



Fact Sheet

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Media Studies

Film Review - *Batman Begins*



Take Time Film Reviewer
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If you've been reading Batman comics since – yes, you've gotta believe it – 1939 when they began – there will be things you will miss about the latest movie outing for the Caped Crusader which is pointedly titled *Batman Begins*.

In this movie – which opened recently on just about every cinema screen in Australia – you will not hear anyone say “Holy Toledo, Batman!”- or any of the other expletives associated with the comic book Batman. Nor will you see Batman's youthful sidekick Robin – unless he is the little kid from the slums of Gotham City who is introduced, but not named, as someone who can see the goodness behind

the masked image of this strange guy who scares the willies out of the bad guys. Perhaps this kid will be transformed into Robin in subsequent movies. And, unfortunately, you won't hear that powerful, hard-driving theme music – do-da-do-da, do-da-do-da, do-da-do-da, do-da-do-da – Batman! – which is remembered fondly from the old TV series. Not that there's anything wrong with the music in *Batman Begins* – in fact it's superb – thundering, stormy, passages of Wagnerian brass swirling over the backdrop of a huge orchestra – very effectively underscoring the onscreen drama.

It's fitting music to wing us through the concrete canyons of Gotham while we join Batman flying high on his parasail wings. Indeed, if we put aside any expectations that this movie is going to be exactly the same as the comics – and, anyway, the other four Batman flicks in the 80's and 90's should have dis-abused us of this expectation – there is much to enjoy and enthrall in this latest, big budget spectacular.

This Batman movie is, happily, not as dark and gloomy as some of the other recent flicks in the genre – although there is still plenty of downright evil and corruption for the caped crusader to contend with in Gotham. And Gotham City is depicted as a run-down, degraded urban environment. In the relentless, pouring rain it resembles the oppressive cityscape of *Blade Runner*. It's interesting that some of this movie was filmed in Chicago and the imagery for Gotham – with its elevated railway system, ghettos and endemic corruption – seems to have been constructed from elements borrowed from the Chicago of old. But the cityscape is, after all, just the backdrop against which Batman does battle with the baddies unleashing his fury against evil. And it all happens with great pace and visual style.

There is never a dull moment in this movie. Within the first ten minutes of the movie Bruce Wayne – who has, at this stage, not yet adopted his Batman persona – is attacked in a prison-yard somewhere in Asia and manages to flatten a dozen or so baddies before being dragged away to solitary confinement by the guards. “It's for protection,” the guards say, looking at the untidy pile of banged-up baddies, “THEIR protection.” There's not a lot of humour in the script – it doesn't play out like a James



Bond – but just now and then there’s a quip like that one which lightens the mood somewhat.

But what, you might well ask, is Bruce Wayne doing in a prison somewhere in Asia? Well it’s all part of his process of beginning to be Batman. The screenplay conscientiously follows the concept of the Hero’s Journey in which the Main Man must travel far and wide in order to overcome his inner demons and come back to where he started as a Better Person.

In *Batman Begins*, flashbacks are used very effectively to reveal Bruce Wayne’s inner demons. Would you be surprised to know that Bats have some part to play in this? – but there are other dark issues as well. So, in the first part of the movie, we find Bruce, burdened with his demons and wandering through Asia in search of some form of exorcism. Fortunately he meets up with a mysterious mentor – played with steely resolve by Liam Neeson – who sets out to instruct Bruce in a range of Ninja-style martial arts.

Ah ha! – you say at this point – so That’s how Batman learned how to subdue baddies with his trademark Biff!, Sock!, Kerpow!

But that’s just the beginning of the story. Later, with Morgan Freeman substituting for James Bond’s armorer “Q” - we learn how Batman came to acquire all those tricky devices that he carries around in his fabled utility belt. And a completely new Batmobile is rolled out no longer sporting its Fifties Fins but now resembling a form of transport more appropriate for the streets of Baghdad.

The cast of the move is first class and well directed by writer/director Christopher Nolan. You might recall his challenging movie from 2001 called *Memento* in which the story is told backwards to underline the confusion of its brain-damaged protagonist. Christian Bale does a good job as the star of *Batman Begins* – moving convincingly between the demonised complexity of Bruce Wayne and the single-minded righteousness of his alter-ego, Batman.

The supporting cast includes Gary Oldman, Rutger Hauer (who, interestingly again connects this movie back to *Blade Runner*. Way back then, Hauer played the cybernaut which was Harrison Ford’s nemesis.) and there’s Katie Holmes – recently engaged to Tom Cruise – who plays Bruce Wayne’s childhood sweetheart.

But the outstanding performer in the supporting cast is Michael Caine as Bruce Wayne’s butler. Caine obviously enjoyed himself immensely in the role of the faithful retainer to Mr Bruce. The Cockney accent is stronger than ever and all the sequences with Caine are a joy to watch.

But then again, the whole movie is a good ride. Holy Toledo, Batman! Go see it.

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