

# Movies run gamut from thrilling to tiresome

By Judith Trojan  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Unless you've been cave-sitting for the past few months, you're well aware of the ballyhoo surrounding the release of "Batman" (Warner Bros.).

With 30-year-old director Tim Burton ("Pee-Wee's Big Adventure," "Beetlejuice") at the helm, and Michael Keaton and Jack Nicholson in the roles of Batman and the Joker respectively, it's no wonder that Batman fans are wary. Despite its off-beat production team, no one could have predicted the mind-boggling, visually brilliant film that resulted.

"Batman" is worth every penny audiences pay to see it, especially if experienced in theaters equipped with 70mm facilities.

But buyers beware! Discard all preconceived Batman notions and assumptions before entering theaters and fasten your seatbelts, for this is no ordinary, lighthearted summer blockbuster.

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of Bob Kane's DC Comics characters, "Batman" comes with a set of warnings. The film is not for preteens and is not a clone of the campy 1960s TV series starring Adam West. As in the very earliest Batman comics, Robin is non-existent, and the folk hero vision of Batman as an invincible caped crusader is also out to lunch.

This Batman, a.k.a. Bruce Wayne, is a troubled man still unable to cope with an early trauma that destroyed forever his hopes of a normal family life. Like many powerful modern men, he has difficulties making commitments to women. As played hauntingly by Michael Keaton, Wayne/Batman is as much of an outsider as is his nemesis Jack Napier, a.k.a. the Joker.

Both men — although one personifies good, the other evil — are misfits who are basically voyeurs to life. A neurotic and a psychotic, Batman and the Joker have both nurtured unfinished business from their childhoods into suicidal adult vocations.

When bespectacled philanthropist Wayne meets up with feisty photojournalist Vicki Vale (Kim Basinger), he finally faces some of his human failings. But when hoodlum Jack Napier is disfigured by noxious chemicals, he returns from the dead to exploit all of his inhuman failings.

Nicholson gives a virtuoso performance as the despicable Napier/Joker. Graduating from black to purple suits with acid-squirting boutonnières, Napier's rebirth as the white-faced Joker is both riotous and horrifying. An evil clown with a perpetual grin and wicked laugh, he aims to control Gotham City at any cost. His villainous acts are gruesome and not fit for clown-loving youngsters, but Nicholson is always in touch with the satiric elements of his role and will delight adults with his broad performance.

The third key character in this moody drama is Gotham City. Overrun with greed, grime and general lawlessness, Gotham City is a metropolis not unlike New York City in the very near future. A confused web of gothic and modernistic spires, the city is perpetually grey and deeply shadowed. No sun shines and no one smiles. Expressionistic and highly stylized, the production design by Anton Furst will pull audiences in like insects being sucked into a spider web. The all-consuming darkness also works effectively to shadow



**Batman, played by Michael Keaton, confronts the Joker, played by Jack Nicholson (right), in "Batman." The U.S. Catholic Conference says the film "is worth every penny the audiences pay to see it." Due to some grisly comic-book violence, a nightmare vision of life surrounding a notable folk hero and a suggested sexual encounter, the USCC classification is A-III —adults.**

much of the violence. Furst will win awards for his startling vision, a vision that says more than the film's choppy script by Sam Hamm and Warren Skaaren. But if you lose track of the undeveloped supporting characters and feel unsatisfied by some of the truncated plotlines, there is no overlooking Tim Burton's fine direction and the stellar performances of Keaton and Nicholson. They do not make the eternal fight between good and evil an easy one. "Batman" offers no "Rocky" ending, no celebratory parades.

Due to some grisly comic-book violence, a nightmare vision of life surrounding a notable folk hero and a suggested sexual encounter between Batman and Vicki Vale, "Batman" is too intense for preteens and impressionable young adolescents. Older adolescents should have no trouble handling this material in context. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 —parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

### 'Renegades'

Watching "Renegades" (Universal) is like eating mediocre Chinese food. An hour later, you'll probably forget you even saw it.

With its minimalist plot and some bloody fisticuffs, the film has maybe three good things going for it. Two key attractions are Kiefer Sutherland as an undercover cop and Lou Diamond Phillips as a Native American out to nab some murderous jewel thieves. Promising young actors who were paired successfully in last summer's hit "Young Guns," they make their buddy scenes work despite a contrived script and hair-raising but implausible stunts.

Most of the film's first 40 minutes cover a jewel heist and far-fetched car chase with Buster (Sutherland) at the wheel of the getaway car. He's infiltrated the gang — although no one on the police force knows it — to nab a crooked cop. He's almost history until he's saved by Hank (Phillips), a

Lakota Indian, who's after the crooks for killing his brother in cold blood and running off with his tribe's sacred lance.

Director Jack Sholder keeps the action fast and furious, which diverts attention from the contrived story line. The Indian subplot has great potential, and the chemistry works between the two mistrusting protagonists, but the film misses its mark as a substantive cop thriller.

Due to some profanity, bloody violence including several coldblooded murders and intense comic-book chases, the USCC classification is A-III —adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

### 'No Holds Barred'

Pro wrestler Hulk Hogan stars in "No Holds Barred" (New Line), a tiresome turn on the mat that may even insult die-hard wrestling fans.

The Hulkster grunts and winks through his role as TV superstar Rip, a strongman with a heart of gold. When sleazy TV tycoon Brell (Kurt Fuller) attempts to lure Rip away from a rival network at any cost, Rip gets mad and Brell gets even.

This is dumb stuff highlighted by the attractive Joan Severance ("See No Evil, Hear No Evil") as Rip's girlfriend and media rep, Sam. Director Thomas J. Wright carries his "Battle of the Tough Guys" final bout between Rip and a mean cross-eyed dude named Zeus (Tom "Tiny" Lister) a tad too far. The stompathon is excessive, the blacks are stereotyped and the mindless scenario can best be forgotten.

Due to excessive, gratuitous comic-book violence, some rough language and vulgar bathroom humor, the USCC classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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