



The Batman Who Laughs, Part 3

My Father wanted to be a neurosurgeon.

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

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

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.







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.

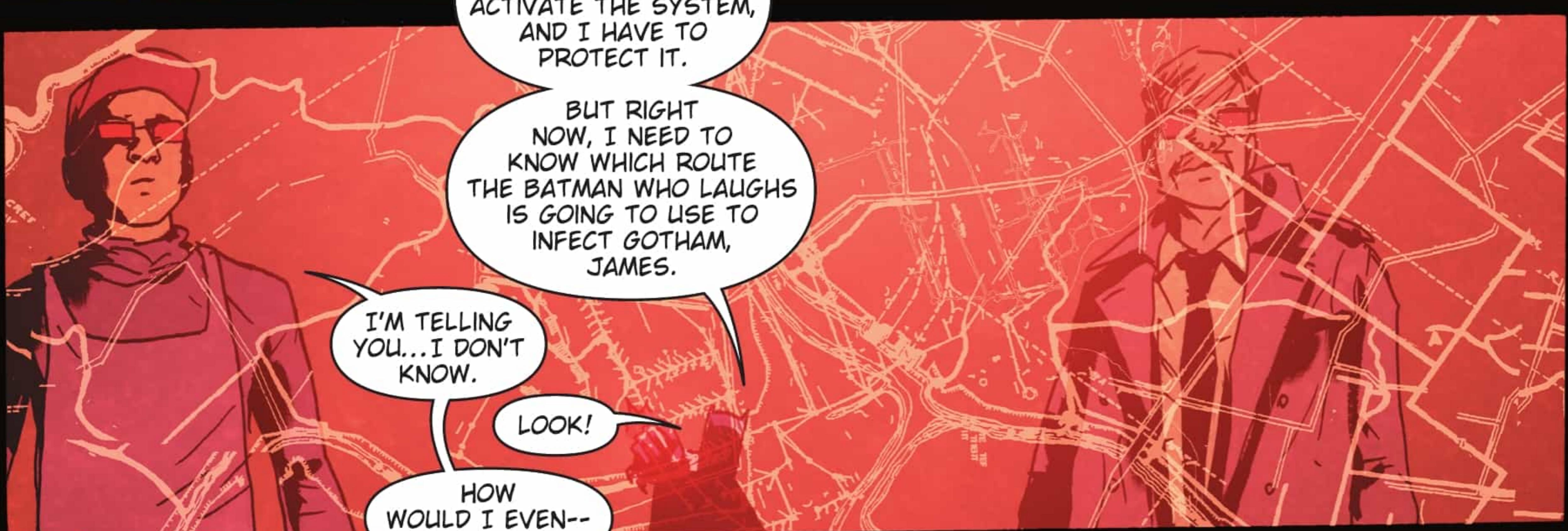
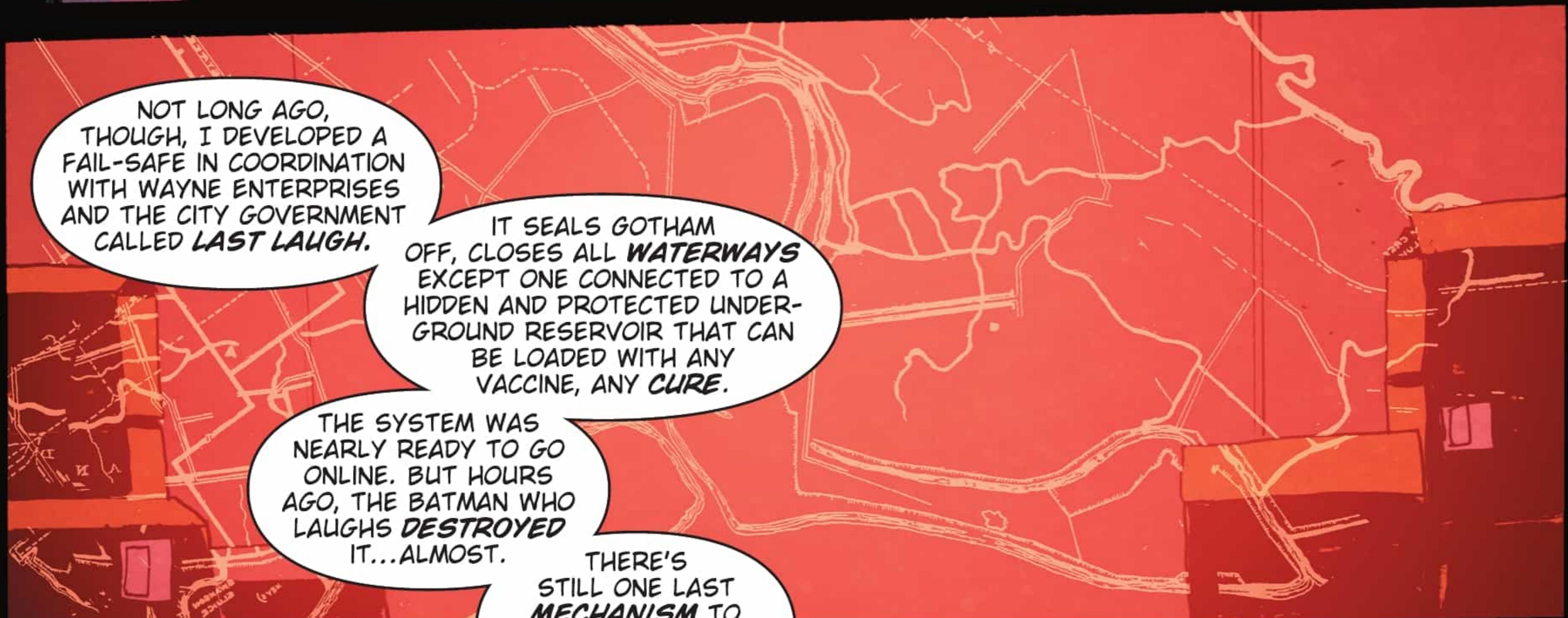
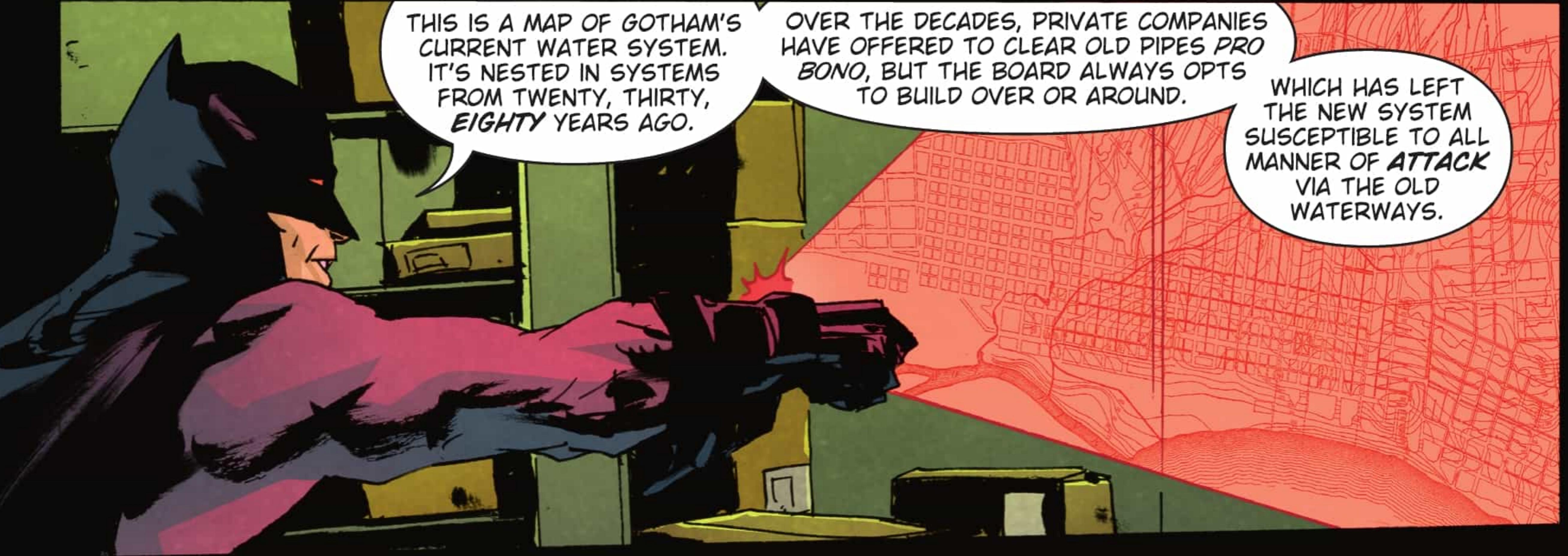
I'M TELLING YOU...I DON'T KNOW.

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 WAYNE'S** 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.

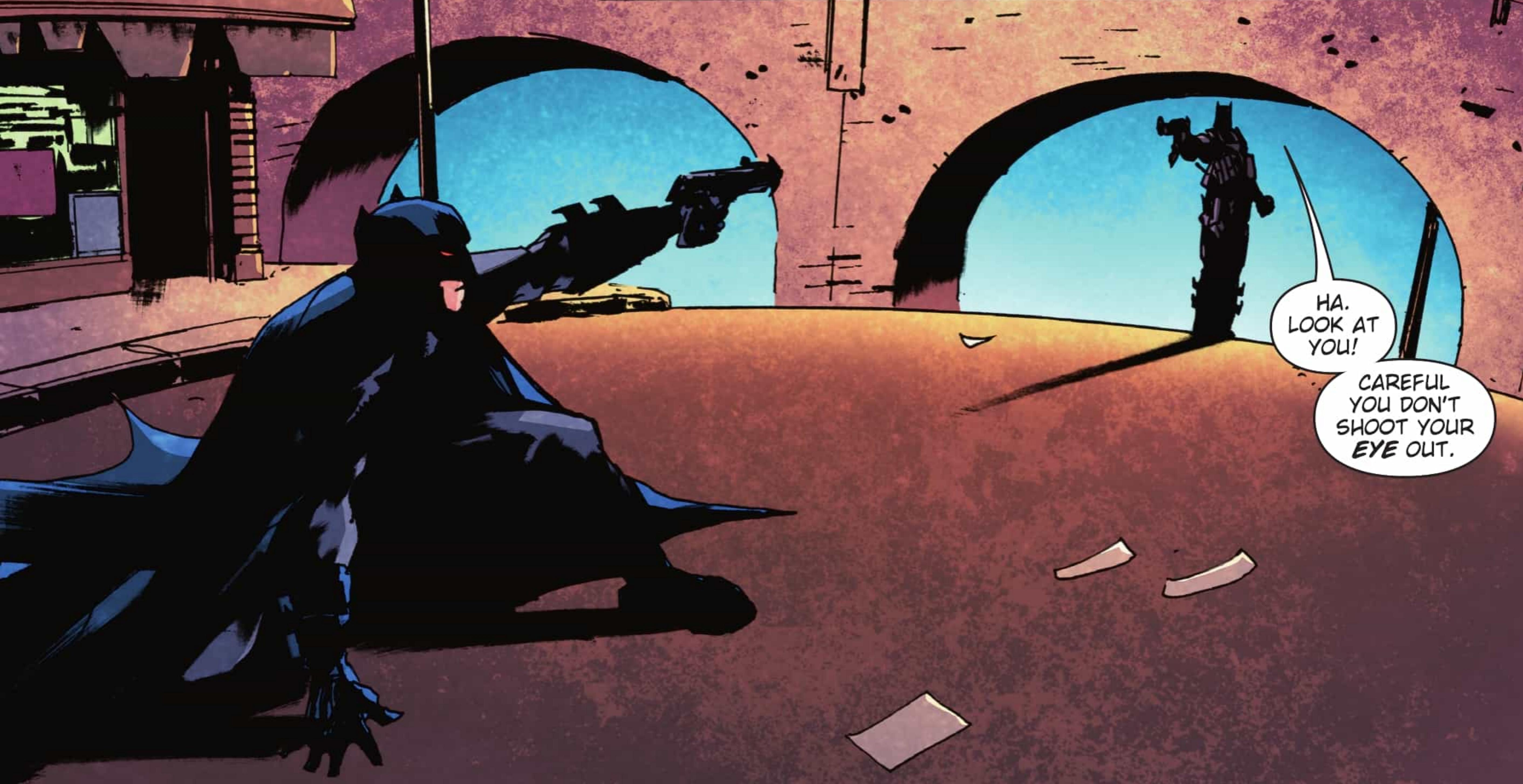
IS THAT WHY YOU'RE HERE, DAD?

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

JAMES...

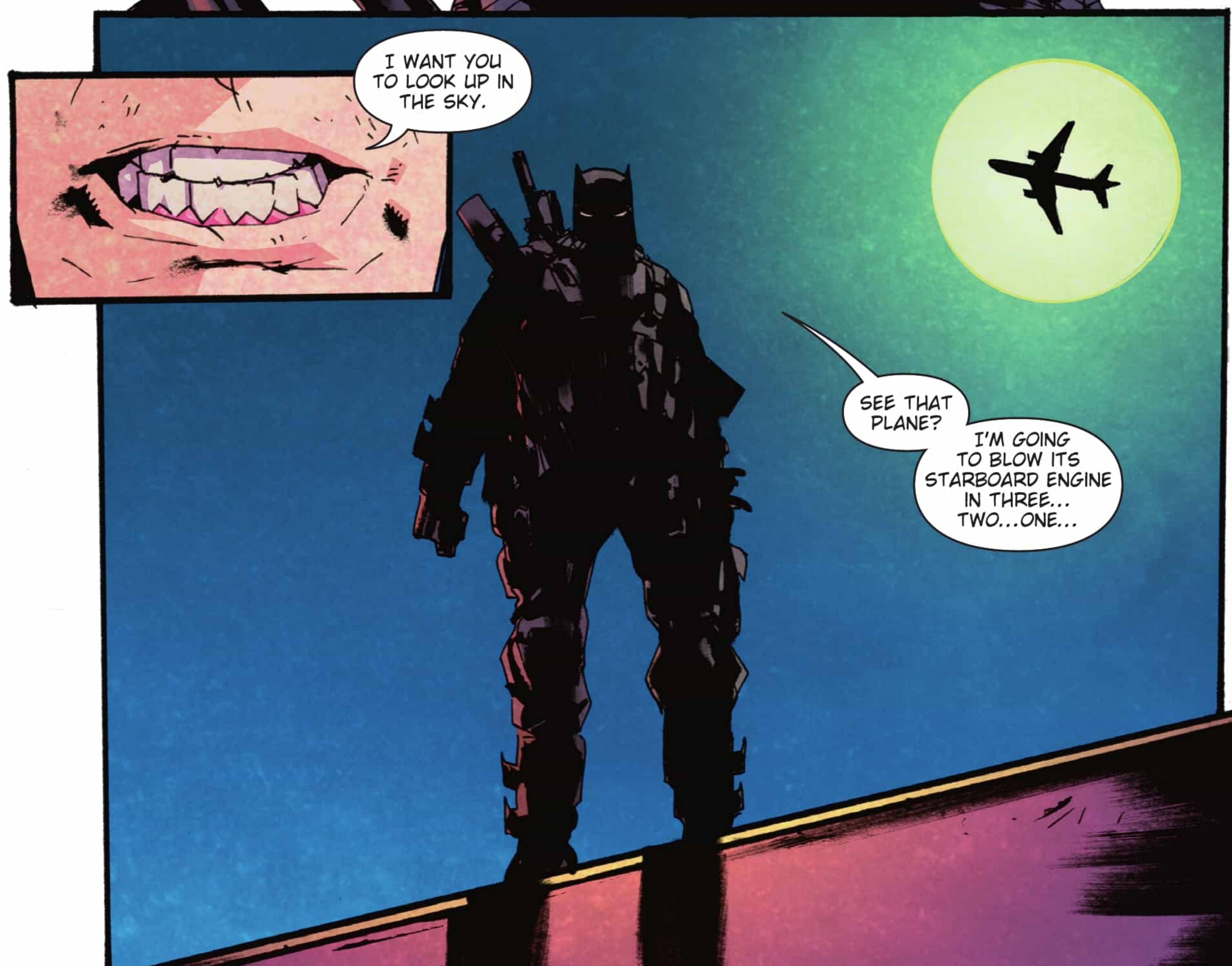
WILL YOU TURN THE STOCK GUN OFF AND TALK TO US?

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









BANG

YOU WILL GIVE
ME GORDON OR THAT
PLANE--NATIONAL FLIGHT
378 WITH 72 PASSENGERS
ABOARD, 41 OF THEM
GOTHAMITES--WILL
CRASH INTO
MIDTOWN...

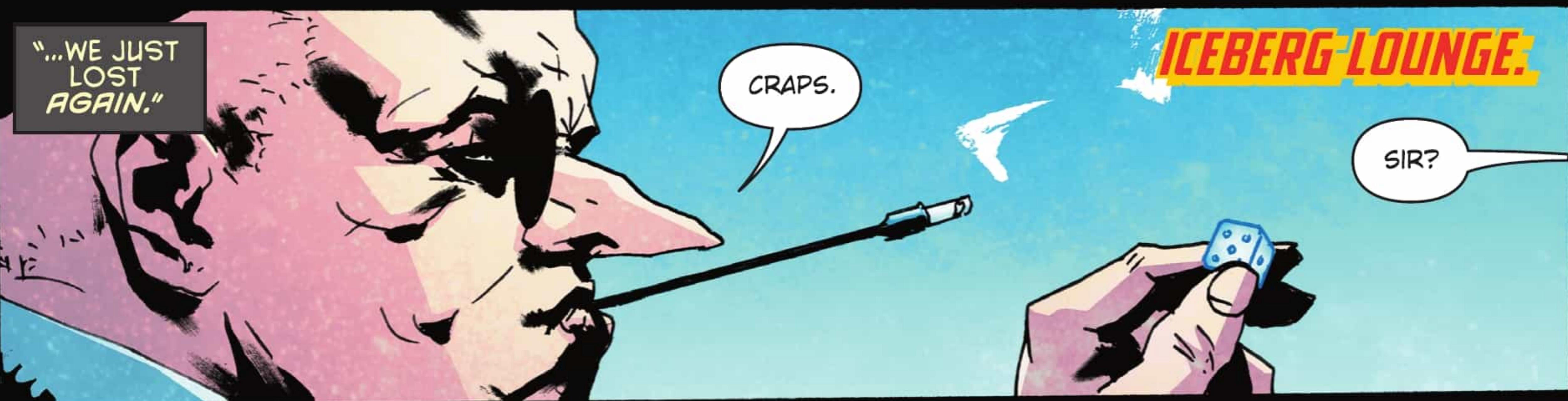
...AND
EVERYONE ON
IT WILL DIE.

JIM.

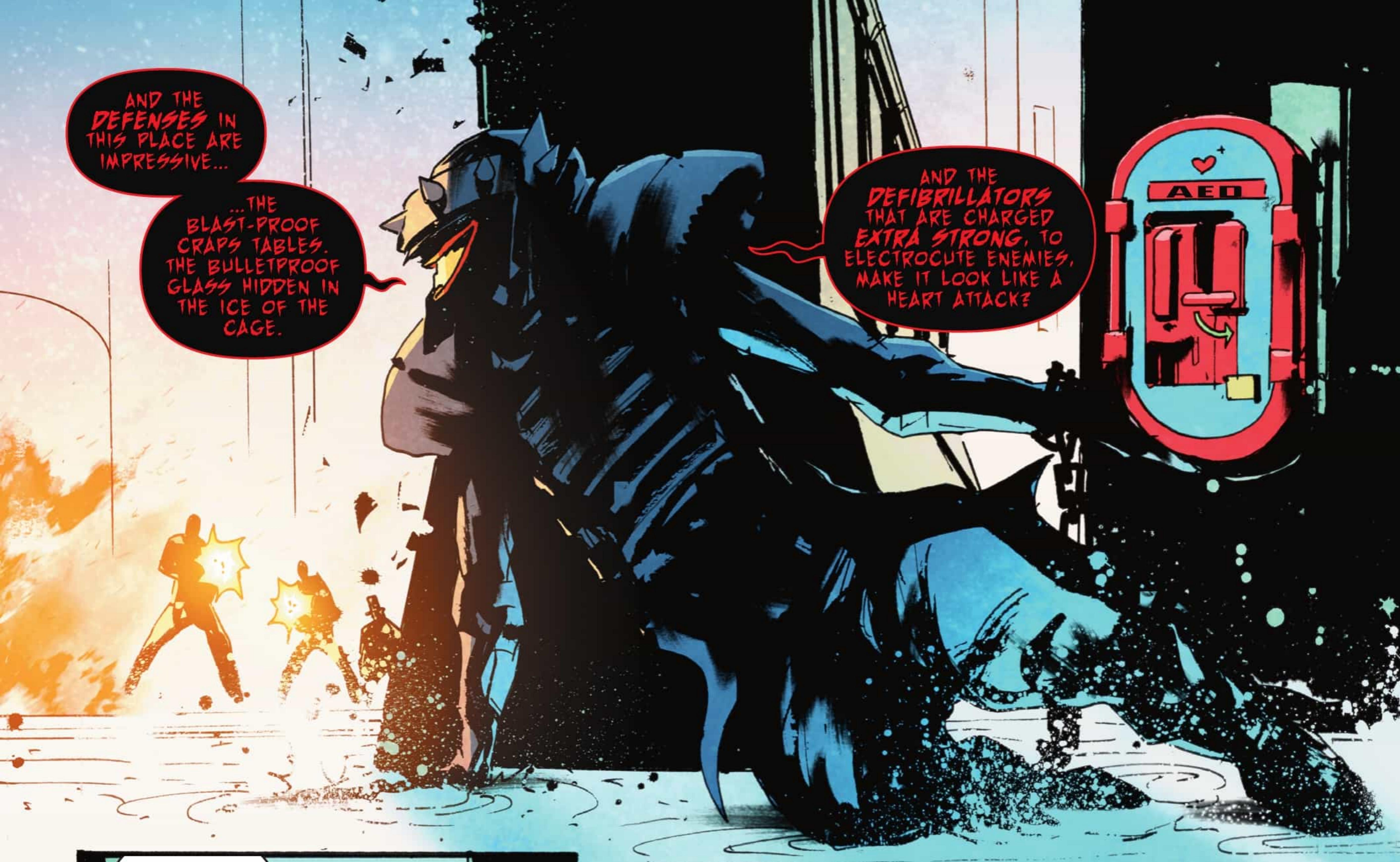
NO.
BATMAN,
WE'RE NOT
GIVING JAMES
TO THAT
THING.

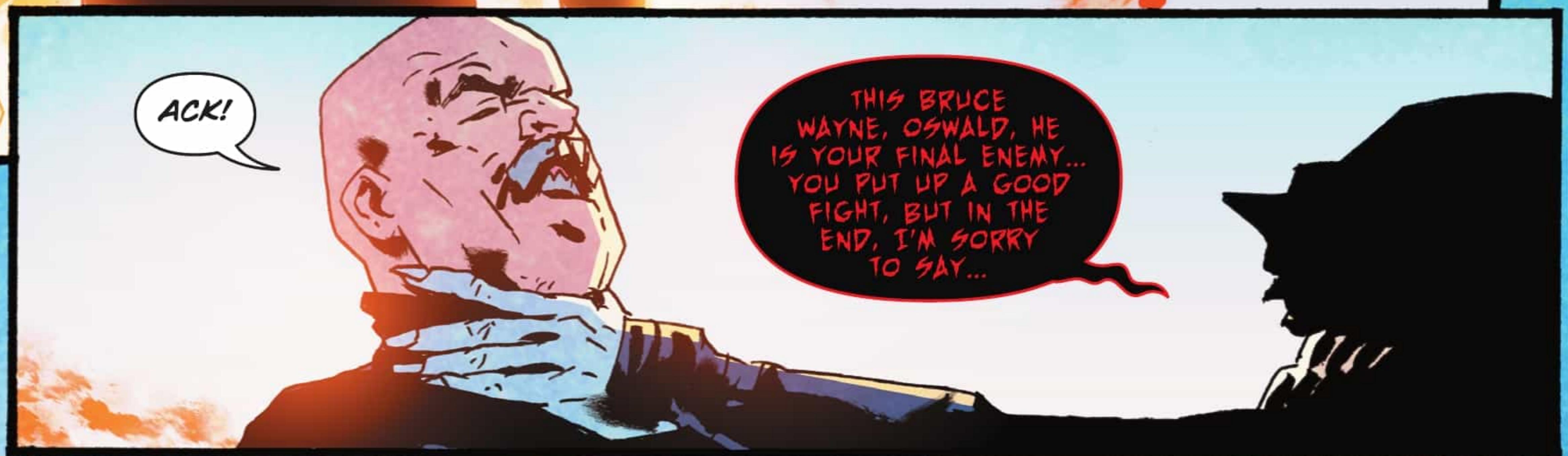
JAMES
ISN'T THE
GORDON HE'S
AFTER.

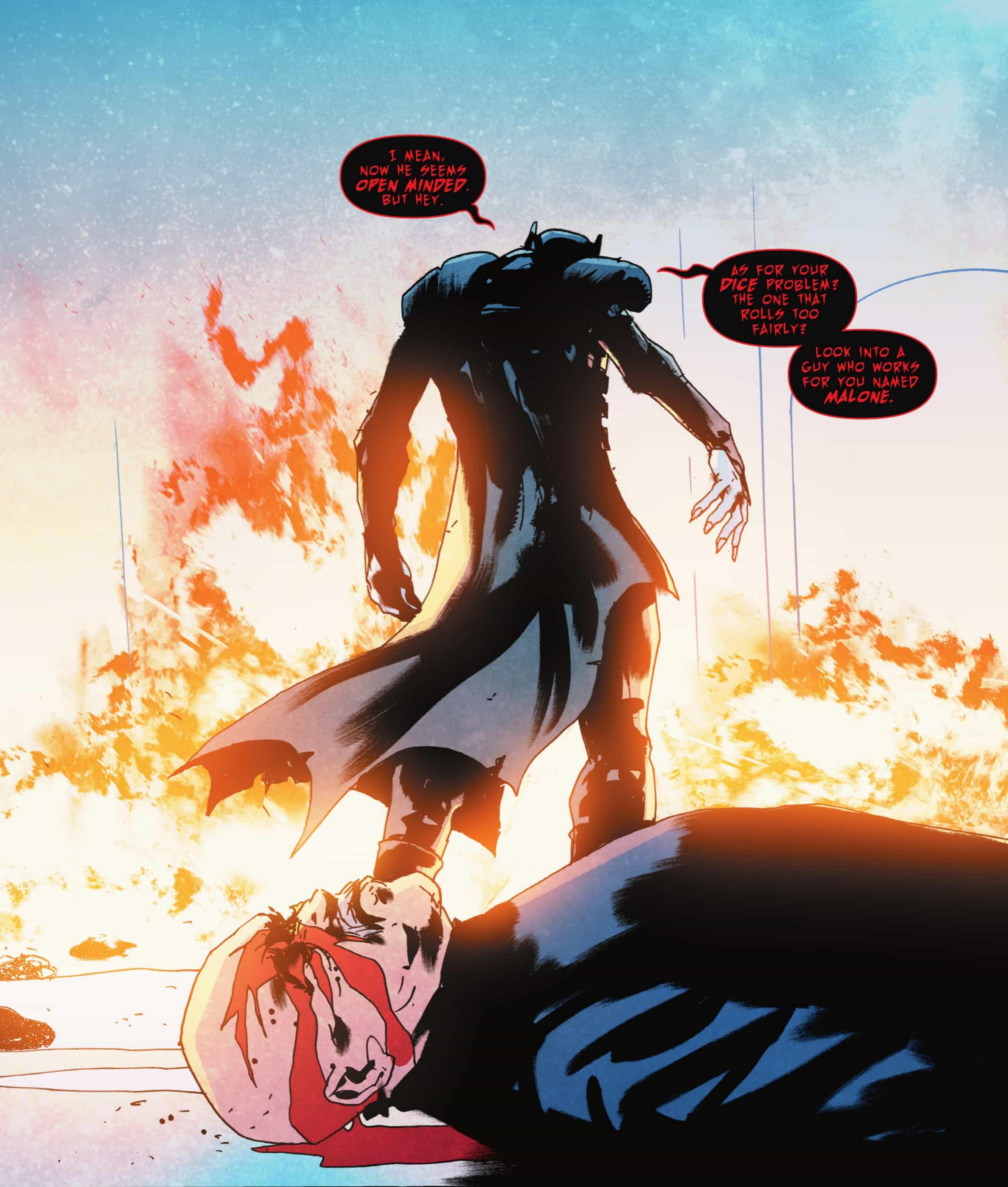












BENEATH GOTHAM CITY.

...GOTHAM IS FED BY THREE RESERVOIRS HE COULD COMPROMISE BY MEANS OF AT LEAST THREE OLD PIPELINES VISIBLE 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--

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

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

WHICH ONE?!

WHICH #\\$%^@!& ONE?!

WUMP

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 GLUTTING 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...





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?!

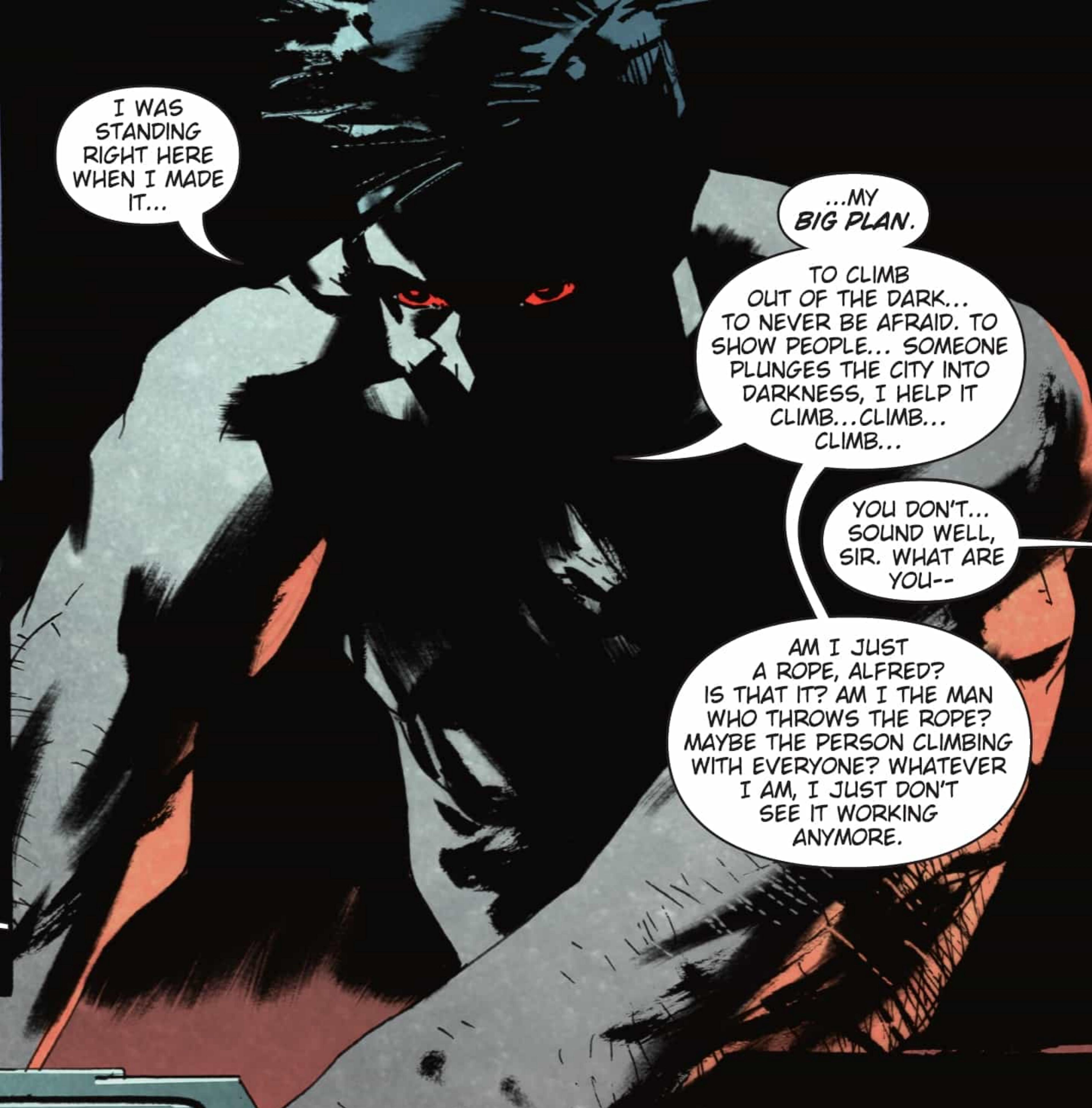
WHY HAVE YOU LOCKED ME
OUT? I'M HERE TO HELP. I
CAN HELP. WE'LL FIGURE
OUT A PLAN TO--

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

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

CLANG

MAYBE
IT HAS BEEN
WRONG THIS
WHOLE
TIME.





...BUT PLANS
CHANGE.