

BATMAN RETURNS

Director Tim Burton wins the creative control to do the Dark Knight justice.

By Taylor L. White

Beneath the T-shirts, bed-sheets and cereal boxes—all emblazoned with the everpresent Batshield logo—BATMAN somehow missed its mark, despite its phenomenal commercial success. One taste of BEETLEJUICE or even Tim Burton's earliest short films readily explains why the director himself has gone on record that BATMAN is the least favorite of his pictures. Now with greater creative control, Burton has opted to return to Gotham City on his own terms. Warner Bros opens BATMAN RETURNS nationwide June 19.

The sequel is a conscious effort on the part of Burton and his EDWARD SCISSOR-HANDS co-producer Denise Di Novi (HEATHERS, MEET THE APPLLEGATES) to add a new slant to an old hero. "One of our main goals to correct in BATMAN RETURNS was to make it more of a Tim Burton movie," said Di Novi. "If you look at the first film and compare it to his other movies, you'll see that only about 50% of BATMAN was Tim. We've had much more creative control this time, so I'm sure it'll be a lot closer to 100%."



Michael Keaton returns as Batman, on Gotham City streets in the dead of winter.

Although Di Novi, now head of Tim Burton Productions, is quick to point out the new film's innovations, she doesn't disregard the roots planted by the first film. "We've tried hard to maintain the important aspects of the first film by keeping it dark and by giving Batman the same kind of tortured duality he had before, but this time we've tried to infuse it with a real freshness. It'll be a weirder movie, but also more hip and fun."

Though the prospect of a guaranteed hit sequel might have seemed enticing to any director, Di Novi reported that Burton was initially reticent about returning to the streets of Gotham City. "Tim didn't want to do the sequel until we came up with an approach that felt fresh and original to him," said Di Novi. With ample time for story development and pre-production, Di Novi recruited HEATHERS sriptor Dan Waters, late of HUDSON HAWK and THE ADVENTURES OF FORD FAIRLANE, to concoct a plot that would be original, yet true to the subject's comic book origins.

"We specifically wanted to start fresh by using a writer who didn't have any emotional ties to the first movie," said Di



Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman and her alter ego Selina Kyle (r). The chance to work with comic book creator Bob Kane's supervillains attracted Burton to do the sequel.

Novi. "Dan is an original thinker who I was certain would come up with something out of left field." Co-credited screenwriter Wesley Strick (*CAPE FEAR*) contributed needed revisions and added material to the film's final shooting script.

The result is a hard-edged, biting satirical yarn that pits Bruce Wayne/Batman against the triple threat of the Penguin

(Danny DeVito), a misunderstood mutant with high political aspirations, Selina Kyle a.k.a. Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer), whose victimization at the hands of her boss turns her into a sleek feline purveyor of vengeance, and corporate shark Max Schreck (Christopher Walken), all vying for power or vengeance using the citizens of Gotham City as pawns. In keeping with the

film's visual style, which echoes the German Expressionism of the silents, Walken's character name is that of the actor who played the vampire in F.W. Murnau's *NOSFERATU* (1922).

It was the inevitable coupling of the Penguin and Catwoman that eventually drew Burton in, noted Di Novi "Dan came up with two really wild characters who have a

real edge to them which I think excited Tim as much as the prospect of doing the Batman character excited him in the first one," said Di Novi. While the casting of DeVito as The Penguin was a natural, finding an actress to fill Catwoman's tights became a much publicized tale of woe with initial choice Annette Bening leaving due to pregnancy, followed by an ill-fated campaign by actress Sean Young to replace her.

Pleased with the casting of the sequel's villains is *BATMAN* creator Bob Kane, the character's self-proclaimed "Pied Piper of Public Relations" and creative consultant, who came up with the original Penguin character for his comic adventures in the '30s. "My God, he looks so gruesome," laughed Kane in approval of DeVito, looking like Lon Chaney in *LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT*. "His makeup was beyond anything I expected. When I saw the early sketches, I figured they'd do a simplistic makeup job, like Burgess Meredith in the TV show, but I was completely stunned when I saw DeVito in full costume. Plus, he acts the same way as he looks, angry and horrific, certainly nothing campy like Burgess Meredith

Batman tools around on the Gotham City streets in a redesigned Batmobile, newly outfitted by production designer Bo Welch.





Danny DeVito as the Penguin, equipped with a series of lethal umbrellas. DeVito, a madcap image of horror echoing German Expressionism, faces Batman at the climax.

[of the BATMAN TV show]. Danny's Penguin is truly the epitome of evil."

The plethora of villains left little room for the anticipated introduction of Robin, Batman's sidekick. In earlier drafts of Waters' script the character was portrayed as a streetsmart Gotham garage mechanic who assists Batman when the Batmobile crashes into his shop after the vehicle is rigged by the Penguin to decimate the city streets. Though sets were reportedly built, costumes were designed and actor Marlon Wayans, the youngest brother of Keenan Ivory and Damon Wayans of *IN LIVING COLOR*, was considered, the sequence was scrapped with Michael Gough's Alfred filling in as Batman's mechanical savior, keeping Robin to perhaps be highlighted in yet another installment.

With a solid story and a green light from Warner Bros, Burton and Di Novi continued to break the first BATMAN mold by reuniting a host of non-BATMAN alumni from Burton's past triumphs, *BEE-TLEJUICE* and *EDWARD SCISSORHANDS*, including production designer Bo Welch, camera stylist Stefan Czapsky, creature effects supervisor

Stan Winston, key makeup artist Ve Neill and longtime associate Rick Henrichs, now acting as art director with Tom Duffield. Noted Di Novi, "These people have garnered a sixth sense of how Tim sees the world, which makes things a lot easier since you don't have to explain everything that's in his head."

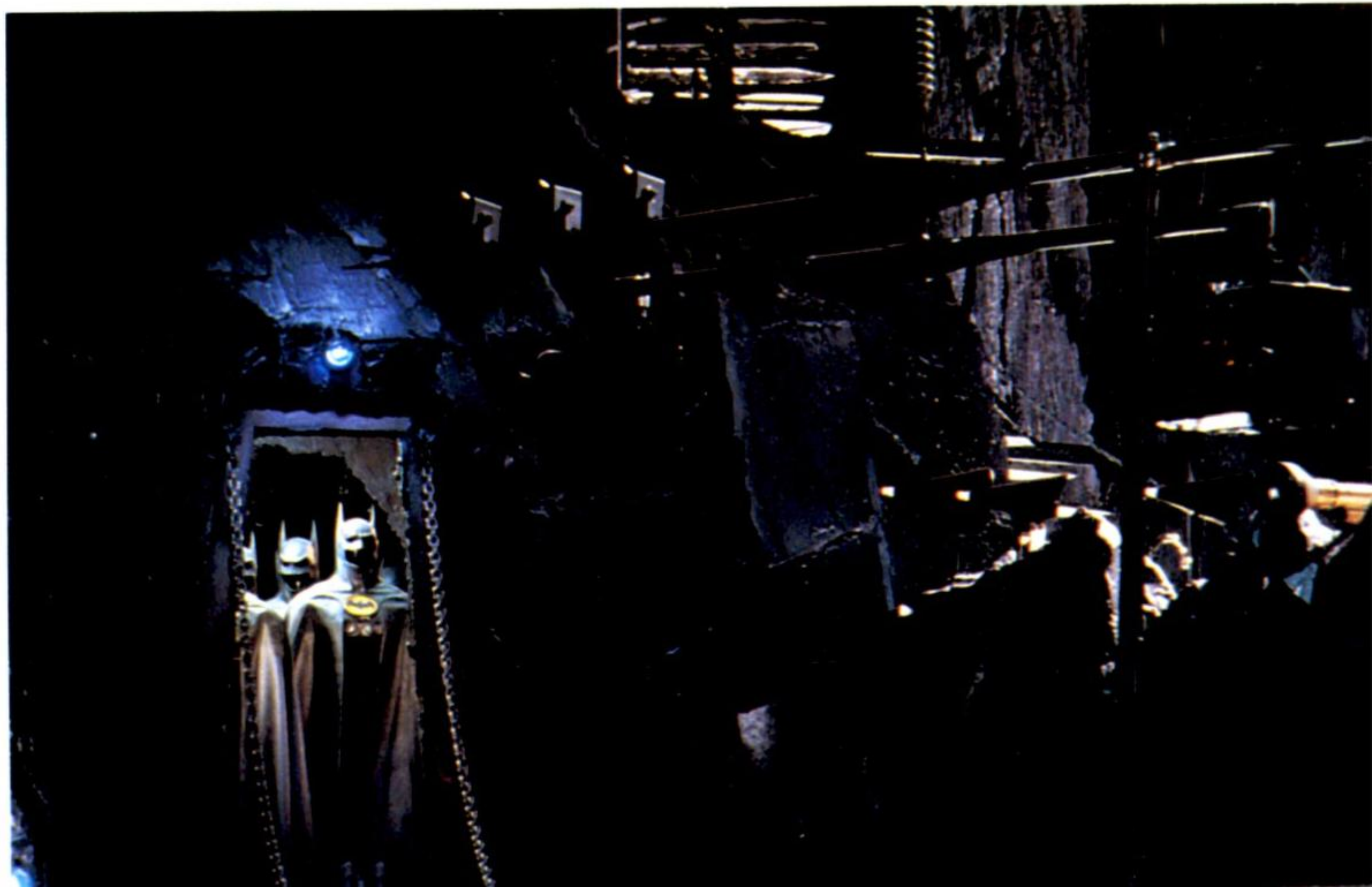
The sequel also marks Burton's reunion with PEE-WEE'S

BIG ADVENTURE star Pee-Wee Herman who, with co-star Diane Salinger, the starry-eyed waitress Simone from the same film, step into the shoes of the Penguin's parents. Comic actress Jan Hooks, Pee-Wee's tour guide at the Alamo, also returns as a fashion consultant.

The souring overseas economy forced Warner Bros to abandon London's Pinewood Studios and mount Gotham

City on the company's Hollywood lot. "The economy in England isn't as financially favorable as it was three years ago, so at this point it would've been more expensive to shoot over there," said Di Novi. "Plus, it would've been hard to give the movie the fresh feeling we were looking for by using the same sets over again, so we shipped over the few sets we needed and then built the rest

Batman in the bowels of the Batcave beneath Wayne Manor, a dark, noir look that makes the original film seem sunny.



on the soundstages."

The gargantuan sets, including stylistically refurbished interiors of the Batcave and Wayne Manor, and the spacious town center known as Gotham Plaza, were spread out over seven soundstages on Warner's Burbank lot, with numerous sets constructed on existing exteriors for some of Gotham's city streets. An additional soundstage at Universal—the largest in Hollywood—was utilized to build the Penguin's Lair, a fortress of ice and water complete with towering stalagmites.

Production designer Welch described his designs for Burton's alternate Gotham City as having an even darker feel than that of the first film. "It's a very oppressive, decaying look with a lot of neo-fascist world's fair architecture overlaid on an old U.S. city," said Welch. "You can find traces of German Expressionism, which we found was the sort of root material that was appropriate for the kind of story that's being told." Welch was quick to point out that his work is a totally new interpretation of the late Anton Furst's original designs. "For me as a designer, there is no marriage to the first and second BATMAN except for the character himself. The sequel has merely given us the license to explode all of the ideas from the first film and take them further and stronger and harder."

Art director Heinrichs, who goes back with Burton to 1983's VINCENT, described the "Caligari"-like German Expressionism which has been an ongoing style since their first efforts. "There's something very timeless about using sets and lighting expressionistically, as in films like CITIZEN KANE and THE THIRD MAN where the stark black and white images are used as a very stark, yet beautiful and clear way of visually telling the story. This is part of the reason why BATMAN RETURNS takes place in the wintertime

BURTON GOES WILD

"We've had much more creative control this time. We're keeping it dark and giving Batman the same kind of tortured duality, but we've tried to infuse it with a real freshness. It'll be weirder, more hip and fun."



Burton (r) with Batman comic book creator Bob Kane and producing partner Denise Di Novi.

because we could visually get stronger graphic images, like having the stark, black Batman silhouetted against the white snow."

Part of Welch's task was to design an entirely new set of toys for Batman, including a slick hydroplaned "Bat-ski boat and a programmable Batarang, while also giving the Penguin his own private arsenal in the form of a series of umbrellas, each with its own lethal purpose—from a flame-throwing or bullet-shooting parasol to an umbrella that clamps on to the hand of its victim, sending him or her flying into the Gotham night sky.

BATMAN RETURNS also allowed Welch to redesign the Batmobile, giving it a unique personality of its own. At one point, the vehicle sheds its metallic skin and rotates its wheel to form what has been christened the "Batmissile," which Batman uses to elude his pursuers in a high speed chase.

Warners began marketing BATMAN RETURNS last September, unveiling a 12-minute promo reel at the

World Science Fiction Convention, followed by a stark black and white advance poster picturing a silhouetted bat head, a campaign which did little to inspire the fans.

In mid-February, promotion kicked into high gear with the unveiling of a revealing two-minute trailer in over 5,000 theatres across the country, and a new poster featuring the familiar bat symbol with a

wisp of wind and snow blowing across the shield. All hype aside, Batman's creator believes the myths will thrive no matter what format it appears in, whether it be comics, film or TV. "I believe every man and every child's dream is to be a superhero, to get away from themselves and be somebody who is very heroic," said Kane. "Batman personifies this escapism for most people who live mundane nine-to-five lives. They see themselves as Batman, living a glamorous, adventurous life, meeting very interesting people and fighting villains."

Though fans expressed initial distrust in the casting of Michael Keaton for the first film, Kane believes it is Keaton who provides the connection between audiences and Batman. "Keaton gives Batman a real vulnerability that an atypical hunk actor probably couldn't bring to the character," he said.

Though, as Kane noted, BATMAN is certain to turn up in various formats well past the turn of the century, producer Di Novi is too fresh from the latest installment to consider the prospect of any further cinematic BATMAN adventures. "That's like asking someone who's nine months pregnant when they're going to have their next baby!" she laughed. □

Christopher Walken as Batman's foe, evil millionaire industrialist Max Schreck.





CREATING CATWOMAN

Director Tim Burton, on adding new wrinkles to Bob Kane's comic book vision.

By Taylor White

To bring *Batman* creator Bob Kane's Catwoman into the '90s, *BATMAN RETURNS* director Tim Burton added a healthy dose of *THELMA AND LOUISE* feminism. "The Catwoman has gone through several different incarnations in the TV show and the comics, but I think our portrayal is much more modern, while still

Pfeiffer, from mousy secretary to tiger lady, a psychic metamorphosis with a decidedly feminist resonance.

fitting within the framework of *Batman*," said Burton.

"One way to portray feminism is to show strong women beating up on men, but the Catwoman is a positive and negative character who's just as screwed up as any other character. She's a lot like Batman in that she was transformed due to negative events, and even though she's trying to be good in a way, she's completely screwed up just like he is. I actually find that much more realistic in terms of a metaphor for life in the sense that this is the way things really are. That's much more interesting than trying to make women, men or men, women," said Burton, referring to current feminist films like Blake Edward's *SWITCH*.

For Pfeiffer's costume, Burton opted to stylistically obliterate the comic and TV renditions by dressing actress Michelle Pfeiffer in a kinky, skintight outfit. "Tim had a definite idea of how he wanted it to look—black, shiny and rubbery," said costume designer Bob Ringwood, who worked from Burton's sketches to create a three-dimensional prototype. Added Ringwood's assistant Mary Vogt, "What we ended up with was very close to his original drawings, with the stitchings and all, but actually much more glamorous and flattering."

When asked about his affinity for putting characters in bizarre outfits, Burton respond-



Michael Keaton as Batman, the stiff board off which Burton bounces the series' high-performance villainy, the formula's counterintuitive casting inspiration.

ed, "I'm *always* thinking about what we can do to keep things fresh and to make it worth going to see. There's too much work involved to just copy the costumes out of a comic book or a TV show. You might as well try to do something different, especially when you've got this kind of material that gives you room to push the boundaries a bit."

According to screenwriter Dan Waters, early response to Catwoman wasn't exactly what the filmmakers expected. "I could tell from seeing the trailer that Catwoman was going to freak some people out," said Waters. "I've already gotten complaints she's not *cute* enough."

Alongside Catwoman and all of the sequel's glaring innovations, the one element that remains largely unchanged is Batman himself. Noted Burton of his eccentric approach to envisioning Bob Kane's comic

book universe on film, "I always hate it when there's just a bunch of weird people running around, like in *DICK TRACY*, where there's no basis to the world that's been created. I personally don't find much power in the fact that these are funny-looking people and nothing more. There should always be a foundation no matter how absurd or ridiculous it may be." □

Burton and *Batman* creator Bob Kane.

