

BAIMAN

Writer's Bible

written by

J. Michael Straczynski

FIRST DRAFT
December 19, 1987
SECOND DRAFT
January 24, 1988
FINAL DRAFT
March 10, 1988

NELVANA PRODUCTIONS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
The Batman	2
Robin	4
The Dynamic Duo: Their Relationship.	7
Bruce Wayne and Jason Todd	9
Interlude #1	12
Alfred Pennyworth	13
Miss Chandra	15
Commissioner James Gordon	17
Special Assistant Frederica Miles.	19
Nightwing	21
Interlude #2	23
The Batman's Rogue's Gallery	25
The Joker	26
The Penguin	28
Catwoman	29
The Riddler	30
Clayface	31
Cat-Man	32
Poison Ivy	33
The Scarecrow	34
Two-Face	35
The Ventriloquist	36
Devices, Gadgets and the Like	37
The Stories	40
Summation	47

In the ARC file you will find this explanatory note, and the following items: the BATMAN bible, the pilot script for the BATMAN animated series, and an outline for an additional episode.

It should be mentioned that the tone of the middle-later half of the pilot is the general tone that the series would take, that emphasis would be given once the series was approved to doing a fairly gritty series, including at least one very strong drug-related story that told the truth about that subject.

I hope you enjoy it, and look forward to your comments on it.

J. Michael Straczynski

BATMAN
Writer's Bible

A brilliant shaft of light slices through the darkened sky, flashing across low-hung clouds and rooftops, spearing the nightwinds with a yellow-and-black symbol.

His symbol.

The sign of the Bat.

And this is his world.

A world of danger and excitement, of strange and fantastic villains, of adventure and gadgetry and heroism and -- at the heart of it all -- a bond of love and dedication between two people.

Father and son.

Hero and apprentice.

Batman and Robin.

For nearly fifty years, the Batman has been one of the most famous and enduring of heroes. During that time, his popularity has taken on nearly mythic proportions, second only to Superman. There are reasons for this -- reasons we must explore and understand if we hope to replicate the success of Batman in the world of Saturday morning animation.

First and foremost, there are two questions that must be addressed.

One: Who is the Batman?

Two: Why is the Batman?

THE BATMAN

(Prefatory Note: Although the following information is included here for the sake of completeness, it is not meant to play a major role in the individual stories that will make up the animated series. It is conveyed here because a) it is canon, and b) it gives us a handle on tone, attitude and motivation. When a doctor operates, we need not know why he became a doctor, what forces shaped him. We need only know that he is very good at what he does. But from time to time the feelings behind those reasons may surface, and in that context, background is relevant. In the case of the Batman, this background tells us much about his motivations, and the way he approaches crime --- not as a kick, not as something neat to do, but because he can do no other.)

Begin in Gotham City. A night long past. Dr. Thomas Wayne, his wife Martha, and son Bruce are returning from a movie. They walk down fashionable Park Row, passing beneath street lamps that are little more than smears against the darkness --

And suddenly there is someone else. Someone from the shadows. His name: Joe Chill, a two-bit hood, a stickup man whose courage comes out of the business end of a .38 handgun.

Voices split the night. Shouts.

Thomas Wayne tries to grab the gun.

Martha Wayne cries out.

Two shots echo down Park Row.

Footsteps are heard running back into the welcoming dark.

And Bruce Wayne, age ten, is alone.

Flash forward across a panorama of pain, past the years spent living with his uncle Phillip, past long nights spent studying science, criminology, biology, medicine, ballistics, mathematics, language and a hundred other disciplines. Move faster now, past a physical regimen that pushes Bruce Wayne into and beyond the sphere of Olympic athletes, noting as we pass the muscles taut as tensile steel, the laser-quick reflexes, the gymnastic skills, the balletic style and grace of movement.

Witness, in short, the evolution of boy into man into something more than a man. The perfect crime fighter.

Finally, the fateful night when Bruce Wayne searched his mind and his conscience for a symbol, a sign, something that would strike terror into the hearts of criminals.

He chose the sign of the Bat.

And the world would never be the same again, nor would the night. For now the shadows of Gotham City held more than danger; they held a guardian, a defender of the weak, a grey-and-blue avenger.

The Batman had come to Gotham City.

In his role of crime fighter and defender of Gotham City, the Batman has faced, and continues to face a fantastic range of adventures. From the streets of the city to the depths of space, from the mundane to the magical, from science to superstition, the threats and adventures continue to come, usually accompanied by an assortment of strange villains.

But they can wait. There's someone else we must meet first.

ROBIN

Or, more accurately, the new Robin.

For many years, Batman worked with his young ward, Dick Grayson. As Robin, they tackled crime side by side, daring and adventuring together.

But young wards have a habit of growing up.

Eventually, Dick Grayson matured, and a time came when he knew that he had to leave Batman's shadow and strike out on his own. This he did, assuming the alter-ego of Nightwing (whose costume, perhaps not accidentally, somewhat resembles Batman's).

For quite some time thereafter, the Batman operated alone. But the void in his life previously filled by Dick Grayson gnawed at him. This need, this relationship, is the key element in the Batman's nature, and the adventures that will make up the series.

Don Quixote needed his Sancho Panza.

Sherlock Holmes needed his Dr. Watson.

And the Batman needs a Robin. In the absence of a Robin, he tends toward a grim, relentless sort of attitude. Robin is needed to lighten his load, make him smile, remind him that there is light amid the darkness.

Everything about Robin is different, if one stops to consider it. The colors of his uniform are bright and cheerful, in stark contrast to the somber blue and grey of Batman's cowl and costume. By nature, a robin is associated with sunshine and cheer, a portent of bright days. A bat is a thing of shadows and fear, a harbinger of ill tidings -- for some.

The old wisdom still holds true:

Opposites attract.

But for several years, there was no opposite, no light side to balance out the dark. Then, a little over a year ago (as this is being written), something remarkable happened.

Late one night, while returning from the scene of a crime, Batman turned a corner and made a startling discovery.

Someone had boosted the Batmobile. Taken the tires and the hubcaps and anything else that wasn't nailed down.

He could only stand there, jaw agape. It took several seconds for the immensity, the absurdity of his situation to sink in.

Someone stole his tires. His tires!

From THE BATMOBILE?!

It didn't take long for the world's greatest detective to track down the offender. His name: JASON TODD. An orphan, around 12 or 14 years old, Jason was a street kid, but smart, wily, with a sense of humor and irony. He would have preferred to live straight, but there aren't many ways for a kid on his own to make money. Boosting cars was one way.

And boosting the Batmobile was just too big a challenge to resist.

On discovering the nature of the culprit, the Batman was torn between several emotions. On the one hand, it was a crime, a Wrong Thing, to steal tires. Especially when they were his.

But he had to admit it. There was a certain humor about it. And it proved the kid had brass combined with smarts. It wasn't easy to circumvent the Batmobile's automatic defense system. But young Jason had done exactly that.

Batman's curiosity was piqued, and after getting his tires

back (for a quite reasonable price), he began to keep an eye on Jason. At a crucial moment, when Jason stood on the crossroads between honesty and a life of crime, Jason stood up to a local gang and chose the former, putting himself at great risk. It was then that the Batman showed up again, helping him out of the scrape, and putting the gang behind jail.

With Jason's help.

It was obvious that they made quite a team. So it was logical that instead of letting Jason return, alone, to the streets, Batman offered him a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity:

The chance to become the second ward of millionaire Bruce Wayne.

And to become the new Robin.

Jason considered the offer for all of about five seconds before agreeing.

And thus, from mutual need and mutual respect, came the rebirth of the dynamic duo.

Batman and Robin the Boy Wonder were back.

An important distinction that must be drawn here between Jason Todd and the original Robin (about whom more later) is that Jason is still learning. Very much a neophyte at crime fighting, he sometimes makes mistakes. Batman has him on a fairly strict regimen of school, physical workouts, and classes in criminology. Jason tackles these subjects with the exuberance of youth -- which has its good points and its bad points.

Sometimes exuberance spills over into recklessness, and that is when things get a little sticky for the Boy Wonder.

Or as the Joker is fond of calling him at such times,

"Rueben, the Boy Hostage."

THE DYNAMIC DUO -- THEIR RELATIONSHIP

For Batman, Robin is a moderating, softening influence. He makes Batman smile, and sometimes even laugh. He is that spark of innocence and playfulness that Batman needs.

Because in a way, Robin represents the playfulness that Batman lost years before on Park Row.

For Robin, Batman is mentor, father, hero. There is great respect there. It's very possible, though, that he could address Batman as "Batguy."

Once.

A Batman frowning is not a pretty sight.

Robin looks forward to the day when he is as good as Batman, but without being quite so stodgy. He keeps after Batman to loosen up a little. To keep things light, he tends to quip during the times of greatest stress. He also does this to make Batman see that he's not worried, that he's more than able to take care of himself -- that he's not afraid, or unsure.

Of course, he sometimes is.

Of course, Batman knows this.

And of course, Robin knows he knows.

But it's the game they play, and neither of them will ever speak of it directly, except in times of self-examination.

On the lighter side, Jason/Robin is perpetually up, and chipper, and gung-ho. This is all new to him, a fascinating and exciting world to be explored. At times he's like a frenetic, over-eager puppy with a brand new ball to roll himself around and bounce into the walls for a while.

Which amuses Batman/Bruce no end -- even if said amusement is sometimes accompanied by much head-shaking and eye-rolling. That contrast between them -- exuberance versus precise control, emotionalism versus a somewhat stuffy nature -- is what gives them balance, and color, and a sense of fun.

Jason is majorly up on the idea of Being Robin. Robin, the Boy Wonder! Robin, the shorter half of the Dynamic Duo! He is not above standing in front of the mirror, trying to get his cape to billow properly, or practicing his lines or his You Guys Are Gonna Get It Now look of unbridled fierceness . . . which Alfred swears is actually just gas.

He tries hard to learn from Batman the ways to do things right. Sometimes he slips into downright emulation and imitation -- and even Batman has to wince just a little.

As Robin, Jason brings a key background trait to bear -- his training in acrobatics, as part of his parent's circus act. He can bounce, jump, swing, spin, somersault and leap out of (or into) trouble.

So much (for the moment) for the Batman/Robin relationship. We turn our attention now to the flip side of the secret-identity coin . . .

BRUCE WAYNE AND JASON TODD

Bruce Wayne's cover reputation is that of millionaire philanthropist and occasional playboy. He is often seen with women sufficiently glamorous to fry your eyes out at twenty paces. But though they may be at his elbow at charity functions and police balls and grand openings, they never quite make it into his heart.

Because that's where the Batman lives, and except for Robin, the Batman works alone.

Which is not to say that he doesn't enjoy their company. He does. And so does Jason, whose jaw is agape more than occasionally at the women who step through the doorway into Wayne Manor. There are times he takes a certain pleasure in trying to set Bruce up with someone. Of all the women Bruce knows, he is closest to VICKI VALE, a photo journalist for Gotham City's Picture News magazine. She has confided to Bruce her greatest ambition: to someday discover the Batman's secret identity.

And Bruce just keeps on smiling.

Bruce also heads up the Wayne Foundation, which provides grants and other assistance to needy families, especially those touched by crimes.

Whereas Bruce fits into this world of money and glamour with practiced ease, acquired over a lifetime, Jason Todd is still a bit overwhelmed by it. He was, remember, a street kid. It may be only five miles from Crime Alley to Wayne Manor, but the difference is staggering.

And a heck of a lot of fun.

Upon arriving at Wayne Manor, and realizing just how much

money Bruce had, he might've whistled long and low and wondered why Bruce just didn't hire a small army or a gang to go out and do the dirty stuff for him.

Which is when Bruce would've patiently explained the need to take personal responsibility for your world, your life, your city, to take a stand against the growing dark. One shouldn't let the pursuit of pleasure interfere with one's duty.

A pause from Jason. "Does this mean I shouldn't have wired the Batmobile for MTV?"

We repeat: A Batman frowning is not a pretty sight.

Jason attends a Gotham public school (no elitism here), where he is a barely-adequate student. Having been reared in the circus, and having spent the last year or so on his own, his academic skills are somewhat lacking. Consequently, he really has to work at it. He's hampered at times by the knowledge of who he is at night, when the Bat Signal breaks the still night, and consequently concentrating is sometimes just plain beyond his capabilities.

Jason is at that age when he's just starting to learn about girls. He's at the "Man, I really like to look at them but what the heck do you do with 'em once you've got them and how about those Mets?" stage.

Socially, he's a bit of a loner, because he has a secret and is still learning how to live with it. If bugged by other kids, he has to rein in his impulses to fight, which takes a lot of courage. Because of Batman's training, he could easily wipe the floor with anybody who picks on him, no matter how big. But that

would not be right, and Batman has taught him that such skills have a time and a place . . . and the schoolyard isn't one of them. Consequently, rather than get into fights, he'll try to get out with a joke or some other device, which opens him up to teasing more than occasionally.

There's a bit of Clark Kent to Jason Todd.

And there are times it drives him absolutely nuts.

But in the long run, it's worth it. In spades.

Interlude #1

If it seems we have dwelled quite a bit on the personal side of the Batman/Robin relationship, and on their relationship as Bruce and Jason -- we have. And there is a reason for it.

A reason that strikes to the core of what will make this series different from any other.

In virtually all animated superhero shows, the secret identities are virtual throwaways. A quick glimpse of the hero in civvies at the top of the show, then zoom and away to the next fight. They are strictly two-dimensional. They fight crime in a world utterly devoid of any personal context.

And the relationship usually seen is one of chums going out and doing cool stuff. No depth of feeling, no true friendship or camaraderie.

BATMAN will be different.

Make no mistake -- the emphasis of the show will always be on action, and adventure, and excitement. But it will be wrapped around this unique relationship, because that aspect gives us a fantastically wide range of stories and approaches.

It can bring in comedy, warmth, silliness, love, anger, and everything in between.

In short, it gives us a context in which to have some very real fun.

And speaking of context, we turn our attention now to the other two characters who are instrumental to the day-to-day functioning of Batman and Robin

ALFRED PENNYWORTH

Stuffy and rail-thin, not quite as old as the Dead Sea Scrolls and not nearly as talkative, the British-born Alfred is the family retainer at Wayne Manor. Butler, friend, confidante, deliverer of the occasional curmudgeonly line, and possessor of a "let's get real" philosophy, Alfred is sometimes (but not often) called upon to help keep the secret identities of Batman and Robin a mystery, and to help in other ways.

In a very real sense, Alfred is their tie to the real world, and he knows it. In their civilian life, he keeps tabs on their schedule, prepares their meals, distracts nosey reporters, chides them about their erratic schedules ("Some of us have a penchant for sleeping in our beds, Master Bruce,"), tidies up the Batcave (which, if you stop to think about all the stuff that's in there, is often an unnerving prospect), and is sometimes involved in their cases.

"Let me see if I have this straight, sir. You wish me to take this -- device to the corner of 5th and Edgemont, in one of the sleaziest parts of town, and attempt to sell it as though I had stolen it, and you wish me to say I'm Al "The Man" Steward from -- Detroit. Is that the gist of it?"

"Precisely, Alfred."

A BEAT. "I see Master Bruce's sense of humor is keen as ever."

He always refers to Bruce and Jason in the third person, in stodgiest British butler tradition.

On a strictly personal level, Alfred is Bruce's closest

friend. He helped raise Bruce, and understands Bruce's passion for the pursuit of justice. In the capacity of friend, he tries to provide some degree of balance, and a different kind of humor.

Jason thinks Alfred's a hoot. He takes every possible opportunity to good-naturedly puncture Alfred's stuffiness, and every so often, Alfred's warmth and concern and humor sneaks through. But then it dashes back behind the door and Alfred returns to his assessment of the dismal state of Jason's closet.

If Alfred's character can be described in any one word, it is loyalty. Loyalty that cuts through all social lines between employer and employee. He would willingly put himself at risk for Bruce and Jason without a moment's hesitation.

MISS CHANDRA

To Jason, Bruce Wayne is father figure, mentor, guide and trainer. But there are still elements necessary to a boy's growth that are missing from that description. Bruce's relationship with Dick Grayson is good, but strained at times -- and Bruce has wondered more than once if the lack of a woman in the Wayne household was a factor.

This time around, he has made the assumption that it was.

And Bruce Wayne never makes the same mistake twice.

Result: Miss Chandra.

Not long after Jason's arrival at Wayne Manor, Bruce makes a call to a "friend" who has a lot of experience with mechanical people, androids and the like. (Jason overhears part of the conversation, but Bruce won't explain. Says it's a surprise for him, and nothing more.) A few days later, in the middle of the night, a long crate arrives mysteriously in the sealed Batcave, the only clue to its origin: a bright S burned in one end. (We cannot use Superman in this show, but a nice throw-away reference would be nice, and surely within legal parameters.)

Inside is Miss Chandra. (Chandra is the Hindu name for the moon -- fitting for a world whose foremost symbol is the bat.)

Miss Chandra is the closest thing ever created to an independently functioning artificial person. Her hair is jet black but with a thin streak of silver running from forehead to back, what would have once been called a handsome woman, apparently in her late fifties.

She is Jason's custom-designed, all-purpose nanny. At first he's a little put off by her, knowing she's not real. But she is

feeling, and wise, and funny, and is always willing to help or listen at any time of the day or night. She doesn't dote, or berate, or complain. She is like the wisest of mothers, who knows how much rope to give her young charge, when to listen and when to speak; the sort of mother one willingly confides in.

In time, she grows into surrogate mother, confidante, and companion for Jason, who eventually accepts her into his life. He realizes that he can tell her anything, and she will never judge him. Only help him. School-work, girls, exercise, food, the difficulty of trying to keep up with Batman . . . she is there to listen to it all, and help when invited.

With Batman, we see a very knowing side to her character. She has quite a bit of knowledge, and at times Batman wonders just how much personality and knowledge she's been programmed for. She surprises him quite often, and when asked how she happened to know about something, she'll just shrug it off and say it was perfectly obvious. After a while one begins to suspect that she's far more human than even Batman realizes.

With Alfred, she has enormous opportunities for fun. He is quite set and determined to see her as a very nice machine, but she persists (and, one suspects, takes an almost mischievous delight) in making him forget this every so often. Invariably he will catch himself doing it, and naturally deny it ever happened.

Though she has a room upstairs in Wayne Manor, she can sometimes be found in her private niche in the Bat cave, where she sits and rocks in her off hours, armed with wisdom and patience, tea cosey and recharger.

COMMISSIONER JAMES GORDON

Although Batman is not a deputized law officer in the strictest sense of the word, he does work extensively and openly with the authorities -- most specifically with Police Commissioner Gordon.

Gordon was still a Lieutenant when Bruce Wayne made his debut as Batman, and at first they were on opposite sides of the fence. Batman was then an unknown equation, a man in a mask who prowled the night, and Gordon made it his business to try and discover the identity of the man behind the cowl.

He did not succeed.

But in the process, he came to realize that the Batman's goals were the same as his own, and both sides recognized honor and integrity and honesty and intelligence in the other. Through this a friendship was born that has endured the years and a multitude of villains. It was Gordon who installed the Bat Signal atop Police Headquarters in order to make contact with Batman when he was needed.

Gordon is in his sixties, a fairly quiet and serious minded man. He has absolutely no interest now in trying to find out who Batman is. (At least, not on the surface, though one suspects from time to time that maybe he has a good idea.)

Gordon is often the entry-point for Batman and Robin to enter a case. He is alerted to the arrival of a letter, a strange midnight robbery, or a fantastic sighting over Gotham Central Park, and if it becomes clear that 1) the police are in over their head, or 2) the perpetrator is one of Batman's rogue's gallery of foes, he goes up to the roof and switches on the Bat

Signal. And waits.

Never for very long.

Soon two figures swoop out of the darkness, landing silently on the roof.

Backlit by the Bat Signal, framed by the night, Gordon fills them in on the evening's events, then mainly gets out of the way as they tackle the problem.

NOTE: Gordon should be an occasional character, not used every episode to set the story in motion. He is a supporting character, and is there to provide occasional backup to the situation. Batman will more often encounter his antagonists through other means, ranging from personal contacts through assaults on the Wayne Foundation to run-ins on his usual nightly patrol.

The Bat Signal was more useful in a day before radio scanners and other means of communication. But from time to time, the signal comes in very handy.

SPECIAL ASSISTANT FREDERICA MILES

Freddie, as she prefers to be called, is Gordon's right hand person, an accomplished detective who's risen through the ranks on the merits of basic, hard work. She's a good cop. A hard-working, determined, professional woman in a difficult job.

If she has any one identifying factor, it's her taste in clothes, which runs toward the 1940s -- tie, slouch-brimmed fedora that casts a fetching shadow across her face, high-collared men's shirts, slightly oversized jacket, slacks with creases so well ironed you could slice bread on them. She has fiery red hair and green eyes you could die for. Happily. Eagerly.

For personality, think Lauren Bacall in "To Have And Have Not," tough as nails, determined, self-assured, knowing her own capabilities. Sexy and appealing as all get-out. (Note: I do not see these as two contradictory elements, and anyone who does has to go through me first.)

As stated, she is a good cop, a by-the-book cop, as was her father, and his father before him. And while she has great respect for what Batman does, she is still somewhat unconvinced by his methods. Her father managed to nab enough bad guys without putting on a mask and tights and swinging from buildings in the middle of the night. And she's followed in their very practical footsteps. Batman's way, she feels, is just a bit on the grandstanding side.

So from time to time, in addition to setting a story in motion by telling Batman what's going on (as Gordon does), she will sometimes go out in the field, pursuing a case from one side

while Batman pursues it from the other.

It's not exactly a competition, but when one of them beats the other to the punch, there's no false modesty in letting the other one know it. Their methods may be different, but they end up complementing one another's techniques more than opposing or complicating the situation.

She is attracted to Batman. And he is attracted to her, and there is a certain edge in their game-playing that indicates that mutual respect and mutual attraction.

She knows Bruce Wayne, and certainly respects his role in the community, but when it comes to relationships, well, it's not that she thinks badly of him, because he's too charming a fellow for that. She just doesn't think of him.

With Robin, she is sometimes a bit of a confidante. Robin knows that she always has an open door (or window) for him. But she doesn't make the mistake of trying to "mommy" him, or patronize him. If he comes by with a question, something he's dealing with, she'll suggest they knock off and get an ice cream over in the park, and talk. She's like the best of all aunts, the sort who'll listen to you when you have something to say, someone who won't treat you like a kid or fawn all over you.

She lives alone, though she is not without dates (men who tend not to do much for her), and in her relationship with Robin one gets a glimpse of how she would like to raise her own son, if and when she has one. Her closest friend is her father, ALEX MILES, a retired police detective with a terrible secret.

And no, I'm not telling you.

Buy the series and you'll find out.

Scheherazade had the right idea.

NIGHTWING

As mentioned earlier, the original Robin -- Dick Grayson -- outgrew the red-and-green-and-yellow costume and went on to strike out on his own, creating on a new blue-and-black costume and a new identity to go with it: Nightwing.

To all intents and purposes, Dick Grayson/Nightwing is pretty much out of the picture. But from time to time, his presence is felt, and in rare occasions -- perhaps once or twice a season -- he may actually show up.

During these times, it's his relationship with, and to Jason that is of significant interest. Nightwing is, in a sense, an older brother to Jason, in spirit if not in flesh. He feels a kind of kinship -- he knows what Jason is going through. He went through it himself not so terribly long ago.

For his part, Jason is deeply aware of the fact that he is trying to fill some very big shoes. He's like a younger brother trying to live up to the reputation of an older brother, who happened to be a straight-A student, a football pro and a Nobel prize winning physicist. The situation here may not be quite as extreme, but the feelings are still there.

It was, in fact, Dick who turned over his original Robin costume to Jason, who was using a copy until then. That act was in a very real way the confirmation Jason needed to have at that particular moment. The torch had officially been passed.

Despite some initial awkwardness, a bond forms soon enough between the two. Jason likes to hear about Dick's adventures, to

fill in the gaps in his knowledge. Dick tends to listen astonished to what Jason manages to get away with.

"You did what to the Batmobile?"

A shrug from Jason. Perhaps an offhand reference to the MTV escapade.

And Dick is nonplused. "You're kidding! Man, he would've killed me if I'd tried something like that."

A calculated-to-the-kilowatt smile. "Hey, you just have to know how to handle him."

From downstairs, a somber, warning voice: "Jason, I would like to see you. Now."

And the smile turns back into a shrug. "Guess he found the Happy Faces I put on the batarangs."

It's very much a sibling relationship. Dick paved the way, and Jason gets to reap the advantages --- but is stuck with the knowledge that he has a lot to live up to.

Interlude #2

In a moment, we will meet the near-legendary foes in the Batman's pantheon of villains. But they can wait for just a moment longer before stepping out into the spotlight.

Besides, they like the shadows there in the back of the stage.

At the beginning of this presentation, we mentioned that the character of the Batman has been enduringly popular, second only to Superman.

We ask you to stop and consider that for a moment.

Batman cannot fly. He cannot bend steel in his bare hands, cannot leap over tall buildings in a single bound, cannot run faster than a speeding bullet.

He is, in the final analysis, a man. Not a superman.

So a question must be asked, a question whose answer is fundamental in determining the possible success of an animated series.

Why is the Batman so popular?

He's popular because he is a human being, an ordinary man made extraordinary through persistence, and dedication. We cannot grow up to be Superman because we weren't born on Krypton. We can't be Mister Fantastic of the Fantastic Four because we know we can't stretch our bodies, we can't be the Flash because we know we can't run faster than light

But we can study. And we can learn. And we can practice.

Some small part of our mind -- and the minds of children -- believes in the proposition that if we work at it long enough, and hard enough; if our belief is strong and our dedication

sufficient to the cause, we can grow up to be the Batman.

There is nothing in his fantastic arsenal that cannot be, to some extent, replicated in real life.

There is nothing he knows that cannot be learned by another.

There is no physical accomplishment he has achieved that cannot be reached by another.

He is, in short, the perfect role model. The ultimate human being, dedicated and educated and physically fit. He is the embodiment of what we tell kids when we say "Stay in school, learn, respect the law, take care of your bodies, believe in a cause."

It is he about whom we're speaking when we say "One man can make a difference."

End of lecture.

Enter the villains, stage left.

THE BATMAN ROGUE'S GALLERY

Don Quixote had the Great Enchanter.

Sherlock Holmes had Professor Moriarity.

The Batman has -- well, everybody else.

If we accept as common wisdom the notion that one may measure one's importance by the caliber of enemies one attracts, then Batman is made even more potent a figure when measured against the fantastic enemies he confronts. Of all the villains that have showed up to baffle and bedevil super heroes, the Batman's foes are among the most colorful and memorable.

They are eccentric, egotistical, dangerous, comical, exotic, obsessive, compulsive, possessed of a finely tuned sense of irony and more than a touch of neurosis.

Among them, they share two characteristics: 1) the desire to not only accumulate wealth and power, but to do so with style, with wit, out-thinking their opponents, taunting them along the way with bits and pieces of the overall picture, and 2) their near-tangible hatred of Batman and Robin, who are able to out-wit them at almost every turn.

But that doesn't mean they're going to stop trying. No, not by a long ways.

Let's meet them.

And since their egos are, after all, just a bit . . . vast, we'll make sure they each get separate pages.

They also dislike each other, you see, and especially hate sharing the spotlight.

THE JOKER

Known to law enforcement officials and to Batman as the Clown Prince of Crime, the Joker is -- like so many of Batman's enemies -- a dangerous figure, a comic figure, and a tragic one. Of all the foes Batman has faced, the Joker is one of the most famous of all, and the oddest.

Once he was little more than a petty crook, specializing in break-ins. He concealed his face behind a red cowl and called himself the Red Hood. But in order to escape the Batman, he dived into a vat of chemicals that emptied out into Gotham River. The chemicals, used by the Monarch Playing Card Company, affected his appearance -- made his skin chalky white, his hair green, his lips a brilliant red. His face was horrific, frightening in the extreme, his mouth twisted into a permanent rictus of a smile. The overall effect was of some twisted, evil clown.

The shock drove him, well, a little nuts.

In time, he realized that his features could strike terror into people, something he turned to his advantage. He took on a new identity at that time, and (to quote the original comic) "since a playing card company was indirectly responsible for his new face, he renamed himself after the card with the face of a clown -- The Joker!"

The Joker wears a colorful costume somewhere between a clown's outfit and a standard business suit, with white gloves and a walking stick (which usually contains one or another of his many gadgets). He tends to surround himself with a small but reliable band of thugs, who he tends to costume in whatever way

strikes his mad fancy.

His crimes are often related in some way to clowns, or to an arbitrary theme, such as the Seven Deadly Sins or famous movie criminals. At other times the crimes have some tie-in to playing cards -- robbing the Aces High casino, for example, or attempting to steal the famous King's Head stamp.

Like Batman's other foes, the Joker has a small arsenal of bizarre weaponry, including Joy Buzzers capable of stunning an opponent, Trick Flowers that spew out smoke screens or gas, Joker Venom (a compound inducing temporary paralysis), Trick Cards capable of cutting through doors, and so on.

The Joker enjoys the little game he plays with Batman, and wouldn't want to know his secret identity. It would spoil the game.

THE PENGUIN

Born Oswald Chesterfield Cobblepot, this rotund little man went to crime out of resentment -- people kept making fun of his size, his shape, his penchant for umbrellas, all of which made him look rather like a penguin. He is exceedingly vain, which often works to his disadvantage. He pulls one caper after another, sure that now the Penguin will become a figure of respect in the Underworld . . . and each time it gets bollixed up, and he becomes even more laughable.

He seems himself as very much put-upon by life. Had life been fair, his genius would have been rewarded. As it is, he feels that he's been forced into crime by default.

Like the Joker, the Penguin tends toward themes in his crimes -- usually a bird theme. He may try to steal a jewel encrusted replica of the Maltese Falcon, or steal the plans for America's Early Bird warning system.

He uses a wide array of trick umbrellas in his arsenal, including an umbrella parachute, glider, boat and bullet-proof shield. He also uses the occasional penguin bomb.

CATWOMAN

Selina Kyle was born with a passion for cats of all sizes and shapes, wild and domesticated. So it was natural that, when she decided -- through boredom with her life and a desire for the good things that only money can buy -- to embark upon a life of crime, she would assume the characteristics and costume of a cat.

She is a strikingly, phenomenally attractive woman who is, despite herself, attracted to Batman. In him she senses an equal, and that is a potent draw. When committing a crime, she will sometimes try to draw Batman into a life of crime along with her, hoping against hope that he will be as attracted to her as she is to him, and will leave the stuffy life of crime-fighter for a real life. With her.

And Robin. She supposes. If she must. Provided he stops making quite so much noise. Cats are sensitive, after all.

(Note: Batman is, in truth, somewhat attracted to her, but won't pursue this unless and until she goes straight. So they are at an impasse.)

She is known for her cat-themed crimes, so the Kit-Kat Klub would not be safe, nor would the rare statue of Bast, the Egyptian Cat God. In her crimes, she uses a fair assortment of devices, including claw gloves (for fighting and climbing), a cat o'nine tails, a car (a Cat-illac), and so on. She is always in the company of a cat, wild or trained.

THE RIDDLER

Real name: Edward Nigma -- or, appropriately, E. Nigma. Formerly a riddle poser at a carnival (guess the right answer and win a prize), he finally came to the conclusion that the Big Bucks were not to be found in sleazy carneys. Besides, he always saw himself as eminently smarter than the people he stiffed for five bucks at the carnival, people unworthy of his attention. So he adopted a disguise and, working off his specialty, became The Riddler, villain extraordinaire.

In a way, the Riddler has continued his carnival tradition. When he selects a target, he delights in providing the Batman with a clue to the nature of the crime to be committed. If the Batman can figure out the answer to the riddle, he has a chance at capturing the really big prize -- the Riddler himself.

Consequently, the Riddler/Batman encounters are solidly based on a battle of wits, wills and strategy. The Riddler needs to prove his mental superiority, and that is inevitably his downfall, since there are few people who can successfully match the Batman in a contest of wits.

His puzzles range from word puzzles to jigsaws, in which whole city blocks can become pieces in the puzzle. He tends to speak in riddles constantly, very much like the carnival huckster he once was, to the annoyance of his underlings.

He has no special weaponry, save for his intellect and his bizarre sense of humor, as well as whatever weapon happens to be handy.

CLAYFACE

A formless, shapeless heap that can, by an act of will, turn into the likeness of anyone or anything. Originally an ordinary man named Matt Hagen, he gained this strange power through exposure to a shimmering underground pool. He lost his original form, but got this power in the bargain.

Clayface tends not to operate alone, but rather in concert with another villain. He's not a terribly good villain. Speaking of Clayface, the Joker once said, "Without his powers, Clayface is a blundering third-rater -- incapable of matching crimes of my caliber!"

He is, however, a rather good spy, and is essential in breaking into high-security buildings and impersonating high-ranking officials.

CAT-MAN

Best described as Batman's opposite number, Cat-Man was once a big game hunter who stumbled upon an ancient talisman which gives him the talents of the lion and the tiger. It also, he believes, will give him nine lives, which means he tends to be rather reckless. After all, he has eight more to go.

Adopting a cat-like costume, he entered a life of crime that borrowed a few pages from Batman's story. He drives a Cat-car, has a Catarang and Cat-line with Cat-claws (grappling hooks), and uses a Cat's cradle-style net to entrap his opponents. Springs in his boots (Catapults) allow him to leap quite a distance, or to land safely on his feet from a long drop.

In keeping with his hunter motif, Cat-Man sees Batman as the ultimate prey, and delights in stalking him through the streets of Gotham City. They are much alike, he believes, and he respects the Batman as a hunter respects a lion. But in the end, it's always Cat-Man who ends up captured.

POISON IVY

Known only by her criminal name, Poison Ivy began as a botanist looking for recognition. When her experiments met with derision and were eventually cancelled as dangerous, she went -- a bit odd. She declared war on those she felt had betrayed her, and eventually branched out (so to speak) into a life of full-scale crime.

She tends to use any of her many mutated, hybrid plants in her daring assaults. Plant-zombies, strangle-vines, plants that obey her every command, flowers that exude a kind of sleep-gas, these and other strange, exotic plants are at her disposal.

In a strange turn-around from the Catwoman, she despises Batman, who she perceives as contributing to her destruction, and rather likes Bruce Wayne, whose Wayne Foundation came to her aid during the early part of her experiments, before she launched into a life of crime. (One interesting dilemma could be her decision to capture Bruce Wayne and hold him in hopes of luring Batman to his destruction!)

THE SCARECROW

Probably among the most brilliant and demented of Batman's foes. Originally a well-known (if often mocked) scientist named Jonathan Crane, he specialized in research into fear. Because of his stick-thin but quite tall figure, his gaunt expression and his rather shabby clothes, his colleagues nicknamed him the Scarecrow.

Eventually turning to a life of crime in order to gather more money for his research, he designed a costume that would let him look the part of a scarecrow. He also refined a potent fear dust that would strike dread into anyone coming into contact with it. He delights in making people confront their worst fears. (In recent years, he's refined his technique further into a set of electronic fear transmitters that render opposition virtually useless.)

With his band of thugs (the Straw Men), he enters the crime arena as needed for his research. Like the Cat-Man, he sees Batman and Robin as intriguing challenges. He wants to find out what they're afraid of, and use it against them. He might, for example, learn that the only thing Batman fears -- is something happening to Robin. He might use this against Batman, until Batman realizes that by giving in to this fear, something will happen to Robin, at which time he rises above his fear to defeat the Scarecrow.

TWO-FACE

Harvey Dent was once a handsome, well-regarded district attorney. But during a trial, a mobster threw acid at him, acid that Batman was able to only partially deflect. The result was that half of his face was scarred, while the other half remained untouched. (NOTE: This will not be gone into in any detail.)

Driven a bit berserk by the incident, he turned against society and adopted the name Two-Face. His world is neatly divided into halves: his room is half neat and half filthy, his clothes are pristine on one side, ragged and ill-fitting on the other, and half his thugs are dressed well, with the other half dressed poorly.

His primary focus is his two-headed coin, one side of which is scarred, the other side being unmarred. When he decides on a potential target, he flips the coin. If it comes up unmarked, he doesn't commit the crime. If the scarred side comes up, he does commit the crime. He is utterly faithful to the flip of the coin, even when he may have the Batman's life in his hands.

He is one of the more tragic figures in Batman's gallery of foes, and Batman feels personally responsible for him. He hopes to one day rehabilitate Two-Face -- a feeling which Two-Face sometimes exploits for his own benefit.

THE VENTRILOQUIST

One of the newest foes to face Batman. The Ventriloquist is a meek, bespectacled, bald little man with a dummy he calls Caesar. Caesar is a loud-mouthed, crude mobster out of a Jimmy Cagney movie, right down to talking like a thirties mobster. He's dressed in a pinstripe suit, with a big fedora, and a fake cigar in his wooden mouth. Caesar sits on the Ventriloquist's lap, and barks orders at his band of thugs.

If someone wants to talk to the Ventriloquist, they talk to Caesar, who answers back. (Because the Ventriloquist isn't very good at throwing his voice, his Bs come out sounding like Gs, and he can't quite get Caesar to give orders when he's drinking water.)

Caesar hates everybody. He's pushy, a bully who likes to intimidate people. He's only recently encountered the Batman.

But already he doesn't much like him.

The feeling is mutual.

DEVICES, GADGETS AND THE LIKE

In combating the villains described on the previous pages, the Batman has developed a fantastic array of ingenious devices, vehicles and gadgets. With some exceptions, he implements them on an as-needed basis, tailoring the device to the criminal.

Some of these include:

The Batmobile

Probably the best-known piece of hardware in the Bat-arsenal, the Batmobile is a state-of-the-art vehicle complete with radio and video communications system, smoke screens, lasers, you name it. (One additional capacity of the Batmobile, only rarely used, is its ability to transform from Bruce Wayne's limo into Batmobile form.)

The Bat Signal

Already mentioned briefly, the Bat Signal is a huge searchlight positioned atop Police Headquarters. It has a silhouette of a bat painted on it, and when lit, it casts a white or yellow circle against the sky with a huge bat in the center. With it, Commissioner Gordon can summon the Batman from anywhere in the city or from Wayne Manor.

The Bat Cave

Located directly beneath Wayne Manor, the Bat Cave sprawls out for a couple of miles in several directions. One tunnel leads to the Gotham River, and a concealed dock. Another leads to a back street, another to a concealed helipad. The Bat Cave contains the Bat Computer, and a wide range of weapons and trophies from past battles.

The Batcopter

Jet-powered, sleek, it has a wide range of monitoring equipment.

The Bat Computer

The heart of the Batcave is this sophisticated computer which Jason has "fixed" by adding a female voice. It contains extensive dossiers on all of Batman's foes, and is capable of adding whatever information Batman doesn't already carry in his head. It can also access law enforcement computers around the world, and can perform sophisticated analyses of chemicals and other clues.

Other items include: the Batplane (a customized F-4 Phantom Fighter), the Batboat (complete with Bat-torpedoes), and the occasionally-used Bat-cycle.

Probably the two most frequently used items in Batman's arsenal are the Batarang and the famous Utility Belt. The Batarang is essentially a bat-shaped boomerang which can be used to stun a criminal, or to snare him with an attached Bat-line. The Batarang and Bat-line can also be used as grappling hooks, allowing Batman and Robin to travel from place to place by swinging over Gotham City.

There have sometimes been specialized versions of the Batarang. There have been noise-making Batarangs which make a police-call whistle, picture-taking Batarangs, explosive Batarangs, and so forth.

The utility belt contains a number of small pouches, each of which holds a different device. They include a mini-camera, a lockpick, a microprocessor/power source, underwater breathing

apparatus, an infrared flashlight and goggles, a laser torch, a number of smoke capsules, explosives, and a micro-cassette recorder, among others. (He tends to restock his utility belt depending on what he thinks will be needed.)

Robin also has a utility belt, containing many of the same items. Both utility belts have hidden reels which feed the Bat-lines out through their buckles, and hidden pouches in the back in which they carry their assortment of Batarangs.

And now, having established the background, we move finally to

THE STORIES

The place: Gotham City.

The time: The present.

The cast: Batman and Robin, and a host of supporting characters, all arrayed against a small army of colorful villains.

The emphasis: Straight-ahead action/adventure framed by humor and personal relationships.

Format: Two acts, with the possibility of a tag prior to the end credits (about which more later).

Each show OPENS with credits OVER a montage of action -- Bruce and Jason in Wayne Manor when the Bat Signal shatters the night, racing to the Batmobile . . . SHOTS of Gotham streets in which we SEE the pantheon of villains, all of it punctuated by shots of Batman and Robin swinging from building to building, running in hot pursuit, helping one another, using any of their many high-tech gadgets, finally culminating in a villain behind bars looking out through the bars to the night sky . . . where the Bat Signal flashes again, MATCH CUTTING to the series stet symbol: a bat silhouette framing the title, BATMAN.

The stories, and the ways we get into them, will range a bit from episode to episode to prevent matters from falling into a bad-guys-rob-bank-Batman-and-Robin-capture-them rut.

A list of possible stories follows:

PILOT EPISODE: (derived in part from DC Comics story)

"To Walk The Night Alone"

In investigating a sudden increase in the number of robberies, the Batman learns that gangs of youth are being recruited to strike at various targets around the city all at once, quick break-ins and getaways before the police, stretched thin, can arrive. Kids are being recruited because they tend to be out on the streets pretty fast -- but they're even more against the world when they get out.

During this time, we have a scene with Commissioner Gordon, who asks how Robin is doing. Batman smiles a little sadly and says he hears he's doing fine. Robin's on his own now, working as Nightwing. We get a sense here that Batman is no less committed to his work, but the loneliness is troubling.

Upon returning from checking out one such robbery, Batman is stunned to find that someone has stolen the tires off the Batmobile. Using an infrared sensor from his utility belt, he's able to follow the tracks of the perpetrator -- Jason Todd -- to his one-room flat. There he meets Jason for the first time, and manages to get back the tires.

Though Jason is street-tough and independent -- an orphan living on his own, dodging welfare workers and school -- there is a sense that the kid's honest at heart, that he's been forced into this life because there aren't a lot of ways to make money if you're a lone kid. The Batman tries to help, but Jason declines. Won't have any of it, he'll make it on his own just fine.

"If you ever need me," Batman starts --

"Don't hold your breath," Jason replies.

Batman leaves, and in time, Jason finds himself being recruited by one of the local gangs. They offer him the semblance of security, of something like a home. He's on the edge, not in, not out -- yet. They're the ones chiefly involved in the kid-committed robberies, though it's also clear that they're working for someone else.

Jason finally agrees to work with them, though reluctantly. But his conscience plays on him as he gets ready for the job -- particularly once he learns that the Joker is the brains behind the operation. The Joker is planning to use the gangs as a distraction while he attempts a much bigger crime.

When Jason learns this, he decides that this has gone too far, and tries to call Police Headquarters to leave a message for the Batman. He gets half the message out when the others from the gang discover him, and he's now in major-league trouble.

The Bat Signal brings the Batman, who receives the information grimly. Deducing Jason's location from the partial message, he heads out in time to intervene. But he doesn't know that the Joker's involved, and that lack of knowledge lets him be captured just after he frees Jason. And the Joker is immensely happy to see his old friend . . . and is looking forward to not seeing him again -- ever -- very soon.

Out on his own, running for his life, Jason is torn between getting the heck out of the area, and going back to help Batman. He certainly can't risk the others knowing he helped Batman,

because that would bring retribution down on him, hard. It's then that he spots a closed costume shop. He manages to get inside, and finds a Robin costume. He dons it, and goes off to help Batman.

Jason arrives just in time to bail Batman out of a highly dangerous situation, and together they beat the Joker into a hasty retreat. The plot exposed, their leader gone, the gang disperses fast as the police arrive.

Batman turns to the red-and-yellow attired figure beside him. Smiles. Jason is kind of sheepish now, knowing he really doesn't belong in that costume. "Guess I'll go on home now," he says.

"What home?" Batman asks. "No family, no friends, no one to take care of you -- you're a good kid. You don't belong here."

"Yeah? So where am I supposed to go?"

Batman nods toward the Batmobile. They get inside, and to Jason's utter shock, the Batman drives to the secret access tunnel that leads to the Batcave, and Wayne Manor.

"Welcome home . . . Robin," Batman says.

Jason smiles, looks at the new world around him. "Wow," he says, "this is gonna be great!"

And so the cycle begins again

OTHER STORIES:

"Heads I Win, Tails You Lose"

Two-Face blows into town, his target: the famous two-headed statue of Bast, the Egyptian cat-god. But the Cat-Man has set his sights on that one also, so it falls to Two-Face to try to lead Batman and Robin sufficiently astray to keep them off his

tail, but to put them on the Cat-Man's trail. Batman manages to break the riddle posed to him, and stops both of them.

In a sub-plot, there is a brief appearance by Nightwing, who has heard of this new Robin running around Gotham. He turns up from time to time in the episode, always in the shadows, leading Batman to suspect that someone of evil nature is spying on them. But it's the new Robin who figures it out, based on some unexpected help when they needed it most, and goes alone to a rooftop where Nightwing shows up.

"I've been watching you," Nightwing says. "You're good. You've got a ways to go, but you're all right. So I thought --- well, I figured you might want to have this."

He opens a package to reveal his original Robin costume, which he's kept all this time. He hands it over to Jason, who up until now had been using the costume from the costume shop. "I know you'll put it to good use," he says, and with a handshake and a smile, swings off into the night, leaving Jason with the clear knowledge that now he truly is the new Robin.

"Mrs. Abacrombie's Here"

Bruce Wayne is putting through the formal adoption papers to make Jason his new ward. And as part of this, he has to be checked out by a social worker. She's fine, but she's exceedingly thorough. She knows that Bruce has something of a playboy reputation. Will he be a responsible parent?

She virtually moves in to find out --- which severely handicaps the Batman's ability to go out and fight crime, a particular problem at the moment, when one of their main villains

is out making trouble. It turns into a comedy of errors, as he runs back and forth between his two lives, all the while trying to keep Mrs. Abacrombie from finding out that he's the Batman.

It all makes Bruce seem even flightier than usual, running out in the middle of conversations, ending up nowhere to be found at critical moments. Pretty soon she's convinced that Bruce is a complete flake.

Finally she finds a clue that makes her suspect that Bruce Wayne and Batman are the same. There's panic at Wayne Manor until, to her surprise, Batman shows up with Bruce Wayne! The Batman explains that he's working with Bruce on a secret project, very hush-hush, and is sure she'll understand.

She does, eminently so. And if the Batman is willing to vouch for Mr. Wayne, well, that's good enough for her. She passes Wayne with flying colors, and finally leaves -- at which time we discover that "Batman" was actually Alfred, using a disguise created by the real Batman, one so thorough that it includes a voice changer, a padded outfit, and contact lenses. (Alfred finds all this running about in costume most undignified, and heads off to get back to his souffle.)

"Steel Against Shadow"

(Prefatory note: since Batman and Robin are crime fighters, this may, I hope, give us the latitude to do this story. It is relevant, it is timely, it is important, and we don't have to use a metaphor to get into it. We can, with this format, tackle the subject directly.)

Jason gets word that one of the kids he knew from the old gang is in the hospital. He goes there, and finds that his

friend is suffering from the effects of drugs. This angers Jason to a terrible degree. He was always too smart for drugs, and he'd thought his friend was also. But the stuff is insidious, and may hurt others he's known. So on his own, since this is a personal case, he goes out to try and track down the source of the poison seeping into the streets of Gotham -- his streets.

His intent is not to capture them, but to break some legs.

The Batman discovers what's going on well into the case, and intervenes when Robin trips up. His passion, his anger, led him to make a mistake. Batman helps clean up the problem, and tries to help Jason understand that you can't just go out and punch out everyone you hate. You have to deal with them by collecting evidence, and then letting the law take over.

You also deal with it via education, and example. Jason emerges from this a little more mature, and a little wiser.

A word about tags:

If a tag is desired, a thirty-second piece can be appended to the end of the show, just before the end credits. Titled something on the order of "Secrets of the Bat Cave," the tag would reveal some of the secrets of Batman's world -- the full scope of the Bat Cave, how a Batarang works, the mysterious trophies they've accumulated, and the like.

Also, the tag can have educational purposes by stressing the scientific/detective/criminological aspects of the show. Tags can discuss how to make invisible ink, how to find your way by watching the stars, how to write in codes, what to do if you see a crime in your neighborhood (perhaps we can revive the Batman

Crime Stoppers Club), what to do in an emergency, and so on.

This will only help to make the show attractive not only to kids, but to their parents.

SUMMATION

The four stories just given represent a fair cross-sampling of episodes, ranging from humor ("Mrs. Abacrombie") to straight ahead crime-solving ("Heads I Win") to personal stories ("To Walk The Night Alone") to stories of relevance ("Steel Against Shadow"). Each of these stories, and those to follow, will be able to stand on their own, but will also convey a larger story, a greater tapestry -- the saga of Jason Todd as he grows into his role as Robin.

As the stories progress, and Jason gets more comfortable with his new role, the humor/action elements will grow, and the funny, wise-cracking Robin will emerge as a major force to be reckoned with.

Consider it.

Comedy, action, warmth, adventure, a hero known to just about every single child in the United States, a hero-in-training who we can identify with and watch grow, a pantheon of highly eccentric and memorable villains, a world as real as the one we live in, a three-dimensional hero instead of a cardboard cutout . . . this combination of elements will surely make BATMAN one of the most innovative series in current network animation.