

BATMAN



PAUL DONOVAN
on the
Caped Crusader's
blockbuster that
is taking the
world by storm

IT'S the £20 million battle every cinemagoer in Britain is dying to see. Batman versus The Joker. The Caped Crusader against the Cruel Clown. Michael Keaton taking on superstar Jack Nicholson. Batman took the American box-office by storm when it opened at 2,196 cinemas in June and became the biggest box-office smash there ever –

by a long way. Here in Britain, it's the most eagerly-awaited blockbuster of the summer. It's taken a decade to bring Batman to the big screen. And the new movie comes out as he celebrates 50 years of crime-fighting since he flapped his way into DC Comics in 1939. The essence of the new adventure epic, set in a jostling collection of skyscrapers called Gotham City,

is that Batman and The Joker are two sides of the same coin. Bruce Wayne and Jack Napier, to give the characters their real names, both have the same fierce intelligence, razor-sharp reactions and extensive armories. They are both loners who hide in masks. "The two characters are related," says director Tim Burton, "and one is the flip

side of the other. It's that particular theme, which is from the comic books, that we wanted explored even more fully in the film." **W**HAT separates them, of course, is what they do with their gifts. Batman has been fighting evil ever since he was nine and saw his parents brutally murdered.

The Joker is a malevolent, greedy, sadistic monster with a personality as grotesque as his appearance – bone-white face, green hair and scarlet lips. He is Batman's malevolent nemesis. Michael Keaton (Beetlejuice) has the title role, but Jack Nicholson has been given top billing. Producers Jon Peters and Peter Guber knew that the actor with a killer smile and two Oscars by his name, the star who froze millions of spines in *The Shining*, was the one they wanted. The Joker mixes clownish humour and chilling evil, a mixture which is a Nicholson hallmark. And for the Caped Crusader himself? "We wanted a guy who's human, funny and scary," says co-producer Peters, "and Keaton is all of these things. He's got that explosive, insane side which is perfect for the character and a recognisable humanity as well."

"What interested me about Batman," says Keaton, "was the complex, interesting character of Bruce Wayne. I asked myself, what kind of a man would do this – put on a bat uniform at night?" The Joker was established in the DC Comics series, alongside photo-journalist Vicki Vale. Chosen to portray her was the movie's third star, the stunning Kim Basinger (*Blind Date*, *My Step-mother is an Alien*), perhaps the funniest and sexiest woman in films today. Batman doesn't just have big stars and a big budget. In order to make the huge and nightmarish sprawl of Gotham City, production designer Anton Furst built a set at Pinewood Studios near London that was the biggest outdoor motion picture structure built in Europe since Cleopatra in 1960. In its sheer scale and scope, the filming of Batman was tantamount to a major military operation. The production team dominated the 95 acres of Pinewood and the majority of its 18 sound stages. Gotham City had to be designed from the ground up. So did the Batcave, Batmobile and Batwing deep in the ground below Wayne Manor.



HOLY Hubcaps! The new Batmobile is everything a super fantasy car should be. Menacing and intimidating, the supercharged, jet black vehicle combines elements of Utah Salt Flat racers of the 1930s with Stingrays of the 1950s. Two Batmobiles were built, both 20 ft long with retract-

able protective armour, heavy duty machine guns concealed above the two front wheels, explosive charges in the hubcaps, remote voice-activated controls, and a "high fear-inducing factor." The car can catapult itself from zero to 60mph in 3.7 seconds, quicker than a Countach, with a top speed "not available to the public."

HOLY SUPERSTARS: Jack Nicholson as The Joker, Kim Basinger as Vicki Vale, and Michael Keaton as Batman. Far left: The amazing Batmobile