

# Table of Contents

Slash Cinema . . . . .	1
------------------------	---



# Slash Cinema

By David Thompson

Disappointed by blockbuster adaptations, superhero comic fans have long been polishing their filmmaking and stunt skills in order to guard the mythology of their idols. David Thompson appraises the dedication of fandom against the technological resources of the film industry

With the summer of comic book movies now over, the inevitable critical post-mortem has started taking place. Beans are being counted, wounds are being licked and internet newsgroups are a-hum with endless annotations, grievances and suggestions.

In May, Bryan Singer's *X2* set the season of blockbusters in motion, raising expectations with its visual flair and a measure of intelligence. Fans of the best-selling comic series were pivotal to the film's success, and Singer's careful balancing of fidelity and reinvention kept them coming back for more. Singer's writers, Dan Harris and Mike Dougherty, are twenty-somethings steeped in the comic's labyrinthine lore, and while the film's final scene may have seemed cryptic to a broader audience, followers of X-Men mythology were treated to a preferential hint of things to come.

However, other big screen comic book outings fared less well. Ang Lee's Freudian adaptation of *The Hulk* met with a decidedly mixed response from fans and newcomers alike, while Stephen Norrington's ill-fated *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* managed to bleach every last trace of charm from Alan Moore's graphic novel and promptly died at the box office.

Tired of such ham-fisted Hollywood adaptations, a number of hardcore comic fans have been busy creating their own mini-spectaculars, intent on showing the major studios where they've all too often gone wrong. This flourishing trend for fan-created films has predictably found its home online, with numerous websites hosting an underground alternative to multiplex imperatives.

One of the first fan films to attract widespread attention was Dan Poole's alternative take on Spider-Man, *The Green Goblin's Last Stand*. Produced in 1992 for under \$500, and intended purely as an unsolicited blueprint for James Cameron (then in line to direct Sony's franchise-launching *Spider-Man*), Poole's low-budget epic was shot and edited on standard VHS over a period of 14 months. One critic described the results as 'looking like a Mexican soap opera...' However, what Poole and his cohorts lacked in resources, they almost made up for with sheer commitment.

[IMAGE]

> Dan Poole as Spider-Man, in his film *Green Goblin's Last Stand*

In the dual role of Spider-Man and (a bizarrely quiffed) Peter Parker, Poole performed all of his own stunts without the aid of computer generated image or safety nets, leaping onto moving cars and hurling himself from tall buildings with alarming abandon. (Significantly, this real-life risk-taking evokes a genuine sense of danger - in pointed contrast with the digital acrobatics of Sam Raimi's \$140-million *Spider-Man*.)

Poole has tirelessly promoted his *Goblin* project, along with a 'Making of...' documentary, winning NODANCE film festival awards for best documentary and 'best guerrilla marketing'. Granted, the film is at times unspeakably cheesy, though scarcely more so than its comic book source material - or, for that matter, Raimi's inexplicably successful 2002 blockbuster. And, given the resources available to each director, Poole's fifty-minute saga is certainly the more ambitious of the two. Poole is currently working on an original superhero project titled *Natural Forces*, and investors are invited to

contact the filmmaker via his website, <[www.alphadogproductions.net](http://www.alphadogproductions.net)>.

[IMAGE]

> Still from Aaron Schoenke's film *Batman Beyond: Year One*

The uncertain status of the Batman movie franchise has prompted impatient fans to take matters into their own hands. Currently an intern at Sony Studios, comic fan and budding filmmaker Aaron Schoenke has completed two short Batman films of his own, both of which can be seen via his website, <[www.batinthesun.com](http://www.batinthesun.com)>. Interviewed by *Film Threat*, Schoenke explained the gestation of his projects: 'It started with action figures because you can storyboard and visualise everything, from angles and locations to special effects... I like to compare fan films with a band that does cover tunes. You get people to take an interest in what you can do, then you can branch off into original projects... Although I do have my eyes set on one day directing a superhero movie.'

[IMAGE] > Stills from Sandy Collora's *Batman: Dead End*

-----  
Much of the latest agitation surrounds *Batman: Dead End*, a 35mm 8-minute masterpiece by commercials director Sandy Collora. Collora described the film as 'my statement about how I think Batman *should* look and feel', before adding: 'I've not heard from Warner Brothers yet, but I'm sure I'll be hearing from their legal department at some point...' *Batman: Dead End* is notable not only for its professionalism, but, perhaps more importantly, for its genre hopping 'guest stars', including a startling appearance by Sigourney Weaver's favourite salivating xenomorph. (*Star Trek* trivia fans may also note the Joker is played by the son of Walter 'Chekhov' Koenig.)

Writers of internet 'slash fiction' have long been creating hybrids of their favourite film and TV characters. Whether introducing Kirk and Spock to homosexual scenarios, or pitting Buffy against the Hulk, 'slash' authors have combined affection and invention with varying degrees of literary success. The extension of the 'slash' phenomenon into backyard film production seems, retrospectively, inevitable.

Legalities aside, it's hard not to admire the tenacity of these amateur cineastes, undaunted as they are by shoestring budgets, ill-fitting costumes and notions of copyright infringement. Indeed, the emergence of this alternative superhero industry actually calls into question the ownership of such iconic and lucrative characters. One thing shared by all of the above filmmakers is a sense of their role as true custodians of comic lore, as unofficial keepers of the faith.

Whether one views the 'slash' film phenomenon as outrageous piracy, inventive re-appropriation, or simply nerdish beyond belief, at least one point is hard to argue. These outlaw enthusiasts have been immersed in the plot convolutions of their beloved characters far longer than most Hollywood screenwriters or directors. They have, after all, bought the comics religiously for decades, often to find some clueless Hollywood dilettante wheeled in to promptly bugger up the franchise and diminish the mythology. If that sounds unfair, just take a look at Joel Schumacher's *Batman & Robin*.

Dan Poole's 50-minute film *The Green Goblin's Last Stand* can be downloaded in full here:  
<http://gearworxprod.com/spidey.htm>

Aaron Schoenke's Bat In The Sun Productions: <http://www.batinthesun.com/>

Sandy Collora's *Batman: Dead End* can be downloaded in full here:  
[http://www.theforce.net/theater/shortfilms/batman\\_deadend/](http://www.theforce.net/theater/shortfilms/batman_deadend/)