

THE BATMAN

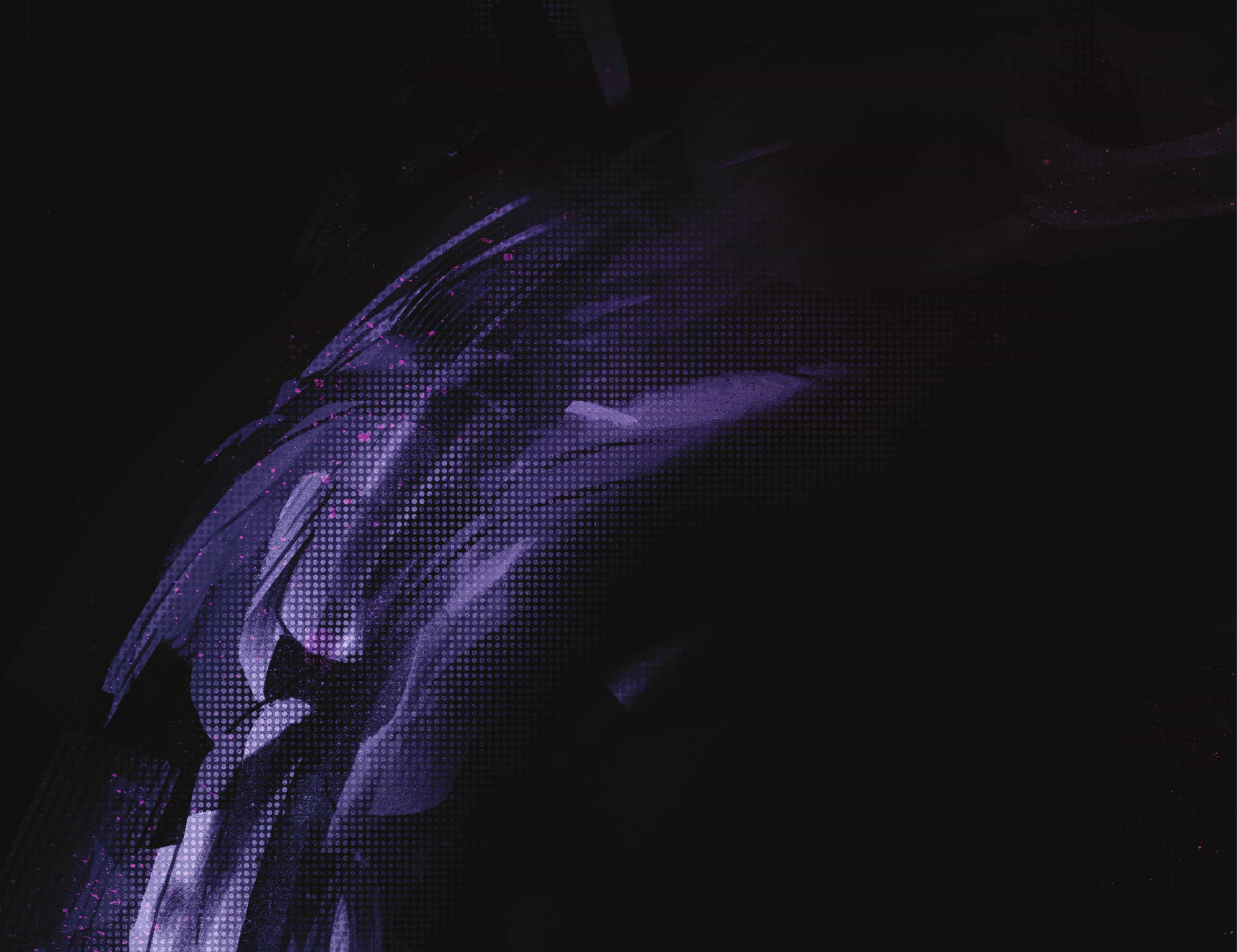
WHO LAUGHS

THE DELUXE EDITION

HA
HA
HA

SCOTT SNYDER
JOCK





THE BATMAN WHO LAUGHS

THE DELUXE EDITION





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THE BATMAN WHO LAUGHS

THE DELUXE EDITION

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THE BATMAN WHO LAUGHS: THE DELUXE EDITION

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-Jack-

The Batman Who Laughs, Part 1

What is your
happiest
memory?

Mine is
my first.

I am four years old and
running toward the manor.
It's a warm summer evening
and past my bedtime.

My parents and Alfred
stand between me and
the house with their
hands clasped. We're
playing a game.



The object is for
me to try to break
through their arms
and make it inside.

So I run and
I throw myself
against their
arms as hard
as I can...but
every time they
stop me.

They keep me
there with them,
so we can all play
a little longer.



So I won't
find myself
in a dark,
empty house,
all alone.

I still
remember
the smell
of the cut
grass. The
pale yellow
sun, like a
jaundiced
eye peeking
through the
bars of the
trees.



What I
remember most
is the strength
of their arms
holding me
back...

...and above all,
the laughter.
All of us laughing
like lunatics as
the sky darkened
behind the house.

GOTHAM! NOW!



ALFRED,
STATUS!





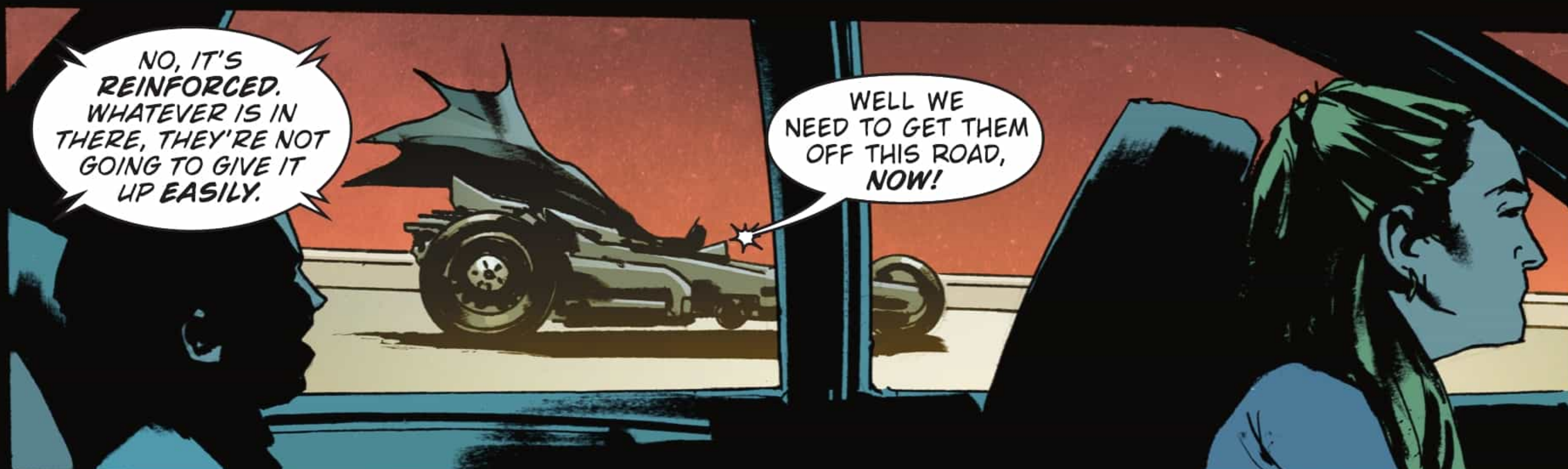
I SEE AT LEAST THREE SHOOTERS, SIR, NOT INCLUDING THE DRIVER!

AND THE TRUCKS?



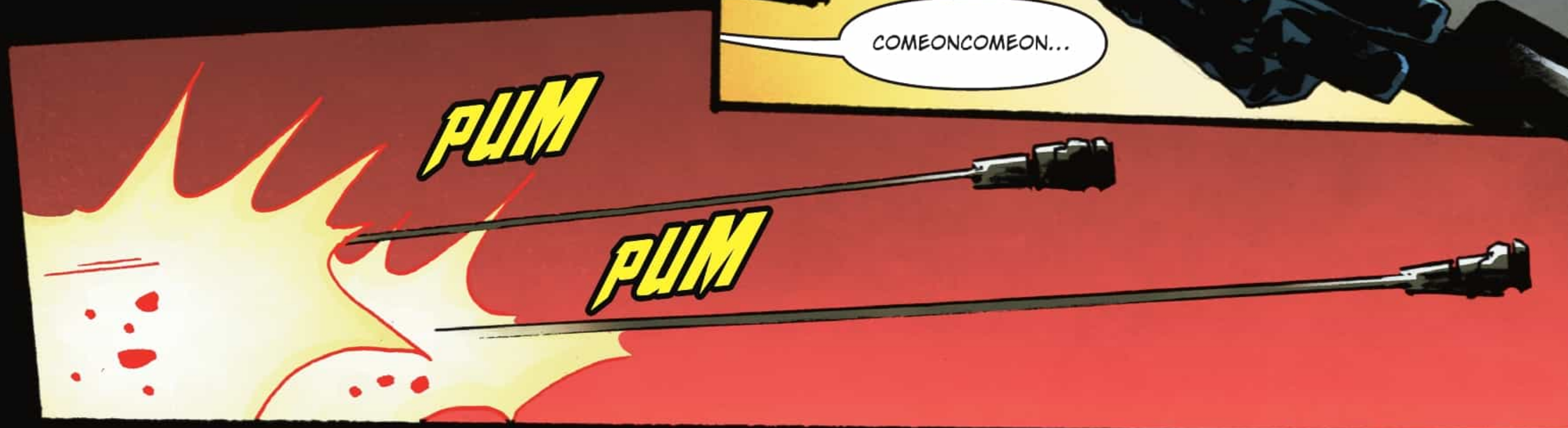
YOU WERE RIGHT. I'M DETECTING EXTRA COMPARTMENTS INSIDE THE FLATBED CUSHIONING.

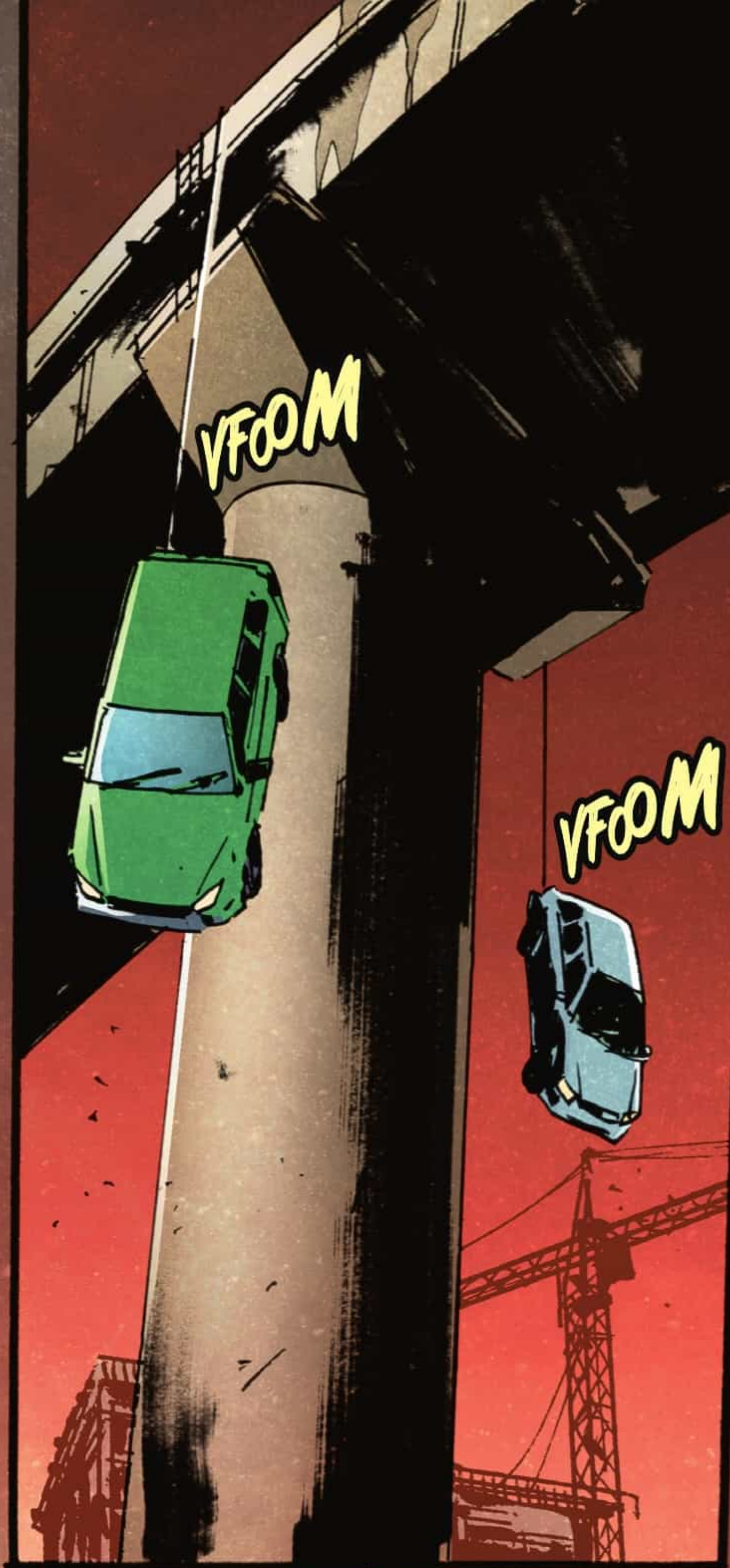
CAN YOU SEE WHAT THEY'RE SMUGGLING INSIDE?



NO, IT'S REINFORCED. WHATEVER IS IN THERE, THEY'RE NOT GOING TO GIVE IT UP EASILY.

WELL WE NEED TO GET THEM OFF THIS ROAD, NOW!





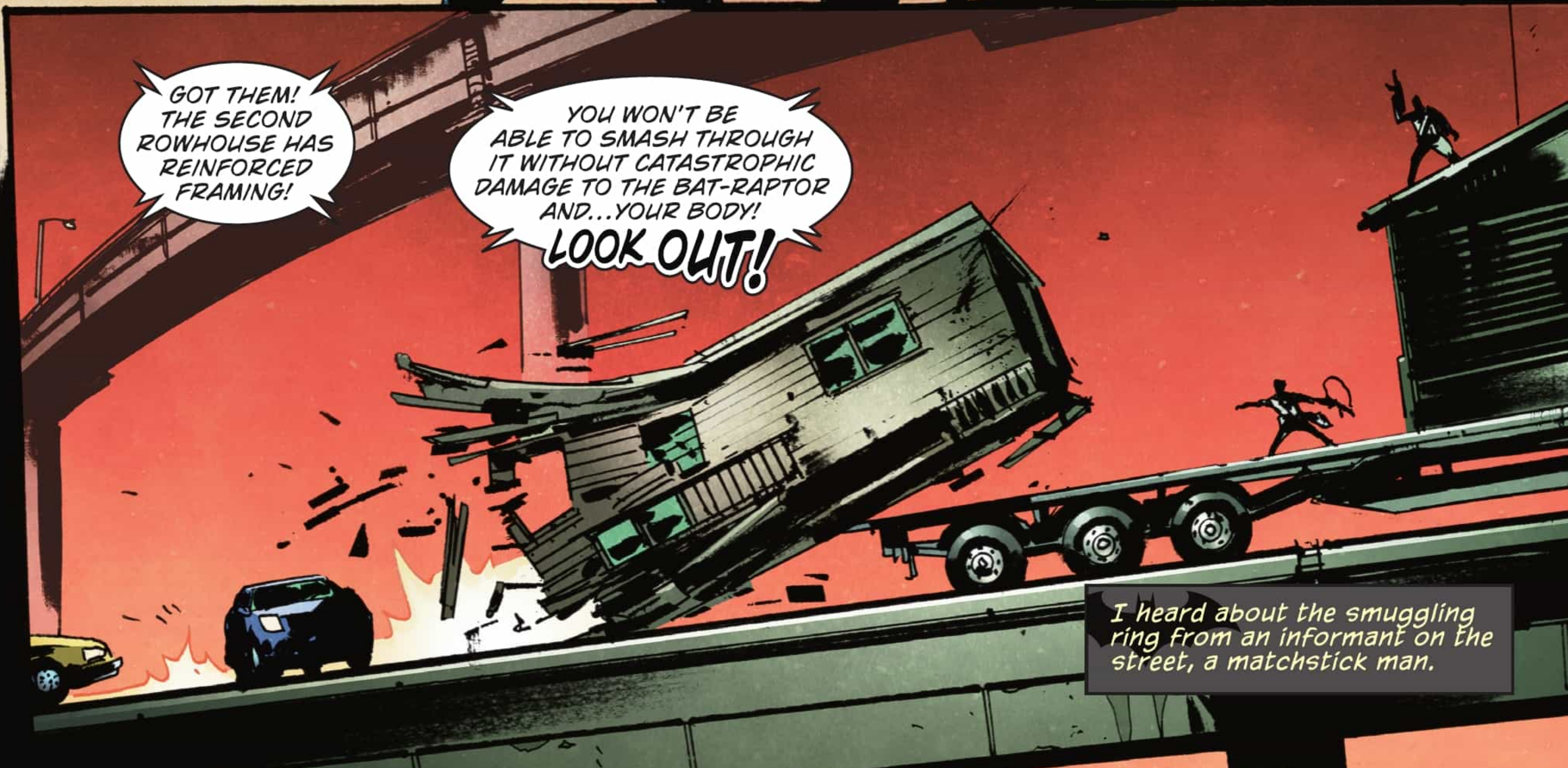
SIR, I'M NOT LOOKING UP A JOKE, WHEN--


NO, LOOK UP THE **SCHEMATIC** ON THE DAMN ROWHOUSES! NOW.



GOT THEM! THE SECOND ROWHOUSE HAS REINFORCED FRAMING!

YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO SMASH THROUGH IT WITHOUT CATASTROPHIC DAMAGE TO THE BAT-RAPTOR AND...YOUR BODY!
LOOK OUT!





They use extreme-load trucks to carry contraband from Gotham to the outside world.

The company is called Happy Trails.

TIK

Word on the street is that they've been smuggling bodies out of Gotham that came into the morgue unidentified, headed for the potter's field.

Trucks like these have pockets within the flatbeds for compression, so they can carry things up to three, four tons--like historical rowhouses removed to make room for new condos.

These are the bodies of people who lived and died here, in this city, in Gotham. People we failed to protect in life...

...but these thieves think they can take them over that bridge? Out of Gotham to be hacked up?

The thought makes me angrier than I expect.

KA-CHING



AGH!

WUMP

SWIFFE

HA! YOU DUMB PIECE OF @\$%--



--YOU MISSED!

DID I?

ZZT

DRIVER! WHY ARE WE SLOWING DOWN?! WHAT HAPPENED TO THE...ENGINE?

SIR! THE ROOF IS REINFORCED, TOO! FROM THAT HEIGHT--

I'VE GOT CUSHIONING.





FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, BATMAN INSURANCE POLICIES ARE CALLED DARK KNIGHT RETURNS.

I WILL BE LOOKING INTO ONE SHORTLY.



SCANNING THE FLATBED...

...THERE.



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(AAAAA)

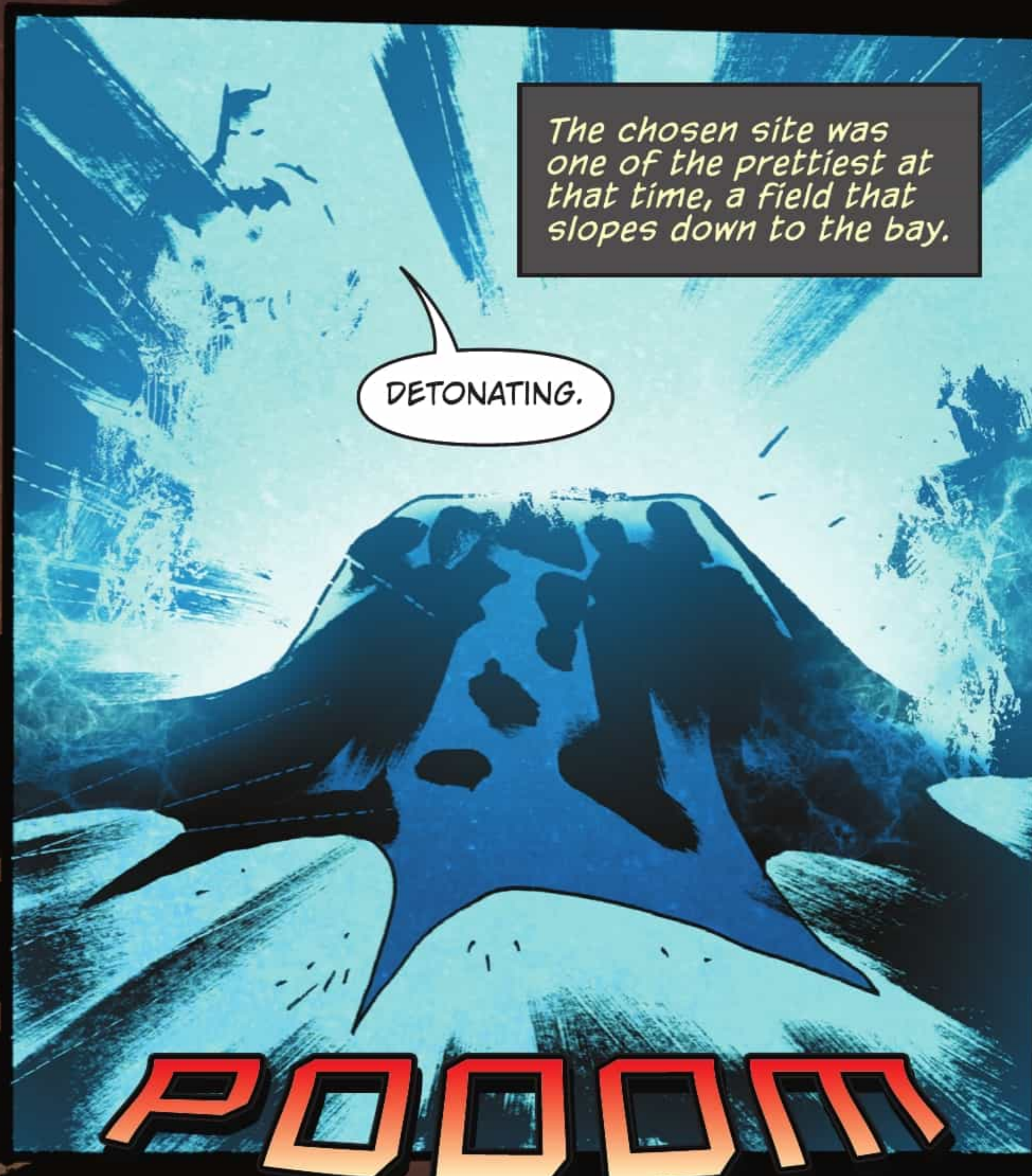
I'VE GOT IT.



SECURING BAT-CHARGE.

Gotham's potter's field was established in the city's early days by its most prominent citizens-- members of the Five Families.

CLIK
CLIK



The chosen site was one of the prettiest at that time, a field that slopes down to the bay.

DETONATING.

POOOOM



*There was confusion over why the city should put a gravesite for anonymous citizens on such a **prime** piece of land, but the thinking was...*



...whatever troubles someone faced in life here in this city...

...let them at least rest in peace on our shores.

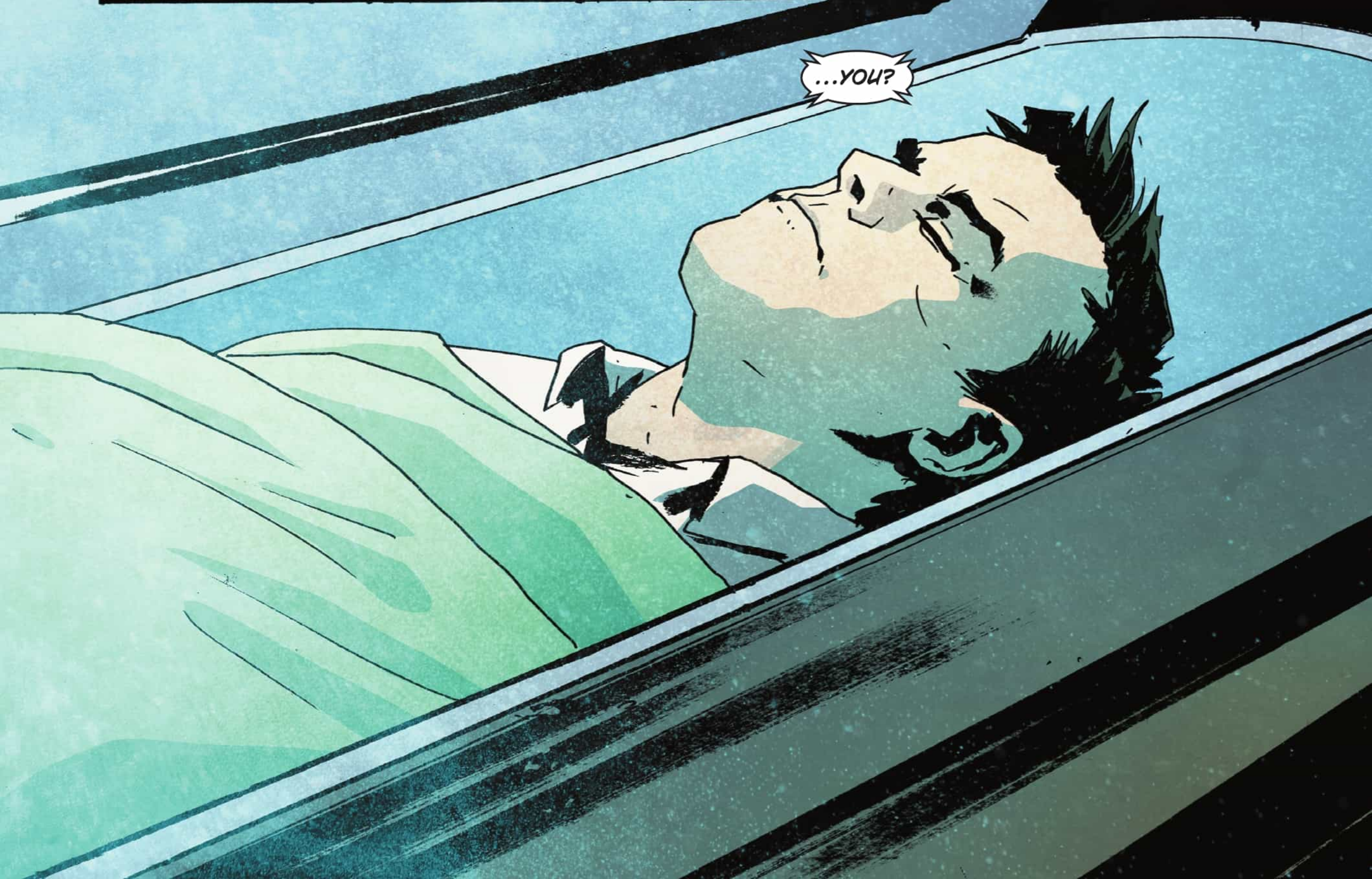
For all its faults, this city was founded on that kind of thinking. It matters.



ALL RIGHT.
LET'S SEE WHO YOU...WHAT IN--

MY GOD...SIR, IS THAT...

...YOU?



GOTHAM MORGUE.

DECEASED IS
BRUCE WAYNE.

AGE,
ROUGHLY 42,
MAYBE 43.
CAUSE OF
DEATH,
UNKNOWN.

SUBJECT
APPEARS TO HAVE
BEEN IN GOOD PHYSICAL
HEALTH. NO WOUNDS, NO
INTERNAL INJURIES
APPARENT.



ARE YOU
HEARING
ME?

HEY.
ALFRED?

I'M SORRY,
SIR. BUT IF I
MAY, IT'S HARD TO
BE AS CLINICAL
AS YOU THIS
TIME.



THE DNA
MATCHES MINE, BUT
IT COULD BE SOME
TRICK, SOME--



I KNOW YOU. I
RAISED YOU, AND
THAT IS YOU ON THE
TABLE. SOME OLDER
VERSION OF YOU.
IT'S JUST
TOO--

LOOK, IT'S
UNNERVING FOR
ME, TOO. BUT IT'S
STILL A CASE. NOW I HAVE
EYES ON ME, AND THE
REAL DOCTOR VETH IS
GOING TO WAKE UP
ANY MINUTE.



ARE YOU
HEARING
ME?

I'M...I'M
SORRY. I'M
HERE. I'LL
HELP.

NO
INTERNAL
INJURIES.
YOU WERE
SAYING?



...AND HE SEEMS TO HAVE ALL THE ONES I HAVE FROM MY EARLY YEARS.

I'M MAPPING THE SCARS, TOO...

AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, HE IS ME.

MY TRAINING--HERE, THE BURN FROM *DUCARD*. THE LACERATION FROM HARVEY, WHEN HE FIRST BECAME *TWO-FACE*...



I KNOW THOSE SCARS TOO WELL, SIR. THE WHOLE HISTORY.



THAT'S JUST IT THOUGH, ALFRED. HE DOESN'T HAVE THE *WHOLE* HISTORY.

HE HAS THE SCARS UP TO A POINT. LOOK. LOOK FOR THE SCARS FROM THE LAST FEW YEARS...



THEY'RE... THEY'RE NOT THERE.

HE'S ME, BUT A ME WHO CHOSE A DIFFERENT PATH AT A CRUCIAL JUNCTURE.



MY GUESS, GIVEN HIS PHYSIOLOGY, IS THAT THE POINT CAME WHEN BANE BROKE MY BACK.

THIS BRUCE WAYNE...HE RETIRED FROM BEING BATMAN AFTER THAT HAPPENED. FOUND A *DIFFERENT* WAY TO HELP GOTHAM.

WHAT WAY?

MY THEORY? LOOK AT HIS HANDS, THAT'S ECO-FIBER BENEATH HIS NAILS USED IN GREEN CONSTRUCTION.



THIS BRUCE LIKELY WAS IN CIVIL PROJECTS. IMPROVING THE CITY TO PROTECT IT.



HE WAS MARRIED. SEE THE INDENTATION IN HIS FINGER?

HE HAD A CHILD.



HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?

THE TATTOO.

MAY

MAY IS...MAY IS THE NAME I WOULD HAVE SUGGESTED TO *SELINA* IF WE EVER HAD A DAUGHTER.

IT EVOKES A NEW START. A NEW *BEGINNING*.



ARKHAM ASYLUM!



SO SHE TELLS
ME THE POLICY
IS CALLED...

BOB,
LOOK!



BATMAN?!

WE JUST
REDID THE DAMN
TRIGGERS. HOW THE
HELL DID YOU
GET IN?

MAN, I
HAVE TO
SAY, IT'S AN
HONOR
TO--



ZZZZT

AAAGH!



VASQUEZ?
KIVIAT?! WHAT
THE...

YOU!
FREEZE RIGHT
THERE, #\$\$~! OR
YOU GO DOWN
FAST!

HOLY...IT'S
BATMAN! ARE
THOSE GUNS?!
BUT BATMAN
DOESN'T
USE...



...GUNS--

HE
DOES
NOW.

NO,
DON'T--

=GULK=

SHULK

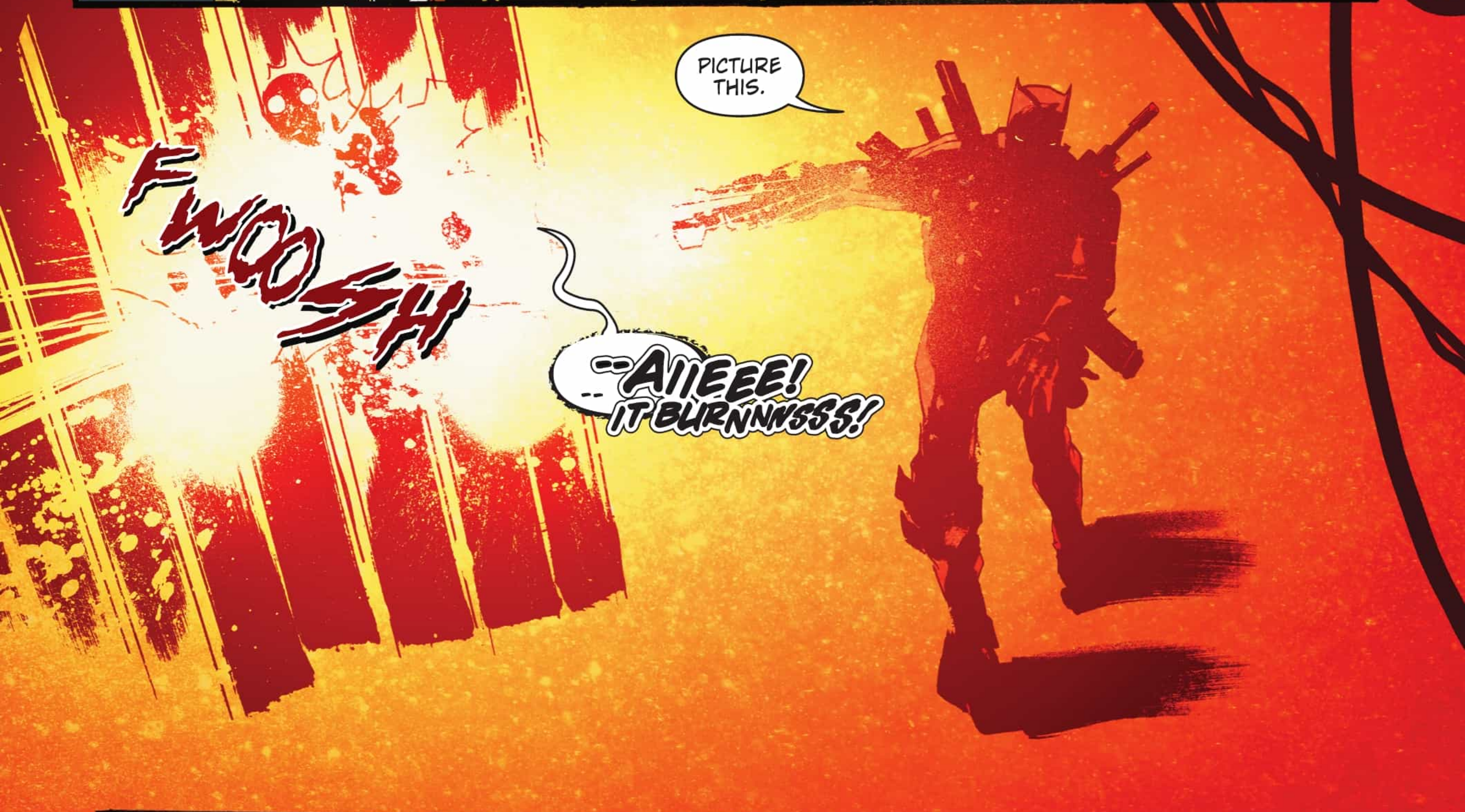
POK

CRUNCH



BATMAN,
WE ARE FOES,
BUT THIS...THIS
ISN'T YOU!

PLEASE!
THE DOCTORS HERE,
WHEN I LOSE CONTROL
THEY SAY THE BEST
WAY BACK IS TO
PICTURE--



PICTURE
THIS.

--AIIIEEE!
IT BURNNNSSS!





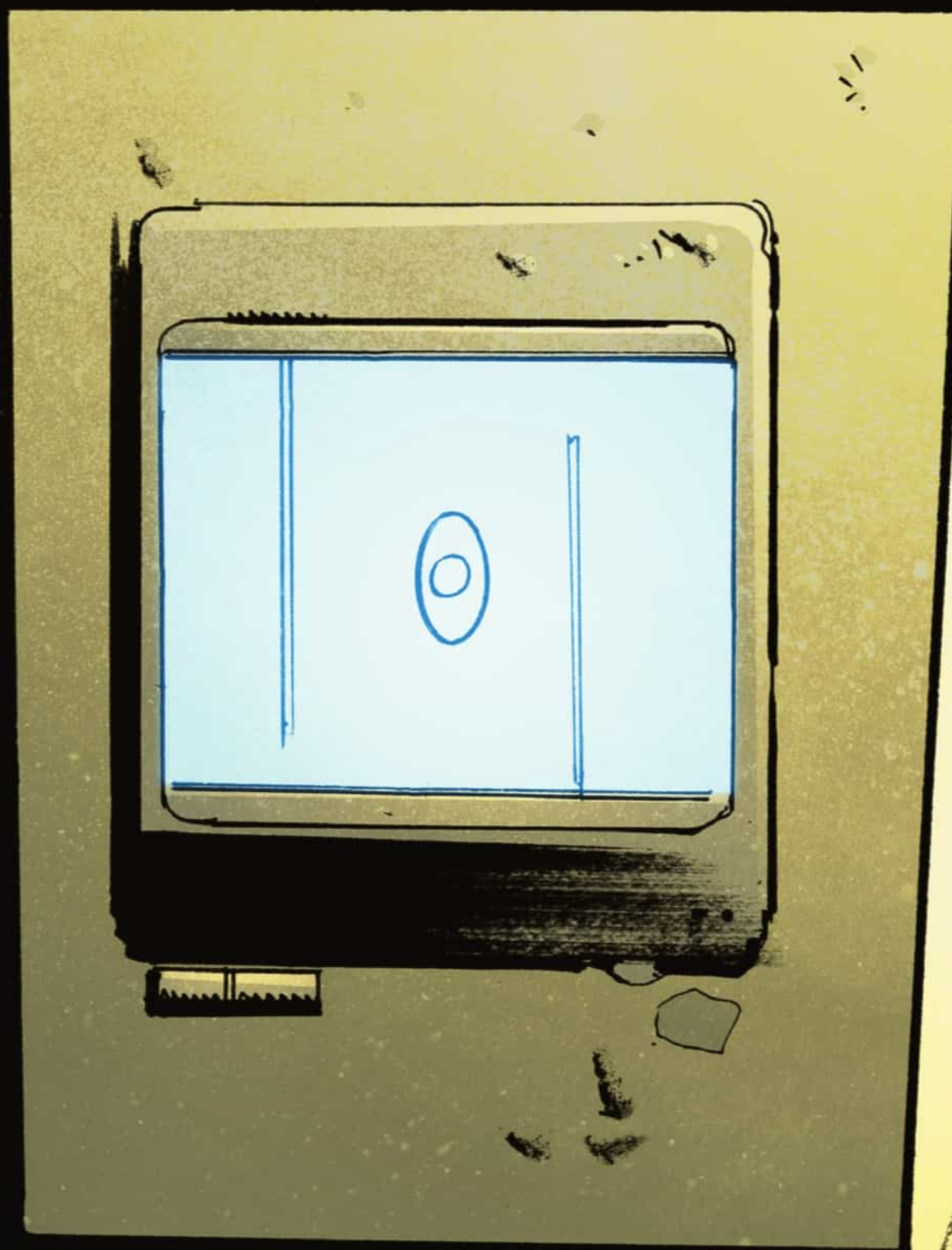
I'M
HERE.



SKOFF?
COME IN...
ANYONE...BATMAN,
HE'S LOST HIS
MIND!
HE'S ABOUT
TO OPEN THE
CELL FOR--



SHUNK



HELLO,
OLD
FRIEND.



Heh.
Hello,
Bats.



Don't
tell me you're
actually here
to *kill* me?



NO.





BUT
I AM.



GCPD HQ.

DEEP DOWN, THEY KNOW IT WASN'T YOU...BUT STILL, THEY'RE **SCARED**. SO I'M KEEPING THE SIGNAL LIGHT OFF.

I UNDERSTAND.

SO THIS...THING. WHAT IS IT?

HE COMES FROM A REALM WHERE ALL OUR HOPES AND FEARS EXIST IN MATERIAL FORM.

I'VE HAD MOMENTS WHEN I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT KILLING THE JOKER, JIM.

BUT IT'S MY BELIEF THAT THE **JOKER'S HEART** CONTAINS A SINGULAR **SUPER-TOXIN** THAT'LL BE RELEASED WHEN HE DIES. A TOXIN THAT WILL MAKE WHOEVER KILLS HIM THE NEXT JOKER. SO THIS CREATURE, HE'S ME, BUT A ME WHO'S--

ALSO HIM. LORD...

WELL FIRST, WHO HASN'T THOUGHT ABOUT KILLING JOKER? THE CITY'LL BE HEARTBROKEN TO KNOW IT WAS A DECOY IN THAT CELL. HOWEVER THE HELL JOKER MANAGED IT, I DON'T KNOW. BUT IF THIS "**BATMAN WHO LAUGHS**" GUY IS THE JOKER IN YOUR BODY, WE CAN STILL--

HE'S NOT THE JOKER, JIM. HE'S BATMAN. HE'S **ME**. JOKER HAS POINTS TO PROVE--TO ME, TO THE WORLD.


THE BATMAN WHO LAUGHS...HE'S NOT HERE TO PROVE **ANYTHING**. HE'S HERE TO WIN, TO KILL ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING THAT'S A **THREAT**.

BUT WHEN YOU SAY HE'S YOU, HOW MUCH OF YOUR LIFE--

ALL OF IT. HE'S LED **MY** LIFE, HAS MY TRAINING, HAS MY MEMORIES, MY **MIND**...BUT HE'S ME FREE FROM CODES, MORALS, HEART BLACK AS THE JOKER'S.

HE'S THE LIVING EMBODIMENT OF THE IDEA THAT--

"**BATMAN ALWAYS WINS.**" MY GOD.




HE'S AN
APEX PREDATOR, JIM.
HE CONQUERED AND KILLED
WORLD AFTER WORLD IN HIS DIMENSION.
AND HE'S HERE FOR SOMETHING. THIS
OTHER BATMAN HE BROUGHT WHO
KILLED THE GUARDS AT ARKHAM AND
NEARLY KILLED FREEZE...THE
ONE THEY'RE CALLING
"THE GRIM KNIGHT"...

...THE BATMAN
WHO LAUGHS MUST HAVE
BROUGHT HIM OVER BEFORE
OUR LAST BATTLE. KEPT HIM HIDDEN,
WAITING UNTIL NOW. BUT WHY? AND
BRUCE WAYNE IN THE MORGUE? HIS
CELLS WERE UNSTABLE, VOLATILE.
HE HAS TO BE THE KEY SOMEHOW.
THE LEAD THAT MONSTER
DOESN'T KNOW WE
HAVE YET.

...IT'S ALL
PART OF SOME
DAMN **PLAN**. I
KNOW IT. I...I
JUST CAN'T SEE
IT YET.



I NEED...
HELP.




At the time of the attack, the
Joker had only been in Arkham a
short while. The decoy in his cell
must have been swapped in just
days ago. As though the Joker
knew what was coming for him...

...the **name** of the man
impersonating him was
changed multiple times to
hide his identity. One of
Joker's Slapstick Men.

Each name change has
significance. Glucks.
Sonasa. Lykken. Gladjeg.
The names are all from
words that mean
"happiness" in other
languages, but each has
one added letter.

Put together, the letters
spell **"Sang"**--an old
Gotham comedy club
expression. If you sang,
you had the best set of
your career. The fat lady
sang. You could die now.



So what would have
been, or **would be**, the
happiest moment in
Joker's life? Where
would it take place?
Where am I supposed
to meet him?

And then it
hits me...

...I already know. I've known all along.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND, SIR. WHY WOULD WE UNDO THE WATERWAY SECURITY SYSTEMS? THE ROCKS WILL SHIFT, THE TUNNELS WILL OPEN.

ALFRED, DO IT.

ANYONE TRAVELING THOSE WATERWAYS WILL BE ABLE TO COME RIGHT INTO--

I SAID DO IT!

IT'S ALREADY DONE, I JUST...

...MY GOD...

...WAS SOMEONE ALREADY LURKING DOWN THERE WITH OXYGEN...JUST... WAITING? WHO WOULD...

NO, NO, NO. TELL ME IT'S NOT HIM, SIR. WHO IS IT?!

WHO'S THERE?!

Now, now, Jeevessss...



...I'm supposed to say "knock, knock" first.



YOU'LL BE SAFE HERE, JOKER.



Heeeeee

But I don't want to be safe, old friend...





A TRICK GUN...?

ALFRED, HE'S GOING! HIS HEART... THE BLOOD, ARTERIAL...

JOKER! JOKER STAY WITH ME! WHY...WHY DID YOU DO THAT?!

BECAUSSSE...



The only way you'll beat him... Is to become him. Heh.



... MY GOD... YOUR HEART. THE TOXIN... WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!

NO... **NO!**

FSSSS

HE'S... HE'S REALLY GONE, SIR.

WHY ARE YOU SMILING LIKE THAT?

WHAT'S WRONG?!

In a second Alfred rushes to me.



And just like in that first memory, I feel the warmth of his hands, the strength as they hold me back...

...he's calling to me. But all I can hear...

Heeee

...is laughter.

HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!

