





# **The Batman Who Laughs, Part 3**



My **father** wanted to be a neurosurgeon.

Eventually he chose a different path, but he kept up a lifelong interest in **neuro-medicine**.

He remained fascinated by the question of where **happiness--true happiness--lived** in the mind.

He found it funny that the same part of the brain that controlled **visual planning** was also responsible for **contentedness...** the "**precuneus**."

It was his belief that planning, envisioning good things coming played a big part in making those things **real**.

I can still remember the day I fell in...calling out to him from the dark.

"See it in your head, Bruce," he called back. "See the rope, see yourself climbing out, see yourself being brave."

And I did.

Sometimes I think that **Batman** was born at **that** moment, even more than in the alley or at the window.

Now, I have become a man of plans, almost **only** plans. Every new one an extension of the first.

I make them **real...one, then the next**. So often I've forgotten what it's like to reach for one and grasp nothing... or worse...



...reach and find something else there entirely.



JAMES,  
WE NEED  
TO TALK.

I'VE  
BEEN DOING  
EVERYTHING  
ASKED OF ME.  
I PROMISE.



CAN YOU...  
CAN YOU JUST  
STOP STOCKING  
FOR A MOMENT,  
PLEASE?

I  
ACTUALLY  
CANT.

ENTER



I'M SORRY, DAD,  
IT'S ALL TIMED AND  
MONITORED.

I DO THE  
FINGER PRICK TWICE  
A DAY, KEEP TO  
THE PROGRAM.



THERE'S A  
TEN-FOOT ERROR  
OF MARGIN ON THE  
ANKLET, BUT I'D NEVER  
RISK IT. HOME, HERE,  
HOME AGAIN. NO  
STOPS.

SOMETIMES  
THE MEAL DELIVERY  
SERVICE LEAVES THE  
FOOD AT THE BACK  
ENTRANCE TO THE  
BUILDING. IT'S IN  
RANGE, BUT I  
DON'T--



YOU DON'T EAT  
THOSE NIGHTS. I KNOW,  
JAMES. JUST BECAUSE I  
VOTED **AGAINST** ALL THIS  
DOESN'T MEAN I'M NOT  
WATCHING YOU.

**NEVER**  
THINK I'M NOT  
WATCHING  
YOU.

I'M GLAD  
TO KNOW YOU  
ARE, DAD. I KNOW  
YOU DON'T BELIEVE  
IN THIS YET,  
BUT--

DAMMIT,  
STOP DOING  
THAT...





...JUST...  
STOP AND  
TALK TO  
ME.

I CALLED YOUR  
SUPERVISORS. WE  
HAVE SOME TIME  
OFF THE GRID HERE.  
I NEED YOU TO  
*LISTEN* TO ME.



I SAW THE  
SCANS. I KNOW  
WHAT'S HAPPENED  
TO YOU. THE...  
PARTS THAT'VE  
*WOKEN UP*. AND AS  
MUCH AS I WAS  
AGAINST THIS,  
I'M...I'M GLAD  
YOU'RE DOING  
*WELL*.

I DON'T KNOW  
HOW "WELL" I'M  
DOING, BUT THANK YOU.  
TO BE HONEST, THE PARTS  
THAT ARE ALERT NOW...  
THEY'RE SORT OF...  
AWFUL. I'VE NEVER  
FELT THIS WAY.  
THIS...SHAME...  
GUILT...



...REMORSE.

SO YOU DON'T  
HAVE TO FEEL  
BAD ABOUT IT. I'M  
READY TO GO BACK,  
DAD. TAKE ME BACK.  
I DON'T KNOW IF  
I EVEN--



JAMES,  
I'M NOT  
HERE TO SHUT  
DOWN YOUR  
PROGRAM.



I DON'T  
UNDERSTAND. IF  
THIS ISN'T ABOUT  
*THAT*, WHAT'S IT  
ABOUT?

IT'S ABOUT  
*PLANS*...

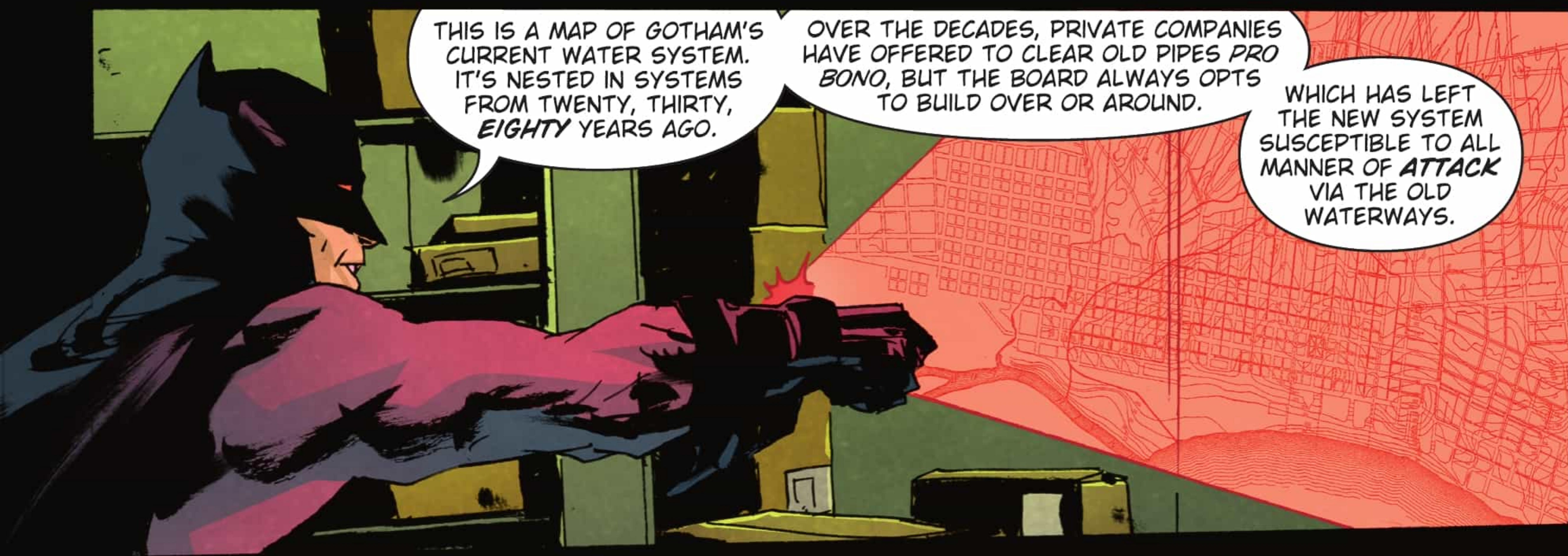


...PLANS TO  
KILL THIS CITY  
A HUNDRED  
DIFFERENT  
WAYS.





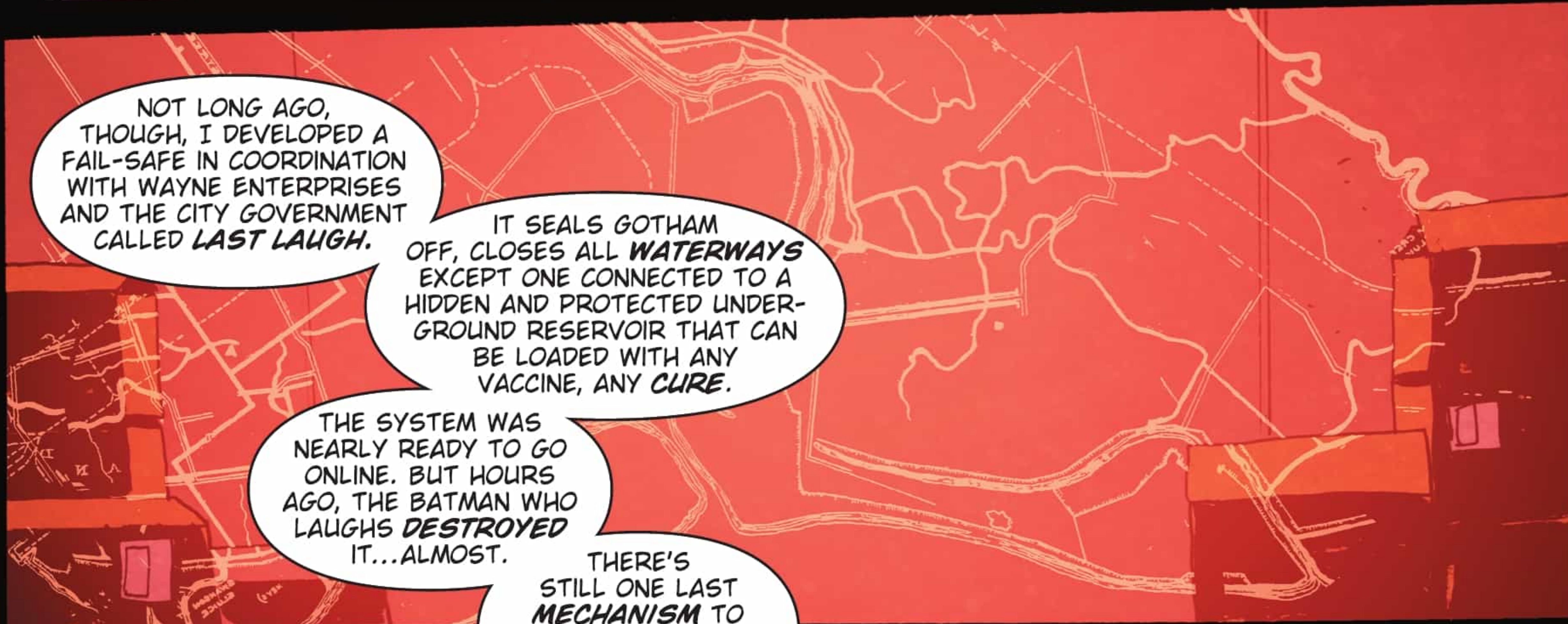




THIS IS A MAP OF GOTHAM'S CURRENT WATER SYSTEM. IT'S NESTED IN SYSTEMS FROM TWENTY, THIRTY, **EIGHTY** YEARS AGO.

OVER THE DECADES, PRIVATE COMPANIES HAVE OFFERED TO CLEAR OLD PIPES *PRO BONO*, BUT THE BOARD ALWAYS OPTS TO BUILD OVER OR AROUND.

WHICH HAS LEFT THE NEW SYSTEM SUSCEPTIBLE TO ALL MANNER OF **ATTACK** VIA THE OLD WATERWAYS.



NOT LONG AGO, THOUGH, I DEVELOPED A FAIL-SAFE IN COORDINATION WITH WAYNE ENTERPRISES AND THE CITY GOVERNMENT CALLED **LAST LAUGH**.

IT SEALS GOTHAM OFF, CLOSES ALL **WATERWAYS** EXCEPT ONE CONNECTED TO A HIDDEN AND PROTECTED UNDERGROUND RESERVOIR THAT CAN BE LOADED WITH ANY VACCINE, ANY **CURE**.

THE SYSTEM WAS NEARLY READY TO GO ONLINE. BUT HOURS AGO, THE BATMAN WHO LAUGHS **DESTROYED** IT...ALMOST.

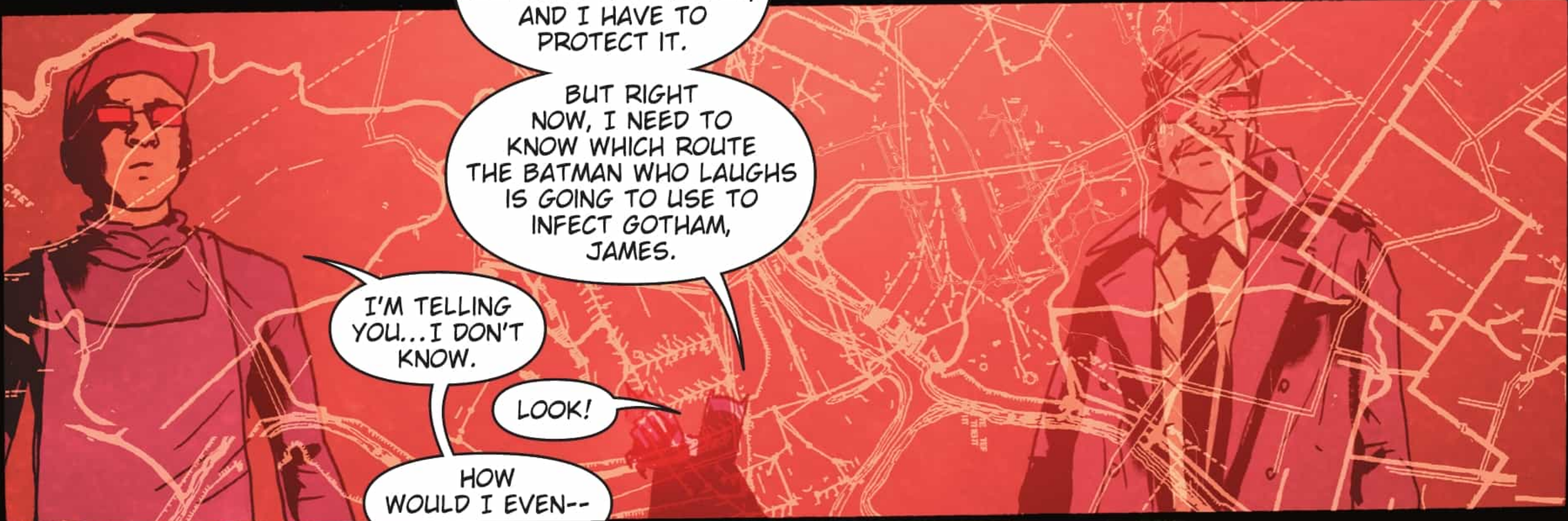
THERE'S STILL ONE LAST **MECHANISM** TO ACTIVATE THE SYSTEM, AND I HAVE TO PROTECT IT.

BUT RIGHT NOW, I NEED TO KNOW WHICH ROUTE THE BATMAN WHO LAUGHS IS GOING TO USE TO INFECT GOTHAM, JAMES.

I'M TELLING YOU...I DON'T KNOW.

LOOK!

HOW WOULD I EVEN--



HOW WOULD YOU KNOW?! BECAUSE IT USED BE **ALL** YOU KNEW! HELL, AS A CHILD, ALL YOU DID WAS **THINK** ABOUT IT!

AT THIRTEEN YEARS OLD YOU WERE A **LEGEND!** YOU HAD BOOKS, JOURNALS FILLED WITH ROUTES, GENIUS COMBINATIONS!



"IN FACT, YOU WERE **SO** GOOD AT IT, CRIMINALS TOOK NOTICE. EVEN **JOKER** TOOK NOTICE, CITED YOU AS THE **BEST**."



ALL THOSE OLD JOURNALS WERE SUBMITTED TO **GCPD** HOLDING YEARS AGO, THEY'RE UNDER LOCK AND--

I KNOW. I CHECKED. THEY'RE GONE. THE BATMAN WHO LAUGHS LIKELY HAS THEM ALREADY.

IF NOT, HE'S COMING FOR YOU. SO YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO REMEMBER.

I WANT TO HELP YOU...

THEN SEE THE PLAN.



I'VE STUDIED THE DATA, BATMAN. CORRECTION'S, LESLIE'S, WAYNE'S. JAMES **ISN'T** LYING ABOUT THE CHANGES IN HIM. I'M NOT SAYING HE'S--

SAYING HE'S WHAT? **CURED?** GOOD.

BECAUSE IF YOU BELIEVED THAT YOU WOULDN'T BE HERE.



THE BATMAN WHO LAUGHS IS **WINNING**. HE'S USING WHATEVER DARK METAL IS LEFT IN THIS CITY TO BRING **BRUCE WAYNES** THROUGH FROM OTHER WORLDS, MAKING A SERUM THAT'LL TURN THIS CITY INTO **HELL**.

I HAVE NO WAY OF SEEING HIS PLAN OR PREDICTING THE TOUCH POINTS. NOW HE'S ALMOST DESTROYED MY ONLY FAIL-SAFE.

SO STOP TIP TOEING AROUND IT. YOU'RE HERE FOR THE SAME DAMN REASON I AM. BECAUSE SOME PART OF YOU BELIEVES, DESPITE WHATEVER **CHANGES** HE'S GOING THROUGH, THAT HE'S **STILL** THE BOY WHO'S BETTER THAN ANYONE AT MURDERING THIS CITY.



IS THAT WHY YOU'RE HERE, DAD?

LOOK, JAMES, CAN YOU HELP BATMAN? CAN YOU HELP US BOTH?

JAMES...

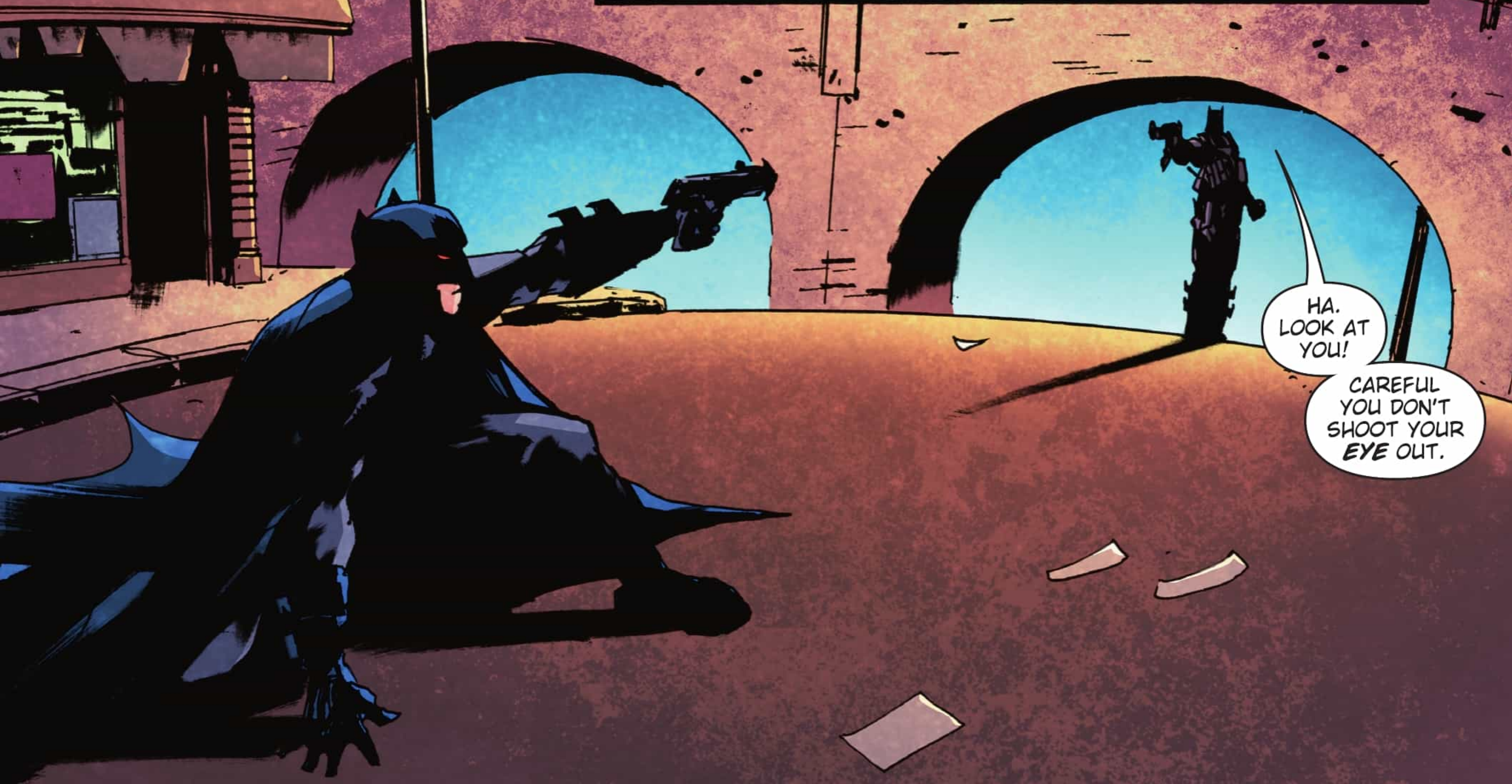
WILL YOU TURN THE STOCK GUN OFF AND TALK TO US?



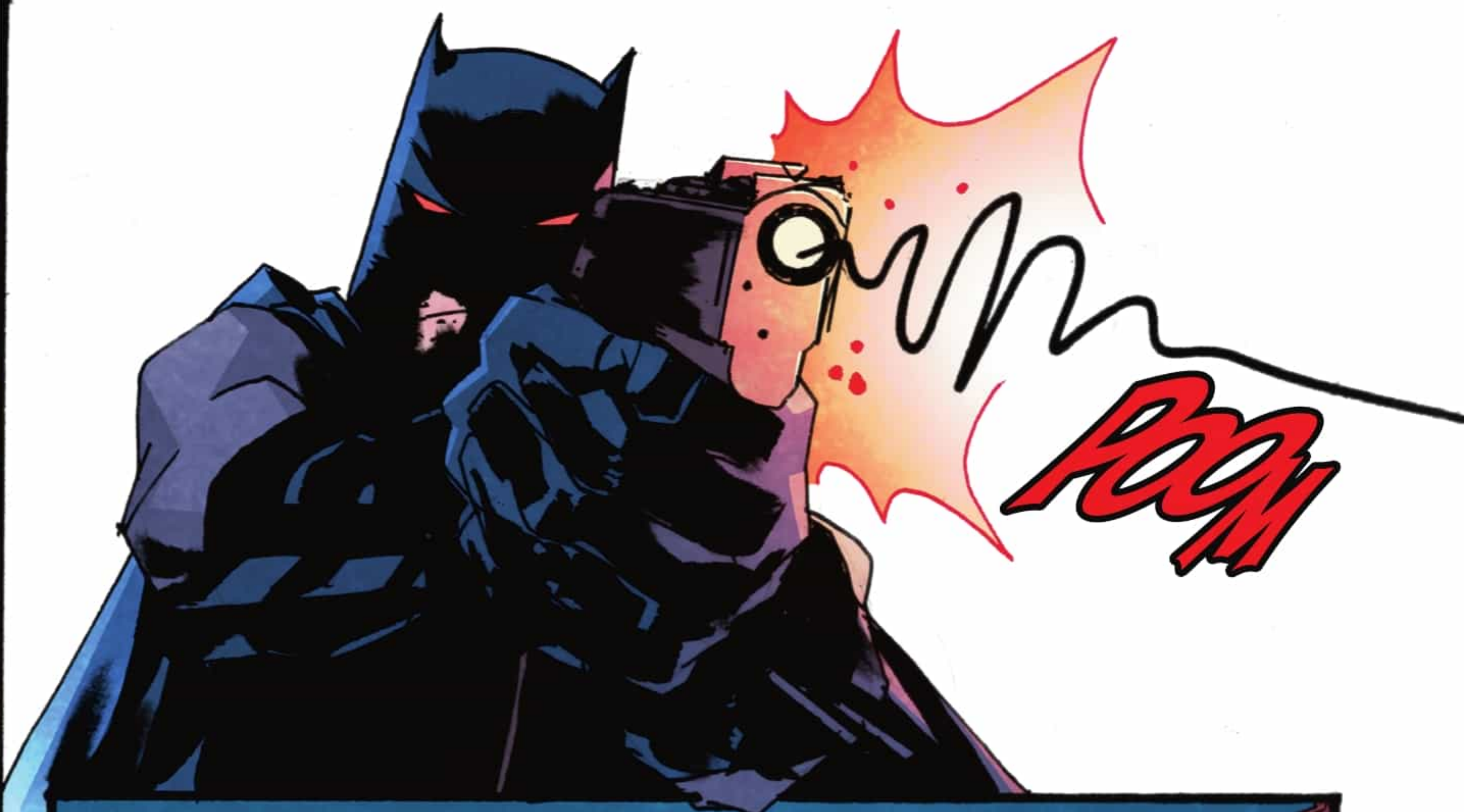
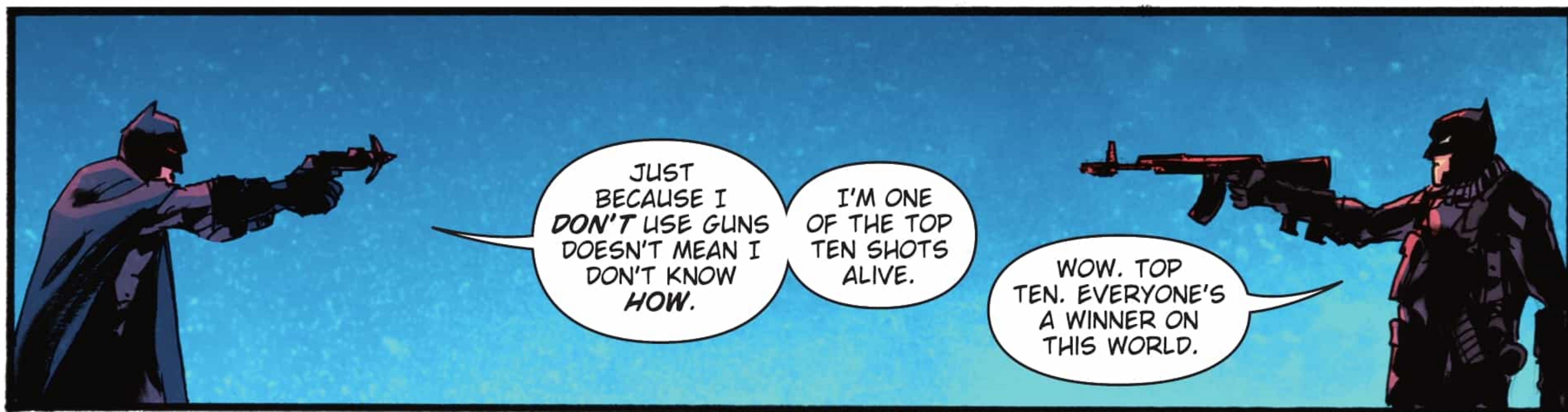
I'M... I'M NOT DOING THAT.











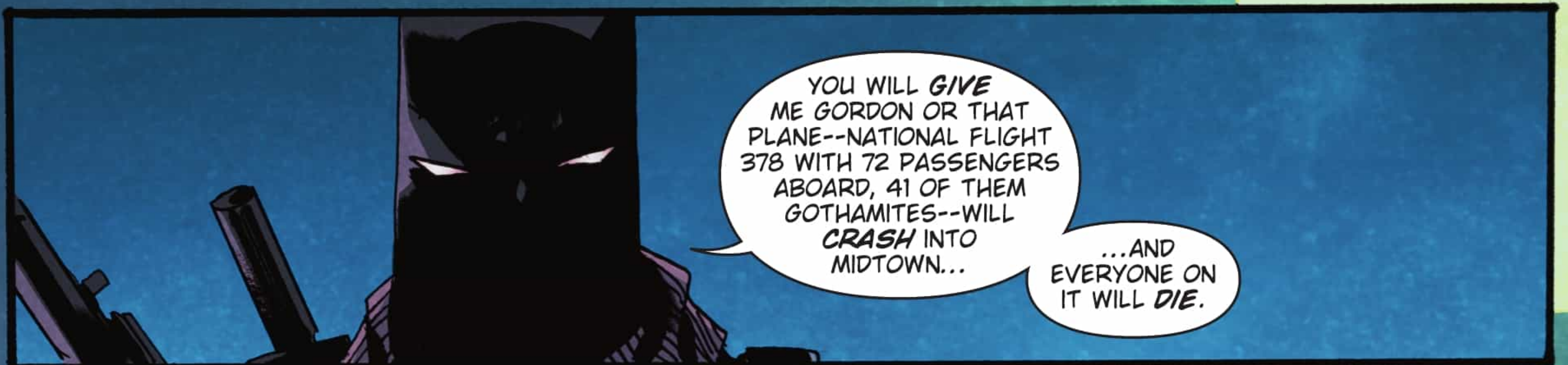
















WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU--?



FOLLOW ME IF YOU WANT. BUT MAKE SURE YOU COLLECT YOUR PARTICIPATION TROPHIES. THERE'LL BE AT LEAST 72 SCATTERED AROUND MIDTOWN.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHAT JUST--

**LAST LAUGH.** UNTIL IT WAS FINISHED AND HANDED OVER TO THE CITY, I RIGGED THE TRIGGER SO IT'D NEED MORE THAN JUST *ME* TO INITIATE IT.

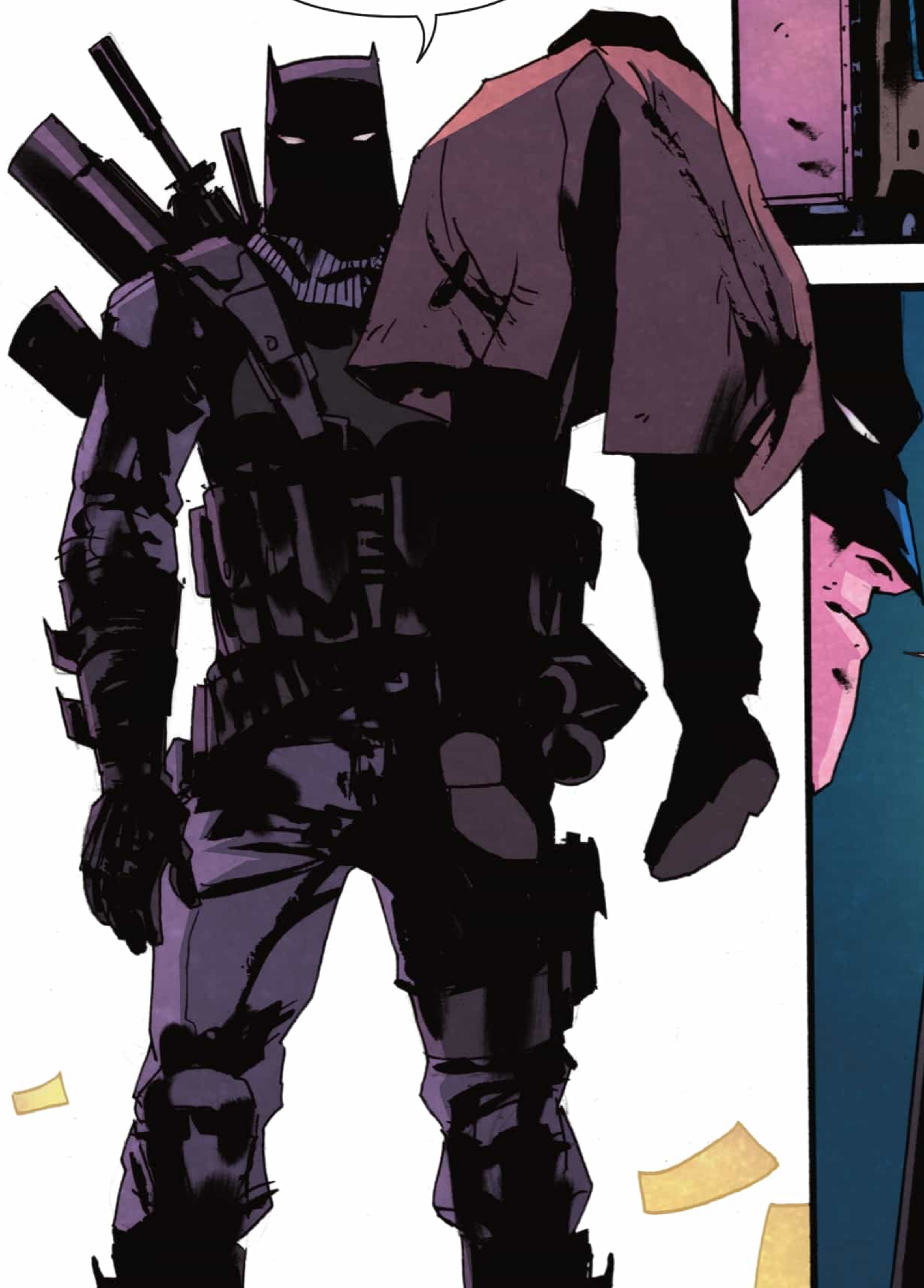


IT WOULD NEED MY AUTHORIZATION **AND** THE AUTHORIZATION OF SOMEONE I TRUSTED AS MUCH AS MYSELF WITH THE INTERESTS OF THIS CITY.

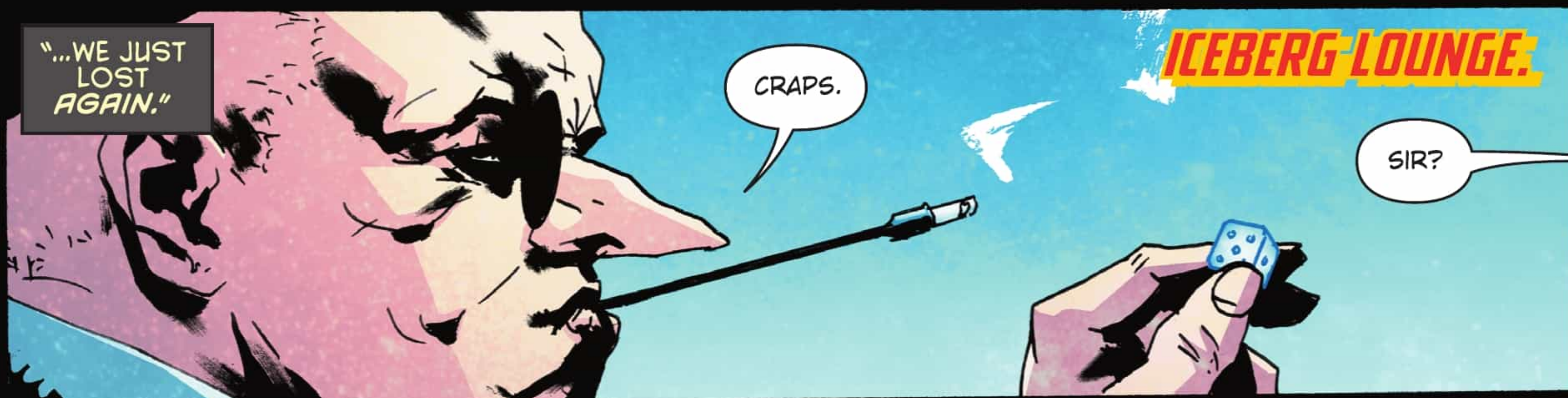
YOUR FATHER.

YOU'RE SAYING...

I'M SAYING...







"...WE JUST  
LOST  
AGAIN."

CRAPS.

ICEBERG LOUNGE.

SIR?



THERE'S  
SOMETHING WRONG  
WITH THIS DAMNED *DIE*.  
THE ICE IS SUPPOSED TO  
BE DENSER AT THE *SIX*,  
GIVING THE *ONE* A TEN  
PERCENT HIKE.

*THIS* DIE,  
THOUGH, A HUNDRED  
ROLLS IN, AND IT'S  
NEARLY #\$\$^ *EVEN*.



SO HE'S A  
JUNKIE. SEND  
SECURITY, YOU  
IDIOT.

SIR, THERE'S A...  
MAN AT THE DOOR. HE'S NOT  
LEAVING. EVERY TIME WE ASK  
HIM WHAT HE WANTS OR WHO  
HE IS, ANYTHING, ALL HE SAYS  
IS, "*I'M BATMAN*," IN  
WHISPERY VOICES  
AND *LAUGHS*.

WE DID.  
WE SENT  
*EVERYONE* OUT  
THERE. NO ONE'S  
RESPONDING.

AND THERE'S  
*BLOOD* IN THE  
ALLEY, SIR. A *LOT*  
OF BLOOD. AND  
MAYBE...OTHER  
PARTS. IT'S  
HARD TO...  
TELL.



WHAT?  
PAXER, PENN,  
COME IN!

SEE?  
NO ONE'S  
ANSWERING,  
SIR.

ENOUGH! GET  
ME MY ARSENAL.  
WHATEVER YOU DO,  
*DON'T* OPEN THE  
DOOR. *WHOEVER*  
THIS GUY IS--

*I TOLD YOU  
ALREADY...*







AND THE DEFENSES IN THIS PLACE ARE IMPRESSIVE...

...THE BLAST-PROOF CRAPS TABLES. THE BULLETPROOF GLASS HIDDEN IN THE ICE OF THE CAGE.

AND THE DEFIBRILLATORS THAT ARE CHARGED EXTRA STRONG, TO ELECTROCUTE ENEMIES, MAKE IT LOOK LIKE A HEART ATTACK?



WAIT...DON'T! I'LL GIVE YOU WHATEVER YOU WAN--

CLEAR.

AGH!

IT'S AMAZING, REALLY, WHAT YOU'VE BUILT HERE. YOU HAD A VISION AND MADE IT REAL. EVERY BATMAN IN EXISTENCE RESPECTS YOU FOR IT, OSWALD.

IN FACT, I'LL TELL YOU A SECRET...PEOPLE ASSUME THAT BATMAN'S LAST ENEMY ON MOST WORLDS OUT THERE IS JOKER. MAYBE RIDDLER, OR RA'S...

...BUT IT'S YOU. SEE, YOU GROW THIS CRIME EMPIRE UNTIL HE HAS TO DEAL WITH YOU. ON SOME WORLDS YOU WIN, GET FOLKS TO TURN ON HIM. ON A COUPLE, HE WINS.

MY FAVORITE WORLD IS ONE WHERE HE ACTUALLY ENDS UP **COMPETING** WITH YOU TO BRING YOU DOWN.

WHERE HE BECOMES THE OVERSEER OF A LEGAL MECCA OF GAMBLING AND DRUGS BUILD ON THIS SPOT HERE...MOSTLY THROUGH THE HELP OF HIS FRIEND...

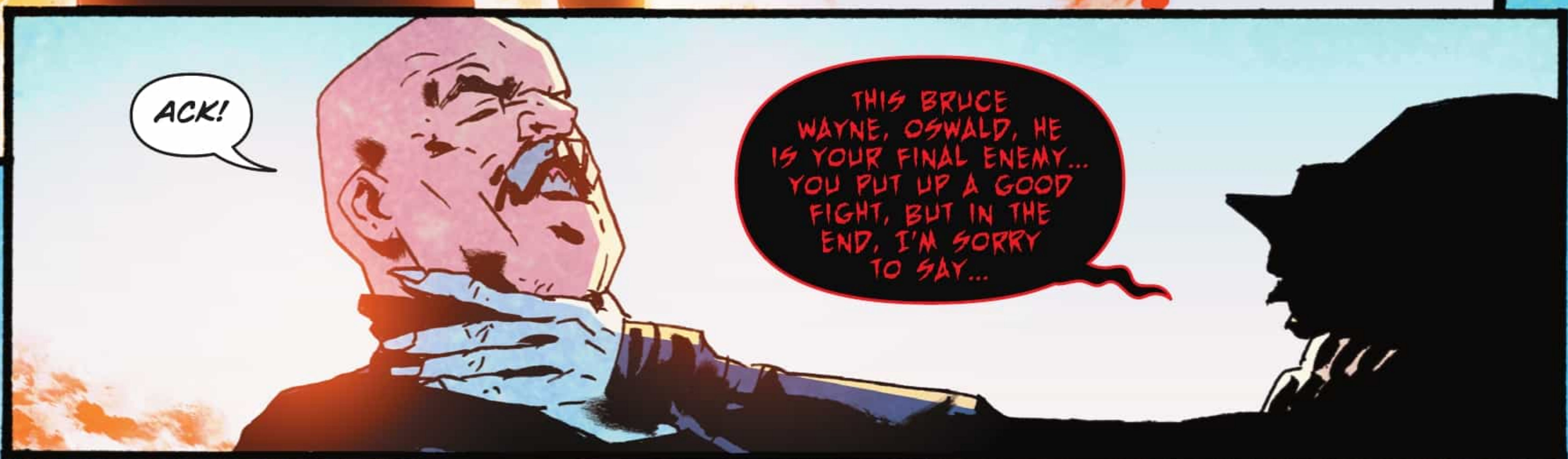




...BRUCE WAYNE.

WHAT THE...  
WHERE *AM* I?  
WHO IN--

BLIP



ACK!

THIS BRUCE WAYNE, OSWALD, HE IS YOUR FINAL ENEMY... YOU PUT UP A GOOD FIGHT, BUT IN THE END, I'M SORRY TO SAY...



WHO THE \$%^& ARE Y--UNH!

SHUK

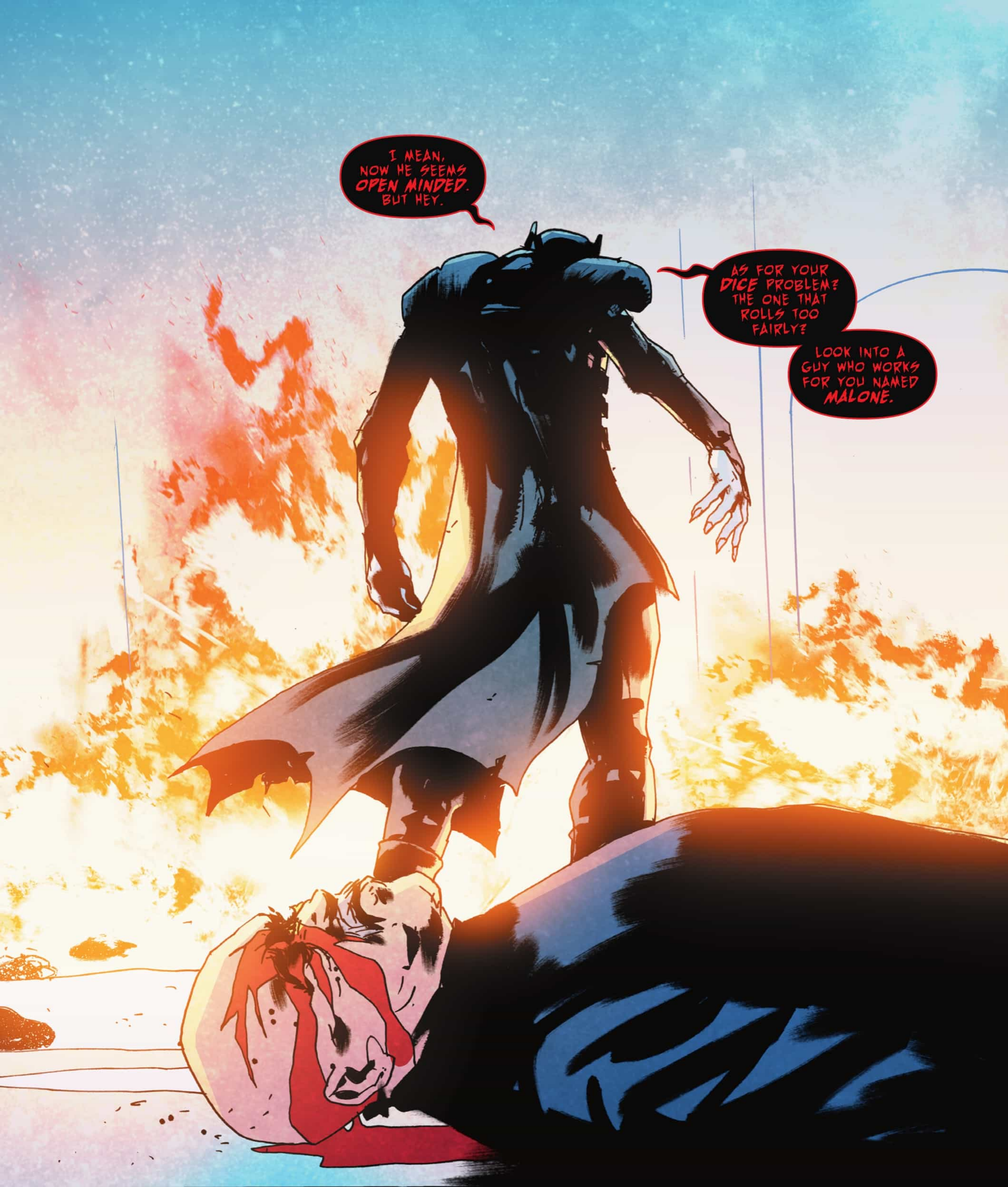
...HE BLEEDS YOU DRY.

RUNS YOU OUT OF TOWN. YOU TRY TO REASON WITH HIM, JOIN FORCES. BUT NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO...



...HE NEVER SEES EYE TO EYE.





I MEAN,  
NOW HE SEEMS  
**OPEN MINDED.**  
BUT HEY.

AS FOR YOUR  
**DICE** PROBLEM?  
THE ONE THAT  
ROLLS TOO  
FAIRLY?

LOOK INTO A  
GUY WHO WORKS  
FOR YOU NAMED  
**MALONE.**



MMMMM...

**MATCHES  
MALONE...**

"THERE ARE ALL  
SORTS OF WAYS  
TO **CORRUPT**  
THE SYSTEM..."



# BENEATH GOTHAM CITY.

...GOTHAM IS FED BY THREE RESERVOIRS HE COULD COMPROMISE BY MEANS OF AT LEAST THREE OLD PIPELINES VIABLE TO EACH.

SO WE'RE TALKING...NINE TO EIGHTEEN WAYS OF **INFECTING** THE WATERWAYS.

I NEED TO KNOW WHICH ONE HE'S GOING TO USE, JAMES. I **NEED** YOU TO SEE IT.

I'M SORRY, BATMAN, I JUST...I USED TO BE **GOOD** AT THIS BUT--



WHICH ONE?!



WHICH #\$\$~@!& ONE?!



BATMAN! STOP! **STOP IT!** IF YOU WRECK THESE PIPES IT'LL ONLY BE HARDER!

I'LL **TRY**, OKAY?! I PROMISE...



I'LL TRY.

I'M... I'M **SORRY**, JAMES.

I WASN'T READY FOR HIM TO COME BACK... NOT THIS SOON. LAST LAUGH WASN'T FINISHED. THE **DARK METAL** IN THE CITY...



...WAYNE ENTERPRISES HAS BEEN GUTTING IT EVER SINCE MY LAST FIGHT WITH HIM. THERE'S OVER A **TON** BENEATH MY CAVE. BUT NOTHING IS COMPLETE.

TELL ME THIS. HE GOT YOU, DIDN'T HE?



WHAT ARE YOU--

HE **INFECTED** YOU WITH WHATEVER IS IN HIM.

I WON'T LET IT TAKE ME OVER. I HAVE ENOUGH ANTI-TOXIN TO HOLD IT OFF FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER WEEK. I...HOW DID YOU--

I MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO THINK LIKE I USED TO, BUT YOUR VOICE... I **KNOW** THAT VOICE.



THE FLATNESS  
DEEP INSIDE. I  
REMEMBER TRYING TO  
HIDE IT, *PRACTICING*.  
SEEING IF I COULD  
FOOL MY FATHER.

I USED TO READ  
GREETING CARDS TO  
MYSELF BECAUSE THEY WERE  
FULL OF EMOTION. IN THIS  
SING-SONG VOICE--"THANK  
YOU FOR BEING THERE FOR  
ME!" PRETENDING...  
ACTING.

MY DAD'S  
GOING TO  
SHUT DOWN  
THE PROGRAM,  
ISN'T HE?

YES. HE FILED  
THE PAPERWORK  
LAST WEEK.

THAT'S OKAY. IT'S JUST  
THAT...THE OLD VOICE, IT  
REALLY IS GONE. ALMOST  
LIKE YOUR LAST LAUGH  
IDEA. LIKE I'VE BEEN CUT  
OFF FROM THE OLD  
SYSTEMS, CONNECTED  
TO THIS STRANGE  
NEW SET UP.

EVERYTHING  
IS SO *DIFFERENT*.  
THE WAY I LOOK AT  
THE WORLD, LOOK  
AT PEOPLE. I EVEN  
LET MYSELF START  
TO *IMAGINE*  
WHAT I...

...I JUST  
WOULD HAVE  
LIKED TO SEE  
WHERE IT  
LED.

I'M GOING  
TO LOSE TO  
HIM, JAMES,  
AREN'T I?

FOR THE  
FIRST TIME IN MY  
LIFE...BATMAN...  
ISN'T WORKING.  
HE'S NOT--

Alfred  
incoming....

SIR! MASTER  
BRUCE!

ALFRED?  
WHAT IS IT?  
WHAT'S  
WRONG?!

I'M SO  
SORRY,  
SIR.

IT'S HIM...  
JOKER...

...HE WAS  
DRUGGED SO HEAVILY  
HE SHOULDN'T HAVE  
BEEN ABLE TO SEE,  
TO TALK, TO *MOVE*...  
AND YET...

AND YET  
WHAT?

MOMENTS  
AGO...HE  
JUST...

WHAT?!

HE GOT  
UP AND HE  
KEPT  
SAYING...





YOU'RE BREAKING  
MY HEART. HEE  
HEEEee

"AND HE  
ATTACKED ME  
AND WRECKED  
THINGS AND..."

"...AND RAN OFF  
SHRIEKING...OR  
LAUGHING...OR  
*WAILING*...I...I'M  
SO SORRY, SIR."



BATMAN, WHAT  
HAPPENED? WHAT  
IS IT?

WHAT  
HAPPENED  
IS...I SEE IT  
NOW. YOU'RE  
*RIGHT.*



I AM?  
I--

YES,  
YOU'RE RIGHT.  
*HE'S* RIGHT.  
YOU'RE ALL RIGHT,  
*EVERYONE...*







MASTER  
B--

CLANG

WHAT  
ARE...

...ALL THE  
ANTITOXINS  
FOR JOKER  
VENOM?  
SMASHED...?

CLANG

WHAT DO YOU  
NEED, ALFRED?

WHAT...  
WHAT DO I  
NEED?!

SIR...  
BRUCE...  
WHAT ARE YOU  
DOING DOWN  
THERE?!

WHY HAVE YOU LOCKED ME  
OUT? I'M HERE TO HELP. I  
CAN HELP. WE'LL FIGURE  
OUT A PLAN TO--

CLANG

heh.  
SEE, THAT'S  
THE THING,  
ALFRED.

MAYBE OUR  
PLAN...MAYBE  
IT'S **WRONG**.

CLANG

MAYBE  
IT HAS BEEN  
WRONG THIS  
WHOLE  
TIME.





WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?!  
BRUCE, YOU CAN'T BE--

I WAS  
STANDING  
RIGHT HERE  
WHEN I MADE  
IT...

...MY  
**BIG PLAN.**

TO CLIMB  
OUT OF THE DARK...  
TO NEVER BE AFRAID. TO  
SHOW PEOPLE... SOMEONE  
PLUNGES THE CITY INTO  
DARKNESS, I HELP IT  
CLIMB...CLIMB...  
CLIMB...

YOU DON'T...  
SOUND WELL,  
SIR. WHAT ARE  
YOU--

AM I JUST  
A ROPE, ALFRED?  
IS THAT IT? AM I THE MAN  
WHO THROWS THE ROPE?  
MAYBE THE PERSON CLIMBING  
WITH EVERYONE? WHATEVER  
I AM, I JUST DON'T  
SEE IT WORKING  
ANYMORE.

DONE.



SIR...  
WHAT ARE YOU  
MAKING?! TELL  
ME WHAT YOU'RE  
MAKING!

**CLANE**

THERE.  
I'M DONE.

DON'T  
DO THIS,  
BRUCE...  
BATMAN *WILL*  
WORK!

NOT  
ANYMORE.  
NOT WITH  
HIM.

HE IS THE  
PLAN! NOW AND  
FOREVER! **HE IS  
THE PLAN!**

I'M  
SORRY, OLD  
FRIEND...





...BUT PLANS  
CHANGE.

