

Headline Option 1: How The Joker's Plan in Batman (1989) Would Have Worked in the Real World

Headline Option 2:

YouTube Headline Option: Batman 1989 Joker is Still the Scariest of Them All!

You Tube Headline Option 2: What the REAL Joker Looks Like!

YouTube Thumbnail Copy: Worried About Joker Toxin?

YouTube Thumbnail Copy Option 2: What the REAL Joker Would Look Like!

Subhed: Tim Burton's 1989 Batman movie is a classic of the genre, and one of the most memorable things about it is the Joker's deadly Smilex gas, which has surprising roots in the real world.

If you're of a particular age, the summer of 1989 holds special meaning for you. Specifically, you were almost certainly completely obsessed with Tim Burton's *Batman* starring Michael Keaton and Jack Nicholson. The film redefined superhero movies for a generation, was a relentless blockbuster at the box office, and kicked off a wave of Batmania that left no merchandising stone unturned well beyond that fateful summer.

But at the heart of that film is Nicholson's stunning Joker performance. And one of the elements that makes it so memorable is how it marked the first time that the Joker was depicted in live action as a brilliant, but murderous chemist, just as he was in his very first comics appearance back in 1940. Joker spends the second half of the movie holding Gotham City hostage via "Smilex" a deadly nerve toxin that leaves its victims with a hideous post-mortem grin on their faces.

These kinds of weaponized poisons are nothing new in the real world, but it's the specific combination of effects that Smilex creates that make it so notable. We're taking a look at the real world parallels, including some disturbingly high profile terrorist attacks that would have made the Joker proud. In the process, we also examine just how this movie's approach to live action superheroics (and supervillainy) changed everything on the big screen.

Watch the latest episode of *Does it Fly?* right here or [check it out on our YouTube page!](#)

[EPISODE VIDEO PLAYER EMBED]

SUGGESTED VIEWING

Of course, you must watch *Batman* (1989). But here's a friendly reminder that we also covered one of Tim Burton's other great films, the original *Beetlejuice*, on an episode of *Does it Fly?* recently, and you should absolutely [check it out right here](#).

And while the rules of the Joker toxin as we discuss them in this episode apply specifically to this particular Batman movie it's been around in other media, too. Notably, a generally less lethal version made a few appearances on the classic *Batman: The Animated Series*, which is always worth a watch, especially now that gorgeous remastered versions are available on HBO Max. A few to consider that might scratch your Smilex-induced itch...

“The Last Laugh” (S1E15)

It's primarily laughing gas here, but you know what it's supposed to be.

“Almost Got ‘Im” (S1E35)

A case can be made that this is the best episode of the series, even though the Joker and his attendant poison only feature in one segment of it.

“The Laughing Fish” (S1E46)

Based on several classic issues of the comics (more on one of them down below) this is probably the closest you'll get to the lethality of the original toxin in animated form.

FURTHER READING

Do you want to delve a little deeper into the facts, concepts, and stories Hakeem and Tamara referenced in today's episode? Of course you do!

VX Nerve Agent

We're bringing this up here in part because of the extraordinarily well-documented (and almost Joker-esque) [assassination of Kim Jong-Nam in 2017](#). The murder was carried out using VX, a nerve agent and banned chemical weapon that is considered one of the most deadly and fast-acting out there. [Let the CDC fill you in](#), because trust us, you want no part of this stuff.

The Animal Kingdom and Joker Venom

“There is no venomous animal on the planet that could do [everything the Joker Venom does]. Having said that, there are components of different animal venoms in the animal kingdom that could, in combination. My understanding of the Joker is that he's quite a smart chemist, so it would be possible to extract the components from those venoms and put them all together.”

More on this subject from Professor Jamie Seymour can be found [here](#).

Now, about that “recipe” (do not do this)...

You’d want a little venom from [the box jellyfish](#), known as one of the deadliest marine animals. A pinch of [cone snail venom](#). And perhaps a dash of the [blue-ringed octopus’ fatal defense mechanism](#).

2001 Anthrax Mailings

A somewhat Joker-esque crime that terrorized an entire nation involved the mailings of lab grown anthrax to high profile politicians and journalists in the autumn of 2001. No less than the FBI itself has [a wealth of resources](#) on this incredibly bizarre case.

The Source Material

For those who want to dive a little deeper into the comics, there are two key stories to consider. Note that the idea of Joker injecting victims with a toxin that causes them to die smiling was introduced in his very first appearance, way back in *Batman* #1 (1940).

But for much of the character’s criminal career after that he was comparatively harmless...that is, until 1973’s *Batman* #251 which brought back the idea of the Joker as a murderer with a penchant for unique chemistry, in a brilliant tale called “The Joker’s Five-Way Revenge” by the legendary creative team of Dennis O’Neil and Neal Adams. This story, along with “The Laughing Fish” and “The Sign of the Joker” from *Detective Comics* #475-476 by Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers also formed the basis of the similarly named *Batman: The Animated Series* episode above. Since then, well...it’s been around a lot, but these are the two real historical keys for those who can’t get enough!

WANT MORE FROM DOES IT FLY?

Shortly after the success of *Batman*, Disney tried to replicate it with *The Rocketeer*. We took a look at that movie’s iconic jetpack technology [here](#).

We also took a look at another rich guy superhero when we unpacked the science and story logic behind Iron Man’s arc reactor, [which you can watch here!](#)

FOLLOW US!

Stay in the loop! Follow *DoesItFly?* on [YouTube](#) and [TikTok](#) and let us know what you think!

And don’t forget to follow Roddenberry Entertainment:

Instagram: [@RoddenberryOfficial](#)

Facebook: [Roddenberry](#)

Twitter: [@Roddenberry](#)

For Advertising Inquiries: doesitfly@roddenberry.com