



The Batman Who Laughs, Part 2

When I was training to be Batman, traveling the globe, it struck me how many different cultures cite the **heart** as the location in the body where happiness lives.

There's science to it, though. Happiness, joy, they require more **blood** from the **heart** than other emotions.

That night in the alley, as the gun rose, I remember my father's hand covering my chest...his fingers like an extra set of ribs, filling in the spaces.

Then his hand was falling away...and everything was different.

It's what you reach to **protect** when you're scared. Not your throat or other real vulnerabilities like exposed arteries or nerves--the things I target when I fight.

When the explosion came, I thought I'd been **hit**. I was sure.

But my heart had only **skipped a beat**.

That **missing beat** though...sometimes I think I live my whole life inside that **missing beat**.

WE'RE LOSING HIM!



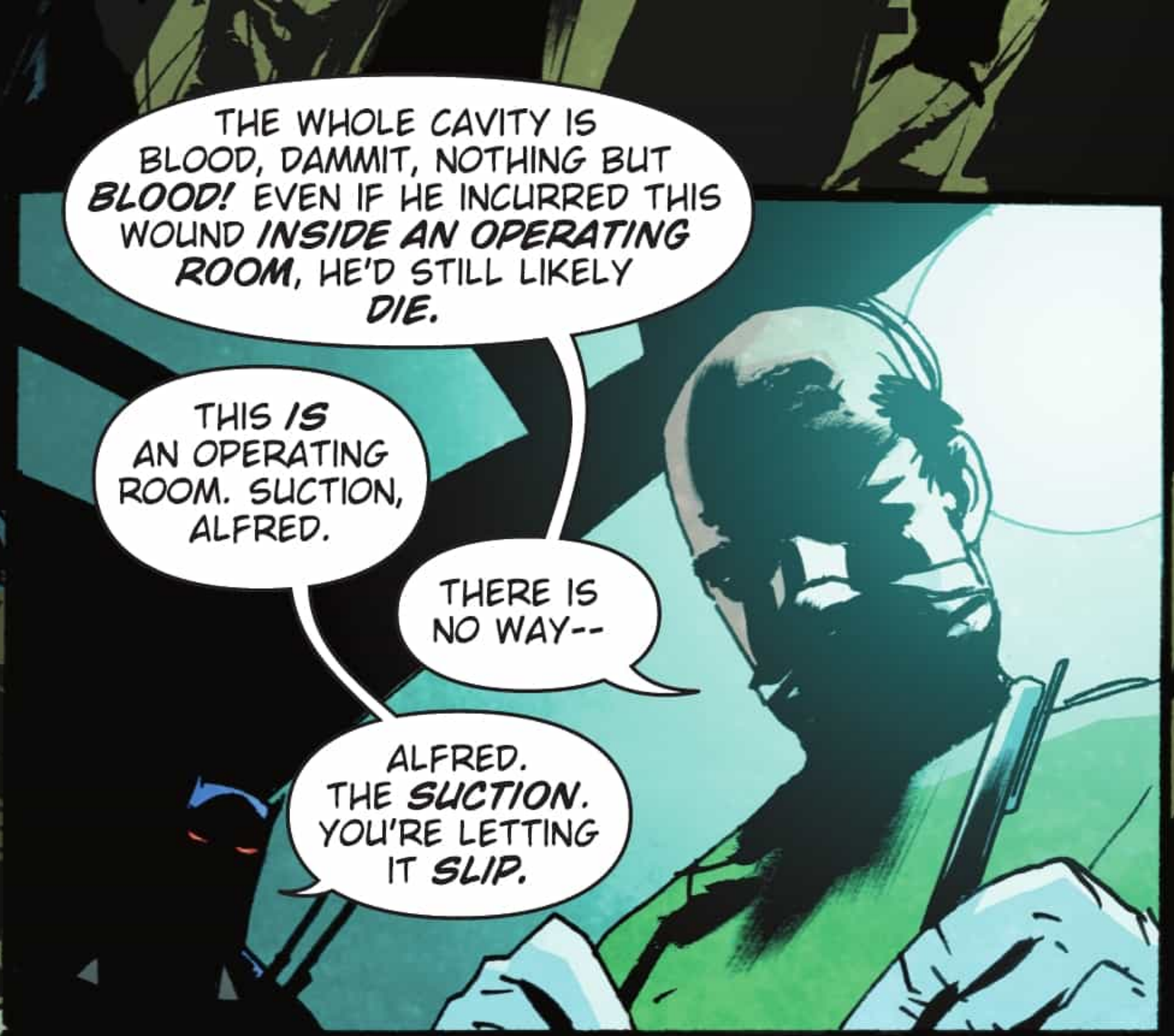


THE WHOLE CAVITY IS BLOOD, DAMMIT, NOTHING BUT **BLOOD!** EVEN IF HE INCURRED THIS WOUND **INSIDE AN OPERATING ROOM**, HE'D STILL LIKELY **DIE.**

THIS **IS** AN OPERATING ROOM. SUCTION, ALFRED.

THERE IS NO WAY--

ALFRED. THE **SUCTION.** YOU'RE LETTING IT **SLIP.**



...FINE.

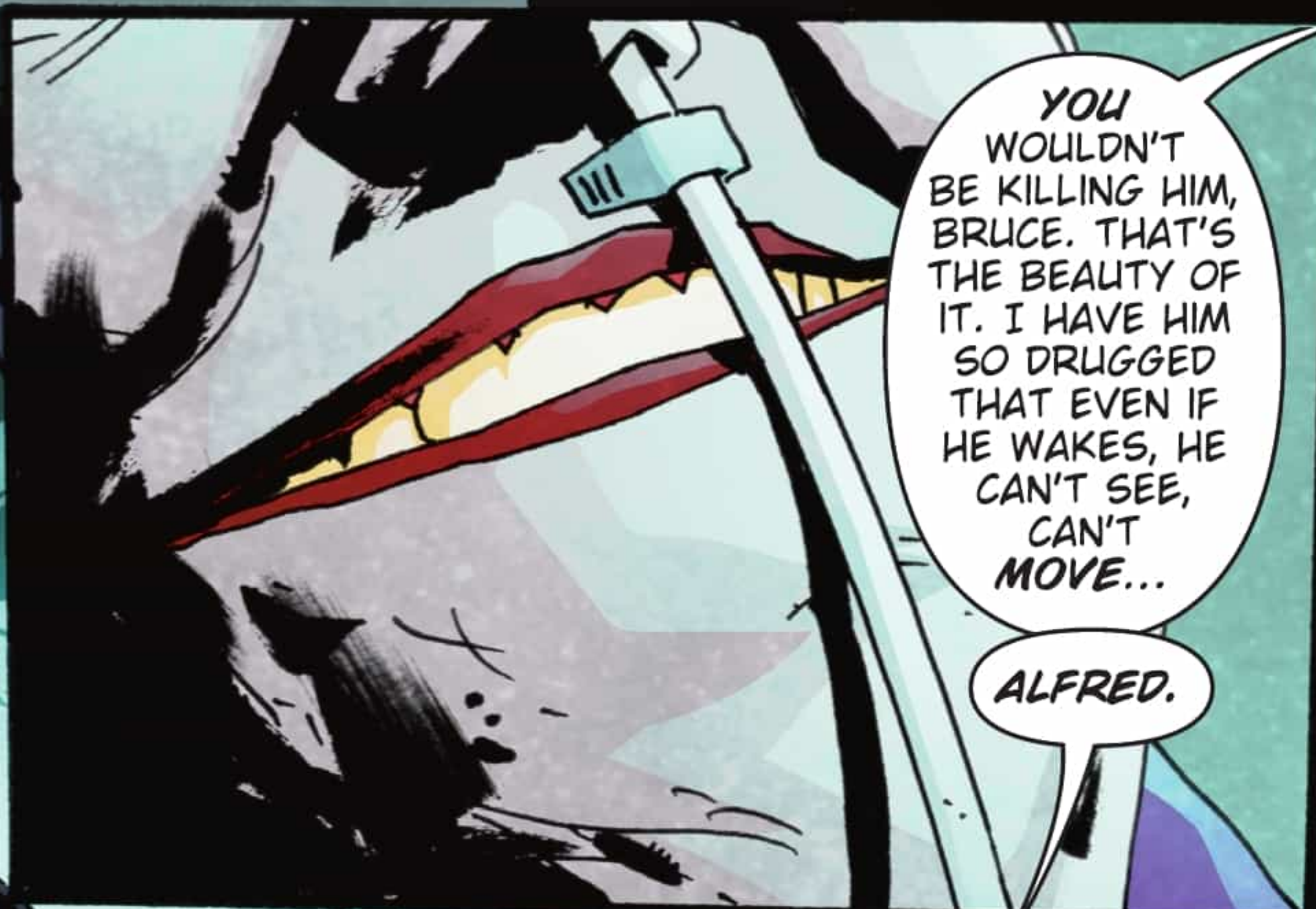
IF I MIGHT ASK, THOUGH, AT A MOMENT LIKE THIS, WHEN SOMETHING AS AWFUL AS THAT **LAUGHING DEMON** HAS COME TO THIS CITY--

DON'T.



YOU WOULDN'T BE KILLING HIM, BRUCE. THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF IT. I HAVE HIM SO DRUGGED THAT EVEN IF HE WAKES, HE CAN'T SEE, CAN'T **MOVE...**

ALFRED.



AT THE VERY LEAST, IF HIS HEART STOPS FOR A FEW MINUTES...IF HIS BRAIN IS DEPRIVED OF OXYGEN...WE COULD KEEP HIM ALIVE. HE WOULDN'T BE **DEAD!**

I KNOW HOW BADLY YOU WANT THIS MAN GONE. BUT YOU WILL NOT LET HIM DIE.

TO BE FRANK, RIGHT NOW WE HAVE A BIGGER DAMN PROBLEM THAN JOKER, AND THE ONLY WAY WE BEAT THIS MONSTER... IS BY STAYING TRUE TO WHO WE **ARE...**



... WHATEVER
THE HELL IT
TAKES.





...
SO BE IT.
THE **SERUMS**, SIR...HOW ARE THEY WORKING?

I'M USING EVERY **JOKER TOXIN ANTIDOTE** WE HAVE...IF I KEEP TAKING THEM DAILY, THEY SHOULD STAVE OFF THE **TRANSFORMATION** FOR A WEEK, MAYBE A LITTLE MORE...



A WEEK?! BEFORE YOU TURN INTO THAT...THAT **THING**?! WE NEED TO STOP HIM BEFORE--

WHAT **YOU** NEED TO DO, ALFRED, IS MIND YOUR PATIENT.

NOW GET YOUR **##\$%#!#** HANDS BACK IN THE **##\$%#!#** CLOWN.

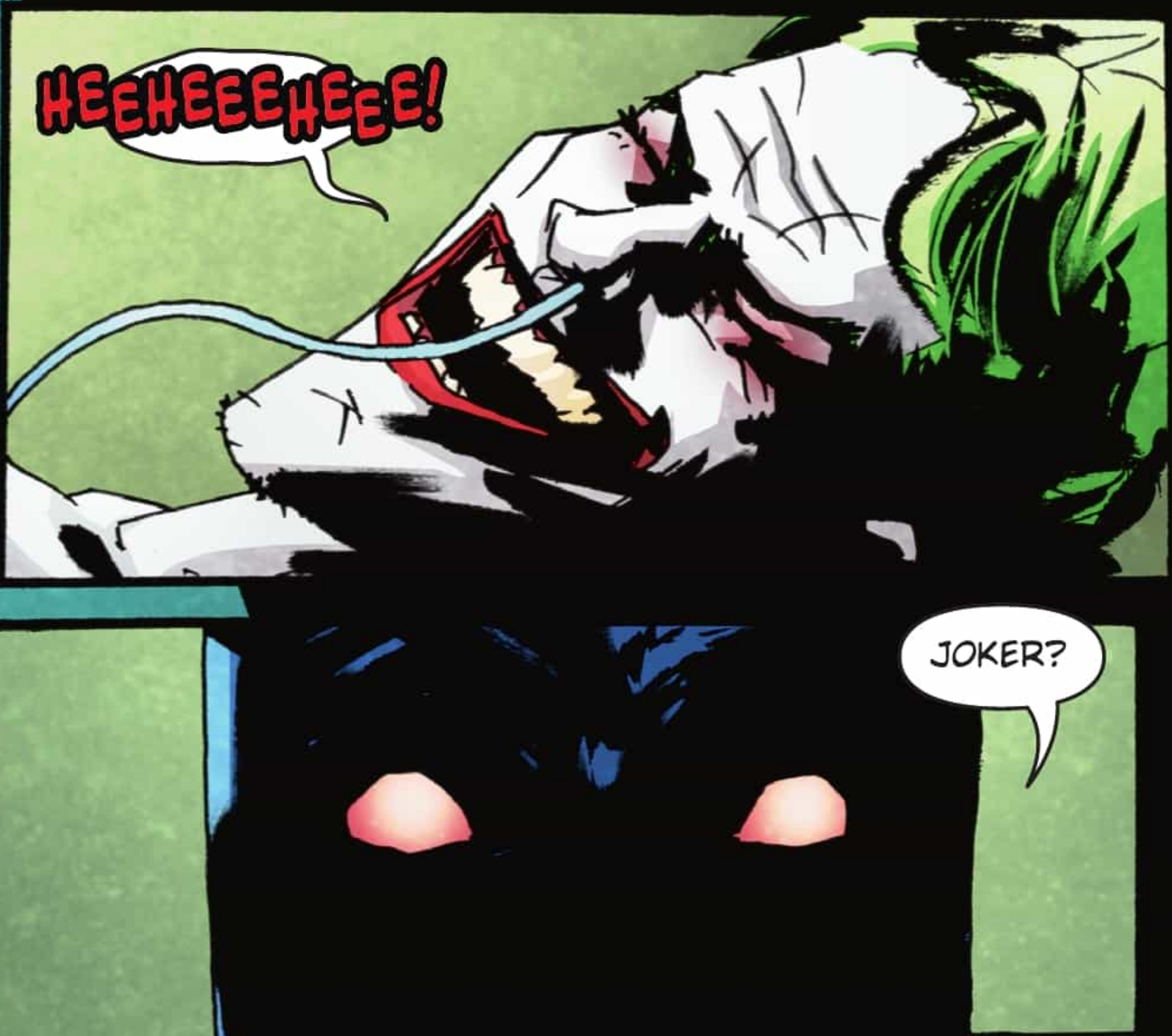


...
LOOK, I--I'M SORRY...I JUST...THAT THING OUT THERE. SEEING MYSELF LIKE THAT. HE FEELS LIKE THE LAST ONE. THE ONE AT THE **END**.

SIR--

HE KNOWS EVERYTHING I KNOW. HE'S GONE THROUGH EVERYTHING I HAVE AND THERE'S NOTHING HE WON'T DO TO **WIN**. HE...WINS, ALFRED. HE HAS NO WEAKNESS I CAN DISCERN. ME...

STILL, THERE HAS TO BE A WAY I CAN BEAT HIM!



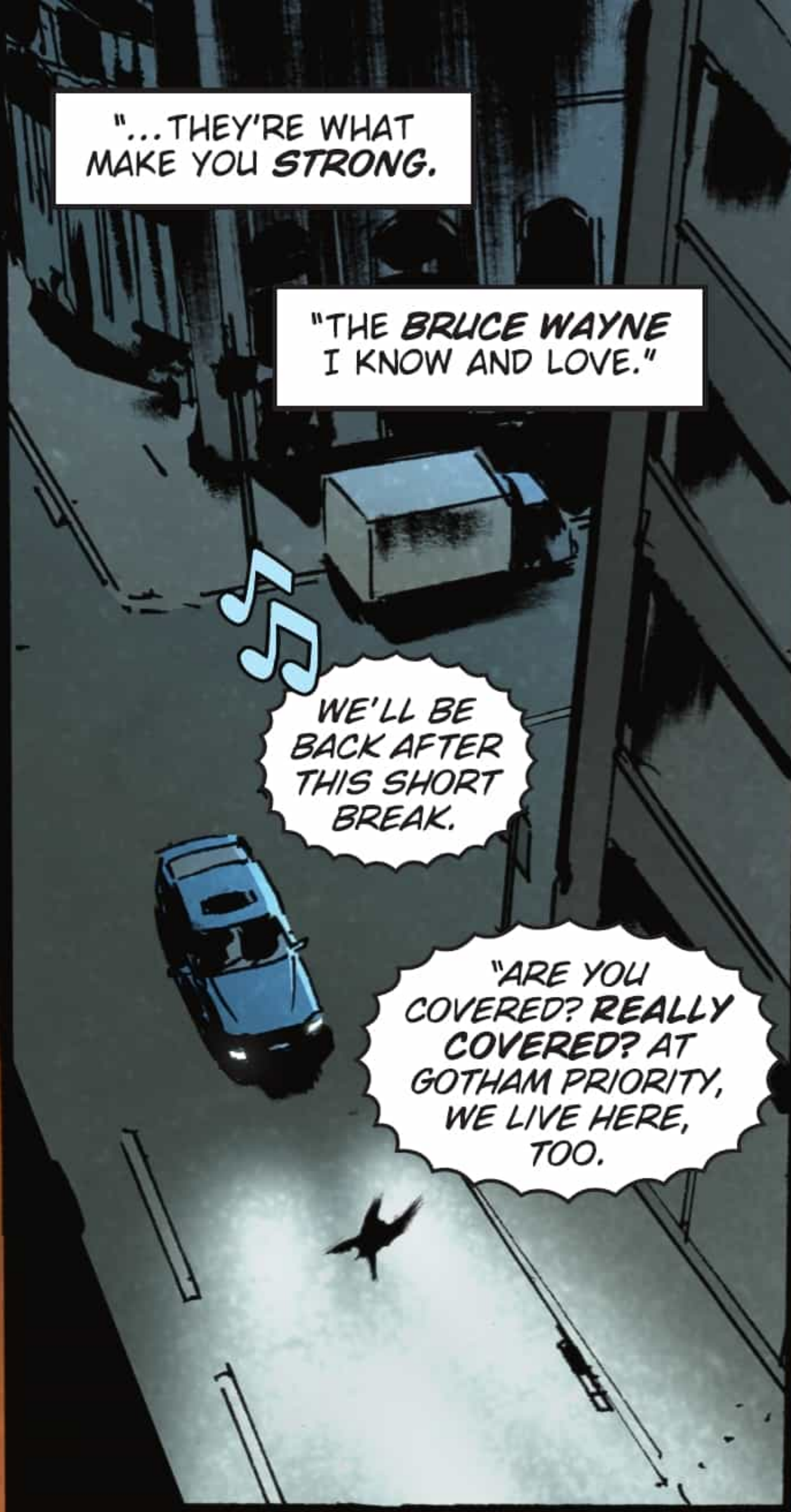
HEEEHEEEHEEE!

JOKER?



IT'S JUST A PHYSICAL RESPONSE. MOST PEOPLE GASP. I SUPPOSE IT MEANS HE'LL **LIVE**.

AND...IF WE'RE STAYING WHO WE ARE...YOUR SOFT SPOTS, THE THINGS YOU'RE WORRIED MAKE YOU **WEAK**...?



"...THEY'RE WHAT
MAKE YOU **STRONG**."

"THE **BRUCE WAYNE**
I KNOW AND LOVE."

WE'LL BE
BACK AFTER
THIS SHORT
BREAK.

"ARE YOU
COVERED? REALLY
COVERED? AT
GOTHAM PRIORITY,
WE LIVE HERE,
TOO."



"SO WE OFFER
ALL **SORTS** OF
POLICIES FOR OUR
FELLOW
GOTHAMITES,
EVEN--"

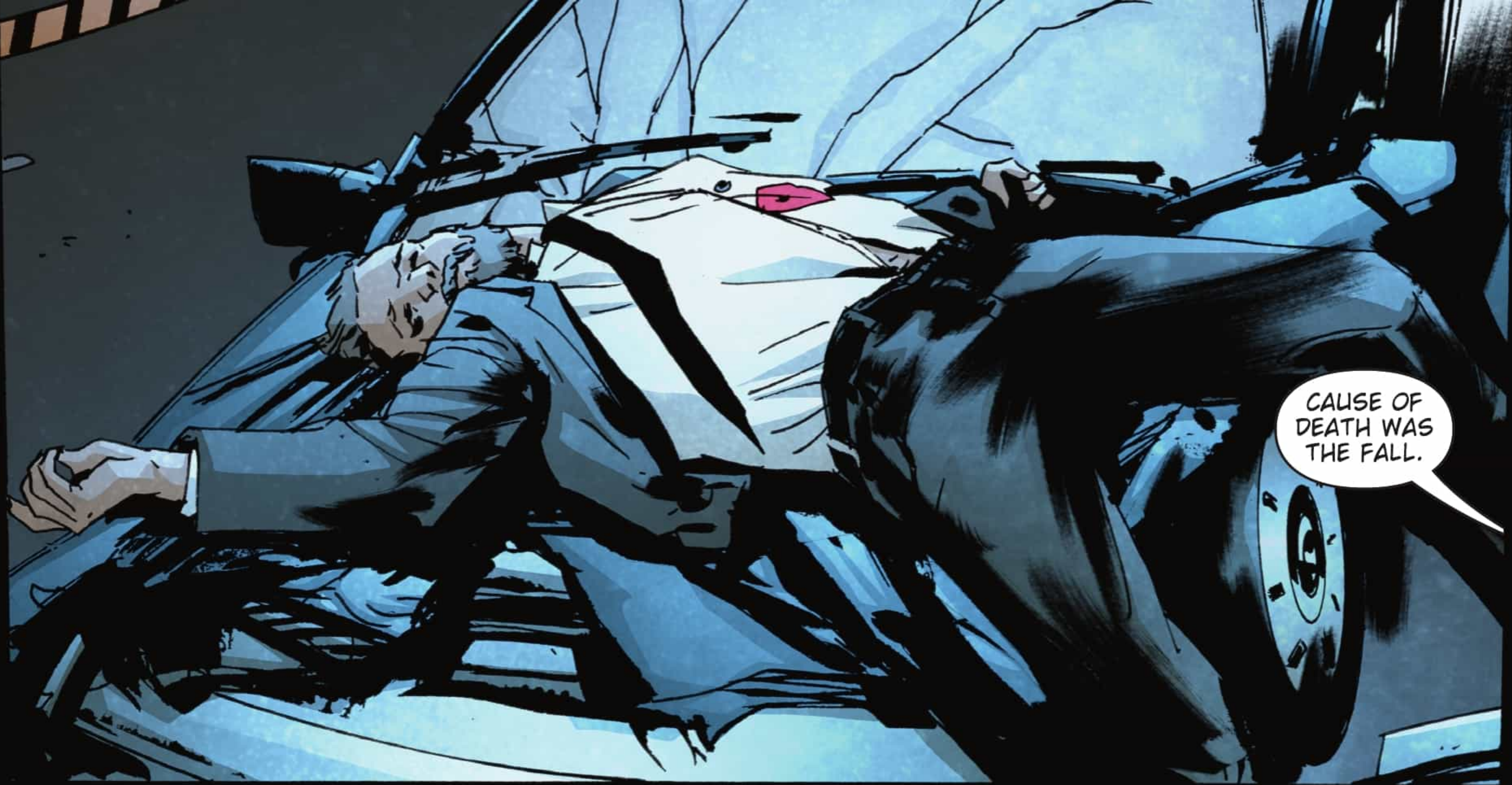


LATER.



VICTIM
IS NONE OTHER
THAN **BRUCE**
WAYNE.

AGAIN.



CAUSE OF DEATH WAS THE FALL.



THE THING IS, HE SEEMS TO HAVE FALLEN FROM A HEIGHT THAT'S **NOT POSSIBLE** GIVEN THE STATURE OF THE SURROUNDING BUILDINGS.

HEY. WELCOME TO TUESDAY IN GOTHAM CITY.

THESE BRUCE WAYNES...THE LAST ONE--THE ONE FOUND IN THE ROWHOUSE--**DISINTEGRATED** IN THE MORGUE.

IT WAS MADE OF SOME KIND OF UNSTABLE CELL STRUCTURE--SOMETHING LIKE DARK MATTER? THIS ONE LIKELY IS, TOO. WHAT THE HELL IS **GOING ON**?

MAYBE THEY'RE FROM SOME OTHER DIMENSION. LIKE IF THIS **BATMAN WHO LAUGHS** IS PULLING BRUCE WAYNES THROUGH FROM OTHER WORLDS...

...MAYBE THEY APPEAR HERE AT THE SPOT THEY WERE AT IN **THEIR** WORLD. WHAT IF **THIS** WAYNE WAS HIGH UP?

WHY BRUCE WAYNE IS SO SPECIAL THOUGH... HEY, WHO KNOWS...

--YOU KNOW, NO ONE BUT **ME** KNOWS THAT HARVEY IS **OFF** THIS WEEK, GETTING TREATMENT FOR A **HERNIA**. EVERYONE THINKS HE'S ON TRAFFIC FOR PUNISHMENT (HE'D RATHER THAN **HERNIA** RUMORS).

THAT SAID, YOU'RE USUALLY BETTER AT THIS **DISGUISE** THING. ARE YOU OKAY, **BATMAN**? YOU SEEM...**OFF**.

I'M...FINE, JIM. I'LL BE FINE. PLEASE, LET'S JUST GET BACK TO IT.

PSST--



SO WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE VICTIM?

EACH OF THESE BRUCE WAYNES LIVED A DIFFERENT LIFE. THE LAST ONE WAS MARRIED, HAD CHILDREN. THIS ONE...



...WAS **MAYOR**.

FROM THE PICTURES IN HIS WALLET, HE LOOKS LIKE HE WAS **HAPPY**. SEEMS TO HAVE RETIRED FROM BEING B...

...BEING A **PLAYBOY** AROUND THE TIME HIS WARD, **JASON TODD** DIED. HE HAS A SPEECH IN HIS POCKET. APPARENTLY, HE WAS CELEBRATING THE SIGNING OF A FEDERAL ENERGY CONTRACT HERE IN GOTHAM CITY. HAVING A **GOOD MOMENT**. MY GUESS, HE WAS CELEBRATING ON A **BLIMP** WHEN HE... CAME THROUGH.

SO THE QUESTION IS, WHY IS THIS MONSTER PULLING BRUCE WAYNES FROM **OTHER WORLDS**? WHAT'S HE TRYING TO **GET**?



WHATEVER IT IS, HE ALREADY GOT IT. HE BEAT US HERE. SEE THAT WOUND? IT'S A BLOOD OR TISSUE SAMPLE **PUNCTURE**.

HE COULD HAVE TAKEN ONE FROM THE LAST BODY AS WELL.

HH...

WHAT?

CARDIAC BLOOD HAS SOME OF THE LAST OF THE BODY'S CELLS TO DIE, THE MOST **RESILIENT**. HE'S USING THE CELLS TO MAKE SOMETHING... A **SERUM**.

WHAT KIND OF SERUM?

I DON'T KNOW... BUT THE DARK MULTIVERSE IS A REALM HIGHLY CONNECTED TO OUR EMOTIONS. MAYBE HE'S USING THESE HAPPY BRUCE WAYNES BECAUSE OUR IMMUNE SYSTEMS WILL BE LESS LIKELY TO RECOGNIZE THEIR PLASMA AS INFECTIOUS? IF SO, HE COULD CREATE SOMETHING THAT SECRETLY **INFECTS** OUR BODIES WITH **DARK MATTER**, CHANGING US INTO...

NIGHTMARES LIKE HIM?

NIGHTMARES LIKE **US**. OUR **DARKEST VISION** OF OURSELVES. **PREDATORS**.



LORD.

BATMAN,
LISTEN...THERE'S
SOMETHING I SHOULD
TELL YOU. SOMEONE
WHO MIGHT BE ABLE
TO HELP, BUT...I...
I'M NOT SURE--

WAIT,
HARV?

HARV, IT *IS* YOU.
WE ALL THOUGHT YOU
WERE ON BRIDGE AND TUNNEL
DUTY! LISTEN, THE GUYS ARE
STARTING A *POOL* BASED ON
WHAT YOU WERE SAYING
THE OTHER NIGHT.

THREE
BUCKETS.



BUCKET ONE,
THIS *GRIM KNIGHT*
TAKES DOWN THE
BAT.



BUCKET TWO,
THE *LAUGHING*
ONE TAKES DOWN
THE BAT. BUCKET
THREE--



WE WERE
DISCUSSING A
@#%@!# *CASE*,
CADET, BUT BY ALL
MEANS, WHAT'S
BUCKET
THREE?!

HARV...I
MEAN, DETECTIVE
BULLOCK, I DIDN'T
MEAN TO--

WHAT
WAS BUCKET
THREE?! PUT
ME DOWN FOR
IT, EH?!



I'M...I'M SORRY, COMMISSIONER...JUST YESTERDAY, THOUGH, HE WAS SAYING HOW WE SHOULD HAVE A *POOL*, HOW THE BAT COULD REALLY GO *DOWN* THIS TIME...

IT'S FINE. GO BACK TO YOUR POST, CADET.



LOOK, I'M SORRY ABOUT THAT. HARVEY BELITTLES YOU TO MAKE THE MEN FEEL MORE IMPORTANT SOMETIMES.

BUT HE'S IN YOUR CORNER, MAYBE MORE THAN ANYONE BUT ME. HAS BEEN SINCE DAY ONE. HE'S JUST...*HIM*.

BUT *YOU*... WHAT *WAS* THAT BACK THERE? IF SOMETHING IS GOING ON WITH YOU, I'M HERE, BATMAN. I KNOW THIS *THING*...HE'S A TOUGH ONE, BUT IF WE DO IT TOGETHER, HELL, IT'S LIKE YOU SAID BEFORE--HE'S JUST *TUESDAY* IN *GOTHAM*.



NO ONE THINKS--

IT DOESN'T MATTER. COME HERE. I NEED TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING.

SURE, AS LONG IT'S NOT ANOTHER DEAD GUY NAMED WAYNE.

IT'S AN OLD MAP OF GOTHAM.

WAYNE TOWER.

"THERE'S ONE HANGING IN **WAYNE TOWER**, TOO.

"WHEN GOTHAM WAS BUILT, THE FOUNDING FAMILIES SAW IT AS THE ENGINE OF THE COUNTRY. THE CULTURAL, INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL **CENTER** OF THE NATION.

"IN 1780, THOUGH, PLAGUE WIPED OUT A THIRD OF THE CITY. AND THE FAMILIES, THEY FEARED THAT WHAT THEY SAW AS THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY COULD BECOME THE MEANS OF ITS **INFECTION**.

"THEY VOWED NEVER TO LET GOTHAM BECOME THE SOURCE OF **DARKNESS**."

THEY SET UP A SYSTEM CALLED **LAST LAUGH**. BASED ON THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF THE EXPRESSION.

A DEFENSE SYSTEM BY WHICH GOTHAM WOULD BE PROTECTED IF ANYTHING TERRIBLE SPREAD INSIDE.

WHAT KIND OF SYSTEM?

A MEANS OF BLOWING THE ENTRYWAYS AND **VACCINATING** THE CITY WITH AIRSHIPS, RESERVOIRS OF FOOD AND WATER HIDDEN DEEP BELOW THE STREETS. I LEARNED ABOUT IT FIGHTING THE **OWLS**.

IT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE A BAD IDEA TO ME.

WELL, AFTER THE **LAST JOKER** ATTACK, I STARTED BUILDING MY **OWN LAST LAUGH**.

"IT'S A FINAL DEFENSE AGAINST ANY CHEMICAL OR BIOLOGICAL ATTACK. A WAY OF **SEALING OFF** THE CITY, PURIFYING AIR AND WATER, RESTORING GOTHAM'S HEALTH INDEPENDENTLY.

"THE CENTRAL HUB IS IN **WAYNE TOWER**, ON THE HIGHEST SECURITY FLOOR. MULTI-POINT DNA ACCESS REQUIRED..."

"LET ME GUESS, THE ONLY PEOPLE WITH ACCESS ARE YOU...AND **BRUCE WAYNE**."

HELLO? HELLO, WHO'S THERE? THE OTHER GUARDS SHOULD HAVE TOLD YOU, NO ONE IS ALLOWED HERE EXCEPT--

I ALREADY SAID HELLO TO THE OTHER GUARDS, BILL. GOOD TO SEE YOU!

AND GOOD TO HEAR YOU, MR. WAYNE.



GOING UP?



HA.
ALWAYS,
BILL,
ALWAYS.



SO, HOW'VE YOU BEEN? GRANDKIDS GOOD? HOW'S YOUR HEALTH?

BLEEP
DNA
RECOGNIZED.

THE NEW PACEMAKER IS WORKING WELL. I CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH, MR. WAYNE. NOT JUST FOR THE SURGERY, BUT FOR ALL THIS.



OH, COME ON. YOU WERE A PUBLIC SERVANT INJURED IN AN ATTACK BY SCARECROW, BILL.

STILL, GIVING ME THIS JOB, PAYING FOR MY RECOVERY...



IT'S THE LEAST I COULD DO.

CHING
CHING



NO, IT'S NOT.

I'M JUST SAYING...



THUNK

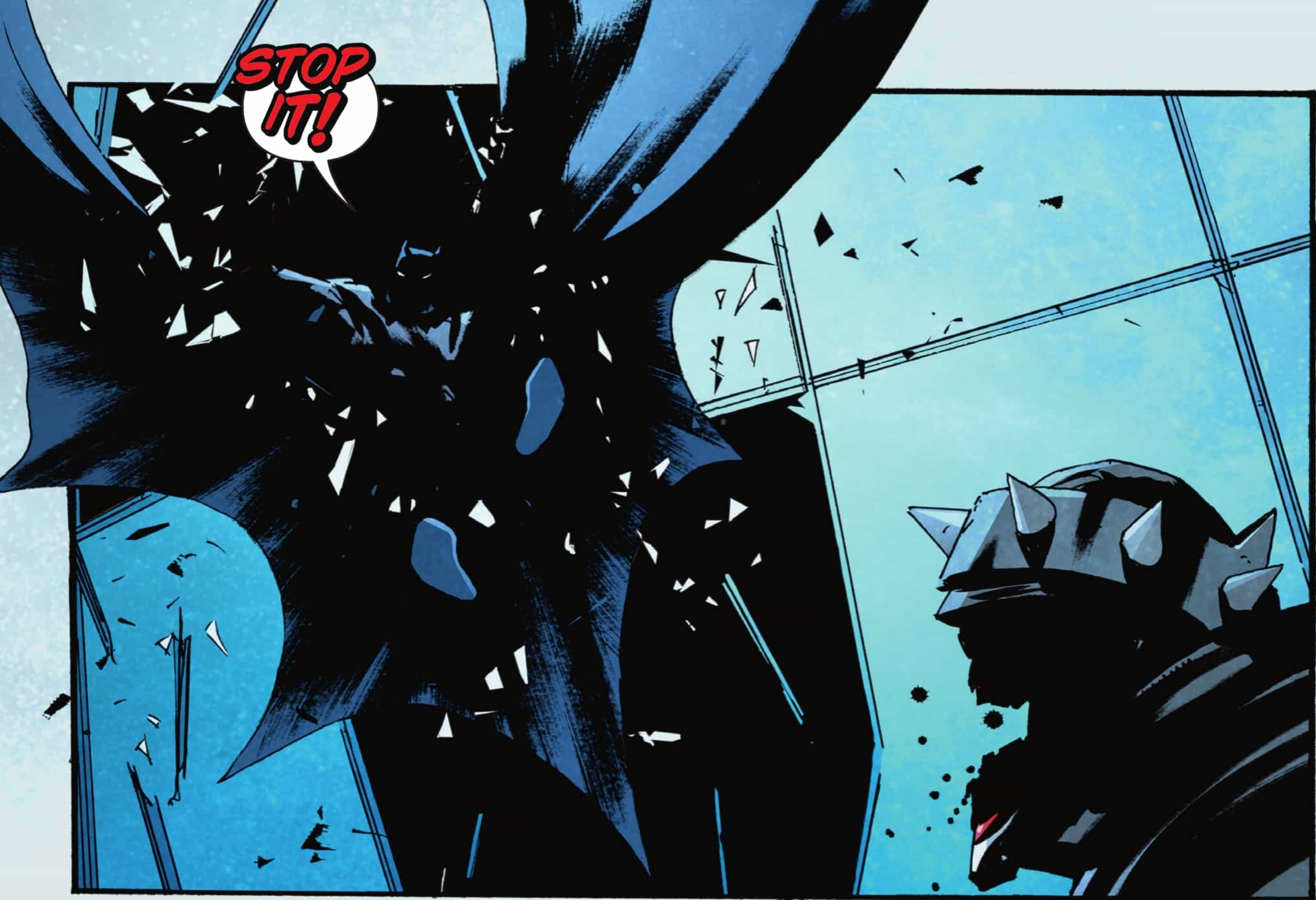
SLASH

WAK

SLUCE

AND IN
THREE, TWO,
ONE...





STOP IT!



SO YOU'RE LOOKING WELL.



My god, he's quick. He's leaner than me, faster.

But I'm stronger.

I attack with a combination of styles that favors power...five methods just in my lunge...

...and yet, in his dodge,
he uses aspects of six...

...he sees it
all coming...

...but I saw this
coming, too.

Since my last fight
with him, I've been
training again.

Training in a
technique he
won't know.

Because
I made
it up.

ENOUGH!

Alfred calls the style "Bam
Pow." It stands for something
clever, but mostly, I think he
just likes saying "Bam Pow."

Especially when he
thinks of *this* monster.

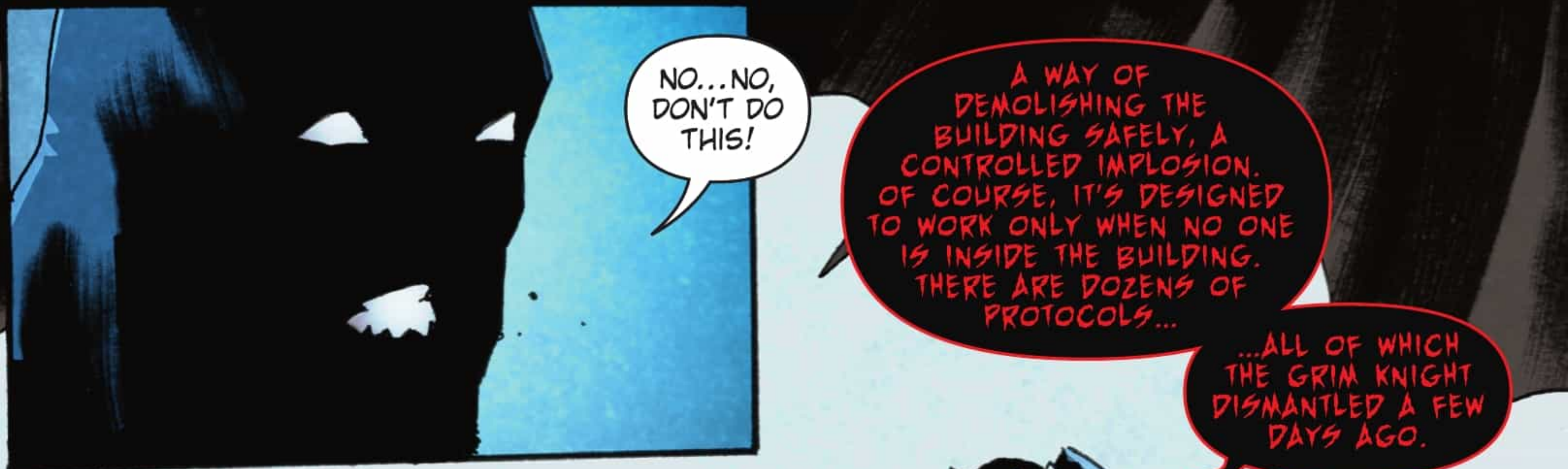
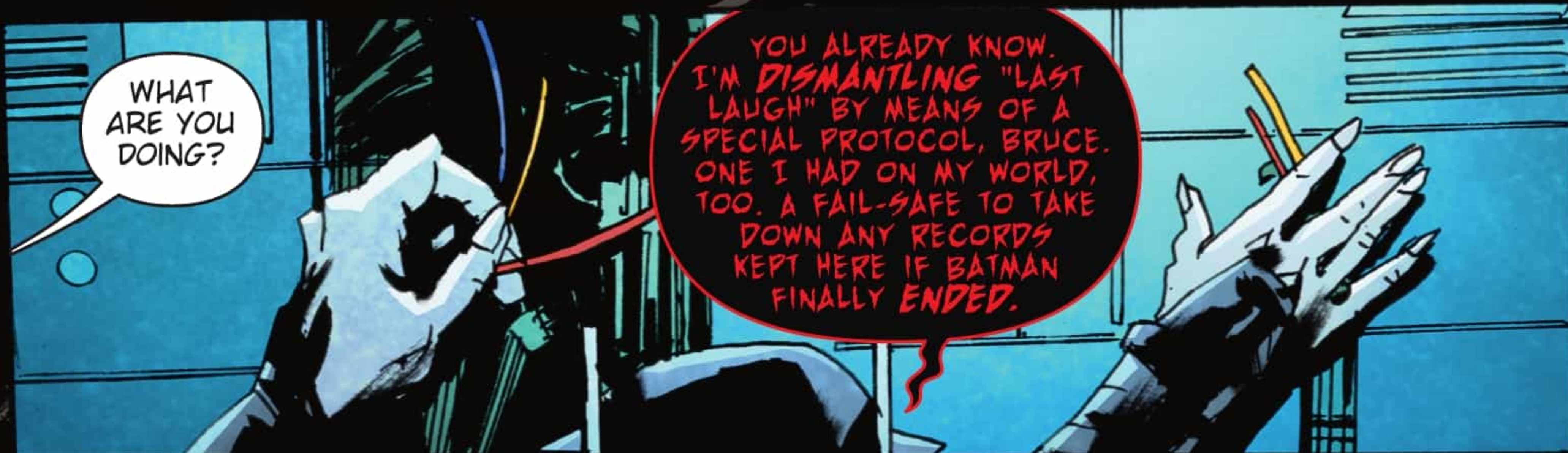


"THE GRIM KNIGHT. EVEN HIS BULLETS SHOOT BULLETS."

"THE DEADLIEST MAN ALIVE. HE'S US IF JOE CHILL DROPPED THE GUN IN THE ALLEY AND WE PICKED IT UP."

"IT'S NOT JUST THE GUNS, THOUGH. NO, ON HIS WORLD HE HAS WAYNE ENTERPRISES WEAPONIZED. CHIPS IN YOUR GPS. VALVES IN YOUR WATER FILTRATION."

"YOUR MINIVAN DRIVES OFF A BRIDGE, YOU NEVER KNOW WHO KILLED YOU."





IT HURTS, I KNOW. JUST LIKE THE NIGHT THEY DIED. OH, I REMEMBER, TOO.

OUR FATHER'S HAND, RIGHT HERE.



FINAL PROTOCOL ACTIVATED. AWAITING CONFIRMATION.

ABORT! ABORT PROTOCOL!

THE TASER DISRUPTS SOUND WAVES, TOO. THE PROTOCOL CAN'T HEAR YOU.

SEE, ALL THESE VERSIONS OF US I'M BRINGING HERE TO USE...THEY'RE **HAPPIER** THAN YOU, BRUCE. THEY'RE AT PEACE, BECAUSE THEY **EFFECT CHANGE**.

WORSE THAN THAT. YOU'RE AN OLD MAN'S HAND OVER A CHILD'S HEART. WEAK, SOFT. PROTECTING NOTHING.

OUT OF EVERY VERSION OF US ACROSS THE UNIVERSE, **YOU'RE THE MOST MISERABLE. THE LEAST ACCOMPLISHED.** YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YET, BUT YOU WILL. SEE, TO ME, TO US, **YOU'RE THE NIGHTMARE BATMAN. THE BAD JOKE.**

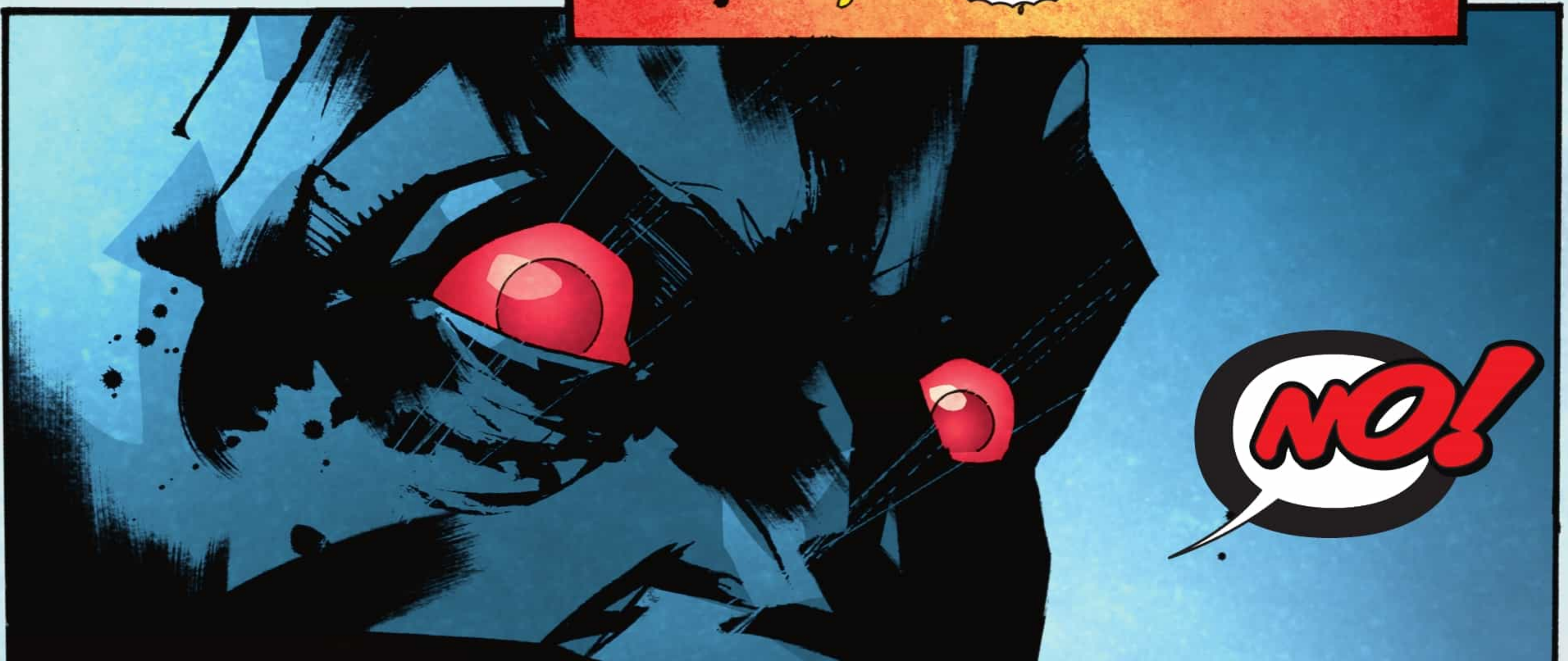


DON'T... DON'T DO THIS!



ME...I'M THE GUN.

CAVE-IN INITIATING.



NO!



TEN
SECONDS UNTIL
IMPLOSION.



KILLLL...
YOU...

I CAN
SMELL IT
ON YOU, YOU
KNOW. THE
CHANGE...

...IT'S FUNNY. SEE,
ON MY WORLD, I WAS
BORN AROUND THIS TIME.
WITHIN WEEKS OF NOW. YOU
FEEL IT, DON'T YOU? THE
END COMING, THE
COLLAPSE...



...I DID,
TOO, BEFORE I
BECAME ME.

BE SEEING
YOU, BRUCE...



...HERE'S
TO THOSE
MOMENTS THAT
LIVE IN YOUR
CHEST.



HAHAHAHA



BATMAN,
IS THAT
YOU?

BILL...
GET ME TO THE
WINDOW...FAST!
I CAN DO THE
REST--

KRAOOO!

The explosion
shakes the city.

And then...
silence.



That
terrible
silence.

Before the
screaming
starts.

"GET HIM
UP."





GET HIM
UP NOW!



HE'S
RECOVERING,
SIR. STILL
DRUGGED
TO--



WAKE UP!
NOW!

SIR--

I SAID WAKE
UP! WHAT'S HE
PLANNING?!



he...

HE
WHAT?!



HE WHAT?!
WHAT IS HE
GOING TO DO?
TELL ME!

heeeheeeheee!



YOU THINK
THIS IS FUNNY?!
I'LL SHOW YOU
FUNNY!

IT'S HOW HE
BREATHES, SIR! HE'S
NOT LAUGHING! HE'S
NOT HERE, HE'S--



I'm
here.



YOU
KNOW HIS
PLAN. WHAT IS
HIS PLAN?! I
NEED TO
KNOW...



hee...hee...
I don't know
it. Only one
person does...



"WHO IS IT?!"

"WHO, JOKER?!"



YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE.



I KNOW. BUT THIS... THIS IS IMPORTANT.

THERE'S A MONSTER ON THE LOOSE, AND... AND I NEED YOUR HELP.



...
WHY ME?

YOU KNOW WHY, DAMMIT. BUT YOU WANT ME TO SAY IT, FINE...



...YOU'RE
MY SON,
JAMES.

AND YOU
MAY BE THE
ONLY ONE WHO
CAN HELP US
STOP HIM.