



Alex Ross took on Hollywood's Man in Gold.

It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Oscar

When the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences decided to make Oscar a superhero, Alex Ross came to the rescue. Armed with his paintbrush and his imagination, the intrepid illustrator of graphic novels (book-length comic epics) saluted Oscar's Hollywood homecoming in a new venue at the Kodak Theatre with "The Gold Knight Returns," the official poster for tonight's 74th annual Academy Awards. Ross, 32, recently illustrated the oversize graphic novel "Wonder Woman: Spirit of Truth" for DC Comics to mark the heroine's 60th anniversary, his fourth in a series featuring Superman, Batman and Shazam! We asked Ross where he gets his secret powers. —MICHAEL T. JARVIS

What do Batman and Oscar have in common?

Naked characters with chrome bodies are very typical for comics.

How did you research the poster project?

The Academy loaned me an Oscar. I had it here in my house. I invited family and friends and had a phony curtain, and we took pictures and pretended that they received it in a ceremony. I photographed it, [and] I also photographed the human body doing the pose.

What did the Oscar statuette resemble before the superhero treatment?

I look at it as an Art Deco representation of a man. The simplified features of the face hold a Spartan helmet, and he's actually carrying a sword. It's bizarre. You can't tell he's holding a sword. It looks like a lump on his leg.

If Oscar is a superhero, what's his mission?

He's an angel of judgment who's come down from heaven to

cleave bad directors in two. But he will knight those who are worthy for their great work, a la the awards ceremony.

What is Oscar's daytime cover identity?

He's either a courier or one of the nondescript [Academy Awards] vote counters [for Pricewaterhouse Coopers]. When they decide not to give the best picture award to "Lord of the Rings," he'll be the first one to know what an injustice has been done.

Who is Oscar's nemesis? His superhero Achilles' heel?

Oscar's nemesis is the People's Choice Awards; his Kryptonite is the Golden Globe.

Does Oscar have a love interest?

His love interest would be the female robot from the silent film "Metropolis." She's his inspiration. She's gold; she has the same facial details. There's a strong similarity.

Comic book crusaders seem more popular now than ever—take Michael Chabon's novel "The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay," or the "X-Men" books and movie. Why?

We're poised for a comeback. Comics and superheroes have been in a slump. With current events, [superheroes] contribute to restructuring the cynicism we are normally given to in this country. The very concept of the superhero is about altruism. It's about those who "have" using their abilities for those who "have not."

Who would you give the superhero treatment to next?

The Jolly Green Giant. He already looks like a superhero. He's giant. He's already green. Or he could be a super-villain and run through town destroying stuff.

