



ANNIVERSARY

ISSUE • 400

400
OCT. 86

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COMICS
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AUTHORITY

BATMAN®

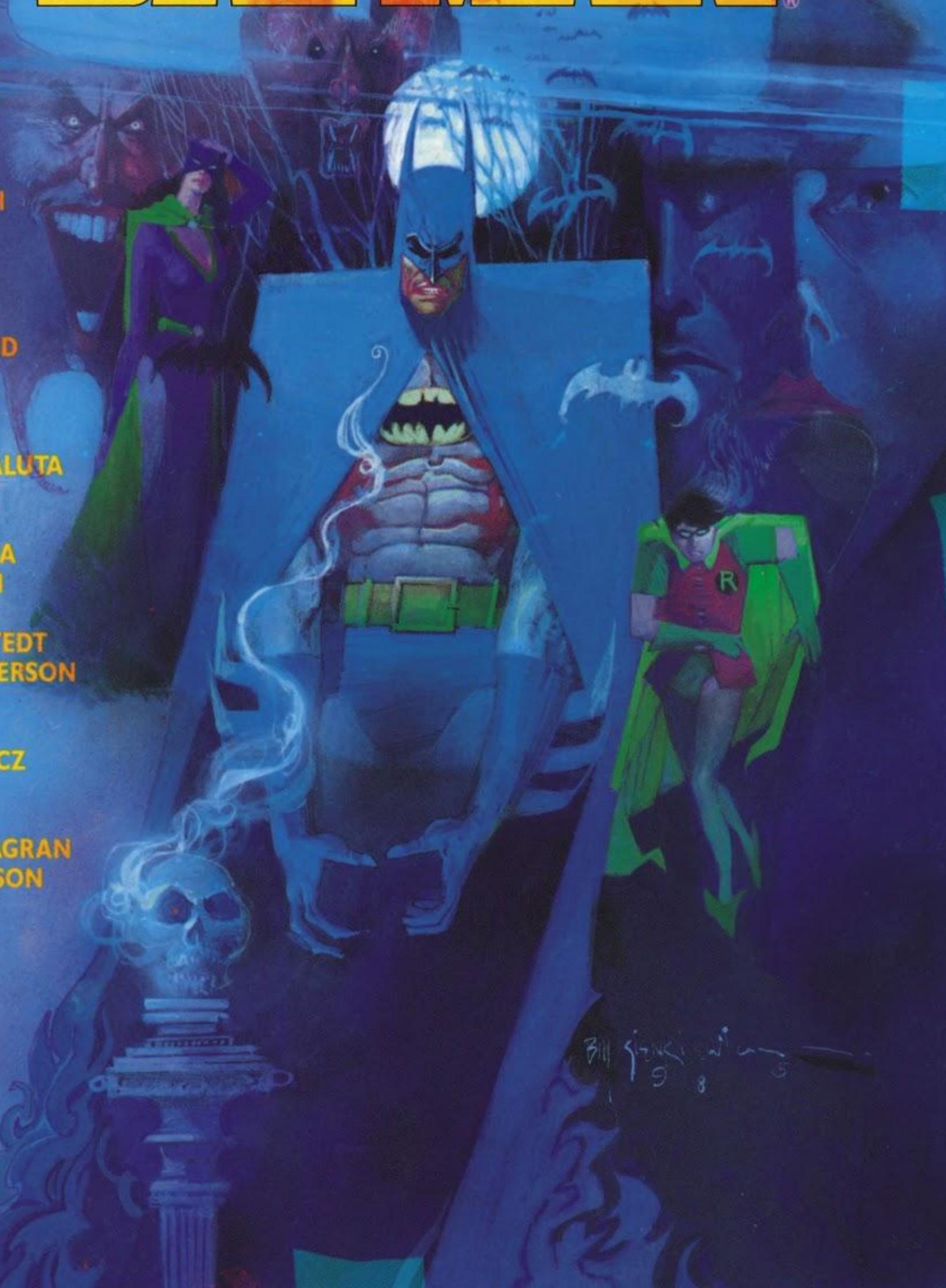
Special
introduction by
STEPHEN KING

Written by
DOUG MOENCH

Illustrated by
ART ADAMS
TERRY AUSTIN
BRIAN BOLLAND
JOHN BYRNE
PARIS CULLINS
MIKE GRELL
MICHAEL W. KALUTA
KARL KESEL
JOE KUBERT
STEVE LEIALOHA
RICK LEONARDI
STEVE LIGHTLE
LARRY MAHLSTEDT
BRUCE D. PATTERSON
GEORGE PEREZ
STEVE RUDE
BILL SIENKIEWICZ
KEN STEACY
TOM SUTTON
RICARDO VILLAGRAN
BERNI WRIGHTSON



Bill Sienkiewicz



W H Y I C H O S E B A T M A N

BY
STEPHEN
KING



When I was a kid there were certain questions which came up and *bad* to be answered...or at least *aired*, if finding a conclusive answer proved impossible.

One was whether or not you thought Don Larsen's World Series no-hitter was skill, fate, or just dumb luck.

Another concerned whatever was at the center of golf balls. I mean, we all knew what was under the pocky white surface: billions of rubber bands. But there was *something else* at the very center, some liquid that was believed by some to be the world's deadliest poison, by others a substance so corrosive it would almost immediately eat your fingers down to the bone, by still others a substance that would explode if you dripped it on hot pavement.

There was the question of why all the Disney characters wore gloves; of whether or not there even *was* such a thing as a complete set of the *green* Davy Crockett trading cards (the *red* ones were easy, but the green ones were weirdly scarce); if you would come out in China upside down if it was really possible to dig all the way through the earth to the other side.

These were questions asked and answered after you were too tired to swim out to the raft anymore and had crashed out on the beach, or when you were walking home from the baseball field in summer's sweet dusk with your feet burning inside your sneakers, or before you fell asleep on camp-outs.

And one of them was always this: Who do you like better, Superman or Batman?

I always chose Batman.

I guess some of my childhood friends don't really remember either the comic books or the question anymore, but I'm relieved to say that I never grew up completely, only grew more hair on various parts of my body and a sense of responsibility on my heart, and have friends who did the same: we love our wives and kids, do our jobs, but we also still read the comics. And I *still* choose Batman.

This is not to say I didn't dig Superman; let me reassure all of you out there howling for my blood (including the editors, writers, and inkers who would give their lives, their honor, and their sacred paychecks to protect the image and good name of the Man of Steel) that I dug him a lot. You couldn't *not* dig him because he was a good guy (and, contrary to the beliefs of some curmudgeons both then and now, kids feel a natural attraction for the good

guys...thank God), because he had all those neat powers, because he had such a fetching array of foes to battle (including that little munchkin with the unpronounceable name—except we all used to pronounce it *Mixtaplik*—and to send him back into the fourth dimension you tricked him into saying *Kilpatzim*, or something like that), because he had such great friends (including Perry White, who was J.

Jonah Jameson long before the Webslinger-to-Be had graduated from diapers to training pants).

But there was something about Superman that I always found a little...let me see. Not disappointing, that's not what I mean, but—wait, I got it. *Pre-ordained*. He was too *strong* for me, too *capable*, maybe because I was a little kid who wore thick glasses, or maybe just because the concept of invulnerability made him seem to be a hero who had an unfair advantage (being good should always be harder than being bad). Take super-breath, for example. Is it fair to just be able to *blow* Metropolis back into place after Lex Luthor has sent it out into the Atlantic on nuclear-power jets? Maybe, but me, I had some trouble with the concept. He had his Achilles' heel, of course, but it was (at least until editors began to confuse the issue with red Kryptonite, yellow Kryptonite, and for all I know pistachio Kryptonite) a very small one.

Batman, however, was just a guy.

A *rich* guy, yes.

A *strong* guy, granted.

A *smart* guy, you bet.

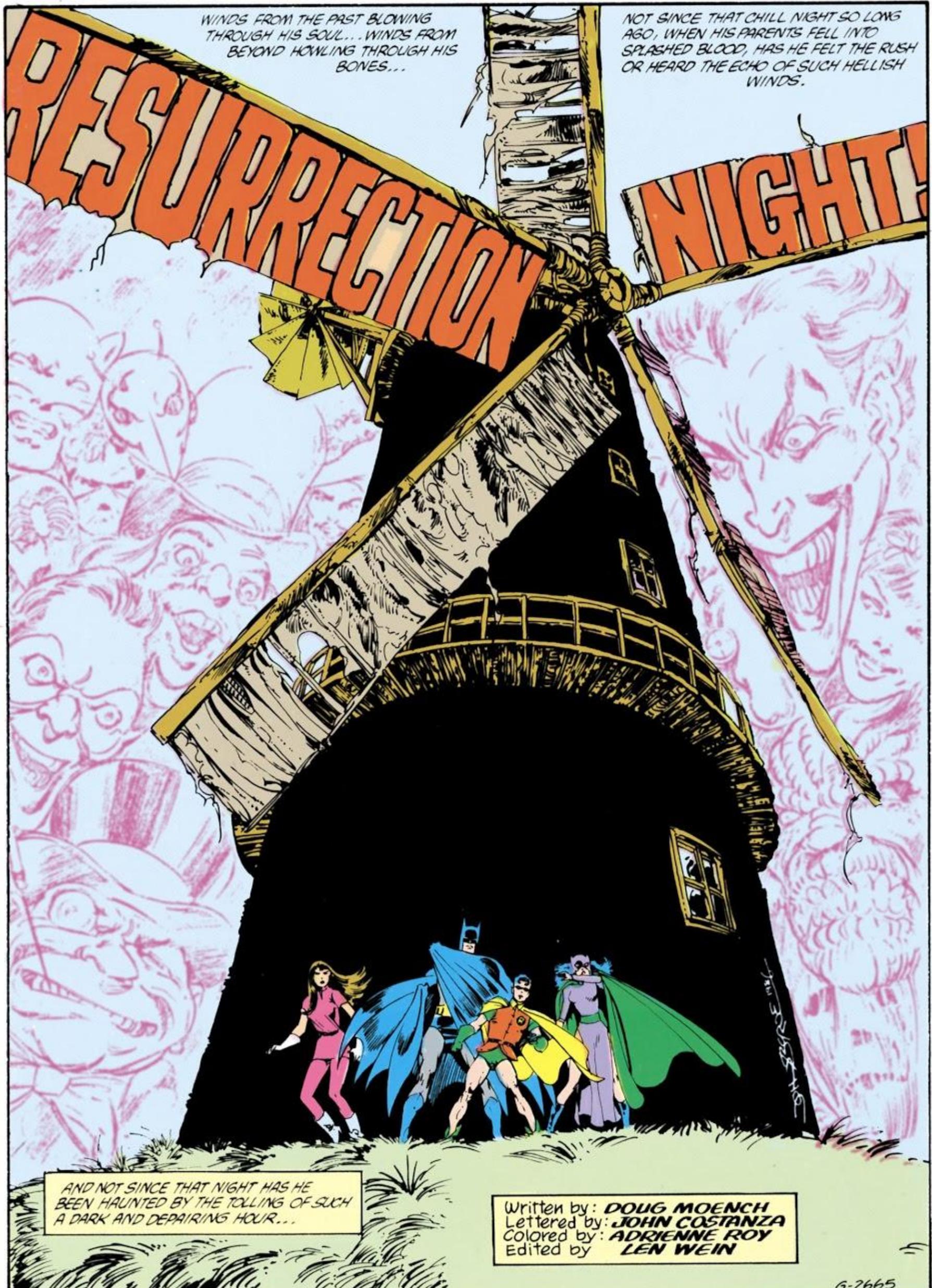
But...he couldn't *fly*.

I think that formed my preference more than anything else. I remember the ads for the first Superman movie (remember the *first* Superman movie, gang? Back there when the world was young and dinosaurs walked the earth?), the ones that said YOU'LL BELIEVE A MAN CAN FLY. Well, I didn't. Not in the movie and not completely in the comic books (ironically, the closest I ever came to believing it was in the TV series). But when Batman swung down into The Joker's hideout on a rope or stopped The Penguin from dropping Robin into a bucket of boiling hog-fat with a well-thrown Batarang, I *believed*. These were not *likely* things, I freely grant you that, but they were *possible* things. I could believe in a Caped Crusader who swung on ropes, threw boomerangs with deadly accuracy, and drove like Richard Petty getting a pregnant woman to the hospital.

Super-breath was hard to believe in, but a guy

WINDS FROM THE PAST BLOWING
THROUGH HIS SOUL... WINDS FROM
BEYOND HOWLING THROUGH HIS
BONES...

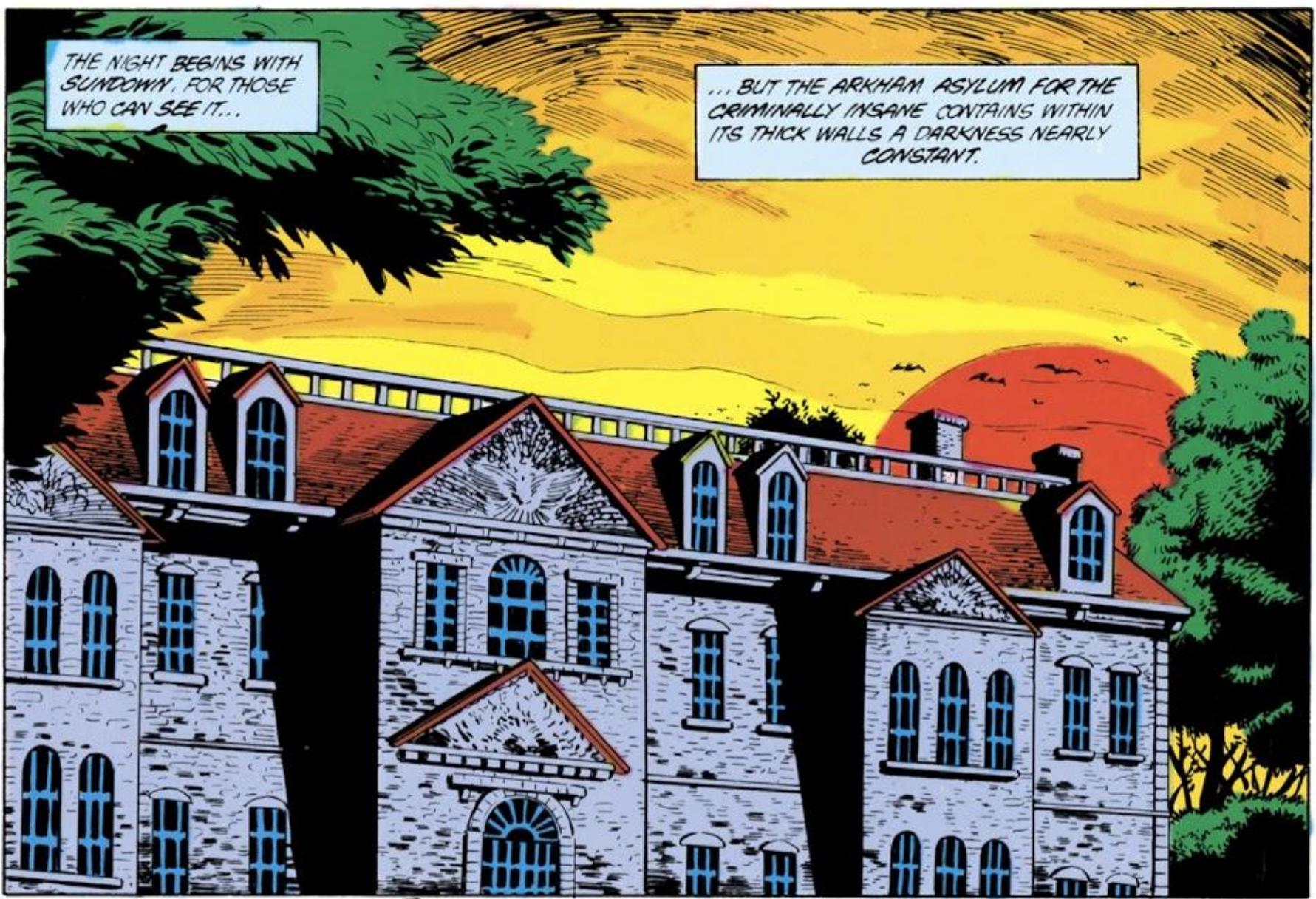
NOT SINCE THAT CHILL NIGHT SO LONG
AGO, WHEN HIS PARENTS FELL INTO
SPLASHED BLOOD, HAS HE FELT THE RUSH
OR HEARD THE ECHO OF SUCH HELLISH
WINDS.



AND NOT SINCE THAT NIGHT HAS HE
BEEN HAUNTED BY THE TOLLING OF SUCH
A DARK AND DEPAIRING HOUR...

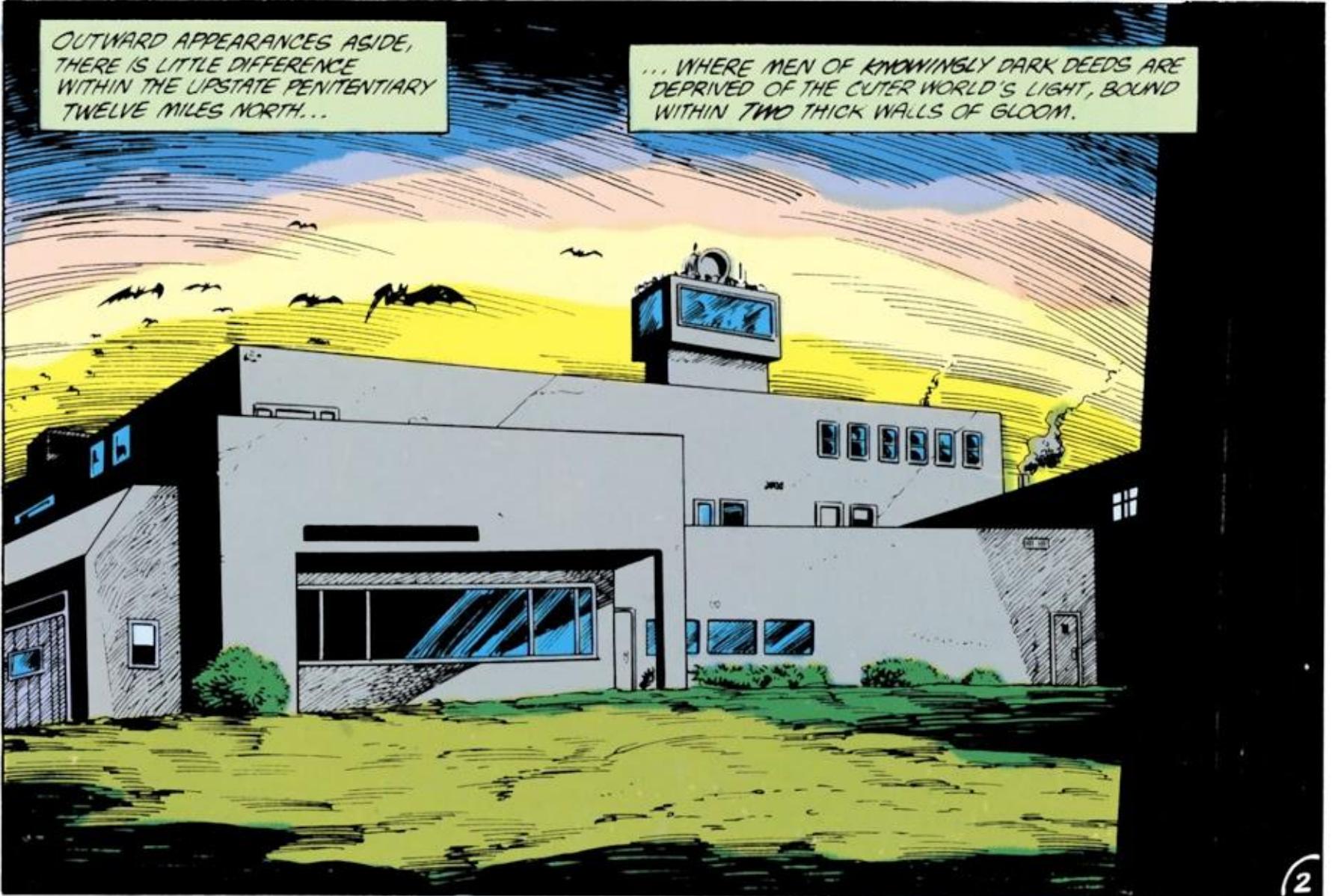
Written by: DOUG MOENCH
Lettered by: JOHN COSTANZA
Colored by: ADRIENNE ROY
Edited by: LEN WEIN

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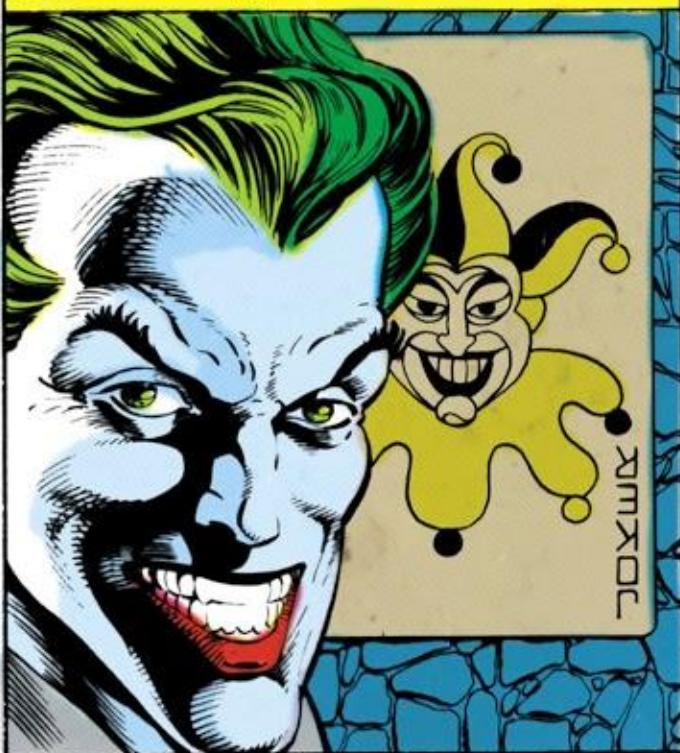


Chapter I TRADING DARKNESS

ILLUSTRATED BY: STEVE LIGHTLE & BRUCE D. PATTERSON



AS SHADOWS LENGTHEN ON THIS NIGHT AND OTHERS, ARKHAM OFTEN RESOUNDS WITH A LAUGHTER TO CHILL RATHER THAN CHEER.



YET THERE ARE OTHERS, WHISPERING TO NO ONE, WHO SEEM TO CARE NEITHER WAY.

HIS FACE NOW PERMANENTLY MASKED BY SCARS, BLACK MASK IS ONE SUCH...



THEN THERE ARE THOSE INMATES WHO SEEM TO RIDE ALTERNATING CYCLES OF CATATONIC STUPOR AND SHRIEKING FRENZY.



SOME, LIKE THE GROTESQUE KILLER CROC, ADOPT PATTERNS OF SUPREMELY MINDLESS DISCIPLINE...

...NINETY-EIGHT... NINETY-NINE...



CLAYFACE, HOWEVER, NEVER SEEMS TO MOVE AT ALL.

HE SIMPLY STARES AT THE WALL... AND THE WET, RED FANTASIES IN HIS EYES, IF SHARED, WOULD PROMPT ANY SANE MAN TO BEHEAD HIM ON THE SPOT.



AND THERE ARE OTHERS, SO MANY OTHERS OF SUCH SICK AND TWISTED EVIL--

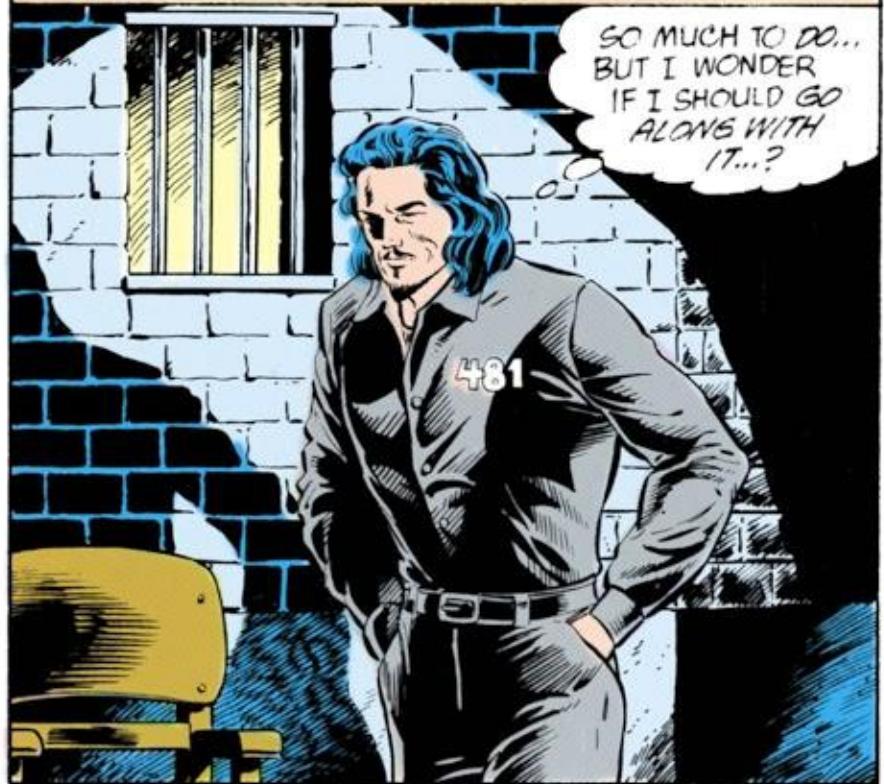
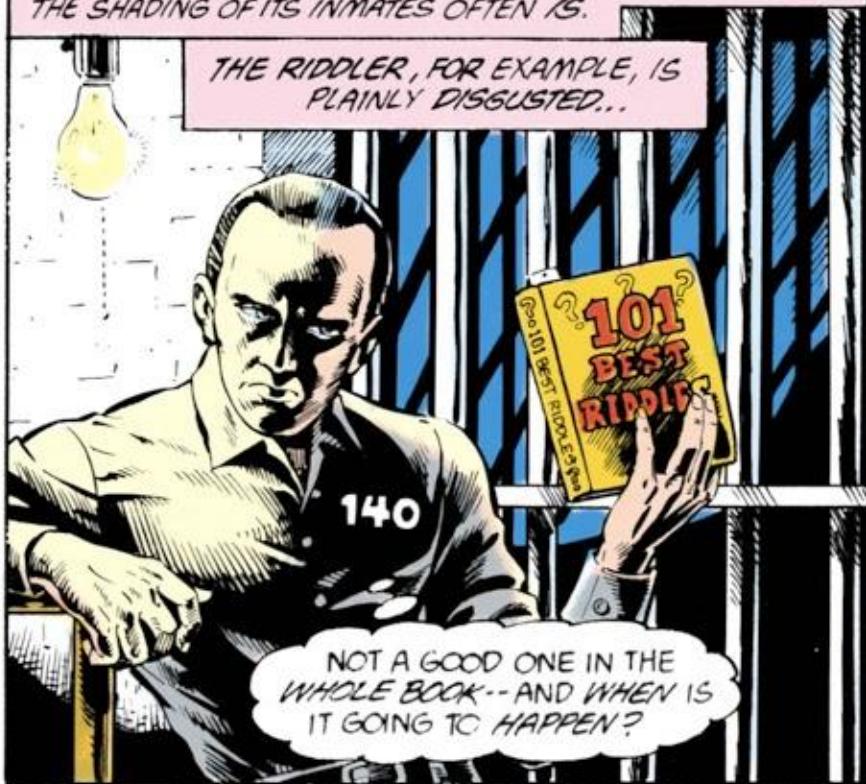


-- THAT THIS BLEAK PLACE, AND EVERY ATOM OF STONE IN ITS WALLS, MUST SURELY BE CURSED TO CONTAIN THEM ALL.



AND IF THE GLOOM WITHIN THE STATE PEN'S MAXIMUM SECURITY CELLBLOCK IS NO DIFFERENT FROM ARKHAM, THE SHADING OF ITS INMATES OFTEN IS.

THE CAVALIER, SEEMINGLY LOST IN TIME WITHOUT HIS SWASHBUCKLING ATTIRE, IS ALMOST CASUALLY RESTLESS...

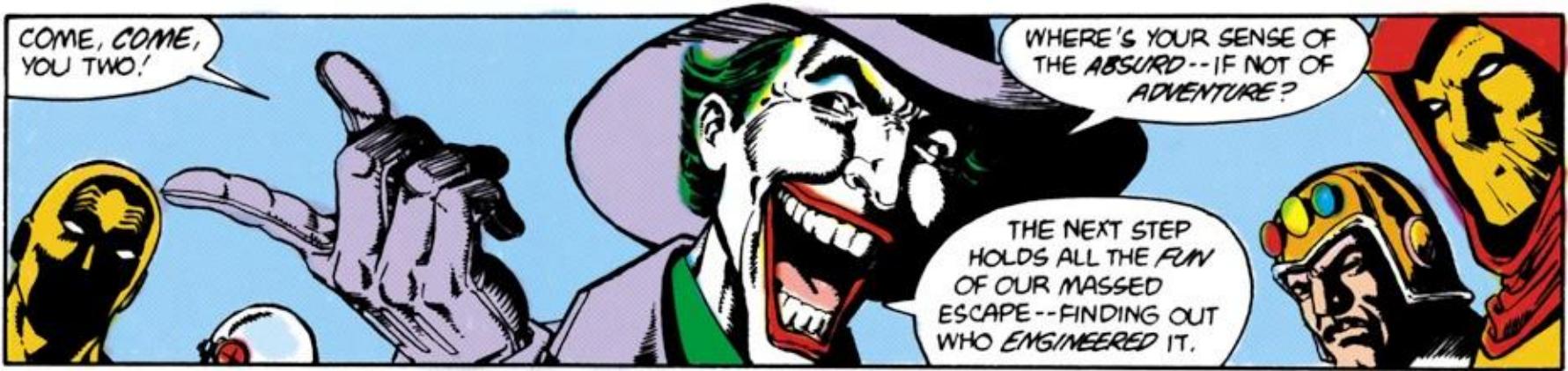


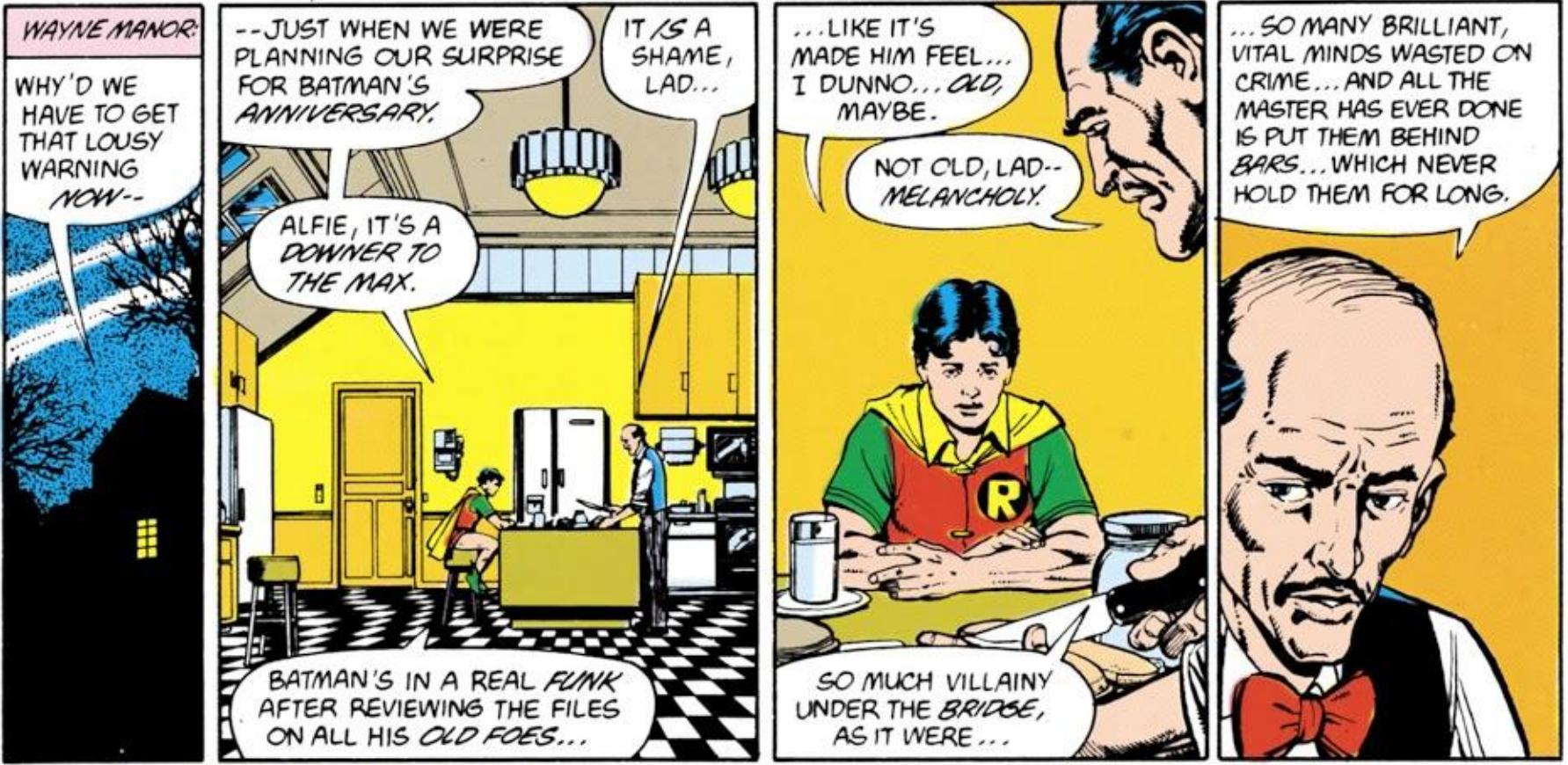


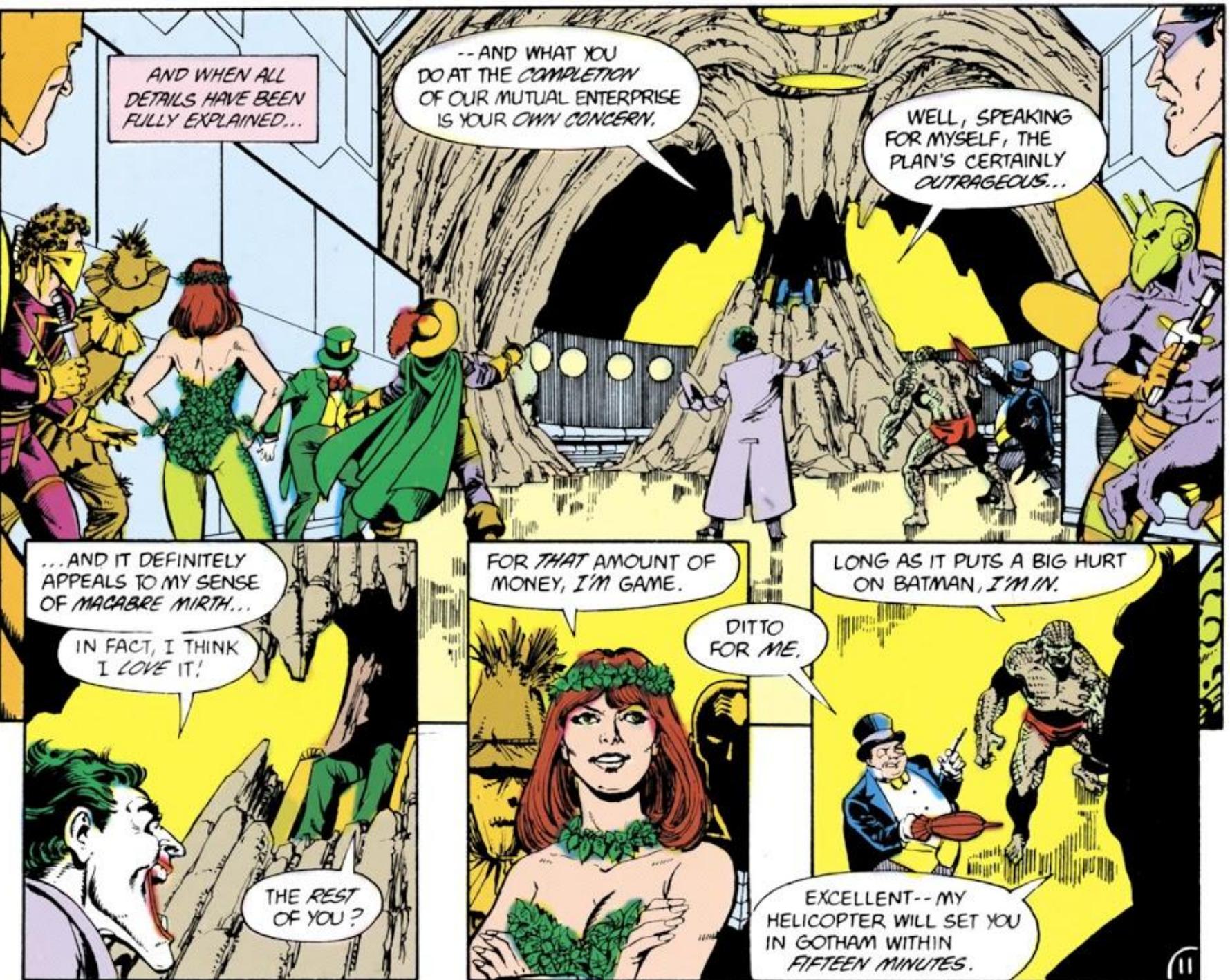




THE MASTER BELOW







CHAPTER III FIRST STEPS

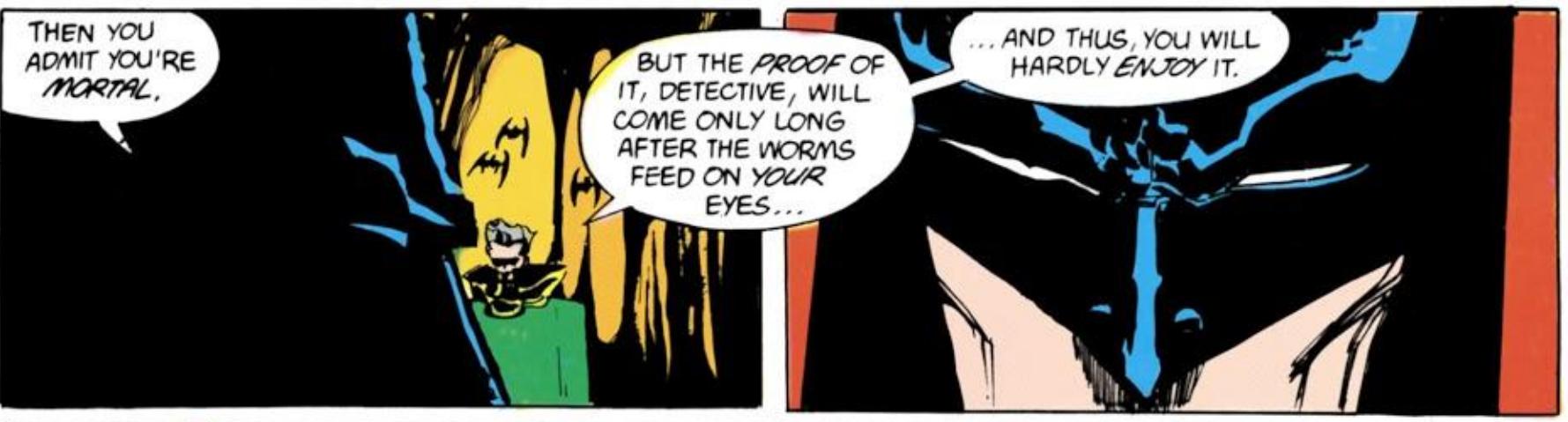
ILLUSTRATED BY: PARIS CULLINS & LARRY MAHLSTEDT

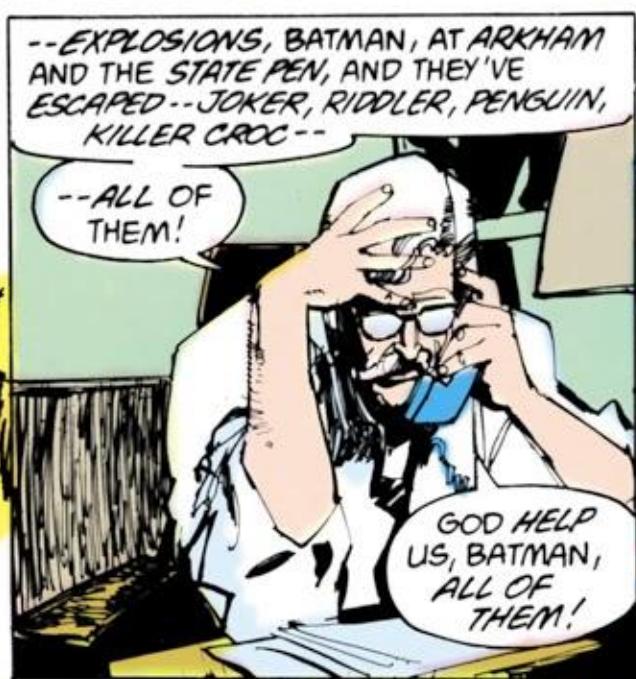


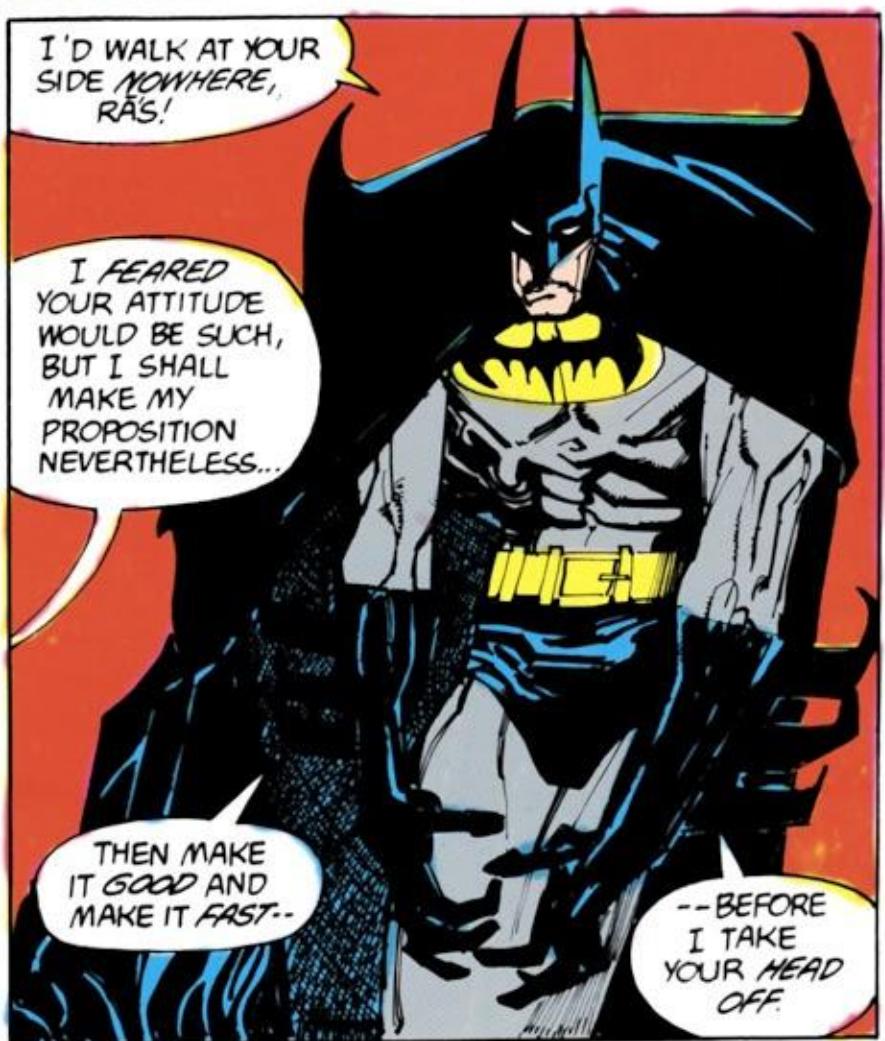


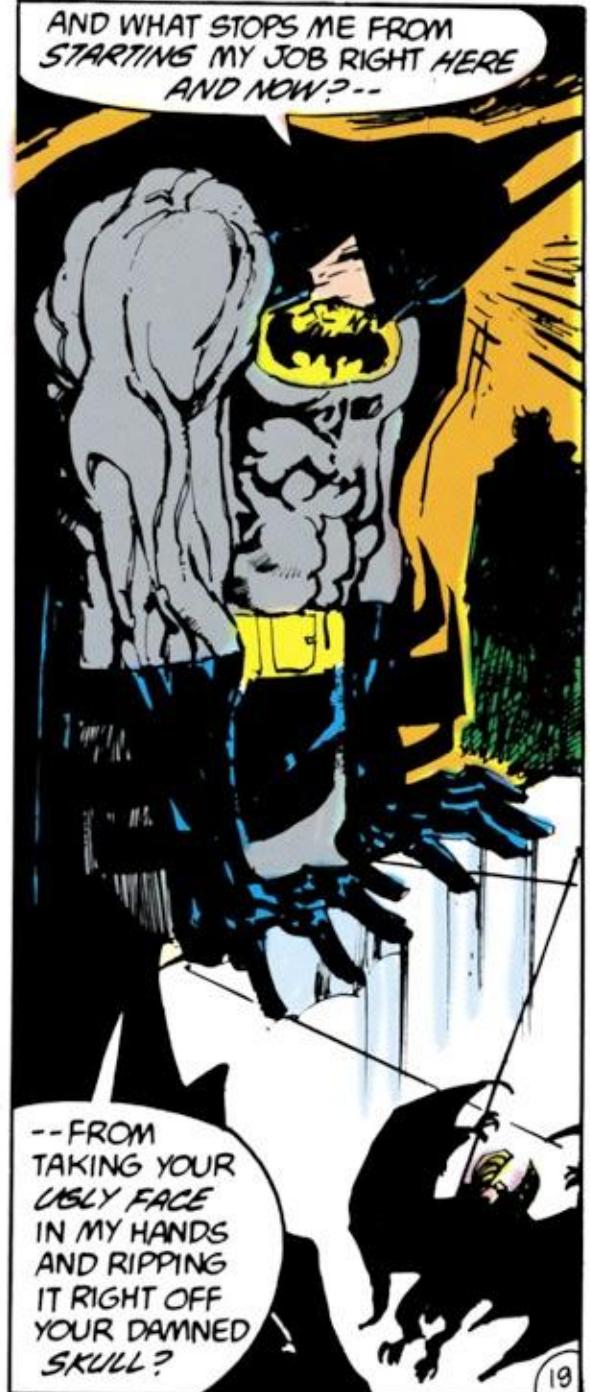
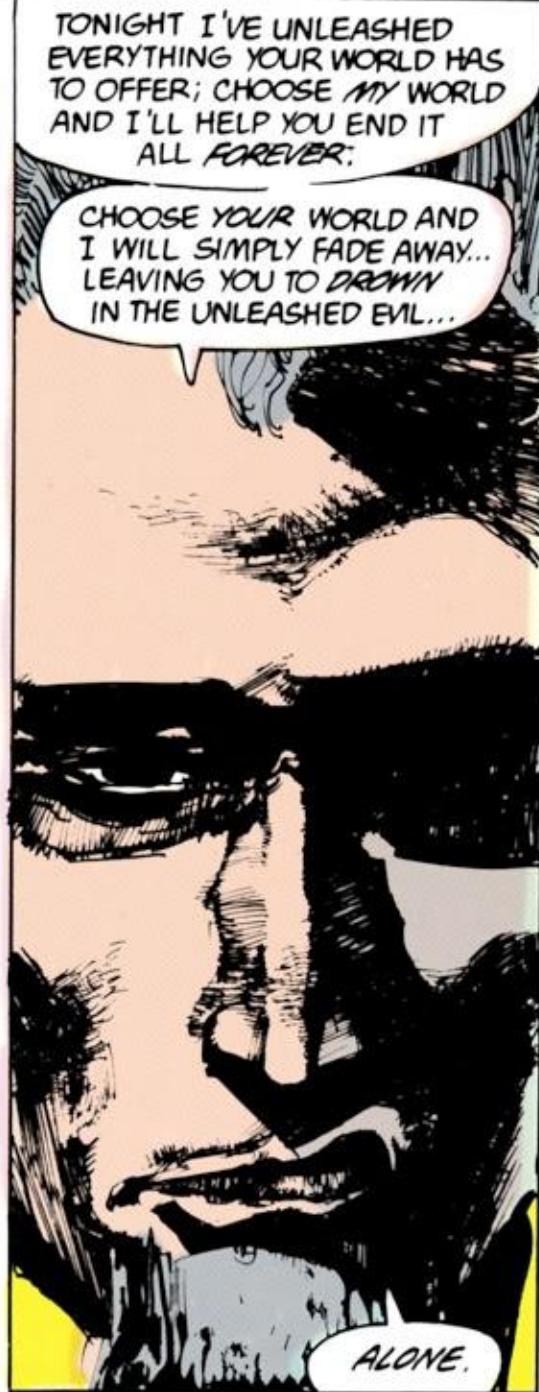
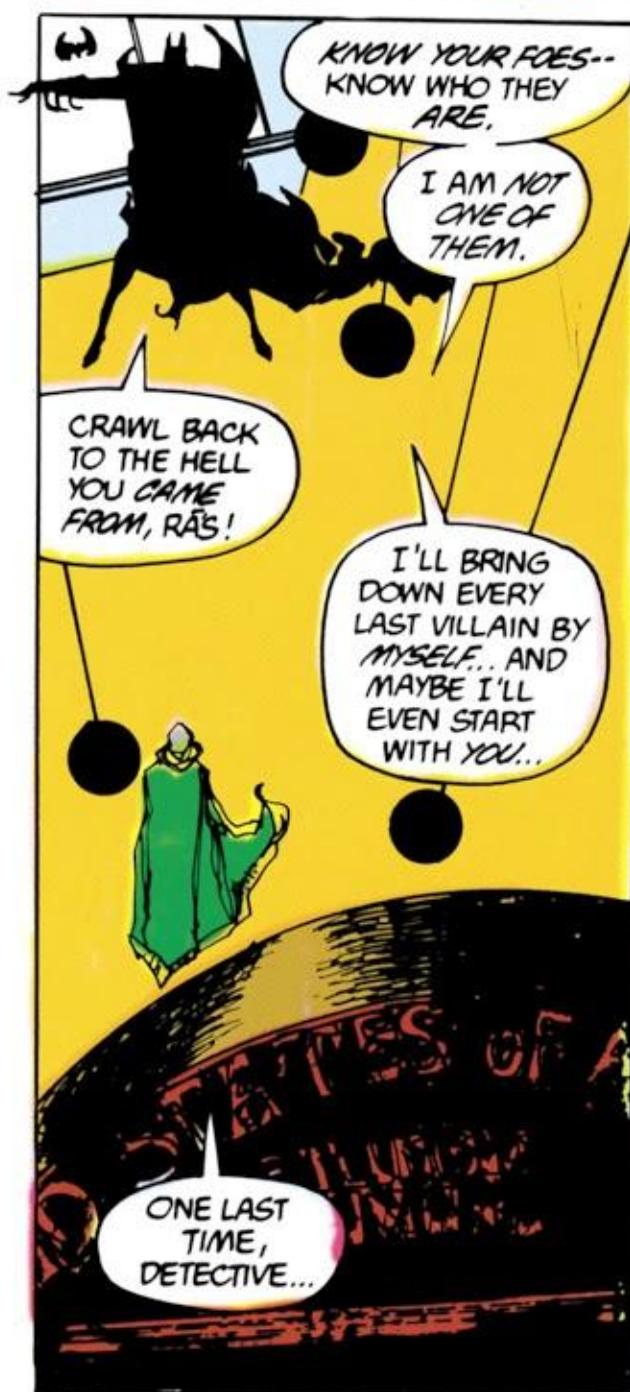
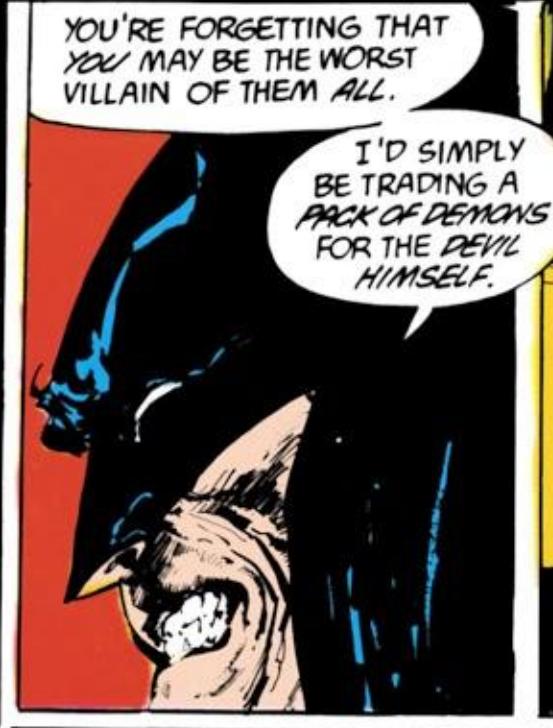






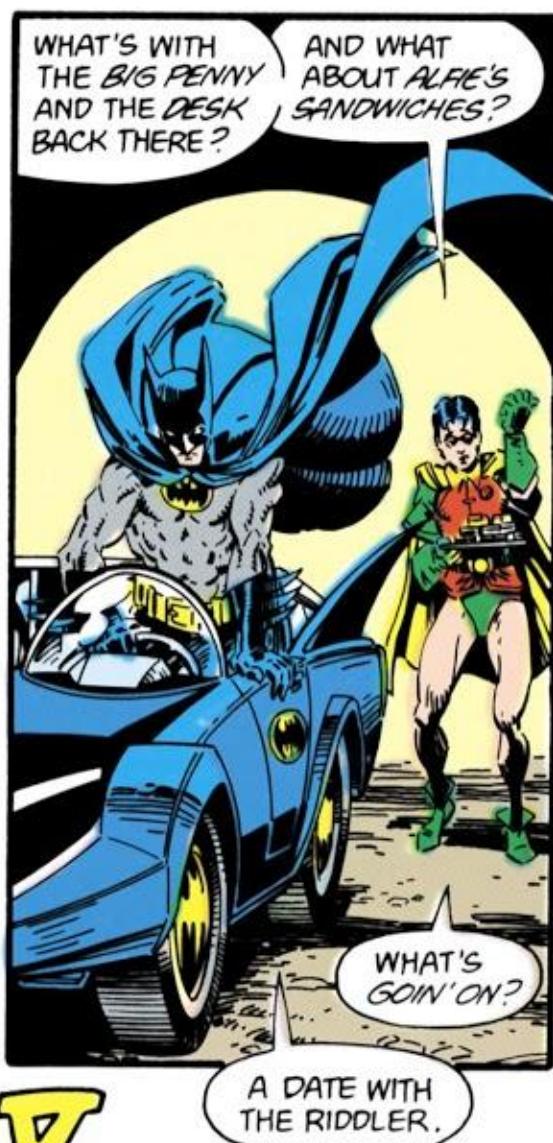








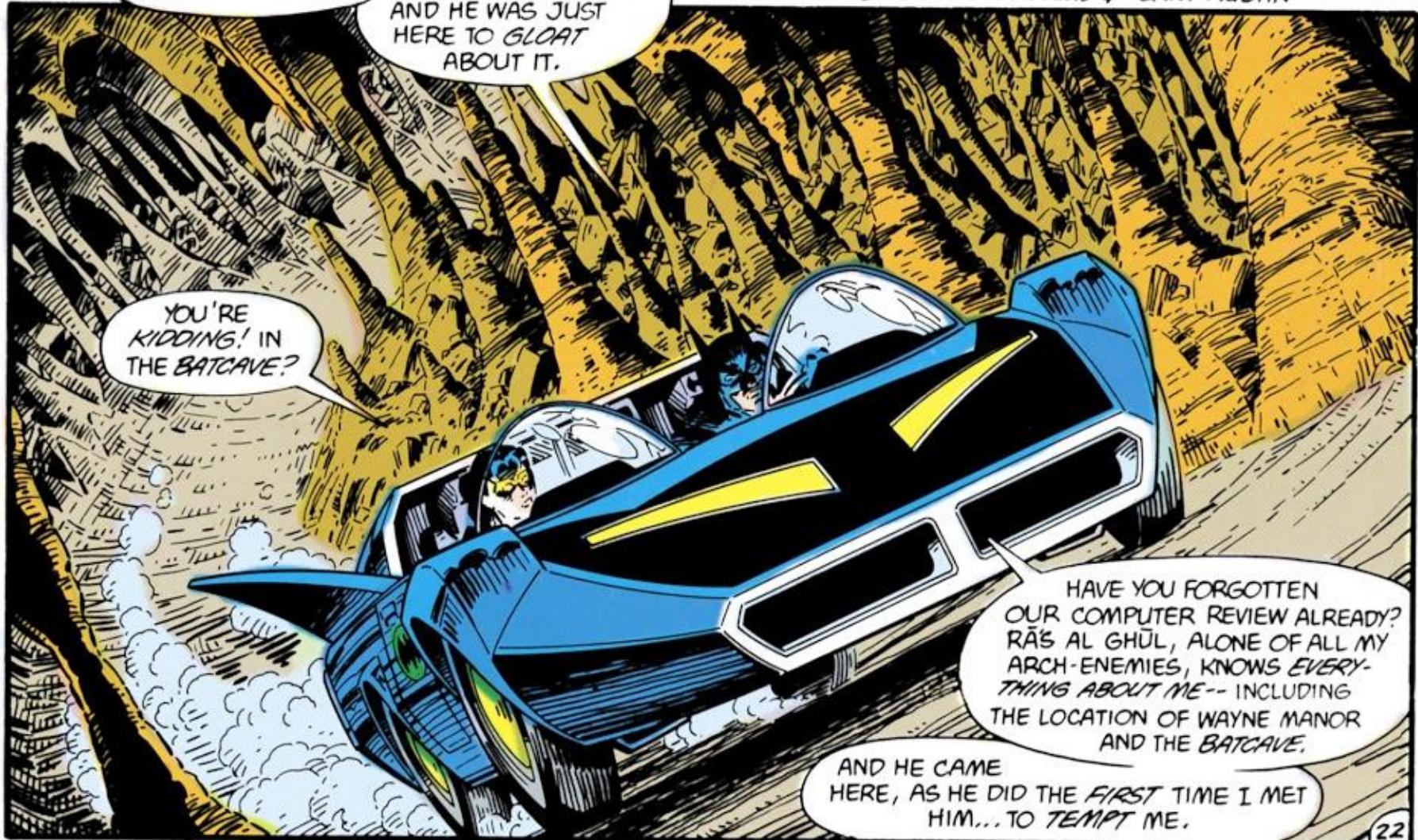


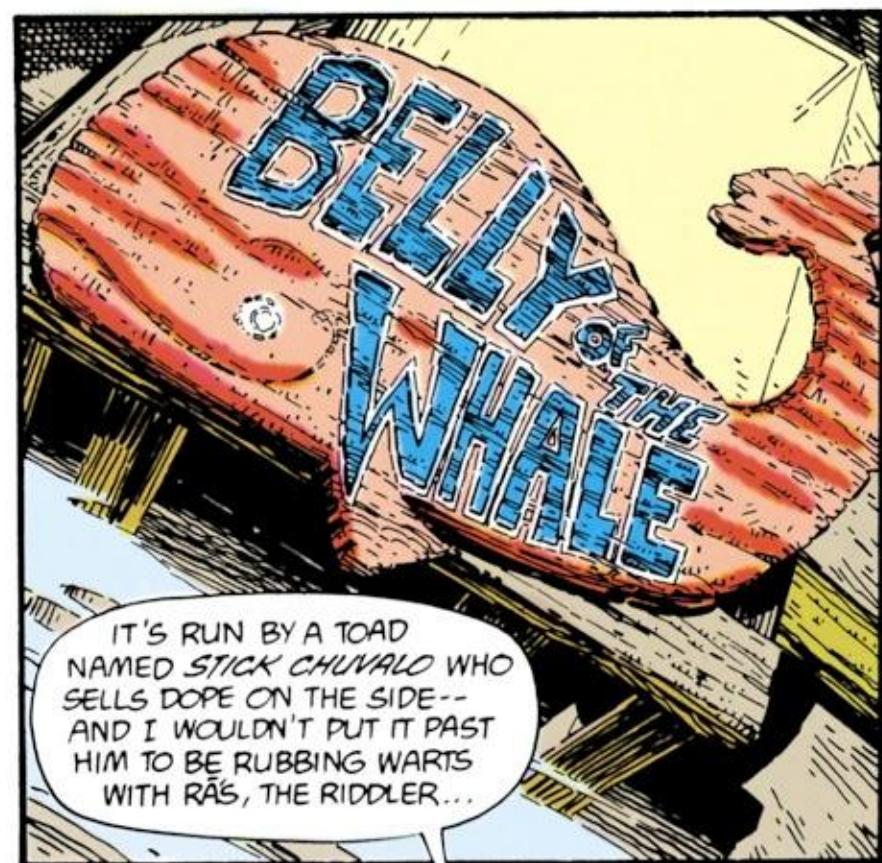
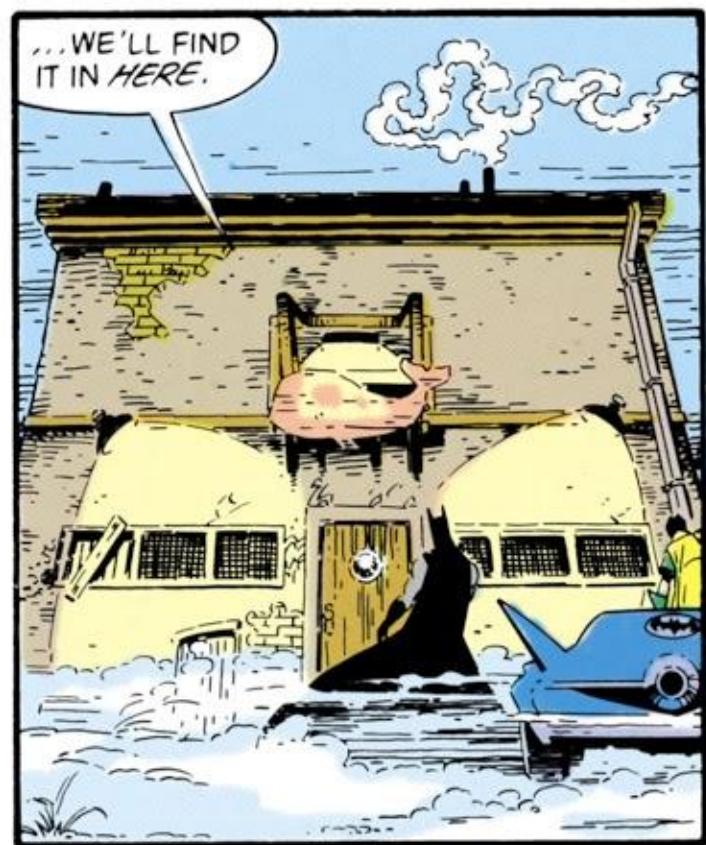
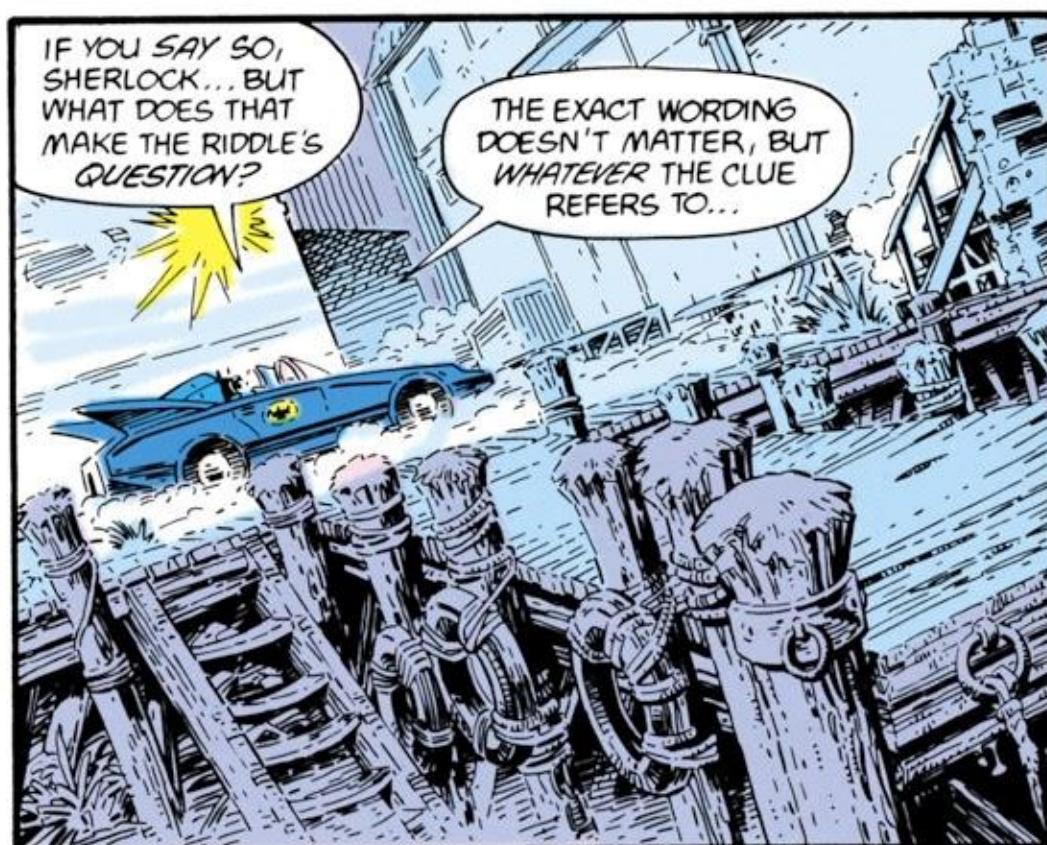
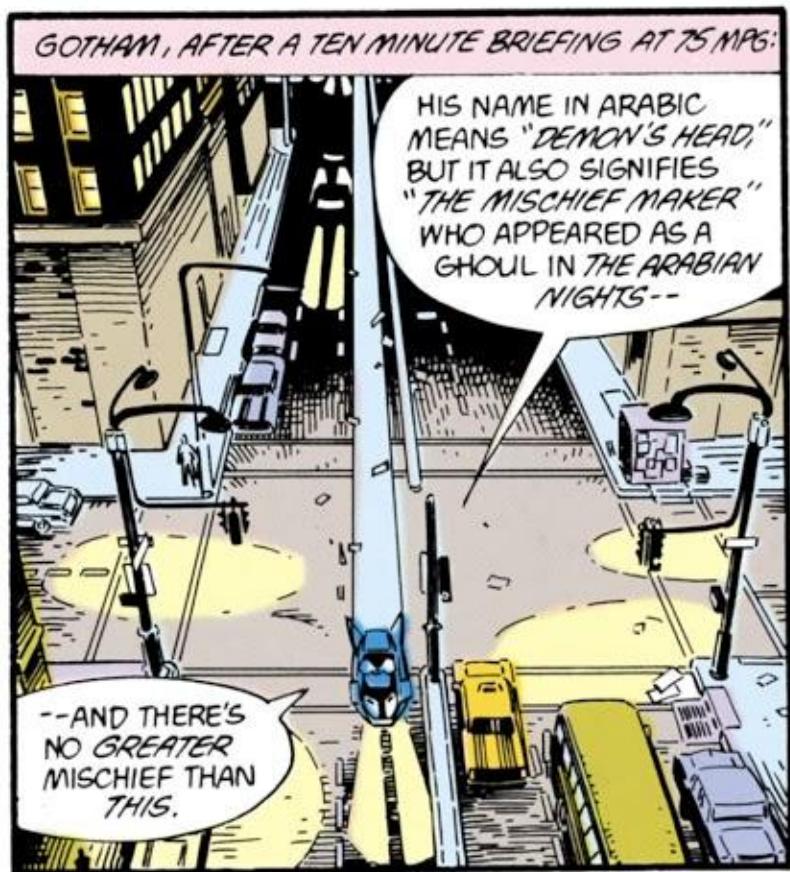


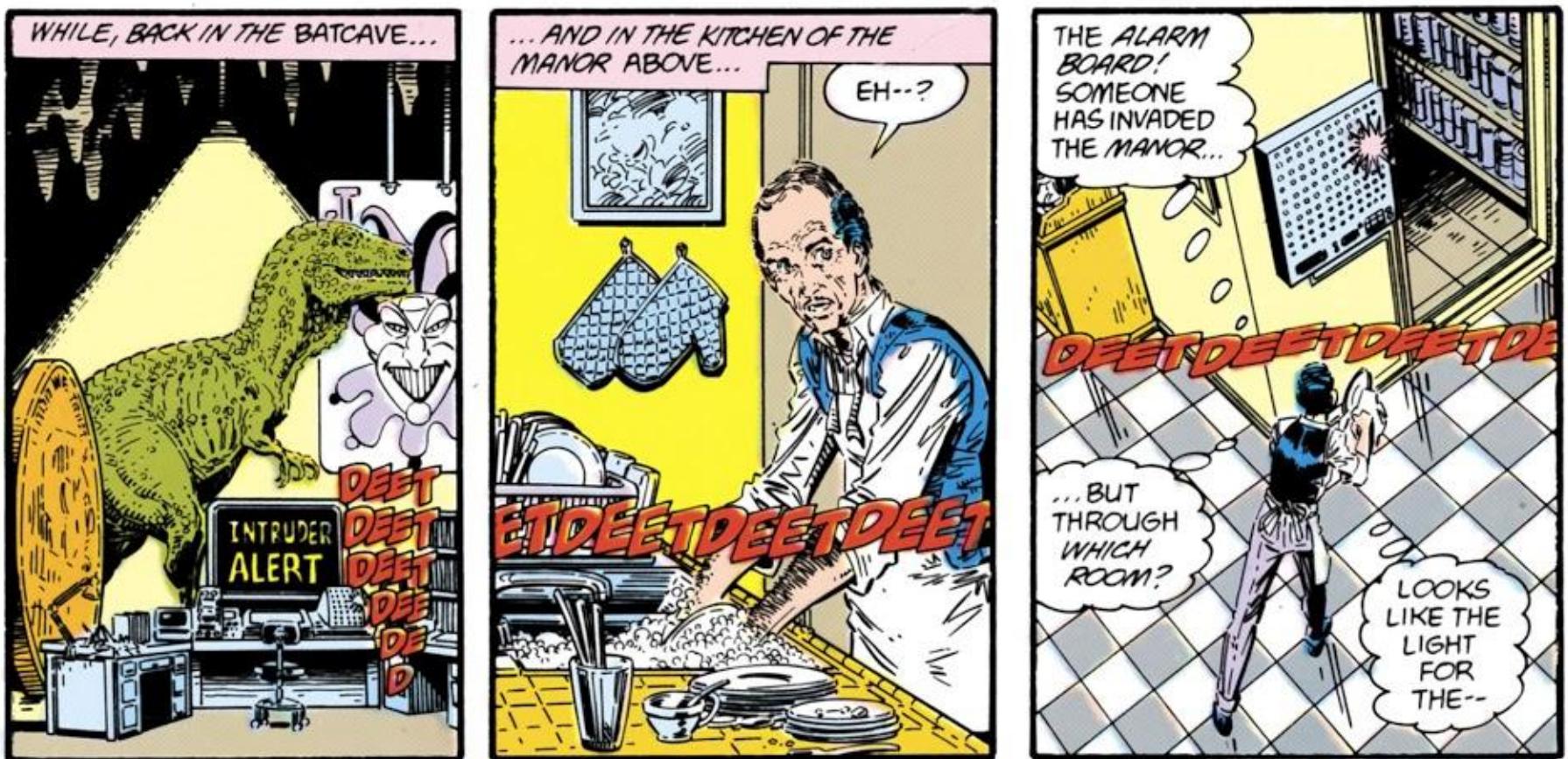
CHAPTER V

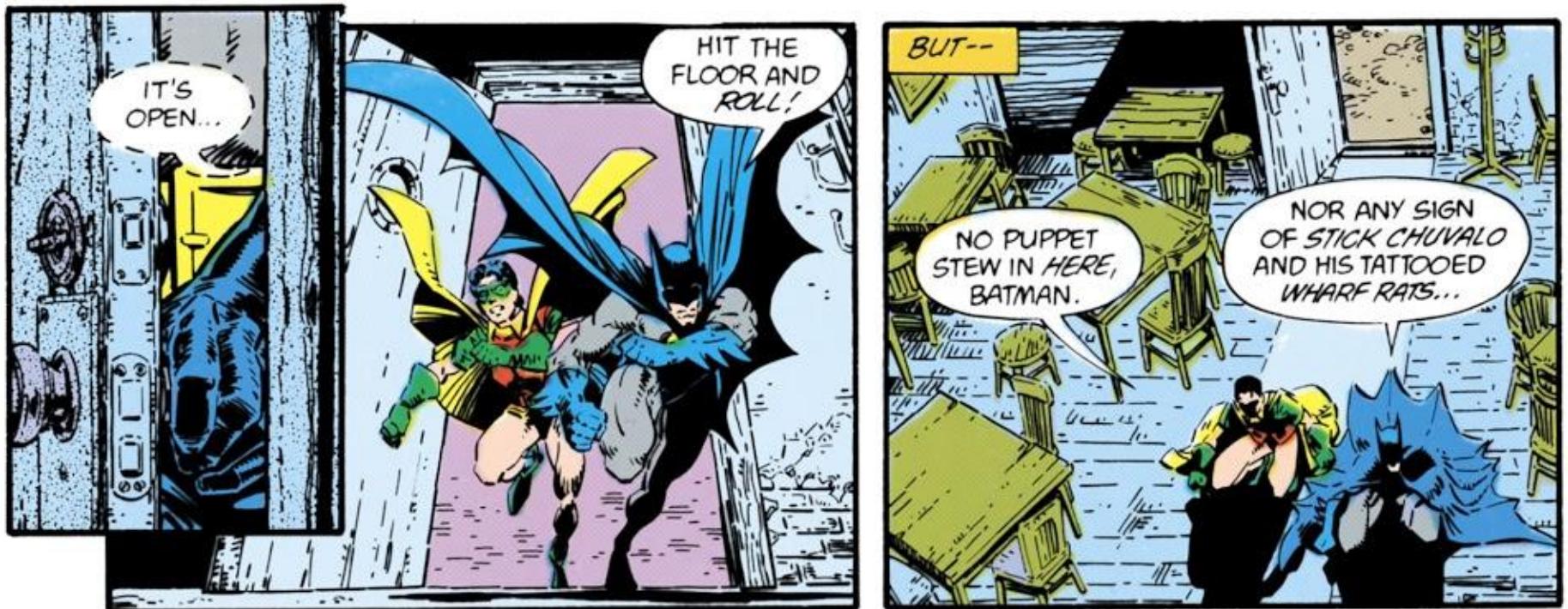
"PINOCCHIO and JONAH'S, TOO!"

ILLUSTRATED BY: ARTHUR ADAMS & TERRY AUSTIN

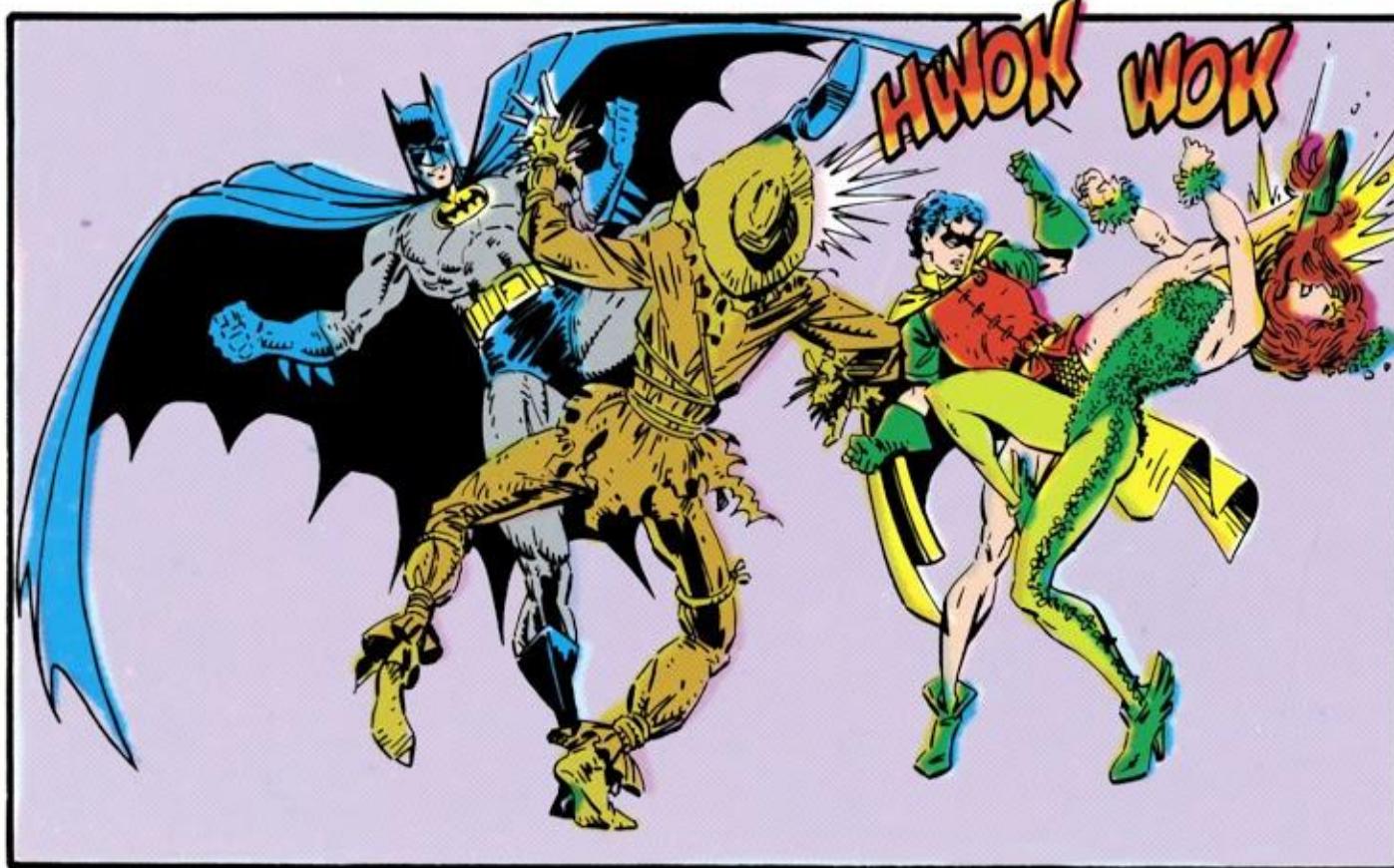




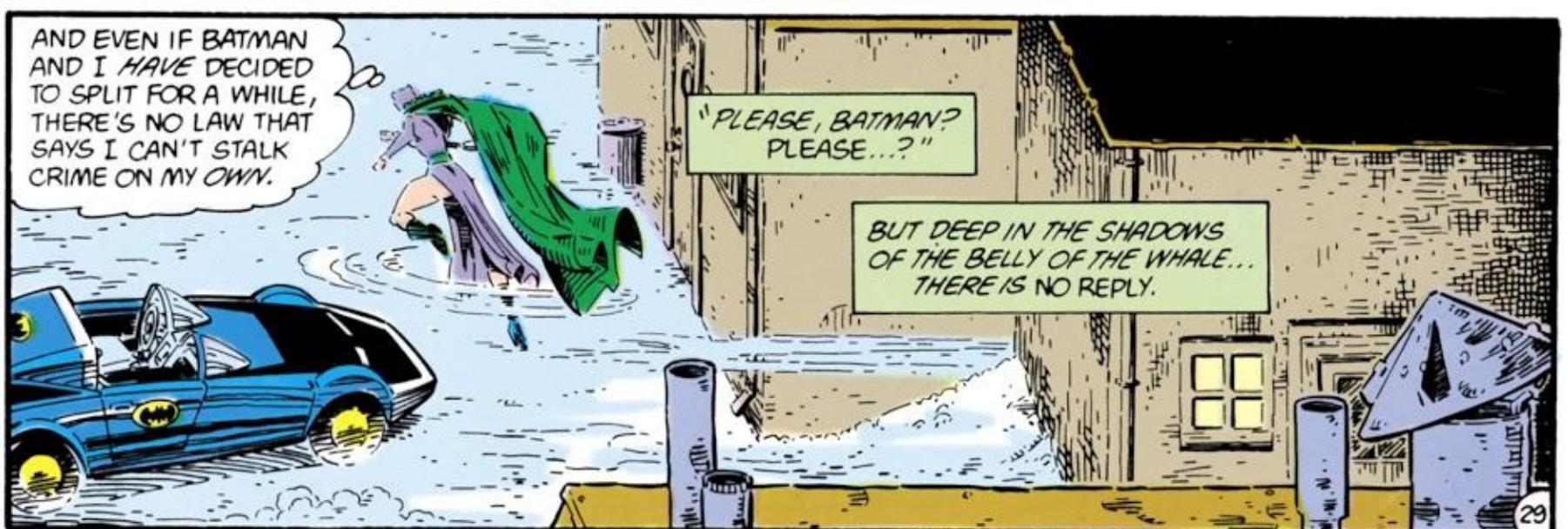
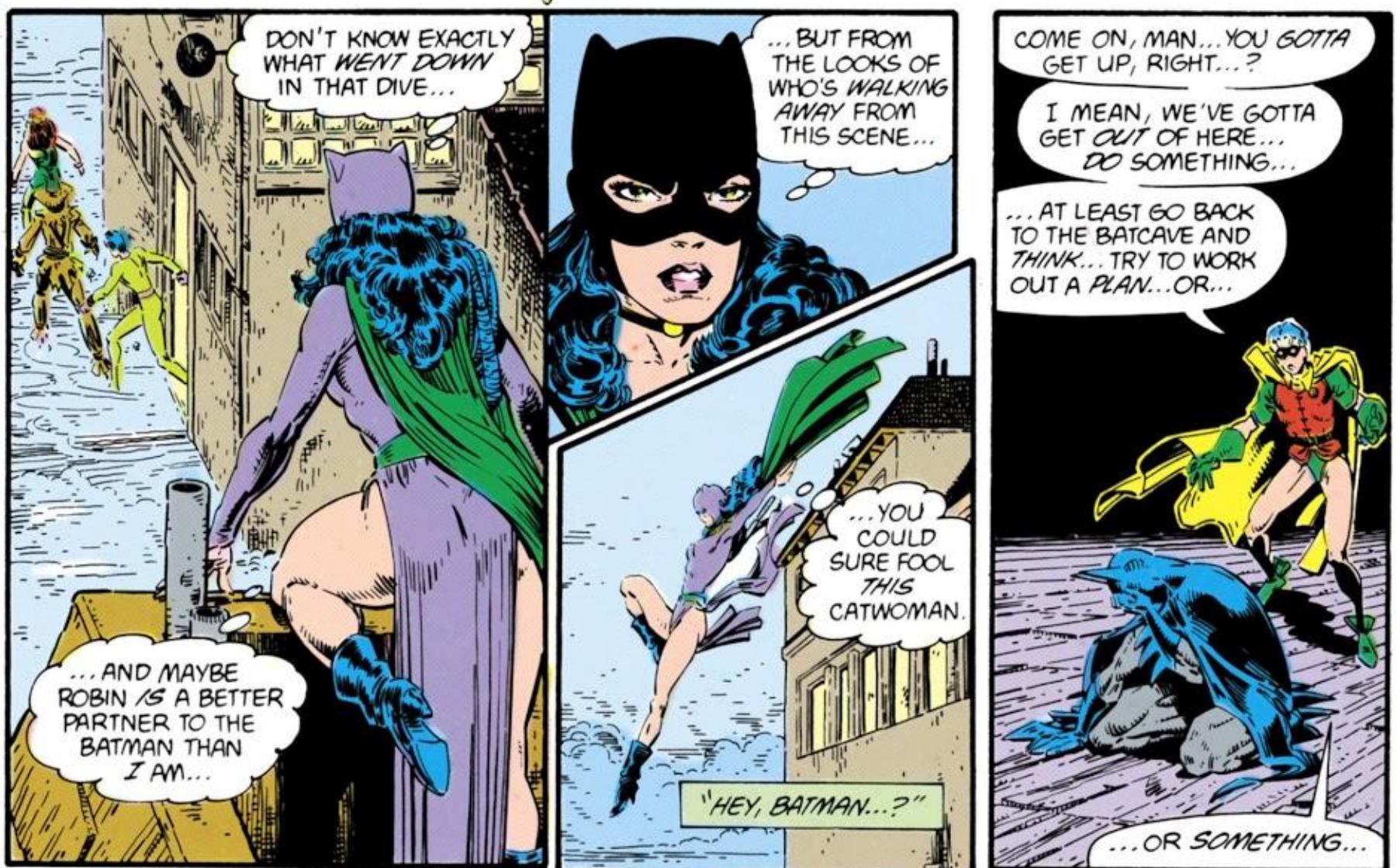
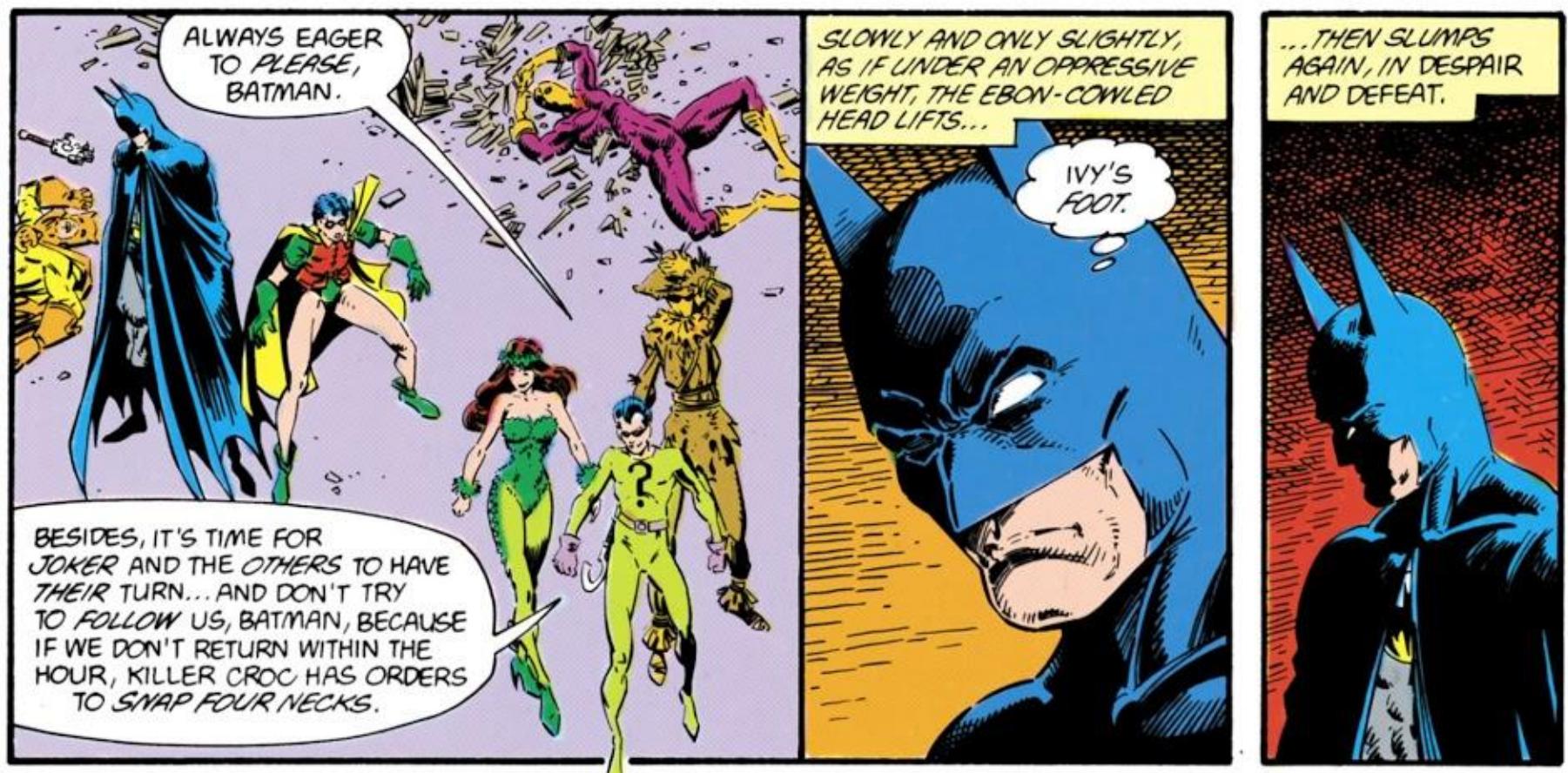


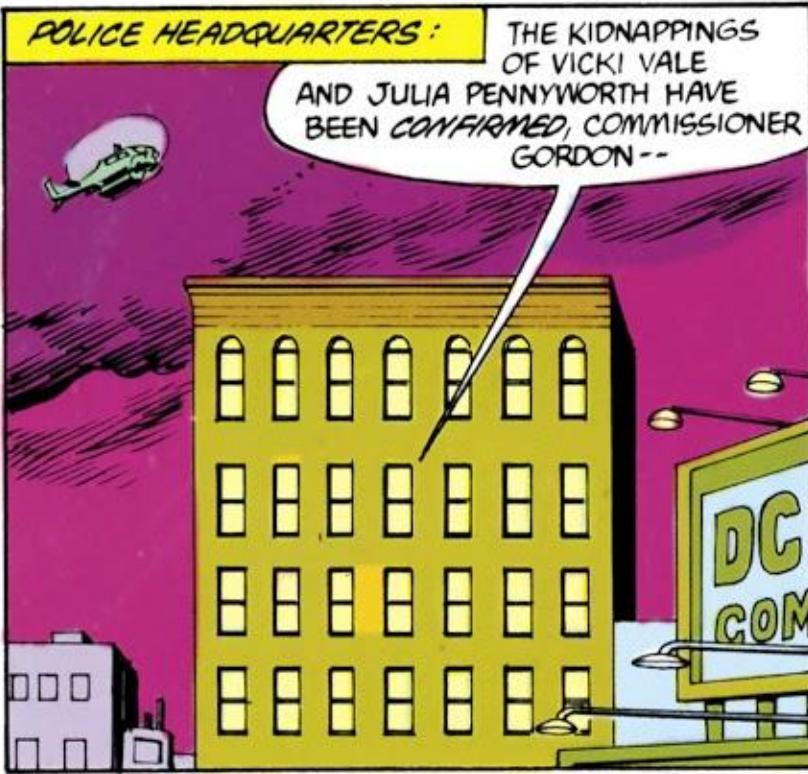






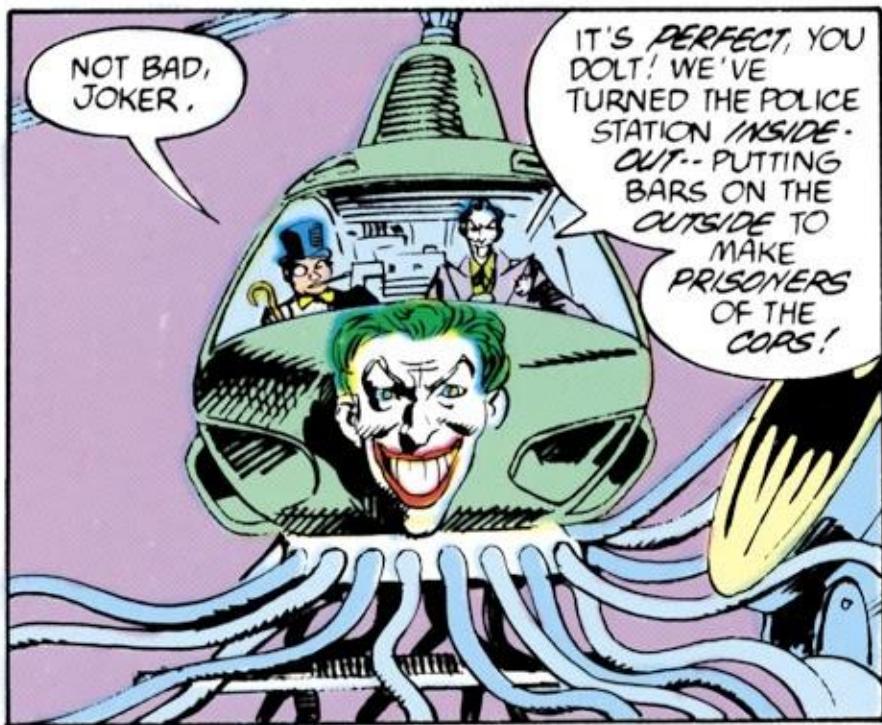


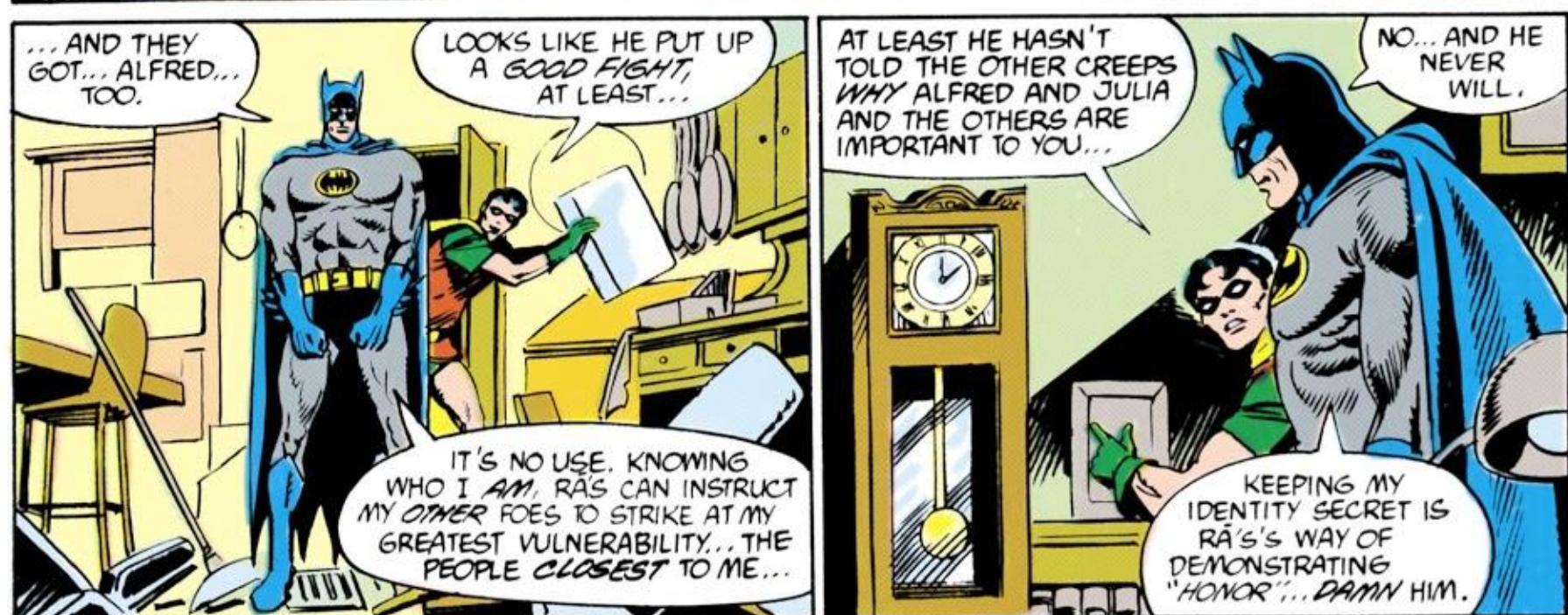
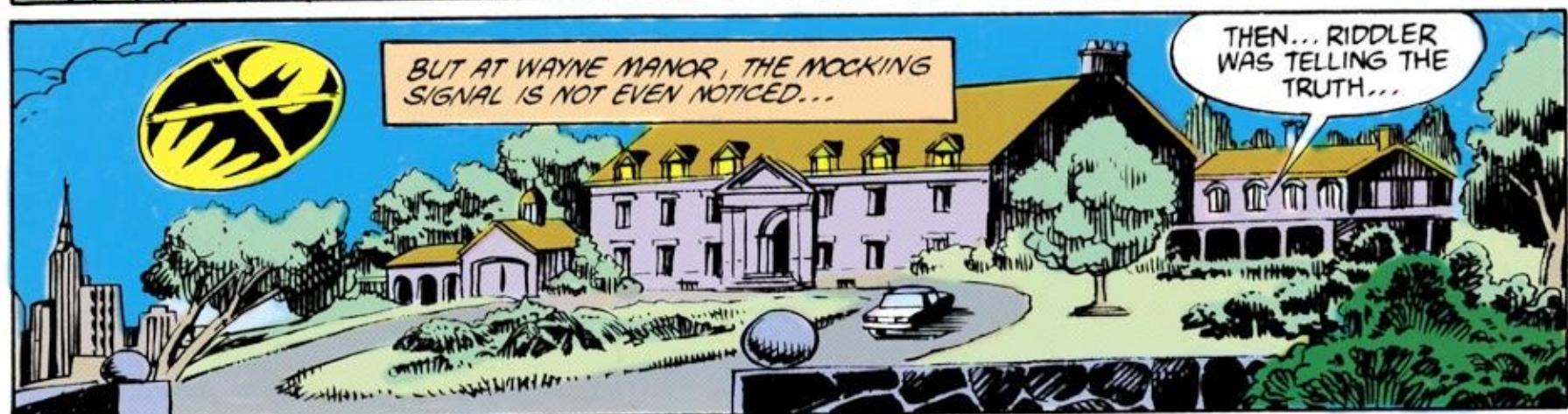


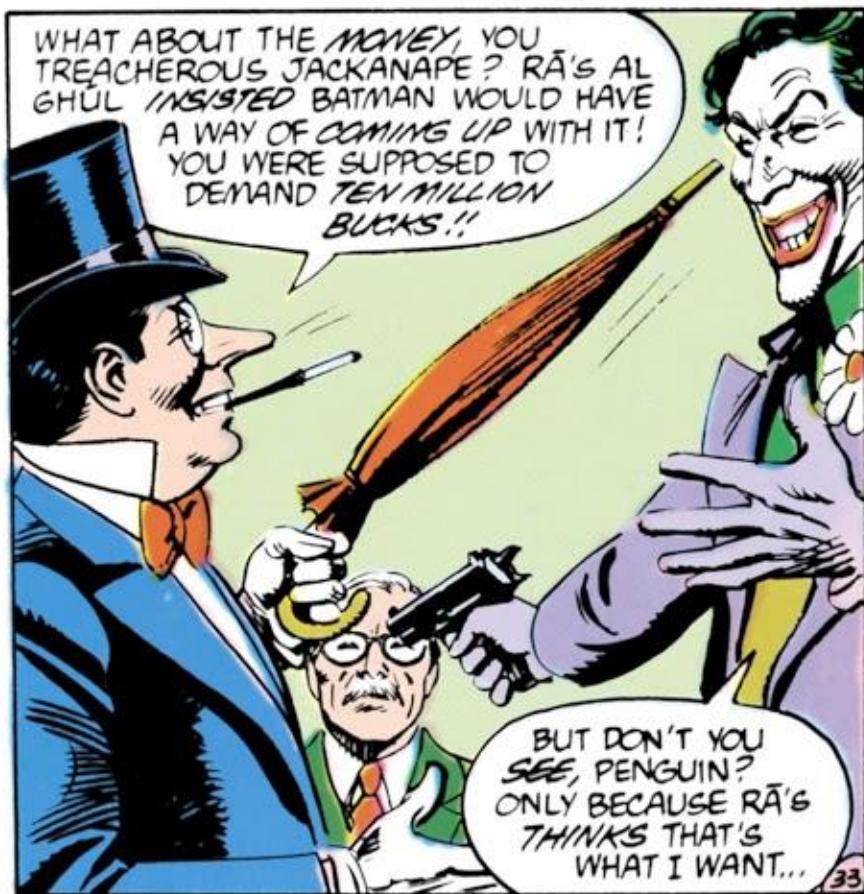
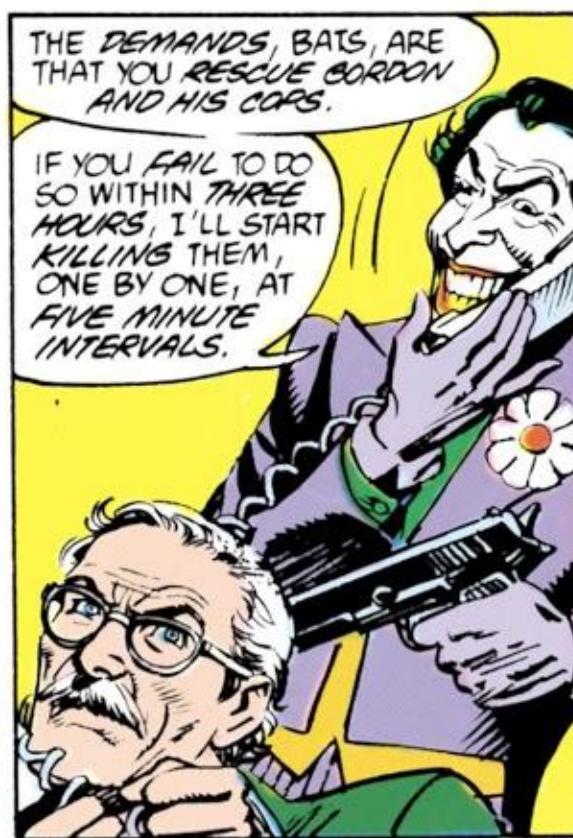


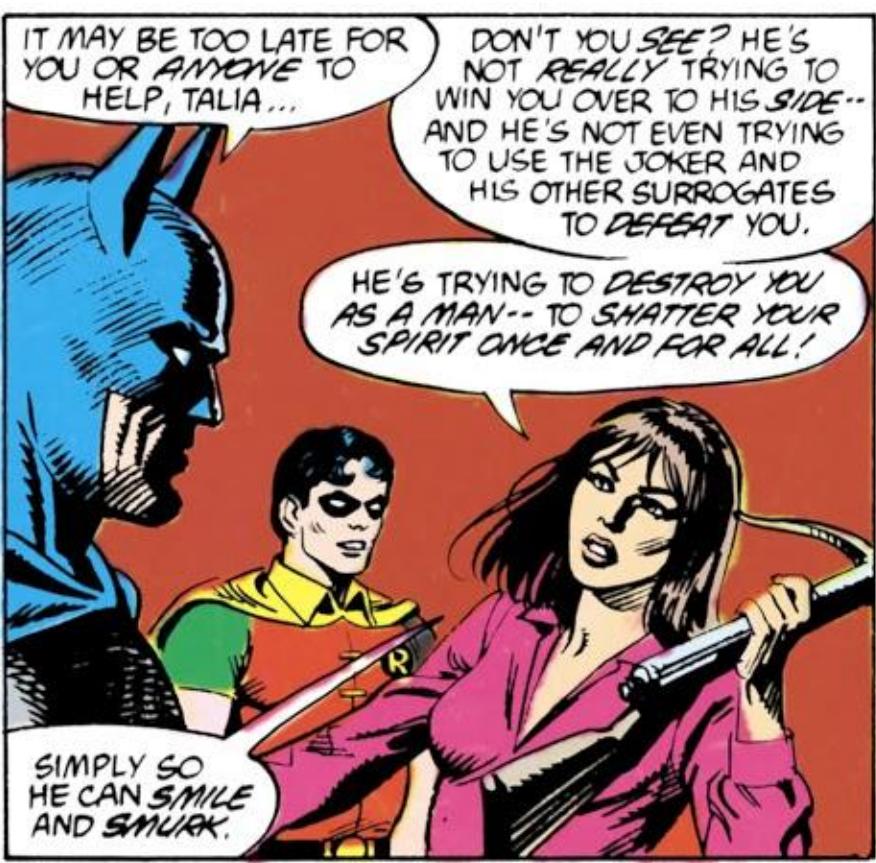
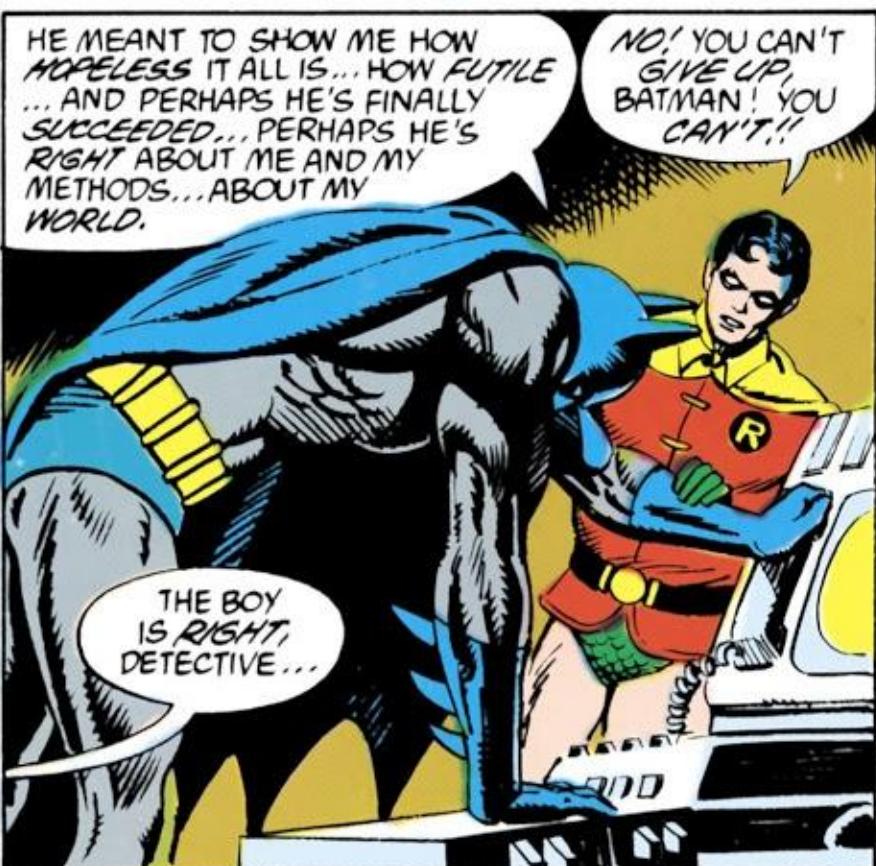
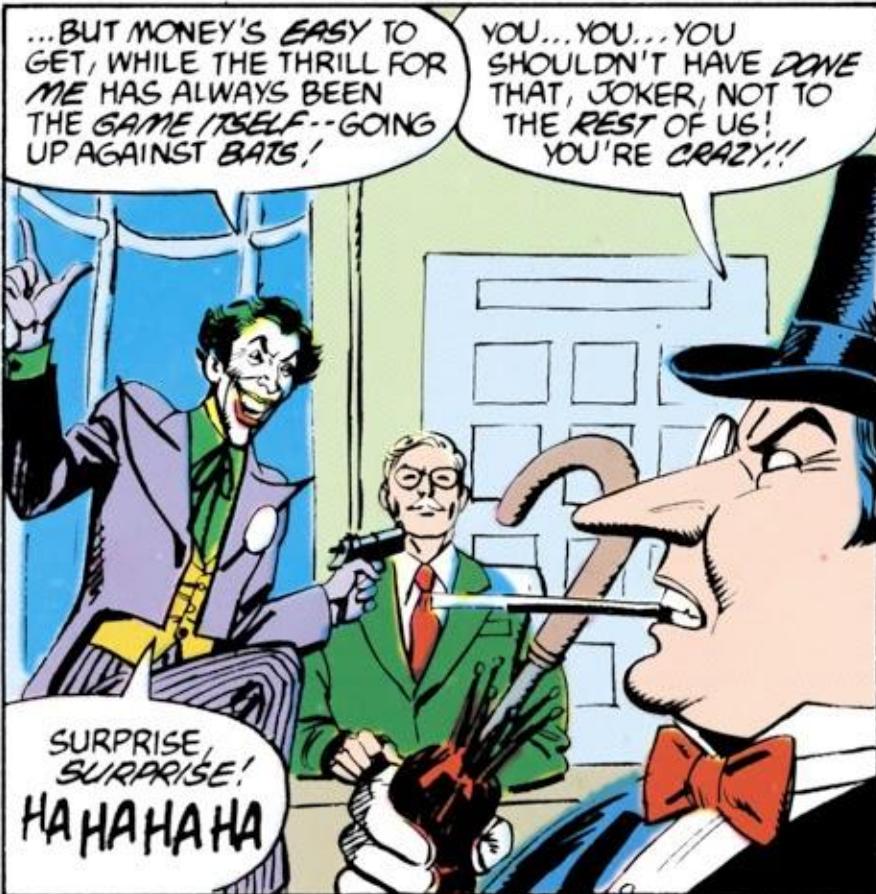
CHAPTER VI: BARRED

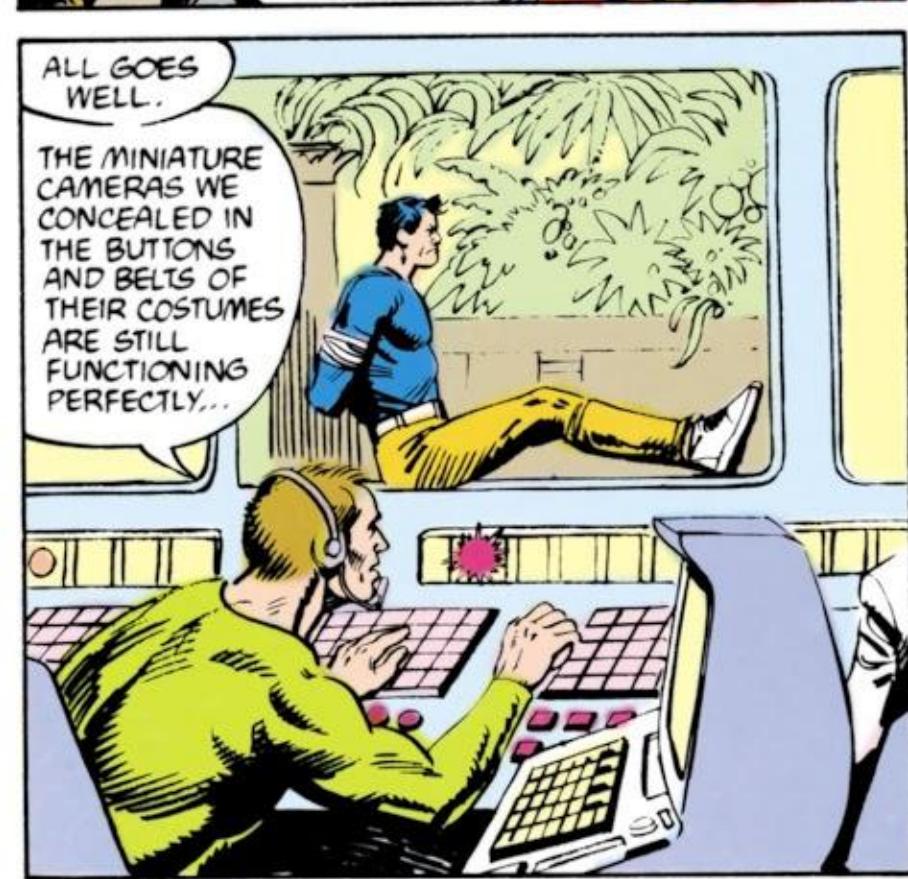
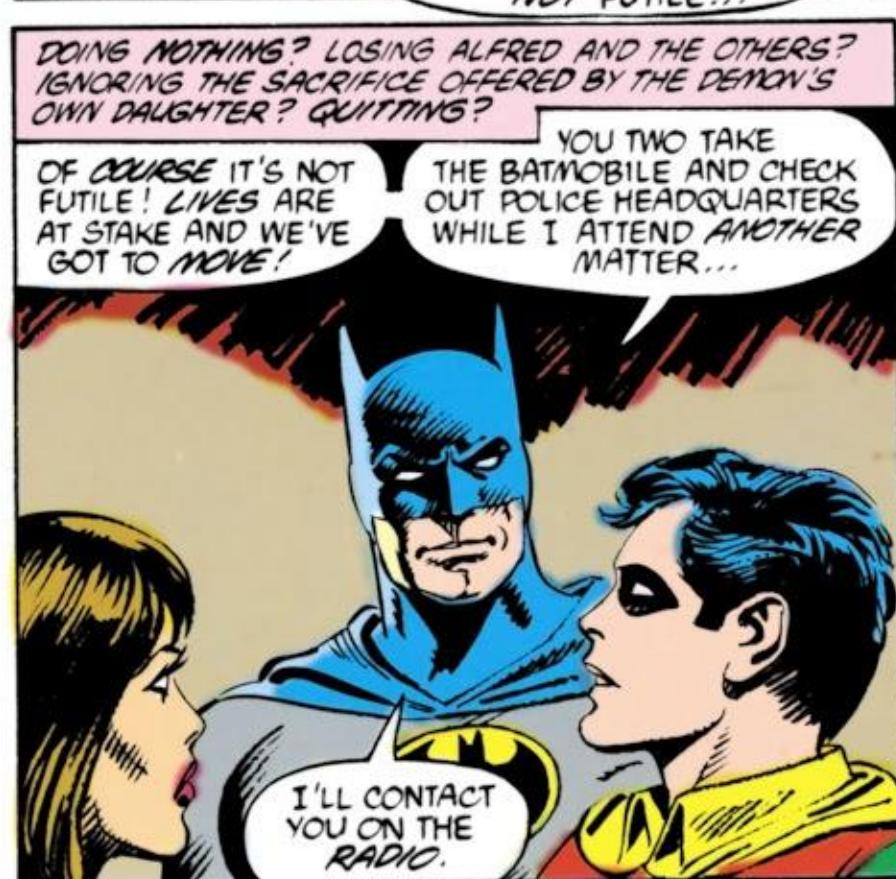
ILLUSTRATED BY: TOM SUTTON & RICARDO VILLAGRAN











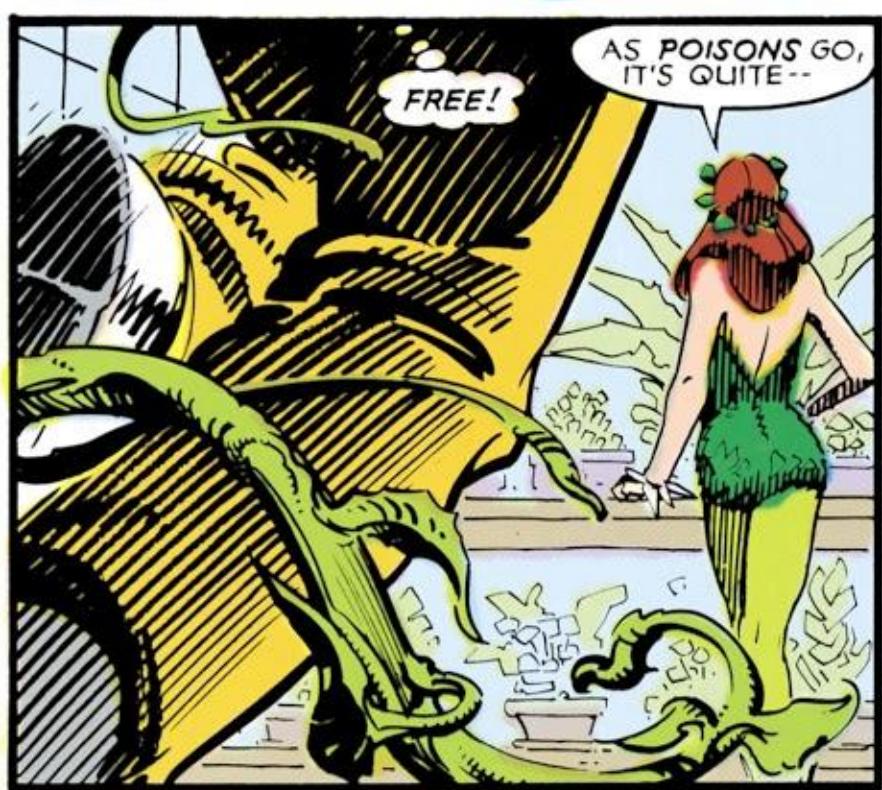
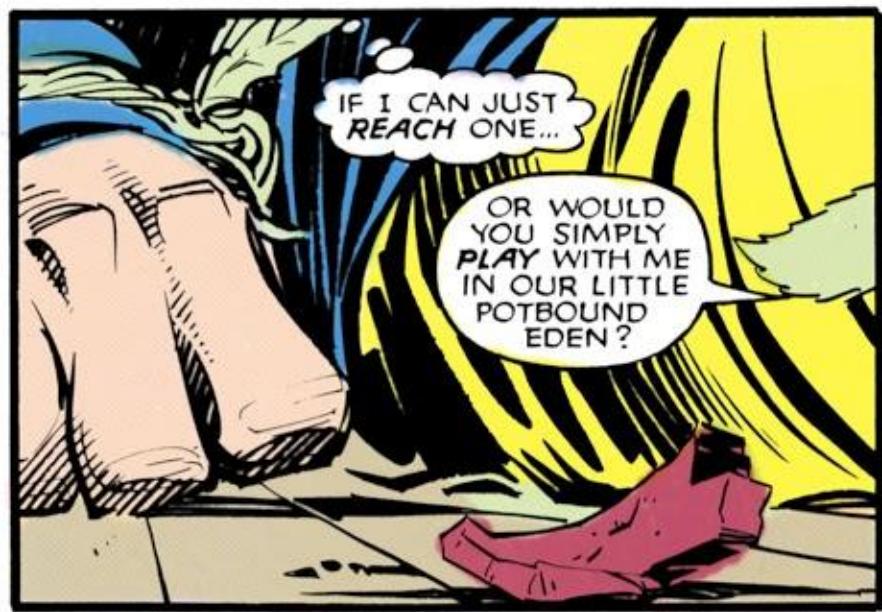


CHAPTER VII

a small itch SCRATCHED!

ILLUSTRATED BY: STEVE LEIALOHA / LETTERS: ORZECHOWSKI







**CHAPTER
VIII**

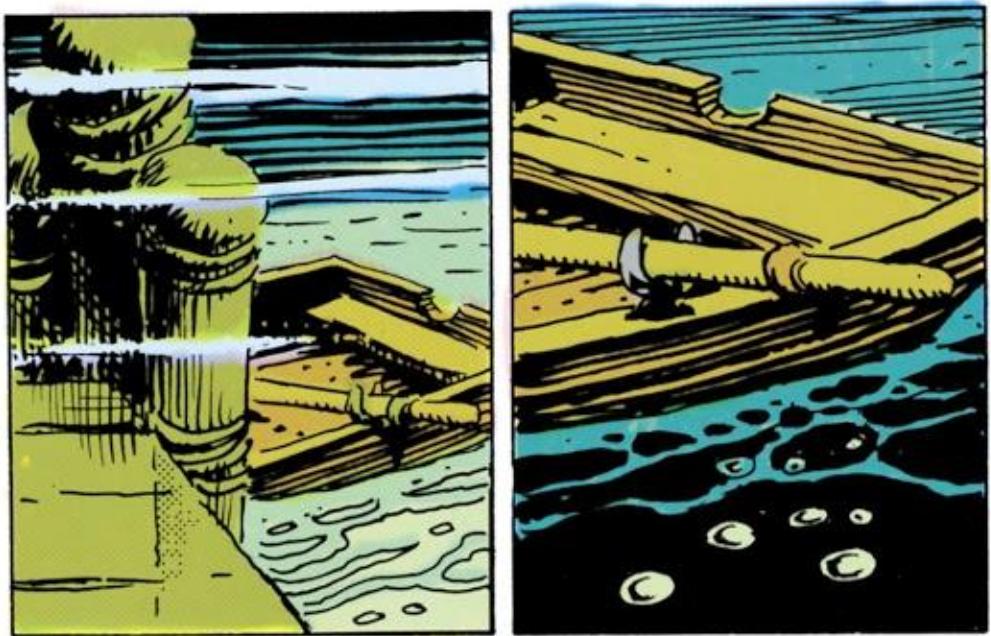
The Big StickinG

**THE BELLY
OF THE WHALE**

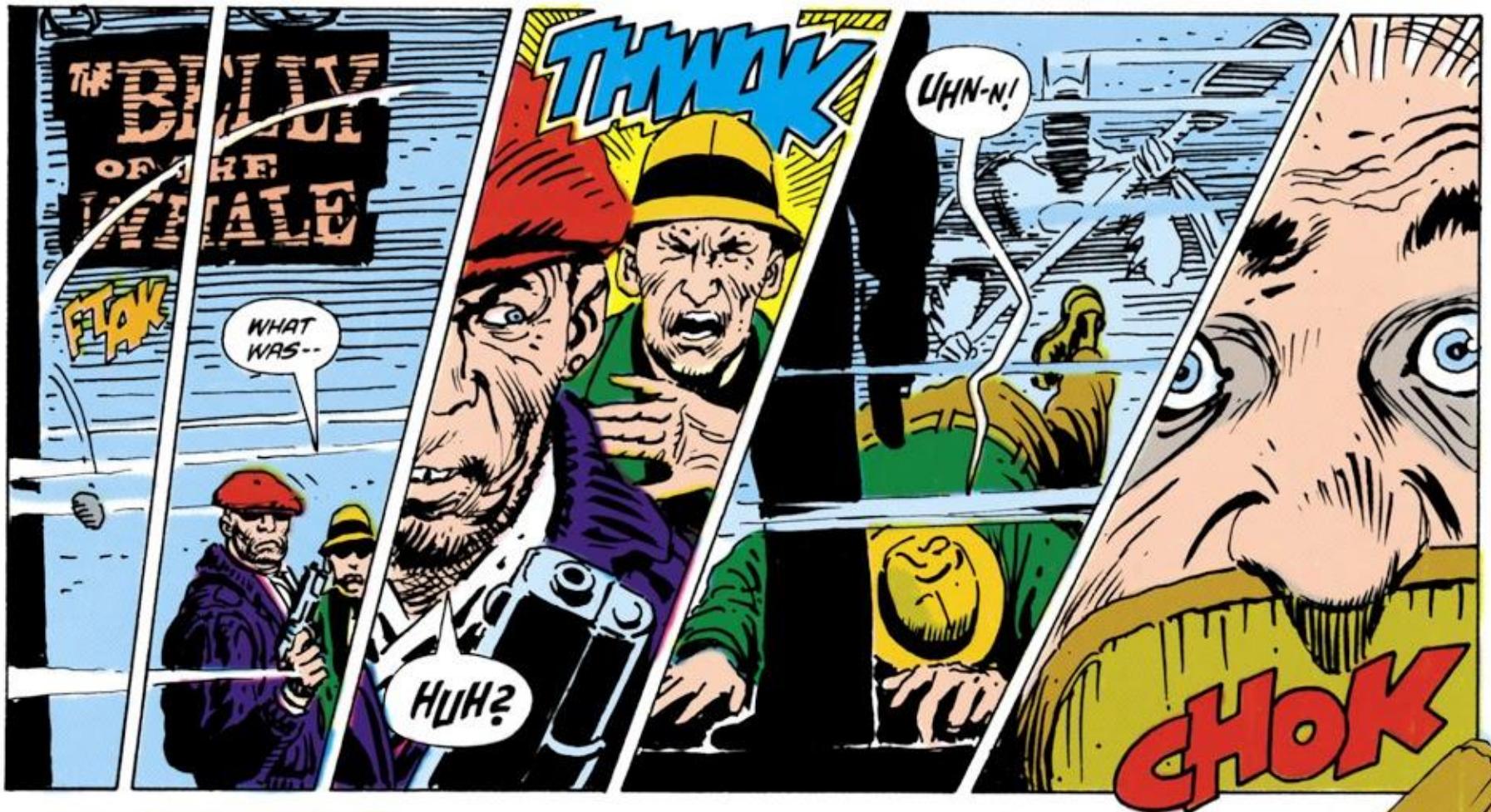
PEEL YOUR
EYES--STICK
SAID THE BATMAN
IS SURE TO
COME BACK!

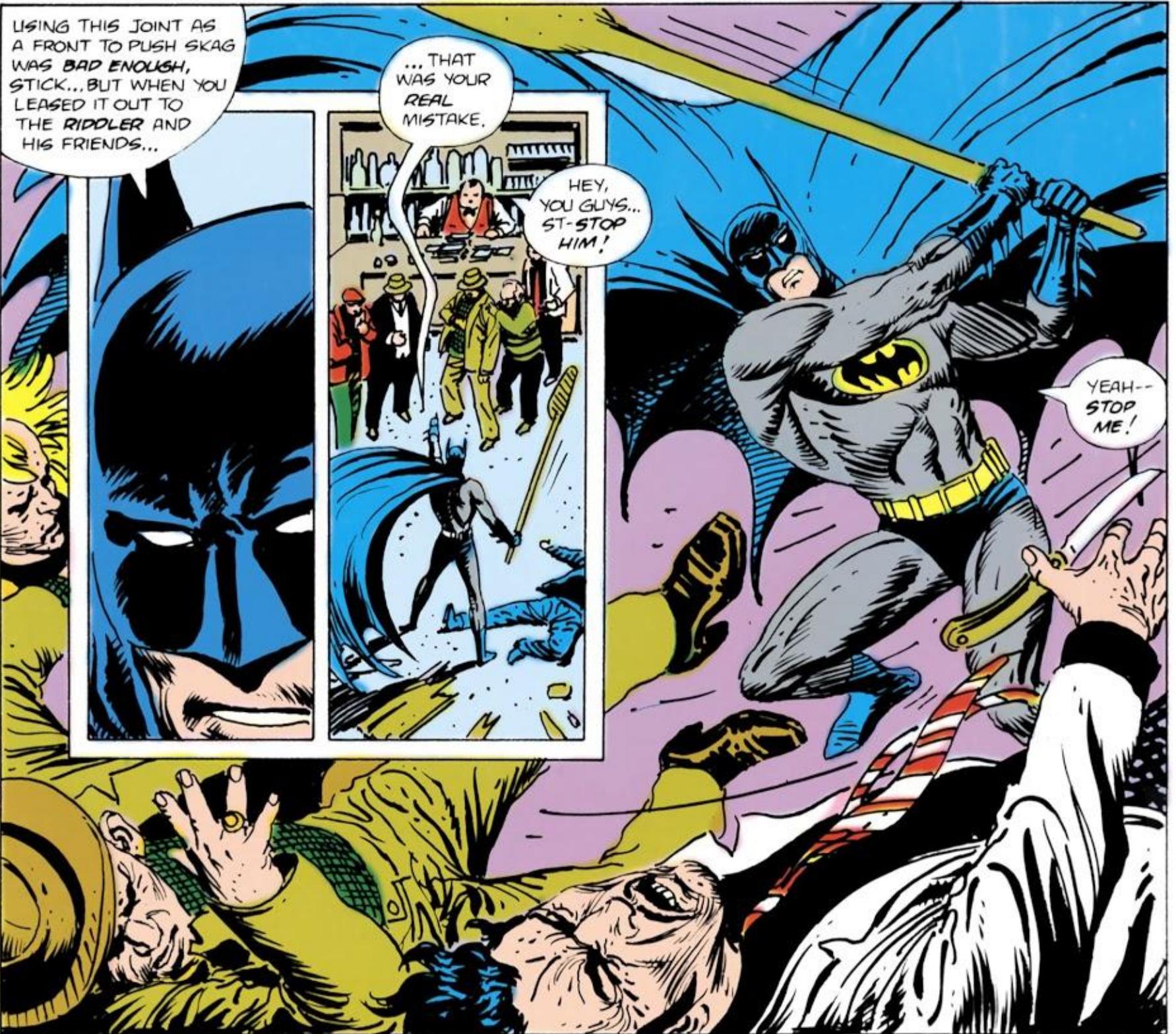
YEAH, AN'
HUNTN' FOR
BLOOD--WHICH
IS WHY I TRIED
TO TELL HIM IT
WAS TROUBLE
LETTIN' THOSE
COSTUMED FREAKS
USE THE WHALE'S
BELLY...

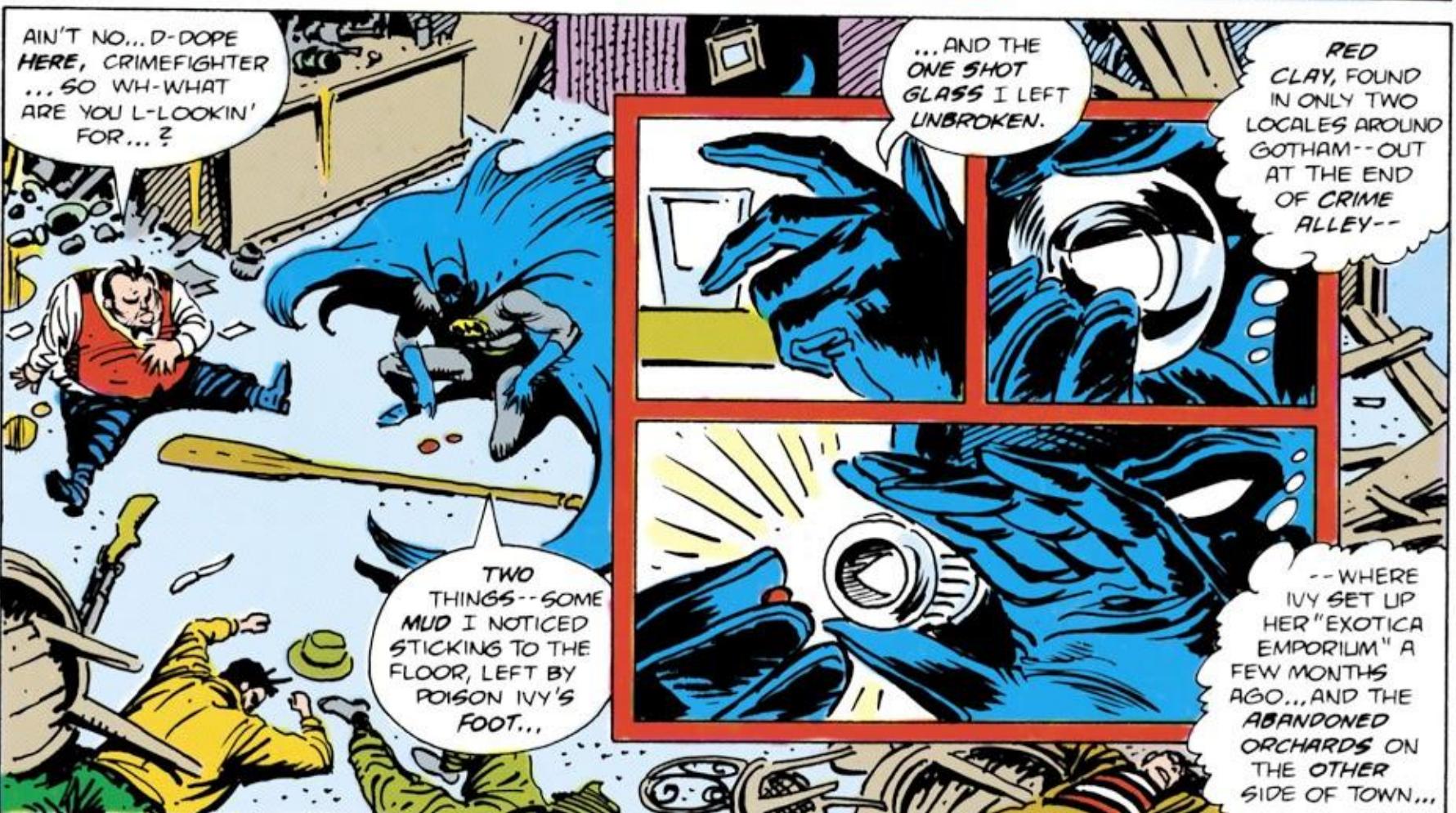
...BUT,
NO...STICK
CHIVALO
ALWAYS
KNOWS
BEST...

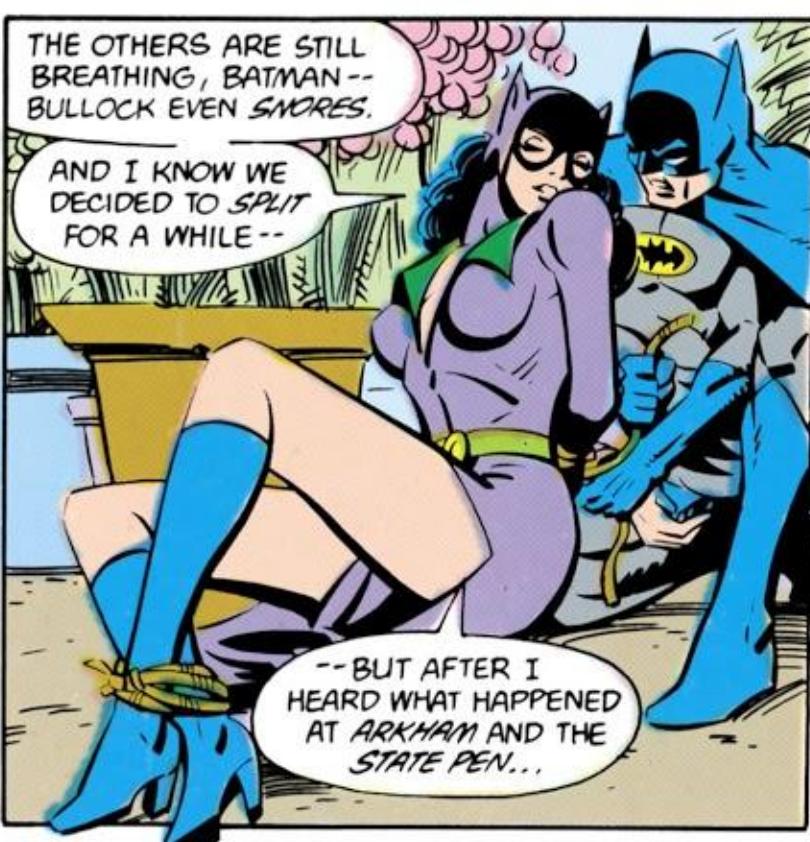


ILLUSTRATED BY: JOE KUBERT / LETTERS: ANDY KUBERT

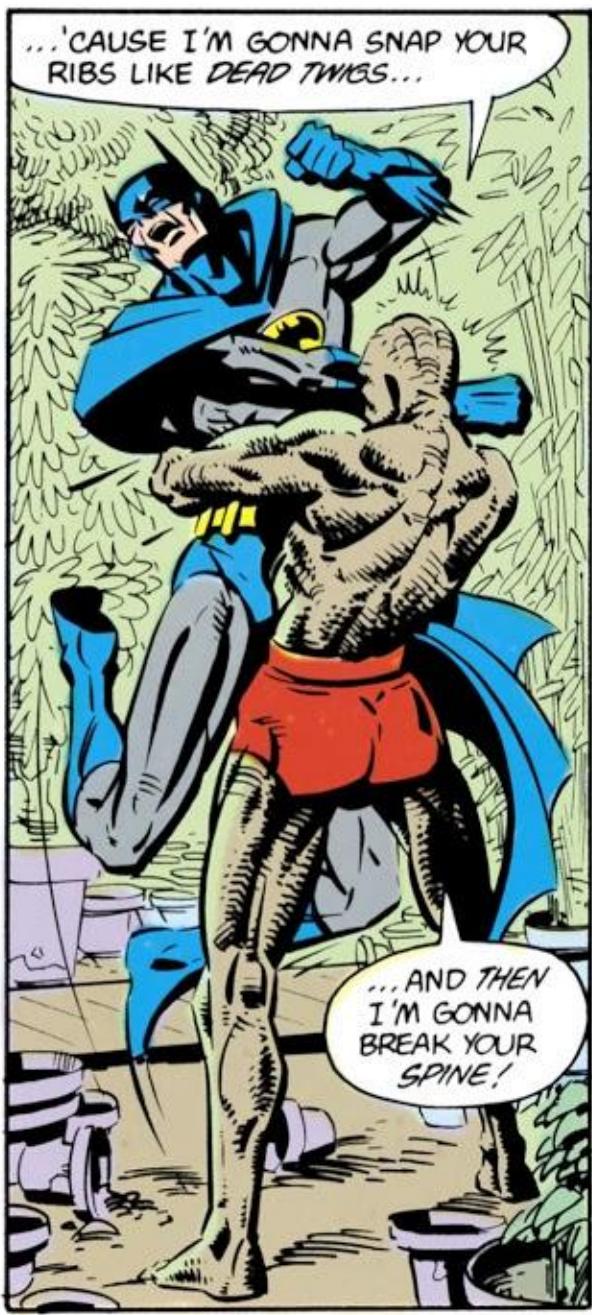












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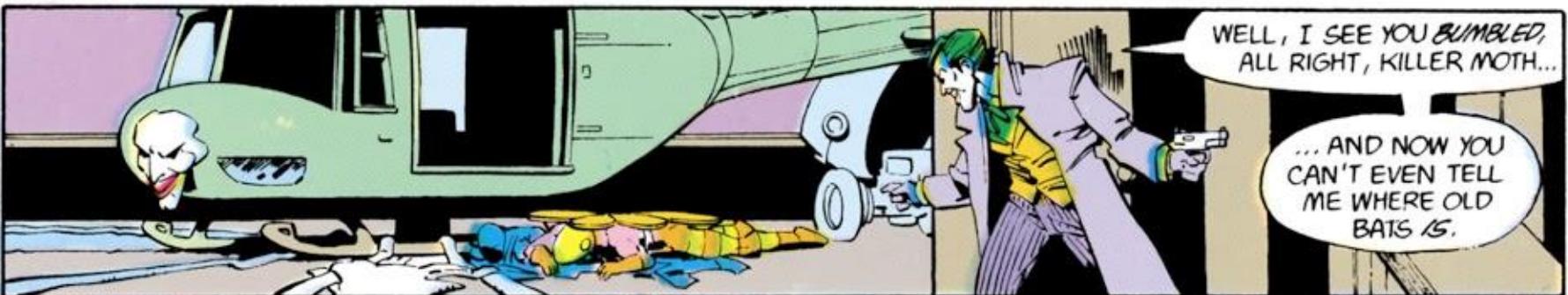
CHAPTER X

THE DARK TRADE

ILLUSTRATED BY: RICK LEONARDI & KARL KESEL

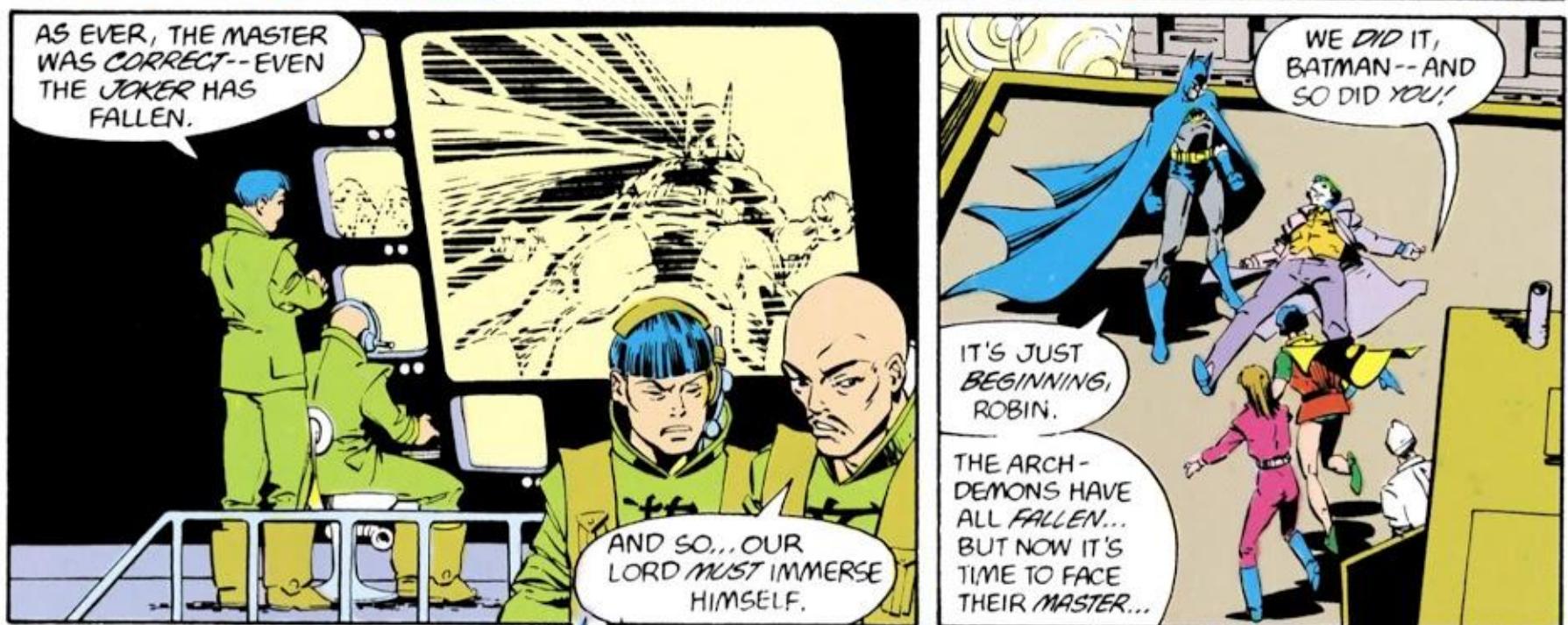
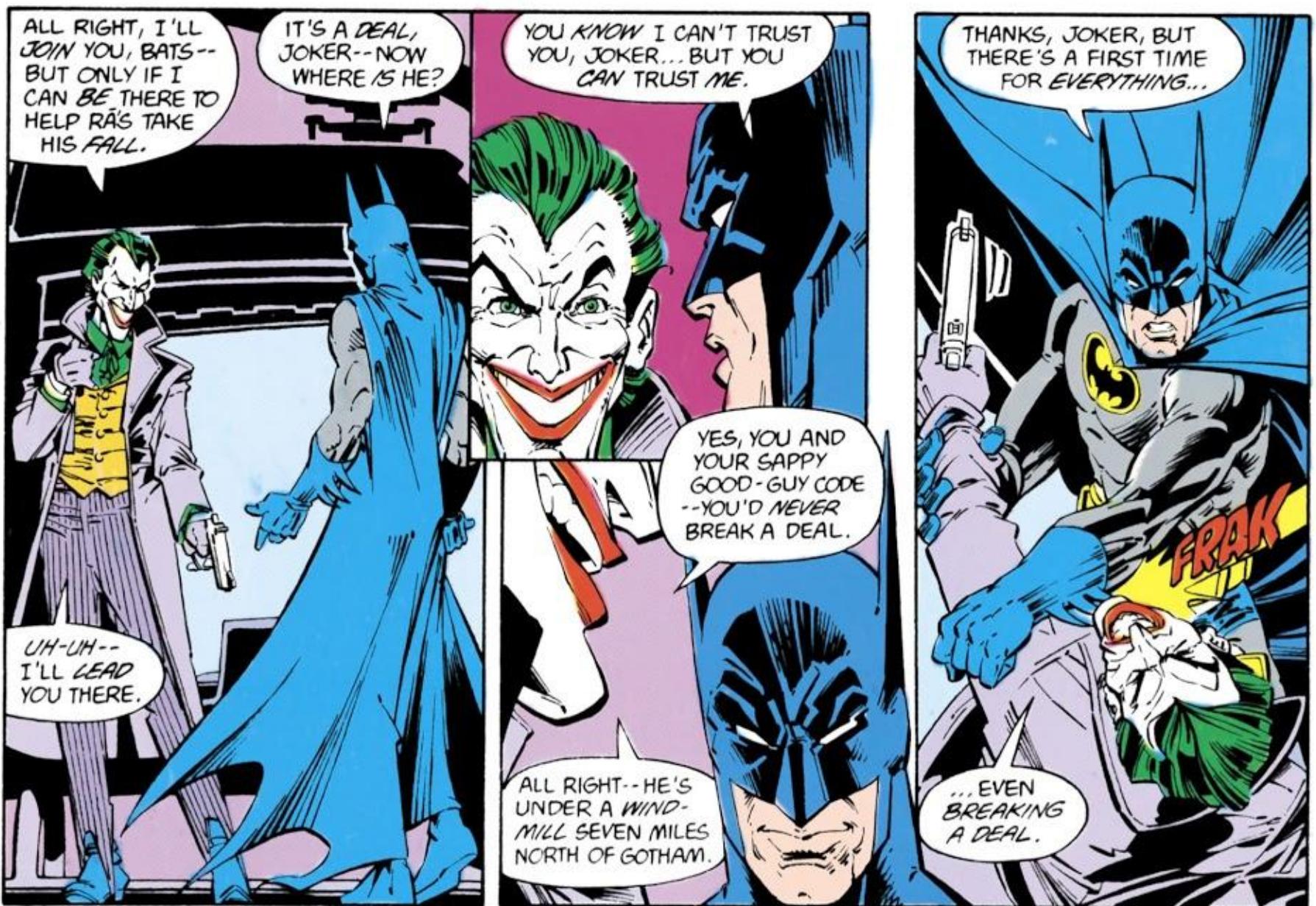
OKAY,
YOU DUMMY,
KAMIKAZE
TIME! 46

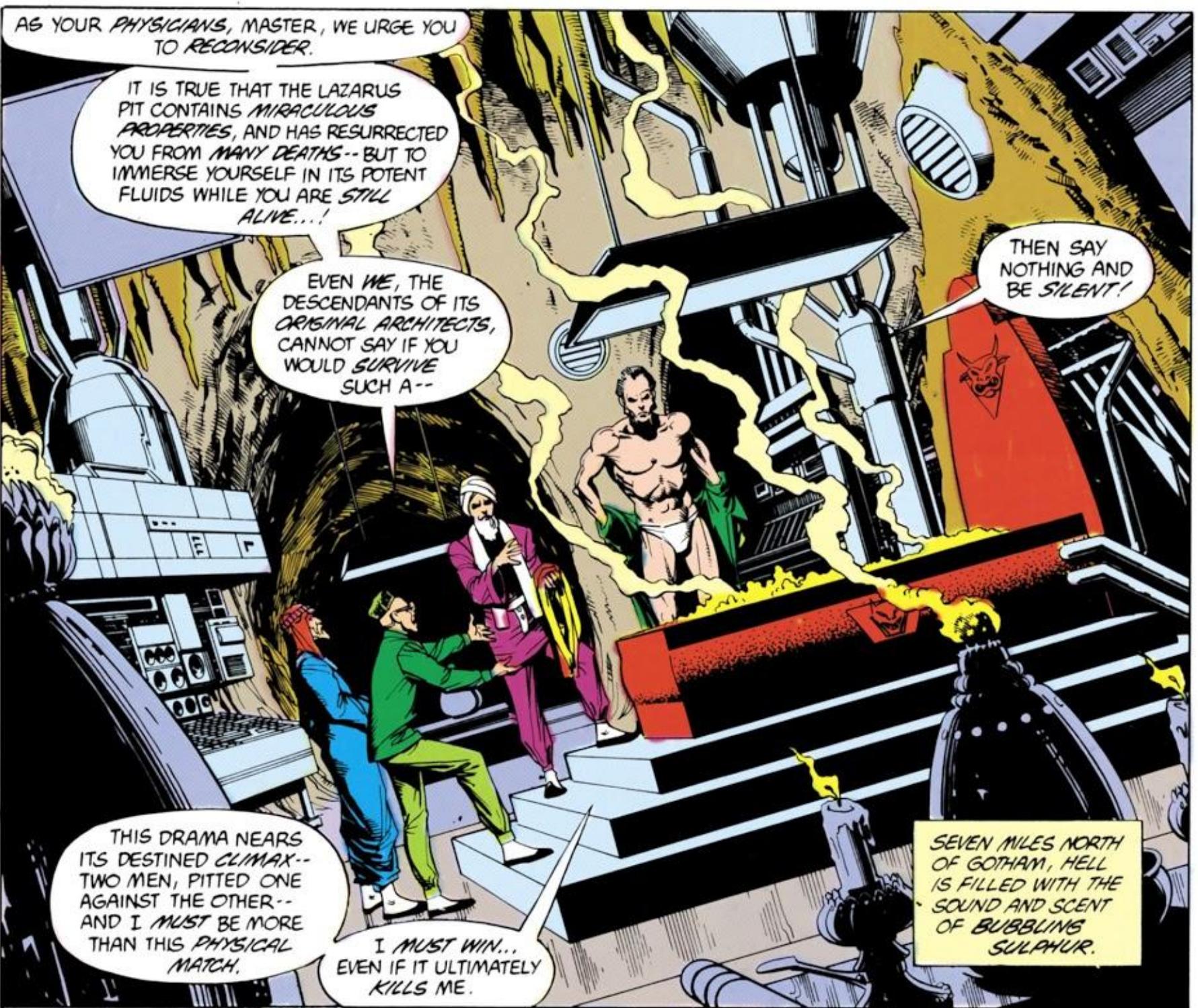








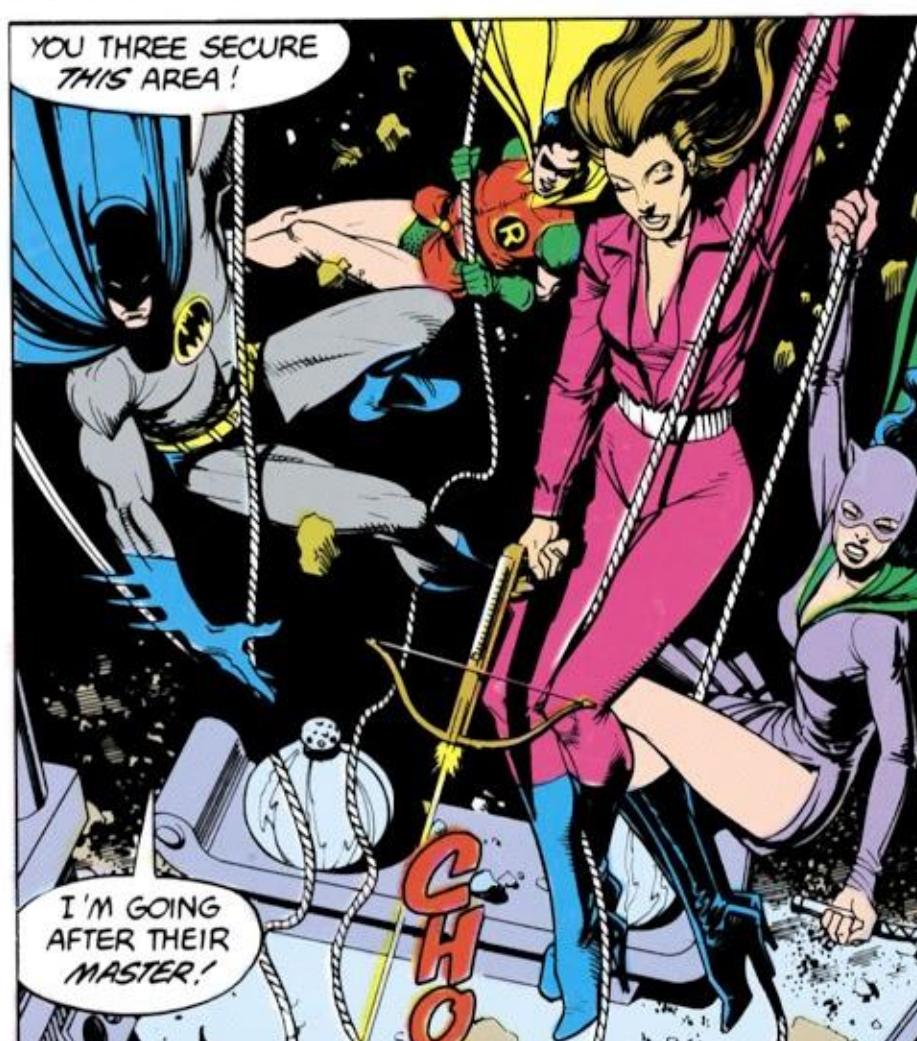


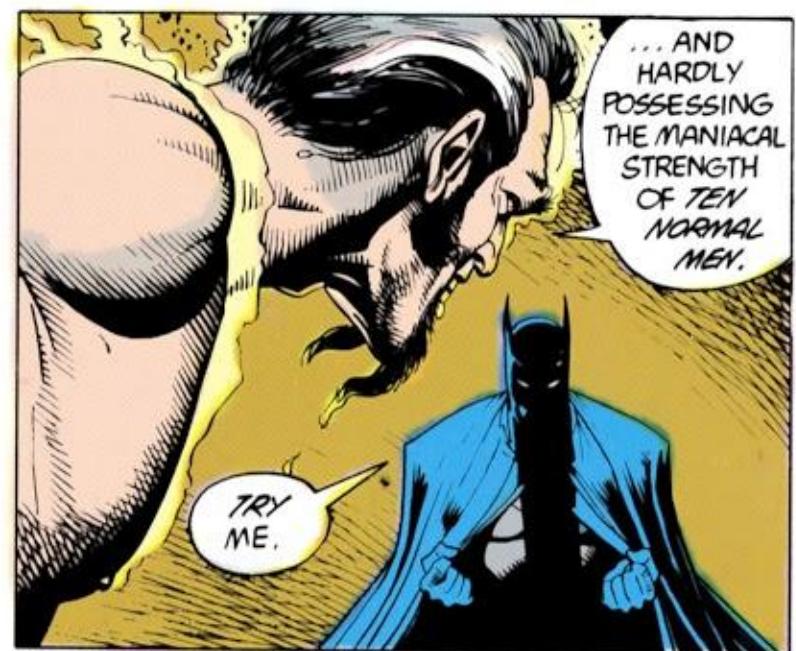
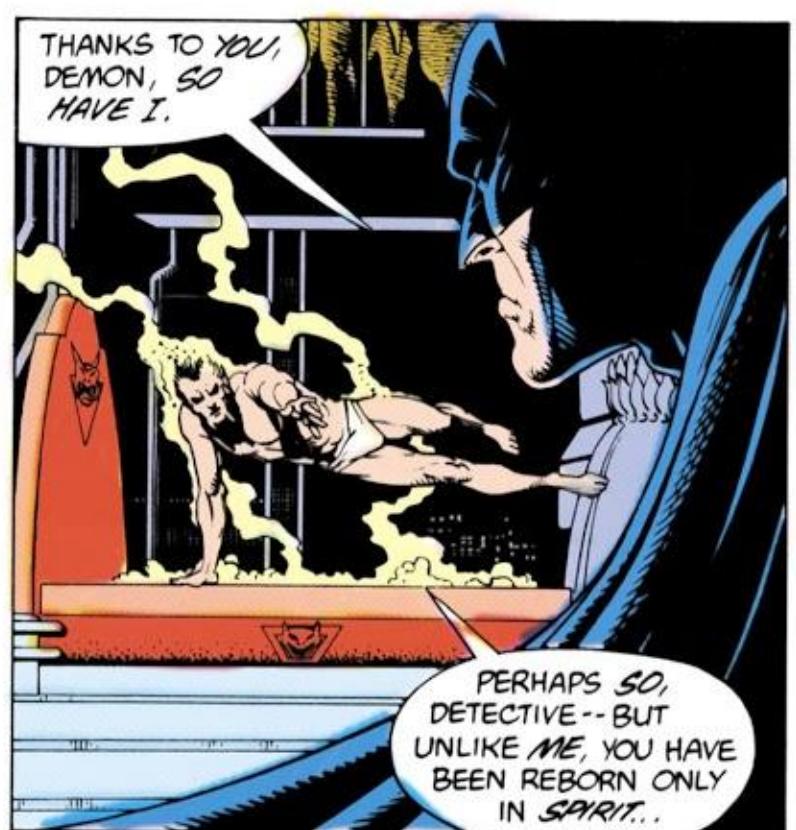


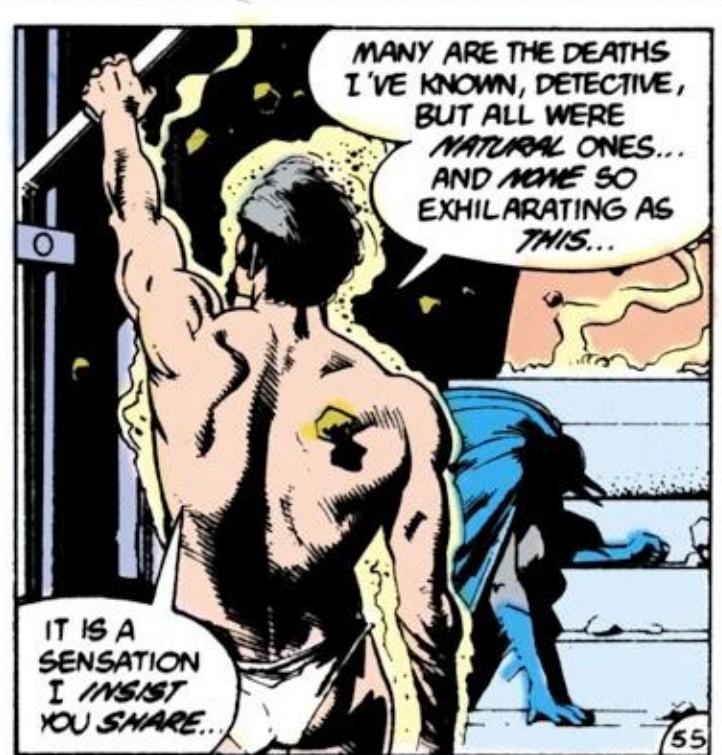
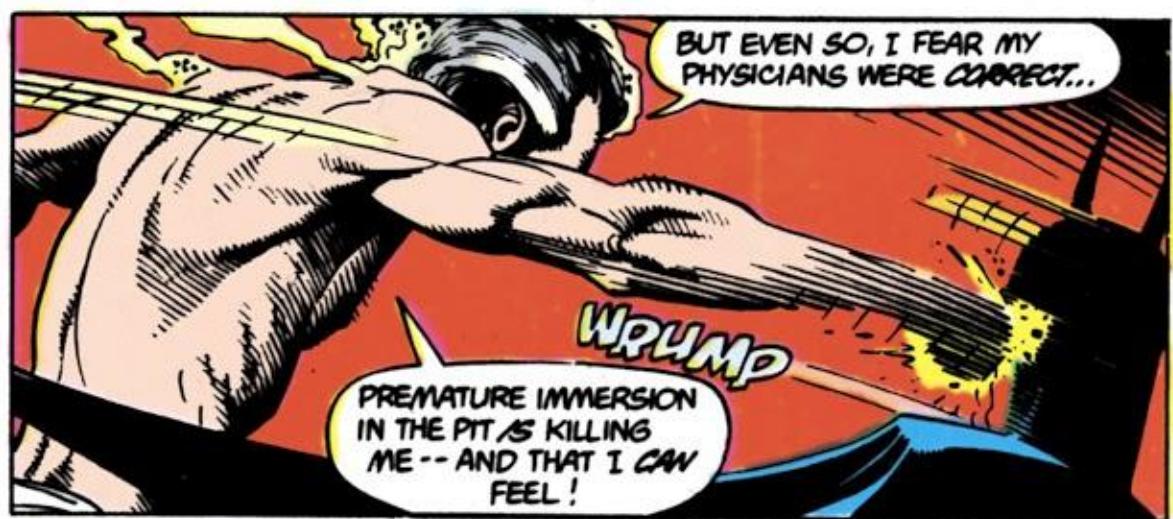
CHAPTER XI **UNDER THE WIND**

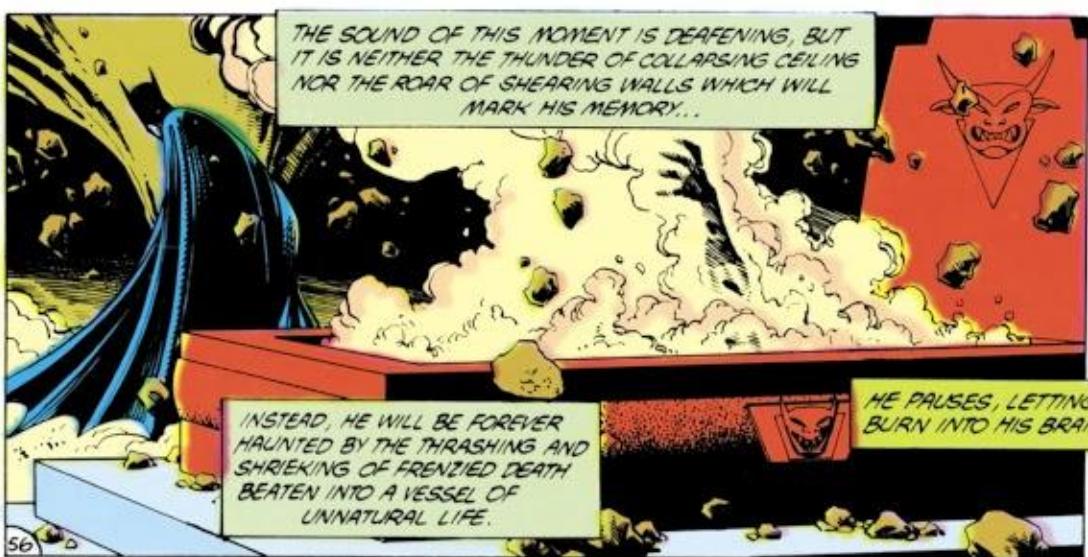
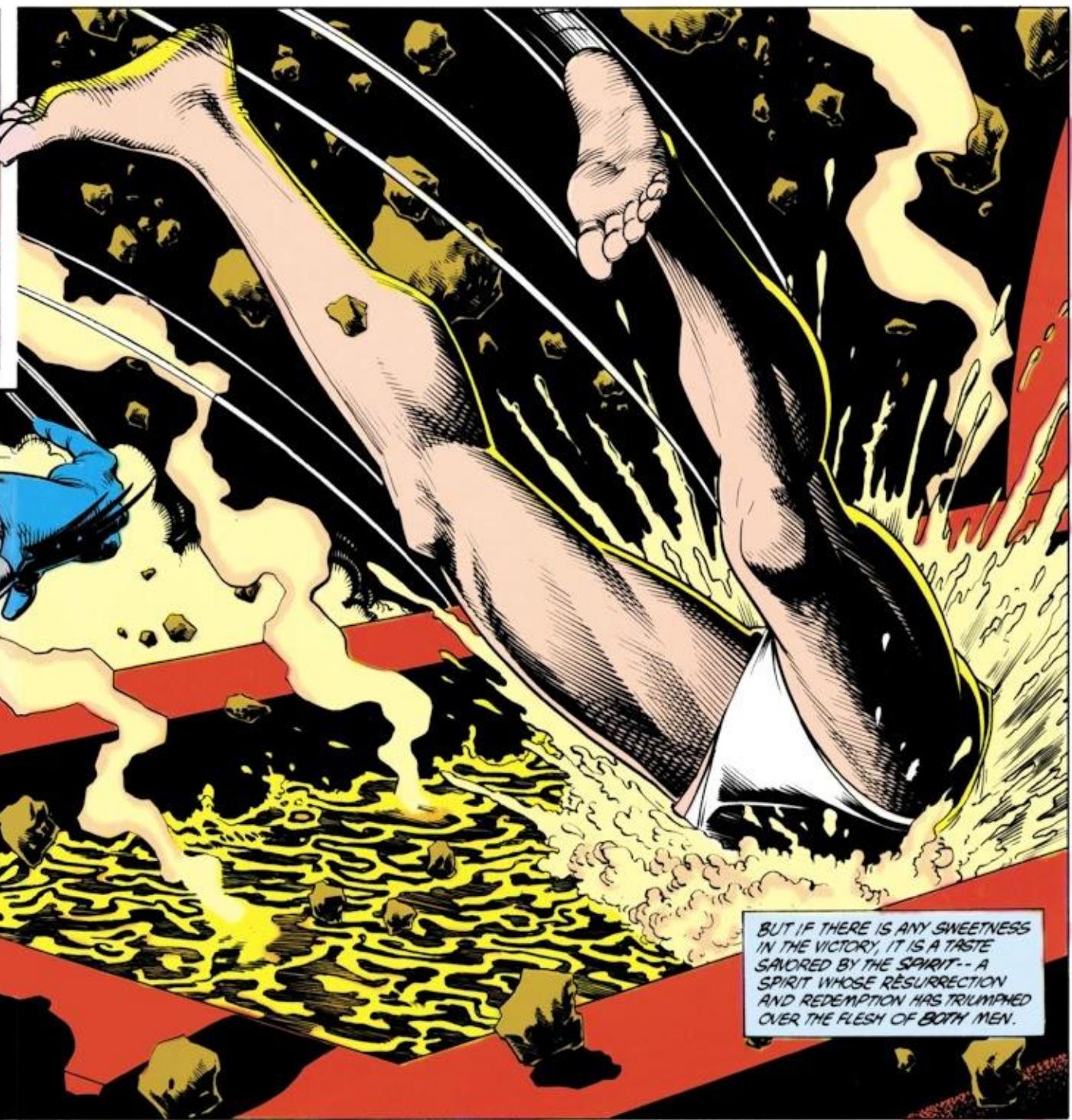
ILLUSTRATED BY: BRIAN BOLLAND









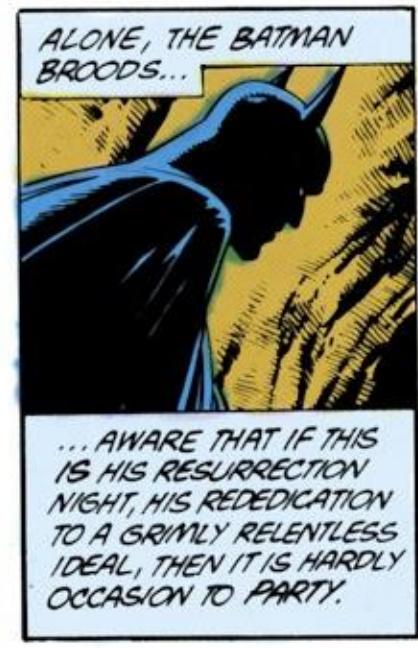
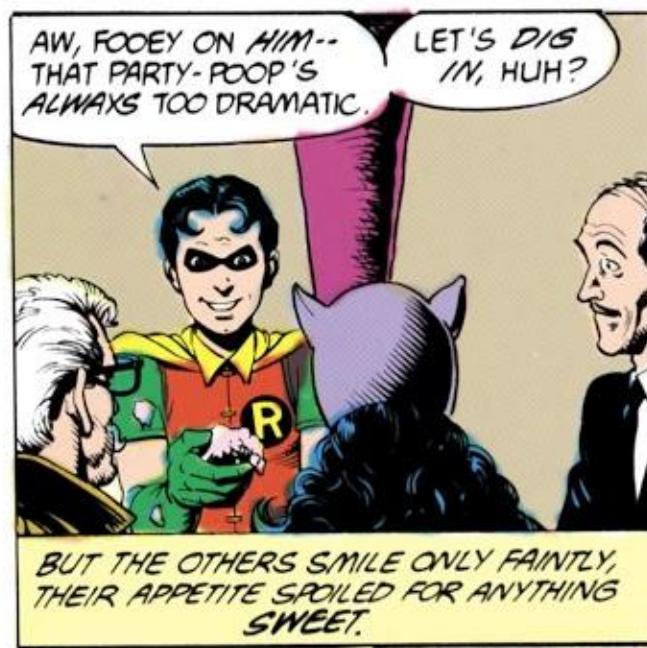




EPILOGUE: FATED FETE

THE PENNY HAS BEEN RIGHTED -- AND ALFRED PLAYS ALONG...











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WRIGHTSON



W H Y I C H O S E B A T M A N

continued from inside front cover

who would keep a little dissolving compound (for those troublesome ropes the crooks of the world keep insisting on binding you with) in one pouch of his utility belt, a high-powered flashlight in another, and some handy fast-acting anesthetic in yet another (Batman was putting people to sleep with tranquilizer darts ten years before they were actually used to sedate irate animals and people)...well, that kind of guy was *my* kind of guy.

Although he eventually got a mag of his own, it was and still is with **Detective Comics** that Batman is most closely associated in my mind. He really *was* a detective; with the deific characteristics and seeming immortality of the super-heroes, those modern Olympians, denied him, he *had* to be a detective. He couldn't rely on super-breath to return Gotham City to its proper place *after* the crime had happened; he had to catch The Riddler or whomever the villain might be *before* he could jump-start those nuclear jets. Like Sherlock Holmes, Batman looked at the tracks the crooks left; he took fingerprints; he picked up hairs from the scene of the crime and took testimony. He kept files—also à la Holmes—on the modus operandi of various criminals. He searched for patterns, knowing—as all the great detectives have—that if a pattern can be found, you can be there waiting for the criminal at his next stop. Batman lived by his wits, dueled and disarmed—sometimes brilliantly—some of the greatest villains ever created, foiled everything from massive jewel heists to dognapping schemes...and managed to live another life at the same time, that of Bruce Wayne, prominent socialite. He raised money, in the sixties he raised his consciousness, and he even raised a ward, Dick Grayson.

Oh...and one other thing. Maybe the real reason that Batman appealed to me more than the other guy.

There was something sinister about him.
That's right. You heard me.

Sinister.

Like The Shadow and the Moon-Man of the pulps, like a vampire (but *not* like a virgin, I never thought that, gang), Batman was a creature of the night.

Oh, yeah, you saw him fighting crime in the day *once in a while*, but mostly he was a shape in the shadows or a grim-faced man-thing crashing through a window at some small hour of the morning, his cape floating around him like a great shadow. In those *Batman-busts-in* panels, you almost always saw a horrid species of fear on the faces of the hoods he was about to flush down the toilet, and I always felt a strong sense of identity with those expressions. Yeah, I thought (and still do think), sitting under a tree in our backyard, or maybe in the tub, or on the john (or, as a kid, under the covers with a flashlight). Yeah, *that's right, they should look scared, I'd sure be scared if something like that busted in on me. I'd be scared even if I wasn't doing something wrong.*

The night was his time; the shadows were his place; like the bat from which he took his name, he saw with his hands and feet and ears. As Bruce Wayne, he was cheerful, posh, full of savoir faire and bonhomie, a fellow easily imagined in front of the fire in his book-lined library with a balloon glass of brandy and a bowl of Cheez Doodles near at hand. But when the Bat-Signal floated against one of Gotham's skyscrapers (or perhaps the underside of a handy passing cloud), a grim and unsmiling creature emerged from the Bat-Cave. You could shoot him and he would bleed...you could crank him a good one on the head and he would fold up (at least for a while)...but you could never, *never* stop him.

From the cancellation of the unpleasantly campy *Batman* TV show until 1982 or so, Batman lived in a shadow-world not just as a character but as a published fictional character. There was a time, I don't mind telling you, when I remember scanning the newsstands carefully (and a little anxiously) around the middle of each month, sure that the Caped Crusader would be gone, a character who had simply slipped away into that quiet hall of obscurity where such great creations as J'onn J'onzz, Manhunter from Mars; Plastic Man; The Blackhawks; Captain Marvel; and Turok, Son of Stone had gone before him.

Seems I was wrong to worry.

Seems like you just can't keep a good bat down.

During the last four years or so, one of two things has been happening: either new fans have been interesting themselves in Batman's doings, or some of the old ones have been quietly stealing back. Either way, the blast of publicity and the triumphant sales of DC's **The Dark Knight Returns**, probably the finest piece of comic art ever to be published in a popular edition, seem to have assured Batman's continued success. For me, that is both a great relief and a great pleasure.

I'd like to congratulate the Caped Crusader on his long and valiant history, thank him for the hours of pleasure he has given me, and wish him many more years of heroic crime-busting.

Go get 'em, Big Guy. May your Bat-Signal never fail, your Batmobile never run out of the nuclear pellets it runs on, your utility belt never come up fatally understocked at the wrong moment.

And please, never come busting through my skylight in the middle of the night. You'd probably scare me into a brain hemorrhage...and besides, Big Guy, I'm on *your* side.

I always was.

— Stephen King



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