In *Batman folklore*, villains’ psyches are twisted like car wrecks, with a history of powerlessness before excruciating injustice that will one day and for evermore make them … SnAp!

After that, they are driven by massive resentment, uncompromising vengeance and the madness that comes with … Being Right!

Scarecrow! The Mad Hatter! Poison Ivy! Catwoman! Penguin! Two-Face! Clayface! Sensitive citizens turn themselves inside out with ostracised angst and then turn schizophrenia into an art form and a lot of fun, with more poetic justice than your average poet.

The Joker, the model for ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair’s I-can’t-believe-I’m-getting-away-with-this portcullis grin, is perhaps the only super-villain who is demonstrably psychopathic. The Riddler gets obsessive-compulsive disorder but that’s normal in consumer culture. The rest are so sensitive they can’t stand another minute of the system that tore them apart.

Hugo Strange is a fiendish scientist who turns the rich and famous of Gotham into mindless zombies in the militant 1970s.

Sounds reasonable.

Marvel, who rival Batman’s DC Comics, fostered a similar criminal psyche, with scientific...
aberrations. Contempt for the system is the common cause. Monastic in seclusion and vocational dedication to a fuck you kind of chaos, comic-book villainy, and the film adaptations, are the gleeful catharsis for every grievous stress in the audience.

The super-villain’s retribution is called terrorism now – devastating the metropolis infrastructure, kidnapping Gotham City Mayor or bumping off a billionaire, and then hijacking the airwaves to spread the word with a sick joke or a barmy riddle.

Recently a psychiatrist in a Texas army base, ‘a military processing centre,’ killed 13 soldiers and wounded 30 more. This wasn’t in a comic-book, by the way, this was in the newspapers: this was real life calling!

The psychiatrist was sedated in hospital custody, and his replacement waited by his bedside to ask him, when he came round, What the fuck got into you?

May I hazard a guess?
He snapped!

The psychiatrist, a major, was scheduled for deployment to Iraq, ‘and appeared to be upset about that’, said Texas Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison.

This may have been the one act of crystal clarity in the major’s life, the one action that made perfect sense, to him, as opposed to all the routine acts of madness against his own interests and the interests of the common man demanded of him by the system every day of his life.

No investigation would bring that out. Psychiatry is a purely personal affair. Ever since the 1980s, when it was announced that ‘there is no such thing as society’, the effects of the system on people has nothing to do with the psychiatric evaluation of a personality that snapped.

The mind boggles.

There are, within our crooked, crippled and psychopathic system, such victims of the
outrageous injustice of everyday forces that it
beats me what’s propping them up.
Drugs, perhaps, and comforting obesity, and
desensitizing la-la land on TV, keeps life and
limb together through a mandatory nightmare,
this pusillanimous void, this ogrous abomination
that is everyday life.
Another thing taught by the super-villainous
1980s was that nothing comes free, not public
services, not emergency services, not educa-
tion, not caring: everything is levied by a bribe,
where briberies for amenities is legitimate com-
merce, and our human rights are leased to us for
exactly as long as we can pay for them. In 1989,
the Wall came down, the levy went up, and Jack
Nicholson took it out on Jack Palance in Batman.

Dignity can be demolished
like a Grade 1 listed building if it
gets in the way, and your rights
are invalid if you outlive your
usefulness to market forces. One
day, on the edge between being
exploited and being discarded,
there is a feral whiff of a short
circuit, a last straw going up in
smoke, and SsNnaApP! ‘What a
day!’
I’m amazed these single
instances are not multiplied by
buckling basketloads of put-
upon psyches, pushed to the edge and over
into an avenging alter ego that churns up every
bitter pill they’ve had to swallow, the Jungian
shadow of repressed rage and fear and distress
surfacing like psychic molten lava, en masse,
like Arkham Asylum escapees looking for ven-
geancevengeancevengeance, terrorismterror-
isterrorism.
In 2005, the levees broke in New Orleans,
the U.S. government looked the other way, and
Scarecrow took it out on Gotham City water
supply in Batman Begins: “Boo!”
In fact, there are enough SsNnaApPs to strain
medical resources, with this difference: when
the fuse blows, when the bough breaks, when
the resilience snaps, it doesn’t explode, it sim-
ply implodes (and then the rest of us don’t feel
so bad). It turns in on itself and shuts down.
It’s called a nervous breakdown, and it’s all
the rage.
In 2008, the capitalist economy had a nervous
breakdown of its own, and as treasuries tossed
a coin over what to do next, Two-Face flipped
in The Dark Knight: “The world is cruel, and the
only morality in a cruel world is chance.”
The latest way that governments treat ner-
vous breakdowns is to get them back to work
right away. Positive re-branding, in the land of
Positivia,’ reframes being sick as being able,
being in debt as liquid capital, and recession as
the dark before dawn, translating weaknesses
as strengths to erase the negative statistic.
Riddle me this: When are the terminally ill
alive and well?
When they are branded as indefinitely eligible
for work!
And so even dying is denied in the conver-
sion of negative to positive statistics. There is
no asylum in sickness any more. Cancer will be sentenced to Community Service. Sanctuary is a defiled concept: no haven in church, no respect for the Geneva Convention, no reverence for truth, no trust in justice, no day of rest, no relief for the dispossessed, no mercy for the sick. There are doctors among us who are as ready to serve the state as Dr Mengele once was, with the same contempt for vulnerability. They are as keen as the government to ignore the core message of the central nervous system that is in meltdown.

Here is the message that the central nervous system emits loud and clear by breaking down: ENOUGH!

Pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, briefed, debriefed and numbered. People in nervous-breakdown mode have ceased trading: they want no further transactions with the system. They cannot pretend anymore: they are all out of denial. It's the total rejection of society, and the next best thing to suicide. And suicide is the alternative to mass murder, the apocalyptic vengeance that super-villains have in mind.

And since a nervous breakdown is no longer a refuge from the system, since the victim of a breakdown can expect to see his psychiatrist these days not in a confidential clinic but in an office in his local employment centre, the options for those about to flip are paired down to suicide or mass murder. It's the toss of a coin in the world of Two-Face.

Contributor details

Endnotes
1 Positivia: Liverpool poet Gerry Potter’s term for senseless positivity that flies in the face of the facts.