



The Batman Who Laughs, Part 6

BUT MAYBE IT'S
SIMPLE! MAYBE
HAPPINESS IS JUST
LAUGHTER? HEH.
MAYBE THAT'S ALL.

SOME ANTHROPOLOGISTSSSS,
THEY THINK LAUGHTER DEVELOPED
AS A COURTING CALL.

OTHERS SAY IT EVOLVED
AS A REACTION TO
INCONGRUITY. THE BODY'S
GAG REFLEX TO LIFE. HEH.

THE THING IS,
SCIENCE DOESN'T
KNOW A LOT
ABOUT LAUGHTER.
ITS NATURE.

BUT MOST THINK LAUGHTER
STARTED AS A GROUP
SIGNAL TO LET THE TRIBE
KNOW EVERYTHING IS OKAY.

THAT'S WHAT LAUGHTER IS
FOR ME. IT MEANS I DID
MY JOB. PEOPLE FEEL SAFE.
LIKE WHEN I WAS A BOY...
RUNNING IN THE YARD.
RUNNING...HEH.

LAST LAUGH WAS SUPPOSED TO MAKE PEOPLE
FEEL SAFE. IT TOOK TWO HOURS TO GO INTO EFFECT...
SEALING OFF ENTRY-POINTS...PROTECTING THE SKIES.

BUT THE CITY ISN'T WHAT
I THOUGHT IT WASSSSS.

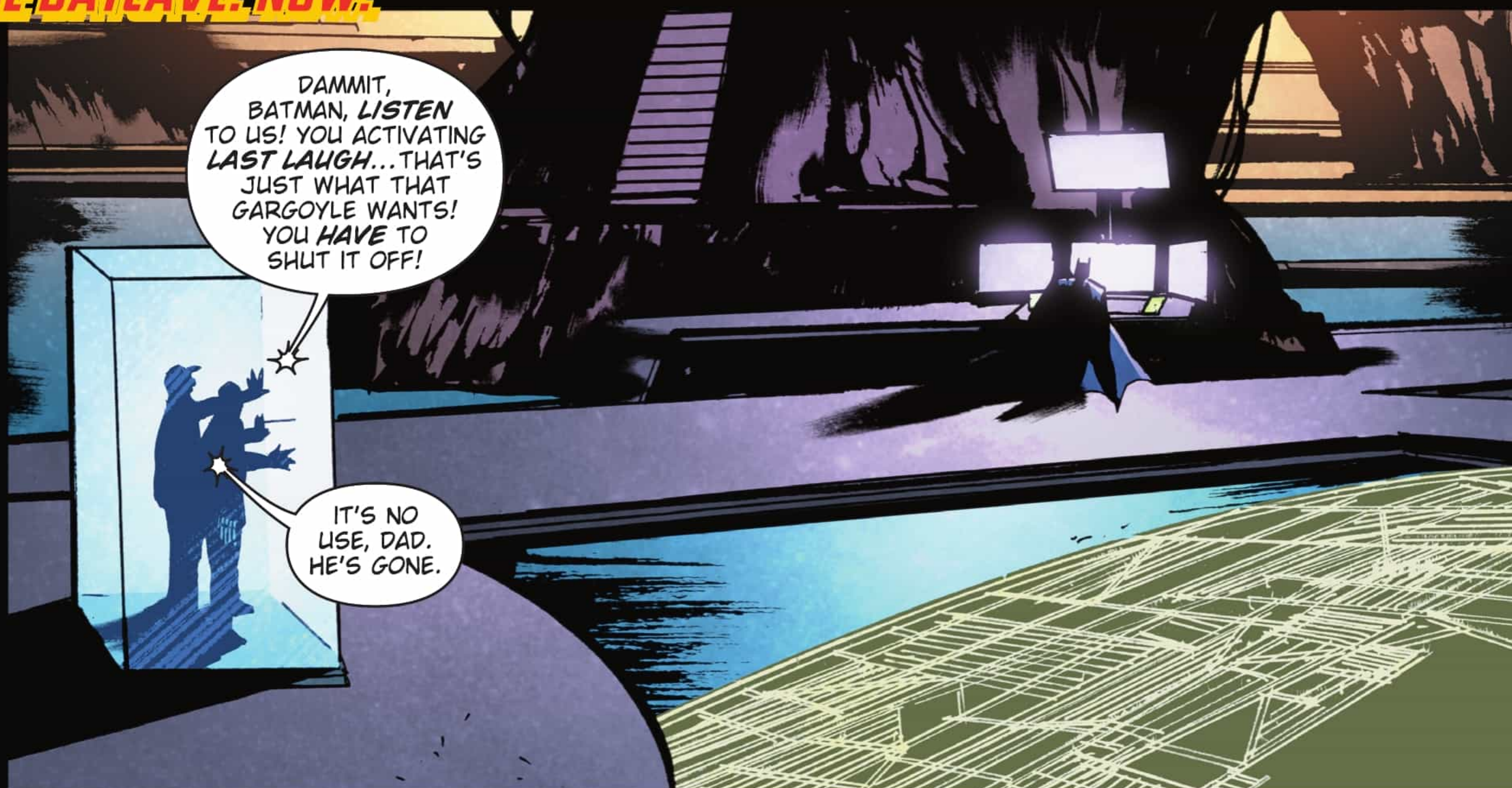
RIGHT NOW, NO
ONE IS LAUGHING
OUT THERE...

...SOON, THOUGH...THE
LAUGHTER WILL COME...

SSHHHHH.
LISTEN.

ANY MOMENT
WE'LL HEAR
THE SOUND.

THE BATCAVE. NOW.



DAMMIT, BATMAN, LISTEN TO US! YOU ACTIVATING LAST LAUGH... THAT'S JUST WHAT THAT GARGOYLE WANTS! YOU HAVE TO SHUT IT OFF!

IT'S NO USE, DAD. HE'S GONE.



NO. I'M NOT. NOT YET.

SIR, YOUR... YOUR TOXICITY LEVELS...



...I SEE MAYBE TEN PERCENT HEALTHY BLOOD CELLS LEFT. THE SLIGHTEST RISE IN ACTIVITY AND YOU'LL CROSS THE THRESHOLD.



YOU NEED TO SLOW DOWN, MAYBE GO INTO CRYO--

I SAID, NOT YET.



THEN WHY, BATMAN?! WHY DID YOU SET OFF THE PROTOCOL?

BECAUSE, JIM, IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE.



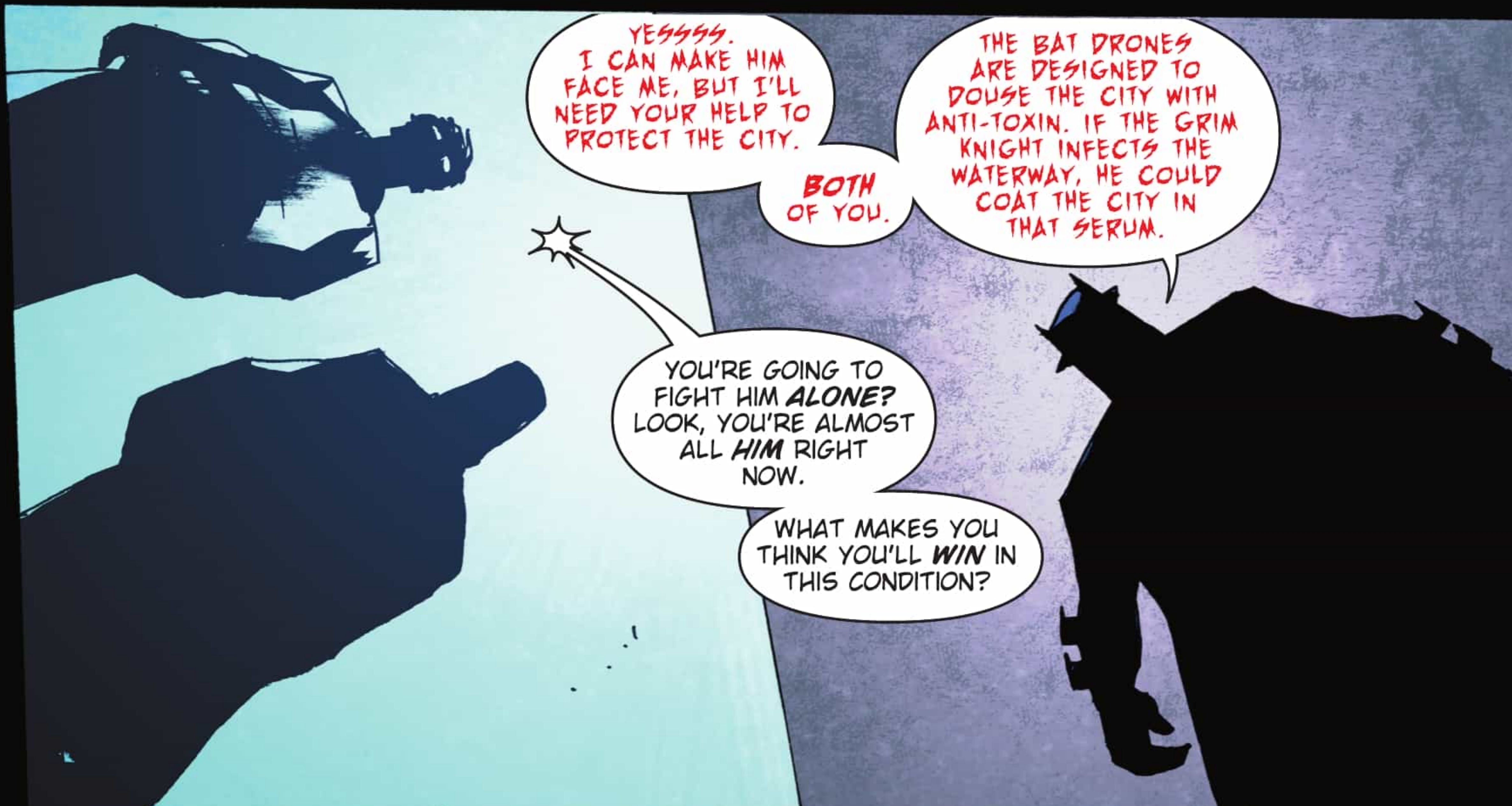
LAST LAUGH CO-OPTS THE CITY'S POWER GRID. THE GRIM KNIGHT WILL LIKELY BE ABLE TO HACK INTO IT IN A MATTER OF HOURS, TAKE IT OVER... BUT UNTIL THEN, WE CONTROL IT.

WE CONTROL THE CITY'S POWER.



SO WHAT?!
WHAT DOES A
MATTER OF
HOURS DO?

IT GIVES US
TIME. TIME TO SET
A TRAP FOR HIM.
DOESN'T IT?



YESSSS.
I CAN MAKE HIM
FACE ME, BUT I'LL
NEED YOUR HELP TO
PROTECT THE CITY.

THE BAT DRONES
ARE DESIGNED TO
DOUSE THE CITY WITH
ANTI-TOXIN. IF THE GRIM
KNIGHT INFECTS THE
WATERWAY, HE COULD
COAT THE CITY IN
THAT SERUM.

BOTH
OF YOU.

YOU'RE GOING TO
FIGHT HIM *ALONE*?
LOOK, YOU'RE ALMOST
ALL *HIM* RIGHT
NOW.

WHAT MAKES YOU
THINK YOU'LL *WIN* IN
THIS CONDITION?



HEH,
BECAUSE OF
EXACTLY THAT,
JIM... I *AM*
ALMOST ALL
HIM...

"...SO I KNOW
HIS ONE
WEAKNESS."

COME
ON...COME GET
IT...YOUR LITTLE
AWARD...

...THAAAAT'S
RIGHT...YOU
KNOW YOU
WANT IT...

CRIME ALLEY

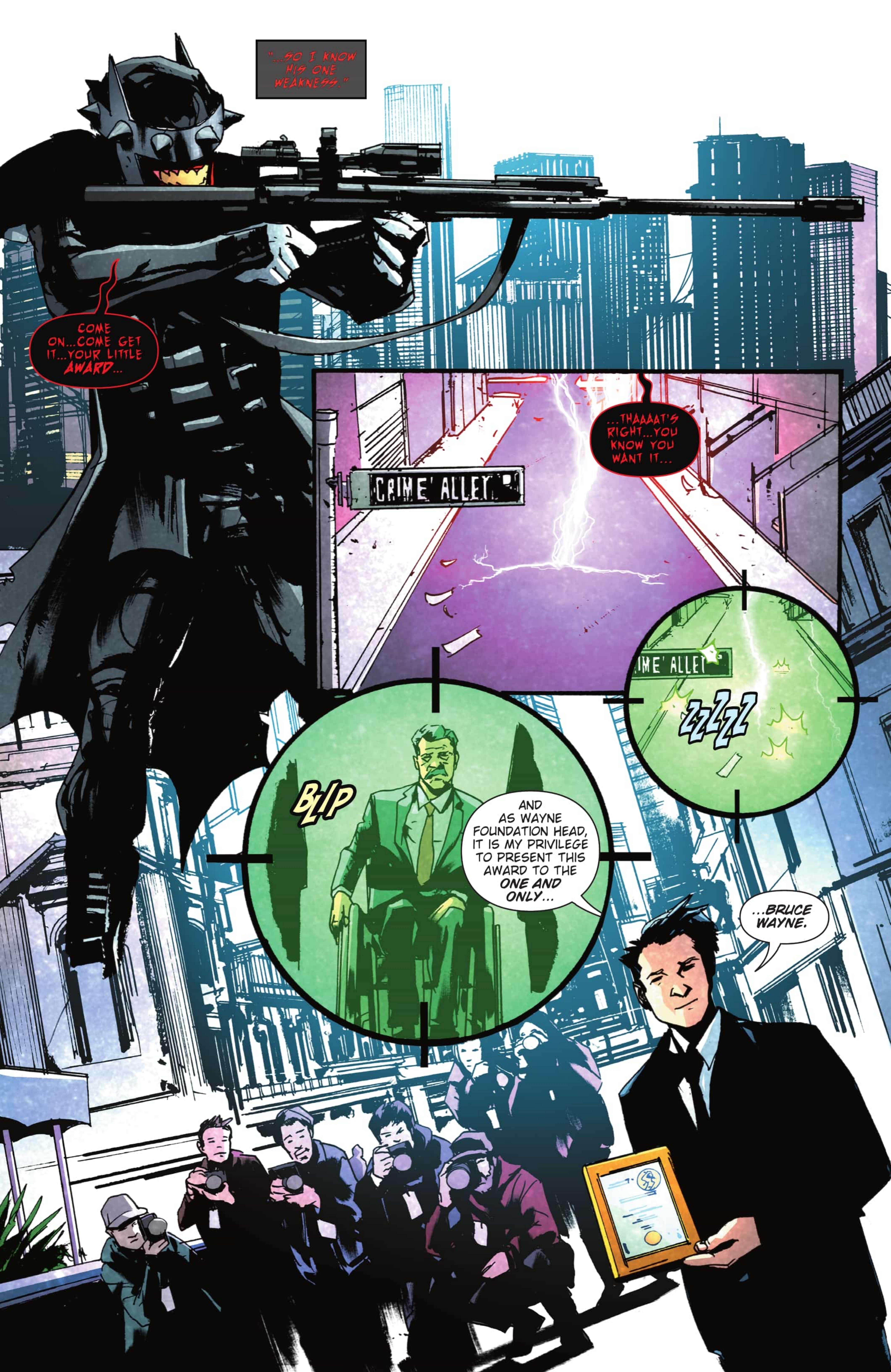
CRIME ALLEY

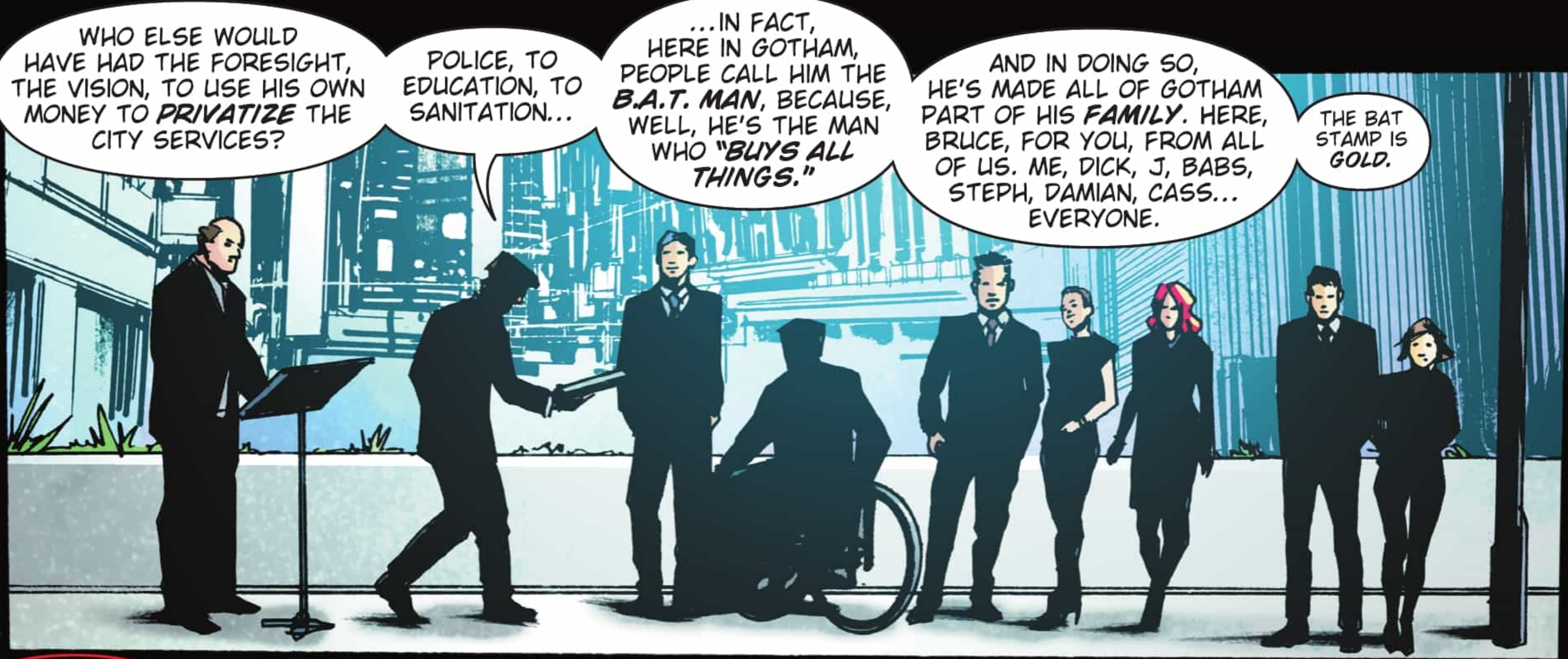
zzzzz

BZP

AND
AS WAYNE
FOUNDATION HEAD,
IT IS MY PRIVILEGE
TO PRESENT THIS
AWARD TO THE
ONE AND
ONLY...

...BRUCE
WAYNE.





WHO ELSE WOULD HAVE HAD THE FORESIGHT, THE VISION, TO USE HIS OWN MONEY TO **PRIVATIZE** THE CITY SERVICES?

POLICE, TO EDUCATION, TO SANITATION...

...IN FACT, HERE IN GOTHAM, PEOPLE CALL HIM THE **B.A.T. MAN**, BECAUSE, WELL, HE'S THE MAN WHO "**BUYS ALL THINGS**."

AND IN DOING SO, HE'S MADE ALL OF GOTHAM PART OF HIS **FAMILY**. HERE, BRUCE, FOR YOU, FROM ALL OF US. ME, DICK, J, BABS, STEPH, DAMIAN, CASS... EVERYONE.

THE BAT STAMP IS **GOLD**.

PFFT. GOLD FLAKE. CHEAP-ASS KIDS.

AWW, IT'S THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS.

BRUCE? IS THAT YOU?

IT IS, MONSTER. NOW WATCH YOUR TARGET CLOSELY...



KLIK

BLAM

...AS I MAKE HIM DISAPPEAR BEFORE YOUR VERY EYESSSSS.

TIM, THANK YOU SO MU--

B/LP



WELL, WELL... AND HERE I THOUGHT WE WERE ON THE SAME SIDE, BRUCE. STILL FIGHTING THE CHANGE, THOUGH, EH? I GIVE YOU, OH, ANOTHER HOUR, MAYBE LESS. SO ENJOY IT WHILE IT LASTS.

HA. OH, I'M ENJOYING IT PLENTY...





...NOW YOU'RE GOING TO DO EXACTLY AS I SAY.

SEE, RIGHT NOW, I'VE TRANSFERRED POWER AWAY FROM EVERY SITE IN GOTHAM THAT CONTAINS DARK METAL...EXCEPT ONE.

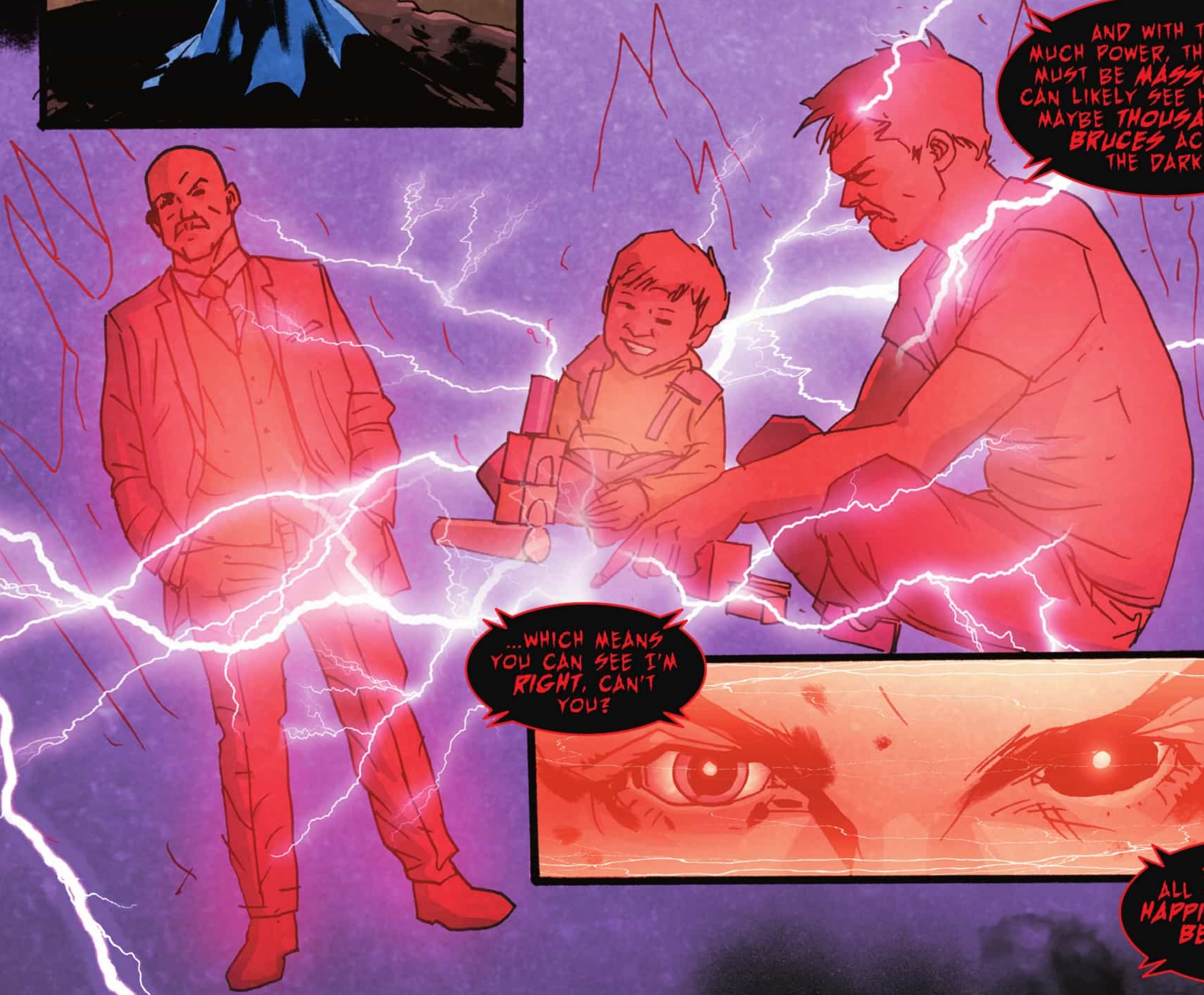


THE BIGGEST, RIGHT HERE, UNDER THE MANOR.

AH...LOOK AT YOU, TAKING CONTROL... LET ME GUESS. YOU'RE LOOKING AT IT RIGHT NOW, AREN'T YOU? THAT VORTEX OF DARK ENERGY YOU'VE CREATED. MAKING SURE IT WORKS...



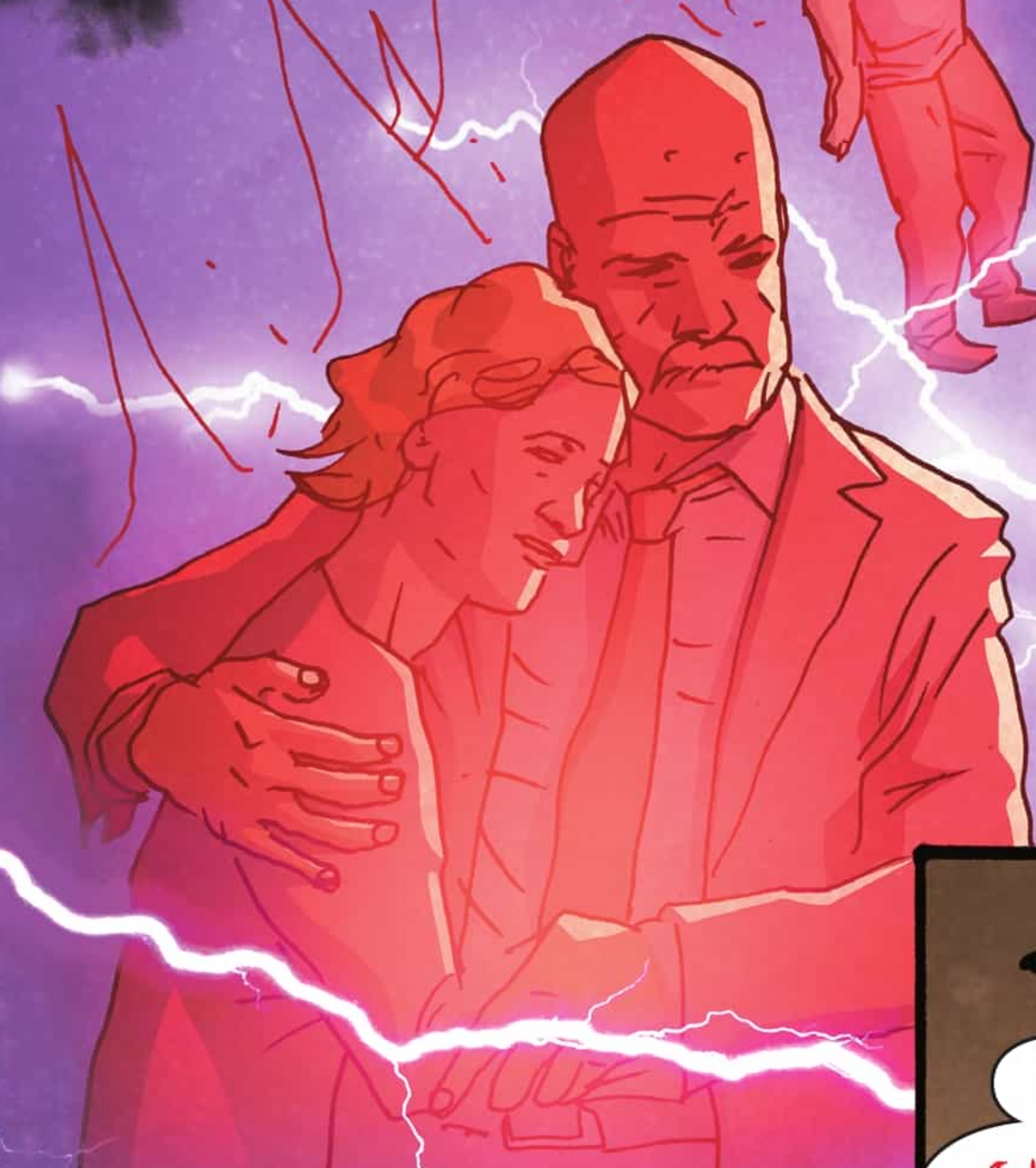
AND WITH THAT MUCH POWER, THE PORTAL MUST BE MASSIVE...YOU CAN LIKELY SEE HUNDREDS, MAYBE THOUSANDS OF BRUCES ACROSS THE DARK...



...WHICH MEANS YOU CAN SEE I'M RIGHT, CAN'T YOU?



SEE THAT ALL OF THEM ARE HAPPIER THAN YOU? BETTER THAN YOU?



BUT MY QUESTION TO YOU IS THIS, BRUCE. DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHY?

HAVE YOU LEARNED ANYTHING, LOOKING AT ALL THOSE VERSIONS OF US?



YES. I LOOK BETTER WITH HAIR.

NOW, BE HERE IN ONE HOUR. I'LL BRING THROUGH THE LAST BRUCE WAYNE.

YOU WANT ENOUGH SERUM TO INFECT THE WHOLE CITY? COME GET IT.

HA HA! IT WON'T TAKE THE GRIM KNIGHT VERY LONG TO BREAK YOUR HOLD ON THE POWER GRID. OR FOR YOU TO FINISH YOUR TRANSFORMATION...WHAT'S TO KEEP ME FROM JUST WAITING YOU OUT?



MAYBE I'VE TAKEN MY OWN PRECAUTIONS.

YOU'RE BLUFFING. BESIDES, I ALREADY HAVE ENOUGH SERUM TO CHANGE MOST OF THE CITY...



"MOST" ISN'T WINNING, IS IT?

"I HOPE THIS WORKS..."



DEFENSES
ANALYZING...

WHAT
NOW?

I GUESS WE
WAIT TO SEE IF IT
OPENS OR IT KILLS US.
BATMAN SAID HE CODED
IT TO OUR DNA, BUT...
LOOK AT HIM. I DON'T
KNOW *WHAT* TO THINK
ANYMORE.



DAD, LISTEN,
I... I WANT TO
TALK TO YOU
ABOUT
SOMETHING.

DAD?



=SIGH=
JAMES...
DON'T.



I HAVE TO. PLEASE... I KNOW
I CAN NEVER MAKE UP FOR
WHAT I'VE DONE, WHO
I'VE *BEEN*...

...SO MUCH
SO THAT THE OTHER
NIGHT, I *WAS* GOING TO
THROW THE MEDICINE IN THE
RESERVOIR. BECAUSE BEING
DECENT, BEING GOOD... IT'S
ALMOST ALL *PAIN*.

BUT I DIDN'T GIVE
IN. BECAUSE THESE
LAST FEW DAYS, WORKING
WITH BATMAN... WITH
YOU... I WANT TO
TRY. I DO.



I'M ASKING
YOU TO LET ME
COMPLETE THE
PROGRAM.

PLEASE,
DAD, LOOK
AT ME.



...
I'M SORRY,
JAMES, BUT
NO.



...
BUT IF
YOU'LL HEAR
ME OUT--

NO,
DAMMIT!
JUST...
JUST NO.

LOOK, ALL THOSE YEARS
I **TRUSTED** THAT... THAT YOU
WERE FIGHTING THE EVIL IN YOU,
EVEN WHEN NO ONE ELSE DID. I
BELIEVED THAT BENEATH IT ALL, YOU
WERE GOOD. BUT IT WAS ALL,
ALWAYS, A **MASK**. A MASK
YOU WERE WEARING.

LOOK, MAYBE
ONE DAY I'LL BE ABLE TO
BELIEVE YOU AGAIN. BUT...
I'M NOT **READY**, JAMES.
I'M SOR--



ANALYSIS
CLEAR.



ARMORY
OPEN.

ENTER AT
YOUR OWN
RISK.



THAT... IS A LOT OF
BATARANG GUNS.

LISTEN, JAMES,
I PROMISE YOU THAT
WHEN THEY RE-INCARCERATE
YOU, I'LL MAKE SURE YOU'RE...
TREATED WELL. THAT
WHATEVER PROGRAMS
WE HAVE--

IT'S OKAY,
DAD. REALLY.
I UNDERSTAND.
HERE, COME
ON...

"...WE HAVE A WAR
TO PREPARE FOR."

SIR, PLEASE!
YOU'RE DOWN TO LESS
THAN FIVE PERCENT
HEALTHY BLOOD
CELLS!

YOU DO THIS,
YOU FIGHT HIM, YOU EXERT
YOURSELF IN ANY WAY THAT
GETS YOUR BLOOD PUMPING
AND YOU'LL BE LOST!
YOU NEED TO...TO DO
SOMETHING.

I AM DOING
SOMETHING. JUST
PROMISE ME THAT
YOU'LL STICK TO THE
PLAN, ALFRED AND
WHEN THE BATMAN WHO
LAUGHS GETS HERE...
YOU'LL *STAY*
AWAY.

I...I DON'T
WANT YOU FACING
THAT DEMON
ALONE.

ALFRED. I
MEANT *STAY*
AWAY FROM
ME.

IT ALL COMES
DOWN TO THIS.



Everything.
A THOUSAND
VERSIONS OF
MYSELF, AT
WAR WITH ME,
ALL led BY
ONE CREATURE.

THIS IS
THE FINAL
BATTLEFIELD.
I FEEL IT.



THERE'S A MOMENT
RIGHT BEFORE A
LAUGH WHEN THE BODY
LOCKS UP. TENSES.



The DIAPHRAGM
HARDENS, THE LARYNX
CLOSES...EVERYTHING
COILS AND TIGHTENS.

THAT'S HOW IT FEELS JUST
NOW. LIKE THE WHOLE CITY
IS ABOUT TO LET OUT A LAUGH...
A LAUGH IT'S HELD IN FOR
FOUR HUNDRED YEARS.



CAN THEY FEEL IT, TOO, ACROSS
THE WATER IN ARKHAM?



SCALPSSSS TINGLING...
FEEL IT ROARING UP
FROM THE BEDROCK?

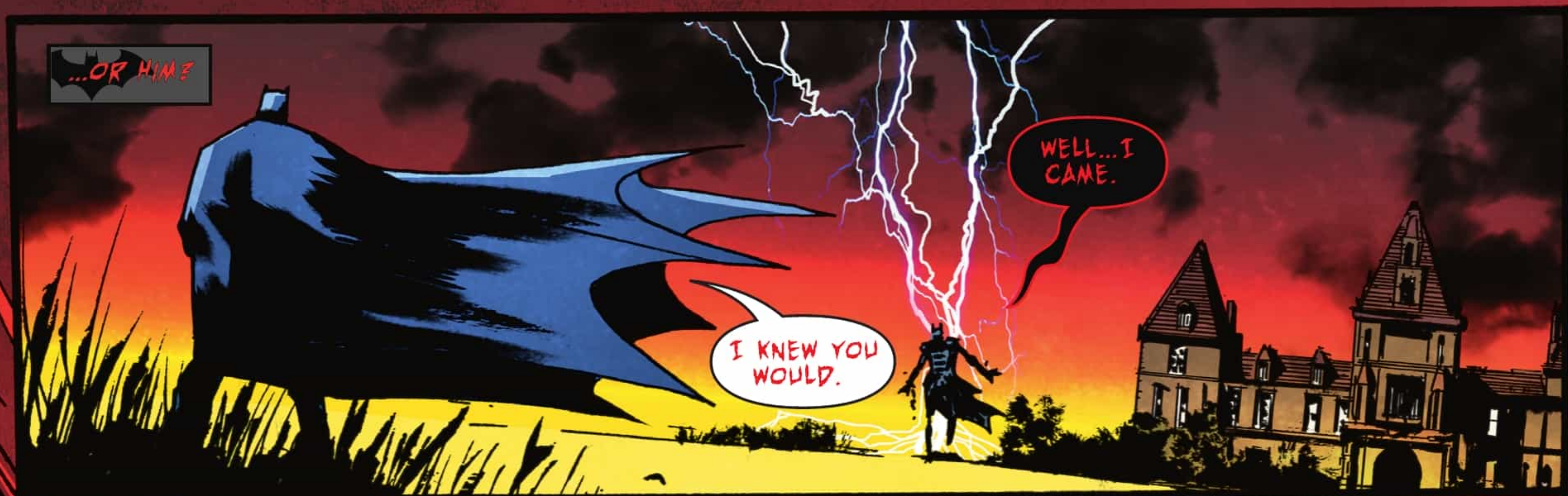


CAN THEY FEEL IT? THE LAST
LAUGH OF GOTHAM CITY?



THE ONLY QUESTION IS...

...WILL GOTHAM
LAUGH WITH ME...



AW, THAT'S WHAT I SAID WHEN I WAS WHERE YOU ARE IN MY TRANSFORMATION. I EVEN CALLED THE FAMILY OVER TO LET THEM KNOW IT'D ALL BE *OKAY*.

WHILE I WAS WAITING FOR THEM, I GOT A PITCHER OF WATER FOR THE TABLE. THAT'S ALL THE *EXERTION* IT TOOK.



AND WHEN THE FAMILY ARRIVED, I *KILLED THEM ALL*.

THEN I DRANK A COOL GLASS OF WATER.

I'LL ADMIT, I DON'T SEE YOUR *PLAN* HERE.

I MEAN, YOU *FIGHT* ME, YOU'LL CHANGE IN NO TIME.

BUT DO *NOTHING*, AND I GET WHATEVER BRUCE YOU'RE PULLING THROUGH YOUR PORTAL. SO WHAT'S YOUR *ANGLE*?



COME CLOSER. I'LL SHOW YOU.

CRACK



HA! I LIKE YOU, BRUCE. YOU KNOW WHAT...?

...YOU MAY BE THE *WORST* BATMAN...

CLINK

...BUT YOU'LL MAKE A DAMN GOOD *ME*.



IF YOU
CAN HEAR ME, I'M
AT THE FINAL
DOORWAY.



DEFENSES
WERE THICK,
BUT I'M DOWN
TO TWO
BATS.



INTRUDER,
STAND DOWN,
OR--



KA-BOOM



BLAM



KA BOOM

NOW
I'M AT THE
WATERING
HOLE.

STANDING
RIGHT ABOVE
THE DROP.



AND THERE
ARE NO **BATS**
LEFT--



POOM



I DON'T
KNOW THAT I'D
CALL US **OFFICIAL**
BATS, BUT
HEY...



...WE'RE
OUT FOR
YOUR **BLOOD**
AND WE HAVE
REALLY BAD
EYESIGHT.
SO...HERE'S
HOPING WE
QUALIFY.



HEH. YOU
THINK THOSE SUITS
WILL PROTECT
YOU.

THAT'S THE
IDEA, GENIUS.
THEY'RE BULLETPROOF
CHAIN MAIL...AND IF YOU
TOUCH US, THEY'LL DELIVER
A CHARGE THAT'LL
SEND YOU THROUGH
THE CAVE WALL.

WOW.
SCARY.

BUT SEE, I'VE
STUDIED YOUR BATMAN'S
ARMORY. EVEN HIS MOST
ADVANCED TECH ISN'T
BEYOND ME.



I'M
BEYOND
IT.



AGH!



NO MORE
GADGETS AND
TRICKS, JIM. THIS
IS YOU AND ME,
STANDING ON THE
ROOF IN THE
RAIN...



...ONE LAST TIME!



YOU WANT ME, YOU @#%\$%?

COME AND GET ME!

WE FINISHED YOU ON YOUR WORLD, WE'LL FINISH YOU HERE!



"WE"? HA! DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID TO YOUR SON ON MY WORLD, JIM?

YOU WERE SO BUSY HUNTING ME THAT YOU DIDN'T HAVE TIME FOR HIM.

YOU LOCKED HIM AWAY, FORGOT ABOUT HIM.

OTHERS TRIED TO HELP HIM...BRUCE WAYNE, EVEN ME...BUT ANY TIME WE TRIED, YOU NEVER BELIEVED IN HIM.

EVENTUALLY, HE HUNG HIMSELF IN PRISON.



YOUR WORLD MEANS NOTHING HERE!

"IT'S JUST A MASK," YOU SAID.

"IT'S JUST A HUMAN MASK HE'S WEARING..."

SOUND FAMILIAR, JAMES?

"UNDERNEATH THAT MASK IS A MONSTER."

HA! NO MORE ILLUSIONS, BRUCE!

YOU'RE BECOMING ME NOW, SO I'LL LET YOU IN ON THE KEY TO IT ALL.



RAHHH!

WHAT IS A BAT, BRUCE?



I ASKED YOU A QUESTION! WHAT IS A BA--



SHUT UP!

SIR, THE ENERGY HAS PEAKED!

OUR BRUCE WAYNE IS ABOUT TO COME THROUGH THE PORTAL! BUT YOUR CELLS--

STICK TO THE PLAN!

BUT, SIR, YOU'RE DOWN TO ONE PERCENT...





...YOU'RE
ALMOST ALL
HIM!

A BAT IS
THE ONLY MAMMAL
ON THE PLANET
THAT CAN FLY.

IT LEARNED TO
RISE ABOVE ALL OTHER
CREATURES LIKE IT BY EMBRACING
ITS STRENGTHS, ITS TRUE NATURE,
ITS URGES. THE BAT SHOWS US
HOW TO EVOLVE, BRUCE.
HOW TO WIN!

SEE, EVERY
SINGLE VERSION OF US I
PULLED THROUGH, THE HAPPIEST
VERSIONS, THEY'RE ALL **SELFISH**.
THEY GAVE UP ON IDEALS TO
COMPROMISE...TO WIN.
THEY ARE **BATS**!

BUT YOU...YOU
HOLD PEOPLE'S FEET TO
THE @#%&*! DIRT.

SO YOU CAN
BRING FORTH WHATEVER
VERSION OF US YOU
CHOOSE.

HELL, YOU
DON'T KNOW A SINGLE
VERSION OF BRUCE
WAYNE THAT WAS, IS, OR
WILL EVER BE...TRULY
HAPPY.

...

I KNOW
ONE.



"...IT'S
MINE."



HE DOESN'T
BELIEVE IN YOU,
JAMES! HE DOESN'T
LOVE YOU!

STOP
SAYING
THAT!

TAK



YOU KNOW
I'M RIGHT!

UHH!



WHAT THE
HELL DO YOU KNOW
ABOUT *LOVE*?! I LOVE MY SON
WITH EVERY DAMN BONE IN MY
BODY! I LOVE HIM WHETHER
HE'S *GOOD* OR
HE'S...OR--



HA! OR
WHAT?!

YOU CAN'T
EVEN *SAY* IT.
A PSYCHOPATH.
A KILLER. A
MONSTER...

...YOU CAN'T SAY
IT BECAUSE IT'S WHAT
YOU BELIEVE.

IT'S WHAT *EVERYONE*
BELIEVES ABOUT YOU, JAMES.
WHAT THEY'LL *ALWAYS*
BELIEVE.

YOU KNOW IT.
DEEP DOWN, YOU DO. SO
GIVE YOUR FATHER WHAT HE
WANTS. GIVE THEM *ALL* WHAT
THEY WANT. YOU WERE
HAPPIER THAT WAY, YOU
WERE PERFECT.

DON'T LISTEN
TO...GAK-
TO HIM, JAMES!
PLEASE! PLEASE
HELP ME!



JAMES...
-KOFF-
PLEASE! I
LOVE YOU! I
-KOFF---

--JAMES!



OH NO...NO,
JAMES -GAK-
PLEASE! I WAS
WRONG!



NO.
YOU
WEREN'T.



"YOU THOUGHT THE
BOY WAS YOUR
ACE, EH?"



THAT I'D GO
AFTER HIM FOR
MY SERUM?

I WON'T
LET YOU NEAR
HIM!

FINE,
BECAUSE I DON'T
NEED HIM.

WHAT ARE
YOU--

AGH!

HEH. GET READY TO
LAUGH, BRUCE...BECAUSE
FOR ALL THE DARK TRUTHS
I'VE SHOWN YOU...

THUNK

UHH!

...ABOUT YOU,
ABOUT YOUR
CITY...I'M GOING
TO SHOW YOU A
FUNNY ONE
RIGHT NOW.

BRUCE, YOUR
LEVELS, CAN YOU
HEAR ME?! I SEE
NO HEALTHY
BLOOD CELLS
LEFT! NONE!

SEE, THE HAPPIEST
BRUCE WAYNE IN ALL
OF EXISTENCE ISN'T THAT
BOY, OR ANY BRUCE I
BROUGHT THROUGH,
EITHER...

...NO, THE
HAPPIEST BRUCE WAYNE--
THE ONE I'LL USE FOR THE
LAST BIT OF MY SERUM--IS
THE VERSION WHO FINALLY
LETS GO OF HIS SADNESS,
HIS MISTAKEN IDEALS...

...AND BECOMES
WHO HE WAS
ALWAYS MEANT TO
BE...THE TRUE BAT
OF GOTHAM.

MEANING, THE
HAPPIEST BRUCE IN
EXISTENCE...

NO!



...IS YOU,
RIGHT AT
THIS VERY
MOMENT...

...RIGHT
NOW. WHEN
YOU BECOME...
ME.

AND I HEAR
IT THEN...THE
TERRIBLE
SOUND.

AS THE CITY
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