besides being an ingenious elaboration of the realism the film brings to Bruce's creation of Batman, this explanation also demonstrates that money is no object for Bruce: he orders 10,000.[\[60\]](#)

Bruce says that a company in Singapore will produce the main part of the cowl. While Bruce was not shown traveling to Singapore during his travels, he was shown traveling Asia and may even have become familiar with the company he plans to use. The cowl's ears are to be ordered through a Chinese company, which recalls Bruce's imprisonment and the situation in which we first saw him in the present.

Act 2, Scene 7: Flass, Gordon's partner, tries to give him extorted money, which Gordon rebuffs. Flass claims Gordon's refusals have made other cops nervous, but Gordon asserts that he's not a rat, adding that there's no one to rat to in the corrupt city at any rate.

In the screenplay, this scene occurred directly after this act's prologue, in which Wayne returned to Gotham. While that position emphasizes Gordon, the character would not be seen for some time, perhaps leading viewers to forget the

earlier scene. Such forgetting is unlikely in the film as released, given that the scene in which Bruce visits Gordon's office follows directly.

In its new location, the scene replaces the one in which Falcone meets with Flass to discuss the hit on Rachel. Presumably, that scene ought to occur after this one, which also features Flass. It also places that scene much closer to the hit against Rachel.

This sequence reintroduces Gordon, previously seen consoling Bruce after his parents' deaths. The sequence is also noteworthy for introducing Flass and further characterizing the state of Gotham.

Flass is a fairly major character in *Year One*, where he is also Gordon's partner. There, he seems a little less dirty in appearance: he has a short buzz cut rather than the scruffy long hair he sports in *Batman Begins*. In both stories, however, he's the embodiment of police corruption. In *Year One*, he even participates in a masked beating of Gordon, an intimidation tactic by the corrupt police department against the moral outsider who won't play ball.

This corruption further emphasizes the darkness of both narratives. Gordon's comment here that there's not even anyone to rat to in Gotham effectively epitomizes the extent of this corruption – and Gordon's resignation in the face of it.

It's worth noting that the concern caused by Gordon refusing the bribe, while it effectively characterizes both Gordon and the city, may be seen as a chronological problem. In *Year One*, Gordon transfers from the Chicago police force to Gotham the same day Bruce Wayne returns to the city. In *Batman Begins*, however, Gordon has been on the force for all seven years of Bruce Wayne's absence. Generally, straight-laced cops like Gordon shake loose in one way or another within their first few years: the other policemen's concern over Gordon seems out of place if they have already tolerated him not taking bribes for seven years. On the other hand, at least this concern is minimized: Flass and other cops beating Gordon, as they do in *Year One*, would seem out of place after seven years.

At the end of the sequence, the figure who watches Gordon and Flass drive away is none other than Bruce Wayne.

According to the script, Gordon here is 46 and has attained the rank of Detective since we briefly saw him in act one's flashbacks. The script notes that he looks "worn" and "weary" from his years in Gotham. Flass, the script notes, is 42.

Frank Miller's *Year One* screenplay includes a similar scene in which Gordon refuses money from Flass.

Act 2, Scene 8: Bruce sneaks into the police station in a black outfit with a black ski mask. He surprises Gordon, asking what Gordon would need to take down Falcone. When Wayne departs, Gordon chases him to the roof, but Wayne escapes, jumping off it.

According to the timeline established by the previous scene between Falcone and Flass, this scene occurs on the same night.

The sequence is important in beginning to establish Gordon's relationship with Batman. While Batman is not yet named and appears anonymously from Gordon's perspective, this is the first time he has met Gordon outside of his Bruce Wayne persona. Despite his faux gun, Batman's words are friendly. Understandably, Gordon isn't ready to embrace them – as his aggressive pursuit of the unknown intruder clearly shows.

The sequence has no clear parallel in the comics. In *Year One*, Gordon led the investigation into the fledgling Batman. When he meets Batman, he attempts to arrest the vigilante. He later suspects and even interviews Bruce Wayne at Wayne Manor. The two next meet when the vigilante rescues Gordon's kidnapped baby son. That sequence ends with Gordon staring at Bruce Wayne, apparently revealed as the Batman. But Gordon has lost his glasses and, holding his rescued son, claims he cannot see. It is a complex and subtle moment: his words are clearly an attempt to assuage any fears his child's rescuer might have of having his identity compromised, but we may easily suspect that Gordon is lying or exaggerating in the context of having his baby son safe in his arms. That moment occurs on the penultimate page, and the story's final page shows Gordon, on a roof and awaiting Batman's arrival, presumably atop police headquarters. How exactly he has summoned Batman is unclear – he has not yet invented the modified spotlight called the Batsignal. The last panel shows Gordon's face in close-up; he seems to be smiling.

That Batman seeks out Gordon in the film, however, makes good sense. First, Bruce Wayne remembers Gordon comforting him after his parents' death: Gordon was the lone understanding officer in that situation, and he remains the lone honest policeman in the days after Wayne's return to Gotham. Second, the film's Bruce Wayne seems to feel more need for a contact in the police. This fledgling Batman seems less sure of himself than his comic-book incarnations.

In the film, he doesn't first venture out in human disguise, getting wounded in the process. Nonetheless, Wayne's added preparation in the film may be read as revealing his uncertainty – or at least his carefulness, now that he has at last found a mission for his life.

While kneeling behind Gordon, Bruce Wayne holds an object to the back of the policeman's head. While the object has the rough profile of a gun, it cannot be one: as previously mentioned, the Batman of the comics doesn't use guns and the scene in which Bruce Wayne throws away the gun with which he intended to kill Joe Chill represents his abandonment of such weapons. Since there is no sign of the object serving a function, we are left to assume that it is merely intended to feel like a gun in the back of Gordon's head and thus keep Gordon in place. The script, however, notes that it is a stapler.

While Bruce asking about Falcone in this scene is his first verbal confirmation that he is still after the mobster who he confronted before leaving Gotham (in the first act's flashbacks), it's not the first sign: we have seen Bruce covertly spying on Falcone earlier in this act. In response to Bruce's inquiry, Gordon says that to take down Falcone, they would need "leverage on Judge Faden." While Bruce doesn't answer, he's already gotten that leverage in the form of photos of Faden with a woman from Falcone's club. That scene was cut from the film, though its effects are still felt in the film as released.

When Gordon turns around, Bruce has already left through the window. In the comics, Batman's sudden and unannounced disappearances when he's finished a conversation – but before his interlocutor has finished speaking – have become a trademark of the character. His disappearances during conversations with Gordon are a particular commonplace.

There are several signs in this sequence that the Bruce Wayne seen here is not yet Batman. Most obviously, while in disguise, he has not yet created the Batman costume. More important, however, is Bruce's hard crash upon the fire escape after jumping off the roof – as when Bruce stops himself from falling off the cliff in the Himalayas, we feel his pain as he hits. Such fumbling, however, does more than add realism: it shows that he does not yet have the skills – or experience jumping off buildings – that so characterizes Batman. So too, for comics readers, does the fact that Gordon even sees Bruce's shadow moving towards the roof and is *able* to pursue him.

Act 2, Scene 9: At work, Lucius Fox introduces Bruce Wayne to "memory

cloth,” a fabric that becomes suddenly rigid, assuming a prescribed shape, when an electrical current is run through it. Fox also shows Wayne a tank-like vehicle called “the Tumbler” that can perform a jump from a stand-still. After a test drive, Wayne asks if it comes in black.

As established by the previous scene between Falcone and Flass, this scene occurs on the day of Batman’s intervention on Gotham’s docks.

When we first see Bruce Wayne in this scene, he is limping slightly. While this might easily be explainable due to his various activities as a rich practitioner of extreme sports, we know the injury to actually come from his jump off the police building after talking with Gordon. Early in the third act, Alfred will suggest that a cover story is needed for the bruises Bruce Wayne sustains during his activities as Batman, leading to the scene in which Bruce takes two girls out on the town.

The “memory cloth” technology (called “memory fabric” in the screenplay) recalls several articles in the popular press on memory materials, such as metals that resume their original shape after being dented, in the years preceding *Batman Begins*. This “memory fabric” will become Batman’s wings, although this transformation is not explicitly shown in the film. The fabric’s ability to become rigid thus allows Batman to make his cape become rigid wings that serve as a glider. This functionality is not typical of the comics Batman and will be discussed later when seen in action.

The Tumbler will become the Batmobile, although it is never so called in the film.

In the comics, Batman has had a succession of Batmobile designs stretching back to the 1940s. The Tumbler is immediately recognizable as derivative of the Batmobile Frank Miller created for *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. That Batmobile also looked like a tank, though even more so than the Tumbler, which looks more like the urban warfare vehicle we’re told it was designed to be than an outright *tank*. Nonetheless, the inspiration is clear: other Batmobile designs are clearly based on various types of cars and look distinctly non-military.



The tank-like Batmobile makes its debut. From *Batman: The Dark Knight* #2 (March 1986). Art by Frank Miller and Klaus Janson. Copyright © DC Comics.

The flame-booster in the rear of the Batmobile has rarely been seen in the comics, though it appeared most memorably in Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman*. In fact, it was first used in the 1960s TV show, a comparison that *Batman Begins* would probably eschew, given that it attempts to eradicate that TV show's campy Batman even more fully than did Burton's films. Perhaps in this case, its

cool look trumps realism.



In interview, Christopher Nolan stated that the Batmobile design came before the script: he wanted to show the design to the studio as an emblem of how he was doing something different. Nolan went on to explain the design as an update for the times, making the vehicle practical again: The car they adapted into the Batmobile for the [1960s] TV show was a cutting-edge state-of-the-art car for that time... [and] every Batmobile... since then has had this styling of an older car... the Batmobile should be... a contemporary vehicle. It doesn't make any sense in the real world for Batman to stick goofy fins on his car.[\[61\]](#)

It's not clear how Bruce Wayne takes the Tumbler home. The armored bodysuit is one thing, however bulky to carry out of the building. The Tumbler, on the other hand, would almost certainly have attracted attention. (It certainly did on the streets of Chicago during filming.) Leaving out such a scene might decrease the film's realism, but it allows the return of the Tumbler later to be all the more dramatic.

After making a cheeky comment about Bruce's spelunking and base-jumping excuses, Fox gives the lines that best summarize their relationship: "if you don't tell me what you're really doing, then when I get asked... I don't have to lie. But don't treat me like an idiot." The relationship between Bruce and Fox is embodied in these lines: Fox is smart enough to connect the dots, but he retains plausible deniability by never having an explicit conversation on the matter. In some ways, this is an elaboration upon the characters' relationship in the comics, in which Fox may or may not know. If anything, Fox is smarter in *Batman Begins*: the film gives him credit even if Bruce, with his excuses, does not. The explanation of plausible deniability for the fact that Fox never explicitly confronts Bruce over being Batman, however, is utterly new to the film – and, it could easily be argued, is a logical improvement upon the comics.

Bruce Wayne asking Lucius Fox whether the Tumbler comes in black may be an amusing line, but it also shows how loose Bruce is playing with his identity

when it comes to Lucius. It's pretty clear that Bruce knows Lucius will put two and two together, especially when he sees the Tumbler operating on Gotham's streets. But at this point in the film, the two men have already settled into their relationship in which neither speaks the obvious.

As Fox suggests, Bruce Wayne's excuses for needing these devices are really paper-thin. Those excuses are amusing to look at in a little more depth. Wayne earlier said he was spelunking when he acquired the grapple gun and his bullet-resistant armor – and it's true that he's cave-diving in the sense that he had just been seen exploring the cave beneath Wayne Manor. In the present sequence, he cavalierly says that he's base-jumping, continuing his portrayal of Bruce Wayne the thrill-seeker, fan of extreme sports. Fox shows him the memory fabric, and Bruce wants to see the Tumbler: the first will be used to glide, and the second has a built-in jumping mechanism. In both cases, Bruce's excuses are ironically correct.

Act 2, Scene 10: In Falcone's club, Falcone and Flass discuss the mobster's pending hit on Rachel. Outside, Batman listens in on their conversation.

In the screenplay, this scene occurred directly prior to Bruce's talk with Gordon in the police station. Remember, however, that the scene reestablishing Gordon was moved forward. That scene featured Flass, keeping him in the audience's mind enough that this scene could be moved forward, bringing it closer to the attempt upon Rachel's life that Falcone and Flass discuss here. The move has the effect of making the two criminals seem to act quicker, whereas the script makes it seem as if the hit takes quite some time to pull off.

Besides reminding us of Falcone's desire to have Rachel killed, this scene is notable for establishing the timeline for the end of the second act. Falcone begins the scene by telling Flass that he wants him to appear "at the docks tomorrow." This scene occurs at night, as does the dramatic dock scene, which means that from this scene to the end of the second act (excluding what I call here its epilogue) covers approximately 24 hours.

Act 2, Scene 11: In the cave, Alfred breaks a mask, demonstrating that the mixture ordered hasn't yet been perfected. Bruce continues prepping his devices, including a sharpened bat-shaped weapon.

This scene occurs on the same day as Batman's intervention on Gotham's docks. It's unclear whether this scene occurs by day or at night.

This sequence sees Bruce testing the memory cloth, though in a different form

than previously seen. Here, the cloth is used like claws, outstretching on command from Bruce's fingers. The claws recall those of Wolverine, the popular Marvel character and co-star of the X-Men films. But they are probably supposed to invoke a bat's wingspan. Presumably, Batman's cape is not entirely made of memory cloth; rather, only its skeleton is, keeping the rest loose like the fabric of a glider, stretched against a hard frame.

The bat-shaped weapon we see Bruce sharpening here, which spurs dialogue about how Bruce seeks to extend his own fear of bats to "his enemies," is an incarnation of a device commonly seen in the comics. Known as the Batarang, though never called as such in the film, the device has come in various shapes, from ones as large and straight as that seen in the film to small and curved ones designed as throwing knives and used in the comics to penetrate criminals' flesh without killing them. Those smaller Batarangs are sometimes dramatically shown hanging out of criminals' flesh, often enough in close-ups, as they continue to fight Batman.

Act 2, Scene 12: On Gotham's docks, Flass talks with Falcone as Falcone's men prepare a shipment of drugs – some for dealers on the street and some for an ambiguous "man in the Narrows."

The drugs are being smuggled into Gotham inside stuffed animals. As the dialogue indicates, the teddy bears go to Falcone's drug dealers, while the stuffed rabbits go to Falcone's "man in the Narrows." This man in the Narrows referenced here is none other than Jonathan Crane, as will be seen in the film's next act. If we hadn't yet guessed this, Falcone emphasizes that Flass shouldn't inquire into such scary people – suggesting the Scarecrow for those in the know. While the film doesn't explicitly specify, the chemicals in the stuffed rabbits are presumably different than those in the teddy bears, since Jonathan Crane uses the chemical to produce his fear toxin.

The use of stuffed animals to smuggle drugs, while hardly foolproof (drug-sniffing dogs, for example, could detect the drugs within), recalls the varied techniques used by real-world drug smugglers. Though *Batman Begins* is fairly dark, the method of smuggling depicted here is actually rather tame. Living humans are routinely used as "mules," swallowing drugs in packets that cause massive drug overdoses when they accidentally burst. Horrifically, even hollowed dead babies have been used in hopes that customs officials will ignore a mother apparently carrying a sleeping baby. Such realism might actually distract from the film, if only due to its shocking nature, and the use of stuffed

animals – associated with innocent children – is symbolically evil enough.

Act 2, Scene 13: Inside a dock warehouse, Batman strikes, taking out one man at a time. Outside, Flass runs, telling Falcone to do so as well, but Falcone stays, entering the warehouse and seeing Batman. Exiting, Flass enters his limo but is pulled out by Batman.

Batman's modus operandi in this scene is meant to establish his style, and it does so marvelously. We see Batman only briefly throughout the warehouse sequence until the end, when he confronts Flass.

The first goon struck by Batman is just *sucked* into the black crate behind him. He simply disappears into black, which the script ably describes as a “black mouth,” suggesting Batman as a frightening spirit of the shadows. The play with light and darkness continues as Batman smashes the warehouse's lights with his batarangs – which the criminals see, observing only Batman's effects and not the creature himself. The effect is not unlike that of a horror movie, as the light goes out suddenly with shocking effect. So too does the *sound* of the scene echo that of horror movies: as the goons fire blind, the sound of steel casings dropping echoes in the silence, nervously anticipating an explosion of fury. Batman strikes downward from an angle, swinging between the boxes of the warehouse that help to obscure our view and keep him unseen. Again and again, he pulls the thugs into the shadows – making most of the scene's actual violence unseen, yet dramatically enhancing the scene's drama.[\[62\]](#)

When Batman is seen, it is in glimpses or upside-down, as if he were really some strange, horrific human bat. It is a masterfully directed sequence, and Batman's invisibility through most of it does more than escalate the sequence's drama, leading up to our finally seeing Batman clearly at the end. To us as viewers, it is cinematic; within the narrative, however, it is theatrical – suggesting the idea of Batman as a symbol, exactly as Ducard suggested Bruce Wayne could become.

To Gotham at large, Batman is rarely seen: he operates in the shadows, and he is largely seen through his effects. Indeed, it would not be going too far to say that Batman isn't a person at all, or even a costumed persona: rather, he can be seen as that fear itself, felt by the criminals in this scene.

All of this goes a great way towards signaling the sort of Batman invoked by the film. Batman has gone through many incarnations over the years, from the lighthearted to the very dark. While the darker versions are best appreciated by the character's comics fans, all versions have possessed vitality. Consider Adam

West's portrayal of a campy Batman in the 1960s show, or the version seen in the comics from the 1950s and early 1960s – in which Batman battled aliens and his bizarre villains were more bizarre in the surreal, campy manner than in any murderous, horrifying way. Appropriately, that lighter version of the character was often seen venturing out in the daytime. The other, darker extreme may be seen in the character's earliest appearances, beginning in 1939, when Batman wasn't above killing. Classic Batman artist Neal Adams helped make Batman darker and more realistic in the 1960s, and the character moved away from his campier incarnation – rarely venturing out during the day, to choose the most obvious example. Villains became more dangerous and frightening.

But the pinnacle of this dark version of the character is widely seen as coming with Frank Miller's appropriately titled *The Dark Knight Returns*. The darkness of this mini-series is best emblemized not in any of the story's dramatic heights, but in a quiet moment in the first issue. In an abandoned and dilapidated building, a criminal gets the drop on Batman and aims a fairly heavy automatic rifle at Batman's head. Accompanying the image of the gun barrel to his head, Frank Miller provides these captions: "There are seven working defenses from this position. *Three of them disarm with minimal contact*. Three of them kill. / The other –". The next, much larger panel shows Batman slamming a kick backwards into the man's thigh, slamming him backwards. The image is accompanied by the large sound effect "KRAK" and the continuation of the previous panel's captions: "– hurts." As a police officer arrives, he shouts, "You're under *arrest*, mister. You've *crippled* that man!" Batman replies much like Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry: "He's young. He'll probably walk again. / But he'll stay *scared* – won't you, punk?"[\[63\]](#) The criminal, lying on the ground and reaching up helplessly in resistance, is saying "Jesus sweet Jesus..." Here, then, we see a Batman so dark as to be sadistic – not killing, but explicitly not "disarm[ing] with minimal contact."

While the Batman of *Batman Begins* isn't sadistic as in the above example, *The Dark Knight Returns* has remained the reference point for advocates of a darker Batman – and, overwhelmingly, they have held sway over Batman's subsequent depictions. Tim Burton's original *Batman* was seen as dark, though it was criticized as not dark enough by many favorable reviewers of *Batman Begins*. The real culprits of the previous run of films, however, were the final two, director Joel Schumacher's 1995 *Batman Forever* and 1997 *Batman and Robin*, both of which blended camp with ultra-modern designs in interesting

combinations. *Batman Begins* was widely seen as not only dismissing the continuity of the previous four films but also moving dramatically away from the previous films' more campy elements.

This first scene showing a fully-fledged Batman fighting criminals, however, goes further than simply avoiding any trace of camp while not letting Batman be as sadistic as Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns*. It distinctly focuses on the *fear* of the criminals. Batman is as capable as ever, but here he operates unseen, letting criminals feel his effects and fear his sudden, violent appearance out of nowhere. The difference is one of point of view. It is ironic – and perhaps just, given the character – that the film which best characterizes Bruce Wayne is also the film that most focuses on Batman through the perspective of others.

One can understand why, in the comics of recent decades, people on the streets of Gotham are shown as believing Batman is no more than an urban legend. While this may not make sense in a world like that of DC's mainstream continuity, where aliens such as Superman have an acknowledged and manifest presence, it illustrates something about the character: Batman might be most effective as the kind of legend that criminal might talk about to scare one another – and this debut sequence illustrates that perfectly.

When the goons in the warehouse first hear the unseen Batman, one asks if Flass thinks it's the police – the uncorrupted ones, anyway. The sequence answers this goon's question clearly enough: "You wish."

Batman's first foray in costume to fight crime, as seen here, differs from its depiction in *Year One*, as previously mentioned. There, Bruce Wayne simply adopted a mundane disguise. The injuries he sustained in that first attempt helped spur him to adopt a persona that would give him an immediate advantage by frightening his adversaries.

While Batman's debut in the film illustrates the essential nature of the character, as well as providing a masterfully dramatic sequence, it comes at the cost of Bruce Wayne's more tentative, human debut. That debut is often seen as a high point of *Year One* because of its realism. It provides a glimpse into a younger, much less certain Batman. But the change from *Year One* to *Batman Begins* is not necessarily a misstep. The film depicts the young Bruce Wayne as much more uncertain – but upon his return to Gotham, Wayne seems more certain of himself and his purpose than in *Year One*. Essentially, the film pushes that uncertainty backwards: Bruce Wayne as a young adult might seem more

troubled and aimless, but once he returns to Gotham after training with Ra's al Ghul and defeating the villain, he is all the more certain of his mission.

Batman's reply to Falcone – "I'm Batman" – is borrowed directly from Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman*. It is the only direct reference to that film, which launched the previous Batman movie franchise.

Batman naming himself here, as in the Burton original, stands in contrast with the origin stories of most super-heroes, who are often depicted as having their super-hero names bestowed on them by the press – so much so that it may be considered a cliché of the genre. But it corresponds nicely to Batman's driven nature. After all, Bruce Wayne did not become Batman through being bitten by a radioactive spider or by arriving from another planet: rather, Bruce Wayne – hardly the average person but still fully human – consciously *invented* Batman, carving out an alter ego for himself through sheer force of will more than anything else.

At the end of this sequence, Batman is observed by a homeless man – the same one to whom Bruce gave his coat prior to leaving Gotham in the first act. This same homeless man would have been seen previously in the scene where Bruce takes incriminating photographs of Judge Faden, had that scene not been eliminated in the finished film.

Act 2, Scene 14: Rachel exits Gotham's monorail train, only to be followed in the elevated station. A second man waits for her at the bottom of the platform stairs. They scuffle and she pulls a Tazer. Batman arrives, stopping one and scaring the other off, and she hits him with her Tazer, to no effect. Batman reveals that Falcone sent the men to kill her and gives her his incriminating photographs of Judge Faden before disappearing.

Batman drops down behind Rachel to stop the man who initially followed Rachel, doing so almost as a living shadow – in line with his style from the previous scene. The second thug seeing Batman behind Rachel and running away does more than provide humor as Rachel, unaware of the costumed figure behind her, thinks her Tazer has scared off the criminal. It also helps establish the fear that Batman's appearance alone can generate in criminals – which is, of course, precisely the point of that persona.

Batman's invulnerability to Rachel's Tazer has precursors in the comics. As previously stated, Batman's uniform has often been depicted as insulated. But the way Batman casts off the Tazer projectiles and wires here is memorably

cinematic.

This is probably the best place to note the voice Bale uses as Batman, given how many lines of dialogue he has here compared with earlier scenes. Bale adopts a low, growling voice to hide his identity and sound frightening or intimidating. But many moviegoers, including myself, felt that this voice was off: it sounds too forced and phony, trying too hard to sound tough.[\[64\]](#)

The photos Batman gives Rachel here are those he took early in this act. He refers to them as “leverage,” a word borrowed directly from Gordon, specifically from the scene in which Bruce appears in black inside the police building. This, however subtle compared to Batman’s aping of Ducard’s words, may be taken as yet another illustration of how much Batman is influenced by what trustworthy others say to him.

Batman disappears here, unseen, as Rachel is distracted by the light of a train passing overhead. As previously stated in commentary to Batman’s disappearance from Gordon’s office, Batman in the comics is known for vanishing abruptly.

This is the first time that Batman rescues Rachel, but it won’t be the last. The second will be when she is doused with Scarecrow’s fear serum, and the third will be from the crazed streets of the Narrows. It’s not altogether clear, however, that Batman really saves Rachel’s life in this scene: unlike the later scene in which Rachel would have gone insane if not given the antidote, here she seems to be capable of fighting back. After all, she strikes at Batman rather quickly – this is no prissy girl. While we may suspect that her Tazer would not have prevented the two goons from murdering her, this is only speculation. And while Batman does rescue her, it’s important to note that she’s hardly a helpless damsel in distress – a stereotypical figure for which super-hero narratives have often been criticized.

Act 2, Scene 15: Gordon arrives at the docks to witness the police and the press observing the aftermath of Batman’s debut. Gordon finds Falcone tied to a spotlight on the docks and says to get him down. In the distance, Batman stands atop a building’s spire.

The projection the spotlight makes through Falcone and his torn clothes evokes the shape of a bat. For those familiar with Batman, this immediately recalls the Batsignal – a spotlight with a bat-shape on it, typically located on top of police headquarters, used by Gordon to summon Batman in times of need. When such

a bat-projecting spotlight appears at the end of the film, Gordon's dialogue seems to suggest that he got the idea from this moment – nicely making the signal a reference to this, Batman's debut and his capture of his first villain.

Nonetheless, it must be said that the spotlight's presence seems a bit convenient. Not seen previously, it seems as if there's simply a spotlight kept on the docks for unknown purpose. It might be for special occasions, or to search ships, but this is not established by the film.

And while the bat-like shape made by Falcone against the sky nicely suggests the origin of the Batsignal, it also feels a bit convenient – depending as it does upon the torn fabric of Falcone's clothes. Had a portion of those clothes torn differently, for example, the shape projected onto the sky might have been ruined. It may well be the case that Batman tied Falcone and tore his clothes in exactly this way precisely to make the bat-shape, as if signaling his arrival. But this too is not shown in the film, leaving the audience to speculate whether or not the shape of the silhouette was a pleasant accident.

The shot of Batman, standing high atop Gotham City on a spire, comes straight from the comics, in which such shots have been commonplace for decades. Previous Batman films, as well as the animated 1990s Batman TV show, also used such shots. The iconic pose clearly signals that Batman, no longer merely Bruce Wayne in half-costume, now watches over the city.

Nolan resisted special effects in general, and this shot was no exception: reportedly, it's a stuntman, not CGI. This choice ran against Hollywood norms at the time, as Hollywood blockbusters were employing more and more CGI. The three *Star Wars* prequel films were particularly egregious in their use of CGI; this, combined with so much secrecy over the script that the actors weren't allowed to understand the context of their lines as they were filmed in front of green screens, frequently resulted in wooden acting. While Hollywood had improved its CGI in recent years, much of it still had a glassy, phony veneer at best or a poorly rendered look at worst, sometimes with curved surfaces appearing as detailed polygons or CGI surfaces not being properly lit for the scene. Nolan seems to have wanted a more realistic look for the more realistic narrative, thus his resistance to CGI.

With this, the second act comes to a close. Batman has begun.

As much as the first act was a distinct entity, despite not being separated in the film from the following act, this second act also has its own identity – that of

Bruce Wayne establishing Batman's.

In some ways, the second act completes the arc begun with the first. Bruce Wayne returns to Gotham and defeats Falcone, the man who made an angry young Bruce powerless before Bruce began his wandering, which turned into his training. While less melodramatic than the others, Falcone truly is the third villain of the film – and his defeat serves as the climax of this second act.

If the film had stopped here, the title would still make sense: after all, Batman has begun. Jonathan Crane, a minor figure in this act, would simply serve to illustrate the extent of Falcone's corruption. Batman reaching out to Gordon would seem less the beginning of a special relationship than a foreshadowing of Batman's coming debut. We might wonder at the identity of Falcone's man in the Narrows, but we'd probably be less bothered by the lack of another scene between Bruce and Rachel, because such lingering elements are commonly left unresolved at the end of films.

Moreover, the shot of Batman perched high and overlooking his city might well serve as a good final shot for the film – as if establishing Batman as a new fixture in the city, as certain as the architecture.

But of course, there is a third act coming, and it will launch into Batman's first adventure, now that he's made his debut – an adventure that will tie together all the lingering elements of the first two acts while having its own distinct identity.

Act Three: The War for Gotham

The fall of Falcone, which acts as the second act's climax, was much closer to the climax of the entire work in *Year One*. From this point on, we're in considerably more uncharted waters. Indeed, most of the film's third act is invention, not without precedent in the comics but even further from adaptation than the previous two acts.

In a strong film, this is probably the weakest portion. It is the most conventional in terms of super-hero movies. The film's third act is a good action movie, and many moviegoers focused on it as the "meat" of the picture, seeing everything preceding as mere origin – as mere lead-in, establishing the character before turning him loose. After all, this final act is closest to what most moviegoers – unaware of *Batman: Year One* and not having followed reports of how this film would attempt to follow its spirit – would have expected of a Batman picture, given the previous Batman films. For those who celebrate the unique attention given Batman's formation in this film, however, the final act is the weakest portion precisely because it is the most conventional.

Act 3, Prologue 1: In police headquarters, Commissioner Loeb speaks to an assembly of officers, telling them to pursue whoever's responsible for the attack on Falcone's operation on the docks. Gordon is the lone voice in support of Batman.

This sequence recalls the moment from *Year One* in which Gordon, assigned by Loeb to lead the police task force against Batman, briefs the police on Batman. Here, of course, Loeb leads the meeting instead because Gordon has not been assigned the position as head of such a task force.

The dialogue here suggests the police aren't entirely clear what happened on the docks. Loeb suspects "rival gangs," but the police have heard the criminals' accounts of a lone costumed vigilante. Loeb seems to dismiss these tales, suggesting instead the criminals were using the drugs they were importing.

Confusion surrounding Batman's exploits is nothing new in the comics, where Batman possesses something of the quality of an urban legend. In comic book stories of recent years, it's widely accepted by officials that Batman exists, but proving his role in any criminal's story tends to be difficult – unless, of course, Batman is working on leads given to him by Gordon. This confusion is particularly pronounced in stories of Batman's early years: in the police briefing

led by Gordon in *Year One*, some of the policemen mock Gordon's description of a bat-like man.

Loeb's response to Gordon's support for Batman is to assert that such a vigilante, even if he stopped a major mobster, is himself a criminal in violation of the law. While Loeb is technically right, we know him to be motivated by his own corruption and connection to Falcone. The great irony is, of course, that in Gotham *everyone* is taking the law into their own hands; even the cops are corrupt.

In fact, it's not clear how Loeb has responded to Falcone's arrest: Loeb may well be worried about his own connection to Falcone. In Frank Miller's *Year One* screenplay, Loeb's role from the comic-book *Year One* is greatly expanded – so much so that he becomes the final villain. His role in *Batman Begins* from here to the end of the film is comparatively marginalized.

Act 3, Prologue 2: As the news breaks of Falcone's arrest, Rachel assures Finch that they can safely prosecute and states that Batman has provided ample evidence against Falcone. She also hints that Judge Faden won't be a problem. Finch grins.

In the screenplay, this scene occurs before the previous one. Thus, this scene acted as an epilogue to the second act, wrapping up its plot threads, rather than as a second prologue to the third act.

While brief, this scene is important for establishing the willingness of the formerly weakened District Attorney's office to prosecute Falcone. But Rachel's statements here are also important for making that prosecution seem legally possible by revealing that extensive evidence was found at the docks against Falcone.

In fact, such prosecutions are a problem in super-hero narratives: super-heroes often stop crooks, typically leaving them for the police. Yet often they leave no evidence behind as to the criminal's guilt, and sometimes the crimes are witnessed solely by the super-hero himself. The film attempts to avoid this pitfall of the genre.

On the other hand, evidence provided by a super-hero might be more easily challenged in court. While police must obtain warrants to search a citizen's abode or deliberately eavesdrop, a third party may legally provide the results of their own identical, unauthorized actions to the police. Nonetheless, super-heroes are not typically shown as testifying in the legal prosecutions of the

criminals they catch, raising the possibility that a defense attorney might question the chain of evidence or seek to have evidence barred because it was obtained illegally, or through a costumed vigilante who effectively acts as an agent of the police. While such legal arguments as they might occur in a superhero universe are fascinating, they have rarely been explored, except in passing mention through dialogue or the occasional use of a legal situation as a plot device.[\[65\]](#) While deliberately affirming the prosecutor's possession of the necessary evidence, *Batman Begins* does not go as far as to answer these possible legal arguments, or these problems with super-heroes' integration with the American legal system.

Rachel here says that Finch need not worry about Judge Faden. Though only seen briefly, we see Rachel in possession of incriminating and embarrassing photos of Faden that Batman has given her. In the screenplay, as previously noted, the first scene of the second act (after the prologue) showed Bruce Wayne taking these photos. While that scene was cut, the photos remain as a plot point.

Even if we piece this together without the missing scene, it's not altogether clear how Rachel will employ those photos. There are two main options. First, Rachel could later cajole Finch into having Faden impeached – although impeachments of judges, who often hold elected positions, are rare occurrences. Second, Rachel might persuade Finch to prosecute Faden, presumably for associating with Falcone – although the fact that she encourages prosecuting Falcone yet not Faden strongly suggests that Finch does not intend to pursue to such a legal route. Most obviously, perhaps, Rachel might intend to use the photos as blackmail in order to get Faden to recuse himself – though this would suggest that she were willing to bend or break the very law she has previously championed to Bruce, especially in regards to his anger at Joe Chill. Perhaps the intervening years have made her more willing to take such extra-legal measures, and this would make her closer to Batman in tactics than we may initially suspect – which may help explain, along with her having witnessed Batman's positive actions, her willingness to accept Bruce's alter ego later in the film.

In grinning, Finch seems to affirm that he is at heart good, even if he earlier seemed gutless in warning Rachael off pursuing Falcone.

Act 3, Scene 1: In Wayne Manor, Alfred wakes a sleeping Bruce at 3:00 PM. Seeing Bruce's bruises, Alfred suggests that Bruce will need a cover story, lest people wonder what Bruce Wayne is up to. Alfred suggests driving sports cars and dating movie stars.

This scene occurs the day following the second act's dock scene. Alfred brings a newspaper and vaguely comments upon it, suggesting that Batman captured Falcone the night before.

This chronological closeness to the second act is apt, given that this conversation sets up Bruce's excursion with the girls. That scene continues the establishing of Bruce Wayne's public persona from the second act, yet structurally serves as an early scene in the third act, sandwiched as it is after scenes that clearly function to establish the plotlines of the third act.

In the comics, Bruce is often shown rising late after his adventures as Batman. Indeed, in stories where Bruce Wayne is shown at all, his difficulty balancing his two personas can be a major theme. It can also be a narrative problem: Batman sometimes seems never to sleep, engaging in his war on crime with singular obsession – so much so that his activities as Bruce Wayne typically involve pursuing leads or acquiring necessary equipment for his present mission.

Wayne is still repeating Ducard, replying to Alfred's comments about Batman's theatricality with words taken directly from Ducard about the power of theatricality and deception.

Alfred's suggestion that Bruce drive sports cars, date movie starlets, and "buy things that aren't for sale" is initially spurred by the bruises he observes on Bruce's body. Alfred's first suggestion that Bruce might take up polo is quickly rejected. While Alfred's more sexy suggestions are directly in response to a general observation about Bruce's lack of a public social life, those suggestions ultimately stem from Bruce's bruises – and *feel* as if they stem from that inspiration, given that Alfred verbally drops the subject of Bruce's bruises. This suggests a certain degree of sadomasochism, of rough play whether with extreme sports or with women.

Sadomasochism, with its playing of roles and incorporation of costumes and props, is strongly tied to the super-hero – but perhaps to no super-hero more than Batman. Batman's weaponry is designed to hurt but not to kill – a delicate line sadomasochism also walks. In Batman's obsessive nature, and in his disregard of pain in his self-imposed mission, he also seems a sadomasochistic character. And in *Year One* (both the comic and in Miller's screenplay), Catwoman explicitly stems from the world of sadomasochistic prostitution.

Bruce's speedy rejection of polo has class implications. Polo is considered an upper-class sport, requiring expensive horses and training in their riding. But

whereas Bruce's parents went to the opera, Bruce seems uninterested in such upper-class activities as opera or polo. Bruce Wayne and Thomas Wayne may both seem uninterested in running their own company, but Bruce seems distinctly more middle-class, if not outside of the class structure, than his father. This should not surprise: Bruce may well have been raised in wealth, even briefly attending Ivy League schools, but he was *formed* by tragedy on the streets of Gotham, by years of wandering the world with criminals, and by training with a secret society in the Himalayas.

Alfred's statement that Bruce might even find that he *enjoys* women and cars may be read on different levels.

It has some of the feeling of a parent pushing his child to have children, albeit in a twisted form – perhaps pulling the rather errant Bruce a bit in that direction. In the comics, Bruce's lack of a child and inability to sustain a relationship symbolically leads him to adopt partners as Batman instead of Bruce Wayne and to adopt children to serve as his sidekick Robin.

Alfred's statement also suggests a certain vicariousness in Alfred: he certainly understands that cars and women *can* be enjoyable. In the comics, Alfred is generally depicted as a far more stogy, sexless British butler defined by duty (much like Batman) to the exclusion of anything else.

But Alfred's comment begs a more philosophical question about role-playing: where's the line between role and self? Sometimes, the question is easily answered – but often, especially in more persistent role-playing, the self comes out in the role being played. In other words, the roles we play are often *parts* of ourselves, however small those personal parts may sometimes be. Bruce may *tell* himself that he's playing a role when he romances beautiful women and plays the rich playboy, but he may well also enjoy letting go of his vigilante obsessions when playing this role. This same dynamic may well apply to Bruce's Batman persona: he *tells* himself that he must fight crime, but the extent to which he secretly (or not so secretly) enjoys the thrill of beating up criminals at night is generally left to the reader to determine.

As Alfred talks to Bruce, the newly awake billionaire spontaneously begins doing push-ups. This demonstrates his extremely driven nature, so severe that he doesn't even take time to wake up, despite his bruises, before exercising. This goes straight to the core of the Batman character, who doesn't have super-powers but becomes a super-hero anyway due to his perseverance and self-

discipline. As Christopher Nolan put it, “Bruce Wayne is just a guy who does a lot of push-ups really!”[\[66\]](#)

Act 3, Scene 2: Richard Earle, head of Wayne Enterprises, receives word that a prototype – but very successfully tested – microwave emitter, designed by the company as a weapon, has been stolen in transit from a cargo ship.

This is the first scene that breaks the series of chronologically tight scenes surrounding Batman’s debut on the docks: it’s unclear when this scene takes place in relation to the dock sequence. This is also the first scene that utterly belongs to the third act, setting up events later in this act without any direct relation to prior acts.

The introduction of this powerful device so late in the film seems to be a flaw. If Batman’s equipment, especially the Tumbler, may be considered convenient, begging the question as to why Wayne Enterprises seems so far ahead of the curve in technological development, the introduction of the microwave emitter would seem to push the credibility of this situation over the edge. This could have been ameliorated somewhat by mentioning the emitter earlier in the film.

There are also problems with the technology of the microwave emitter, in stark contrast to the general believability of the rest of the film’s equipment. We’re shown the emitter in use in flashback during this scene, which is enough to establish the machine’s power. But how the emitter targets water, or even specific bodies of water, is left unclear. This is less of a problem in terms of the emitter’s effect in the flashback than it will be later when the machine is deployed in Gotham City.

In the film’s defense, however, the microwave emitter is still probably more plausible than similar menacing devices: Magneto’s weapon concealed in the Statue of Liberty that makes humans into mutants in 2000’s *X-Men* is far more improbable, though it hardly bothers most viewers – in part because that film took itself a bit less seriously.

Beyond the implausibility of the microwave emitter itself, it’s unclear exactly why the device was in transit. Moreover, the deaths of the ship’s entire crew get short shrift – ironic in a film all about avenging the deaths of one’s parents through a war on crime. The ship’s crew is barely mentioned here, though they are shown in flashback – during which we seen some of them being killed. They will never be seen or mentioned again.

Act 3, Scene 3: Bruce arrives at a hotel with two giggly girls, letting them goof

off while he dines and then buying the hotel when told they must leave.

Though the script calls for the two girls to be blondes, only one of them is blonde in the film as released. The other is a brunette.

The car in which Bruce Wayne arrives at the hotel is a Lamborghini Murciélagos. The car is named for a famous bull, but the word *murciélagos* is Spanish for “bat.” The script calls for a Bugatti Veyron, and presumably the Lamborghini was substituted during production.

The tracks on the film’s soundtrack were similarly named after various species of bat.

Wayne’s comment to the valet about his “other” car is a sly reference to Bruce’s alter ego as well as a sly comment to the viewer – who will quite memorably get to see that other car later. While none would interpret such a comment as suggesting that Bruce is also Batman, the comment still demonstrates Bruce’s sense of play. This playfulness further suggests that he’s in some way enjoying the playboy behavior that’s supposed to act only as a cover.

Bruce’s playboy ways have been seen previously, but particularly in the comics. Like Bruce’s role with Wayne Enterprises, this is a side of Batman that moviegoers have not previously seen – and its inclusion greatly enhances the film’s depiction of the character. Never, however, has Bruce’s playboy act been depicted with as much panache as it is here: the scene is masterful, important yet funny, and a major contribution not only to the film but, arguably, to the Batman mythos.

Bruce’s playboy act here also recalls James Bond movies, which famously feature the spy with gorgeous women.

In the film as released, Earle is sitting with Bruce as Bruce allows the girls to run wild in the decorative pool. It’s Earle who expresses anti-Batman sentiment, allowing Bruce to weigh in. It makes good sense that Bruce Wayne would meet with Earle socially. After all, Wayne has recently returned and Earle has good reason to entertain the man who remains the nominal heir of the corporation, if only symbolically. Bruce, too, has good reason to meet with Earle. While Bruce may not be concerned about impressing Earle, the playboy routine requires an audience.

It’s unclear to what extent Bruce is already planning to retake his company. We may well suspect that he already intends to do so, which would mean his

performance here for Earle serves a double purpose. First, it provides a cover story for Bruce's nocturnal activities. Second, it's a fake out, getting Earle to underestimate Bruce. After this performance, Earle would hardly suspect Bruce capable of secretly purchasing the family company when its stock goes public.

In the screenplay, Bruce doesn't dine with Earle at all, though Earle is visible at another table in the hotel restaurant. Earle simply sighs at Bruce's behavior and waves. Nonetheless, even in the screenplay's version of the scene, it is likely that Bruce *knows* that Earle would be there. After all, if Bruce is establishing his cover as a rich playboy, Earle is probably the only specific character Bruce would wish to witness the deception.

Bruce's comment at his table that "a guy who dresses up like a bat clearly has issues" is particularly interesting.

In terms of the film's narrative, Bruce's comment tells us that Batman has become a subject of gossip and daily conversation in Gotham. Commissioner Loeb's meeting with his officers at the beginning of this act – and the newspaper Alfred gives Bruce the afternoon of the next day – is all we have at this point in terms of Gotham's reaction to Batman. While the press was shown covering the Wayne murders and Joe Chill's parole hearing, they have not been shown covering Batman's capture of Falcone.

While it appears that Bruce is dissembling, covering his secret identity by disparaging Batman, he may well be right: Batman's insanity has increasingly been questioned, especially since *Batman: The Killing Joke* (by writer Alan Moore and artist Brian Bolland) and *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (by writer Grant Morrison and artist Dave McKean). Moreover, Bruce may well know that he's a little odd, if not questionably sane – he may well be *consciously* telling the truth. And, aware of his own obsession and grief over his parents' loss, he may well be at least aware that he has *issues*.

The word "issues," however, also suggests comic books. In America, comics books are generally published in the form of periodicals – magazines, typically published monthly and typically running 32 pages, including ads. These periodicals, cited by number and not by date (as magazines generally are), are typically known as "issues" – as in "issue #402 of *Batman*." So, in a literal but metatextual way, Batman does indeed have *issues*.

Bruce justifies the girls' behavior, hilariously enough, by explaining that they're European. The suspicion of European culture, and concomitant feeling of

inadequacy towards it, has a history as long in America as whites do. Europhilia is generally associated with the upper classes in America, while popular denigration of Europe is generally considered... well, popular. Of course, this only applies to European culture: rich Americans, especially in the twentieth century, stereotypically felt Europe inferior economically – even as they were using their American bucks to purchase European art.

Of course, it's not all of Europe that's being invoked here: the easily governed English are not known for bathing in the decorative pools of fine restaurants. It's the French who are being invoked, stereotyped in America as wild, uninhibited, and fantastically sexually liberal. And fine dining such as that of the hotel restaurant, complete with a maitre d', has long been associated with the French.

The American-European divide was greater in the few years prior to *Batman Begins* than it had been in quite some time. This was largely due to French and German resistance to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq – criticism that, in turn, lead to Europe-bashing in U.S. conservative circles. The Bush administration and its proxies began verbally distinguishing between European allies (such as the tentative British and the Poles) and what they called “Old Europe.” French wine was poured into American gutters, anti-French statements became commonplace in American popular culture, and a handful of American restaurants even began calling French fries “freedom fries” and French toast “freedom toast” (much as the outbreak of World War I led to sauerkraut being renamed “liberty cabbage” and frankfurters being dubbed “hot dogs”). In 2004, Democratic candidate for President John Kerry hid his French fluency, leading some opponents to slur him as somehow French or European. Meanwhile, France saw anti-American protests and a few instances of discrimination against Americans abroad. Such sentiments were so commonplace in a rather politically divided America that they certainly colored the audience’s perception of Bruce’s statement.

When Bruce announces that he’s purchasing the hotel, he has completed Alfred’s trinity of suggestions: fine cars, gorgeous women, and “buy[ing] things that aren’t for sale.” Just as Batman follows Ducard’s words, Bruce is following Alfred’s suggestions rather closely. It’s unclear, however, whether Bruce has planned to buy the hotel – or, for that matter, whether he has instructed the girls to act ditsy or swim in the restaurant’s decorative pool.

In some ways, it’s the purchase of the hotel, more than the cars and women, that most evokes the figure of the eccentric rich. As Bruce offers to purchase the

hotel, he writes a check *on the spot* and places it in the pocket of the maitre d'. The screenplay simply notes that he begins to write a check, and the elaboration of this gesture in the film as released only accentuates the eccentricity of Bruce's idly rich public persona.

In speaking about the character Bruce Wayne, director Christopher Nolan compared him to Howard Hughes, the subject of Martin Scorsese's 2004 film *The Aviator* and the inspiration for Orson Welles's classic 1941 film *Citizen Kane*: "The thing about Howard Hughes as a young man that Bruce Wayne recalls is that Hughes was orphaned as a young man and given the keys to the kingdom and billions of dollars to play with."[\[67\]](#) Hughes was a famous eccentric, about whom the public and the press speculated. Bruce Wayne, on the other hand, is secretly far more eccentric than his public persona. Nolan noted that, while both might seem idyllic characters for their fabulous wealth, one wouldn't want to be the shoes of either.

As Wayne exits, he happens to meet Rachel outside. However much we may speculate as to how much of this scene Bruce has planned, he almost certainly did not plan to run into Rachel under these circumstances. While we might criticize the film for this convenient meeting, it does save precious screen time by providing such a scene between Bruce and Rachel – and Rachel's witnessing of Bruce's apparent philandering does provide wonderful dramatic tension.

The pain of a super-hero being forced to hide his costumed alter ego from his loved ones is a long traditional part of the genre. Spider-Man, star of the two most successful super-hero films at the time (not adjusted for inflation), is the most famous example. Indeed, the end of 2002's *Spider-Man* stands as one of the most memorable dramatizations of this dynamic in cinematic history. When Rachel sees Bruce exiting with two wet girls but Bruce is unable to tell her it's all an act, the scene certainly bristles with the same tension. Bruce does, however, *try*: he says he's more than this ostentatious display. But he cannot *show* what he's saying, and it falls flat in the face of two wet girls and a sports car.

When Rachel complains about her job, Bruce replies, "Can't change the world on your own." This is distinctly *not* Batman speaking. Batman is all *about* trying to change the world on one's own – and the power of one individual to do so. There are two explanations for this incongruity: either Bruce is still acting with Rachel, and this comment can be interpreted along the lines of his earlier mocking of Batman, or Bruce is holding Rachel to a lower standard than he

holds himself. The later interpretation seems more probable. After all, if Bruce held everyone to his own standards, he wouldn't so freely rescue them.

Rachel ends the scene by chastising Bruce, claiming that her childhood friend has changed not superficially but at his core. Her words sting, especially given Bruce's inability to provide evidence otherwise – of his career as Batman. But he will later do just that – using these same words, after rescuing her as Batman, as a way of acknowledging who he is without explicitly telling her.

Act 3, Scene 4: In prison, Jonathan Crane talks with Falcone, who asks what Crane's mysterious boss will offer to keep Falcone's mouth shut. In response, Crane puts on a Scarecrow mask and sprays Falcone, making Falcone hallucinate and eventually go mad.

When Falcone asserts that he knows about Crane's "experiments on the inmates," he's explaining what he knows that Crane's boss would like to keep quiet. But he's also revealing information the viewer does not yet share. We know at this point that Crane is in league with Falcone, based on Crane's testimony at Zsaz's trial, and that Falcone was importing something for someone scary in the Narrows, but it's not made explicit until this scene that Crane *is* that man – something the viewer may well already suspect, especially a viewer familiar with the Jonathan Crane of the comics. The scene also reveals what Crane's using those smuggled chemicals for: his fear toxin, previously tested on inmates but first seen in use here. And we learn that Crane, the boss of Arkham Asylum, also has a boss – though, of course, we don't yet know this boss to be Ra's al Ghul.

Learning that Jonathan Crane has dosed his own inmates raises an interesting possibility that Crane has dosed other criminals before trial, rendering them insane as he does here with Falcone. In support of this theory, a prison official at the start of this scene says that Falcone's probably preparing an insanity plea; at the end of the scene, Crane asserts to the same guard that Falcone's not faking. If this theory is true, it would ironically raise the possibility that Crane is *not* a perjurer: he need not have repeatedly testified falsely to the insanity of Falcone's incarcerated men (as seen in the previous act when we first meet Crane), since his gas may have rendered them chemically and permanently insane.

Falcone losing his sanity is new to *Batman Begins*. In *Year One*, Falcone was arrested and tried but never went insane. Nor did he meet Scarecrow, who did

not appear in *Year One*.

As previously noted, Scarecrow's trademark toxin was a later addition to the character, who simply killed people in his original appearances. Just as in the comics, Scarecrow's fear gas works remarkably quickly in the film. While it's been perfected as a weapon by Ra's al Ghul's chemists, the nearly instant effect of the gas stands in stark contrast to most known hallucinogens. For example, the most commonly available hallucinogen, LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide, commonly called "acid" and illegal in the U.S.), reportedly takes about an hour to take effect, and more than twice that time for full effect. Of course, the hallucinogenic effect of Scarecrow's fear toxin is far stronger: acid generally produces mild hallucinations, in stark contrast to the rapid and extreme hallucinations associated with Scarecrow's gas.

Scarecrow's costume, first seen here, is decidedly minimalist: Crane just puts a bag over his head and lets his toxin do the rest of the work, animating the bag and making it more fearful than any costume would have been. This minimalism serves again to emphasize the film's realism: Scarecrow may not need to be considered a super-villain. This dovetails nicely with the use of Ra's al Ghul, who may be eccentric but also doesn't wear a costume – and, in this version, does not have the unrealistic Lazarus Pit. At the end of the film, Gordon will speak ominously about the super-villains to come, so it is important to note how realistic these villains are – and their lack of costumes is one major element of this realism.



As previously noted, the minimalist Scarecrow costume seen here is within the range of costumes the character has used in his comic-book appearances, though certainly on the minimalist side of that range.

Falcone's remark about the lunatics taking over the asylum resonates deeply with the comics, in which a string of crazies have held dominion over Arkham Asylum. A few stories, including *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (by Grant Morrison and Dave McKean), even depict the Arkham inmates literally taking over the asylum. To some degree, this is emblematic of Gotham as a whole – as Batman continues his career, the town becomes increasingly dominated by costumed madmen. In some sense, all of Gotham becomes a lunatic asylum. Falcone, representing the old way of gangsters, is the perfect voice for disdain of such costumed interlopers.

Act 3, Scene 5: At his home, Gordon takes out the trash and finds Batman waiting. Batman says he'll interrogate Flass to follow Falcone's shipments into the Narrows. Gordon reveals that Loeb has established a task force to catch Batman.

Just before talking with Gordon, we see Batman looking down over the city. The shot recalls that of Batman looking down over the city after busting Falcone on the docks at the end of the second act.

At the beginning of this scene in the screenplay, we briefly see Gordon's pregnant wife Barbara and the couple's two-year-old child. In the comic-book *Year One*, Gordon's family life receives much more attention, including his affair with a female officer named Essen. Frank Miller's *Year One* screenplay goes further, making Gordon a major character with considerably more screen time – almost on par with Batman. There, Gordon's wife announces her pregnancy. In neither version does Gordon already have a two-year-old child.

This scene is more notable for dramatizing the growing trust between Gordon and Batman than for the information imparted. Batman here surprises Gordon when the cop is without a gun or fellow officers: there's therefore no point in his trying to arrest Batman. It feels as if this impotence provides the policeman with a rationalization to converse with the vigilante. On the other hand, Gordon has seen Batman's effects through the vigilante taking down Falcone single-handedly, doing what the corrupt police were unwilling and unable to do.

Gordon himself says that he thinks Batman's "trying to help," but adds that he's been wrong before. This is remarkably ambivalent language: *trying* to help isn't

helping. But it's certainly an improvement from chasing Batman with a gun. Batman's disappearing act, a trademark of the character, has improved since they last talked in Gordon's office.

Act 3, Scene 6: After Flass steals from a street vendor, he is suddenly hauled high over the pavement and held upside down by Batman, who inquires about Falcone's shipments. Flass only knows that the other shipments went to the Narrows.

This scene and one following are reversed from their place in the screenplay. Presumably, this was done to show Batman immediately following up on his conversation with Gordon, interrogating Flass precisely as he told Gordon he would. In this scene, however, Flass cannot give a name but only a general location: the Narrows. This interrogation scene thus leads into the later sequence in which Batman ventures into the Narrows.

Moving the scene with Finch suggests that some time passes between this scene and the Narrows sequence. In the script, the Finch scene's earlier placement instead suggests that some time passes between the talk with Gordon and the interrogation of Flass. This might be a slightly superior structure, given Batman's use of an optic in the Narrows sequence that Batman might not normally carry. Moreover, the Narrows sequence is longer and may stand better on its own. But it's a minor change.

Flass's robbery of the falafel vendor is remarkably petty, a stark depiction of Gotham's corruption.

Batman holding criminals aloft and upside down while interrogating them has become one of the character's trademarks. Frank Miller notably, and probably best, used this strategy in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. This cinematic version retains the dark style of those comic-book interrogations. Batman is all tense, exuding intimidation – so much so that we may think him overdoing it, at least until we imagine the scene from Flass's perspective.

Act 3, Scene 7: Finch investigates a ship from Singapore that has arrived with one container more than it left with – a crate belonging to Falcone. As the dock employees open the crate, revealing a large machine, one kills Finch.

This scene and the previous one are reversed from their place in the screenplay. The machine in the crate is the stolen microwave emitter, complete with the Wayne Enterprises logo on its side. Establishing its arrival in Gotham is the

main function of this scene.

District Attorney Finch is presumably investigating the crate as part of his prosecution of Carmine Falcone, although how he would know about the crate and for what reason he is making this inspection remains unclear. Finch does not seem to display any warrant to the dock workers, and we can only guess that he discovered the crate's existence through his investigations of Falcone's enterprises.

Finch's death does not seem to have important ramifications for the remainder of the film. While Falcone's prosecution was important enough to be depicted in the moment that it gets underway (in the epilogue to the second act), Jonathan Crane has rendered Falcone mad, rendering that prosecution of little relevance.

In the screenplay, there is oddly no later reference to Finch's death in Rachel's later appearances. The film as released essentially fixes this problem with a single line, spoken by Rachel when she stops by Wayne Manor on Bruce's birthday.

The dock employees who kill Finch are presumably working for Ra's al Ghul, protecting his crate, but this isn't established in the film.

The ship has arrived from Singapore. It is presumably only a coincidence that Bruce ordered the main part of Batman's cowl through a company in Singapore.

Act 3, Scene 8: As Batman follows the trail of Falcone's shipments into the Narrows, a little boy climbs onto a fire escape and talks briefly with Batman, who gives the boy an optical device.

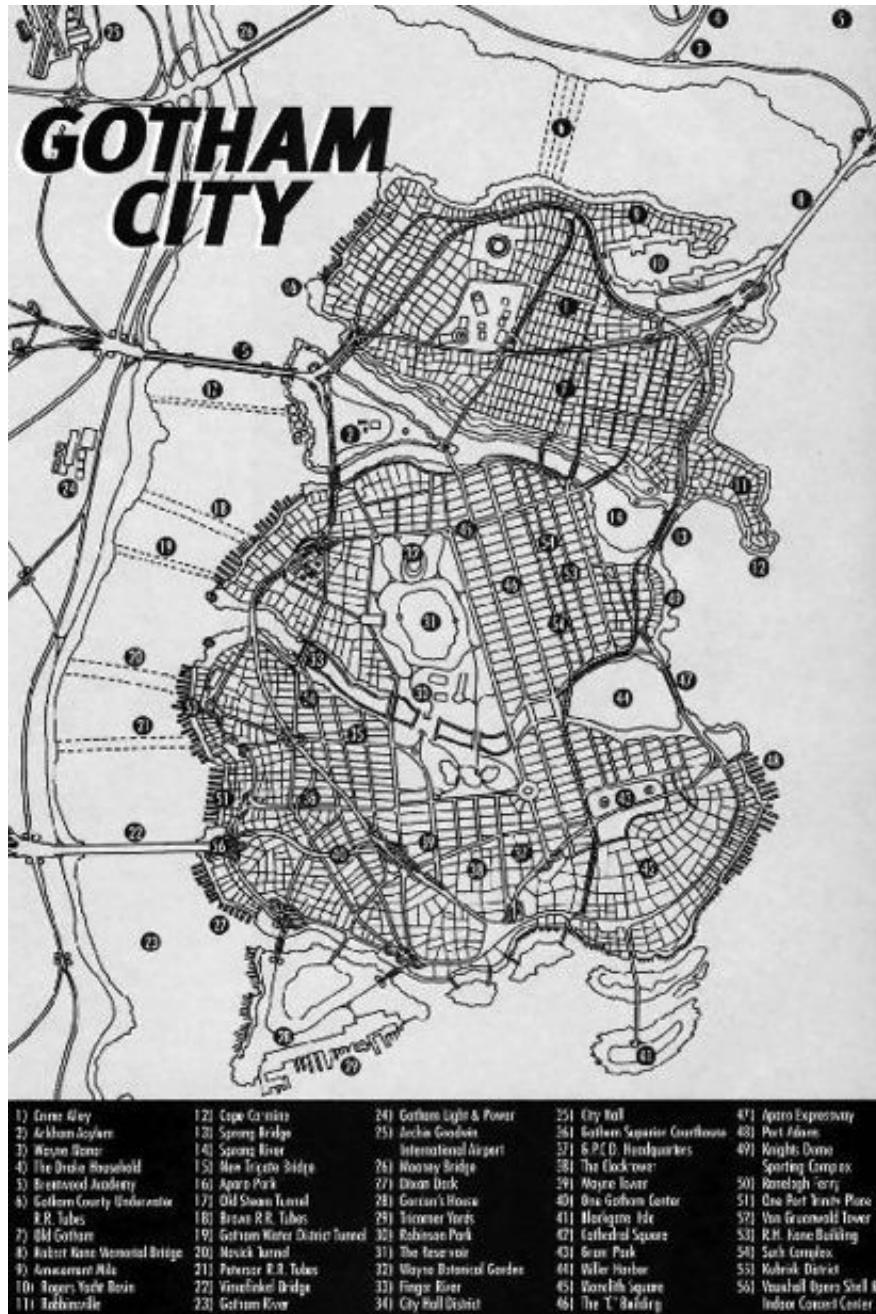
This is a strange scene in the film that doesn't seem to advance the plot. Because of this, it's intensely interesting.

The Narrows is new to *Batman Begins* but not without precedent. The geography of Gotham City has varied widely over the years. In the earliest Batman stories, it seems clearly modeled after New York City. Later writers would redefine Gotham's terrain according to the needs of particular stories. Occasional maps were created, though often for role-playing games that had no official status within the universe of the comic books.

It was not until the year-long "No Man's Land" storyline in 1999 that Gotham's geography was conclusively defined. That innovative story began with the U.S. government forcing an evacuation of Gotham in the wake of a massive earthquake. There, all of Gotham seems a massive version of the Narrows of

Batman Begins: the government explodes the bridges into Gotham, cutting off those who have elected to stay from the rest of the nation. Over the course of the year-long storyline that followed from this, maps of Gotham occasionally appeared in the backs of issues, showing who controlled which portions of the city plunged into anarchy and gang warfare. Interestingly, those maps *do* locate Arkham Asylum on an island, not unlike the Narrows seen in the film.

The script describes the Narrows thusly: “An island in Gotham River connected by five bridges. At one end is an insane asylum, the rest is a ramshackle labyrinth of crumbling public housing, makeshift additions growing like fungus. A walled city.”[\[68\]](#) The Narrows is clearly impoverished, the bad neighborhood of a fairly bad city. In the previous scene with Flass, the crooked cop says that “cops only go there in force.”



A clean version of the map used in 1999's "No Man's Land" storyline, with Arkham Asylum on an island similar to the film's Narrows. From *Gotham City Secret Files and Origins #1* (April 2000). Art by Eliot R. Brown. Copyright © DC Comics.

In the film, the establishing shot of the Narrows that begins this sequence is particularly powerful. Black smoke pours out of decidedly Dickensian buildings, clearly communicating the area's primitive and impoverished conditions. The Narrows is ugly and industrial, seemingly a world away from the ultra-modern civic embellishments of Wayne Tower and the monorail. The

Dickensian resonance is particularly deep, given the appearance of the little boy here, complete with an astoundingly innocent face. Charles Dickens, the English novelist known for novels like *Great Expectations*, chronicled not only Victorian poverty but often touchingly depicted childhood in such conditions.

The little boy interrupts Batman as the vigilante is preparing to enter through a specific window – which he does at the end of the scene.

The boy seems to suffer from not only the poverty of the Narrows but from a dysfunctional family. We hear angry voices inside his apartment, which the script notes to be within a housing project. As the scene progresses, we hear a female – presumably the boy’s mother – yelling for him: “Get your ass back in here!”

It might seem curious that Batman, so formed by the tragic loss of his parents, doesn’t at least intimidate the boy’s arguably abusive mother. Admittedly, he has bigger fish to fry at the moment. Nonetheless, super-heroes have sometimes been criticized for their failure to deal with real-world problems – such as poverty, starvation in various corners of the world, unjust regimes, child abuse, and domestic violence. In the decades preceding *Batman Begins*, super-heroes in the comics have increasingly addressed such problems, but such stories remain a rarity. Super-heroes often have the ability to help fix these problems, but super-hero stories are easier – and less morally ambiguous – when the protagonists simply have to fight bizarre villains with bizarre devices and schemes.

That being said, the gesture of giving the boy the optical device, which lets Batman see through walls, is an uncharacteristic small act of kindness for Batman. It helps to humanize the character, but it stands in sharp contrast to the majority of contemporary Batman stories – in which he seems far too serious for such an act. Perhaps because only the child is observing, Batman doesn’t have to put on his tough guy act.

The child will be seen later, when Rachel shields him from the toxin-crazed residents of the Narrows.

Some have speculated, given the apparent narrative irrelevance of the child, that he was written in order to establish a character who could become Batman’s young sidekick Robin in a sequel. That should not surprise, given that the film’s third act in other ways seems to be establishing its own sequel – or even sequels. And the residents of the Narrows, who are left to go crazy without

antidote, may be establishing the overwhelming crazies who will later so characterize Gotham – as future notes will discuss. *Batman Begins* ends by suggesting the Joker’s appearance in the next film and introduces the theme of escalation. In turn, *The Dark Knight* would end with Batman being hunted by the police.

But deliberately laying the groundwork for Robin, were that the case here, does not mean he will appear in a sequel. Screenwriter David S. Goyer might have been aware of this possibility, while Nolan might have simply seen the boy as a humanizing element or as comic relief. At the time of the release of *Batman Begins*, Nolan repeatedly said that, while he wished to direct one or two more Batman films, he had no intention of ever using Robin – an admonition he repeated around the release of *The Dark Knight*. There is also precedent for such groundwork being laid in a film only to be abandoned due to a subsequent change of mind: 1989’s *Batman* included Harvey Dent, though director Tim Burton chose not to include the character in the sequel. The monthly publication of comic books has also led to such instances: writer Neil Gaiman often wrote unnecessary characters into his celebrated stories on *The Sandman* in case he needed them later.

Were this boy to become Robin, however, his background would be considerably different than that of Dick Grayson, the first Robin seen in the comics and still the archetype. Grayson was the son of two circus gymnasts who died during an accident witnessed by Bruce Wayne, who had the boy named his ward. The boy would seem to be more in line with the second Robin: Jason Todd, who Batman first met when the wayward youth had the chutzpah to steal the Batmobile.

Remaining troubled, Jason Todd was eventually killed by the Joker – a development chosen in a phone-in poll of the readership – in the storyline entitled “A Death in the Family.” Todd has since been brought back to life in the comics as a still-troubled anti-hero. The third and (as of this writing) current Robin is Tim Drake, a more centered and well-adjusted boy who originally lived with his father – though his father was subsequently killed off in the mini-series *Identity Crisis* (2004-2005).

Act 3, Scene 9: Inside an apartment in the Narrows, Batman battles Crane and some henchmen who are destroying evidence of Falcone’s shipments to Crane in the Narrows. In his Scarecrow mask, Crane douses Batman with the fear toxin, then sets him on fire. Batman falls out of the building, on fire. He lands hard

and calls Alfred for help.

The setting is the apartment into which Batman entered after speaking with the little boy in the previous scene.

This scene's main function seems to be providing a reason for Batman to have an antidote to Scarecrow's toxin, important later in the film. But, in creating a reason for Scarecrow and Batman to meet for this purpose, the writers have economically also tied up a loose plot thread: the evidence of Falcone's connection with Crane, which the District Attorney might otherwise have discovered.

Crane is able to set Batman on fire because Crane and his thugs were preparing to burn the apartment and its evidence, including the toys in which Falcone smuggled the chemicals to Crane. The thugs use Molotov cocktails – bottles filled with gasoline and stuffed with a rag which is then lit; when the bottle is tossed and breaks, it explodes into flame. After dousing Batman with the fear toxin, Crane breaks a Molotov cocktail over the hero, then tosses a lighter at Batman, setting him aflame.

Crane clearly can think on his feet. And while his fear toxin provides him with a surprise, Crane's quick thinking cements his victory – literally sending Batman down in flames.

Batman, who routinely swings through Gotham on rope lines supposedly attached to outcroppings of tall buildings, has occasionally been shown falling. The most famous instance is probably in the first chapter of "Hush," the 12-issue run in *Batman* by writer Jeph Loeb and artist Jim Lee.

Batman's fall here also recalls the theme of "The Man Who Falls," which greatly influenced Nolan and Goyer. Falling, or the threat of falling, has occurred twice previously in the film: first when Bruce fell into the abandoned well, and second when he nearly slid off the ice shelf with Ducard.

At the end of this scene, Batman pulls a tiny phone from his belt and uses it to call Alfred. In the comics, Batman famously possesses a "utility belt" filled with useful gadgets – often as needed by a particular story.

Act 3, Scene 10: Batman continues hallucinating as Alfred drives him home. Bruce awakens two days later, on his birthday. Lucius Fox is present and explains that he has synthesized an antidote.

Alfred is not shown arriving in the Rolls Royce that he drives here. His picking

Batman up from the street might compromise Bruce Wayne's identity, especially if Crane and his crew are watching. Most viewers probably don't think about this, though.

It's not clear exactly *which* birthday Wayne is celebrating. The script notes that Bruce was 28 when first seen as an adult in the Bhutanese jail, so he's probably turning 29. While his age isn't made explicit in the film, one can roughly guess from the number of years Bruce has been away from Gotham.

In comics, the ages of characters are generally not given. Characters owned by corporations such as DC or Marvel are expected to continue under successive creative teams over many years; for these characters to age or change too dramatically with time might risk the weakening of their brand. Years of publication may feature multiple stories featuring Christmas or snow, and even references to months passing over the course of a story – yet later stories will compress this timeframe without feeling awkward to the reader, making those years of stories take place over the course of a year or so. Characters may age, albeit slowly. The first Robin, Dick Grayson, joined Batman when he was a boy; Grayson subsequently went away to college, graduated, and become a man with his own identity. Yet Batman himself has clearly not aged the same ten years or so that must have passed for his young ward. As a rule of thumb, characters not featured in monthly titles are the most likely to suddenly age. Though all these characters share the same universe and continuity, the timeline of that continuity is routinely and organically revised to compress time and keep characters – especially the company's major characters – at roughly their classic ages.

Recovering, Bruce says that he has “felt these effects before” – referring to his hallucinations from the smoke during the sequence (in the first act) in which he fought Ducard among the ninja. This is more than a reference to earlier in the film, preventing Bruce from acting as if he's never been subjected to a hallucinogen. In fact, it's a clue: that smoke and Crane's fear toxin likely contain the same hallucinogenic chemical – after all, Ra's al Ghul has produced both concoctions. As Bruce notes, however, Crane's fear toxin is much more potent. Nonetheless, he doesn't seem to make the connection, imagining that the fear toxin is a weaponized version of the substance in the smoke – perhaps because he doesn't have that much experience with hallucinogens. If the audience doesn't put two and two together, it may be forgiven: after all, Batman – a great detective in the comics – makes the same mistake.

The humorous verbal sparring between Fox and Wayne continues here, as they play with the idea that Wayne has gassed himself with “weaponized hallucinogens” at parties. More than humorous, however, the dialogue again demonstrates how loosely Batman plays his secret identity around Fox – who seems to know full well that Bruce is Batman, yet wishes to maintain plausible deniability in the matter.

There’s some difficulty with the fear toxin in the film’s narrative. It’s unclear exactly how Fox synthesized the antidote: such mastery of chemistry, requiring the single-handed discovery of the antidote to an unknown toxin over the course of less than two days, would be beyond most master chemists – let alone Fox, who has not been shown to have any background in chemistry either in the film or in the comics. In the comics, it is Bruce himself who typically does chemical analysis. Fox would likely have used equipment at his Applied Sciences division in order to analyze the toxin and synthesize the antidote, and it would have been nice to have seen this – if only to make the antidote’s production more believable.

Later, at his birthday party, Bruce expresses the desire for more antidote, and Fox promises to give Bruce what he has. Because of this, both Fox *and* Gordon are set to work on the antidote – yet neither will come through. We’ll follow this antidote through the remainder of the film, as it will become what may be the film’s greatest plot hole. The film as released attempts to deal with this plot problem in the film’s final scene.

Act 3, Scene 11: Rachel arrives at Wayne Manor with a gift for Bruce on his birthday. As she talks with Bruce, she is called away by Falcone’s transfer to Arkham Asylum.

Rachel attempts to simply leave her gift with Alfred at the front door, preferring not to come inside. This should not surprise us, given that Bruce has not once tried to contact her since his return to Gotham: they have only met twice – once on the street by accident, the other time with Wayne as Batman.

When Rachel sees Bruce, he is bruised, with messy hair and red eyes. She can only assume that he’s been partying, especially after having seen him with the girls. The same dynamic of that earlier scene applies here: Bruce cannot reveal the truth, yet appearances distance him from Rachel.

Rachel’s gift is the arrowhead seen in the film’s opening. She’s obviously kept it all these years, more evidence of her holding a candle for Bruce.

Rachel's rapid response to the call that Crane has gotten Falcone moved to Arkham Asylum suggests that she's been following the Falcone case – appropriately enough, given that she and Finch decided to prosecute it in the second act's epilogue.

Given her dialogue, it would seem that some judge other than Faden has decided to allow Crane to move Falcone. Recall that Batman gave Rachel incriminating photos to use against Faden, and that Gordon said that prosecuting Falcone would require such leverage against Faden. It would seem that this was not enough, however, and that Crane has corrupted some other judge.

In the film as released, Rachel says that her boss has been missing for two days and that, in Gotham, this means he's probably at the bottom of a river. While she doesn't explicitly say the name Finch, the fact that she's referring to him is clear enough – especially since we've recently seen Finch's death.

This brief bit of dialogue represents the only reference to Finch's disappearance in the film. While this might seem odd, it's actually quite an improvement upon the script. The dialogue was added, as Rachel does not comment during this scene on Finch's disappearance or death in the screenplay.

This is not the only improvement from the screenplay, as noted elsewhere. Nor is it the only time that a brief line of dialogue was added to patch up a dangling plot thread. The most important such instance occurs in the final scene, as Gordon refers to the Narrows as "lost." In a more minor instance, Gordon orders the bridge lowered before driving the Tumbler. See the notes to those scenes for more information.

Act 3, Scene 12: Bruce abandons his birthday party, telling Alfred to hold off the guests. He then descends into the cave and reaches for his Batman costume.

While this scene is necessary only to show that Batman will be following Rachel to Arkham Asylum, there is a long tradition of showing Bruce descending into the Batcave through various measures – as already noted in commentary upon the discovery of the cave's dumb-waiter.

The film briefly shows Bruce hit certain piano keys to access the dumb-waiter. The screenplay clearly describes how Bruce goes to a piano in his study and hits four specific notes, causing "a large, ornate mirror" to swing open. There, Bruce steps through the portal and descends a stone staircase before arriving at the dumb-waiter. We may speculate that Nolan slightly abridged this sequence because it was hokey, as well as not being necessary in terms of the narrative,

but it is exactly in line with the tradition of showing various inventive methods of opening a door into the Batcave. These methods typically vary each time they are seen, or according to the writer involved.

Bruce reaching for his suit, which hangs like “a phantom,” in the words of the script, also has a tradition in the Batman mythos. This tradition is more a part of film than of the comics: the previous four Batman films used this device extensively. It would seem a particularly cinematic moment, pregnant with ominous anticipation as the camera closes in on the suit.

Act 3, Scene 13: Earle arrives in the Applied Sciences division of Wayne Enterprises, inquiring about the missing microwave emitter. After requesting the information, Earle says that he’s merging Applied Sciences with the Archiving division, forcing Fox into early retirement.

This scene would seem to occur following the previous one and before the following one, yet it’s unclear at what time of day it takes place. The script notes that it’s evening, and we may well wonder how late Earle and Fox work. Especially given Fox’s emergency creation of an antidote to Crane’s fear toxin, one must assume Fox spends copious time in Applied Sciences, whiling away the hours without much of a family life. This idea is supported here by Fox knowing exactly what device Earle means only by its product number: Fox clearly has spent a lot of time in Applied Sciences, mastering such little details. If the scene takes place after normal working hours, Earle must know Fox would be there, given that his visit would be pointless were Fox gone for the evening.

Fox points out that the microwave emitter’s rumored application would be illegal. It’s not entirely clear developing a device that can vaporize water-based chemicals would in fact be illegal: the U.S. Congress has likely passed no such law. Nonetheless, the comment demonstrates Fox’s awareness of Earle’s dirty laundry – perhaps through long, otherwise boring hours of study in Applied Sciences. Yet it’s curious that Fox doesn’t attempt to use this knowledge as leverage against Earle – and that Earle seems unconcerned about such knowledge in his mistreatment of Fox.

That Fox so quickly ascertains Earle has lost a microwave emitter suggests Fox’s quick wits. This is yet more evidence to support the belief that Fox has also determined Wayne is Batman – as he says to Bruce, he’s not stupid.

Earle seems more the villain here than perhaps at any other point in the film. While Fox has said Earle forced him off the corporate board, we didn’t get to see

that. Thus, this is the first time we see Earle acting maliciously towards Fox. Earle's curt dialogue, dismissive of Fox, is particularly key in generating audience sympathy for Fox and dislike for Earle. Rutger Hauer's rather obnoxious performance accentuates this villainy, and the cinematic audience could sometimes be heard responding negatively. Of course, Fox will later get to throw back Earle's words here: "Didn't you get the memo?"

Fox being forced into early retirement has particular symbolic resonance. It may be read as a reference to Batman, who has enjoyed uninterrupted publication in the comics since 1939, yet has required substantial reinventions along the way. It may also be read as a reference to Batman's film career, which was cut short by 1997's *Batman and Robin*. The comment may also be read as a reference to Morgan Freeman, a venerable veteran actor in an industry that discriminates against the elderly in favor of young, hot faces – generally attached to less talented actors. Indeed, the film's cast is stocked with other veteran actors no longer getting major roles despite their talent, including Gary Oldman, Rutger Hauer, and Michael Caine.

Act 3, Scene 14: Rachel arrives at Arkham, and Crane lets her see a stark-raving mad Falcone. As Batman listens, Rachel demands bloodwork on Falcone. Crane then escorts her to a secluded area of the asylum, where he puts on his Scarecrow mask and douses her with his fear toxin.

The is the first time that Arkham Asylum itself appears in the film, though it has been referenced earlier. The asylum has become a staple of Batman comics, and appeared in the two previous Batman films (briefly in *Batman Forever* and a number of times in *Batman and Robin*), as well as the 1990s animated TV show.

The maddened Falcone mutters the word "scarecrow," one of the few times the name of Crane's alter ego is mentioned in the film. While he is obsessed with the word, this is based solely on Crane saying the word once before dousing Falcone, which triggered horrific hallucinations of Crane and his scarecrow mask.

In response to Rachel's inquiry, Crane claims that the scarecrow is a Jungian archetype – a reference to Carl Jung, one of the founding pillars of psychiatry, along with Sigmund Freud. Whereas Freud generally focused upon childhood traumas and sexual repression, Jung conceived of a "collective unconscious" through which humans conceived of similar symbols and human relationships. Popular psychiatry, including that of the super-hero, generally relies on Freudian

psychology – particularly the theory of childhood trauma – more than Jung’s collective unconscious. Popular culture often denigrates psychology as finding sexual repression and childhood abuse everywhere, but is less aware of the work of Jung – and generally laughs at the notion of a collective unconscious. Yet super-heroes often partake of Jungian psychology as well, and the aforementioned *Batman: Arkham Asylum* is particularly noteworthy as a Batman story that consciously plays with Jungian archetypes.

The scarecrow is not a frequently cited Jungian archetype, and such Jungian theory could more easily be applied to Batman – and, indeed, to *Batman Begins*. As an animal creature of the night intended to inspire fear, Batman can be said to recall primal horrors within the human psyche. Through the theme of fear in *Batman Begins*, which overshadows the typically Freudian emphasis upon childhood trauma and places more emphasis upon Bruce’s fear of the more archetypal bat, the entire film may be considered an exploration of Jungian psychology. And, of course, Batman has long been a part of America’s “collective unconscious.”

Rachel points out how it’s “convenient for a fifty-two-year-old man with no history of mental illness to have a complete psychotic break.”

This would suggest that he *hasn’t* been dousing other Falcone employees, causing them to go insane before Crane testifies to that effect and gets them moved to Arkham. Falcone, it would seem, is a special case – precisely because of his criminal importance and his limited knowledge of Crane’s mysterious employer.

On the other hand, Crane has certainly testified that those employees were insane, and presumably most of those criminals also had no past history of mental illness. Rachel may well be pressing the point precisely because of her particular attention to the Falcone case.

Rachel’s suspicions of Crane explode here, leading to Crane’s decision to eliminate her – or, at least, to eliminate her sanity. She states that she wants her own evaluation of Falcone, including “bloodwork to find out *exactly* what you have him on.” While Crane remains unruffled, Rachel says that Dr. Lehmann – who she ordered contacted in the phone call at Bruce’s door – will be arriving that very night to perform the tests. With these statements, Rachel has clearly crossed the line – even directly accusing Crane of having drugged Falcone – and is about to discover, if allowed, that Falcone’s blood has the same strange

chemicals in it that Fox earlier analyzed. It is at this point that Crane decides to eliminate her, and his calm in doing so is worth note: he simply turns his key and pushes a different elevator button, taking her to a different floor of the asylum.

After Crane douses Rachel with fear toxin, he asks her who knows that she came to Arkham. The gas has not been shown to have truth serum effects, however – if anything, it would seem to have the opposite effect, rendering a subject unable to process reality. Nonetheless, this recalls the C.I.A.’s infamous project MK-ULTRA, which involved experiments in the 1950s with acid, designed in part to produce non-existent truth-imposing effects. Of course, Rachel has already said that Dr. Lehmann has been called – though he may not believe her or may merely be asking who *else* knew of her venture to the asylum. If Rachel answered truthfully, the answer would include her unknown interlocutor on the phone (perhaps someone in the D.A.’s office) and Bruce Wayne. This would threaten to expose Batman’s identity, as Ra’s al Ghul does not seem to have shared this information with Crane.

The large room in which Crane turns on Rachel is an “abandoned hydrotherapy room,” according to the script. The script calls for us to see various inmates working with powder – presumably ingredients for Crane’s fear toxin, probably including Falcone’s secret shipments to the Narrows. The script also calls for these inmates to be briefly shown pouring the powder into a hole in the floor which Batman’s later dialogue to Gordon suggests goes straight into Gotham’s water supply. In the film as released, a slightly milky liquid is substituted for the powder and the hole in the floor is more explicitly an open pipe filled with rushing city water.

In any case, Crane has apparently turned his asylum into one big fear toxin manufacturing plant: not only has he been testing his gas on inmates, but he is apparently enslaving them as well. We can only speculate how good these insane workers are, or if Crane threatened those who misbehaved with chemical-induced madness. Presumably, some of these enslaved inmates were never insane but were actually Falcone employees who Crane got transferred to Arkham. Ultimately, however, we can only speculate as to the true depths of Crane’s corruption of the asylum.

We see Zsaz, the man sent to the asylum in the scene that introduced Crane, among the inmates. He will also be seen later in the film.

The reason Rachel cannot get the elevator to work is because it requires the key Crane used earlier, when he pushed the button that took him and Rachel to the apparently abandoned level wherein enslaved inmates are manufacturing fear toxin.

Crane's anticipation of Batman's arrival is rather curious. When the lights go out suddenly, Crane seems to become suddenly nervous, then announces "he's here" with a kind of geeky fascination. It would seem as if Crane knows that Batman has arrived almost by instinct, though it is a logical conclusion to draw. Cillian Murphy's performance, however, raises a more interesting possibility than instinctual suspicion of Batman's arrival. Crane seems perversely interested that Batman has arrived, as if an extension of his interest in abnormal psychology. This is as close as the film will come to suggesting, as the comics occasionally have, that Batman is as insane as the inmates of Arkham.

Crane's goons exhibit fear of Batman. One asks, "Can he really fly?" After a brief cut of Batman after this scene, another thug says he's heard Batman "can disappear." These fearful comments further helps to show Batman's impact among Gotham's criminal element. Bruce's intention to spark fear among criminals would seem to be working, as Gordon seems to suggest when Batman earlier talked with the cop outside the policeman's home. The thugs' comments also nicely reflect the urban legend element shown in the comics, in which Gothamites often aren't certain that Batman even exists. Bruce has succeeded, it seemed, in turning himself into a symbol.

Crane orders the police called, which sets up Batman's subsequent confrontation with the police. The police are apparently so corrupt that they would, upon arrival, question neither Crane's activities nor the suddenly mad Rachel. Still, Crane's decision would seem a bit risky: after all, Batman could somehow expose Crane's drug-manufacturing operation to the police. It seems that, as Crane's dialogue implies, he merely wishes to use the police against Batman – planning to get Batman outside, instead of outright beating him, so that the police will gun down the vigilante.

Act 3, Scene 15: Confronting Crane, Batman redirects the villain's fear gas at Crane himself. Crane hallucinates Batman as a demon and confesses his boss is Ra's al Ghul. As Batman knocks out the hallucinating Rachel in order to rescue her, the police outside demand the vigilante's surrender.

When Batman appears and shoots upward with a goon, he seemingly confirms

the goon's worst fear: that Batman really *can* fly.

Although sprayed by Crane with the fear gas, Batman isn't affected because he has taken the antidote prepared by Fox, yet Batman still – perhaps instinctively – pulls away from the gas as Crane fires it.

Batman's gassing of Crane is certainly morally problematic, despite that it seems motivated by deep anger over Crane having gassed Rachel. Batman may not know that such a gassing will probably make Crane permanently insane – there is no reference to these long-lasting effects during Batman's earlier gassing and the recovering Bruce's conversation with Fox. Even if he doesn't know, Batman knows first-hand the horror of Crane's hallucinogen – gassing Crane himself may well be a mere turnaround of what Crane has done, but such actions require a certain "eye for an eye" mentality. Batman may well reject such a mentality when it comes to killing, but he doesn't seem to reject this ancient philosophy when it comes to illegal violence. As will be discussed later, Batman may well pay for this moral transgression: Crane goes uncaptured at the end of the film and may become more dangerous than ever due to his insanity. Although briefly seen in *The Dark Knight*, apparently restored to sanity, Crane must have undergone a bout of serious derangement, and it's not clear what he did during this time.

Crane's hallucinations of Batman as demonic are one of the film's most memorable features and were mentioned by critics cautioning parents about the film. Having mostly followed Bruce Wayne's journey from his perspective, Crane's hallucinations provide us an outsider's view of Batman, demonstrating Batman's success in constructing a fearful, intimidating identity, following Ducard's advice about theatrics. (This recalls the movie's shooting title, *Intimidation Game*, used to disguise the film from the media.) But the hallucinations also let us see how truly horrifying Batman can be. Becoming fearful might sound good in the abstract, but it doesn't necessarily feel so good after one identifies with those being made afraid – even if that person is a criminal. Forcing this perspective upon viewers might yield some powerful imagery emblematic of Batman's mystique, but it also shows an underside to Bruce's entire project of becoming Batman – a kind of social cost, paralleling Bruce's private ones.

When Crane questioned Rachel earlier, as if the gas also acted as a truth serum, Rachel did not answer. Here, the gas does seem to have truth-imposing effects, as Crane reveals that Ra's al Ghul is his employer. Batman clearly doesn't

believe the answer, though it's worth pointing out that he has already experienced the fact that Crane's toxin felt like al Ghul's. In the comics, Batman is known as the world's greatest detective and would probably put these clues together. Here, at the beginning of his career and without the detective skills learned as part of his training in the comics, Batman seems unable to accept that the mentor he left for dead half the world away has returned in Gotham.

Act 3, Scene 16: The police have surrounded the building but do not enter. Gordon enters alone, ahead of a SWAT team. Batman pulls Gordon away, showing him Rachel and triggering a device in his boot. Batman tells Gordon to take Rachel outside and reveals that Crane was Falcone's man in the Narrows and that Crane was dosing the water supply. As thousands of bats invade the building, Batman plunges down the stairwell, escaping the asylum by blasting through a cell. Outside, Batman meets Gordon and takes the unconscious Rachel away in the now-black Tumbler.

The regular police officers seem afraid of Batman: one says they're waiting for the SWAT officers to arrive. Gordon entering ahead of the others recalls a scene in *Year One* in which he does exactly this to stop a madman with a child as a hostage. That scene occurred earlier in the narrative and is used mostly to establish Gordon's tough moral nature in contrast with the other police. Frank Miller included a more violent version of that scene in his *Year One* screenplay.

When Gordon sees the unconscious Rachel after Batman pulls the policeman up the stairwell, ahead of the other cops, it is the first time we have seen Gordon and Rachel together. He may well know of her due to her prominent role in the District Attorney's office. Gordon's comments, however, do not particularly suggest whether he recognizes her.

Batman's conversation with Gordon serves as an update for viewers as to what Batman knows. He has figured out that Crane was Falcone's mysterious man in the Narrows, the destination for a second shipment of chemicals. More importantly, Batman states that Crane has been putting his toxin directly into Gotham's water supply – which hasn't been seen previously, except for briefly in the large hydrotherapy room where Crane doused Rachel and where Batman later doused Crane. While Batman knows that Crane was working for an unknown boss, and says this boss is "someone worse" than Falcone, it's unclear whether Batman believes Crane's claim that his boss is Ra's al Ghul.

Batman summoning the bats through a small high-frequency device is taken

directly from *Year One*, in which a wounded Batman summons bats with a similar device after being surrounded by police. In *Year One*, however, the scene occurs in an abandoned building instead of in Arkham Asylum. In addition to sending in SWAT officers, the police bomb the building from a helicopter – which they obviously do not do here.

In Frank Miller's *Year One* screenplay, the scene's set-up is preserved from the comic version. There, however, Batman escapes the bombed-out building and the invading SWAT team members through Gotham's system of underground tunnels, infrastructure created by Wayne Corporation. He never summons the bats.

The use of an ultrasonic signal to summon bats may strike some as unbelievable – especially since the film generally does such a good job of establishing Batman's tools, yet omits the creation of this particular device.



Batman escapes in the chaos caused by the bats he has summoned. From *Batman* #406 (April 1987).
Art by David Mazzucchelli. Copyright © DC Comics.

While this device has rarely been seen in Batman stories outside of *Year One*, ultrasonic signals are more often seen in Superman stories – since Superman's capacity for hearing, like that of bats, surpasses most humans. Jimmy Olsen, a young reporter, even has a signal watch that can be used to summon Superman. In the 1978 film *Superman*, Lex Luthor uses a similar device to lure the Man of Steel into a trap.

Batman's escape through a cell is another successful humorous moment in the rather dark and somber film. The screenplay accentuates the humor by giving one of the inmates a comment, saying – simply but ambiguously – “What'd I tell ya?” as Batman passes through. In either form, the scene does recall Batman's own uncertain sanity: the humor comes partially from the fact that the towering black figure seems exactly the kind of thing that a mental patient would hallucinate. In comics, a few stories have questioned Batman's sanity, but this moment recalls nothing so much as *Batman: The Killing Joke*, which ends with the Joker sharing a joke about two mental patients – implying that Batman and the Joker are bonded by their insanities, that they have merely taken two different extreme responses to trauma.

The Tumbler's appearance here is the first time it has been seen in black. While the film shows Bruce spraypainting his suit, it does not give the Tumbler similar treatment – perhaps because the vehicle is less crucial to the character, and one such scene is enough, but perhaps also because the appearance of the black Tumbler is more surprising and dramatic this way. Similarly, the film does not show Bruce arriving at the asylum – which he must have done in the Tumbler. Gordon's response to the Tumbler – “I gotta get me one of those” – is amusing (however obvious from a writer's standpoint), but it also accents the viewer's sense of drama and surprise.

Act 3, Scene 17: A stunning chase ensues. The police corner the Tumbler on the roof of a building, but Batman activates the vehicle's jumping capacity and races across rooftops. Later, Batman engages the vehicle's silent mode to drive past police cars without them seeing him. He finally enters his cave by jumping through a waterfall, then injects Rachel with the antidote.

Moviegoers typically remember this chase sequence, given that it is the Tumbler's *tour de force*. Oddly enough, although the Tumbler is based on the tank-like Batmobile in Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, that narrative does not feature an analogous chase sequence.

It does, however, feature shots of Batman crouched down in the Batmobile in a pose recalled by that taken by Batman when activating the Tumbler's jumping function.

The Tumbler causes a great deal of property damage over the course of its chase. A good deal of this damage is done to police cars: the Tumbler smashes into a police car, then drops spikes that causes a number of car tires to blow,

making the cars skid out and crash into one another. The Tumber also pushes its way between two parked cars on the roof of the parking garage where it is cornered. After jumping off the parking garage roof, the Tumbler tears apart a tile roof. Dropping onto an elevated freeway, we see cars desperately swerving to avoid the tank-like vehicle that's dropped suddenly, almost on their heads.

Dropping spikes from the Tumber recalls nothing so much as James Bond, famous for driving cars equipped with secret weaponry. While the Batmobile has been seen previously as equipped with various gadgets, not all have been as realistic. This is not the only resonance between *Batman Begins* and James Bond, as previously noted.

The shot in which the Tumbler inserts itself between two parked cars, pushing them aside, was used in the trailers for the film. The space between them is marked “Compact” and was noted as such in the script. The shot combines vehicular action with humor and was particularly memorable from the trailers.

Another humorous moment comes when the Tumbler flies through a toll booth, chased by police cruisers. The toll booth attendant looks down at this coffee, as if it might be causing him to hallucinate. This scene is an invention for the film and was not in the screenplay.

When we see the Tumbler jump off the roof of the parking garage, it is the first time the vehicle’s “rampless jump” has been shown. It seems this feature requires the vehicle to be moving at a rapid speed, given that Batman first activates the jet at the Tumbler’s rear, accelerating before triggering the rampless jump.

The script describes a crucial shot in terms of making that jumping feature realistic: “an inverted spoiler jams into the airstream at the front of the car, bumping it just off the ground.” In the film, the Tumbler seems to have little parts that stick out in preparation for the rampless jump, but the exact nature of those parts remains unclear.

It’s not clear, however, that the rampless jump is actually realistic. Using the airstream to lift a weighty – albeit fast – tank off the ground strains credibility. Moreover, the shots following in which the Tumbler drives over rooftops, while dramatic, also strain credibility: most roofs are not built to support the weight of a heavy vehicle. This is all the more apparent when the Tumbler drives over a tile roof, however dramatic the flying tiles might be.

It’s also unclear exactly how much practice Batman has had driving the

Tumbler, particularly in using the vehicle's rampless jump. While the cave below Wayne Manor seems vast, it's hard to imagine it would have the clear room and the smooth surfaces needed for practice. To some extent, however, this is merely an extension of not having been shown Bruce getting the Tumbler home earlier, after he borrowed it from Lucius Fox and the Applied Sciences division.

It's worth noting that the Tumbler behaves in much the same way as Batman himself: keeping to the shadows and striking from them with surprising, devastating effects. The Tumbler rockets past police cars, barely seen as it roars past. The script even describes the vehicle as "a shadowy monster" in this scene. Most notable in this regard, however, is the scene in which Batman shuts off the car's lights and engine noise, driving unseen past police cars on the freeway. The script describes it as "a shadow only visible breaking the glare of other cars' headlights." All of this vividly recalls Batman's debut on the Gotham docks.

That the Tumbler has a silent mode, however, is not entirely unbelievable. Silent modes are typically reserved for submarines and planes, and have been devised to enhance stealth and avoid detection. Such silent modes, much as depicted in the film, are not actually *silent* – just very, very quiet given the power of the engine.

The years have seen various methods of concealing the Batcave's entrance, much as various methods of descending from Wayne Manor into the Batcave have been shown. 1989's *Batman*, for example, used a holographic solid rockface – and driving through it provided an occasion for Vicki Vale to scream memorably. In *Batman Begins*, a waterfall obscures the cave entrance behind it – accessible only by jumping a gorge.

It's not clear whether Batman has to activate the Tumbler's rampless jump in order to make it across the gorge and into the cave. He is not shown activating that feature, but the Tumbler does seem to lift off the ground as it leaps off the gorge. Possibly, one merely has to achieve a certain speed and know the cave to be there – but the idea of the cave being unachievable without the Tumbler's rampless jump is a nice idea, since it would restrict access even further.

In the script, as the Tumbler lands, it hooks a steel cable, helping it come to a stop in a relatively short space. The technology is based on that used to stop jets landing on aircraft carriers, where airstrip space is at a premium. This is a nice

realistic touch, though it seems to have been omitted in the film as released. Just as we do not see Bruce painting or practicing with the Tumbler, however, the screenplay does not show Bruce installing this functionality into the cave.

Bruce's concern for Rachel, as opposed to his mere joy at using the Tumbler in a chase, is demonstrated by how quickly Bruce gets himself and Rachel out of the vehicle, laying her on a table and injecting her with a syringe containing the antidote that Fox has prepared.

In the script, the film takes a moment to breathe after Bruce has done so. Not only does this calm us down after the high tension of the dramatic chase, but it helps signal the end of the sequence, reinforcing what the chase was all about: Bruce saving his childhood friend. But the film as released contains no such pause at this moment. Perhaps Batman staring down at a woman unconscious on a slab – a woman for whom we suspect he has sexual feelings – felt too creepy.

If the third act had to be cut in two, this would be the place.

The film's third act is considerably longer than the previous two and in fact contains two fairly—evenly placed climaxes. The first climax is the battle in Arkham Asylum and the defeat of Jonathan Crane, followed by the Tumbler chase and the saving of Rachel. The second is the battle with Ra's al Ghul in the Narrows and then on the monorail. Seen thusly, the first half of the second act features Scarecrow as the villain, a misdirection for the audience. The second half begins with Ra's al Ghul revealed as the real villain behind it all.

We could even claim that the two halves of the third act are really two separate acts in themselves. Each would have a climax, after all, and would have roughly the same length. In the screenplay as published, the first half of the third act (as I have suggested that division here) occupies some 40 pages, from page 73 to 112. The second half occupies some 39 pages, from page 112 to page 150, which includes the film's epilogue scenes. If we understand the film as really having four acts, they would be of roughly the same length.

Films, however, are typically divided into three acts, and the film's creators explicitly referred to the film as having three acts. More importantly, despite the reasons for seeing the third act as falling into two halves, there are good reasons for understanding these two *halves* of the third act as exactly that, rather than as two independent acts. After all, the second half of the third act continues directly from the first half. While it is true that the third act continues directly from the second, those acts are more clearly divided in their concerns: Batman

is formulating himself in the second act and having a separate adventure in the third act. The villain of the second act, Falcone, appears in the first half of the third act; and the villain of that first half, Scarecrow, appears in the second half. But both halves of the third act see Batman fighting against the fear toxin, having a single adventure, rather than training or formulating his costumed persona.

Ultimately, however, such divisions are necessarily subjective. One could responsibly claim that *Batman Begins* really has *four* acts, rather than three. One might even claim that the film has *five* acts, after classical play structure, with the epilogues serving as a brief fifth act. Such choices I leave to the reader and to later criticism, though I have preserved the three-act structure for the sake of these annotations.

Act 3, Scene 18: Inside the room where Crane gassed Rachel, Gordon talks with Hazmat technicians. While he learns that Crane's been dumping his chemical into the water mains, he also learns that the chemical must be absorbed through the lungs.

Although we briefly saw Crane's enslaved inmates dumping the powder into the water main, in the scene in which Crane gassed Rachel, this is the first time we learn that Crane has been dumping his chemical into Gotham's water supply – and also that the chemical must be inhaled.

It is not yet clear, however, whether Jonathan Crane has been captured. He was last seen, maddened by his own gas, inside the asylum prior to Batman's escape. His capture – and subsequent escape – will soon be established.

The idea of poisoning Gotham's water supply is hardly unique to *Batman Begins* – understandably, given Batman's long history.

This is not the first time that Ra's al Ghul has tried to poison Gotham. The most extended version is the comic's 1996's "Contagion" storyline, which saw Ra's unleash a murderous plague that decimated the city's population and caused wide-scale chaos – though Ra's was not shown to have been responsible until the "Legacy" storyline later that year. In 1998, Gotham City was given a major earthquake, causing yet more damage and eventually leading (with the aid of Superman foe Lex Luthor) the U.S. government to abandon the city completely – setting off the year-long "No Man's Land," running throughout the Batman titles in 1999 and ending with Gotham's reunion with the United States.

It is also interesting to note that the episode "Dreams in Darkness," from the

animated Batman series begun in 1992, saw Scarecrow attempting to add his fear-gas to Gotham's water supply.

There may also be a riff on *Year One* here: in the Joker's non-appearance at the end of *Year One*, he is apparently trying to poison Gotham's reservoir.

In the years prior to *Batman Begins*, there was much speculation about the vulnerability of American cities' water supply to terrorist attack. In such scenarios, widely covered by the press, terrorists would poison a reservoir (as the Joker seemed to be attempting at the end of *Year One*), rather than put poison directly into water mains. Such horrific scenarios, given that the prospective terrorists were Islamic fundamentalists in the wake of 9/11, relate well to Ra's al Ghul, who in the comics is more clearly Arab and was created in the 1970s during a different wave of concern over Islamic terrorism. In the comics, Ra's al Ghul is an eco-terrorist; in the film, he acts against moral corruption rather than corruption of the environment.

Water mains are pressurized, which is why the water inside can be made to run uphill – and why fire hydrants can jet water out into the street so that kids can play in it. Later, monitors in Wayne Tower show water pressure building as a result of al Ghul's device. Yet the film seems to depict an open pit in the floor wherein a large pipe has been opened. In real life, that opening would force water flooding up and into the room.

Act 3, Scene 19: Rachel revives, still in the cave. Batman explains that Crane was responsible and gives Rachel a sedative to knock her out for transport home. He gives her two vials of antidote: one for Gordon's own use, the other for Gordon to have manufactured.

It would seem that Rachel has no ill effects from having been gassed, though she would have gone permanently insane if not treated. Given the time it took him to get her to the cave and the antidote, and how quickly the gas begins to act, it seems improbable that Rachel would recover so completely, at least in such a short amount of time. In comics, as in popular films, such quick recoveries are commonplace.

Batman tells Rachel that "Gordon has Crane," but it's not clear how he knows this. We haven't been shown Crane's capture. When Batman left Gordon at the asylum, neither did Batman tell Gordon to capture Crane nor did Gordon on his own promise to do so. Moreover, the asylum was teeming with police, who would have undoubtedly gotten to Crane before Gordon – and Gordon,

outranked, would not have been able to take control of the prisoner.

Batman's statement that he doesn't have "the luxury of friends" is very much in line with the hero's comics appearances, particularly in the 20 years prior to the film. Even as Batman has increasingly acquired allies during that time, he often seems to have less than complete trust in them. The degree to which this is true depends upon the writer of the story, and a line such as Batman's here would generally be considered an important indicator of the writer's perspective on Batman.

The story of the antidote, problematically produced with remarkable speed by Lucius Fox, now turns towards the ridiculous: Batman gives Rachel two vials of antidote, one for Gordon personally (since she has just been inoculated) and the other to give Gordon so that he can "start mass production."

The fact that Gordon *doesn't* start mass production will be the subject of more extended notes later. At present, the question is how Batman even *imagines* Gordon's capable of ordering such mass production. Such a process, given Gotham's population (or even that of the Narrows, though none can be sure only they will be affected), would undoubtedly take considerable time – certainly far more time than the heroes have. Shortly after this scene, as Bruce talks with Fox at the party, Fox judges the time necessary as "weeks."

Moreover, even if rapid mass production were possible, it's not clear that Gordon could accomplish this. He certainly doesn't seem to have many friends in the police department, and police departments aren't known for their mass manufacturing of unknown antidotes. Wayne Enterprises, or Lucius Fox in specific, would seem a more certain route. In fact, Bruce will also tell Fox to also manufacture antidote. Perhaps Batman simply isn't thinking when he gives the antidote to Rachel to take to Gordon for manufacture – after all, he has just started out and doesn't seem to have significant chemical expertise.

In the script, after Batman again injects Rachel (this time with a sedative instead of the antidote), the script notes that he "stares at her for an inexpressibly lonely moment."

In 1989's *Batman*, Batman similarly brings Vicki Vale to the Batcave, only to induce her unconsciousness and return her home. There, instead of using a sedative, Batman simply whiskers his cape over her: his method of rendering her unconscious isn't explicit, and that scene is infused with more menace. In both films, however, a certain tension is added by the salacious intimation of possible

rape.

Act 3, Scene 20: As Wayne reenters the mansion, Alfred questions Bruce's motives as Batman. Bruce tells Alfred to take Rachel home.

Alfred's disapproval of Bruce's activities as Batman reflects their earlier conversations, both after the adolescent Bruce returned home from college and when Alfred picked Bruce up after the latter's training period. Alfred's urging Bruce to care about the Wayne name particularly recalls the earlier, more confrontational encounter. That Bruce again rejects his family name illustrates the fact that nothing's changed: while Bruce claims the "creature" Batman honors Thomas Wayne, nothing's been made conveniently pat. This strikes me as realistic: in life, such basic differences of opinion are rarely settled, however the two parties may come to understand one another. All of this also helps to establish Bruce's breakdown after Wayne Manor burns.

Alfred's right, of course, that someone could have been injured during the chase with the Tumbler. Batman endangered not only property but also lives.

Alfred says that Bruce's quest "can't be personal" or else Bruce is "just a vigilante." In doing so, Alfred unknowingly echoes one of Bruce's earliest responses to Ducard: there, it was *Bruce* who dismissed Ducard's plans for him as vigilantism. Of course, Batman *is* a vigilante – he does take the law into his own hands in order to do justice, even if he doesn't kill. But vigilantism, while morally questionable, certainly isn't obviously and utterly morally *wrong*: someone who threatens the neighborhood drug dealer, or who stops a gun-toting mugger through violence, may well be breaking the law yet cannot easily be morally faulted. But Nolan, in interview, seems to have a different definition of "vigilante," saying that Batman is "on that line between right and wrong. He stays on the right side of the line – not being a vigilante, a vengeful figure who isn't morally correct ... What distinguishes him from Charles Bronson in *Death Wish*? ... There isn't a simply answer to that."[\[69\]](#)

In the comics, Alfred has often objected to Bruce's behavior – especially when Bruce seems to be unnecessarily isolating himself from friends or lovers, as he seems to be here. Similarly, Alfred is also sometimes used to run errands – such as taking the unconscious Rachel home, as he's told to do here.

Act 3, Scene 21: As Wayne joins his birthday party in the mansion, he talks with Earle, who tells Bruce that the company's stock offering went well. Outside, Alfred loads the unconscious Rachel into a car, pretending she's drunk.

It hasn't been clear until this scene exactly *when* the stock offering would take place. Earle has only said that it was too late to stop. It would seem that Earle, ironically, has scheduled the public offering for Bruce's birthday.

If true, this would seem to be a further insult to the Wayne legacy with the company, given that Earle would have scheduled the offering while Bruce was gone from Gotham and legally dead. Moreover, Bruce must be going mad with busy thoughts: not only is it his birthday, complete with a massive party he just wants to get rid of; not only is he concerned about Rachel, who nearly went mad; and not only is he convinced that all of Gotham is about to be poisoned – but it's also the day his company goes public. Perhaps we shouldn't make too much of this, though: after all, it's the result of cinematic compression of time.

Alfred's bumping Rachel's unconscious body around, as he loads her into the car and is observed by a smoking caterer, is yet another funny moment in a film with quite a number of them.

Act 3, Scene 22: Gordon demands of Crane how the toxin was to be vaporized, but Crane reveals nothing except that it's too late.

While Batman has told Rachel that Gordon apprehended Crane, this is the first time we've seen Crane in custody.

Crane seems only half insane here, first muttering "scarecrow" repeatedly and then saying that Gordon's too late to stop the vaporization. Apparently, one can remain lucid enough to make sense after being exposed to a large dose of the fear gas – though it's not altogether clear *exactly* how large a dose Batman gave Crane.

Act 3, Scene 23: Finding Fox at the birthday party, Bruce asks about mass manufacturing the antidote. Fox says it would take weeks and reveals the stolen microwave emitter along with his firing. Wayne encourages Fox to break into Wayne Enterprises to work on the antidote anyway.

This is the only indication of how long the antidote would take to manufacture, and it's clearly too long a time to have an effect on the current situation. It's curious that we get this information, yet are never shown the antidote's manufacture, or even lamentation of the failure to manufacture it in time.

Though Fox will be seen again at the end of the film, there will be no comment on this separate attempt to create the antidote on a mass scale, though we will follow Gordon's lack of an attempt.

It is Fox, already shown to be clever, who fills in a major piece of the puzzle – that the stolen microwave emitter will be used to vaporize the city's toxin-infused water supply. At this point, Bruce knows everything about the plan – even the involvement of Ra's al Ghul, provided he believes Crane's statement that Ra's is the mastermind behind the scheme.

Act 3, Scene 24, Part 1: At the party, an elderly woman tells Bruce that he must meet a partygoer named Ra's al Ghul. But Ducard is there instead, revealing that he is actually Ra's al Ghul. When Bruce tells Ra's to let the partygoers leave, Ducard tests Bruce's allegiance to Batman's secret identity by telling Bruce that he's welcome to explain the situation. Bruce responds, amusingly, by feigning a drunken toast and insulting his guests – who quickly leave in disgust.

When the woman at the party asks the new Asian Ra's al Ghul if she's pronouncing his name correctly, she does it with all the superficiality of a rich society woman to whom the eccentric Asian is a curiosity. But the line also recalls the differing pronunciation of al Ghul's name, which was pronounced differently in the animated Batman TV show.

Though subtle in the film, the Asian man's vest sports a blue poppy – the same flower Bruce carried up the mountain in the first act. Ra's later reveals in the scene that Crane's gas is derived from the poppies, connecting this act to the first. All the time Batman has been dealing with the fear toxin, he has in fact been dealing not only with the same substance with which he was gassed during his trial in the Himalayas, but with the implications of the flower he carried up the mountain near the beginning of the film.

Wayne seems fairly cool about Ra's al Ghul's presence and Ducard's revelation. It remains debatable whether Bruce believes Crane that the criminal's master was Ra's al Ghul – though, as previously noted, Bruce has all the clues to do so, including the similarity between Crane's fear gas and the smoke used in Wayne's Himalayan initiation. To whatever extent Bruce has pieced this together, he has almost certainly not guessed at Ducard's presence – which might be a logical guess, given Ducard's survival, but which had not been previously hinted. Exactly how much Bruce has guessed, however, remains speculation – although the fact that he doesn't reveal any such suspicions argues strongly that he hasn't guessed much when it comes to al Ghul's return.

When Ducard reveals himself, he jests about what Bruce must have thought

upon hearing that Ra's was at the party: is Ra's somehow immortal, somehow supernatural? Without disturbing the flow of dialogue, *Batman Begins* has managed to reference the comics here in an interesting way. Remember that, in the comics, Ra's does use his Lazarus Pit to maintain a limited form of immortality. Ducard's dialogue here slyly answers viewers who know the comics, who may have been waiting to see if Ra's would return and be revealed as immortal. By having Ra's return via the revelation that Ducard was Ra's all along, the movie has its cake and eats it too: Ra's returns without evoking the more unrealistic elements of the comics version.

It is not at all clear that Ducard always has been the real Ra's al Ghul – that the Asian version seen earlier was really a henchman masquerading as the master at that master's request. While Bruce accepts Ducard as the real Ra's immediately, and we are thus inclined to believe that *the film* wishes us to agree, we only have Ducard's word in the matter. Official books on the film seem to confirm this, including the script itself. As Ducard apparently confirms that he is Ra's al Ghul, commenting about dual identities, his dialogue is tagged "DUCARD / RA'S AL GHUL." From then on, he's tagged simply as "RA'S AL GHUL."

In the script, the man who tries to stop Bruce during his toast is Fredericks, seen earlier in the board room scene interrupted by Bruce's return to Wayne Enterprises.

As Fredericks exits, he says that the apple has fallen very far from the tree indeed – in other words, that Bruce is a far cry from his noble parents. The irony is that, as Ra's will soon reveal, both generations of Waynes are united in opposing Ra's – albeit unknowingly so, in the case of Thomas and Martha Wayne.

Yet there is some truth to the statement. Earlier, when Bruce rises from the cave to join the party, Alfred scolds Bruce about becoming lost in the new persona he's created for himself. And while Bruce is united with his parents in helping Gotham, Bruce's *method* of doing so is quite different – if not distinctly at odds with that of his parents.

This is made clearer as Wayne Manor burns, symbolically destroying the elder Waynes' legacy.

Ra's al Ghul ends the scene by talking about the need to destroy the corrupt city of Gotham. Describing the poor conditions there, Ra's says that "this is not how man was supposed to live." Wayne undoubtedly agrees, though their respective

answers to these problems are quite different. As Ra's will soon reveal, he had a hand in creating – or at least exacerbating – these conditions.

Ra's talks about how the League of Shadows has attacked other corrupt cities, including burning London to the ground. It's unclear which London fire Ra's references here: the one in 1212 or the one in 1666. The Great Fire of 1666, much better known today, didn't burn down all of London, but it did leave approximately 100,000 people homeless, about a sixth of the city at the time. The fire was massive and gutted the heart of the city, including St. Paul's Cathedral. It was judged by many at the time as God's judgment on the English people for their return to monarchy in 1660 – and perhaps a sign of the Apocalypse, especially since it occurred in a year with "666" in it, understood as the mark of the beast in the Biblical book of *Revelations*.

Act 3, Scene 24, Part 2: Back in Wayne Manor, Ra's reveals that he's targeted Gotham City before, using economic methods – a plot that Bruce's parents unknowingly helped to foil. As Ra's and Bruce talk, Ra's henchmen begin lighting Wayne Manor aflame.

The idea that Ra's had previously attacked Gotham economically, and that Bruce's parents had helped arrest that economic depression, is new to the film.

It does raise an interesting point in terms of the movie's timeline, however. Given that this version of Ra's is seemingly not immortal, and if we believe that Ducard has always been Ra's, Ra's would have had to have been fairly young when he engineered Gotham's economic depression.

Ra's also speaks of the murder of Bruce's parents. Some may suspect that Ra's ordered their deaths, despite Joe Chill's sympathetic depiction earlier as a poor Gothamite who regrets his actions and agrees to testify against Falcone. After all, if the Waynes resisted al Ghul's economic attack upon Gotham (even if they didn't know they were doing so), it would make sense for him to have ordered their death – only to find it turn against him as a shocked Gotham united behind the martyred Waynes.

Presumably, had he been working for Ra's al Ghul when he shot the Waynes, a remorseful Chill would have offered testimony against al Ghul as well as Falcone. We may, of course, speculate that Chill was simply too afraid to testify against Ra's. Falcone's killing of Chill may even have been directed by al Ghul in some way, though this is utter speculation without much textual support.

Ra's seems to hold his revelation about Bruce's parents back until he was certain

that Bruce wouldn't join him. Ra's seems to know that his revelation here will only cement Bruce's opposition to Ra's. The revelation directly follows an exchange in which Ra's once again invites Bruce to join him and Bruce promises resistance. In response, Ra's signals his henchmen to torch the manor. In some sense, this may be regarded as Ra's al Ghul's final test of his apprentice – even if it's one about coming back into the flock instead of officially joining it in the first place. Such a reading has the benefit of further connecting this act with the first one.

In any case, the revelation that al Ghul previously attacked Gotham and was opposed to Bruce's parents makes all of al Ghul's tests less than complete – after all, even if Bruce had "passed" the tests and joined Ra's, he would only have done so not knowing that by doing so he was aiding the man his parents had unknowingly fought. We can almost imagine another narrative in which Bruce chose differently, only to later discover Ra's al Ghul's previous attack on Gotham and the Waynes' resistance – leading Bruce to reject his former master, albeit later than he does in the given narrative.

Bruce seems remarkably passive as he watches Ra's al Ghul's henchmen set fire to the family estate. His family heritage is burning around him, yet Bruce does nothing.

Act 3, Scene 24, Part 3: Back in Wayne Manor, Bruce Wayne battles Ducard, now revealed to be Ra's al Ghul. Knocking a support down on Bruce, Ra's spares his former protégé because Bruce rescued Ducard in the film's first act. Exiting the mansion, Ra's leaves a guard to prevent Wayne's escape, then takes off in a SWAT truck with the stolen microwave emitter.

As al Ghul knocks the ceiling beam down upon Bruce, the villain echoes a line he said previously about minding one's surroundings. As Ducard, al Ghul used the same trick when he broke the ice beneath Wayne's feet. Batman will later throw the line back at Ra's just prior to letting the villain die.

While Bruce does briefly resist al Ghul's ninja, he is defeated with remarkable speed. While this keeps the plot moving forward, it continues Bruce's remarkable passivity in response to the return of Ra's al Ghul and the villain's revelations. It's almost as if, while he plays it cool, Bruce is so shocked by Ra's al Ghul's return and his words that he can mount no real opposition.

But Bruce's failure to defeat a single ninja has a narrative benefit: it helps prevent any unconscious ninja (who Ra's might abandon) from dying in the fire.

While Bruce's escape from al Ghul's monastery may well have involved numerous deaths, Bruce has come into his own considerably since then – and this new dramatic confrontation between the two, while mirroring the earlier one in the Himalayas, will not entail such problematic carnage.

The fact that Ra's al Ghul has had the microwave emitter in a truck outside the manor during the party can be seen as ironic. When Fox earlier told Bruce about the emitter's disappearance, it presumably was already sitting just outside.

Act 3, Scene 24 Intercuts: Corrupt SWAT officers storm the asylum's control room, unlocking all of the cells. Others free Crane, giving him back his mask. Later, others blow a hole through the wall of Arkham's exercise yard, giving the freed inmates an escape route. Hearing the explosion, Gordon runs outside and learns of the escape from Flass. Gordon orders the bridges separating the Narrows from the rest of Gotham to be raised, but Flass prioritizes capturing the inmates.

These intercut sequences, four in number, numbered only two in the screenplay. The freeing of Crane occurs first in the script, immediately followed by the unlocking of the cells. In the second sequence, the hole is blown to allow the inmates' escape, to which Gordon and Flass immediately respond. In the film as released, this material is resequenced and separated into four intercuts that interrupt the scene in Wayne Manor.

Arkham's inmates escaped *en masse* in 1993's "Knightfall" storyline. That storyline saw the relatively new villain Bane destroy Arkham, freeing its criminals as part of a strategy to defeat Batman. With Batman exhausted from battling the escaped inmates, Bane entered Wayne Manor and broke Batman's back. This forced the relatively new hero Azrael to take over as the new Batman. The storyline was a smash hit, launching the first ongoing *Catwoman* and *Robin* titles. Azrael subsequently went insane, burning bridges with Gordon, altering his costume, and becoming ever darker until he let the villain Abattoir fall to his death. Meanwhile, Bruce Wayne's back was healed (through his girlfriend's super-powers, the weakest portion of the story). After retraining, Wayne defeated Azrael and reclaimed the Batman mantle.

The idea of a super-villain prison releasing all of its inmates would be reused, first in DC's 1995 crossover mini-series *Underworld Unleashed*. Marvel used the idea in the inaugural storyline of *New Avengers*, which was wrapping up as *Batman Begins* hit theatres.

One of the inmates released is Zsaz, the criminal on Falcone's payroll who was shown being transferred to Arkham by Crane. Zsaz was previously seen slaving over Crane's powder with other inmates. He was presumably captured during the raid on Arkham Asylum and put back into a cell. He will also be seen later, loose on the streets of the Narrows. The completeness of this minor character's story is a testament to the film's careful construction.

Lest we think Flass irredeemably bad, he here seems genuinely concerned about the escaped inmates. He may be corrupt, but he doesn't seem thrilled about insane killers running loose on the streets, attacking the people and businesses from which he extorts money. In the comic-book *Year One*, Flass seems far less redeemable: there, the only good thing he does is testify against Falcone, and even that is hardly a selfless act.

Though Flass doesn't seem to go along with Gordon's instructions to raise the bridges, the next time we see the Narrows, the bridges are indeed being raised. It's unclear whether someone else has had the same idea to effectively quarantine the island, or if Gordon has further pursued his idea between scenes.

Act 3, Scene 25: Rachel Dawes awakens in her apartment and finds the antidote nearby.

In the screenplay, this scene is intercut with the confrontation in Wayne Manor. Placing it after that sequence makes good sense, since the scripted version requires that the viewer must follow events in three simultaneous locations: Wayne Manor, Arkham Asylum, and Rachel's apartment. Placed as it is in the film, this brief scene also helps to indicate the passage of time between al Ghul's exit and Alfred's entrance at Wayne Manor.

Just as Batman knocking out Rachel at the end of her visit to the cave recalls Vicki Vale's visit to the Batcave of 1989's *Batman*, so her awakening here recalls Vicki's awakening in that film. There, instead of the antidote, Vicki awakens with information Batman has given her about the Joker's poisoning of Gotham's consumer goods.

Act 3, Scene 26: Alfred arrives at the mansion and uses a golf club to knock out the guard. Inside, Alfred encourages Bruce to free himself, and Bruce does. The two escape down into the cave as the mansion explodes with flames. As the mansion burns above them, Alfred helps inspire Bruce to keep fighting.

Alfred has only rarely ever had to resort to physical force before, though his doing so here is not without precedent. As typical of those instances, his use of a

golf club here – complete with that implement’s upper-class symbolism – is played partly for laughs.

That Bruce wasn’t able to free himself until inspired by Alfred is an instance of the “extra effort” cliché, particularly rife in super-hero comics. The cliché typically involves a hero being all but beaten, then suddenly inspired to fight further, typically as he thinks of the danger to others. The cliché has the advantage of characterizing the hero as noble and selfless, but it often strains credibility: typically, the hero is shown to be beaten terribly until he seems at last defeated, only to have his full strength suddenly return.

While the cliché’s use here isn’t as extreme as many cases, it still strains credibility. If Wayne can lift the support beam so easily, why does Ra’s seem to think it enough to hold him? While seeing Alfred may well be an inspiration, especially if Bruce was seriously thrown off by Ra’s al Ghul reappearing, one would think that the prospect of *burning to death* would be motivation enough. Perhaps Alfred simply didn’t give Bruce enough time to realize the gravity of the situation, though the situation may well be more dire than Bruce would acknowledge: after all, it’s not long after Bruce frees himself that the manor explodes with flames.

Wayne Manor has been destroyed before, most memorably in the climax of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. There, its destruction is triggered by Alfred, following Bruce’s orders. Alfred simultaneously dies of a heart attack, his mission as faithful butler over. That story occurs outside of Batman’s normal continuity, however.

Screenwriter David S. Goyer argued for the importance of the manor’s destruction’s importance in terms of Wayne’s character: I just thought that would be really important for Bruce’s character ... to be responsible for destroying the house that Wayne built. He lives in the shadow not of only his father but also all the Waynes who have come before him. At that point in the film, he very much feels like a failure for having put that all in jeopardy.[\[70\]](#)

Nolan and Goyer worried that DC would not approve, but in a meeting with DC, the company readily agreed.

Safe with Alfred in the cave below the burning Wayne Manor, Bruce laments that he has destroyed his family’s legacy. Alfred claims that “the Wayne legacy is *more* than bricks and mortar.” While the film wants us to agree with Alfred, the reality of the film’s narrative is not so simple.

Indeed, in burning down Wayne Manor, and in the later destruction of Thomas

Wayne's train, we may see the Oedipal complex in action. In simplified Freudian theory, the boy seeks to kill the father in order to marry the mother. But he also seeks to replace the father, to supplant him. That is to say, one must destroy the father in order to become one's own man, one in the father's image but different.

While neither the destruction of Wayne Manor nor the train is a free choice on Bruce's part, it is worth noticing that Bruce doesn't take quick action against the setting of his house aflame. And it will be his plan for Gordon to destroy the train, however practical this choice may be under the circumstances. But however deliberate, the destruction of Thomas Wayne's legacy, so nicely symbolized by the picture burning in the fire, symbolizes Bruce Wayne's different avenue to accomplish his father's mission of helping Gotham.

It is worth noting the dramatic nature of this difference and the corresponding debate in comic-book criticism over Batman's nature. Thomas Wayne's social engineering may be seen as classical liberalism. To the extent that he responded to the city's high crime, he seems to see crime as stemming from poverty. But Bruce Wayne focuses not on poverty but on crime. Bruce seems to see poverty as a product of crime and poor moral choices. Indeed, his solution may be read as quintessentially conservative.

This evokes the debate over the dark version of Batman inaugurated by Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*. That Batman, who debates the morality of *not* having killed the murderous Joker, has even been called fascistic.

Alfred's inspirational words to Bruce at the bottom of the shaft about falling "so that we might better learn to pick ourselves up" echo those Thomas said to the young Bruce after Bruce fell into the cave the first time. Note that, in the screenplay, those words were originally voiced by Alfred himself. It's not altogether clear how Alfred would know the words that Thomas spoke, although we may conjecture that Thomas said them often enough for Alfred to have picked them up.

These echoed words help to connect this scene with the beginning of the first act, particularly with Bruce falling into the cave. Given that Alfred and Bruce come down hard on the ground as they flee the flames overhead, a nice symmetry is therefore established with that primal sequence in the film.

The words and this fall into the cave, moreover, recall the theme of "The Man Who Falls," the comic-book Batman origin story that largely inspired the film's

first act.

Act 3, Scene 27: Rachel crosses a bridge into the Narrows. As Gordon and Flass keep the crowd at bay, Rachel arrives, giving Gordon the antidote. He largely ignores it, signaling for another officer to escort her away. Behind her, the SWAT truck with Ra's al Ghul passes over into the Narrows, the last vehicle to pass before all five bridges into the Narrows are raised.

While Gordon and Flass attempt to control the crowd, Flass points his gun at a citizen and asks if he wants to “see excessive force.” It’s dark humor, funny yet indicative of Gotham’s corruption. Nonetheless, it’s also more evidence that the Flass of *Batman Begins* isn’t entirely bad: he may be extreme, but he does seem to want to control the problem.

Rachel gives Gordon the antidote, but Gordon disregards it in favor of continuing to corral the escaped inmates. This certainly doesn’t bode well for Gotham. Later, Gordon will reconsider, injecting himself – but he will never try to have the antidote manufactured. Moreover, Rachel *doesn’t even ask* him to do so: she seems to have forgotten Batman’s instructions.

Act 3, Scene 28: Along with shots of a monorail driver coming to a stop above the Narrows, we see Batman preparing in the cave, then exiting in the Tumbler. Underneath the stopped monorail, Rachel spots the little boy Batman encountered earlier and protects him – first from the police, then from Ra’s al Ghul, who emerges from his parked SWAT van and activates the microwave emitter. Sewers and pipes explode. Inside Wayne Tower, water operators notice a spike in the Narrows’ water pressure. Ra’s and his men put on gas masks. Flass begins to hallucinate, threatening civilians with his gun. Gordon injects himself with the antidote and tackles Flass.

The elevated train driver simply stops his vehicle and tells everyone to get off. As will later be made clear, this driver works for Ra’s al Ghul.

The boy Rachel meets here is the same boy Batman encounters earlier on a fire escape, just before Batman first confronted Crane and was exposed to fear gas. This is the boy some have speculated might be a future Robin, as previously noted. It’s not clear why he’s on the streets unsupervised, especially at night and during civil unrest: he doesn’t seem to be looking for his parents, though the scene that introduced the boy seemed to suggest his parents consisted of a single, at least verbally abusive mother.

If the Narrows’ water supply exploded through the streets, that would tend to

lower water pressure. How exactly a sudden explosion of the whole city's water will occur should the spike hit the tower is unclear, though necessary for the plot.

While Gordon injects himself, he doesn't seem to feel the need to send the second vial off to be duplicated. In fact, it may well be shattered as Gordon tackles Flass.

Flass, who has been more sympathetic in recent scenes, here returns to menacing the population – now with murder instead of extortion. But he does so only under the influence of the gas, so his actions need not reflect poorly on his character. Nonetheless, these circumstances do allow Gordon and Flass to fight physically, as they do in *Year One* – albeit under different circumstances that cast a poorer light upon Flass.

Act 3, Scene 29: Loeb, on the city side of the bridge, talks by radio with Gordon in the Narrows. As Rachel holds the little boy, Crane arrives in his mask and riding a horse. Batman jumps the river in the Tumbler, then talks to Gordon. Batman reveals the culprits will use the monorail to get the microwave emitter off the Narrows and to Wayne Tower, the hub of the city's water system. Batman asks if Gordon can drive stick. Rachel Tazers the Scarecrow, knocking him unconscious. She then protects the little boy from a mob of escaped inmates, including Zsaz. As Rachel prepares to fire a gun, Batman arrives. Gordon orders the bridge lowered. Batman pulls Rachel and the boy up to a roof and out of harm's way. As Batman leaves them, he repeats a line to Rachel that she told him earlier, effectively revealing his identity.

In the script, the sequence in which Rachel confronts Scarecrow is uninterrupted from the villain's arrival to Rachel's Tazing him. In the film, the sequence is interrupted by Batman's conversation with Gordon, thus increasing the tension and seemingly prolonging the moment of threat. Similarly, Gordon's conversation with Loeb is followed directly by his conversation with Batman. The various scenes are recut in the film as released.

When Gordon requests reinforcements and Loeb refuses, it seems the Commissioner only does so because no more reinforcements are available. Like Flass, Loeb may be corrupt but still wants to help protect Gotham in such a dire emergency.

Rachel protects the little boy much like a parent might. He certainly doesn't seem to have much supervision during the present crisis, and earlier we heard

what seemed like his mother yelling at him. But this scene also suggests Rachel's nurturing character.

The boy drops the optic that Batman gave him. Presumably, the boy's been carrying the device around with him – an indication of his obsession with Batman, also suggested by his subsequent faith that Batman will rescue the pair.

Where the Scarecrow found his horse is unclear, as it's unlikely to have been stabled at Arkham Asylum. But it does provide some nice visuals, letting the horse breathe fire and making the Scarecrow look like a horseman of the Apocalypse.[\[71\]](#)

Crane here has metamorphosed into the Scarecrow, and not just in the film's hallucinogenic visions. Now, doubly dosed with his own fear gas, he seems utterly mad and utterly threatening. The script describes his depiction as that of the "Crown Prince of the Insane." The phrase recalls the Joker, known in recent decades for his homicidal, almost utterly mad character.

Relating this to the comics, Crane's transformation into a truly frightening figure recalls the transition – depicted in *Year One* and *The Long Halloween* – of Gotham from a corrupt city of mobsters to a city of costumed crazies. This is also a theme in *The Dark Knight*. He has rarely been depicted as horrifically as he is in this scene.

Though not made explicit, it would seem a reasonable assumption that the Tumbler uses its rampless jump in order to get over the river into the Narrows. If so, it's a nice gesture, given that the Tumbler's original purpose was to jump over rivers in combat and lay bridges that troops and other equipment could cross.

Batman not only gives new information to Gordon here, but also to us. It hasn't previously been explicit that Ra's al Ghul even intends to target the entire city, instead of just the Narrows, though al Ghul's statements about destroying Gotham City would certainly suggest that Ra's plan is exactly as Batman suspects. Moreover, the information that Ra's will use the train system is also new.

Rachel's use of the Tazer was foreshadowed in her attack by Falcone's men the night Batman captured the gangster on the Gotham docks. There, the Tazer failed to work on Batman. Here, however, the Tazer works, quickly disabling the threatening Scarecrow. Rachel's rapid defeat of Scarecrow, who appears so threatening yet cannot stop the Tazer, recalls nothing so much as Indiana Jones

shooting the swordsman in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, after the swordsman tries to intimidate him with a showy display of prowess.

Rachel's dialogue as she shocks Crane, a pithy reference to shock therapy, recalls a psychiatric practice that has been much criticized and discredited. Shock therapy, the use of electrodes to artificially induce seizures in mental patients as part of their treatment, was once used to treat a variety of mental illnesses, frequently traumatizing the patients. While a pithy line of dialogue, the words thus also recall real-world instances of the kind of psychiatric abuse that Crane takes to a more theatrical extreme.

As Crane is dragged away by his horse, his posture recalls that of the dead policeman dragged by the horse as it rode into the scene. Symbolically, Crane is dead. And, indeed, this is the last we will see of Jonathan Crane during the film, though he will be referenced as still free in the film's final scene and will reappear in *The Dark Knight*.

When threatened by Zsaz and the other inmates, the little boy believes that Batman will rescue him and Rachel, saying that Batman's his friend. Batman indeed has a special relationship with the boy, and it's unclear to what extent this should be read as part of the scant evidence the film gives us of Batman's reception among Gotham populace. If the boy is intended as a Robin-figure, however, his strong belief in Batman is telling.

In comic-book circles, the boy's blind faith recalls an argument associated with the super-hero genre: does the presence of super-heroes lead to impotence among the civilian population? The boy doesn't seem to feel the need to resist the crazed inmates – after all, Batman will save them. Applied to an entire population, such as those in a world with a plethora of super-heroes who almost always win, could be disastrous. While this dynamic of the genre is only very rarely shown in super-hero stories, it is more frequently discussed by writers and critics.

It's not clear whether the boy feels any effects of the gas. He doesn't seem to exhibit any signs of fear or hallucinations. There seems no reason for this, except symbolically, given the child's innocence. Watching the little boy freak out or break down in the chaos of the Narrows would have made for a considerably darker movie.

Gordon's call to order the bridge lowered is another case of a brief bit of dialogue improving upon the screenplay, although this instance is more minor

than the others. Here, the problem being solved is how Gordon got the Tumber over the river – a problem not addressed in the script. Other problems solved by brief dialogue include Finch’s disappearance, mentioned only by Rachel when visiting Wayne Manor on Bruce’s birthday, and the loss of the Narrows, which will be mentioned in the final scene.

Rachel’s near use of a gun here has deep resonance for the Batman mythos, as suggested earlier when Bruce nearly uses a gun to kill Joe Chill. While Bruce may have disdain for guns, Rachel here is clearly acting in self-defense. While Batman preempts Rachel’s use of the gun, her near use of it still constitutes an important symbolic moment.

She attempts to keep the boy from seeing what she thinks will be her shooting a seemingly homicidal Zsaz, who she earlier argued in court should not be declared insane. Her protective comment to the boy – “Don’t peek, OK?” – is remarkably telling. Most obviously, it is a remarkably maternal gesture, complete with childish language designed to keep the boy’s innocence – a mirror of what Batman does, fundamentally, protecting not only the innocent but also, perhaps, becoming Batman to, in some sense, preserve what remains of the inner child within Bruce. Rachel’s line here is also a fine demonstration of Rachel’s ability to keep cool and thoughtful while under threat: this is no beauty who screams girlishly at the first sign of trouble.

Rachel does not, as the boy does, assume Batman will save the two. This is all the more curious given that Batman has previously saved Rachel on two occasions – from Falcone’s men on the elevated train platform and then from Crane in the asylum. Batman has never rescued the boy – at least literally, though his family conditions may be so dire that Batman’s kindness may well be interpreted as a sort of rescue.

While the irony of a crazed inmate attacking the attorney who argued he wasn’t insane, Zsaz’s presence here this further connects the film’s second act with the third.

In the end of this scene, Batman reveals his identity to Rachel by repeating a line that Rachel said to Bruce. In fact, this is a cliché not only of the super-hero genre but of all stories involving characters with alter egos.

Various twists on the idea exist. In fact, the one in *Batman Begins* is already a permutation: the original is assuredly for a character to repeat the same thing that *he* has said while his alter ego. 1992’s *Batman Returns* saw a particularly

unique permutation: there, Bruce Wayne and Selina Kyle mutually reveal their alter egos Batman and Catwoman by repeating the lines *each other* told them, as if in call and response. “Mistletoe’s deadly if you eat it” produces the evocative response “a kiss is even deadlier if you mean it.” Batman and Catwoman thus realize each other’s identity at the same time (leading Selina, wonderfully, to ask if they have to fight now, playing with the notion that they are merely playing roles).

While a cliché, the device is too good to leave out – and is used well in the film. It’s not clear whether the little boy hears Rachel say Bruce’s name as Batman departs.

In the comics, Batman rarely divulges his identity to his girlfriends. It may be worth noting that, in 1989’s *Batman*, Batman revealed his identity to that film’s love interest, Vicki Vale.

Act 3, Scene 30: Batman glides to the monorail platform, where he confronts Ra’s. On the platform, al Ghul’s ninja knock Batman off, landing around the hero on a roof. Elsewhere, Gordon gets into the Tumbler. On the roof, the ninja knock Batman down to the street below. A resident picks up Batman’s dropped grappling gun. Overhead, Ra’s starts the elevated train moving with the emitter on board. On the street below, a hallucinating mob attacks Batman, winning until Batman grabs his discarded grappling gun and fires it, catching the moving monorail.

After Batman reveals his identity to Rachel, he leaps off the building, falling. At the end of this scene, he falls again – this time at the hands of al Ghul’s ninja. Like many other instances of Bruce or Batman falling in the film, this recalls “The Man Who Falls,” which uses falling as a theme.

The shots of the streets of the Narrows, seen as Batman glides overhead, are particularly important for dramatizing the general insanity of the area. Because they are not given the antidote, we may guess that at least some of these residents of the Narrows may become the costumed crazies that so popular Batman stories. If so, the fact that they see Batman, gliding overhead, as if some kind of “black dragon” (as noted in the script) may be significant.

I must confess that having Gordon drive the Tumbler stuck me as a mistake. It’s essentially comic relief amidst the melodrama of the film’s climax, and such comedic play with the Tumbler might have felt more at home in one of the sequels.

As Batman lands among the mob of crazed Narrows residents, we again get glimpses from their perspective of Batman as a demonic monster. While some in Batman's world have regarded him as a monster, literally or figuratively, such a perspective is not particularly common. As with the earlier hallucination of an evil Batman gliding above the population, we may read this as helping to establish a number of crazed residents of Gotham who hate Batman – and who may well later become Batman's eccentric costumed villains.

In the script, it's unclear how Batman could have connected his grapple to the moving train. It's certainly a lucky shot, given how distracted Batman is at the time he makes the shot – not to mention that the target is moving. Most perplexing, perhaps, is the fact that the train seems to be roughly above Batman, despite it having already begun moving. Since it is the same train Batman fell off, we would have to believe that Batman somehow got *ahead* of the train in his fall, his fighting with the ninja, and the commotion on the streets.

The film as released helps avoid this confusion by clearly showing that the train has not yet picked up speed. Though the passage of time can be confusing in film, it would seem that Ra's has only just started the train. It may still be a lucky shot, but the magic of cinema severely reduces its ridiculousness.

To be sure, all of this is at worst a minor flaw, one not likely to bother most viewers.

Act 3, Scene 31: Gordon races the Tumbler across the bridge and past Loeb. As the monorail passes into the city, manhole covers and fire hydrants explode below, near Loeb. In Wayne Tower, the technicians note that the water pressure explosions are coming towards them. Holding onto the grappling gun's line, Batman finally gets the gun secured on his belt and shoots up to the monorail. Inside Wayne Tower, the technicians realize that the city's entire water system will explode if the pressure build-up reaches them. Below the monorail, Gordon drives the Tumbler. On the train, Batman smashes al Ghul's sword and rams it into the train's brakes, destroying them. Below, Gordon finally gets the Tumbler to blow up the elevated train's support strut. As they see the demolished track ahead, Batman beats Ra's but refuses to kill the villain, jumping free instead. The train crashes to the ground, destroying the emitter and apparently killing Ra's. In Wayne Tower, employees note that the water pressure has dropped. Above the train's burning wreckage, above Gordon and the Tumbler, Batman glides through the air.

The scene in which Gordon races the Tumbler over the bridge was added after the screenplay was drafted. It includes no such scene, and the addition helps solve the problem of how Gordon got the Tumbler over the river.

The problem, essentially, is that the script does not show the Tumbler jump over the river out of the Narrows. Given that the script does not show a bridge lowering, the Tumbler would have to make the jump, and we saw Batman doing so earlier to get into the Narrows. Making the jump would require Gordon to have a degree of proficiency driving the Tumbler that he clearly does not have. If we pursue this line of thinking following the script, Gordon would never have gotten off the Narrows, Tumbler notwithstanding – or it would have taken him so long to figure out how to get the Tumbler to achieve the jump that he could not have outraced the train in order to destroy it.

The solution offered in the film as released raises its own, lesser problem. Having Gordon order the bridge lowered requires that the officers operating the bridge listen to him. And, as suggested by Loeb's protests as Gordon drives by, Gordon doesn't have the authority. After all, the order to raise the bridges in the first place was clearly implemented with great weight. Still, while this may be a problem, it's a lesser one than leaving Gordon with the Tumbler in the Narrows.

The explosion of manhole covers and fire hydrants in the train's wake is a nice touch, as it dramatizes the effects of the microwave emitter. Nonetheless, it begs the previously—discussed questions about how the emitter and Gotham's water system work.

In one of the shots inside the water control room in Wayne Tower, a technician says that all of Gotham's water supply will explode if the emitter's effect reaches the tower. While it adds to the drama of the climax, this makes little sense. The emitter's effect is clearly localized, and the fact that water is pumped from the tower to all of Gotham would make no difference: the pipes around the tower would merely explode, venting the pressure caused by the water's evaporation.

Batman hanging from the train strains credulity in two respects. First, the grappling cable hangs under the train, where it clearly would be hitting the elevated support struts. Second, the acceleration and centripetal forces generated by the fast-moving monorail would almost certainly be too much for a human to continue holding onto the line. In its defense, the film does do a good job of showing Batman straining, but the ability of any human being to not only hold

on but also attach the grappling gun to his belt is very doubtful.

It is worth noting, in considering *Batman Begins* in context with the other superhero films of prior years, that a crisis on an elevated train also provided a major scene in 2004's *Spider-Man 2*.

It's also worth mentioning that we do not hear Batman's instructions to Gordon. Batman must have told Gordon (off-screen, following his asking the cop to drive the Tumbler) to destroy the train's support structure, given that Gordon does so with singular focus. Batman using al Ghul's broken sword to disable the train's brakes also indicates that he has planned the train's derailment and doesn't want Ra's to be able to prevent that derailment by timely braking. As it will turn out, there would not have been time to brake anyway. Batman saying "Who said anything about stopping it?" (meaning the train) should thus be read not as an improvisation on the spot, but rather as the revelation of Batman's earlier plan, hidden even from us as viewers.

During his fight with al Ghul, a number of elements recall Bruce's earlier training under the villain.

Ra's claims that Bruce is "just an ordinary man in a cape." In other words, that Bruce has not become the symbol that the villain, as Ducard, promised to empower Bruce to become when they first met in a Bhutanese prison. It is apt that Ra's would not see Batman as a symbol: the type of symbol Ducard had in mind was the League of Shadows, feared embodiments of stern justice, against which Bruce rebelled. Returning to Gotham, Bruce echoed the notion of becoming a symbol, transforming that symbol from a secret order into a sole vigilante. Naturally, Ra's sees Bruce only as a "man in a cape": he does not understand that Bruce has reinvented al Ghul's notion of becoming a feared symbol of justice.

Before Batman leaves Ra's to die, the hero throws Ducard's words back at him, telling the villain to "mind his surroundings." Ra's earlier used the phrase not only as Ducard, on the ice during Bruce's training, but also in Wayne Manor when he pinned Bruce beneath a support beam. That Bruce has *learned* the lesson, rather than merely being snippy, is indicated by Batman having planned the derailment beforehand, issuing orders to Gordon to that effect – though we are not privy to that conversation.

Batman considers abandoning that plan when he has to decide whether or not to kill Ra's. Ra's makes this mirroring explicit, taunting Bruce to kill the villain.

A foe making such taunts, while rarely so explicit in real life, has become a commonplace in film and literature. In not killing Ra's just as he refused to kill the imprisoned murderer in the Himalayas, Bruce triumphs over Ra's in a more complete way than merely killing the villain: Bruce has not only learned the lesson of minding one's surroundings but has bested Ra's while becoming a larger-than-life symbol his own way – including a refusal to kill.

Batman's final words to Ra's al Ghul draw a distinction between "killing" and "not saving" that recalls the Catholic distinction between sins of commission and sins of omission. Sins of commission are sins one actively commits – such as murder. Sins of omission are passive sins – such as standing by while a murder is committed. Batman essentially justifies the death of Ra's al Ghul as a sin of omission.

But the distinction can be slight. Because Batman set up the conditions of the train's derailment, and left the villain with no obvious escape, it could easily be argued that Batman's is indeed a sin of commission. If we are right about Batman's plans to derail the train – and we must be, given Gordon's action – Batman saying that he doesn't have to *save* Ra's falls rather flat: Batman has established the conditions that require Ra's life to be saved in the first place.

Understood thusly, Batman *does* kill Ra's al Ghul. He may refuse to deliver the killing stroke on the train but is just as guilty – he merely doesn't want to get his hands dirty, or to watch Ra's die and know he has himself to blame. Bruce's distinction between "killing" and "not saving" is ultimately a rationalization: Ra's has, ironically, succeeded in making his protégé take a life.

This should not be understood as an error on the film's part. Rather, it is part of the complex moral and psychological portrait that it paints of Bruce Wayne. As director Nolan has noted, Batman's actions walk a thin moral line – one he did not want to resolve in any simple fashion for the viewer.

The script notes that the burning train and surrounding carnage serve as a "funeral pyre" for Ra's. The phrase aptly suggests the antiquated nature of Ra's and his League of Shadows, known for sacking cities throughout history. When Ra's died in the comics, in *Batman: Death and the Maidens*, his body was indeed ritually burned.

With the destruction of the monorail, the main action of the third act is now complete.

The main action of the film ends rather abruptly, and we are not treated to scenes

in which Batman gets the Tumbler back from Gordon, for example. Instead, Gordon simply waves as Batman passes overhead.

Epilogue 1: Later, Earle finds Fox presiding over a board meeting and learns that Wayne has had him replaced by Fox. Over the speakerphone, Earle challenges Bruce's authority to make such decisions – and Bruce reveals that he has purchased the majority of his company's newly public shares.

In this scene, Lucius Fox achieves the role in Wayne Enterprises that he has in the comics: running the company, leaving Bruce to focus on his activities as Batman.

Both Fox and Wayne seem to enjoy rubbing the victory in Earle's face by echoing lines said earlier by the arrogant Earle. Fox echoes Earle's "Didn't you get the memo?" – said by Earle when he fired Fox after inquiring about the missing microwave emitter. Earle's comment there seemed particularly smug, and Fox's turnabout seems utterly fair. Bruce echoes Earle's "it's all a bit technical" – said here about Wayne's purchase of the company through various intermediaries, but said earlier by Earle at Bruce's birthday party as Earle answered Bruce's question about who had purchased the company's newly public shares. There, Earle seemed a little less smug, merely treating Bruce as the playboy Bruce was acting like.

Earle is really the fourth villain of the film, after Ra's al Ghul, Scarecrow, and Falcone – and it's here that this fourth villain is defeated. During screenings in movie theatres, the audience cheered and celebrated Fox's echoed line and Earle's defeat – interestingly, much more so than that of Ra's al Ghul just minutes before. Partly, this is the result of Ra's al Ghul's death being so dramatic: one is more likely to hold one's breath as one watches the train crashing than to celebrate. But, clearly, Earle is the villain the audience most loved to hate: while not as villainous as Ra's al Ghul or Scarecrow, he seemed smug and wasn't particularly three-dimensional. But the audience's reaction may also have to do with the financial scandals noted earlier in discussing whether Earle should be seen as particularly villainous: after the scandals of Enron and WorldCom, the American moviegoing audience would seem to prefer city—destroying monsters over a corporate president.

Before Bruce gets the call from the board room, Alfred shows him a newspaper with the headline "DRUNKEN BILLIONAIRE BURNS DOWN HOME" – moved to page eight, while Batman gets the front page. It's the last of the film's

many funny moments, but – like many of the other such moments – has deeper resonance.

Most obviously, it plays on the radical distinction between the reality of who Bruce Wayne is and the public perception of Wayne as a playboy. Batman has just saved Gotham and is being celebrated, while Bruce is depicted as so drunkenly irresponsible that he had destroyed his family mansion. Bruce's cavalier, amused response to the headline also nicely embodies how much he seems to care for Bruce Wayne's public perception, and so the final comedic moment nicely embodies a meaningful element of the film.

Such a public perception does have its consequences, however, especially once it reaches this level of perception of Wayne's irresponsibility. Bruce being accused of burning down his home may lead to problems with insurance paying for the fire – if Bruce even has insurance. Wayne Enterprises is also a publicly traded company, even if Bruce has bought most of the shares, and it doesn't help the stock price to have Bruce depicted in such a light – though Bruce may well not care. More importantly, however, there are things Bruce Wayne can accomplish that Batman cannot. It is precisely for this reason that, in the comics, Bruce is a little more careful with his public persona. For example, it was Bruce Wayne the American aristocrat who was able to help plead Gotham's case to Congress when the government cut Gotham off from the United States during the previously—mentioned year-long *No Man's Land* storyline.

Symbolically, the pushing of Bruce Wayne to page eight in favor of Batman also represents the relative importance of the two personae. It has become an axiom of the Batman mythos that, unlike most other super-heroes who clearly *are* their civilian self and *pretending* to be a masked alter ego, it is Bruce Wayne who is the phony alter ego. The theory goes that Bruce Wayne died with his parents: even traveling the world, he was already driven, and the persona of Bruce Wayne exists solely as a cover. *Batman Begins* holds a different point of view on the character: the public Bruce Wayne is indeed a farce, but Bruce is clearly acting as Batman as well – acting tough, for example, and lowering his voice. There is a third persona to the character in *Batman Begins*: the *real* Bruce Wayne who only Alfred, and later Rachel, really see – one who is playing a role as the public Bruce Wayne but who is also playing a role, albeit to a lesser extent, as Batman.

Epilogue 2: At the ruins of Wayne Manor, Rachel arrives and talks to Bruce. Relieved that she no longer has to worry for her directionless, playboy friend,

she nonetheless reveals that she doesn't want a relationship: Bruce Wayne, she says, is the mask – and Gotham needs Batman, at least for the present. As she leaves, Bruce tells her that he'll rebuild the mansion. After she leaves, Alfred suggests that they make improvements to the cave entrance in the process.

When Rachel arrives, we see the ruins of the greenhouse in which Rachel and Bruce played in the film's opening scene. This emphasizes the manor's destruction, as the location in which we first saw Bruce – and the only place we saw him act as an innocent child – has been reduced to ruins. But there is also a sense of completion here, and of rebuilding: the cycle started with that first scene is complete, and in some sense Bruce's childhood has come to an end with the greenhouse.

Rachel's dialogue makes clear that she has been hiding feelings for Bruce all these years – and that, when she heard of Bruce's return, she secretly hoped for a relationship. This is new info, strictly speaking, but information that the viewer has likely already figured out, particularly when Rachel dismisses District Attorney Finch's advances.

Critics complained about Rachel Dawes, citing Katie Holmes as the weak link in an excellent cast and grumbling about the lack of chemistry between her and Bale during their shared scenes. As previously noted, however, she represents the life Bruce might have had if his parents hadn't been murdered – in another life, he might have married Rachel. This scene further makes it clear that she isn't really the film's love interest, despite seeming to fill that role as the film's sole prominent female: after Bruce's parents died, he was set on a course that preempted any relationship with Rachel. What's notable isn't their romance, but the lack thereof.

A comparison might here be of use. 2002's *Spider-Man* also ended with the protagonist and his love interest *not* getting together for a similar reason: the man's super-hero career. In that case, however, the woman doesn't know the man's super-hero identity and *he* pushes her away for the greater good. Here, Rachel knows but is the one to declare a relationship impossible in the wake of super-heroic responsibilities. It may well be a wise choice, but it can come off as *too* wise: when Mary Jane learns Peter Parker's identity in 2004's *Spider-Man 2*, she decides on a relationship anyway – in a move that may not be smart, but is certainly human.

On the negative side, that humanity is notably absent in Rachel, and there

certainly isn't the chemistry between her and Bruce that there is between Peter Parker and Mary Jane. Bruce and Rachel's relationship is more cerebral, remaining more like aged childhood friends than lovers. On the positive side, this can be seen as illustrating exactly what Rachel's character is about, and a cerebral relationship between a man and a woman is a rare Hollywood beast indeed.

Alfred's claim that Bruce's father would be proud of him feels a bit too pat. As previously discussed in connection with the fire, Bruce and Thomas Wayne vastly differ in substantial ways. The stethoscope that Bruce digs out of the rubble is symbolically ambiguous in this regard: it may be read either as Bruce's rediscovery of his father or as evidence of Bruce's destruction of his father's legacy.

The improvements to the cave alluded to here suggest the complexity of the Batcave, as typically depicted, in contrast to the limited cave environment seen in this film. Whereas *Batman Begins* does well at showing the creation of Batman's costume, it leaves the Batcave relatively sparse – a fact this ending recognizes.



Epilogue 3: Batman arrives on the roof of police headquarters, where Gordon has prepped a searchlight to project a bat-shape. Gordon reveals that, in the wake of recent events, he's been promoted to Lieutenant and that the police are no longer hunting Batman. Gordon adds that, while crooked cops are scared and people are hopeful, the Narrows has been lost and Crane is still at large. Moreover, he suggests that criminals will respond to Batman by escalating into costumed antics themselves. He then reveals a playing card found at the scene of a robbery / homicide: a joker. As Batman leaves, Gordon tries to thank him –

which Batman says is unnecessary.

1989's *Batman* also ended with the revelation of the Batsignal, though this version is grounded in the earlier scene in which Falcone was strapped to a searchlight on the docks, projecting a bat-like shape.

In *Year One*, Gordon begins as a lieutenant. The end of that story sees Flass turn state's evidence, testifying against Commissioner Loeb. He is promoted to captain at very end of the story. Here, Gordon is a sergeant as Wayne returns to Gotham and is only promoted to lieutenant at the story's end.

While Batman is no longer being hunted by the police, he's far from a deputy of the police department. In the comics, since the reversal away from camp in the 1960s, Batman has held a quasi-legal status: unofficially tolerated by the police, while still an unlicensed vigilante.

Gordon tells us that "the Narrows is lost." With this phrase, he resolves the film's largest unresolved plot thread, revealing what happened to the Narrows. While Bruce has sent Fox to produce more antidote, Gordon has failed to order the same despite being given a vial for that purpose. Only Bruce, Rachel, and Gordon have been inoculated. Whatever antidote Fox may have produced, we certainly don't see it distributed; nor do we see Gordon get out of the Tumbler.

In fact, Gordon's phrase here about the Narrows was not included in the screenplay, which left the situation in the Narrows unresolved. Nonetheless, the single phrase may not seem fully satisfactory. Let us consider exactly what "the Narrows is lost" really means.

The climax of the film makes it clear enough how the *whole* of Gotham is saved, but the areas affected by the gas are presumably left to go permanently insane. We're therefore left to imagine how the poor people of the Narrows – going through widespread hallucinations, panic, and madness – manage to survive any more sane than Falcone after being exposed to Scarecrow's gas. Seen this way, Batman's victory can seem hollow, pyrrhic.

It is possible, however, that the loss of the Narrows may be establishing how Gotham, dominated by mobsters and corruption during *Batman Begins*, will later become a home to the costumed lunatics that so characterize Batman's adventures. Perhaps, then, this is less a loose end than a rather sophisticated attempt to set up the film's sequels. Perhaps the film's realistic take on Batman, keeping the character's essential elements but adding explanations, even extends to providing an explanation for a city full of eccentric and dangerous lunatics. If

this were intended, however, one would expect a short scene or a line of dialogue about the hundreds or thousands of now permanently insane Gotham residents – especially given how well other plot threads are wrapped up in the epilogues.

On a more charitable note, the loss of the Narrows may be seen as adding something important to the story. Batman is a truly heroic figure in many ways, but it is crucial that he not be perfect. He is, at heart, simply a self-actualized individual – someone who, however questionably, dedicates his life to fighting the sort of violent crime that claimed his parents. This humanity, however often invisible behind Batman's planning and cool exterior, is all the more significant in a story about Batman's origins, in which he is still that wounded human making himself – more by sheer force of will than by his family money – into a force of nature. It *adds* something that his victory over Ra's al Ghul wasn't total. Victories usually entail losses, and even Batman isn't perfect. It is, perhaps, how we deal with such losses – whether we let them defeat us or not – that truly defines the hero.

Gordon's argument that villains will start adopting eccentric costumed personae is not only a nod towards potential sequels, providing a justification for their moving away from this film's more realistic, non-costumed villains. In fact, it's a reference to an argument within the super-hero genre and an answer that become a fully-fledged literary theory.

One of the dilemmas of the genre is the presence of copious costumed villains in cities where heroes are located, yet their apparent lack in other locations. Batman's Gotham and Superman's Metropolis both teem with bizarre criminals. Upon visiting some small town, a super-hero will almost inevitably encounter a super-villain – out to rob, for example, the town's single bank. Yet it's rare that a super-hero hears of a super-villain attack in such a location unless that hero's already there. Despite rare attempts at letting super-villains star, there's just little narrative use for a super-villain without a super-hero to stop him. Such may be the requirements of the genre, but for an audience that expects increasing levels of realism, it's become quite the conundrum.

This situation has led some to wonder whether super-heroes effectively *create* their villains. In some cases, this creation is literal: a character might, typically through misreading a scene, blame a hero for some personal tragedy, thus triggering that character's adoption of a super-villain persona. But most super-villains don't have such origins. In such cases, the idea is that they *wouldn't*

have thought of becoming a crazed super-villain were it not for the hero's presence. Thus, the hero *creates* his foes.

While this argument has been pursued by comic-book creators and readers, comics frequently introduce such theories into the texts themselves. It is not uncommon for a character to off-handedly complain that the hero's existence caused the tide of costumed criminals that followed his debut. The fullest exploration of this probably occurred in Rick Veitch's run on *Swamp Thing*, which occasionally featured a pop psychiatrist who made such arguments – and even visited Arkham Asylum.

In the case of Batman's early years, this argument has actually been dramatized. *Batman: Year One* features Batman battling mobsters: Catwoman appears, and is certainly eccentric, but is hardly a super-criminal. Moreover, she's clearly influenced in coming out as Catwoman by observing Batman. Jeph Loeb's *Batman: The Long Halloween* took as one of its central premises the transition from a mobster-dominated Gotham to one with super-villains. While that story begins with a number of super-villains already in play, this transition certainly was dramatized to some extent. So not only does Gordon's comment provide the cinematic audience with its first glimpse into this particular debate or strain within the super-hero genre, but that strain has particular resonance within Batman comic books.

This leads nicely into discussion of the joker playing card. While *Year One* features Catwoman as its only super-villain (and even that is a limited instance), it ends with Gordon waiting for Batman to arrive. Gordon's narration reveals that "somebody's threatened to poison the Gotham reservoir. / Calls himself the Joker." While borrowing from this ending, and the Joker is not seen in either narrative, *Batman Begins* goes further, showing Batman's arrival and the resulting conversation. That the Joker's presence resulted from Batman's is implicit in *Year One*; in *Batman Begins*, Gordon makes it explicit. The playing card is new to the film, but it illustrates the eccentricity of this new criminal – an eccentricity visible not only in the presence of the card, but in its vaguely antiquated style.

It's not entirely clear, from *The Dark Knight*, what the Joker was doing around the time of the conclusion of *Batman Begins*. Presumably, he was committing various crimes, though he probably had not yet begun pressuring Gotham's surviving mobs into hiring him. The Joker gives alternate versions of his own origins in the second film, so his connection, if any, to the events of *Batman*

Begins remains unknown. He might not be crazy enough to have been a victim in the Narrows, and it's not entirely clear what role Batman played in his choice to don make-up and use the Joker card as his theme.

End Titles: With the film complete, the titles at last roll.

As Batman swoops into the camera, the film suddenly cuts to a black screen with the title “Batman Begins” – a dramatic move which reminds us that the film did not include opening titles. It’s as if the title is employed as the film’s final statement. Batman has begun, crafting himself into a legend, and we have all been privy to that process.

But all of this is only a beginning, only prologue.

Erasing Burton: *Batman Begins*, Realism, and the Anxiety of Influence

In celebrating *Batman Begins* and its realism, many statements have been made derogating the previous films starring the character. Criticism of the campy 1960s TV show, and the film that spun out of it, is nothing new. Among champions of the character, however, criticism of Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman* arrived only with the advent of *Batman Begins* and its heightened emphasis upon realism. Previously, the three films that followed it were seen as increasingly diminishing the character and the film franchise. But it was director Joel Schumacher's *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman and Robin* (1997) that were singled out for almost religious disdain – so much so that, in comics circles, Schumacher was almost never mentioned without disparagement. Schumacher even apologized for his films and all but publicly begged for another chance to get it right.

It therefore surprised me, in discussion of *Batman Begins*, to hear Burton's two films – in particular, his original – tarred with the same brush previously reserved for Schumacher. The previous four films were routinely called campy, if not outright silly and unrealistic. When members of the media did so, it could sometimes be chalked up to an equivocation between all four films – a lack of distinction between Burton and Schumacher, perhaps aided by the fact that Schumacher's films had been most recent. But, as *Batman Begins* neared release, an increasing number of comics and film professionals began making the same equivocation.

Consider James Mottram's introduction to the *Batman Begins* screenplay. He states that Nolan "eschews the high-camp theatrics particularly prevalent in the ABC 1960s TV series starring Adam West and the four preceding feature films."[\[72\]](#) Here, then, is total equivocation – not just between the four previous films but between them and the 1960s series! A number of media commentators similarly mentioned the 1960s series right along with the previous four films.

Director Christopher Nolan, in his interview in the same volume, seems to agree with the interviewer's assertion that Nolan's is "the opposite direction to Burton."[\[73\]](#) He describes Burton's Gotham City as "hyper-stylized" and his own Gotham as "gritty" and "not glamorous."[\[74\]](#) Of course, Burton's Gotham *was* highly stylized – but a city having a gothic style is not itself unrealistic.

Moreover, Burton's Gotham wasn't glamorous, nor without its gritty elements: in fact, it seemed a city in which the administration was helpless to combat routine crime. When District Attorney Harvey Dent says on TV that he wants to make Gotham safe for "decent people," Jack Napier says that "decent people shouldn't live here." Burton's Gotham was highly stylized, but it distinctly *wasn't* the happy, glamorous place of the 1960s TV show – nor was it Schumacher's stylized Gotham where vehicles could drive down exaggerated portions of bizarre gothic architecture. Nolan's Gotham may well be even more gritty, and he took praiseworthy pains to film in Chicago in order to make Gotham City more realistic, but his Gotham has some stylized elements as well: for example, the elevated trains running through Wayne Tower.

To his credit, while Nolan says Burton's work wasn't for him, he admits that "what Tim Burton did could certainly be considered visionary."^[75] Nolan explains that Burton's challenge was "convincing a cinema audience" – one "who remembers ... the TV show" – "that you could have a 'cool' Batman film."^[76] And Nolan ably explains that Burton's 1989 original just wasn't Batman's "origin story," adding that he "felt like there was a version of *Batman* that never got made in 1979 ... when Dick Donner made *Superman* in 1978."^[77] While Nolan's language could be considered backhanded praise, his main point is that Burton made a cool movie but not the definitive origin tale that he wanted to make – one comparable to 1978's lionized *Superman*.

In interviews around the release of *Batman Begins*, actor Christian Bale echoed these sentiments, stating his desire to play the definitive Batman as Christopher Reeve had played the definitive Superman. There, too, the previous Batman films were criticized in order to open the possibility of *Batman Begins* being in some way "definitive": Bale had to explain that the previous Batman actors hadn't possessed that "definitive" quality. Michael Keaton, mostly known at the time for his comedic roles, was certainly a very controversial choice for Batman when he was cast – especially to those who worried the film would have a silly, campy tone. But most felt that he proved himself, and he remains the definitive Batman for many moviegoers. And while Val Kilmer's performance as Batman in *Batman Forever* won little praise, some have praised George Clooney's work in the same role in *Batman and Robin*, even as they strongly criticize the film.

David Goyer, who Nolan admits knows comics better, is more careful in his criticism of Burton: "I liked the first of the previous films. But I felt the later films became more akin to the TV show" – in other words, campy.^[78] But

while Goyer is impressively modest here, focusing on how Batman's been depicted realistically for decades in the comics, he doesn't give himself enough credit: he knows that Burton's Batman wasn't camp, but doesn't take credit for *Batman Begins* being more realistic – which it is.

What we're dealing with here isn't a simple dichotomy between campy material and realistic material. Rather, we're looking at a continuum between the two – a spectrum of options. On the one extreme is the 1960s television show. Indeed, certain 1950s and early 1960s Batman comics may be seen as even more unrealistic than the 1960s TV show: in many of those stories, Batman cavorted with various bizarre extraterrestrials and developed a string of colorful alternate uniforms. On the other extreme is *Batman Begins*. But while *Batman Begins* is more realistic than most of Batman's comic-book appearances, even in today's generally pro-realism comic-book market, the film is not without its unrealistic elements: the microwave emitter used to partially vaporize Gotham's water supply comes immediately to mind.

The previous four films each fall somewhere between the two extremes, with 1989's *Batman* falling closest to *Batman Begins* and *Batman and Robin* falling closest to the 1960s TV series. I will spend little time defending Schumacher's two films from the charge of camp, though I would like to note that they remain enjoyable. There's nothing *wrong* with camp, even if one prefers a more serious Batman, and I feel that time has actually helped Schumacher's films because one is more likely to approach them as they are instead of bringing one's anti-camp baggage. Schumacher's two films feel sort of like what one imagines a big budget action movie directed by John Waters or Pedro Almodóvar would look like – which is hardly a criticism, though it helps to know what one's getting. In any case, my focus will remain on Tim Burton's work.

To be sure, 1989's *Batman* did have its unrealistic elements. No explanation is given for Batman's costume, headquarters, car, or plane – though it's clear enough that he's rich and has somehow manufactured them. Gotham City is a timeless wonderland, filled with Gothic-inspired architecture – and, while Gotham is celebrating its 200th anniversary, everything from the cars to the style of telephones suggests that the film is set in some previous decade. The Joker's fall into chemicals, and his resulting disfigurement, aren't exactly realistic – though this is true to the comics original and not utterly beyond possibility. He takes over Gotham's television broadcasts without explanation – though this is a familiar genre move. And, in the film's climax, the Joker downs Batman's plane

with a single shot from a pistol with a long barrel – though it's not entirely clear what sort of ammunition it might be carrying.

Overall, however, 1989's *Batman* was notable for its realism, not the lack thereof. If Nolan's right that Burton's job was to convince people that Batman could be cool in the wake of the 1960s TV show, Burton also had to convince the world that Batman might be stylized but wasn't campy. Compared to the Batman known outside of the comic books, Burton's 1989 original was a stunning manifesto in favor of realism.

In fact, Michael Uslan, executive producer of *Batman Begins*, was crucial in bringing the previous four Batman films to the screen. If Nolan laments that a Batman origin film wasn't created around 1978, when Superman was getting such treatment, it wasn't due to any failing on Uslan's part: the producer had been working for around a decade to bring a Batman film to screen before 1989's *Batman*. Part of his vision was always that Batman be more realistic, in accordance with Batman comic books since the 1960s. In the late 1970s and the 1980s, this was a near impossible task: not only did the studio reject that the audience could accept a non-camp Batman in the wake of the 1960s TV show, but the studio didn't understand comic books. In the wake of Marvel's successful films following 2000's *X-Men*, as well as films based on non-superhero comics such as *Road to Perdition*, Hollywood has come to understand comics as a world of source material. But Uslan was once told that a Batman film would never succeed since the film *Annie* had flopped; when Uslan asked why, he was told that they were both based on comics – as if there were no difference between a newspaper comic strip about a rich little girl with a cute dog and Batman comics.

As 1989's *Batman* was being prepped, it was always intended as a turn towards the realism of Batman comics. Uslan has recalled his initial horror at the casting of comedian Michael Keaton – until Burton showed Uslan the actor's excellent dramatic performance in *Clean and Sober*. Through later films such as *Ed Wood* and *Mars Attacks*, Burton came to be known as one of Hollywood's eccentric directors of the weird, and he had already directed Keaton in the classic offbeat supernatural comedy *Beetlejuice*. But, as later interviews made clear, he had read Batman comics including *The Dark Knight Returns* and clearly understood the dark, quasi-realistic vision he was supposed to bring to *Batman*.

To be sure, 1992's *Batman Returns*, while still directed by Tim Burton, is considerably less realistic than Burton's 1989 original. Just as Batman's flying

Batwing appears without warning in the 1989 film, so a Batboat appears without warning in the 1992 film. Gotham remains just as stylized, but now the ambiguous timeframe is made explicitly the present as Batman uses compact disks.

The Penguin, one of the film's villains, seems to possess electronic devices without explanation, including a spinning ball that lets him control the Batmobile and helmets that seemingly let him control his army of penguins, who are outfitted with missiles on their backs. Batman unrealistically punches through the floor of the Batmobile to disconnect the car's control device, which the Penguin controls through a tiny mock-up of the Batmobile that looks like a silly video game accessory. Batman and Alfred block and then take control of the signal that lets the Penguin control his tuxedoed army.

Catwoman, the film's other costumed villain, is less unrealistic but still seems vaguely supernatural. While not as bizarre as the Catwoman of 2005's disastrous film *Catwoman*, she nonetheless seems to really have nine lives – in fact, her counting them down becomes one of the repeated elements of the film.

We may guess that the increase in unrealistic qualities between *Batman* and *Batman Returns* had something to do with Tim Burton's increase in power between the two films. Burton, an eccentric known for his gothic visions, had only directed two feature films when he was given *Batman*. After *Batman*'s success and that of *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), Burton had a lot more sway over *Batman Returns*. But even its unrealistic elements paled in comparison to Joel Schumacher's subsequent two sequels – which Warner Bros. reportedly dictated be less dark after *Batman Returns* failed to perform at the level of Burton's original.

The four Batman films prior to *Batman Begins* thus began in relatively realistic fashion and drifted increasingly back to camp – even as the comics remained just as quasi-realistic, if not becoming slightly more so. Nolan, Goyer, Bale, and others are right that *Batman Begins* is decidedly more realistic than the previous films, but the previous films are not cut of the same cloth: there's a world of difference between 1989's *Batman* and 1997's *Batman and Robin*. It's enough to say that 1989's *Batman* didn't go far enough in terms of its realism, that it didn't include enough in terms of origins, and that the whole series acquired a certain degree of taint from the Schumacher films that needed to be swept under the carpet. (One might add, of course, that the realism of *Batman Begins* goes beyond that of the comics, even as *Batman Begins* ultimately puts being a

dramatic action-thriller above the goal of being utterly realistic.) So why equivocate between all four previous Batman films? Why denigrate Burton's *Batman* along with Schumacher's costumes and their oft-cited nipples?

The most obvious answer is that, as previously stated, the whole film series had been tainted by the bad taste left by Schumacher's efforts. If Nolan is right that Burton had the difficult task of making Batman seem cool in the wake of the 1960s TV show, Nolan had the difficult task of erasing the cinematic audience's memory of *Batman and Robin*, just eight years prior. Just as Batman has been through various and contradictory incarnations in the comics, so too has he in film – and each new version must in some way erase, or overcome, previous ones.

But there is another explanation for the erasure of Burton's *Batman*: it is a good movie, still enjoyed by legions of viewers. Moreover, Burton remains a popular director – as evidenced by his hit film *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which debuted almost exactly one month after *Batman Begins*. Burton might not be to everyone's taste – his self-indulgence at the expense of plot and his repetition over his career have drawn some criticism – but few would argue that he is other than a cinematic visionary.

For this reportedly \$150 million relaunch of the Batman film franchise, therefore, Burton's *Batman* is a threat – especially given that the new film takes a different direction, ignoring Burton's work in favor of a new cinematic continuity.

All of this strongly recalls the literary concept known as “the anxiety of influence.” Harold Bloom invented the idea in his 1973 book *The Anxiety of Influence*. Based largely on Bloom's study of the Romantics, the idea essentially states that while all writers draw upon and imitate their literary predecessors, in the Western cult of originality those same writers must overcome, transcend, or otherwise outdo their predecessors. Artistic influence, therefore, produces personal and creative anxiety. Sometimes, the result is greater creativity; other times, the result is a certain neurotic awkwardness. In either case, literary gymnastics often result – sometimes for the better, other times for the worse.

Batman Begins does perform a good deal of literary gymnastics. Probably never before has a super-hero's origin been so elaborately depicted, right down to each piece of his costume. If we like this (and if we don't, we probably don't like the entire project of the film), we owe some thanks to Tim Burton's *Batman* and the

desire to transcend it, to improve upon it so methodically. Even the realistic Gotham City of *Batman Begins* can be attributed to the anxiety of influence: unable to outdo Burton's gothic landscapes, Nolan instead found a reason to go a different direction.

It only remains to be said that there is nothing judgmental in any of this. *Batman Begins* has its own vision of the character, and it is a compelling one. We need not agree that it renders Burton's Batman irrelevant. The artist's goal may well be to transcend his predecessors, but we need not agree that he succeeds for us to admire his accomplishment. The anxiety of influence is simply a dynamic in artistic creation, and such dynamics are amoral. Indeed, Nolan has stated that he was introduced to Batman through the 1960s TV show – but the director, known for his realism in contrast with Burton's eccentricities or Schumacher's flamboyance, had a different vision for *Batman Begins*.

The history of Batman in the comics demonstrates the character's versatility. As Frank Miller and others have said, one of the remarkable aspects of the character is that each of these versions work. We may well admire the realistic tone of *Batman Begins* and still admire the versatility of Batman's other cinematic outings.

Reception and Box Office Performance

Batman Begins was extremely well-received. It grossed \$205.3 million domestically and \$166.5 million in foreign markets but was only the ninth highest-grossing film domestically in 2005. Critics felt that the film deserved more attention, but it failed to electrify the youth market the way Marvel's recent movies had. The film would fare well, however, on both DVD and when aired on television, setting the stage for the financial success of *The Dark Knight*.

Reception

Early reviews of the film were very extremely positive. As fans awaited its debut on Wednesday, 15 June 2005, reviewers who had already seen *Batman Begins*, from comic-book fans and movie critics alike, were already busy pronouncing rave reviews.

Even before the film's completion, fans had been excited by the screenplay. The script had leaked online, and Warner Bros. monitored the response with great nervousness. Fans responded positively, with some cynics even wondering whether the film would be made because it was too good. As the film's release neared, positive buzz surrounded the project. Many were excited by the film's closeness to seminal Batman texts, particularly Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli's *Batman: Year One* and Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, which had clearly inspired the film's Batmobile design.

The film was first screened on 4 June 2005 at Wizard World Philly, a comic-book convention in Philadelphia. Around 300 lots were drawn from attendees of that convention's Batman panel, and the winners received the chance to see the film 11 days earlier in the IMAX format. This was a wise move on the part of DC and Warner Bros.: fan approval had been sought by Hollywood, especially following the relative success of *Hellboy* and *Sin City*, praised for their fidelity to the comics, in contrast with less faithful adaptations (such as *Catwoman*, which debuted earlier in 2005 to horrible reviews and financial failure).

Lo and behold, fans who saw the screening responded with overwhelming praise. Michael Doran, founder of the comics news website Newsarama.com, was one of those who won a ticket to the screening. His review was full of praise, from the acting to the costumes to the sound to the representation of Gotham City. But he also praised its originality and its seriousness as a film in

its own right, contrasting it to the usual commercial summer fluff. Doran ended his review by comparing the new film to Burton's original: In 1989 Tim Burton's

Batman ushered in the era of the modern superhero / comic-book movie. On June 15th, *Batman Begins* may well rewrite the rulebook for future superhero movies. *Batman Begins* isn't just good. It's *that* good.

On ComicBookResources.com, Khalil Asadullah was no less effusive: "it couldn't have been done better." He praised the depiction of Gotham, of Bruce Wayne as businessman and playboy as well as guilt-ridden child, the depth of Wayne's love interest, the script's faithfulness to the spirit of the comics, and also the film's seriousness as a story and work of art beyond its genre conventions. "Do not go to the theatre thinking that this is a comic book movie; this is nothing of the sort," wrote Asadullah. "This is an action / drama that just so happens to use a comic book entity."

The film premiered for the celebrity audience in L.A. on Monday, 6 June, and film critics were given advance screenings.

Film reviewers Roger Ebert and Richard Roper praised the film prior to its opening, giving it two enthusiastic thumbs up. Ebert said the film was "one of the best films of the year." The duo praised Bale's performance as Batman, the ensemble cast, and Nolan's direction. Ebert's praise was especially meaningful because, as he pointed out, he hadn't liked any of the previous Batman films. "This time they got it right," he said. Roper agreed that the film was "the best Batman movie ever by far."

The verdict was all but unanimous. A reporter sent by CNN to cover the premiere praised the film, though she added that it felt long at almost two and a half hours – a sentiment shared by few general moviegoers.

Box Office Performance

Expectations for the film were duly raised from all of these positive reviews. Prior to this early reception, many comics and movie pundits were simply hoping the film wouldn't be another *Catwoman*. The reviews helped solidify the feeling that *Batman Begins* would be a hit, and debate turned to *how much* of a hit, with most predicting something in line with Marvel's X-Men franchise.

Indeed, a lot was riding on the film for both DC and Hollywood.

DC had its hopes for a cinematic renaissance pegged on the film, which fans hoped would usher in a wave of DC films that would rival Marvel's cinematic successes of the past few years. From the late 1970s to the 1990s, DC's

successful Superman and Batman franchises dominated comic-book movies, while Marvel's few movies failed miserably (some were sent straight to video and Roger Corman's *Fantastic Four* wasn't even released at all). But 1998's *Blade* and especially 2000's *X-Men* had inaugurated a string of generally successful Marvel movies, including 2002's record—shattering *Spider-Man*. DC fans wanted a return to greatness – one *Catwoman* had failed to provide earlier in 2005.

Hollywood had a lot at stake too. The movie story of 2005, running throughout the year, was the box-office slump when compared with 2004. News stories argued that many people actually preferred to watch movies on DVD at home, rather than in theatres. Many hoped *Batman Begins* would ignite a string of summer blockbusters that would also include Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (released on 29 June 2005) and Marvel's *Fantastic Four* (scheduled for 8 July 2005).

And of course, there was good reason to expect Batman to perform well at the box office: Batman had a history of doing precisely that. Burton's 1989 *Batman* took in \$251 million domestically, making it, when *Batman Begins* was released, the 33rd highest-grossing film ever. Subsequent Batman films had also done well, though not quite as well as that first installment.

Batman Begins opened on 3,718 screens, in league with other summer blockbusters, on Wednesday, 15 June 2005. Opening a film on a Wednesday or a Thursday has advantages and disadvantages: it allows a film to accumulate more revenue by the end of its opening weekend, but these added days typically do not count towards calculations of that opening weekend, which consists of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday and has become an all-important Hollywood indicator of a film's success.

The film took in \$15.1 million on its opening day – the 11th highest Wednesday opening ever at the time, a category dominated by *Spider-Man 2*'s \$40.4-million opening Wednesday. But pundits pointed out that *Spider-Man 2*, which appealed to a less mature demographic, was released a little later in June, when more schools were out. The film's Thursday take of \$9 million meant that it went into its opening weekend with \$24.2 million domestically. The film took in \$48.7 million during its opening weekend, bringing its total to \$72.9 million. It was a bonafide hit and #1 at the box-office, besting the recently-released Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie action vehicle, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*. A sequel was

already under discussion.

But this opening weekend take was actually slightly below expectations, which called for a \$60-65 million opening weekend, in line with Marvel's successful X-Men franchise. Batman's newest opening weekend was just under that of 2003's *Hulk* and below the two X-Men and two Spider-Man films that had then been released. Adjusted for inflation, the opening weekend of *Batman Begins* also wasn't as strong as other Batman debuts.

The film also failed to accomplish the mission Hollywood had designated for it: ending the industry's losing slump against 2004's figures. The weekend *Batman Begins* opened was the 17th weekend in a row to see ticket sales down versus 2004.

Batman Begins passed the \$100 million mark on Friday, 24 July, in its tenth day of release. It remained in first place in its second weekend, taking in \$27.5 million domestically – \$7.5 million more than the runner-up, the newly-released comedy *Bewitched* (loosely based on the 1960s TV show of the same name). Including its second weekend, *Batman Begins* had totaled \$122.5 million domestically. The film dropped about 45% against its opening weekend, a percentage seen as respectable to good. This performance was probably aided by good word-of-mouth, as well as new TV ads capitalizing on the film's positive reviews. But industry news still focused on the slump against 2004, which now entered its 18th week.

In its third weekend, which included the Monday 4th of July holiday, *Batman Begins* dropped to second place. The debut of the summer's second blockbuster, Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*, ousted Batman, taking in \$77 million domestically in its opening weekend, despite a Wednesday debut and poor reviews. For its part, *Batman Begins* took in \$19.5 million over its third weekend, bringing its total \$154.8 million. This wasn't enough to end the much-reported slump versus 2004, which now continued into its 19th week. Hope now rested with *Fantastic Four*, which had originally been scheduled for the 4th of July weekend but had been pushed back when the hastily-produced *War of the Worlds* moved to that spot.

The following weekend, *Fantastic Four* won the top spot, knocking *War of the Worlds* to second place and *Batman Begins* to third. Despite poor reviews and characters less well-known than Batman, *Fantastic Four* earned \$56 million

domestically over the weekend, exceeding expectations and beating Batman's opening weekend by some \$7 million. The film's fun nature and casting of sex symbol Jessica Alba, despite being critically panned, bested Batman's brooding nature and veteran actors. *Fantastic Four* also opened on a Friday, whereas both *Batman Begins* and *War of the Worlds* had opened on Wednesdays. With *War of the Worlds* taking in \$30.5 million and *Batman Begins* \$10 million, Hollywood finally ended its slump against 2004, and *Fantastic Four* reaped the credit. In fact, the film helped revitalize Marvel's films, following a string of underperforming movies.

Batman Begins had now taken in \$171.9 million, surpassing 2000's *X-Men* as well as two of the previous four Batman films. While both *Fantastic Four* and *War of the Worlds* competed directly for Batman's audience, *Batman Begins* now seemed to benefit from its good reviews, especially in contrast to its competitors. In fact, the film lost less audience over its first four weekends than any Batman film to date – especially impressive since week-to-week declines had accelerated over the years.

The very next week saw the debut of two hits: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, directed by former Batman director Tim Burton, and the lowbrow comedy *Wedding Crashers*, which took the top two spots in that order.

Fantastic Four, *War of the Worlds*, and *Batman Begins* each shifted down in that order, placing Batman in fifth place. For the second week, the domestic box office continued to surpass 2004's. But while *Fantastic Four* and *War of the Worlds* were shedding 50% or more of their audience between weekends, *Batman Begins* was losing considerably less (just under 40% between this weekend and the previous). It took in \$6 million in its fifth weekend, totaling \$183.1 million domestically.

By its sixth weekend, *Batman Begins* dropped to ninth place and was already being beaten by low-budget releases. But it shed only 21.7% against the previous weekend and was now clearly outperforming *Fantastic Four*, which remained in third place but continued to shed its audience rapidly. *Batman Begins* grossed \$4.7 million over the weekend, bringing its total, after 40 days, to \$191.1 million, surpassing *Batman Forever*'s \$184 million and becoming DC's second highest-grossing film domestically, losing only to 1989's *Batman*. But with several new releases disappointing expectations (including the big-budget flop *The Island*), the slump against 2004 returned.

As the year continued, Hollywood continued to bemoan its box office results.

While *Wedding Crashers* proved a big hit, retaining its audience incredibly well and even briefly rising (in *Batman Begins*'s eighth weekend) to first place, other movies shed their audiences quickly. Some comedies did well, including *The 40-Year Old Virgin* and, to a lesser extent, *The Dukes of Hazzard* (a exploitation remake of the TV show starring Jessica Simpson). Big-budget flops continued with *Stealth*, which opened (also in *Batman Begins*'s eighth weekend) with \$13.3 million despite costing about \$100 million to make. Late 2005 saw hits with the newest Harry Potter movie, the first Narnia movie, and Peter Jackson's remake of *King Kong*, but 2005 was simply a bad year at the box office, especially for big-budget action movies.

Batman Begins continued to retain its audience, but its low take per screen meant that it was being removed from theatres anyway. The film inched past \$200 million domestically on Thursday, 11 August 2005, its 58th day of release. By the end of that weekend, the movie's ninth, it was reportedly down to 710 theatres. Its tenth weekend was the first to gross under \$1 million.

The film ended its run with over \$205.3 million domestically and \$166.5 million internationally. It surpassed all previously superhero movies except for the first two Spider-Man films, 1989's *Batman*, and 2003's *X2: X-Men United*.[\[79\]](#) Of course, this doesn't take into account inflation of ticket prices. In fact, *Batman Begins* sold fewer tickets than all four previous Batman films, with the sole exception of 1997's disastrous *Batman and Robin*.

While *Batman Begins* was, for much of its theatrical run, the third highest-grossing film of the year, after only *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* and *War of the Worlds*, it would ultimately wind up ninth.

Ultimately, *Batman Begins* had been a hit but not as much of one as Warner Bros. might have hoped. It had successfully shown that Batman could still sell movie tickets and had received good reviews from critics and fans alike. Despite all of Marvel's trumpeted success at the box office, *Batman Begins* had trounced Marvel's 2005 offerings, including the unexpected success of *Fantastic Four*, which had debuted strongly only to quickly drop. In fact, *Batman Begins* had beaten all but two of Marvel's films then released, including both X-Men films.

As *Batman Begins* wrapped its theatrical run, Warner Bros. said that the film had cleared the audience's palate of the previous Batman films, which was a big part of the challenge facing the movie. In this regard, the studio publicly pointed to the example set by the X-Men franchise. 2000's *X-Men* had scored \$157.3

million domestically, back when major Marvel characters still seemed doomed at the box office. Both it and *Batman Begins* had faced real challenges in terms of public perception. But *X-Men* fared well on DVD and on TV, giving its sequel much more buzz. Warner Bros. hoped this would be the case with Batman too. The *X-Men* sequel had outperformed the original, grossing \$214.9 million domestically – a 37% increase. Applied to *Batman Begins*'s \$205.3 million, that movie's sequel would have made over \$280 million domestically.

It turns out that Warner Bros. was being conservative. No one could have predicted the buzz surrounding *The Dark Knight*, nor that it would redefine the very notion of a successful comic-book movie. And while many factors played into its success, one was certainly the esteem given *Batman Begins*, building anticipation for a sequel wherein the characters could be let loose, the origin story already established.

Further Reading

This section is offered for those looking to explore *Batman Begins* in more depth, for those unfamiliar with the character's comicbook stories, and for those wondering where to go online for more information.

Books on *Batman Begins*

Nolan, Christopher and David S. Goyer. *Batman Begins: The Screenplay*. Faber and Faber, 2005. ISBN 0-5712-2994-8. Includes the full screenplay by Nolan and Goyer, the film's storyboards by Martin Asbury and James Cornish, an interview with Nolan, an interview with Goyer, and an introduction by James Mottram. If you're seriously into studying the film, this is required reading.[\[80\]](#) If you're into slick books with glossy photos, this isn't the book for you.

O'Neil, Dennis. *Batman Begins*. Del Rey, 2005. ISBN 0-3454-7946-7. A novelization of the screenplay. O'Neil is one of Batman's major writers, known for creating Ra's al Ghul as well as editing the Batman titles for several years.

Vaz, Mark Cotta. *The Art of Batman Begins*. Dorling Kindersley, 2005. ISBN 0-8118-4948-1. A collection of photographs from the film's shooting, as well as sketches, storyboards, and the like – including more on the making of the movie than on the film's distinct style. Vaz, who previously did a number of similar movie books, includes text on Batman's history and the film's production.

Beatty, Scott. *Batman Begins: The Visual Guide*. Dorling Kindersley (DK), 2005. ISBN 0-7566-1233-0. DK's glossy books on comics are typically slight on detailed information and big on artwork and summary information – and this book is no exception.

Batman Begins: The Official Movie Guide. Time, Inc. Home Entertainment, 2005. ISBN 1-9329-9418-1. Features photos and snippets of script.

Comic Books / Graphic Novels

Various. *Batman Begins: The Movie & Other Tales of the Dark Knight*. DC Comics, 2005. ISBN 1-4012-0440-6. Includes the movie adaptation (published separately and simultaneously as *Batman Begins: The Movie*),[\[81\]](#) plus "The Man Who Laughs" (from *Secret Origins of the World's Greatest Super-Heroes*), "Air Time" (from *Detective Comics* #757), "Reasons" (*Batman* #604), and "Urban Legend" (*Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight* #168). Published in

conjunction with the release of *Batman Begins*. If you're new to Batman comic books and like *Batman Begins*, this isn't a bad place to start.

Miller, Frank (writer) and David Mazzucchelli (artist). *Batman: Year One*. DC Comics, 2005. ISBN 1-4012-0752-9. Although the classic *Year One* has been collected in various editions over the years, DC offered this anniversary edition with many pages of back-up material, including David Mazzucchelli artwork and pages from Frank Miller's scripts for the series. Originally serialized in *Batman* #404-407.

Miller, Frank. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. DC Comics, 1997. ISBN 1-5638-9342-8. Shortly before Miller authored *Year One*, he wrote and illustrated this story of an elderly Batman returning from ten years of retirement.

Originally published in 1986, this very violent story, along with *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, has been credited with revitalizing the comicbook super-hero narrative. Available in multiple editions, including this 10th anniversary edition. Mandatory reading. 15 years later, Miller produced *Batman: The Dark Knight Strikes Again*, a sequel of very different tone that brought a plethora of other DC super-heroes (e.g. Wonder Woman, Captain Marvel, the Atom, and the Flash) into the mix.

Loeb, Jeph (writer) and Tim Sale (artist). *Batman: The Long Halloween*. DC Comics, 1999. ISBN 1-5638-9469-6. While many others have followed *Year One* with tales from Batman's early years, none have assumed the status of a classic in their own right... except for this work by frequent collaborators Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale. The duo had created three shorter stories of Batman's early Halloweens before creating *The Long Halloween*, which effectively ignored those earlier stories and instead covered a full year, like *Year One* itself.

Running from the Halloween during *Year One* to the Halloween a year following, the story sees Gotham City transition from a city run by mobsters to one known for its costumed criminals. Carmine Falcone from *Year One* appears, as does District Attorney Harvey Dent – in some ways the focus of the series. Loeb and Sale followed this story with a less memorable sequel, entitled *Batman: Dark Victory*, as well as with an interlude, entitled *Catwoman: When in Rome*.

O'Neil, Dennis (writer); Trevor Von Eeden, Russel Braun, and José-Luis Garcia-López (Art). *Batman: Venom*. DC Comics, 1993. ISBN 1-5638-9101-8. In 1989, in conjunction with Burton's *Batman*, DC launched *Batman:*

Legends of the Dark Knight. The title began by telling stories set in Batman's early years, effectively continuing *Year One*. While these stories are of varied quality and drifted into later chronological settings, *Batman: Venom* (serialized in #16-20) stands as the best of those early stories set during Batman's early years. The tale purports to tell how Batman became the dark figure seen in later stories. While other stories have made the same claim, none are as memorable as *Venom*, which sees Batman taking drugs to enhance his performance and thereby save more lives. This dark tale is written by Denny O'Neil, classic Batman writer and later editor. It inspired the villain Bane, crucial to Batman's "Knightfall" storyline and seen in the movie *Batman and Robin*.

Online Reading

[Sequart.org](#). Sequart Research & Literacy Organization, the publisher of this book, is not only a book publisher but a documentary film producer and a website with its own resources.

[DCComics.com](#). Batman and related characters are trademarks of DC Comics. This is the publisher's official website, featuring previews of upcoming publications as well as message boards and other features.

[Batman-on-Film.com](#). Created by Bill Ramey in 1998, this website is the best one devoted to Batman's cinematic outings. It notes and archives anything relevant, meaning that it's certain to have all the rumors, release dates, and links to important interviews.

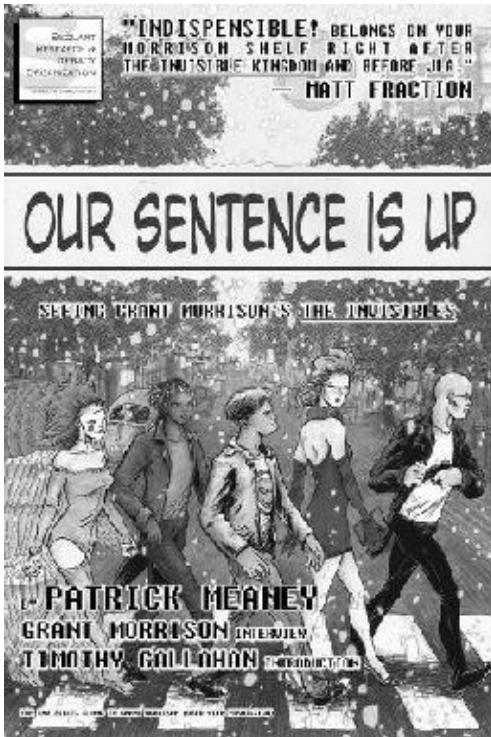
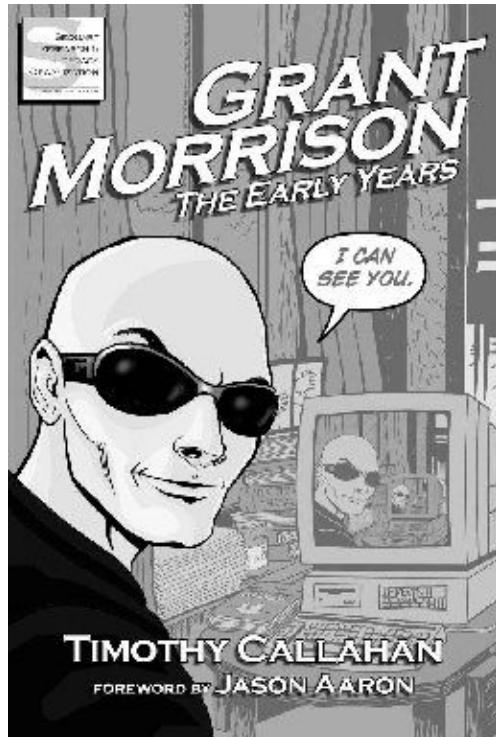
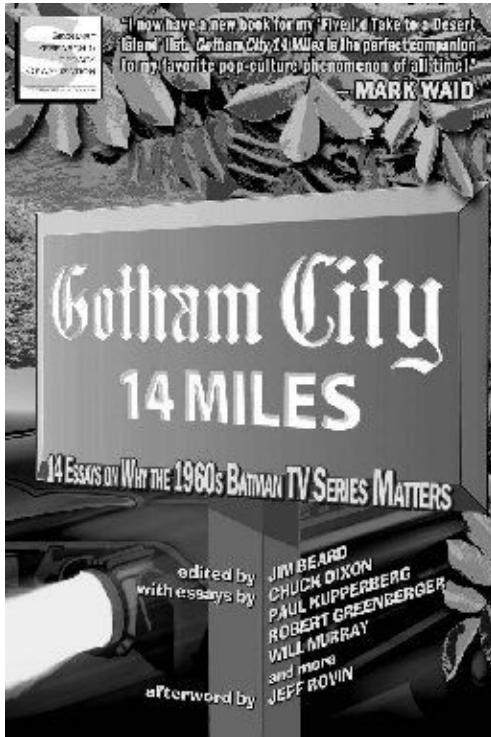
[ComicBookResources.com](#). One of the most popular sites for comic books, this website is filled with news, previews of upcoming issues, reviews, and opinion columns.

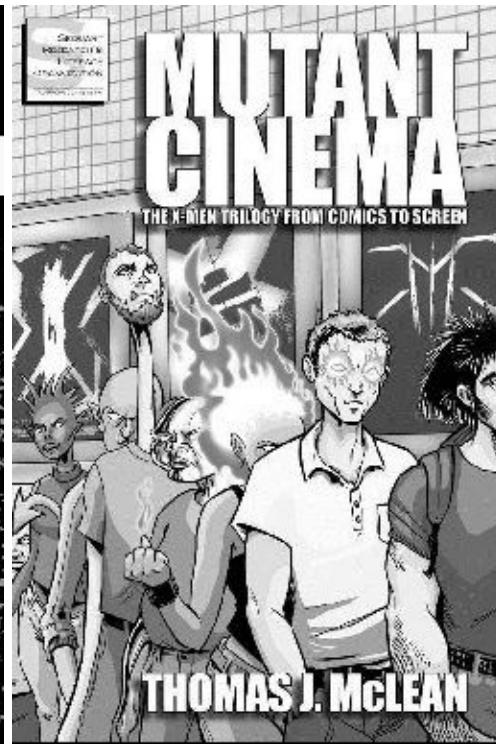
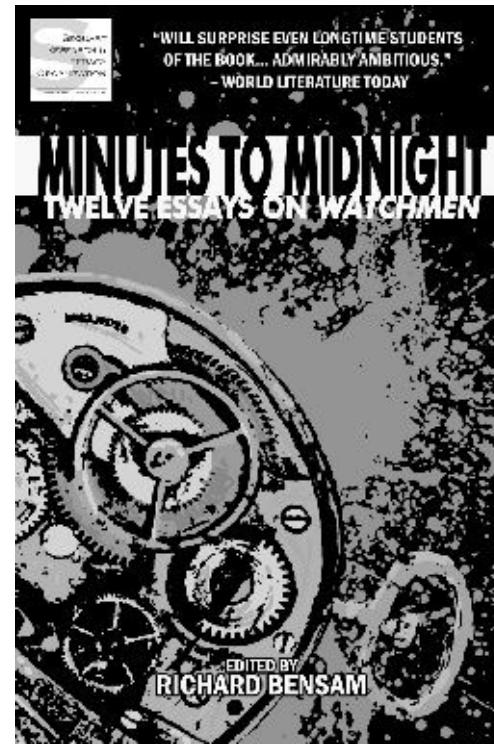
About the Author



In 1996, while still an undergraduate, Dr. Julian Darius founded what would become Sequart Research & Literacy Organization. After graduating magna cum laude from Lawrence University (Appleton, Wisconsin), he obtained his M.A. in English, authoring a thesis on John Milton and utopianism. In 2002, he moved to Waikiki, teaching college while obtaining an M.A. in French (high honors) and a Ph.D. in English. In 2011, he founded [Martian Lit](#), which publishes creative work. He currently lives in Illinois.

Also from Sequent Research & Literacy Organization





For more information and for exclusive content, visit Sequart.org.

[1] 1943's *Batman* was hampered by weak plots, unconvincing action, and ludicrous costumes, but was

nonetheless popular enough to spawn a sequel, 1949's *Batman and Robin*.

[2] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the revised origin for the second Robin (Jason Todd) and the origin given the third Robin (Tim Drake) would actually more closely parallel this proto-Robin's active role. Jason Todd stole the wheels off the Batmobile, while Tim Drake actually figured out Batman's identity. It could almost be argued that, while the original Robin was clearly modeled simplistically after Batman, the idea of a separate Robin type, one with an active role, goes back to this silly and comparatively forgotten story.

[3] Interestingly, the following year *Superman* #113 (May 1957) would depict the Man of Steel's father Jor-El as having once had his own heroic career as "The Superman of the Past." The flashback tale, structured much like this story or "When Batman Was Robin," shows that DC editors were unlikely to waste a story premise simply because it had been used before.

[4] During her time in Wayne Manor, various suspicious incidents lead Aunt Harriet to suspect that Bruce and Dick might be Batman and Robin, and she even discovers the Batcave below Wayne Manor. But Bruce is apparently able to trick her every time, much as Superman tricked the similarly suspicious Lois Lane during the same era. Aunt Harriet is best known for appearing, alongside Alfred, in the campy *Batman* TV show, beginning a few years after she appeared in the comics. After Alfred's return in the comics, Aunt Harriet was probably kept around only because of her inclusion on TV; her disappearance corresponds perfectly to the show's cancellation.

[5] Byrne, eager to illustrate Batman, sought the job after hearing about the series and took it despite DC paying less than Marvel. But he only had a three-month window before his Marvel contract prohibited work for DC. DC hired Terry Austin, Byrne's inker on *The Uncanny X-Men*, but Wein's first script reportedly did not arrive for another month and a half. Byrne completed his pencils for it, but the second script apparently never arrived. According to Byrne, DC then offered to double Marvel's page rate, despite having earlier said that it couldn't match the same rate. For its part, DC claimed Byrne's pencils had been "very loose," indicating preliminary or rough work; Byrne denied this, and Terry Austin confirmed Byrne's denial. Byrne appears with Aparo on the first issue's credits, while Austin is not credited.

[6] While almost universally referenced as *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, simply *The Dark Knight Returns*, or even just *The Dark Knight*, the official title of the series is actually *Batman: The Dark Knight*. Collected editions were indeed titled *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, so including the "Returns" emphasizes the collected editions that most have read, as opposed to the original serialization.

[7] In the novel's first chapter (entitled "Down the Rabbit Hole"), Alice begins her adventures by chasing a rabbit, who wears a coat and laments that he's running late, down a rabbit hole.

[8] A silent film entitled *The Mark of Zorro* and starring Douglas Fairbanks was released in 1920, and the title was used again on a film starring Tyrone Power in 1940. This does not mean the Waynes necessarily saw one of those films in one of those years; they may have seen one of these in a revival house, or a different film could have been made using this title in the world of *The Dark Knight*.

[9] *Year One* can be either italicized or placed within quotations. "Year One" refers to the storyline as it appeared in the pages of *Batman*. But that storyline was so special that it often feels as if it were its own separate entity, and far more people have read it in its collected form (for which it was recolored) than in the original issues. As its own collected book, the story is known as *Batman: Year One* (or *Year One* for short), which emphasizes its longevity and importance.

[10] A later sequence helps cement this implication: on 21 February, Bruce is shown continuing his

training on the grounds of Wayne Manor, over which his journal notes that he has “hundreds of methods” but is still “not ready.” The frontispiece to the second issue begins, “He has trained and planned and waiting eighteen years,” further cementing the impression that Bruce has been training abroad.

[11] On page 20 of that issue, Bruce narrates that his parents were killed 18 years ago, which would set their murder when he was only seven. Such fixed dates, even relative solely to the present, were rarities in those days.

[12] It’s worth noting that O’Neil was now the editor of the Batman comics and Giordano the managing editor of the entire DC Comics line, so this evolution of their approach took place with their encouragement.

[13] This collection included several origin stories from the then-running series *Secret Origins*, along with a Superman origin story from that character’s own mini-series *Man of Steel*. Only for Batman’s origin was a new story produced.

[14] In fact, this character was the second DC Comics character to use the name Harlequin. She was later revealed to be Duela Dent, daughter not to the Joker but to Two-Face, a.k.a. Harvey Dent. Her character has been revised, however, leaving her parentage in doubt.

[15] Apparently, what was good for Batman wasn’t seen as good for Superman. But while Warner Bros. was working on a new Superman film, one hadn’t appeared since the 1980s, and any new Superman film would not so obviously contradict *Smallville* because it would not be set during Superman’s early days.

[16] As evidence, comics fans were initially thrilled about Frank Miller’s 2005 return to the character with *All Star Batman and Robin, the Boy Wonder*, then largely condemned it as an over-the-top pastiche of his earlier work, as if Batman had been dropped into über-corrupt world of *Sin City*. Miller’s similarly over-the-top directorial debut on *The Spirit* met with similar befuddlement, even from fans.

[17] While the dating of this stage is difficult, it would seem to have occurred after the Wachowski brothers scored a titanic hit with 1999’s *The Matrix*, also from Warner Bros., and the brothers’ focus on *The Matrix*’s two 2003 sequels.

[18] In fact, the title, begun in 1941, had featured *solo* stories of *various* heroes, though always including Superman and Batman. It was the declining length of comic book issues over the years, designed to keep the cover price at ten cents, that eventually compelled Superman and Batman to be combined into a single story, a format inaugurated with *World’s Finest* #71 (July-August 1954). Except for a brief period in the early 1970s when the book ran stories teaming Superman with other heroes, the Superman-Batman team-ups continued until the series’s final issue, #323 (January 1986). Subsequent stories have often teamed the two, and a successor series, entitled *Superman / Batman*, debuted in 2003.

[19] Warner Bros. made a similar mistake in 2007, fast-tracking a Justice League movie that would have included Superman, Batman, and other characters. The film was intended to serve as a launching pad for those characters’ own films, helping DC to catch up with Marvel’s many movie franchises. Fans responded with universal disdain, not because they were against a Justice League movie but these characters deserved to be established on their own before being lumped together. News stories about the film also seemed to indicate that Warner Bros. simply misunderstood the characters, and many fans publicly hoped the film would be cancelled. Despite proceeding with casting, Warner Bros. capitulated in 2008, tabling the project and acknowledging fans’ reaction.

[20] Abrams, of course, would later go on to reboot the *Star Trek* franchise – although he apparently took

a lesson and did so in a dramatically more faithful form.

[21] While McG cited budgetary concerns and a feeling that the Sydney, Australia, shooting location was inappropriate “to capture the heart of America,” he later admitted that his real reason was his own fear of flying.

[22] Whedon’s own comments confirm this dating, saying that the pitch took place when Warner Bros. started developing *Batman Begins* and that he lost out to Nolan. Wheden has also scripted comics himself, including a continuation of *Buffy*.

[23] “Joss Whedon Talks about his ‘Batman’ Movie that Never Was,” available at <http://splashpage.mtv.com/2008/08/11/joss-whedon-talks-about-his-batman-movie-that-never-was/> as part of MTV’s movie blog “Splash Page.”

[24] Nolan, Christopher and David S. Goyer. *Batman Begins: The Screenplay*. Faber and Faber, 2005. Page xvi.

[25] Ibid, page xxix. A similar desire to unify movie plots made the Joker the murderer of Bruce Wayne’s parents in 1989’s *Batman*.

[26] Ibid, page xv.

[27] Ibid, page xxx.

[28] Readers will be forgiven for misremembering the sequence as part of *Batman: Year One*. This is a logical error, given *Year One*’s focus on Batman’s debut and the fact that *Dark Knight Returns* features an elderly Batman. In fact, however, the sequence does not occur in *Year One* at all.

[29] In Europe, the idea of a sexual utopia has sometimes been known as Mahomet’s Paradise, a European interpretation of the Islamic afterlife that exaggerates its sensual descriptions.

[30] In interviews for *Batman Begins*, Bale spoke with the same American accent he used in the film to avoid any audience confusion.

[31] Nolan, Christopher and David S. Goyer. *Batman Begins: The Screenplay*. Faber and Faber, 2005. Page xvii.

[32] Gilchrist, Todd. “IGN Interviews Christian Bale.” IGN FilmForce, 15 October 2004.

[33] Sanderson, Peter. “Comics in Context #89: Batman Reboots.” [IGN.com](http://comics.ign.com/articles/626/626762p2.html). Available at <http://comics.ign.com/articles/626/626762p2.html>.

[34] The nation’s largest city is its capital, Thimphu, with a population of 50,000; the entire nation’s population is a matter of vastly differing estimates. Some 90% of the population work in agriculture or forestry. Infant mortality is shockingly high, at just over 10% of live births. Life expectancy is about 54 years. The country’s terrain is mountainous and over 70% forested, but this terrain also provides hydroelectric power that is sold to India, reported to provide 75% of the government’s income.

[35] For the record, there is no connection between Ra’s al Ghul and the Egyptian sun-god Ra.

[36] In my own writing, here and elsewhere, I do refer to Batman as a vigilante, though I mean no criticism by the term. I employ it simply in reference to an extra-legal crime-fighter or a civilian who takes

the law into his own hands to right wrongs as he sees them. To be sure, Batman is a particularly sophisticated vigilante.

[37] Campbell's work on comparative mythology rests upon his four-volume *The Masks of God*. His best-known work, however, is *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which focuses on the hero's quest across cultures, proposed the idea of a cross-cultural "monomyth" and was published in 1949. His work has been extremely influential on popular culture – including, most famously, *Star Wars*.

[38] While obvious in retrospect, neither Batman's villains nor his writers, had thought of this technique before, and it indicates the era's new commitment to realism. It's also a sign that Ra's is a major foe. Right from the start, Ra's bests Batman at his own game: Batman was known as the world's greatest detective, yet Ra's clearly attributes his discovery of Batman's identity to "deduction and research."

[39] Batman cannot marry Talia and join Ra's for two reasons: first, he knows Ra's to be evil; second, he cannot abandon his duty to protect Gotham City. In the real world, the explanation was simpler: it would have changed the character too much. But it's a credit to O'Neil and Adams that the prospect seemed reasonable. It also helped make Ra's a far more interesting villain: he didn't simply want to kill Batman; he wanted to *convert* him, to give him a fabulous woman and an empire.

[40] Nyssa actually first appeared in *Detective Comics* #783, which featured a back-up story that serves as a prologue to the mini-series.

[41] In fact, al Ghul's creator, Denny O'Neil, has claimed that Ra's is *not* Arab, since O'Neil later depicted him as being descended from a long-dead North African tribe. This wasn't necessarily the case when the character was introduced, however, and the character remains quasi-Arab.

[42] Besides appearing in numerous films and TV shows over the years, Fu Machu has appeared in the Marvel comic book *Shang-Chi: Master of Kung Fu* and in the recent classic *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, by Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill.

[43] See, for example, Jack Shaheen's 1984 *The TV Arab*, which won great attention as one of the first books on the subject.

[44] Nolan, Christopher and David S. Goyer. *Batman Begins: The Screenplay*. Faber and Faber, 2005. Page xxix.

[45] This isn't the only case of a corporate super-hero being revealed to be abused, for the purposes of a single story, only to have that abuse ignored thereafter. In 1984's *Spider-Man and Power Pack* one-shot, which Marvel co-produced in conjunction with the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse and the National Education Association, none other than Spider-Man recalls his own sexual abuse at the hands of a male babysitter, who apparently intimidates a young Peter Parker to participate in mutual genital touching. While the events it depicts are horrible, the story has become hilarious to many fans. But that story, while produced by Marvel, didn't occur in a regular title and was clearly subordinated to a story with a social message: what spurs Spider-Man's memories is meeting a boy named Tony with a similar story. Batman's equivalent is aimed less at telling children what to do and more on telling a good, socially conscious story.

[46] The killing of the Waynes, as depicted in that story, clearly borrows from both *The Dark Knight Returns*, with its series of several small panels, and *Year One*, with Bruce kneeling over the bodies. In fact, most of the panels are simply redrawn versions of those two depictions.

[47] latimesblogs.latimes.com/herocomplex/2008/10/christopher-n-2.html.

[48] Consider, for example, the aforementioned *Batman: Death and the Maidens* #1, which features tall panels of the pearls on the sides of pages in which Batman contemplates his parents' death.

[49] One exception, an apocryphal tale of Bruce Wayne attending college during the 1930s, meeting actress and love interest Julie Madison along the way, was presented by writer Roy Thomas and artists Marshall Rogers and Terry Austin in *Secret Origins* #6 (September 1986). Although thoughtful and well-produced, this story depicts the original Batman who made his debut in 1939 rather than the modern-day version, and was outside regular continuity even when it was published.

[50] Though Katie Holmes, in *Batman Begins*, may seem overshadowed by the many excellent and often veteran actors around her, I am not personally of the opinion that her performance is actually bad. This first scene between the couple as young adults feels well-done to me: Bruce and Rachel seem good together. They seem to possess, despite the distance created by their years apart, an intimate understanding of each other. They communicate largely without speaking: Bruce nods quietly about not staying, and the way he tells Rachel that he needs her to understand feels particularly understated. Perhaps this was part of the problem for critics, who may be habituated to more emotionally gushy love interests.

[51] The couple announced their engagement in June 2005, two months after meeting. Holmes, 16 years Cruise's junior, said she had dreamt of being with Cruise all her life. In contrast with his more private past relationships, Cruise talked glowingly about his love for her, literally jumping on Oprah Winfrey's couch during an interview. He also starred in a summer blockbuster, Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*, and some suspected their relationship was a publicity stunt. In October, the couple (dubbed "TomKat" by the media) announced Holmes's pregnancy. Suri Cruise, born in April 2006, immediately became the subject of conspiracy theories, as the media went into a frenzy to publish the child's photos. The two married in November 2006. At every step, their relationship was the subject of media attention, speculation, and (often) mockery, often overshadowing their films.

[52] The only significant glimpse of Chill's background in the comics appeared in "The Women in Batman's Life" from *Batman* #208 (January-February 1969), where it was revealed that Chill's mother was employed as housekeeper by the orphaned Bruce Wayne's legal guardian.

[53] Batman subsequently lost the yellow circle around his bat-symbol, which is why it does not appear in this film.

[54] Unfortunately, the sequence in which Bruce tosses away the gun seems to suffer from poor use of day-for-night, a process by which film shot during daylight can be made to look as if shot at night. The process frequently leaves a dark blue tint, as if the scene were shot in the odd blue-tinted hours of dusk that some parts of the world see. The shots both before and after the sequence in question are much darker.

[55] In the revised continuity that emerged in the wake of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, Superman did not gain his powers or learn about his alien heritage until early adulthood, and his continuing Clark Kent persona may thus be seen as the character masquerading as the human being he once *thought* he was, not the Kryptonian he truly is.

[56] Both of these origin stories were collected, along with several others, in *Batman: Scarecrow Tales*, a trade paperback offered in time for the release of *Batman Begins*.

[57] That story was loosely adapted for the 1990s Batman animated TV series, in the episode entitled "Dreams of Darkness." This adaptation is of particular note here, since Zsasz is replaced by the Scarecrow.

[58] The theme of Bruce Wayne's stunted relationships with women was explored with considerable

thoughtfulness by writer Steve Englehart and artists Marshall Rogers and Terry Austin in the six-issue mini-series *Batman: Dark Detective* (2005), in which the Scarecrow plays a role in forcing Batman to confront his fears in that area.

[59] See the screenplay, pages xiii and xiv.

[60] In interview, Nolan credited Goyer with the idea of farming out the creation of the mask in pieces and to separate companies, though Nolan claimed the idea of ordering in bulk. See the screenplay, pages xii and xiv.

[61] See the screenplay, pages xii and xiii.

[62] The screenplay goes further. As in the film, Falcone reenters his car after briefly entering the warehouse and seeing Batman in battle with a group of goons. He orders the driver to go, but the driver does not respond. Finally, we see the driver unconscious – though we have not seen Batman cause this unconsciousness. Again and again, we see Batman primarily through his effects.

[63] Frank Miller apparently thought that this was a key sequence as well. In his screenplay for *Year One*, the narration mentioned here is given by Batman as a voice-over.

[64] In August 2008, the Associated Press ran an article about criticism of the voice Bale uses in *The Dark Knight*, quoting many who felt similarly.

[65] Batman's legal status has varied over the years, in keeping with the changes made to the character. In the 1950s and '60s, Batman was often described as an authorized deputy or an "honorary member" of the Gotham police and occasionally even appeared in a courtroom in daylight to give testimony. As the character subsequently darkened, Gotham police have increasingly had only begrudging toleration for Batman, with only a small crew around Gordon actually coordinating with the vigilante.

[66] See the screenplay, page xvii.

[67] See the screenplay, page xix.

[68] Page 85 of the script, at least in its published edition.

[69] See the screenplay, page xix.

[70] See the screenplay, page xxx.

[71] A Scarecrow on horseback may also bring to mind Doctor Syn, the masked smuggler featured in a series of novels by Russell Thorndike starting in 1915, novels which inspired the creation of Zorro and Batman himself. The character was adapted for the screen as *Doctor Syn* in 1937 and again in 1963 as *The Scarecrow of Romney Marsh*, with Patrick McGoohan in the title role. In fact, Disney timed a reissue of the McGoohan film on DVD to coincide with the opening of *Batman Begins*.

[72] Pages xiii-ix.

[73] Page xii.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Page xi.

[76] Page xii.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Page xxv.

[79] *Men in Black*, somewhat loosely adapted from a Marvel comic, also garnered more at the U.S. box office, though that film is not considered a super-hero movie.

[80] But ignore the title page, which prints David S. Goyer's first name as "Davis" and fails to credit the storyboard artists, whose work is only credited on the back cover.

[81] Scott Beatty wrote the adaptation, which was illustrated by Kilian Plunket and Serge LaPointe.