






# **The Batman Who Laughs, Part 7**





HAVE YOU EVER HAD A  
MOMENT WHEN SOMETHING  
THAT SEEMED SO  
COMPLICATED SUDDENLY  
JUST...MADE SENSESSE?

WHEN YOU JUST  
GOT IT?!

BECAUSE I  
SEE NOW...HA!

HAPPINESSSSSSSS!

TRUE HAPPINESS IS  
WHEN YOU BECOME  
THE PERSON YOU  
WERE ALWAYS  
MEANT TO BE.

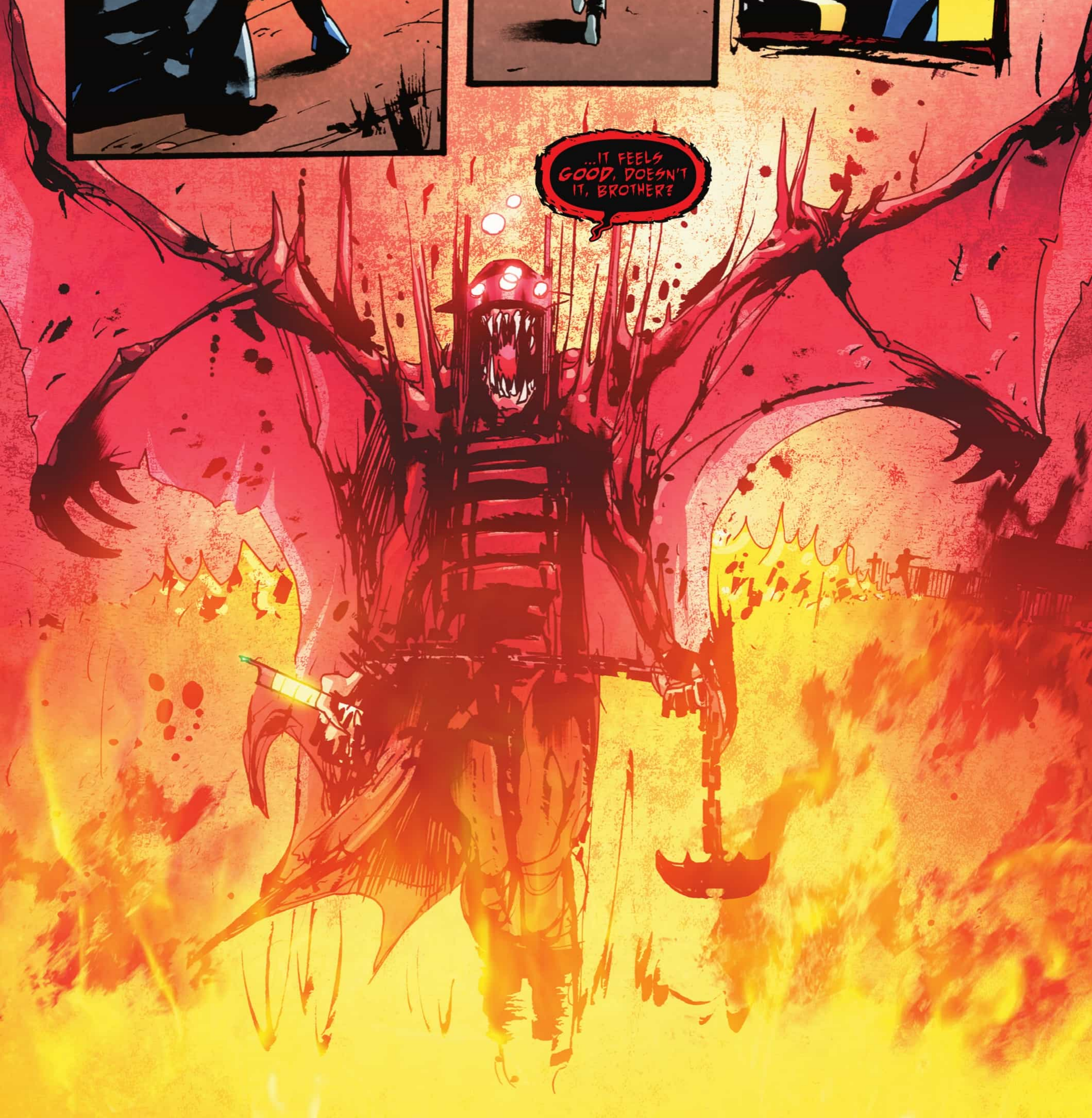
WHEN YOU STOP  
FIGHTING AND  
JUST...ACCEPT IT.

WHEN YOU  
THROW OFF THE  
ILLUSIONS, THE  
MASKS...AND  
JUST...BE  
YOURSELF.

AND FOR ME THAT  
MOMENT, IS RIGHT...

...NOW.









YESSSSSS...

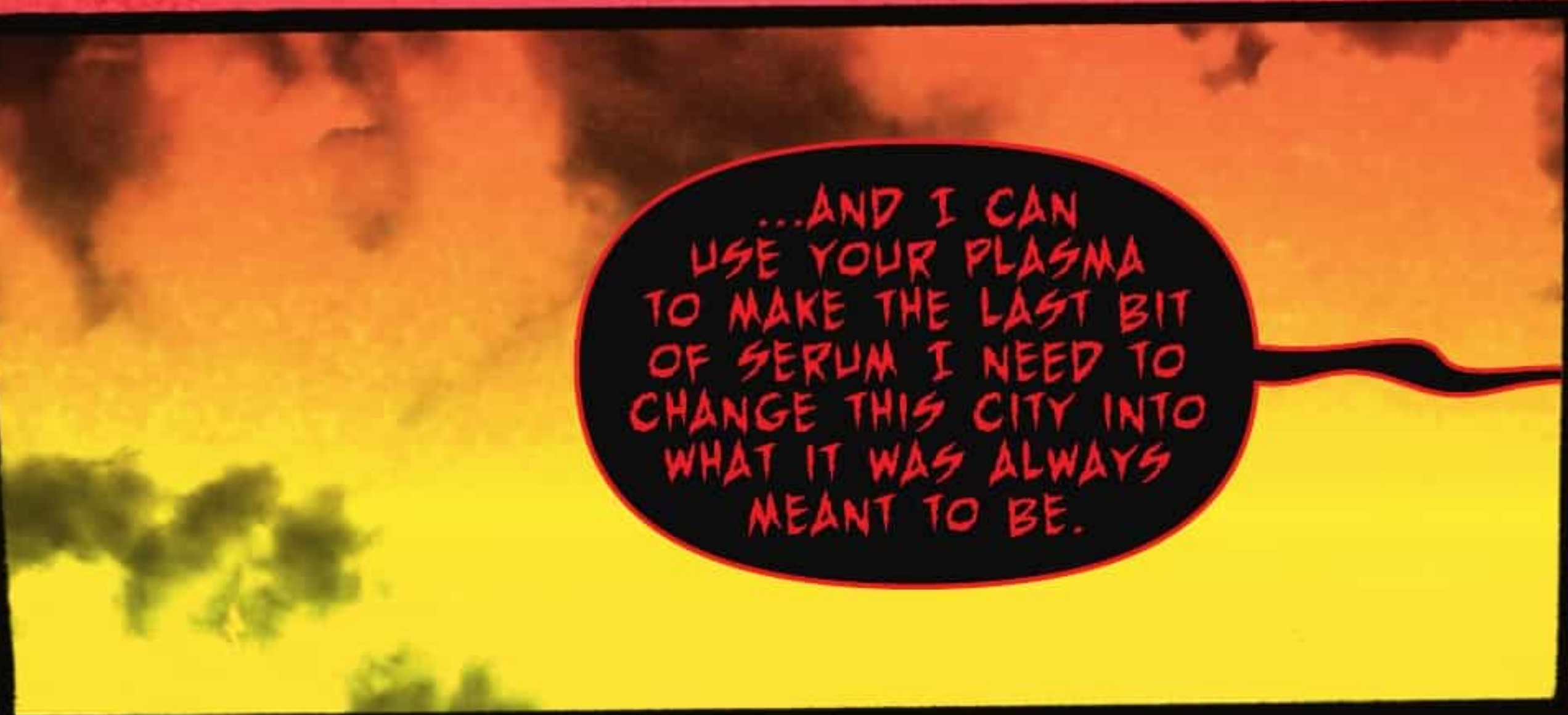


AND YOU  
THOUGHT I WAS  
THE BAD GUY...  
HA!



ONCE THE  
LIGHT ON THIS  
SYRINGE SHOWS  
RED...

...IT MEANS  
YOUR BLOOD IS  
MY BLOOD...



...AND I CAN  
USE YOUR PLASMA  
TO MAKE THE LAST BIT  
OF SERUM I NEED TO  
CHANGE THIS CITY INTO  
WHAT IT WAS ALWAYS  
MEANT TO BE.



BUT...  
IT MEANS  
SOMETHING  
ELSE, TOO.





HAHA! THAT'S RIGHT, MY FRIEND. I'M AFRAID WHEN THAT LIGHT GOES RED...

...IT'S GOOD-BYE.



"THERE'S NO HAPPY ENDING COMING..."



...NO  
LAST-MINUTE  
ESCAPE THIS  
TIME, JIM.

NO! FOR  
YEARS YOU KEPT  
HIM DOWN WITH YOUR  
FALSE MORALS,  
YOUR *RULES*...

=KOFF=  
JAMES! I'M  
BEGGING  
YOU TO--  
=ACK=

...



...BUT NO MORE! YOUR KNEE IS OFF HIS  
THROAT, OFF *MY* THROAT, OFF THE THROAT  
OF THIS WHOLE DAMN CITY--



WAIT, *THIS*  
KNEE?

=UNH=



=KOFF  
KOFF=

THE *KNIFE*,  
JAMES!

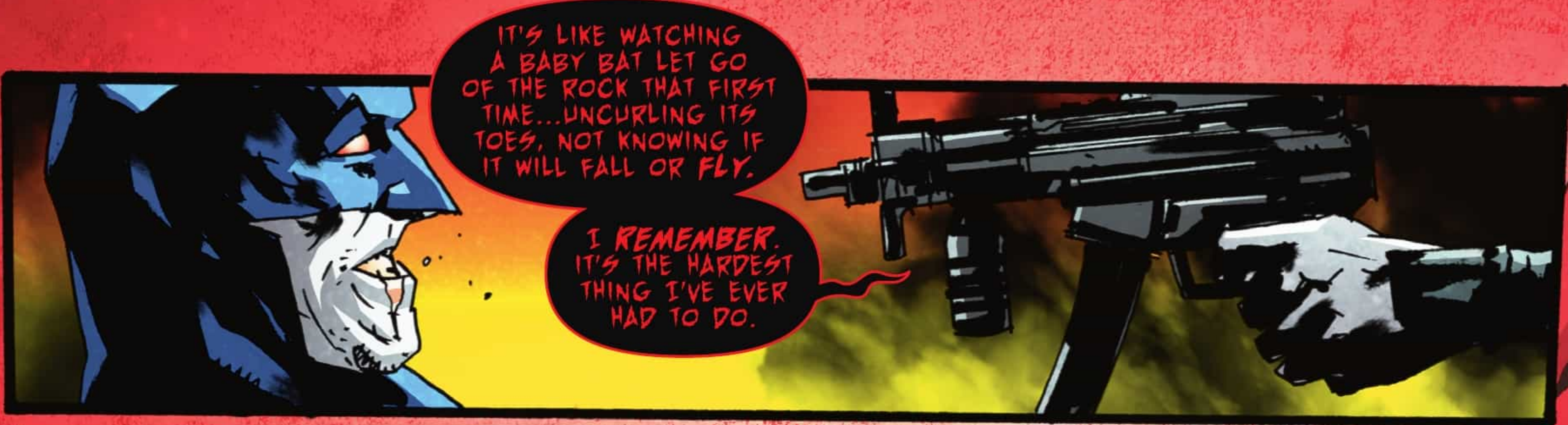


HE'S  
GOING FOR  
THE KNIFE!

GET IT  
FOR ME!

"I'M SO PROUD  
OF YOU."





IT'S LIKE WATCHING  
A BABY BAT LET GO  
OF THE ROCK THAT FIRST  
TIME...UNCURLING ITS  
TOES, NOT KNOWING IF  
IT WILL FALL OR FLY.

I REMEMBER.  
IT'S THE HARDEST  
THING I'VE EVER  
HAD TO DO.



THE  
ONLY THING  
HARDER...

...IS WHAT I'M  
ABOUT TO DO.



"BUT TO PASS A TORCH TO  
THE NEXT GENERATION..."



GET IT, JAMES!  
I'LL BE THIS CITY'S  
BATMAN. YOU'LL BE  
MY ALLY! SOMETHING  
**BETTER** THAN A  
@!#\$~% ROBIN. BE  
MY CROW. BE MY  
**BIRD OF  
DEATH!**



"...TO LIVE ON  
THROUGH YOUR  
PROGENY?"



THAT'S THE  
BIGGEST WIN  
OF ALL, AM I  
RIGHT?







**BLAM**

YOU ALMOST HAD ME, BRUCE. LET ME GUESS. YOU KNEW ANY SYRINGE I BROUGHT WITH ME WOULD BE WAYNE TECH.

SO YOU RIGGED A CHARGE IN YOUR SUIT TO TURN THE LIGHT RED, WHEN IN REALITY...

...IT'D STILL BE GREEN. HAHA!

TIK

NOW, I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU'RE NOT CHANGING ALL THE WAY, BUT I DON'T CARE ANYMORE.

SEE, I WAS THE BEST FRIEND YOU'VE EVER HAD, BRUCE. BUT NOW...

"...NOW I'M JUST GOING TO #@!%& KILL YOU."

YOU WANT ME TO...

HA. NO, I HAVE A BETTER IDEA...

BEEP.



...LET'S  
MAKE HIM  
THE *FIRST*  
ONE.

"SEE, JIM, RIGHT NOW THE  
*DRONES* ARE ON THEIR  
WAY HERE TO ACQUIRE  
WHAT THEY *THINK* IS AN  
ANTITOXIN FROM THE  
RESERVOIR TO SPRAY  
ACROSS THE CITY...

"...BUT THAT  
ANTITOXIN IS  
OUR *SERUM*."

"ALL ANYONE HAS TO DO IS  
INGEST IT...DRINK IT IN, AND  
THEY WILL BECOME THEIR  
BEST, *DARKEST SELVES*."

HERE, JIM,  
HAVE A *SIP*!

=GURGGGLE=

SORRY, BRUCE,  
BUT YOU LOSE  
AGAIN! HAH!

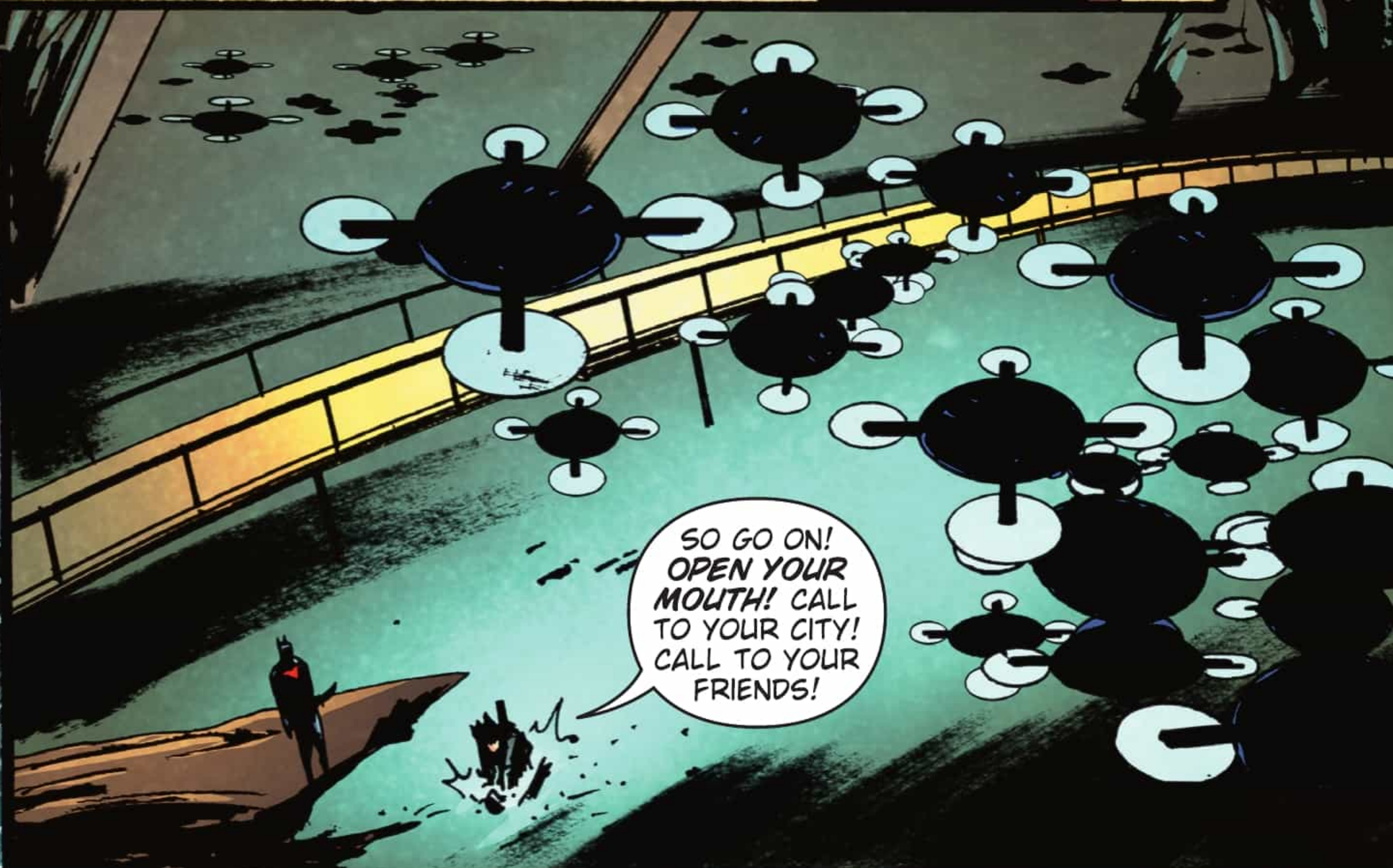
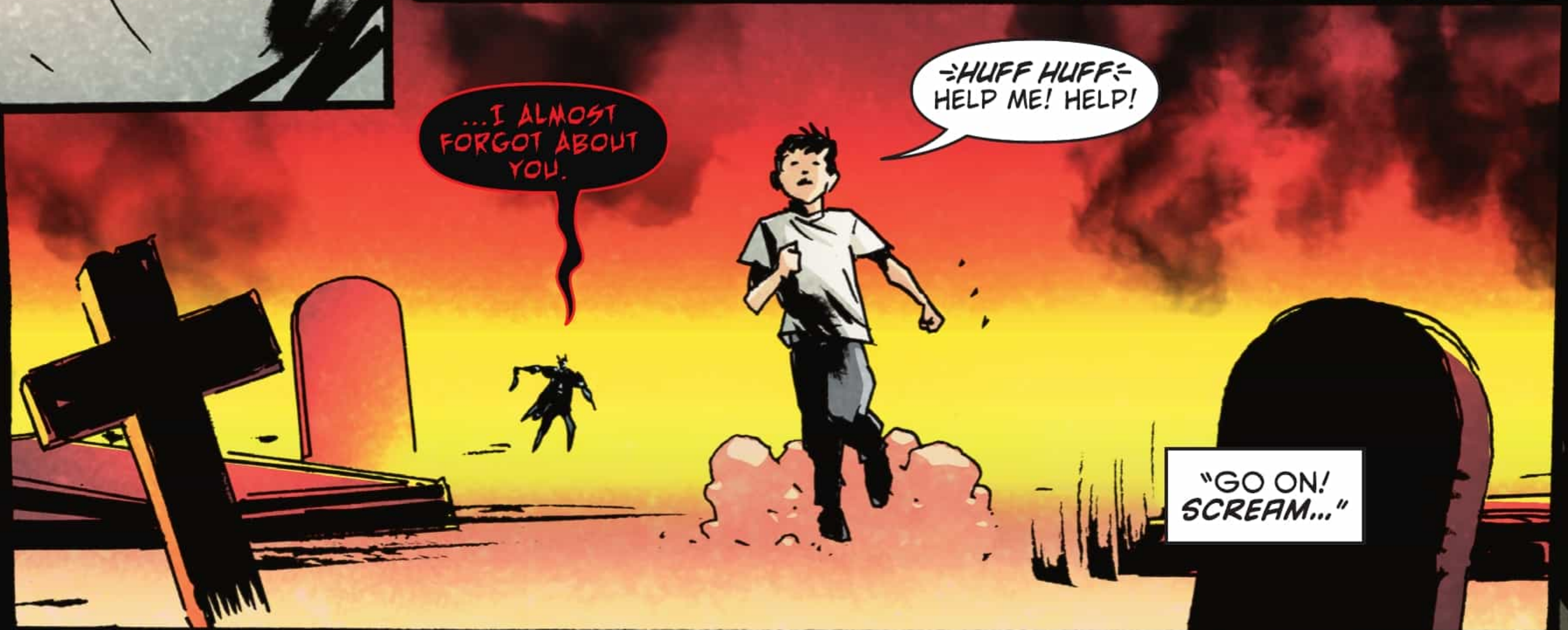
**BLAM**

**AGH!**

SEE, I *WILL*  
CHANGE THIS WHOLE  
CITY. KNOW THAT AS  
YOU DIE. BECAUSE IF  
YOU WON'T GIVE ME  
WHAT I NEED TO  
COMPLETE THE *SERUM*,  
I'LL JUST BRING  
ANOTHER BRUCE  
WAYNE HERE, AND--

**NO!**













DIE,  
DEMON!

**DIE!**

**DIE!**

DIE AND  
GO BACK TO  
THE HELL  
YOU CAME  
FROM!

**CLIK  
CLIK  
CLIK**

**BLAM  
BLAM  
BLAM**

**BLAM**



HEH.  $\geq$ KOFF  
KOFF $\leq$  YOU  
NEARLY HAD ME,  
ALFRED. JUST A  
COUPLE MORE  
SHOTS...

...YOU KNOW, I  
NEVER TOLD YOU  
HOW YOU DIED ON  
MY WORLD.

SHUT  
YOUR--

YOU WERE THE LAST  
ONE I FACED. AFTER EVERYONE  
ELSE. YOU WERE TOUGH, TOO.  
YOU RIGGED THE CAVE, THE  
VEHICLES, ALL  
TO KILL ME.

TRUTH IS, YOU  
**WOULD** HAVE WON...  
BUT THEN I MANAGED TO  
CONVINCE YOU THERE WAS  
STILL GOOD IN ME. THAT YOUR  
LITTLE BOY WAS STILL  
ALIVE IN HERE...HEH.

THEN I TRAPPED YOU  
IN THE SUB-CAVES. FED YOU  
SCRAPS. WHISPERED TO YOU  
AT ALL HOURS...IT TOOK OVER  
A YEAR TO BREAK YOU. BUT  
BREAK YOU I DID!



SEE, THE  
JOKE IS, YOU'RE  
**NOT** DEAD ON  
MY WORLD.  
YOU'RE **STILL**  
MY FAITHFUL  
MANSERVANT.

MY MOST  
TRUSTED  
ALLY.

I'D...  
NEVER.



"HA! WE'LL SEE SOON ENOUGH, WON'T WE?"

"NOW GIVE ME THE BOY."

APPROACHING TARGETS.

NEVER! YOU STAY BACK, YOU...*ABOMINATION!*

YOU THINK YOU CAN *SAVE* HIM? YOU'VE NEVER SAVED ANY BRUCE W--

--AGH!

I'LL BE... WHY THE HELL AREN'T YOU *CHANGED?!*

JUST LUCKY I GUESSSSSS...

AH. WELL PLEASE TELL ME THIS WAS IT, YOUR BIG CONTINGENCY AFTER THE SYRINGE...

...LURING ME HERE SO ALFRED COULD SHOOT ME?

THIS WAS YOUR GREAT PLAN?!

NO. THIS WAS.



AFTER OUR FIRST ENCOUNTER, I SET TRAPS FOR YOU IN PLACES ONLY BRUCE WAYNE WOULD KNOW... CRIME ALLEY, THE CAVE, THE MANOR...*HERE*.

BECAUSE I KNEW YOU'D MAKE ANY FIGHT PERSONAL. FOR THE *SSSSSOUL* OF BATMAN.

WHIRRR

CHK

HEH, YOU THINK A FEW TASERS WILL--

THUNK

THUNK

THUNK

AAAGH!

DEPLETED URANIUM SHELL HARPOONS, ACTUALLY. MEANT FOR INCAPACITATING TANKS.

AND EVIL BATMEN.

"STILL, FOR ALL YOUR ATTACKS, ALL YOUR PLANS..."

DRONES EQUIPPED. PROCEEDING TO VACCINATION SITES.

...THE TRUTH IS, I PREPARED THE HARDEST TO DEFEND MYSELF AGAINST *YOUR ARGUMENT*. OF ALL THE BATMEN IN EXISTENCE, I'M THE LEAST HAPPY, LEAST EFFECTIVE... THE WORST.

BUT I JUST LOOKED INTO THE DARK MYSELF AND SAW HUNDREDS OF VERSIONS OF ME. AND THE THING I REALIZED...

...IS THAT BY THOSE STANDARDS, YOU'RE *RIGHT*. I AM THE WORST BATMAN OF ALL.





AND THE TRUTH...IT HURTS.

THOSE HARPOONS ARE HIGH VOLTAGE, BY THE WAY.

AAAGH!

ZZZZTTT



"IT'S THE HARDEST THING, WHEN SOMEONE MAKES YOU SEE WHAT YOU DON'T WANT TO SEE ABOUT YOURSELF."

DRINK! DRINK OR YOUR SON HERE WILL CUT A HOLE IN YOUR WINDPIPE! ISN'T THAT RIGHT, JAMES?!



RAHHH!

YOU ARE THE WORST, YOU'RE A @#!\$%^ JOKE! WE ALL LAUGH AT YOU!



THAT MAY BE. BUT YOU KNOW WHO'S A BIGGER JOKE THAN THE WORST BATMAN?

THE BATMAN HE BEATS. HEH.





≡GURGLE≡

AW...WHY  
AREN'T YOU  
LAUGHING?



THE DRONES ARE  
NEARLY OVER THE  
CITY BY NOW.

≡GAK≡

IF HE WON'T  
DRINK, JUST USE THE  
**KNIFE** ON HIM. GO ON,  
JAMES. AND TELL HIM  
HOW **GOOD** IT FEELS  
AS YOU DO!



**THUNK  
THUNK**

ALL RIGHT! YOU  
WANT TO KNOW,  
**DAD?! HOW IT  
FEELS?!**

**AGH!**  
WHAT ARE  
YOU--?



**HABA!**  
YOU WERE RIGHT  
ABOUT IT ALL,  
BROTHER! LETTING GO,  
IN THIS MOMENT...  
I FEEL SUCH  
HAPPINESS!



YOU  
REALLY  
WANT TO  
KNOW?!

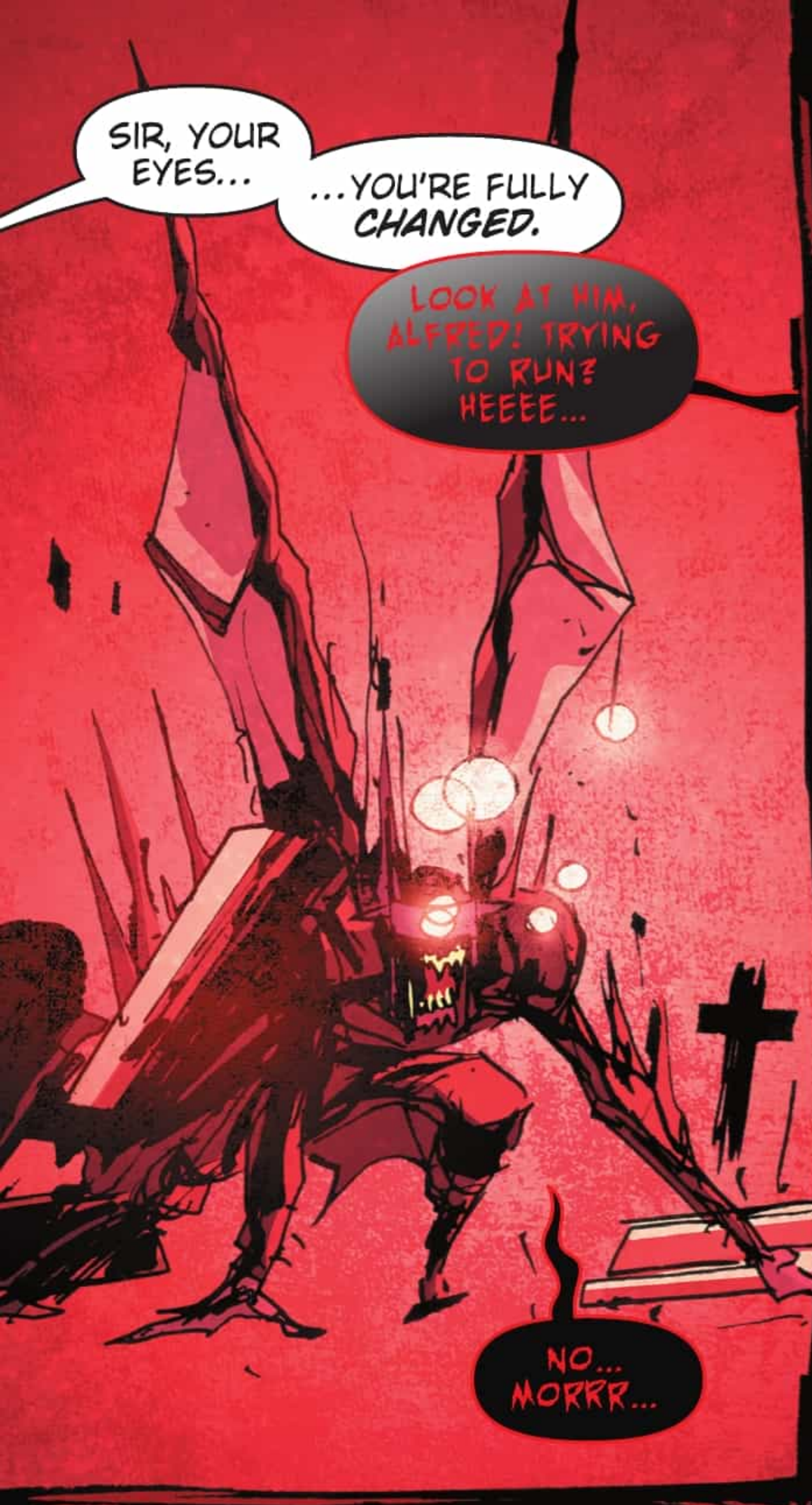
**THUNK**



**CRRACK**

...STOPPPP...  
PLEASSSSSSSE...





SIR, YOUR EYES...

...YOU'RE FULLY CHANGED.

LOOK AT HIM, ALFRED! TRYING TO RUN? HEEEE...

NO... MORRR...



PLEASE! YOU MUST COME BACK TO--

HANA! NO!



IT FEELS AMAZING!

THUNK THUNK



IT'S THE BEST FEELING IN THE @!#\$%^& WORLD.



INITIATE EMERGENCY DISSEMINATION...



EVERYONE NEEDS TO FEEL THIS WAY! YOU HEAR ME, GOTHAM?!

YOU HEAR ME?!



STOP! JAMES!



JAMES, IT'S TIME =>HUFF=< TO STOP!

HIS REMOTE... =>HUFF HUFF=<



CRACK CRACK

THANK YOU!

THANK YOU!

NNN...



THANK YO--

Hey, Bats...

COMEON COMEON--END!





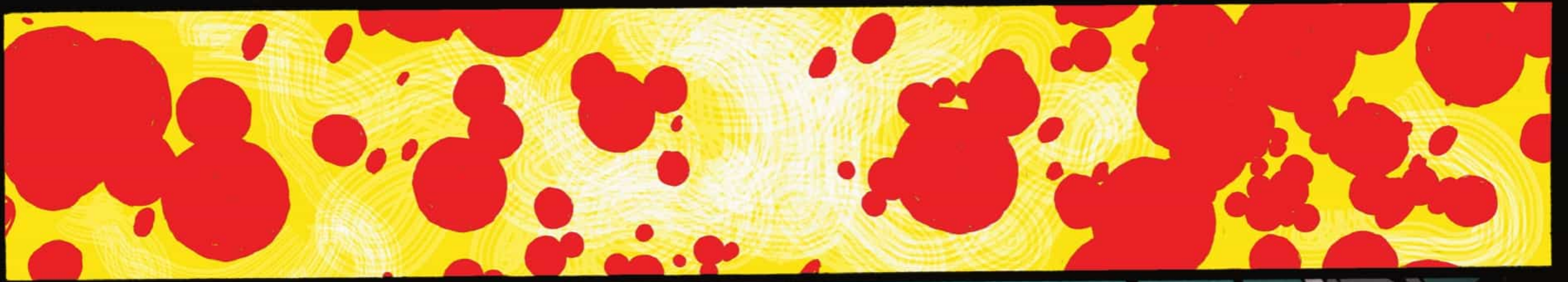
...you're welcome.

BLAM

ERROR. CIRCUIT BROKEN.

SYSTEM SHUT DOWN.





YOU'RE MELTING IT DOWN? GOOD. NO MORE PORTALS, NO MORE WINDOWS INTO... THAT PLACE. I'LL BE GLAD WHEN THE CITY IS STRIPPED OF ALL ITS *DARK METAL*.



AND YOU, SIR? THE *TRANSFUSION*? IT'S STILL HOLDING AFTER TWO WEEKS?



...SO FAR.

I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT. THE *BOY'S* BLOOD...

...IT WAS LIKE CORD PLASMA OR SOME KIND OF *EMBRYONIC STEM CELL*, BUT MADE FROM...*YOU*.



THE DARK MULTIVERSE IS A REACTIVE REALM. EVERY WORLD THERE IS CREATED FROM THE HOPES OR FEARS OF SOMEONE HERE.

IT'S LIKE A WOMB IN THAT WAY. BROUGHT HERE, WITHOUT ANY METAL GROUNDING, ITS BEINGS DIE. BUT...THE BOY? HE...?



I SENT HIM BACK, SIR. I MANAGED IT JUST BEFORE YOU WOKE.

BUT WHATEVER HAPPENED, WHATEVER THEY SAID, THEY SHOULD STAY *HOME*.

AND...I...I TOLD HIM THAT ON A NIGHT IN THE NEAR FUTURE HIS PARENTS WOULD SUGGEST THEY GO TO THE THEATER.

HEH. SO, I SAVED *ONE*, SIR. AT LEAST THAT'S SOMETHING, NO?

IT IS.





AND, SIR, I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I'M **PROUD** OF YOU. WHATEVER THAT VILE TOXIN WAS...

...YOU STAYED YOURSELF. YOU STAYED **BATMAN**. BY FORCE OF **WILL** YOU--

WHEN JOKER WOKE HERE WITH YOU, HE KEPT SAYING **ONE** THING: **YOU'RE BREAKING MY HEART**.

IN ANCIENT TIMES, THE COURT JESTER WITH THE **SLOWEST** WIT OFTEN WORE A BROKEN HEART INSIGNIA.

"HEARTBREAKER" IS ALSO A TERM FOR A JOKE THAT'S FUNNY, BUT TAKES **TOO LONG** TO LAND.

**HELL**, THE FACT THAT HE WAS ABLE TO **FUNCTION** GIVEN ALL THE DRUGS YOU PUMPED INTO HIM... ALL OF IT SUGGESTED HE'D ADDED SOME KIND OF **MASKED DECELERATION AGENT**.

TO GIVE ME JUST ENOUGH TIME.

NOT BY FORCE OF **WILL**, ALFRED. BY A SLEIGHT OF HAND.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

**JOKER**. I KNEW HE'D LIKELY **RIGGED** THE ORIGINAL TOXIN IN HIS HEART BEFORE ALL THIS TO **GIVE** ME MORE TIME **THAN** ANYONE ASSUMED.

SIR, I, LISTEN TO ME, THAT'S NOT--



NO, SIR, YOU WON BECAUSE YOU REMAINED TRUE UNTIL THOSE LAST MOMENTS. SO CONTRARY TO EVERYTHING YOU SAID ABOUT BEING THE **WORST** OF THEM--

I **MEANT** WHAT I SAID, ALFRED.



WHAT?

I MEANT EVERY **WORD**. WHAT I SAW WHEN I STOOD HERE AND STARED INTO THE DARK...ALL THOSE VERSIONS OF ME...THE ONES WHO IMPRESS THEIR WILL ON THE CITY, ON THE **PEOPLE**...

...THE ONES WHO GIVE UP **BATMAN** FOR LOVE OR AMBITION OR GRANDER PLANS FOR CHANGE...



...THEY **ARE** MORE EFFECTIVE IN CHANGING THIS CITY. AND THEY'RE HAPPIER.

SIR--

NO, THE HARD TRUTH IS THEY'RE LIKELY **BETTER** BATMEN THAN ME FOR GOTHAM, A CITY THAT WAS BUILT ON SECRET PLANS FOR CONQUEST, FOR **WINNING**. I THOUGHT GOTHAM WAS ONE THING...BUT IT'S JUST NOT.

MAYBE EVERYONE WOULD BE HAPPIER WITH **THEM** AS HEROES. HAPPIER UNDER THAT **SERUM**, WITH THE WHOLE BURDEN OF GOODNESS JUST...**GONE**.



"YOU CAN'T BE SAYING..."

"I'M SAYING HE'S NOT *WRONG* ABOUT US, ALFRED. THAT MONSTER, LOCKED AWAY IN THE DUNGEON OF THE *HALL OF JUSTICE*...HE'S *RIGHT*."

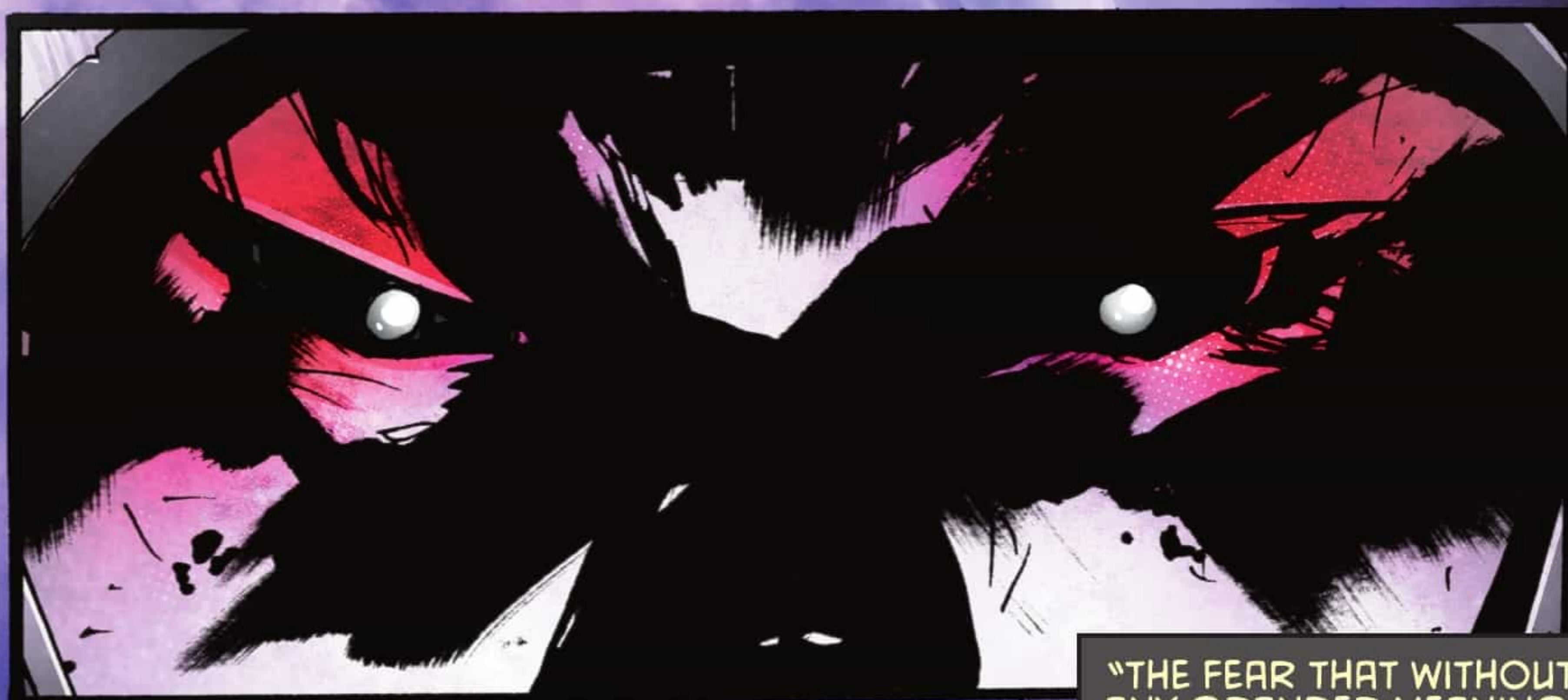
"HE'S A NIGHTMARE, NOTHING MORE."

"A NIGHTMARE IS BUILT ON *TRUTH*."

"THAT'S *JOKER* TALKING. HE IS YOUR FEAR THAT THE JOKER IS RIGHT ABOUT THE WORLD, THAT'S ALL."

"NO, JOKER SAYS THAT TO *ACCEPT* THAT THERE'S NO MEANING IN YOUR ACTIONS IS TO WIN. I SAY, TO *BELIEVE* THERE IS MEANING IN *ALL* YOUR ACTIONS IS TO WIN."

"THAT DEMON, WHAT HE SAYS IS THAT THERE IS *NO MEANING* IN YOUR ACTIONS, THEREFORE THE ONLY MEANINGFUL ACT IS TO WIN. HE IS THE FEAR THAT WE'RE *BOTH* RIGHT, JOKER AND I."



"THE FEAR THAT WITHOUT ANY GRANDER MEANING, AT HEART WE ARE COLD, ANIMALISTIC, SELFISH THINGS."

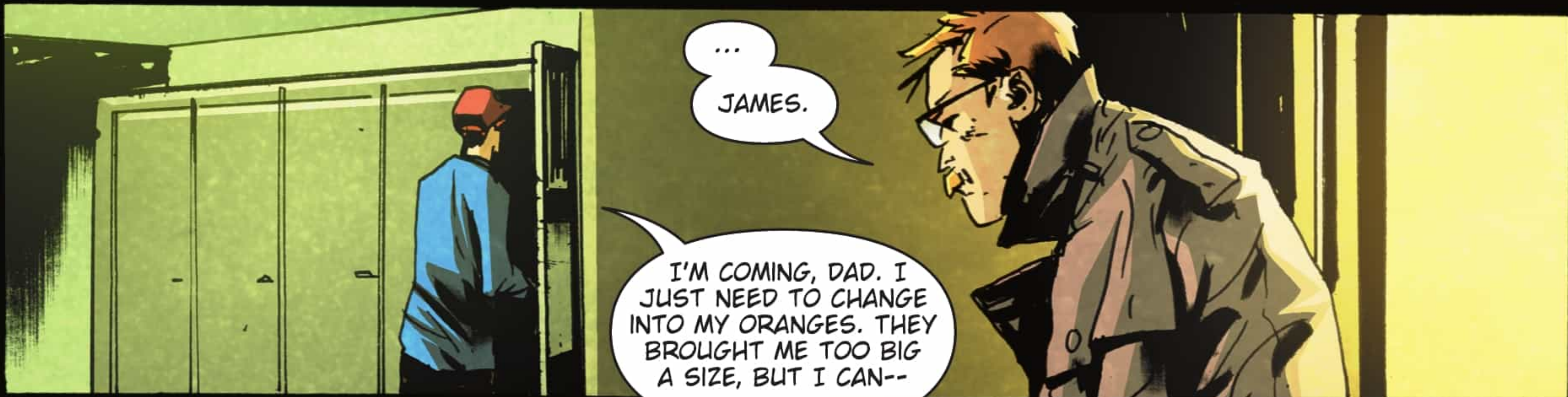




"THEN IF HE'S RIGHT  
WHERE IS THE **BLOODY**  
**HOPE** IN *ANY* OF THIS?"

"WHERE IS  
THE **LIGHT**?"

"SIR?"



...

JAMES.

I'M COMING, DAD. I  
JUST NEED TO CHANGE  
INTO MY ORANGES. THEY  
BROUGHT ME TOO BIG  
A SIZE, BUT I CAN--



JUST, LISTEN.  
THEY'RE...  
THEY'RE NOT  
TAKING YOU  
BACK.

I CALLED IN AND  
THE TRUTH IS... I WANT  
THIS TO CONTINUE. I WANT  
YOU TO KEEP GOING. WHERE  
YOU ARE ALREADY, IT'S...  
A **GOOD** THING.



DAD... SO YOU KNOW, I'M  
NOT WHERE I WANTED  
YOU TO THINK I WAS,  
NOT YET.

IT **WAS**  
PARTLY A  
MASK.

I MEAN,  
I'M... I'M  
NOT THERE  
YET.

HEH.  
SO YOU  
KNOW, SON,  
NEITHER  
AM I.

BUT YOU'RE  
TRYING. AND  
SO AM I. AND  
SO IS  
EVERYONE.





"WHERE IS THE  
LIGHT, ALFRED?"

"I DON'T KNOW, I'VE  
BEEN WRESTLING WITH  
THAT A LOT LATELY..."

"BUT THE BATMAN WHO  
LAUGHS SPOKE ABOUT  
LEARNING FROM A BAT."



"HE SAID THAT A BAT,  
BEING THE ONLY  
MAMMAL THAT CAN FLY,  
IS AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT  
WE CAN ACHIEVE IF WE  
*EMBRACE* OUR PRIMAL  
NATURE."

"BUT MAYBE IT'S THE  
OPPOSITE. I MEAN, LOOK  
AT A DAMN BAT."

"A BAT ISN'T DESIGNED  
FOR FLIGHT THE WAY A  
BIRD IS, WITH HOLLOW  
BONES AND FEATHERED  
WINGS."

"FOR WINGS IT  
USES ITS OWN FLESH,  
STRETCHED BETWEEN  
FINGERS THAT REACH  
TOO FAR."



"A BAT'S FLIGHT  
IS ABOUT  
*DEFYING* WHAT  
COMES  
NATURALLY,  
ACHIEVING  
WHAT'S *HARD*..."

"...WHAT'S PAINFUL,  
BUT *SUBLIME*."





"AND FOR BETTER OR WORSE, THAT'S BATMAN. ISN'T IT? HE SAYS DEFY YOUR NATURE--DEFY *EVERYTHING*--TO BE BETTER THAN YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE. DAY AFTER DAY, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT.

"I THINK I'VE *ALWAYS* KNOWN THAT. AT LEAST I KNEW IT WHEN I WAS THAT BOY, RUNNING IN THE YARD.

"HAPPY IN THE ARMS OF PEOPLE I WANTED TO BE LIKE WHEN I GREW UP. SO THANK YOU, ALFRED.

"BECAUSE THE TRUTH IS BATMAN ISN'T ABOUT KNOWING *WHO* YOU ARE, BUT WHO YOU *WANT* TO BE, AND IN YOUR WAY, YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN THERE TELLING ME SO."

"I'M BLUSHING, SIR...BUT I WANT YOU TO KNOW SOMETHING. WHAT I WAS TRYING TO SAY EARLIER...I *TESTED* THE TOXIN THAT CHANGED YOU AND FOUND *NO* DECELERATING AGENT IN IT."

"THAT'S... IMPOSSIBLE."

"IS IT? MAYBE YOU DIDN'T CHANGE BECAUSE...WELL, BECAUSE YOU'RE *BATMAN*."

"ALFRED..."

"NO ONE HATES THAT CLOWN MORE THAN I DO. BUT...BUT WHAT BETTER *JOKE* TO PLAY, IN THE END, THAN TO TAKE *CREDIT* FOR SOMETHING BATMAN ACHIEVED *HIMSELF*?"

HEH.





"COME NOW, SIR,  
THAT'S THE BEST  
YOU CAN DO?"

"I MEAN, I KNOW,  
I KNOW...BATMAN  
DOESN'T *LAUGH*,  
BUT STILL."

SORRY,  
SORRY!

HEY,  
WATCH IT,  
MAN!



"I'M LAUGHING  
ON THE *INSIDE*,  
OLD FRIEND..."

"...ON THE  
*INSIDE*."



COMMISSIONER,  
ARE YOU *OKAY*?  
YOU DON'T LOOK  
SO GOOD.

FINE,  
CADET, FINE.  
IN FACT...



...NEVER  
BETTER.

THE HORROR CONTINUES IN  
**BATMAN/SUPERMAN**