



The Batman Who Laughs, Part 5

I'm not quite **MYSELF** lately.

(Shhhhh.)

When I've felt off in the past...I always came back to the same thing: the city itself.

I think of my first **TIME** riding the subway. Waiting for the train **TO** come, standing on the platform with my father, excited.

He smiles at me. Hands me a token. It's brass with a map of Gotham in its earliest days printed on the front. I stare at it.

"Right now, **KID**do," he says, "you're holding everything this city stands for in your hand."

When I ask what he means, he says that **in** most cities, public transit costs more the farther you travel from the city center. So people of means live at the edges... the poorest at the heart.

But **Gotham** was founded on the idea that everyone is equal, **SO** all rides cost the same from **SLAUGHTER** Swamp to Wayne Tower.

"The one means a single fare for all," he says. "The ring means we protect each other. The light in the sky means we strive to be better. It's all right there, **BRUCE**."

I am mesmerized.

The train comes and I don't want to put the token in the slot. Ever.

I see the token now, in my mind, and I...I am myself again.

I am Gotham. Because Gotham is Batman. They are one idea.

The idea that together...



BLACKGATE PRISON. NOW.

...we bring
out the very
best in
each other.

KILL THAT
@#%\$!

STAND DOWN! I'M THE
REAL BATMAN, DAMMIT!
HE'S THE BATMAN WHO
LAUGHS! RIGHT
THERE!

DON'T
LISTEN TO HIM!
HE'S TRYING
TO TRICK
YOU! KEEP
FIRING!

FUN
BEING ME,
EH, BRUCE?

I'D GET
USED TO IT IF
I WERE YOU...
HEH...

BYE-BYE
NOW.

NO!

POOM

OFFICERS! HIS
CAPE IS KEVLAR!
BRING IN THE A.P.S
OR JUST AIM FOR
HIS MOUTH.

YES,
SIR!

NO! HE'S
GETTING AWAY!
LISTEN TO ME! I
KNOW ALL OF
YOU! WE'VE
WORKED
TOGETHER!

YOU'RE OFFICER
LAURIE LENNER, AND
YOU'RE OFFICER DAVID
JIMENEZ!

BLAM BLAM BLAM

Why aren't they
listening?!

SOUNDS LIKE
BATMAN...NO...
BLOCK IT
OUT!

KILL
HIM...TO BE
SAFE!

NOT
WORTH THE
RISK...

...FAME
EITHER
WAY...

STOP IT!
STOP FIRING!
THIS ISN'T
YOU!



It is them,
BRUCE...

No.
It's not.

You need
to GET OUT
of here!

Go, BRUCE,
go! NOW!

EVERYONE!
AFTER HIM! BRING
UP THE ARMOR
PIERCERS! WHERE
ARE THE--

MR. WAYNE!
BRUCE!

Dead. Head practically
SEVERED...he was
WARDEN...though...

...wearing an
armored vest.
Get it off him
before the
A.P.S--

COMING NOW,
MA'AM!

A.P.S ARE
HERE!

BRING THEM
UP FRONT!

AIM
FOR THE
MOUTH...

THE
MOUTH...

MOUTH...

BUDDA BUDDA

THUNK

THUNK

THUNK

THUNK

No time! Just
use him!

Between his
vest and your
armor you
should
be--**AGHH!**

Every bullet
like a knife...

The pain...
Move! Get
to the hatch
before more
of them...

...oh no...

More in front...
cutting you off!

THERE
HE IS!

MOUTH.

MOUTH.

They'll never
let you out!
They'll call in
the A.V.s,
the boats...
because they
think you're
him!

That you'd...

...so show them!
SHOW them who
YOU really are!

And before I know
it, I'm yelling!

Yelling at them **WHO**
I AM. Screaming...

...and they finally
hear me! They
HEAR ME and...

...suddenly
they stop.

WHAT...
WHAT
DID YOU
SAY?

I ~~SS~~SAID HOW'S
YOUR FATHER, OFFICER
JIMENEZ? BUS ROUTE
FIFTEEN...GETS A LITTLE
DANGEROUS AT
NIGHT, EH?

AND YOU, OFFICER
LENNER...FIRE ESCAPE
OUTSIDE YOUR BEDROOM
WINDOW STILL MAKE YOU
NERVOUSSS...? I SEE
YOU CHECKING IT IN THE
MIDDLE OF THE
NIGHT...**HEH**.

HE
KNOWS...?

HE
KNOWS
MY...

BUT HE
DOESN'T
KNOW
WHERE I
LIV--

OFFICER PINE? FIVE
ELMORE LANE. OFFICER
GANTZ? ONE NARROWS
HEIGHTS! **I KNOW
EVERYTHING ABOUT
ALL OF YOU!**

NOW I'M
GOING TO WALK OUT
OF THIS PLACE, AND IF
YOU EVEN **THINK** OF
CALLING THE BOATS,
OR THE CHOPPERS...
**I WILL COME
FOR YOU.**

...MAYBE TONIGHT,
MAYBE TOMORROW, MAYBE A
YEAR FROM NOW, BUT **I WILL
COME...FOR YOU AND EVERYONE
YOU LOVE AND I WILL MAKE WHAT
HAPPENED TO THIS BRUCE WAYNE
HERE LOOK LIKE A DAMNED
MERCY.**



...WHY?!

BECAUSE
I'M THE
#&%^&*%
BATMAN WHO
LAUGHS!
HAHAHA!

SO FOLLOW
ME DOWN...



"...I DARE
YOU."

CROW
CROW!



THUNK

STOP! PLEASE!

AAGH!



CROW
CRO--

BAR.

YOU
RECOGNIZE
THEM, JIM? THE
BATMAN WHO
LAUGHS MADE
THEM *SPECIAL*
FOR ME.

THEY'RE ALL
VERSIONS OF
YOUR *SON*...
JAMES.

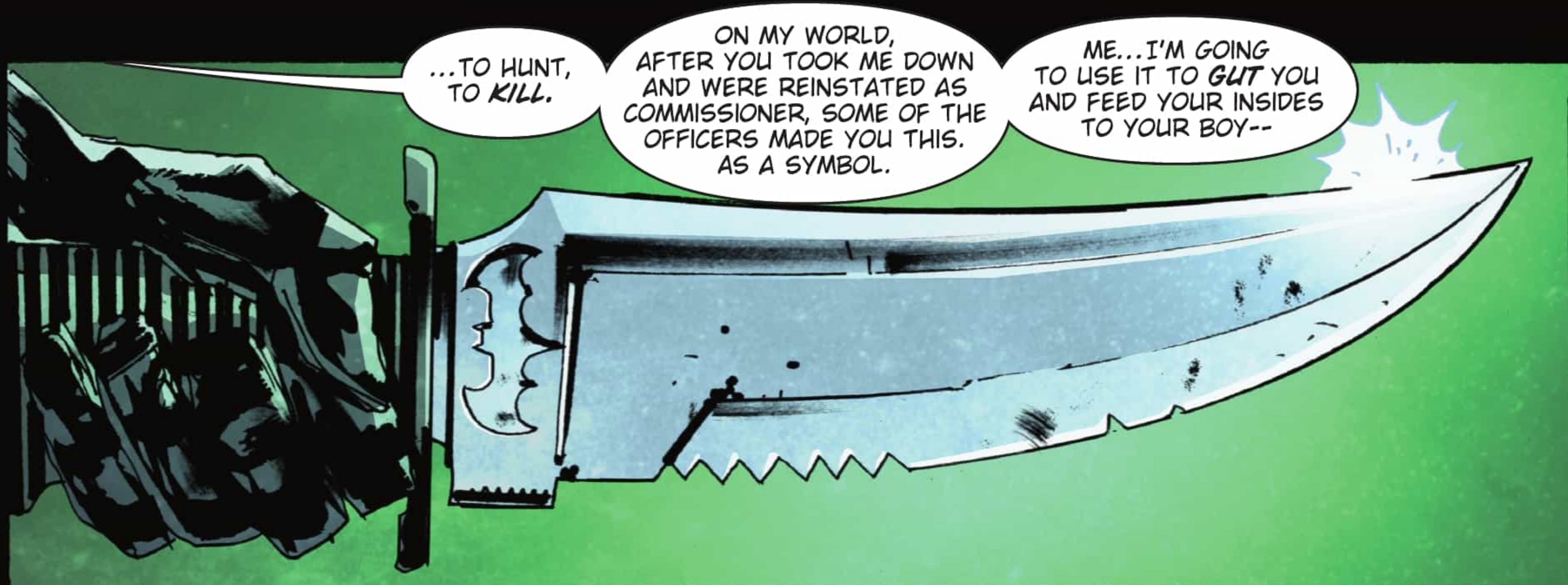
LOOK AT
THEM. REALLY
LOOK.

USUALLY, IT
TAKES A WHILE
FOR SOMEONE TO
BECOME A ROBIN.
BUT YOUR BOY...IT
WAS ALMOST LIKE
HE WANTED IT.

LIKE IT'S
ALL HE *EVER*
WANTED...

NO, THEY
CAN'T BE...





...TO HUNT,
TO KILL.

ON MY WORLD,
AFTER YOU TOOK ME DOWN
AND WERE REINSTATED AS
COMMISSIONER, SOME OF THE
OFFICERS MADE YOU THIS.
AS A SYMBOL.

ME...I'M GOING
TO USE IT TO **GUT** YOU
AND FEED YOUR INSIDES
TO YOUR BOY--



HA! OKAY,
JIM! THAT'S
GOOD!



"CURRENTS HERE
ARE STRONG..."



"...CARRY
YOU FAR AND
FAST..."



...KEEP
RUNNING. IT'S
MORE **FUN**
THAT WAY.



=GASP=

HELP!
HELP M--

DAAADD...

JAMES,
PLEASE!
JAMES!

SCREEEE--

BLAM

BLAM

JAMES...
NO...I...

HEY.



HEY!

WHAT...
WHO--

DAD!

THEY'RE
NOT ME.

I'M RIGHT
HERE.



JAMES?
HOW DID YOU
FIND ME?

I USED
TO KNOW ALL
THESE TUNNELS
LIKE THE BACK
OF MY HAND.

BUT
YOU SAID
YOU--

FORGOT?



I DID.

BUT
BEING DOWN
HERE...



"...THE PAST FEELS
MORE REAL THAN IT
HAS IN A WHILE."

STEP
INTO THE
LIGHT.

GO ON,
NOW. LET'S
HAVE A LOOK
AT YOU.

TA-DA.

WHY HAVE
YOU COME
HERE?

I'M HERE
BECAUSE...WELL,
THE TRUTH IS, I
NEED SOMETHING
FROM YOU. A
SMALL FAVOR.

THEY CALL
ME THE--

OH WE
RECOGNIZE YOU,
DEMON. AND WE
WILL JUDGE YOUR
REQUEST AGAINST
ALL WE KNOW
OF YOU.

HEH.
THANK YOU,
TRULY. I STAND
A **HUMBLE MAN**
BEFORE YOU,
HONORED JUST
TO BE
HEARD...



...BY THE
LEGENDARY
COURT OF
OWLS.

HA. THE FLATTERY
FROM THIS GHOUL. WHY
HEAR HIM OUT AT ALL?
LET'S TEST OUT THE NEW
CHAMBERS ON HIM INSTEAD.
THE *HERETICS PERCH*?
THE *HOODED
HOLLOW*?

NO, THE
RED CLUTCH! IT'LL
TAKE YEARS FOR HIM
TO EXPIRE IF WE
CAUTERIZE HIS
STUMPS...



IT IS
TRADITION
THAT WE LET
THE LITTLEST
ONE DECIDE.

YES!

YES,
THE LITTLE
ONE SHOULD
CHOOSE! HEAR
HIM OUT OR
NOT?



I WILL
DECIDE
THEN.

HELLO.

HELLO,
LITTLE ONE.

WHY
SHOULD WE
HEAR YOU OUT,
CREATURE?



WELL, BECAUSE I
WANT THE SAME THING
THAT YOU DO. TO SEE
THIS CITY BECOME
WHAT IT WAS *MEANT*
TO BECOME. TO SEE
ITS MOST ANCIENT
PLANS REALIZED.

I ASK JUST A
SMALL FAVOR OF
YOU TO HELP MY
PLAN ALONG. SO
WHAT DO YOU SAY?
IT'LL BE A HOOT.
PROMISE.



I SAY...

...NO.

THE *TALONS* WILL TAKE YOUR HEAD NOW. I'D LIKE TO MAKE IT A LAMP. A NIGHT LIGHT FOR MY ROOM.



THE TALONS!

ALL RIGHT THEN, THEY ARE CALLED! HIS HEAD GOES TO THE YOUNGLING.

THE REST, WE WILL DECIDE LATER.



GREAT COURT, NO! I BESEECH YOU...YOU HAVEN'T EVEN HEARD MY CASE. I ASK SOMETHING VERY *SMALL* FROM YOU! PLEASE! PLEA--

ENOUGH! WE ONLY HUMORED YOUR CASE FOR OUR AMUSEMENT.

NOW YOU CAN TAKE YOUR REQUEST UP WITH THE TALONS, BEAST!

HEH! SEE, THAT'S THE THING...

...I ALREADY
HAVE. HEH.



MY GOD...
THE TALONS...
WHAT HAS
HE--

RUN,
BROTHERS AND
SISTERS!



YOU WILL
PAY FOR THIS,
MONSTER! WE
WILL FIND YOU,
WHEREVER
YOU HIDE!



HEH.
FIRST YOU'LL
HAVE TO FIND A
WAY OUT OF THAT
MAZE OF YOURS.
I THINK YOU'LL
FIND SOME OF
THE ROUTES...

...REMODELED.
HAHAHA!



NO...THOSE
EXPLOSIONS...
WHY?!





I'M JUST GETTING WHAT I CAME HERE FOR, LITTLE ONE.

NO! WHAT ARE YOU... PLEASE... SIR, PLEASE! DON'T! I'LL GIVE YOU ANYTHING! WHATEVER YOU CAME TO ASK, IT'S YOURS!

CREAK



BUT MY FAVOR... ALL I WANTED... WAS TO HEAR YOU ALL DIE SCREAMING. SO... HELP A GUY OUT?

AAAAA!!!



HAHAHA! THERE YOU GO.

I MEANT WHAT I SAID, THOUGH! ALL YOU OWLS HIDING IN THE SHADOWS! I HAVE A LOT OF RESPECT FOR THE COURT.

THE CONTROL WIELDED FROM BEHIND "HALLOWED PERCH"... WHICH IS WHY ON ONE WORLD, A FAVORITE OF MINE IN FACT...

...I TOOK
YOU OVER AND
BECAME YOUR
LEADER.

BLIP

WHAT IN...WHO
ARE YOU?!

WHAT
HAPPENED TO
MY--

YOUR BIRDIES,
BRUCE? YOUR
WHOLE WORLD!
ALL GONE.
YOU'RE HERE
WITH ME
NOW.

RAH!

THAT'S THE
SPIRIT!

HANANA!

WHO ARE
YOU?!

I SAID
WHO ARE
YOU?!

I don't
recognize
myself
anymore...

So again I go back to the beginning. To the city.

Look at it.

See it for what it is, what it always has been, always will be. It's Batman. Batman is Gotham.

And Gotham is about people being better, together...

...~~BEING BETTER~~...
Together...?

No. ~~STOP~~ it!

Focus. See deeper, dammit!
To the bedrock. The #%^ mica schist it's all built on.
The idea. The blueprin--

BATMAN!
BATMAN COME IN! I
HAVE HIM, I HAVE DAD!
BUT WE'RE TRAPPED
IN THE SEWER...
WE NEED--

GOOD WORK,
JAMES! STAY
WHERE YOU ARE!
I'M SENDING A
VEHICLE
NOW!

SIMPLE...

THE GRIM
KNIGHT, HE'S
BOOBY-TRAPPING
THE ROUTES! TO GET
US OUT AT THIS POINT
YOU'D NEED A BOAT, A
PLANE, MAYBE A DAMN
TANK...WHAT KIND OF
VEHICLE COULD YOU
POSSIBLY SEND
THAT WOULD--

"...A BAT ONE."

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

WE'RE FINE, BUT DAD SAW WHAT HE'S PLANNING. WE HAVE TO ACT FAST.

I WAS IN HIS LAIR, BATMAN, AND THE STUFF HE'S MAKING... THIS **SERUM**... YOU WERE RIGHT. IT CHANGES PEOPLE INTO THEIR WORST SELVES, CELL BY CELL...

HE HAS FOUR OF THE SIX CONTAINERS HE NEEDS OF THE STUFF.

OUR ONLY ADVANTAGE IS THAT WE CAME AFTER HIM BEFORE HE WAS **READY**, BEFORE HE HACKED **LAST LAUGH**.

WITH YOU HERE WE CAN STOP HIM. WE CAN **SET IT OFF** AND PROTECT THE **CITY**.

HERE, THOUGH... WE NEED TO DO IT TOGETHER. WITHIN TWO MINUTES OF EACH OTHER OR IT'LL **SHUT DOWN** FOR SEVEN DAYS FOR **SAFETY** AND BE INOPERABLE.

WHAT WILL IT DO, EXACTLY?

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY, IT WILL DISMANTLE GOTHAM'S ENTRY POINTS, DISCONNECT IT FROM THE NATIONAL GRID, OUTSIDE WATER, RESOURCES.

BOTTOM LINE, LAST LAUGH WILL TURN GOTHAM INTO A QUARANTINE ZONE AND **ELIMINATE** ANY CHANCE OF THE **BATMAN WHO LAUGHS** INFECTING THE WATER SUPPLY.

IT'LL ALSO GIVE US A THOUSAND WAYS OF CATCHING HIM. HERE, JUST PUT YOUR HAND--

BATMAN, WAIT. BEFORE WE DO THIS... I... I WANT TO SAY SOMETHING...

WHAT IS IT?

GO ON,
SAY IT.

LOOK AT
HIM! HE'S LIKELY
GOING TO DIE...
YOUR BEST
FRIEND.

SO DON'T
LIE TO HIM. DON'T
TELL HIM, IT'LL BE
OKAY. NOT THIS
TIME.

THIS
ONE TIME, NOW,
SPEAK THE
TRUTH...

...TELL HIM
WHAT HE MEANS
TO YOU, AND YOU KNOW
ABOUT HIM, HAVE ALWAYS
KNOWN... SAY IT ALL,
JIM. BE BRAVE
AND SAY IT!

I...WANT
TO SAY...

...THAT IT'S
GOING TO BE
OKAY.

...
OF
COURSE
IT WILL.

NOW PLEASE, JIM,
PUT YOUR HAND ON
THE PANEL. THE **VOICE**
RECOGNITION WILL ACTIVATE.
THE CODE IS THE MIAGANI
SAYING ON THE OLD
SUBWAY **CHANGE**
TOK--

"WITH NEW
EYES." I KNOW
IT WELL.

INITIATED

0 1:59

IT
WORKED.
THANK
GOD.



WE BARELY PULLED THAT OFF.

IF THAT GRIM KNIGHT MONSTER HADN'T TRIED TO HUNT ME DOWN INSTEAD OF KILLING ME OUTRIGHT...IF YOU HADN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET US OUT OF THERE... WE WERE LUCKY.



GO AHEAD, OLD FRIEND. ACTIVATE IT AND SAVE THE CITY.

...



WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, BATMAN? WHAT IS IT?



YOU'RE RIGHT. WE WERE LUCKY...



...IT'S ALMOST LIKE...IT'S WHAT HE WANTED ALL ALONG...

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? BATMAN, THE COUNTDOWN IS--

DON'T YOU SEE? HE WANTED YOU TO ESCAPE. HE CAN'T HACK **LAST LAUGH**. BUT HE'S FOUND SOME KIND OF ACCESS TO THE DAMN RESERVOIR. HE NEEDED ME TO ACTIVATE IT.

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN HIS PLAN.



THAT'S WHY I COULDN'T FIND ANY TAMPERING WITH THE PIPES OR WATER WAYS.

THAT...THAT CAN'T BE TRUE. HE CAN'T BE THAT--



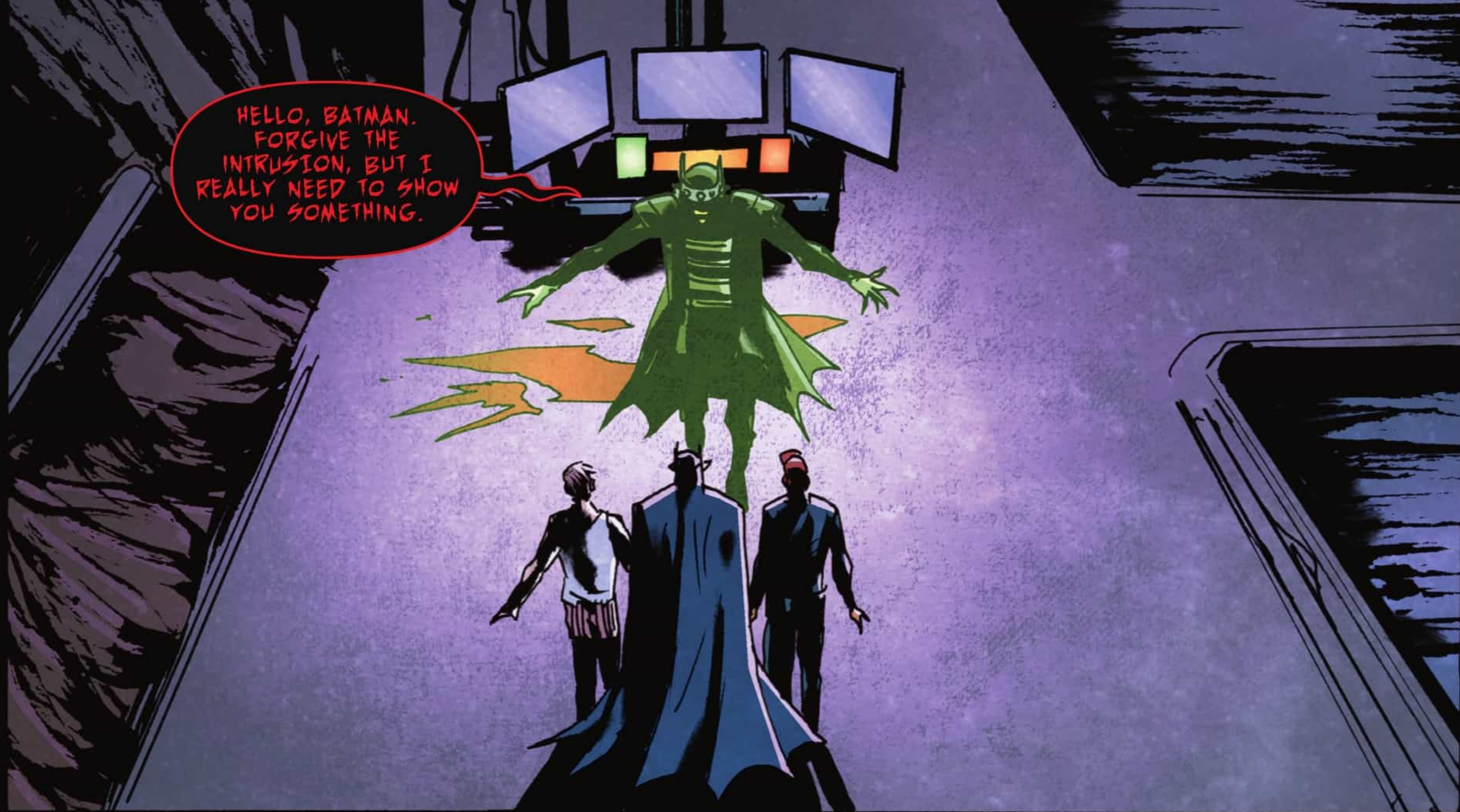
INCOMING MESSAGE



IT'S HIM, ISN'T IT?

DON'T ANSWER IT.

BATMAN, DON'T ANSWER THAT!



HELLO, BATMAN.
FORGIVE THE
INTRUSION, BUT I
REALLY NEED TO SHOW
YOU SOMETHING.



ENOUGH! I
FIGURED OUT YOUR
DAMNED PLAN! I
WON'T LET
YOU WIN!

YOU WON'T MAKE
GOTHAM INTO SOME **MONSTER!**
SO SHOW ME WHATEVER DEAD
BRUCE WAYNE YOU--

OH, THAT'S NOT
WHAT I WANTED TO
SHOW YOU....



THIS
IS.
AS YOU
KNOW, THE
OWLS KEEP
THESE **MAPS**
IN THEIR MAZE.
THIS IS THE
OLDEST. FROM
1699. BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES.
BEFORE THE NEW
RULES. I WANT
YOU TO LOOK AT
IT AND LEARN
WHAT GOTHAM
REALLY IS.

I KNOW
GOTHAM
BETTER THAN
YOU EVER--



YOU KNOW
NOTHING!



FOR ALL YOUR
HATRED OF ME...I
AM YOUR FRIEND,
BATMAN. I'M THE
BEST **#3%*** FRIEND
YOU'LL EVER
HAVE.

SHUT
UP!

NO! BECAUSE
ALL I'M TRYING TO DO IS
MAKE YOU SEE WHAT YOU
COULD BE, WHAT THIS CITY
COULD BE...WHAT IT **HAS**
ALWAYS WANTED
TO BE...

DAMMIT,
DON'T LISTEN TO
HIM. BATMAN! SHUT
THE MESSAGE
OFF NOW!



LOOK AT IT!
YOU THINK THE CITY WAS
DESIGNED TO BE SOME
BEACON? A HAVEN. BUT
WHAT THIS FIRST MAP
SHOWS...

...IS THAT GOTHAM
CITY--AND LAST
LAUGH--WAS BUILT
FOR THE EXACT
OPPOSITE.

SEE, LAST LAUGH WAS
CREATED SO THAT GOTHAM
COULD BECOME A SEAT OF
POWER, A FORTRESS CITY
WHERE A NEW, STRONGER
MAN WOULD BE
INCUBATED.

...A CITY THAT
COULD CUT ITSELF OFF
FROM THE WORLD WHEN THE
TIME WAS RIGHT... WITH ITS
OWN FOOD SUPPLY AND
RESERVOIR.

THE RING MARKED
HIDDEN MOORINGS FOR SHIPS
TO DEFEND FROM. THE STAR WAS
FOR THE ARMORY, WHERE THEY'D
KEEP SUPPLEMENTS TO MAKE
PEOPLE STRONGER, BETTER...AND
WEAPONS, THINGS NO ONE
HAD SEEN BEFORE.

NOT JUST ARMS, BUT
DISEASES TO SPREAD. POTTER'S
FIELD WASN'T SOME KINDNESS. HA!
LOOK AT THE PLANNED TUNNELS! IT
WAS A SECRET LABORATORY FOR
PESTILENCE, AWAY FROM
PRYING EYES...

0 1:00

YOUR FRIENDS
WILL LIE TO YOU, TELL
YOU I'M WRONG, BUT
YOU KNOW...

YOU SEE THEM
FOR WHO THEY
ARE. WEAK. PETTY.
JUST AS GOTHAM
HAS BECOME.



BATMAN!
BATMAN!



THAT'S
THE SECRET I'VE
BEEN WAITING TO
TELL YOU ALL THIS
TIME...

...THE POINT OF
GOTHAM WAS TO
CONQUER! THE
LAST LAUGH WAS A
STRATEGY. A
DESTINY...



SEE IT LIKE I DO!
ITS HEART. ITS MIND.
ITS PLAN. ITS VISION.
ITS SOUL. SEE
IT ALL!



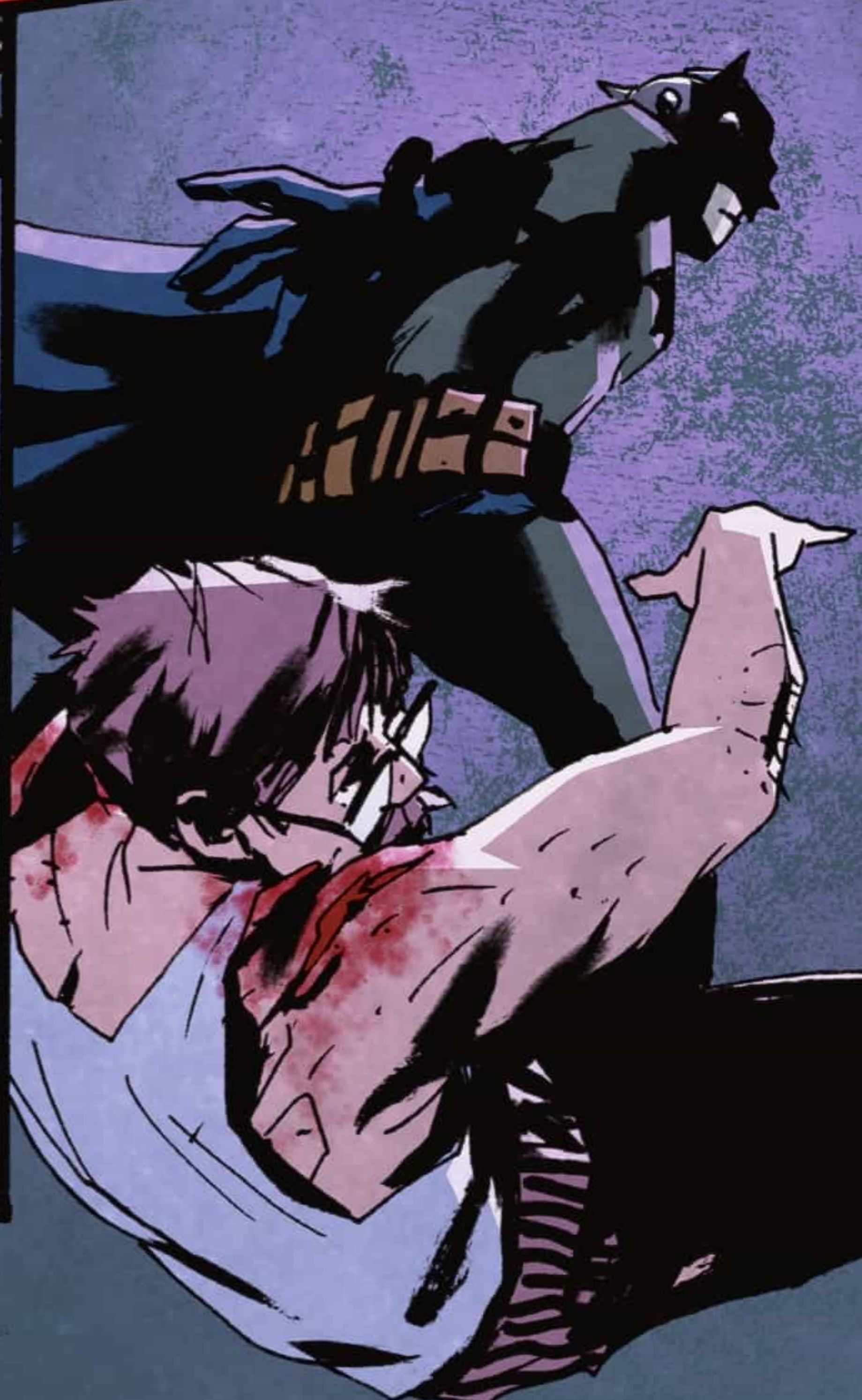
SEE IT
AND SEE
YOURSELF!



AND
MAKE IT
ALL REAL!



00:40



"YES,
BROTHER!
YES!"

"REMEMBER
IT..."

KLIK

"REMEMBER THAT
SUBWAY TOKEN IN
OUR HAND. THAT
MORNING BACK
WHEN WE WERE
YOUNG.

BEEP


"REMEMBER FATHER SMILING. 'RIGHT
NOW, KIDDO,' HE SAID, 'YOU'RE
HOLDING EVERYTHING THIS CITY
STANDS FOR IN YOUR HAND.'

"AND HE WAS RIGHT.
IT WAS ALL THERE.
THE TRUE MEANING.

"YOU JUST DIDN'T
SEE IT THEN.

"BUT NOW
YOU DO!"

RMMMBLE

A comic book panel showing Batman in his black suit and cowl standing next to a figure in a green suit with a mask. They are in a control room with multiple computer monitors. The background is a dark, textured wall.

YOU SEE IT FOR
WHAT IT ALWAYS WAS, AND
WHAT IT CAN BE NOW. NOT A
BEACON, NOT A LIGHT. A
DARKNESS. AN OPEN MOUTH
WITH SHARP TEETH. A NEW
KIND OF CITY...

00:20

...A CITY OF
PEOPLE WHO
LAUGH LAST.
LIKE ME. LIKE
YOU...

SIR, STOP! PLEASE!
HEAR ME! YOU MUSTN'T LISTEN!
THE LEVELS IN YOUR BLOOD...
IT'S NEARLY SATURATED WITH
HIS TOXIN! YOU'RE NOT
SEEING CLEARLY!

THE CITY MIGHT NOT BE
WHAT YOU THOUGHT BUT YOUR
FAMILY--THE WAYNES, AND OTHERS,
THEY STOOD ALONE FOR WHAT'S
RIGHT. FOR SOMETHING BETTER!
THAT'S WHAT **YOU** ARE!
WHO **YOU** ARE!

AND...
IT HASN'T
WORKED.

00:10

DO IT!
FOR ONCE IN YOUR
LIFE BE GOTHAM'S REAL
BATMAN! BE THE SYMBOL OF
WHAT THIS CITY TRULY IS!
LEAD IT FORWARD!
FINALLY, LEAD IT
RIGHT!

NO! SIR,
PLEA-- **MUTE.**

00:05

HAHA! YES!
GO ON, BROTHER. SEE
IT AS IT CAN BE! AS IT
SHOULD BE! I KNOW
YOU CAN! SEE IT AS
I SEE IT...

00:03

"THROUGH
NEW EYES."

00:02

00:01

**LAST
LAUGH...
ACTIVATED.**