

Q Notes

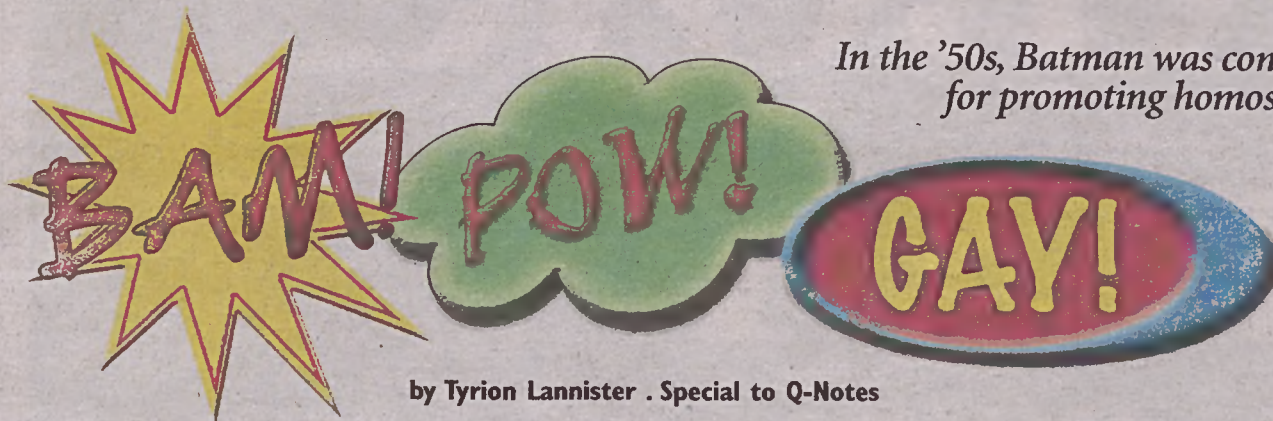
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In the '50s, Batman was condemned for promoting homosexuality



by Tyrion Lannister . Special to Q-Notes

Everyone is pretty whipped up about the release of "The Dark Knight," which shattered the record for largest first-weekend box-office haul in its debut. Unlike previous champ "Spiderman 3," "The Dark Knight" is actually a very entertaining film.

Christopher Nolan's Batman franchise is darker, more serious, and consequently more frightening. It also captures the psychological complexity of the titular character in a way that the more stylized vision of Tim Burton — not to mention the dreck produced by Joel Schumacher — never could.

Nolan's vision is inspired by the Golden Age Batman, who was a different breed altogether. Batman of the early 1940s, for example, shot people, tossed them off rooftops and had few reservations about killing criminals.

He menaced murderers, gangsters and thugs, not overgrown graffiti artists.

Early Gotham was a dark and scary place, the sort of place that might inspire people to, you know, dress up like a giant bat. So what happened? Why did the dark and menacing Batman of the 1940s become the lame and tame Batman of the 1960s?

Much of it has to do with changing national mores and an evolving economic and social landscape. In this sense, Batman's story is a microcosm for what happened throughout the entire comic book industry during that period and, to a lesser extent, some of the changes that swept across the nation.

One of the most important episodes in the hero's metamorphosis centered around the startling accusation that Batman (Bruce

Wayne) and Robin (Dick Grayson) were gay and might seed impressionable youths with homosexual fantasies. Silver Age Batman was indelibly shaped by the gender expectations of the era and his failure to adhere to those expectations incited criticism that predictably called into question his sexual identity.

I always preferred Batman to Superman, largely because Batman, the central implausibility of his character aside, was psychologically interesting in a way that the bland Superman never was. Of course, my introduction to Batman was Frank Miller's "The Dark Knight Returns," a crucial revision of the Batman myth which imagined Batman as a psychologically scarred character inhabiting an increasingly savage world.

In contrast, baby boomers might be more

likely to associate Batman with the campy, absurdist version of the late-1950s and '60s best captured in the long-running television series. Similarly, in the pages of DC Comics' "Detective" magazine in that era, Batman traveled through time, verbally sparred with "Batmite," and foiled countless plots to deface many of Gotham City's iconic landmarks.

In other words, Silver Age Batman was a glorified boy scout, patrolling against vandalism — just like Superman without the awesome powers.

Outing the Caped Crusader

The accusation that Batman was a homo, as strange as it might sound to our ears, was taken quite seriously by both the government and public. It wasn't leveled by a

marginal nut or crank, but by a world-renowned psychiatrist, Dr. Frederic Wertham. see *Wayne Manor* on 15



Gay people are good parents, teachers, soldiers, employers, and friends.

www.TriadEquality.org

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Triad Equality Alliance hopes to keep these billboards up for Greensboro, N.C. motorists for a total of four months. Q-Notes' editor, Matt Comer, a native of the Triad area, appears in one billboard for the organization.

Mass appeal

GREENSBORO — For the past few years, the Triad Equality Alliance has raised funds to place LGBT-friendly messages on billboards around the Winston-Salem, Greensboro and High Point metropolitan area. This year, they've taken up the task again.

Organizers hope their "Good People" campaign, which highlights LGBT citizens as "good parents, teachers, soldiers, employers, and friends," will help community members see just how much gay folks contribute to the worth and value of their local communities.

"The 'Good People' campaign was a combination of multiple people's brainstorming," Triad Equality Alliance organizer

Judith Kobler told Q-Notes. "Our past campaigns really were a natural segway into this year's campaign."

In the past the organization has funded campaigns highlighting equality between gays and straights and a 2006 "We are your neighbors and we are gay" campaign.

"Our themes throughout the years have always been about getting people to know us," Kobler said. "When they do they found out that we're really ordinary people like everyone else."

The group hopes to have the billboards up for a total of four months. They've applied for grant funds from the Guilford Green Foundation to cover some of the cost. Donations to help fund the campaign can be made online at www.triadequality.org. ■

— by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

A continuing saga

S.C. state officials' email released page 22



At a session's end

Bullying bill dies in N.C. Senate page 12



The love of gays

Q-Notes' annual auto and pet issue page 27

