

Does this film deserve \$100 million?

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★★1/2 Batman
Center, Oaks East Six

Tim Burton directs movies that look like cartoons. First he helmed *Pee Wee's Big Adventure*, a film that looked like a Looney Tunes episode brought to life. Then Burton directed *Beetlejuice*, a comedy with a wacked-out Michael Keaton and loopy sight gags.

Now Burton has faced his biggest challenge: with *Batman* he must make a cartoon look like a movie. For the most part he succeeds, even when the script fails him.

Despite its much-ballyhooed dark edge, the tone of this *Batman* is more slick fun than psychological angst. Ace photographer Vicki Vale (Kim Basinger) comes to Gotham City when reports surface about a mysterious winged assailant.

She soon finds herself attracted to the very wealthy Bruce Wayne (Michael Keaton), an absent-minded billionaire who disappears for days at a time. He is, of course, Batman, a tortured soul obsessed with avenging his parents' murder by brutally killing criminals without so much as a habeas corpus.

Batman has his hands full because Gotham City is a towering, oppressive metropolis teeming with undesirables. The most undesirable of all is the Joker (Jack Nicholson), a dangerously sadistic madman who was scarred by a dip into a vat of acid courtesy of Batman.

Jack Nicholson sinks his teeth into the role of the Joker with a performance that is hilariously over-the-top, providing jolts of humor and excitement that keep the movie moving past all the silliness.



Michael Keaton and Kim Basinger lack chemistry in *Batman*.

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And there's plenty of it. Nicholson and Keaton give strong, convincing portrayals, but the script keeps their antics from really catching fire. For example, after sleeping with Vicki Vale on their first date, Bruce Wayne feels inexplicably driven to reveal his deep, dark life-long secret.

Vale herself isn't much of a news photographer. Even though she is caught in the midst of destruction, Vale rarely thinks to take a photo.

Cartoons should be simple, not simple-

minded. When Batman is a moody, dangerous vigilante that frightens and arouses Vicki Vale, the movie works.

But when a sidekick like Vale gets more screen time than our hero, when she doesn't even show any emotion or interest after Wayne's secret identity is revealed, when the climax is marred by a crucial plot gaffe, then *Batman* becomes an example of what we hope the sequel(s) will avoid.

by michael giltz