



Robert Pattinson, *The Batman*

# THE BATMAN DEEP DIVE

By John Nugent

**B**ruce Wayne (Robert Pattinson) is only two years into his tenure as the masked vigilante known as the Batman when a serial killer who calls himself the Riddler (Paul Dano) begins targeting high-profile figures in Gotham City. With the help of Lieutenant Gordon (Jeffrey Wright) and cat burglar Selina Kyle (Zoë Kravitz), Bruce must unravel the clues and stop a terrorist attack — while wrestling with his family's legacy.

Batman has become Bat-ubiquitous. Gotham's protector is rarely far away from the screen; this year alone, there is the return of Michael Keaton's



Bruce Wayne, the cinematic debut of Batgirl, and the animated DC League Of Super-Pets, which features Ace the Bat-hound, Batman's pet dog. He is everywhere. An icon. The challenge for *The Batman's* writer-director Matt Reeves: how to make a totemic, mythic figure of pop culture feel new.

Reeves' approach, it seems, is evolution rather than revolution. Comparisons with Christopher Nolan's era-defining Batman trilogy are unavoidable — it shares Nolan's serious, neo-noirish tone, and one set-piece is reminiscent of *The Dark Knight* — but the difference to, say, *Batman Begins* is that this is emphatically not an origin story. There is, gratifyingly, no new recreation of Bruce Wayne's parents being murdered. Like *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, this is 'post-origins': a superhero still in his early years, grappling with youthful naivety and what his masked identity actually means.



So, in Robert Pattinson, we get a very different Bruce Wayne. Where Christian Bale and Ben Affleck embraced the macho side of the character, Pattinson looks like a boyish vampire, his skin tone only a shade warmer than in *Twilight*. His is the first screen Batman to be fully seen wearing the eyeshadow required of the character's costume, which evokes Robert Smith from *The Cure*. In the suit he's methodical and muscular; out of it, he's racked with insecurity and self-doubt. A repeated needle drop of Nirvana's 'Something In The Way' confirms it: this is emo-Bats.

As a new direction, it makes total sense for this most brooding of superheroes. And though the humourlessness sometimes flirts with self-

**“This is emo-bats”**

parody — Pattinson's narration, delivered like Rorschach's journal, grumbles mainly about vengeance, fear, justice, the usual stuff — the mood is justified by a believably dark bad guy. In a crowded rogues' gallery (shout-outs to Zoë Kravitz's instantly charismatic Catwoman and Colin Farrell's bafflingly convincing prosthetic Penguin), this is the Riddler's show, anchored by a chilling Paul Dano performance. He's a bespectacled terrorist of the Trump era, driven by an incel's misplaced sense of injustice and a love of fiendish puzzles. (And latte foam art.)

Fully embracing the “world's greatest detective” comics reputation that cinematic Batmen often forget, Reeves thus plays things out like a twisty David Fincher-esque thriller.

Some of the Riddler's clues could have been ripped from the pages of the Zodiac killer.) Occasionally the knottiness of the plotting will leave you feeling that near-three-hour runtime, but it is never boring, the narrative propelled by a series of grisly conundrums through Gotham's seedy underbelly.

What will also hold your attention is how beautiful that underbelly looks. Working with his cinematographer Greig Fraser, Reeves has rendered perhaps the best screen realisation of Gotham so far; walking a careful tightrope between gritty realism and heightened pulp (lots of neon, lots of rainfall) without ever overplaying their hands. The result is some remarkable film craft, of a level rarely seen in modern blockbusters. Michael Giacchino's brilliant, minimalist score completes the effect, building on the hugely effective work of Hans Zimmer — evolution, then, rather than revolution.



Matt Reeves' arrival in the Bat-verse is a gripping, beautifully shot, neo-noir take on an age-old character. Though not a totally radical refit of the Nolan/Snyder era, it establishes a Gotham City we would keenly want a return visit to.

**“Perhaps the best screen realisation of Gotham so far”**





# Inside the Character: Paul Dano & The Riddler

By Chancellor Agard

Paul Dano had several near-sleepless nights while filming *The Batman*.

The *There Will Be Blood* actor stars as the Riddler in director Matt Reeves' rain-soaked new *Dark Knight* film — and this take on the puzzle-loving rogue is a far cry from Jim Carey's colorful and hammy version in *Batman Forever*. Inspired by the Zodiac killer, Reeves reimagined the Riddler as a serial killer who targets Gotham's (likely corrupt) politicians and leaves taunting messages for Batman (Robert Pattinson) at his crime scenes. The role took Dano to a dark place.

"There's a sequence with Peter Sarsgaard's character [Gotham district attorney Gil Colson]. That was intense," Dano tells EW. "There were some nights around that I probably didn't sleep as well as I would've wanted to just because it was a little hard to come down from this character. It takes a lot of energy to get there. And so you almost have to sustain it once you're there because going up and down is kind of hard."

Another uncomfortable night was partially of Dano's own making. Like Batman, the Riddler has his own homemade costume and mask in the movie; however, as Dano was preparing for the role, it occurred to him that his meticulous murderer should also cover himself in plastic wrap to avoid leaving any DNA evidence at his crime scenes. Reeves loved the idea, so they tried it out; however, things took a turn after an hour because of how hot Dano got under the mask.



"He took off the mask. He was beet red," says Reeves, recalling that day on set. Dano adds: "My head was just throbbing with heat. I went home that night, after the first full day in that, and I almost couldn't sleep because I was scared of what was happening to my head. It was like compressed from the sweat and the heat and the lack of oxygen."

Nevertheless, Dano persisted with this plastic idea (Luckily, the costume department found a way to get more oxygen into the mask to make it slightly more comfortable). But this is likely the kind of commitment Reeves expected when he cast the *Prisoners* actor as the Riddler. According to the director, he started thinking about Dano for the part while he was writing the script, which was also the case with Pattinson.

"Paul is really a chameleon," says the *Cloverfield* director. "He's brilliant in so much. But I think you see him going through a very internal tortured experience in his characters. You can see him really in an active way, having this kind of psychological turmoil that I find is really compelling."

Meanwhile, Dano had always wanted to do a superhero movie, but nothing had really piqued his interest until Reeves reached out about *The Batman*.

"[I was] waiting for the right one or ones, where you're in collaboration with people and material that excites you. And this was definitely that," says the actor, who was visiting his parents when Reeves sent him the script but couldn't tell them.

"I was totally surprised, frankly, that [the script] was so good. I felt immediately [on] page one, page two, you could tell that the director was seeing the film that they wrote. You could feel, even in the action scenes, the type of energy behind the fighting or the violence, it was just very fully conceived."

Compared to the villains in previous *Batman* movies, the Riddler functions somewhat differently in *The Batman*. He doesn't have a movie-stealing presence like, say, Heath Ledger's Joker in *The Dark Knight*, because Reeves didn't want the rogue to take over the film. The focus had to remain on Batman. Nevertheless, the Riddler does present a unique threat to the Caped Crusader.

"The Riddler is omnipresent, but almost as a ghost," says Reeves. "When I came up with the idea that the Riddler would be sending correspondence to Batman, [what] was captivating to me was if you're a character whose mode is to work as a symbol, be anonymous, to come out of the shadows, nobody is supposed to know who you are; your power comes from the fact that you're anonymous. Then suddenly someone starts to rob you of your anonymity, you start to lose a bit of your power and it starts to unsettle you."

Reeves continues: "The flip side of that is that by withholding the Riddler, he had more power, he was more unsettling."



He felt like a ghost throughout the whole movie, this kind of presence that you never knew where he would show up and how he was affecting things. And that that mystery would put Batman in a very vulnerable position because he didn't understand from where and how and what the Riddler was acting."

Even though the *Love & Mercy* actor had high hopes for the movie, he still can't believe how much fun he had in his first foray into the world of superheroes. "It's so funny to be in something that has this much fan culture and fervor around it. And to my surprise, I'm really enjoying it," says Dano. He especially loved shooting the moment when the GCPD and Batman surround the Riddler at a diner, which is the first shot of the trailer. "Seeing what Matt was doing, what the camera was doing, and Rob out the window... It just felt like, 'F---, this is making a movie. Like a capital M movie.'"

