

CELEBRATING BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES' 25TH ANNIVERSARY!

BACKISSUE!

September 2017

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Harley Quinn history!
The Batman Adventures
comic! The animated
DC Universe in comics!
And a tribute to the late,
great Mike Parobeck!
featuring Altieri •
Burchett • Conroy •
Dini • Pasko • Sorokin •
Strong • Timm & more!

B.T.



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BACKISSUE

Comics' Bronze Age and Beyond!



BATMAN

THE ANIMATED SERIES

25TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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HARLEY QUINN CREATED BY PAUL DINI AND BRUCE TIMM

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BATMAN™

THE ANIMATED SERIES AT 25: AN ORAL HISTORY

by **John Trumbull**
additional transcription by Steven
Thompson and Jon B. Knutson

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In Batman's 78-year history, 1992's Batman:

The Animated Series (BTAS) is regarded as one of the best-ever interpretations of the character. Its striking look, suspenseful stories, nuanced voice acting, and memorable music captivated audiences from the start, winning the show a total of four Emmys. BTAS adapted the best from the comics while also making several new contributions to the legend of the Dark Knight. Harley Quinn, Renee Montoya, and Mr. Freeze's origin all debuted on the show. But the production of Batman: The Animated Series was not without its growing pains. Like any great Batman story, it featured character conflict, intense obstacles, narrow escapes, and ultimate triumph. This is the story of a modern classic of animation.

In 1990, Warner Bros. Animation was at a crossroads. The massively successful Tiny Toons was winding down, and the studio needed new projects going forward. Jean MacCurdy, president of Warner Bros. Animation division, realized that WB had a perfect property for animation in the blockbuster movie of 1989: Batman.

RANDY ROGEL, Writer: Jean MacCurdy ran the studio. Jean is "mom." Jean was basically—I come from the military—she's a commander. And what a commander does is marshal the troops and then gets out of their way. She ran an unbelievably big organization with lots of temperamental artists, composers, and writers and directors, and animators—people who get all crazy on you, because they're artists—and she had the sensibility to just control all of that and put out one hit after another.

MacCurdy announced to the 40-person team at Warner Bros. Animation that the company was developing four new animated shows based on WB properties: Gremlins, The Griswolds, Taz-Mania, and Batman. She asked everyone who was interested to submit ideas.

CREATING THE PILOT

Inspired, Tiny Toons storyboard artist Bruce Timm went back to his desk and spent the next hour sketching up character designs for Batman. Another Tiny Toons artist, Eric Radomski, created background treatments for all four potential shows. For Batman, he devised a new technique involving airbrushed highlights on black paper to emphasize a gritty, film noir look.

BRUCE TIMM, Producer, Director: [Eric] had independently of me just started doing some experimentation with background treatments on black paper. So we both showed up at the same meeting and I had some character sketches, he had some BGs, and Jean liked both. She mixed his peanut butter with my chocolate. It turned out to be a smart choice on her part—I thought we made a really good team.

It's a shame Eric doesn't get nearly enough credit for the series as he deserves—he and I were practically attached at the hip throughout those first couple of seasons, not just on the art direction, but every facet of production, from story development to casting and voice recording to post-production.

Recognizing the strength of Timm's character designs and Radomski's backgrounds, MacCurdy asked the two artists, who only tangentially knew each other from Tiny Toons, to collaborate on a two-minute presentation reel for Batman. She recommended that the duo look at the 1940s Fleischer Superman cartoons for inspiration.

BRUCE TIMM: They'd been in negotiations with Fox Kids to actually do the show, and the negotiations, I guess, had been dragging on for a while. Jean thought that might be a good way to kind of goose the process was to just show them some footage and say, "Hey! This is



give it a try." Fortunately, he hit the ground running and the first couple of scripts that he developed for us were kind of exactly what we wanted the show to be, so things were a lot smoother sailing from that point on.

RANDY ROGEL: It was just a case where they brought the right guy in at the right time.

PAUL LEVITZ: Alan came on board and began to build a writing staff. The combination of the writing team that he assembled and the visual team that was already there made for a wonderful piece of work.

As the head writer and third producer on the series, Burnett persuaded Paul Dini to return to Batman, first as a freelancer, and then on a full-time basis.

PAUL DINI: Once writer/producer Alan Burnett came on, *Batman* began to sound very exciting from a writer's point of view. He really wanted me on the show and told me he and the artists were anxious to stretch action-adventure as far as they could take it. Alan was very encouraging and liked my scripts. He said I could work directly with him, writing and editing my own scripts, if I returned to Warners. It was too good to pass up.

DENNIS O'NEIL: They obviously wanted to do the show and at one point they hired Marty Pasko as one of their editors.

MARTIN PASKO, Writer, Story Editor: I was the story editor Alan Burnett brought in to help him "fix" it when he came aboard in spring of '91. I was told I was hired, not just because of my samples and credit sheet, but because I also had had good, close working relationships with both the Fox guy overseeing the show, Sid Iwanter, and Denny O'Neil, who was DC's sign-off (both of whom were, in fact, old buddies).

This was key because the two story editors Bruce and Eric had brought in weren't getting scripts approved; when I came in, I was handed a large cardboard box filled with manuscripts—outlines and teleplay drafts, with titles like (I kid you not) "Rockabye Batman"—that had been rejected by both Fox and DC Comics.

PAUL LEVITZ: DC had approval rights for the series and the material. Obviously, we're a sister company so it's not really a matter of what the legal rights are, but our job within the company was to protect our property and that gave us certain powers of approval.

Alan Burnett's entrance marked the beginning of the end for story editors Sean Catherine Derek and Laren Bright. Their more socially conscious take on Batman was now in the minority, and neither would return to the show after their options expired.

LAREN BRIGHT: I was hired on for a year. By the end of the year I realized I wasn't having fun for a lot of reasons. Part of it was that I prefer working on stories that have some sort of human value. My guiding principle in writing cartoons is that whatever we can inspire children to believe in what they will create in the world. While *Batman* was (obviously) an outstanding entertainment vehicle, the focus was on action and entertainment. But it was hard to work in pro-social stuff, and that wasn't really supported by the decision makers. Even in silly, little-kid types of shows we could demonstrate positive values, like diversity, integrity, stuff like that. There simply wasn't a lot of room in *Batman* for that. So I don't think I was making the kind of contribution to *Batman* they were looking for and when my contract ended, we parted ways.

RANDY ROGEL: I think Alan just said the show you want to make is different from the show I want to make, and Alan was the show runner. He took the reins, and the rest is history.

SEAN CATHERINE DEREK: For me, it was a lot easier because then I was just busy in my office, writing. For me, that was easier because when you're trying to juggle writers... I just finished out my contract and that was it. I left. And then the good news was I got to go back to Hanna-Barbera to do *Captain Planet*, which, to me, was just great.

RANDY ROGEL: That was a great show for her.

SEAN CATHERINE DEREK: If I were doing this today and I had just met Bruce, I would just be like, "You know, whatever you need, buddy. I am so there." I just had this sense of duty to the children that they didn't... which is probably why the show turned out well. A little bit of that did make it through, there was a little bit of heart. I mean, [Batman's] an angst-driven character, which is why he's so interesting. But there's a point where it's like, "You know what? Get over yourself!" and that's how I felt a little bit. "Stop feeling sorry for yourself, Bruce!"

RANDY ROGEL: I really liked Sean. And I liked Laren as well. But it just comes down to, sometimes, vision. Whose vision is going to prevail? And I think in this case, it really went the way it should have gone.

a new animated series for Warner Bros. You've never done an animated series. Why don't you give it a shot? It's *Batman*."

While Conroy had heard of Batman and had watched some episodes of the 1960s show with Adam West, he was largely ignorant of the character. He hadn't even seen the 1989 Batman movie with Michael Keaton.

KEVIN CONROY: I didn't even read comic books as a kid, really, 'cause I went to very traditional Catholic schools and all that stuff was very frowned upon, so I came late to it all. Which was probably the strongest thing I had going for me. I had *no* preconceptions at all.

So I went in to meet Bruce Timm and Paul Dini and Andrea Romano. And I was so naive to it all I didn't even realize who I was meeting. I didn't know that these were like the *wunderkind* of animation, you know? This was a really impressive group of people and I had no clue. And Bruce Timm asked, "What is your background on Batman?" and I said, "Well, I don't *have* one. I know the Adam West show..." and he went, "No, no! That's not the direction we're going! Erase that! Erase that memory!"

Despite being new to Batman, Conroy had his eye on one part in particular—police detective Harvey Bullock.

KEVIN CONROY: Whenever I tell that at comic-cons, everyone howls and they're thinking, "What an idiot!" I was saying, "Why don't you let me do a character..." 'Cause actors always want to do things that are farther from them. You want to do character roles! You want to stretch! Everyone wants to stretch. And then Andrea said, "Kevin, you will be in every show as Batman. Do you get it? *Every* show!" But I didn't know it was going to go on for 25 years. I thought this was something that was going to be for a season! I just wanted to get the most interesting role, and the heroes are not usually the most interesting roles.

Ultimately, Conroy was convinced to read for Batman/Bruce Wayne... and Timm and Romano instantly knew that they had found their Dark Knight.

ANDREA ROMANO: Bruce and I did have one of those jaw-dropping moments. That "Eureka!" moment! Bruce and I all but leaped up from our chairs and hugged each other. We were so happy that we had found *exactly* what we were looking for!

BRUCE TIMM: This guy that none of us ever heard of came walking in and nailed it the minute he opened his mouth. I was like, "Ho! Okay, we're done!" So that was serendipity.

KEVIN CONROY: It was *totally* a fluke! It was a one-in-a-million shot and I was just so lucky to have been in that booth that day and made that choice. A lot of people don't realize how much of acting is about choices. There's a dozen different ways to play a character. You can play the same scene and make it tragic or make it comic. It's *all* about choices! And the director usually guides you in the choices he wants you to make, because he has a vision for how he wants the show to work, but when it's a new show and new characters, they don't really know what they're looking for. I was just lucky that one day that I made that choice, and it led to 25 years of work. That's amazing.

ANDREA ROMANO: It began a very long love affair among Bruce, Kevin, and myself, and the entire production crew on that project. It was just dreamy.

KEVIN CONROY: I think I've kind of fallen in love with the character over time. I really grew to love his sense of morality, his sense of dignity, his really... *no* gray zone between black and white, between good and evil. He's so *pure* in that way. It would be so hard for any of us to achieve that in our daily lives. He's a *wonderful* character to play and he's a great character to have been associated with in any way.

Although he was not versed in comic books or animation, Conroy didn't look down on what some might consider low-brow source material.

KEVIN CONROY: I had done soap operas in New York, so I learned a long time ago not to look down on any aspect of the business. It's *all* legitimate. I certainly didn't understand how serious it was and how important it was socially. I did think of it as an extra job that I was doing on the side.

And as I got more involved in it, I realized, "Wow. This is an iconic character. This is like Hamlet! This is Orestes." I grew to understand, playing the role over time, that animation in our culture is what the myths were to the Greeks and the Romans. The way they taught morality to their young people was by telling those

Courtesy of animator Lancelot Falk and appearing in print for the first time, a 1991 Batman gag done for Lance by Bruce Timm.

Batman TM & © DC Comics.



(top) Mark Hamill and Kevin Conroy in a recent photo, courtesy of Kevin Conroy. The voice of Batman invites *BI's* readers to follow him on Twitter at @RealKevinConroy and at his website, www.realkevinconroy.com. (bottom) From the book *Batman Animated*, an early Joker rough by Timm, from 1990.

Joker TM & © DC Comics.



EXIT CURRY, ENTER HAMILL

Another member of the original *Batman* cast also proved to be very short-lived: Tim Curry, whose interpretation of the Joker received a mixed reaction among the crew.

ANDREA ROMANO: This was very, very hard for me, because I loved what Tim Curry was doing. I loved Tim Curry. He was lovely! He was so great and I loved working with him. And he was so generous with his stories, his *Rocky Horror* stories and his music video stories. Just great! So when I did the initial casting for the Joker and he was the top choice, I was delighted!

BRUCE TIMM: I think what Tim was doing was very, very interesting. It didn't seem terribly organic to us. A lot of his line readings were just... they felt almost non-sequitur. They were just really weird and quirky but without really any deep meaning behind them. Again, not to knock him, because I'm a huge fan. Still am. But it didn't seem—and it sounds weird to say this about the Joker—but it didn't sound natural. It didn't sound organic. Specifically, his laugh. It never really sounded like he was genuinely amused by anything. It just sounded like this weird, odd laugh. So that was the main thing.

ANDREA ROMANO: Then a new producer was brought on board and he just didn't like what Tim was doing. So I brought Tim back several times because I really don't ever like to replace actors and I certainly don't like to ever replace celebrity actors. And because I really didn't mind what Tim was doing.

BRUCE TIMM: It was Alan Burnett who kind of forced the issue. I was already kind of on the fence about Tim as the Joker anyway, but Alan was the one who made an issue out of it. He came to me one day and said, "You know, I think we have to replace Tim." And I didn't want to, just because I knew it was going to be a really tricky situation to do, but I couldn't disagree with him, so...

ANDREA ROMANO: I really, really wanted to fight for Tim to save the role. So I called him back two, three times I think, with that producer in the room and Bruce in the room. We did a couple of different versions and played with the voice and see if there was some way I could save this job, but ultimately I just could not please the producer. So I had to recast the role, which was heartbreaking for me. Literally, literally heartbreaking.

Now, we're dealing with several levels of complication, which is, we're recasting a celebrity. Tim Curry was a known entity. I've got to find somebody of equal stature to kind of fill out that role because that's a really choice role! I have to find someone who is a really good actor and can do the really kind of bizarre, strange, unusual twists that we want from *this* kind of Joker.

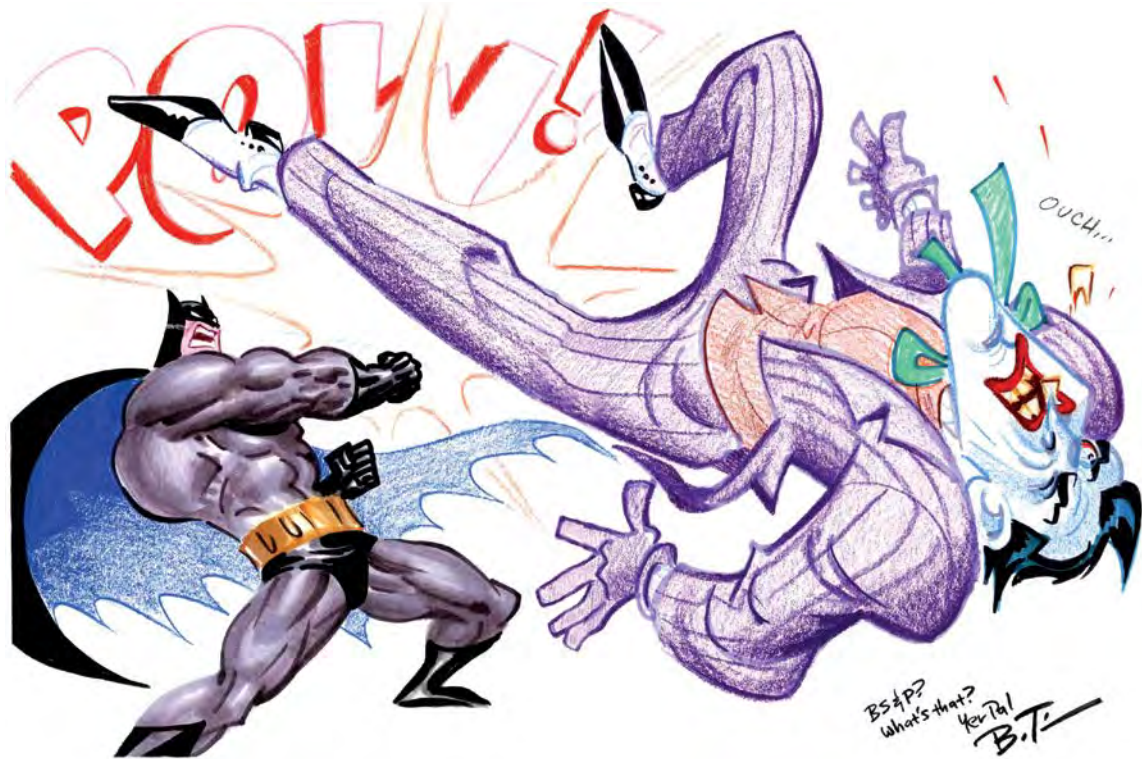
Thankfully, a celebrity who proved to be an unexpected yet perfect choice for the Clown Prince of Crime had just recently done the show. Having heard about the new Batman cartoon in the works, Star Wars star and comic-book fan Mark Hamill had his agents submit him for a guest-starring role. Romano cast Hamill as Ferris Boyle in "Heart of Ice."

ANDREA ROMANO: [Boyle] was an executive who turns out to be the bad guy. I also gave Mark a secondary role. And he was *lovely!* Absolutely fantastic! We had a great time at that session. He totally understood the energy. He could rattle off ridiculous bits of minutiae—trivia—about the *Batman* world and *this* version of *Batman* and *this* version and *this* artist and *this* artist and... I mean,



Another never-before-published Timm piece from the collection of Lance Falk, illustrated in 1991, before BTAS aired.

Batman and Joker
TM & © DC Comics.



TOO DARK FOR TV?

RANDY ROGEL: I remember one of the artists, she did all the ink and paint, before the show came out, she's saying, "I'm thinking this is going to be too dark!" Visually. Not dark in terms of story, but people aren't able to see what's going on!

BRUCE TIMM: We had to retake some shots because it was literally really, really dark characters on really, really dark backgrounds and you couldn't tell what was going on, so we'd have a certain amount of retakes. We didn't want to do a show that was just black-on-black. That was one of the things that Eric and I both were in total agreement early on. It was a weird kind of unwritten rule in animation—especially for TV animation—that you could not actually use true black anywhere. For some reason it looked dull on TV. That's what everybody always said. "Oh, yeah, it just looks dull. You have to use a really, really dark blue or a dark brown or something. You don't actually use true black," which just seemed ridiculous to me. We could never figure that out. So that's kind of why Eric started his first early BG experiments with actually starting with black paper and adding color to it. If you look at classic cinematography, that's the sweet spot is when it's so dark, that it's almost too dark. I think that's what Gordon Willis was quoted as saying one time: That's when you know you're right in that magic zone—you push it so dark that it's almost too hard to see, but just barely. As we were doing the telecine [video transfer] on one of our first episodes, the operator said, "You know this show is actually illegal."

"Whaddaya mean, it's illegal?"

"Yeah, the show's too dark." It had to be within a certain technical range to be airable in the United States."

"Oh, okay. So what does that mean?"

"That means we have to artificially boost the luminance level a little bit."

"Well, okay. Just make sure it still looks cool." So they had to do a little bit of fine tuning on it, but yeah, we were actually told that our show was too dark to be legally shown in the United States, which was just hilarious to us.

Catwoman and Batman tell BS&P to kiss off in this undated hilarious Timm toon. Courtesy of Heritage.

Batman and Catwoman TM & © DC Comics.

BS&P

Although BTAS successfully pushed the envelope in many areas, they still had to deal with a necessary obstacle before going on air: Broadcast Standards & Practices.

BRUCE TIMM: Here's the thing: I don't want to make it seem like they were the bad guys. Because clearly their job was to make sure that they didn't warp kids or start an angry protest from parents groups or whatever, or be sued. So, they basically did what they're supposed to do, you know? And at the same time, in retrospect, they allowed us to do a lot of things other shows probably would not have gotten away with, because of the prestige of the show.

PAUL DINI: There were little things here and there—don't show impact punches to the face, not so much gunplay, things like that. Usually we policed ourselves pretty well. Also, we would look for more creative ways to indicate tragic action, like the death of Robin's parents. We never see them fall; the broken trapeze rope just swings back into view. Your imagination fills in the rest and that's vivid enough.

RANDY ROGEL: Sometimes what you don't show is just as effective as what you do show. You can find clever ways without actually showing



BATMAN

THE ANIMATED SERIES EPISODE GUIDE

by *John Trumbull*

BATAS VOICE CAST

Michael Ansara (Mr. Freeze/
Victor Fries)
Edward Asner (Roland Daggett)
Adrienne Barbeau (Catwoman/
Selina Kyle)
Jeff Glen Bennett (The Creeper/
Jack Ryder)
Lloyd Bochner (Mayor Hamilton Hill)
Jeffrey Combs (The Scarecrow,
1997–1999)
Kevin Conroy (Batman/Bruce Wayne)
Robert Costanzo (Det. Harvey
Bullock)
Mari Devon (Summer Gleeson)
George Dzundza (Ventriloquist/
Scarface)
Brooks Gardner (Killer Croc,
1997–1999)
Melissa Gilbert-Brinkman (Barbara
Gordon/Batgirl, 1992–1995)
John Glover (The Riddler/
Edward Nygma)
Mark Hamill (The Joker)
Bob Hastings (Commissioner Gordon)
Marilyn Henner (Veronica Vreeland)
Aron Kincaid (Killer Croc, 1992–1995)
Loren Lester (Robin/Dick Grayson/
Nightwing)
Roddy McDowall (The Mad Hatter/
Jervis Tetch)
Richard Moll (Two-Face/Harvey Dent)
Diana Muldaur (Leslie Thompkins)
Ingrid Oliu (Renee Montoya,
1992–1994)
Ron Perlman (Clayface/Matt Hagen)
Diane Pershing (Poison Ivy/
Pamela Isley)
Brock Peters (Lucius Fox, 1992–1995)
Henry Polic II (Scarecrow, 1992–1995)
Liane Schirmer (Renee Montoya,
1994–1999)
Henry Silva (Bane)
Marc Singer (Man-Bat/Kirk
Langstrom)
Helen Slater (Talia)
Arleen Sorkin (Harley Quinn/
Harleen Quinzel)
Tara Strong (Charendoff) (Batgirl/
Barbara Gordon, 1997–1999)
Matthew Valencia (Robin/Tim
Drake, 1997–1999)
John Vernon (Rupert Thorne)
David Warner (Ra's al Ghul)
Paul Williams (The Penguin)
Mel Winkler (Lucius Fox, 1997–1999)
Efrem Zimbalist Jr. (Alfred Pennyworth)

BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES

Episode 1: "On Leather Wings"
(Airdate: 9/6/92)

Synopsis: Batman is accused of thefts committed by a bizarre Man-Bat.

Guest-stars: Clive Revill (Alfred), René Auberjonois (Dr. March), Pat Musick (Female Lab Technician), Meredith MacRae (Francine)

Writer: Mitch Brian
Director: Kevin Altieri
Animation: Spectrum

Episode 2: "Christmas with the Joker"
(Airdate: 11/13/92)

Synopsis: The Joker kidnaps Commissioner Gordon, Harvey Bullock, and Summer Gleeson on Christmas.

Guest-star: Clive Revill (Alfred)
Writer: Eddie Gorodetsky
Director: Kent Butterworth
Animation: AKOM

Episode 3: "Nothing to Fear"
(Airdate: 9/15/92)

Synopsis: The Scarecrow debuts, trying to get revenge on the University that fired him.

Guest-stars: Clive Revill (Alfred), Kevin McCarthy (Dr. Long), Richard Moll (Computer)

Writers: Henry T. Gilroy, Sean Catherine Derek
Director: Boyd Kirkland
Animation: Dong Yang

Episode 4: "The Last Laugh"
(Airdate: 9/22/92)

Synopsis: On April Fool's Day, the Joker laces a garbage barge with laughing gas, creating havoc throughout Gotham City.

Guest-stars: Pat Fraley (Jest), Richard Moll (Computer)

Writer: Carl Swenson
Director: Kevin Altieri
Animation: AKOM

Episode 5: "Pretty Poison"
(Airdate: 9/14/92)

Synopsis: Harvey Dent is poisoned by his new fiancée, Pamela Isley.

Guest-stars: Melissa Manchester, Neil Ross (Additional Voices)

Story: Paul Dini, Michael Reaves
Teleplay: Tom Ruegger
Director: Boyd Kirkland
Animation: Sunrise

Episode 6: "The Underdwellers"
(Airdate: 10/21/92)

Synopsis: Batman discovers a band of children living in the Gotham sewers committing crimes at the behest of the Sewer King.

Guest-stars: Victoria Carrol (Matron), Michael Pataki (Sewer King)

Story: Tom Ruegger
Teleplay: Jules Dennis, Richard Mueller

Director: Frank Paur
Animation: Studio Junio

Episode 7: "P.O.V."
(Airdate: 9/18/92)

Synopsis: Det. Bullock, Officer Montoya, and Officer Wilkes all give conflicting accounts of an encounter with Batman.

Guest-stars: Robbie Benson (Wilkes), John Considine (Hackle), Ron Perlman (Driller), Marc Tubert (Scarface)

Story: Mitch Brian
Teleplay: Sean Catherine Derek, Laren Bright

Director: Kevin Altieri
Animation: Spectrum

Episode 8: "The Forgotten"
(Airdate: 10/8/92)

Synopsis: Batman loses his memory while investigating the kidnappings of Gotham's homeless population.

Guest-stars: Lorin Dreyfuss (Salvo), Dorian Harewood (Dan Riley), George Murdock (Boss Biggis), Ian Patrick Williams (Ivan), Richard Moll (Computer), Jay Thomas (Guard I)

Writers: Jules Dennis, Richard Mueller, and Sean Catherine Derek
Director: Boyd Kirkland
Animation: Dong Yang, Noa Animation

Episode 9: "Be a Clown"
(Airdate: 9/16/92)

Synopsis: The Joker takes Mayor Hill's young son Jordan under his wing.

Guest-stars: Jim Cummings (Real Jenko), Justin Shenkarow (Jordan Hill)

Writers: Ted Pedersen, Steve Hayes
Director: Frank Paur
Animation: AKOM

Episode 10: "Two-Face"
(Airdate: 9/25/92)

Synopsis: Blackmailed by Rupert Thorne, Gotham D.A. Harvey Dent is transformed into Two-Face.

Guest-stars: Murphy Cross (Grace), Bob Doqui (Doctor), Matt Landers (Frankie), Diane Michelle (Candace), Linda Gary (Dr. Nora Crest), Marc Tubert (Carlos)

Story: Alan Burnett
Teleplay: Randy Rogel
Director: Kevin Altieri
Animation: TMS

Episode 11: "Two-Face, Part II"
(Airdate: 9/28/92)

Synopsis: Rupert Thorne works to find a way to stop Two-Face's attacks on his operations.

Guest-stars: Murphy Cross (Grace), Bob Doqui (Doobie), Micky Dolenz (Min, Max), Matt Landers (Frankie), Diane Michelle (Candace)

Writer: Randy Rogel
Director: Kevin Altieri
Animation: Dong Yang

Episode 12: "It's Never Too Late"
(Airdate: 9/10/92)

Synopsis: Aging mobster Arthur Stromwell faces the consequences of his life of crime as Batman tries to prevent a gang war between Stromwell and Boss Rupert Thorne.



Bob Hastings.



THE VOICE OF COMMISSIONER GORDON



by *Steven Thompson*

© Warner Bros. Commissioner Gordon TM & © DC Comics.

Bob Hastings in 2012. Courtesy of Steven Thompson.

Batman: The Animated Series had perhaps the most impressive voice cast list of any TV series ever. Mixed in with all the top-of-the-line cartoon character actors like Batman himself, Kevin Conroy, *Scooby-Doo's* Frank Welker, and *Winnie the Pooh's* Jim Cummings were familiar TV voices from the likes of Ed Asner, Nichelle Nichols, and Ron Perlman, as well as big-screen greats such as David Warner, Mark Hamill, and Malcolm McDowell. In a bit of stunt casting, even the original TV Batman, Adam West, turned up!

Another actor who appeared in an episode of the 1966 *Batman* series would become, from the beginning, a mainstay of the animated series and, in turn, his role in it would become the highlight of his later career.

Although eternally handsome and always looking younger than his years, Bob Hastings (1925–2014) rarely played the lead throughout his nearly 80-year show-business career and when he did, you usually didn't see his face at all!

Hastings' vocal characterization of Commissioner James Gordon turns up in more than 50 episodes of the cartoon series and carries over to the movies, video games, and even episodes of related DCU programs. It was hardly Bob's first comic-book connection in show business, though.

Born in 1925, Hastings started out as a boy singer on radio shows such as the long-forgotten *Doug Gray's Singing Gang* and *Coast to Coast on a Bus*. Except for a stint in the World War II Army Air Corps, radio is where he worked for nearly three decades—and that's how he liked it. In later years, he repeatedly told fans that he hated the fact that dramatic radio was kicked to the curb by television, because on radio you could play absolutely anything. It didn't matter what you looked like, only what you sounded like.

The postwar Hastings settled in for a five-year run as the title comic-strip teenager of NBC's *The Adventures of Archie Andrews*. In the 1950s, he memorably popped up on many episodes of the intelligent adult

science-fiction radio series *X Minus One*, sort of an audio precursor to TV's *Twilight Zone*.

With television inevitable, Bob had already gotten his video feet wet appropriately enough on more juvenile science-fiction series, *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* (which co-starred his brother, Don) and *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*. He looked good in uniform and began getting cast often as a military man, police officer, or other authority figure in anthologies, live dramas, and eventually sitcoms—including multiple uniformed appearances as different characters on episodes of *The Phil Silvers Show*.

McHale's Navy, beginning in 1962 and running through 1966—with two feature film spin-offs as well—gave Bob the role for which he would most be recognized. His Lieutenant Eloy Carpenter was the manic, sputtering, sycophantic stooge to Joe Flynn's Captain Wallace Binghamton and the two made quite the comedy team. Many years later, Bob told me that if the director hadn't gotten what he wanted out of Flynn in the morning, he was pretty much out of luck for that day as Joe tended to enjoy a "liquid lunch."

Except when standing at attention, Carpenter was always moving—he twitched, he blinked a lot, he curled his lip, moved his hands, cocked his head. For a radio actor, Hastings had quickly learned how to give a visual performance and, in fact, to often steal scenes with very little effort.

Although he continued popping up in person in almost every series on the air throughout the remainder of the 1960s, Bob's first cartoon role came right after *McHale's Navy* ended. Taking advantage of his still-youthful voice, he starred as Clark Kent/Superboy for Filmation in one of the first of the deluge of new superhero cartoons. Apparently a Kryptonian accent sounds a bit like a light Brooklyn accent.

Already established at Filmation when they went on to do their first *Archie* cartoon just a few years later, Bob was the obvious choice to voice "America's Favorite Teenager" again, but it never happened.

THE TOY BOX

Every version of Batman has had its Batmobile, and the car from *Batman: The Animated Series* ranks among the most memorable and long-lived. It was integral to the series, appearing in nearly every episode, and featured prominently in the opening credits.

The animated Batmobile largely used the same platform as the 1989 movie Batmobile. It had an elongated wheelbase, a long nose, and a small cockpit with sliding canopy set over the rear wheels. However, given the “dark deco” theme of the animated series, it also drew some styling cues from 1930s sports roadsters. Instead of having a turbine intake like the movie car, the animated Batmobile had a more conventional slatted grille that formed a raised ridge incorporating the engine cover. The six (or rarely, four; see image at right) exposed manifold pipes on each side of the hood further evoked classic roadsters. The car was fitted with concave wheels and low-profile tires. The only concessions to typical Batmobile styling were scalloped “Bat-wings” incorporated into the rear wheel arches.

As *BTAS* existed in a fairly ambiguous time period—steam trains and autogyros coexisted with cellphones and computers—the Batmobile could have been designed anywhere from the 1930s to the 1990s. Most other vehicles in the series, including the police cars, appeared to be from the '30s or '40s, and many had similarities to long-gone automobile marques such as Cord, Pierce-Arrow, and Cisitalia.

Like all Batmobiles, the *BTAS* car featured a number of defensive and offensive gadgets, including front and rear grappling lines, tire slashers, flamethrowers, and ejector seats. (If all these sound copied from James Bond's cars, note that Green Arrow's Arrowcar had an ejector seat in the 1940s, 20 years before the Bond films!) The Batmobile also had an autopilot function, and could be summoned or controlled by a transmitter in Batman's belt buckle. There was a retractable shield fitted to the car, although this was much less extensive than the heavy cocoon fitted to the movie Batmobile, and only covered the wheels and windshield. In some episodes, large, rectangular metal plates extended from the underside of the parked Batmobile, in order to camouflage it as a garbage skip.

In the *BTAS* episode “The Mechanic,” it was revealed that the Batmobile was actually constructed by Earl Cooper, a former motor company executive who had been blacklisted as a whistleblower for revealing a new car as a deathtrap. After Batman rescued him from some company bully boys, Earl was hired to build a new car for Batman when the original Batmobile developed problems. Batman supplied Earl with a hidden garage where he and his daughter Marva built and repaired Batman's vehicles. However, by using

To the Batmobile!

The Dynamic Duo race to their super-car in this 1992 painting by John Calmette, from the Little Brown and Company *BTAS* tie-in book *Batman: The Joker's Apprentice*. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

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THE ANIMATED BATMOBILE

by Mike Pigott



THE BATMAN ADVENTURES AN ENDURING LEGACY

by Philip Youngman



The early 1990s was a time of great upheaval for some of DC Comics' classic characters. Superman had long hair, Wonder Woman had red hair, and Batman had a new heir, and by 1993, the only place readers could find the classic Bruce Wayne Batman every month was in *The Batman Adventures*.

Regarded as one of the finest animated series of all time, it is only fitting that *Batman: The Animated Series* itself would inspire one of the greatest comic-book adaptations of all time.

Three days after the premiere of *Batman: The Animated Series* (BTAS) on FOX, *The Batman Adventures* (TBA) arrived on comic-book-store shelves. Sporting a striking cover by Ty Templeton that featured the Penguin looming large over the Gotham skyline, the issue gave many their first look at the world of the animated Dark Knight.

Originally conceived as a miniseries, TBA would soon outgrow its status as a tie-in, establish its own voice and identity, and, by way of subsequent spin-offs, enjoy a run which continued long after the final new animation episode aired.

OUR STORY BEGINS...

It all started in Denny O'Neil's office.

After viewing a rough cut of the premiere episode of BTAS, DC Comics VP Dick Giordano floated the idea of a miniseries based on the show to Batman group editor Denny O'Neil and his assistant editor Scott Peterson. The pair agreed, except for one problem—O'Neil already had a full load on his plate and wasn't going to be able to take on the task. After a brief discussion, it was clear the young assistant editor was going to be entering the "big leagues"—as he described it in the text page of TBA #1 (Oct. 1992)—and one of his first priorities was to find a creative team.



SCOTT PETERSON

TEAM-BUILDING

"Kelley Puckett and Ty Templeton were absolutely my first and only choices for TBA," Scott Peterson recalls. "Because

we started working on the comic long before any of the episodes aired, and we weren't allowed to send scripts or the story bible or model sheets or anything like that out, I needed a writer who was already familiar with the look and feel of the series. That meant there were really only a handful of comic-book writers who were available,

Welcoming Committee

Original Ty Templeton
wraparound cover
painting to the 1993
trade paperback
*Batman: The Collected
Adventures* vol. 1.
Courtesy of Heritage
Comics Auctions
(www.ha.com).

TM & © DC Comics.

The Adventures Begin

Batman is challenged by the Penguin in the first issue of DC Comics' *The Batman Adventures* (Oct. 1992). (right) Cover by Ty Templeton. (left) Original art from #1. Script by Puckett, pencils by Templeton, inks by Burchett. Courtesy of Heritage.

TM & © DC Comics.

and pretty much all of the other ones had day jobs working on the animated show."

However, Peterson had an ace up his sleeve. "Kelley Puckett, as my predecessor as the assistant editor on the Batman books, had already read all of the scripts—he had even flown out to Burbank at one point with Dennis O'Neil to advise on the show, so he was more than familiar with the series. What's more, I already knew he was a really good writer, thanks to an issue of *Detective Comics* [#634] he had recently written, and which had just blown me away. Of course, at that point I had no way of knowing just how great a writer he'd soon prove to be."

Of Templeton, Peterson says, "I was already a big fan of Ty the Guy due to his work on *Justice League*. And he just so happened to be visiting the offices when I first started looking for an artist. So, I stapled his feet to the floor and wouldn't let him leave until he agreed to do the first three issues. Fortunately, despite having a superhumanly high tolerance for pain, he agreed. It's kind of unbelievable to think about the fact that he drew those issues without the benefit of any official materials other than what had been released in press materials and such."



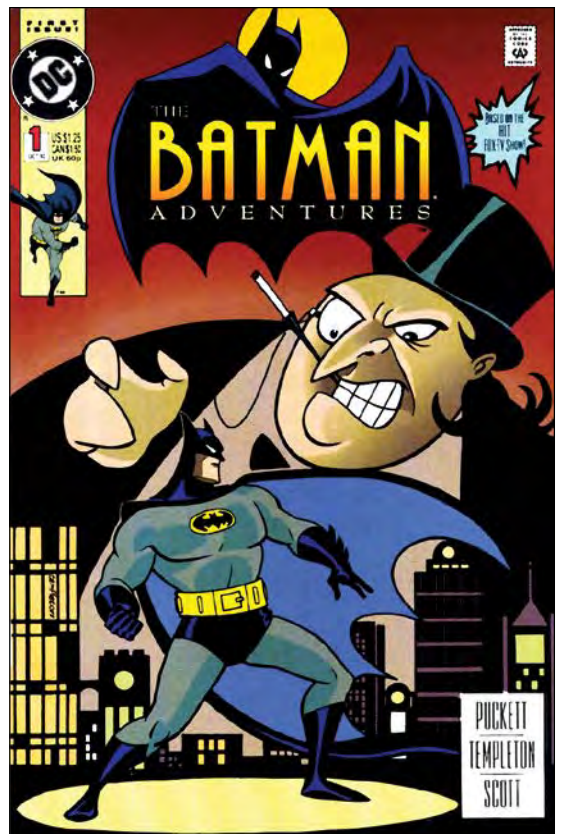
RICK BURCHETT

© Rich Burchett.

that he pretty much immediately

decided it should be an ongoing." Completing the team were letterer Tim Harkins and colorist Rick Taylor. "I jumped!" says Taylor in regard to being offered the assignment.

"I got the most up-front source material for a gig that I have ever gotten," Taylor recalls. "We benefited mightily because the first three episodes of the cartoon were in the can as we were doing the books and we watched them first. Plus, we had style guides from the studio and Joe Orlando's department made an expanded print one of licensing."



Love Psychotic Style

Uh-oh. Mistah J's not happy with Harley on this page from *Batman Adventures: Mad Love*.

TM & © DC Comics.

with the idea for *Mad Love*, contacted Denny, who put us in touch with Scott Peterson, and we were off to the races—literally as simple as that!”

While it may have been “as simple as that,” the finished work is anything but. Highly deserving of its praise and awards, the story explores the complex relationships between Harley and the Joker, and Batman and the Joker, far more deeply than had been possible on the animated series. In a book full of standout moments, the scene where Batman admits to the Joker mid-fight that Harley came closer to killing him than he ever did—and the look of fury on the Joker’s face after Batman derisively calls him Puddin’—is worth the price of admission alone.

While this was the first time either Dini or Timm had worked on the spin-off, it would certainly not be their last—in fact, they would return multiple times over the next decade, working on projects both together and separately. Outside of these official assignments however, they did not exert any influence over the books.

“We didn’t have any direct input on the comics,” Timm says. “DC never solicited our opinions on what they were doing, nor would we have had time to give them notes if they had—I learned very early on not to get my nose bent out of joint if they did something in the comics that we would never have done—my own personal way of dealing with it was to consider only the animated episodes themselves as true ‘canon’—which means that even *Mad Love* wasn’t purely canonical until we adapted it for the animated series.”

“MY NAME... IS TWO-FACE.”

The Batman Adventures continued to build upon its strengths during its second year featuring a return of Batgirl—teaming up with Robin for the first time—and returns of the Scarecrow, the Threatening Three, and Man-Bat, among others. Among all of these returns though, is a first appearance.

While in early issues—as was the case in early episodes of *BTAS*—Harvey Dent had played a minor role, Two-Face had yet to make an appearance. That would all change in #22’s (July 1994) excellent “Good Face, Bad Face.” With the team delivering a truly threatening portrayal—Dent even manages to intimidate the Joker—the story fits in early in his transformation as Bruce Wayne struggles to save his friend’s fractured psyche after he escapes from Arkham Asylum.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the story, though, is a new detail offered about Two-Face’s use of the coin. Literally putting his life on the line, Batman takes a chance that Harvey is still somewhere inside Two-Face, which is why he needs the coin—he won’t let Two-Face’s actions define him. While Two-Face argues that it is just a theory, Batman’s hunch pays off and Two-Face collapses, unable to choose whether or not to shoot Batman without a flip of his coin. While it does not redeem him, the story offers the character a glimmer of hope.



BRUCE TIMM

Courtesy of Comic Vine.

🦇 SUPER FRIENDS

The Batman Adventures #25 (early Nov. 1994) played host to the biggest guest-star of the entire run—the Man of Steel himself. With *Superman: The Animated Series* still two years away, the portrayal of Superman and Lex Luthor would be in keeping with their appearances as established in the *Superman & Batman Magazine*—that is, an animated take on the then-current mainstream DC Universe continuity, hence Superman’s long hair and the presence of Lex Luthor II.

Bruce Timm offers his thoughts on the appearance: “We tried really hard in the early days to keep *BTAS* grounded in as ‘real’ a world as possible. Sure, there were man-bats and mad scientists and killer robots, but no space aliens—thus, no Superman—also, the only DC heroes we used as guest-stars were characters we could rationalize somewhat. For example, Zatanna was more of a stage magician than an actual sorceress—we had zero interest in having Superman guest-star in *BTAS*.”

“When we did eventually do the *Superman* series (and later, crossed over with the *BTAS* continuity) we fought *really* hard to keep Superman in his ‘classic’ look—DC at the time was insisting that Superman’s long-haired look was permanent, not just a passing phase—but (A) I didn’t believe it and figured he’d be back to his old hairstyle sooner than later, and (B) I disliked the long-haired look intensely.

“Did I know they were going to have Superman show up in *The Batman Adventures*? I guess so, but whether I heard about it from the folks at DC or just through the grapevine, I don’t recall. Did they consult me on what he should like in the ‘animated style’? Nope, I don’t think they did.”

Same Timm, Next Year

(top left) Bruce Timm's cover to 1994's *TBA Annual #1*, and (bottom) an unused cover preliminary for that issue (courtesy of Heritage). (top right) *Annual #2* (1995), guest-starring the Demon, with Mike Royer inks giving Bruce's cover pencils an extra Kirby boost.

TM & © DC Comics.



A CHRISTMAS CRACKER

Fans must have been on Santa's "nice" list as they received a special present in their Christmas stocking in 1994—one wrapped in a striking Bruce Timm cover. The 64-page one-shot *Batman Adventures Holiday Special #1* (Jan. 1995) is truly deserving of the title "special." Drawn by members of the *BTAS* animation staff including Kevin Altieri, Butch Lukic, and Dan Riba, the collection of short stories was tied together by a holiday theme. It also followed in the footsteps of the previous year's *Mad Love*, winning the Eisner Award for Best Single Issue/Single Story... and likewise, being turned into an episode of *The New Batman Adventures (TNBA)*, in this case under the title "Holiday Knights." That is, with one notable omission.

Written by Paul Dini with art and color by Glen Murakami, "White Christmas" manages in just 13 pages to, if possible, be more heart-wrenching than Dini's Mr. Freeze episode, "Heart of Ice," as Mr. Freeze visits his wife's Nora's grave on what would have been their tenth wedding anniversary. With no snow forecast until January, Freeze breaks out of Arkham determined to make it snow—but it is his motive that tugs at the heartstrings. It had snowed on their wedding night and Freeze's beloved wife loved the snow—his final words, "I thought it... sad that there should be none this year. And I wouldn't want my Nora to be sad tonight" hang in the air as Batman leads the broken man back to Arkham. Visually stunning, Murakami maintains his own style while at the same time evoking that of Mike Mignola, who designed the animated Mr. Freeze. While the other sequences—which included Batgirl teaming up with a comically undercover Bullock and Montoya to take down Clayface, the Joker's attempts to ring in the New Year with a little mass murder, and two old friends sharing a coffee—are all extremely solid, it is this standout sequence which would not be animated due to a continuity conflict created by the Warner Home Video animated film, *Batman & Mr. Freeze: SubZero*.

"We tried to follow the show's continuity and tried not to contradict or establish anything," says Scott Peterson. "We were following their lead. And while we'd occasionally try to do an issue that specifically came before or after a certain episode, in general, we just concentrated on not contradicting anything." It is therefore somewhat ironic that an issue created by the show's animators would in turn be contradicted by an animated movie.

Bruce Timm explains further, "As far as I was concerned, Nora Fries was already dead in 'Heart of Ice'—100% dead, dead as a doornail—her lifeless corpse preserved in the cryo-chamber, not still-clinging-to-life in suspended animation.

"We wanted to adapt the Mr. Freeze story that Glen Murakami had drawn for the holiday special—but unfortunately, in between *BTAS* and *TNBA* Boyd Kirkland and Randy Rogel had brought the 'late' Mrs. Fries back to life in their movie *SubZero*, so we couldn't." As Timm previously stated, once a story was on the screen, only then was it considered canon. "Yes. *SubZero* was absolutely canon, even though I had no involvement in the project (and I personally would never have brought Nora Fries back to life)," he remarks.

The movie would be subsequently adapted as *Batman & Robin Adventures: Sub-Zero* by Kelley Puckett, with art by Joe Staton and Terry Beatty. The one-shot would not only introduce the revived Nora Fries to the DCAU, setting her up for future appearances, but it would present the final in-print appearances of the characters in their original *BTAS* style. It would also be one of the last times original series colorist Rick Taylor would work on a DCAU title.

"Comic adaptations of animated series were always relegated to the bottom of the barrel, getting the least attention in the line," opines Taylor. "But *Batman Adventures* made fun comics cool again and started the all-ages wing of comics. The team participated wherever possible for the stuff from Joe Orlando's special project group so we could maintain the look of everything. For me, *Batman Adventures* was a step toward comics being fun again."

THE SANDS ARE RUNNING OUT

Although *TBA* was heading towards its conclusion, there were still some great stories left to tell. During the book's final year Batgirl and Robin would team up yet again (#26), Batman would teach a grieving widower the futility of vengeance (#27), the Threatening Three's origin would be revealed (#30), and Anarky would make an appearance

EXPANDING THE TIMMVERSE A Look at the DC Animated Universe in Comics

by James Heath Lantz

The Animated Universe

Issues #1–19 of *Adventures in the DC Universe* and its *Annual* #1, featuring many of DC's major and minor superstars in "animated" form.

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When Bruce Timm and company created *Batman: The Animated Series*, a new version of the DC Universe was born. Superman and the Justice League later got their own shows that spun off from the Dark Knight's outing. With *BACK ISSUE* celebrating the 25th anniversary of the cartoon that gave birth to what has been called the "Timmverse," it seems only fitting that the companion comic books featuring the animated versions of the Caped Crusader's compatriots are covered.

ADVENTURES OF STEEL

The next logical step after the success of *Batman: The Animated Series* for Bruce Timm and company would be to work on *Superman: The Animated Series*. It flew onto television screens on September 6, 1996. The first issue of *Superman Adventures* debuted just a day earlier, with a November 1996 cover date. This wasn't the first time readers saw an animated series version of the Last Son of Krypton. *Batman Adventures* #25 saw Superman team up with the Dark Knight in 1994.

Written by Paul Dini with cover art by Bruce Timm and drawn by *Batman Adventures* artist Rick Burchett, *Superman Adventures* #1 takes place about one week after "The Last Son of Krypton: Part Three." After his plans for the LEX SKEL 5000 battle suit were foiled, Lex Luthor created a robot duplicate of Superman to destroy the Man of Steel and his reputation.

Other scribes from *Superman: The Animated Series* had migrated to the comic-book version of the show after Paul Dini. Evan Dorkin and Sarah Dyer, Hilary J. Bader, and Mark Evanier penned tales for both the cartoons and the comics. *Superman Adventures* also had a slew of famous creative talent in the comics field. Legendary Marie Severin served as colorist, while Scott McCloud, Mark Millar, and Jordan B. Gorfinkel were among the writers on the title. Aluir Amancio, Neil Vokes, and Mike Manley were some of the names that drew the book alongside Rick Burchett, who provided visuals for most of Scott McCloud's post-Dini run.

Scott McCloud told *World's Finest Online* how he got the *Superman Adventures* assignment. "I'd been a fan of the *Batman* cartoons that Paul Dini and Bruce Timm had overseen, and I had heard that there was a *Superman* cartoon coming up at about the time that I got a call from Mike McAvennie at DC Comics asking me if I'd be interested in writing a comic based on the *Superman* cartoon. Usually, I don't work on work-for-hire characters. I normally write and draw my own stuff, but it was as if I'd been given an invitation to write a brand-new character because, I think, Paul and Bruce had done such a great job in rebooting the character. It's so hard to write a character that's mired in decades of continuity. With one that's just newly minted and newly re-conceived—and so well conceived, as I thought was the case with their ideas—it was pretty hard to resist, so I signed on and did 12 issues of the series. I had a lot of fun writing it."

Scott McCloud's series of *Superman Adventures* issues began with issue #2. A woman claiming to be Superman's girlfriend becomes bait for a trap set by Metallo, the cyborg with the kryptonite heart. McCloud's run also included Brainiac, Mr. Mxyzptlk, Kryptonian villains Jax-Ur and Mala, and an alien sports competition among its pages.

After Scott McCloud's run ended, Mark Evanier (#14 and 15), Chris Duffy (#17), Devin K. Grayson (#18), and Jordan B. Gorfinkel (#20) took on the writing duties, while art chores alternated between Neil Vokes and Aluir Amancio, with Rick Burchett drawing issue #15.

Rogues' Gallery

The Action Ace's arch-foes, including (top left) Brainiac and (top right) the Parasite, got makeovers in the animated DCU. (bottom)

Unused pencil page by Rick Burchett from *Superman Adventures* #6 (Apr. 1997). Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

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On an interesting side note, Aluir Amancio had drawn a character named Senninha in *Superman Adventures* #29. He is based on the late Formula One racing pilot Ayrton Senna.

Gorfinkel also informs *BACK ISSUE* about constraints and freedom on *Superman Adventures*: "The mandate for the animated titles was the same as for any other comic book: be entertaining and don't break anything! So, plenty of freedom, and perhaps more than on the mainstream titles, because stories were meant to be self-contained, and continuity, aside from the major stuff such as how Superman's powers worked, wasn't constricting. For example, if Metropolis had been destroyed in the prior issue, it was magically whole in the next. Superman's cast of supporting characters is so rich and well developed that I naturally gravitate towards writing Lois, Jimmy, *et. al.* If you look at my stories, the through line is my love of Superman's supporting cast—they're the mirror that reflects Superman's best nature."

"I went story by story," Gorfinkel says of his overall experience on *Superman Adventures*. "I certainly would have continued if the opportunity existed. Maybe with my last one, I had a sense that the series was winding down? I don't know. I certainly went for broke on that last one. I was the first one to bring the worlds of *Superman Adventures* and *Batman Beyond* together. I even worked in Superman referring to him as *Batman Beyond* in dialogue, another first. Why they greenlit me doing such a big moment in this series, I don't know. I'm very grateful. What an honor to play in the animated sandbox."

Hilary J. Bader had been an established writer for television, comics, and animation when her story for *Superman Adventures*, the only Annual in the series, was released. It tied in with *Adventures in the DC Universe Annual* #1, also written by Bader. The cover designs for both comics and *Batman and Robin Adventures Annual* #2, according to John Delaney's reflections on *World's Finest Online* were even similar as per the artist's requests.

While *Superman Adventures Annual* #1 saw Superman fighting demons and training with Zatara, the heroes Dr. Fate, Rose and Thorn, Superboy, Mister Miracle, and Impulse must fight the same creatures in *Adventures in the DC Universe Annual* #1. The final pages of both comics have Fate and Superman finishing their conflict with the monsters. (For more on *Adventures in the DC Universe*, look elsewhere in this article.)

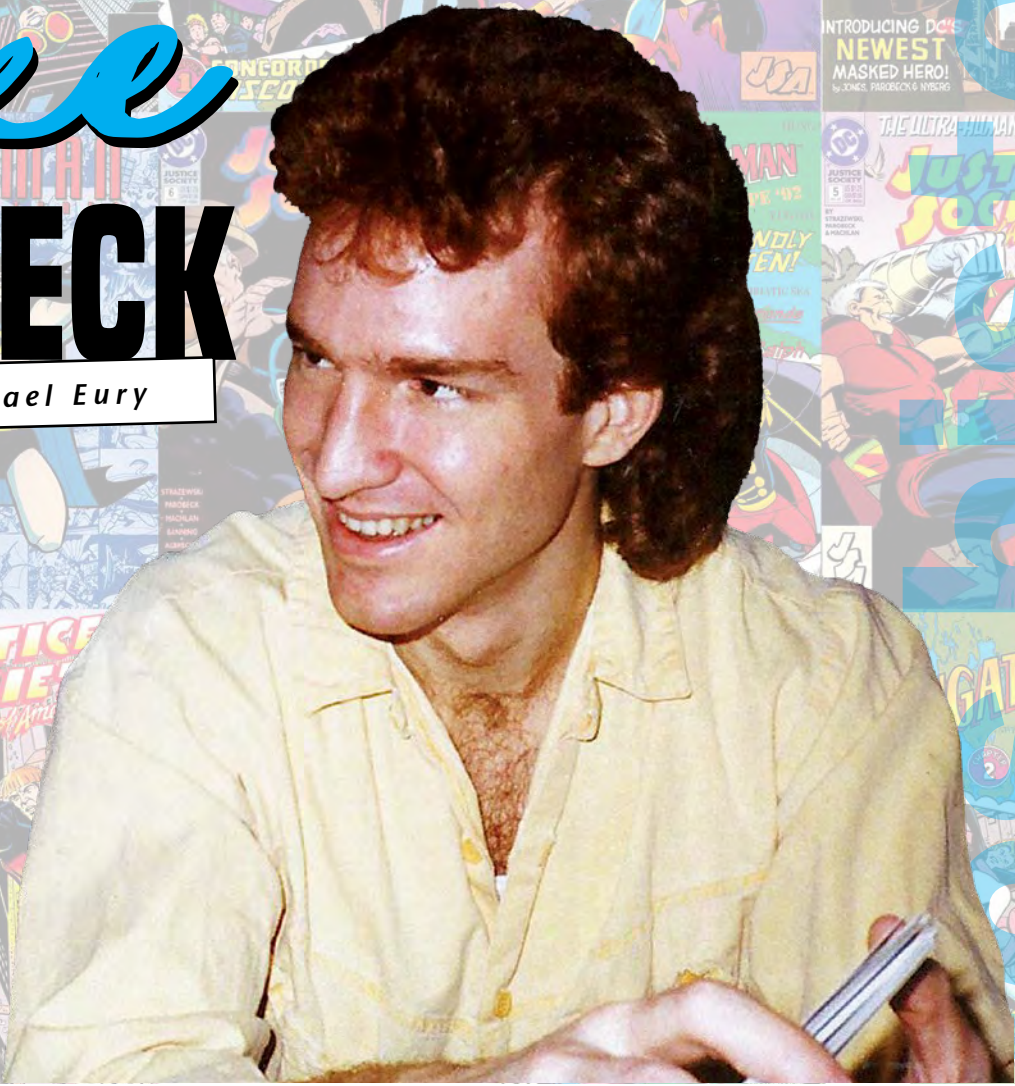
One of the most popular guest-stars on *Superman: The Animated Series* was Lobo. His appearance in the two-part episode "The Main Man" spawned several *Superman Adventures* comic books starring the Last Czarnian, including the *Superman Adventures Special* #1 (1997).



REMEMBERING

Mike PAROBECK

by Michael Eury



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He drew in the “animated” style before that term was coined. His figures were deceptively simple, resembling coloring-book art, yet they bristled with emotional impact. His storytelling was crisp and accessible, luring the eye from panel to panel. His art wasn’t flashy at a time when over-rendering and exaggerations were becoming the norm. He was Mike Parobeck, perhaps best known for his work on DC Comics’ *The Batman Adventures* comic book. Mike’s art brought out the inner child in many an adult comics reader... making his untimely death in 1996, just days shy of his 31st birthday, all the more tragic. This issue’s theme and its coverage of DC’s “animated” universe allows us this opportunity to look back at the career of this phenomenal artist.

Former DC Comics editor Brian Augustyn was fundamental in bringing Parobeck to the company, telling *BACK ISSUE*, “I first met Mike in Chicago before I moved to DC. We were introduced by a mutual friend. [Mike] was maybe 21, very shy, but very genuine and sweet. It quickly developed that he was also a very talented cartoonist with a serious love for comics.”



BRIAN AUGUSTYN

According to writer and educator Len Strazewski, “Mike was the artist that Brian Augustyn chose for *Quest for Dreams Lost*, a fundraiser comic for the Literacy Volunteers for Chicago. He drew a story-framing sequence into which other independent comic creators contributed pages. Contributors included [creators from] *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, among other independents of the mid-1980s.”

Once Brian Augustyn landed in New York at DC, “one of my goals was to find Mike work. He was a junior art director in a Chicago ad agency and I knew he wasn’t happy there. Shortly after I arrived, I managed to convince Mark Waid to use Mike for a *Secret Origins* feature,” that assignment being the Dr. Light story in *Secret Origins* #37 (Feb. 1989), written by Craig Boldman and inked by Ken Branch. “That guy was a genius,” remarked editor Waid of the young artist in *BI*’s *Secret Origins* article in our last issue.

While Parobeck would soon pencil additional *Secret Origins* stories, he was quickly tapped to illustrate a brand-new monthly series: *El Diablo*. Appropriating the name of a Bronze Age Western

CRAZY in Love: A HARLEY QUINN HISTORY

by **John Trumbull**
additional transcription by Steven Thompson



Sometimes being sick pays off.

One day in the late 1980s, animation writer Paul Dini was home ill. Flipping through television channels, he caught his college friend Arleen Sorkin on *Days of Our Lives*, in her regular role as Calliope Jones. Inspired by the film *The Princess Bride*, Sorkin suggested a fantasy sequence where the regular *Days* actors played fairy-tale characters. Sorkin's Calliope appeared as a court jester, mooning the king in an ornate harlequin outfit. As omens go, it was certainly more whimsical than a bat flying through a study window.

Explaining the origin of his longtime friendship with Sorkin, Paul Dini tells *BACK ISSUE*, "We were both at Emerson College in the late '70s, though I think Arleen was graduating the year I was coming in. We didn't overlap a lot, though I certainly knew she was one of the bright lights in the theater department. After college all the ex-Emerson kids seemed to drift either to New York or Los Angeles and eventually reconnect. I kept running into Arleen at mutual friends' parties and we became friends through them."

By the early '90s, Dini was a writer on *Batman: The Animated Series*, and needed a villainous gal Friday to the Joker in the episode "Joker's Favor." Remembering the image of Arleen as a harlequin on *Days*, a new character began to click into place. As *BTAS* producer Bruce Timm recalls, "We had a bunch of Joker episodes where he had different kinds of henchmen, and they're usually just guys in suits. Sometimes they were named after famous comedians or comedy sketches. Like 'Rocco and Henshaw' [Sgt. Bilko's sidekicks on *The Phil Silvers Show*] or whatever. So [Paul] pitches me, 'As a change of pace, what about a hench-woman? And we could call her 'Harley Quinn' like a harlequin.' I thought it sounded like a great idea. I said, 'Sure. Let's do that.' So it was pretty straightforward."

Dini was so enthusiastic he even sketched out a proposed costume. Bruce Timm explains, "It was an Adam West-show kind of version, where she has the '60s miniskirt. Kind of a curly bob and stuff. I was just like, 'Naaah.' It didn't seem to me like it worked in the world that we'd created, so I took it upon myself to design her." Simplifying the look of traditional medieval harlequins, Timm devised a sleek red-and-black costume partially inspired by the Golden Age Daredevil. Harley Quinn was born.

FINDING HARLEY

But Harley still needed a voice. And who better to play the part than her inspiration, Arleen Sorkin? Since Harley was a one-time guest role, no other actresses auditioned. As Dini remembers, "I think [voice director] Andrea Romano had a short list of actresses in her pocket to call if Arleen didn't work out, but I never knew who they were. Arleen nailed it, so that was that."

Timm concurs. "Arleen came in doing that voice and I was, like, 'Okay, great! That fits. That's good.' It's cute, it's charming, it's funny, and it fit the dialogue. The dialogue was all written in '40s comedic gun-moll slang, so it was all kind of perfect."

Arleen Sorkin tells *BACK ISSUE*, "All I knew was I had a job, you know? That's an actor. 'Oh my god, I got a job!'"

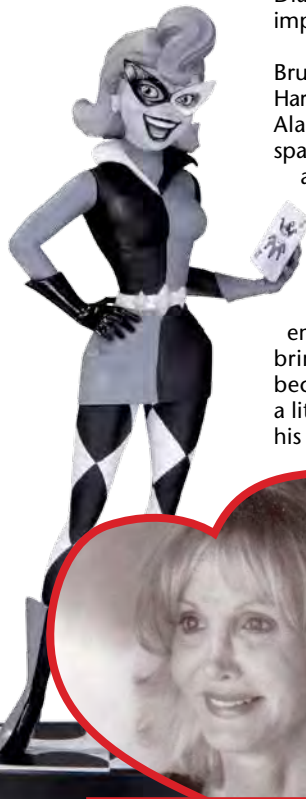
And I went in, and Mark Hamill was there. I think I had met Mark at Carrie Fisher's house years ago. You know, he's a lovely, lovely guy. So I didn't feel nervous around him. When we would go in to record it, I would lose track of what I was doing. When Mark would perform, I would just watch him. It was like watching a master! I know that sounds corny, but it's true. He's such an unbelievable actor. And then when

Love Psychotic Style

Detail from the cover of DC's *Batman Adventures: Mad Love*, its Timm cover signed by Harley's co-creators, Paul Dini and Bruce Timm.

TM & © DC Comics.





ARLEEN SORKIN

Diane Pershing came in and did Poison Ivy, I was so impressed with her! So I loved it. It was a great job."

But despite this successful debut, *BTAS* producers Bruce Timm and Alan Burnett were hesitant to have Harley immediately return. As Paul Dini relates, "Bruce and Alan agreed, and rightly so, that we should use her sparingly at first. It was important to keep the Joker as a solo threat in *Mask of the Phantasm* and episodes like 'Joker's Wild' and 'The Strange Secret of Bruce Wayne.' But when Joker needed to have his gang, Harley was usually a welcome addition."

Timm wanted to keep the *BTAS* Joker as frightening as possible, as previous animated shows always emphasized his wacky side. "When Paul talked about bringing Harley back, I was a little bit reluctant just because I thought, 'Okay, that kind of undercuts him a little bit,'" Timm says today. "It plays more towards his comedic side and it gives him a recurring girlfriend, which also humanizes him to a degree which I was not really comfortable with. But having seen that first episode once it came back from overseas, it was hard to deny that she had immense appeal. The combination of the design, the personality in the script, and what Arleen definitely brought to the table, we were all kind of like, 'Wow!' I mean, immediately. The minute we saw the raw footage, it was like, 'Okay, there's something here!' So [Paul] didn't have to twist my arm very hard to bring her back. And then, of course, once we opened that door, then suddenly Paul was *constantly* bringing her back! We couldn't have the Joker without Harley at that point."

HARLEY AND IVY

Further appearances in "The Laughing Fish," "Almost Got 'Im," and "The Man Who Killed Batman" solidified Harley's part on the show, but a new side was revealed when she teamed up with fellow bat-villain Poison Ivy in the episode "Harley and Ivy."

"That was a fun one," Timm recalls. "That one was just one of Paul's weird ideas. You could see the appeal of it. They were interesting characters together. I tend to think Poison Ivy is a much more serious character than Harley usually, but when they're together, she kind of becomes Bud Abbott. And Harley's like Lou Costello. So she's funnier, but she's still the straight man, you know? They definitely make a good team, weirdly enough. They shouldn't really go together, but they do."

Ivy was in some ways a positive influence, forcing her friend to realize just how abusive the Joker really was. "Poison Ivy is definitely the catalyst for Harley's quote-unquote 'awakening,' in terms of kind of opening her eyes to how the Joker is actually treating her," Timm explains. "Poison Ivy takes no sh*t from anybody,

She Coulda Been a Contenda

(top) Paul Dini's original character design for Harley Quinn, and a DC Collectibles' statuette of same. (middle) A cartoon given by Timm to Sorkin. (bottom left) Dini and Timm cameo on *BTAS*. (bottom right) Gal pals Poison Ivy and Harley.



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**Romantic
Bat-Roast**

(top) Cover to *The Batman Adventures* #28 (Jan. 1995), by Mike Parobeck and Rick Burchett.

(bottom) An undated Harley illo by Bruce Timm, courtesy of Heritage.

TM & © DC Comics.



HARLEY QUINN, SHOWSTOPPER

Sorkin’s friendship with Paul Dini continued to inspire her animated counterpart. The episode “Harlequinaide” featured Harley distracting a group of mobsters by belting out the humorous show tune “Say We’re Sweethearts Again” from the 1944 MGM musical comedy *Meet the People*. The song was an old audition piece of Sorkin’s, and Dini arranged to buy the rights after first hearing it on a harrowing ride home.

“Paul was driving me back from a recording session during the [L.A.] riots, so I was trying to keep him distracted,” Sorkin recalls. “And I’m not a great singer, but I just thought, ‘I’ll sing songs for him.’ So I knew that song from my cabaret days and sang it to him and next time I saw him, he said, ‘It’s in the show.’ He really knew how to make me feel like he valued me and I certainly was so impressed and valued him. We had a great working relationship.”

The episode also provided another one of Harley’s trademarks. Bruce Timm reveals, “Harley’s pigtails? [Director] Kevin Altieri came up with those for ‘Harlequinaide.’ He suggested it. He said, ‘Yeah, when she’s in her civilian look, she should have these pigtails that stick out like the jester hat.’ So that was Kevin’s big contribution.”

HARLEY’S LAST HURRAH?

As *Batman: The Animated Series* neared the end of its initial run, Harley got a solo story as a grand sendoff. The 1994 episode “Harley’s Holiday” finds a newly released Harleen Quinzel struggling to stay straight, only to be falsely accused of shoplifting in an ever-escalating comedy of errors. The episode ends on a touching note, as a sympathetic Dark

Knight tells a contrite Harley to rebuild a life. I had hoped that someday she’d get out of Arkham perm

Much like her movie, she was inspired by an episode on a sitcom called “Harley’s Holiday” that premiered, so did she. “I was in Geneva, and I said, ‘I didn’t know how to do it,’” Sorkin says. “The actor pitch a story she didn’t know the words to. ‘I told that she didn’t know the words to,’ [re]jected the idea. He had breakfast with me. He thought it was a good idea. He made something out of it. I felt bad and he made something out of it.”

As Bruce Timm explains, “We thought at the time that Harley was a bad character. ‘Okay, we’re probably going to do an episode.’ So we killed her.”

But ultimately, Harley was reformed for good. “I was a fan of *Batman*, Harley was a fan with the Joker.

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INTO THE DCU

Although she made her first comic-book appearance in the *BATAS* tie-in comic *Batman Adventures* #12 (Sept. 1993), Harley was officially incorporated into the regular DC Universe with the October 1999 special *Batman: Harley Quinn*. As Bruce Timm points out, “It’s not the first time a character from other media has been subsumed into the official DC canon. Normally they don’t make a big deal out of it. Like, Jimmy Olsen originated in the [Superman] radio show. It was just, ‘Oh, that’s a cool character. Let’s put him in the comics.’ But they were smart to publicize and make a big deal out of it because, obviously, it helped with sales and her profile and everything.”