BATMAN

Directed by Leslie H. Martinson
Produced by William Dozier
Distributed by Twentieth Century-Fox
Released in 1966

Unsure how quickly their new 20th Century-Fox Television production would catch on, and particularly eager to introduce the character to European audiences (where color television was all-but unheard of), producer William Dozier made plans for a Batman movie to be filmed during the show's summer hiatus in 1966. Nothing fundamentally was different, apart from Lee Meriwether's substitution as Catwoman/Kitka (she's much better as the latter), and the lack of a clock-is-ticking deathtrap. The oft-derided humor of the series (consistent, actually, with the goofy travelogue/sci-fi-themed Batman comics of the era) works well enough here, and the increased budget permits the introduction of the Batcycle, Batboat, and Batcopter. But it's fundamentally wrong to get the four strongest villains of the series together so soon. It's a premature (and ultimately underwhelming) raising of stakes. And once the four of them, together, fail, there's no point imagining (in the T.V. show) they can ever succeed individually.

Still, the Nelson Riddle score is a blast, the opening title sequence is moody and atmospheric, the disappearing yacht provides a (momentary) sense of awe, Penguin's foray into the Batcave posing as Commodore Schmidlapp yields a degree of suspense, and the initial take-off of the Batboat from the dock (wisely handled as one long, very-fast tracking shot) is a thrill. Also of note: Batman's defense of alcoholics (following his frustrations getting rid of the bomb), reminding Robin that they are humans, too, and worthy of sacrifice; and Batman's gentle rebuke to Robin when the latter contemplates bending the "laws of nature," in order to fashion a United World Security Council that is more to his liking.

The sub-plot—Bruce Wayne's growing attachment to Kitka—works very well, but the main plot of capturing the world's top diplomats (through super-dehydration!) fizzles. Only in a world where men in tights run at full speed down the middle of a busy thoroughfare after crash-landing at a foam-rubber convention would anyone even care; here entire nations hold their breath and pray! No, what's really needed in *Batman* is more tension betwixt the antagonists. Let's make it clear that this league of villains (as hinted at in the briefing scene in Commissioner Gordon's office) is all-but unbeatable. Batman bravely takes up the mantle, but faces setbacks at every turn; only in the end does he manage a victory, less through his skill than because of the inherent wickedness of their cabal—manifested in a selfishness that shuns any compromise or subordination, a collective character deficit that proves their undoing. Instead, the villains' disagreements are minor and easily resolved, amounting to brief squabbles over tactics, particularly concerning the Riddler's sky-writing messages.

Perhaps because it's the one component of the villains' machinations that Batman is blind to, the sub-plot of the manufactured Bruce Wayne/Kitka romance is more interesting than the elaborate conspiracy to undermine the governments of the world through fear and blackmail. Seeing how Bruce is enflamed with desire, seeing how protective and chivalrous he behaves toward Kitka, how he acquits himself during the kidnapping (even beating up all the

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villains and their lackeys so he can escape and bring help), it would be more satisfying if we could hear, from Catwoman, just *why* she is such a man-hater. What does she have against this erudite, rich, athletic playboy with the heart of gold? There's too many unanswered questions here, and because their (albeit one-sided) relationship is more feasible than the dehydrated-diplomats scam, and reflects the daily wants/needs/hopes of the non-juvenile portion of the audience (while requiring no additional costs in sets or special effects), this concept should have been explored in more depth—*if* the filmmakers possessed the courage to take the implications of their material seriously, rather than tossing off the whole venture as a money-making joke.

Notwithstanding, we get one great scene at the emotional climax of the film. Catwoman's mask falls off, and she is exposed to her quarry—defiant to the last. Batman composes himself, and cuts off any commentary from Robin. He realizes he's been duped, that Kitka is a phony, and his "dream" will never come true. That he recovers so quickly is part of the comical charm of this iteration of Batman. But perhaps it is a lesson to us here in the real world as well.

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