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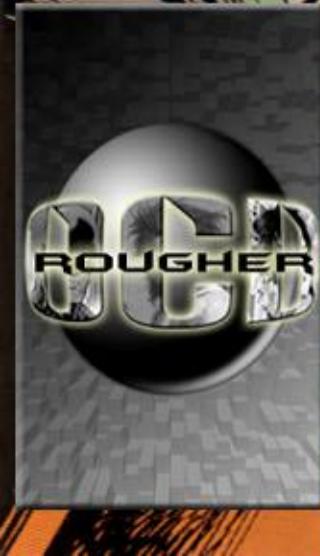


BATMAN

APPROVED
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CODE
COP
AUTHORITY

MEET HAROLD.
HE'S HATED, HUNTED,
DESPISED
...AND HE MAY BE
BATMAN'S
BEST FRIEND.

GRANT
BREYFOGLE
MITCHELL



ROUGHED





It could have been me.

NIGHT MONSTERS

LOOSEN UP,
KID! YOU'RE GONNA
LOOOOOOVE
THIS!

ALAN NORM STEVE ADRIENNE TODD KELLEY DENNIS BOB
GRANT BREYFOGLE MITCHELL ROY COLORIST KLEIN PUCKETT O'NEIL EDITOR KANE
SCRIPT PENCILLER INKER LETTERER ASST. EDITOR EDITOR BATMAN CREATOR

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G-5903

Swooping from
the shadows
like Hell's own
angel--

OOF!

FRATCH!

Demon of the
Darkness, dispensing
instant justice--

BLAM! BLAM!

Bloody
retribution!

SPOK!

Voices chilled,
like frosted
razors--

SCUM LIKE YOU
NEVER LEARN. THERE'S
ONLY ONE THING
COMES OUT THE END
OF A NEEDLE--

SQUIT

DEATH!

It could have been me. I was fit enough--strong enough. I had the dedication--maybe even the motivation ... once.

I could have been the night monster. But I chose to hit them from the other side.

I chose law, not justice.

=K-KOFF!=

=KOPF!
KOPF!
KOPF!=
=KOPF
KOPF!=



Must have dozed off. Getting too old, too many late nights, too many blows from the hammer of life.

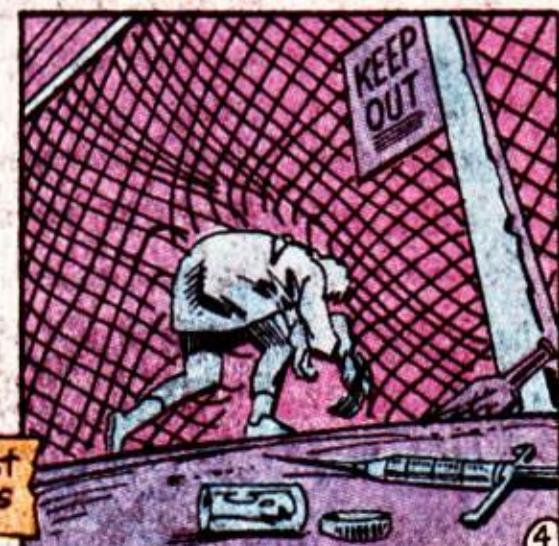
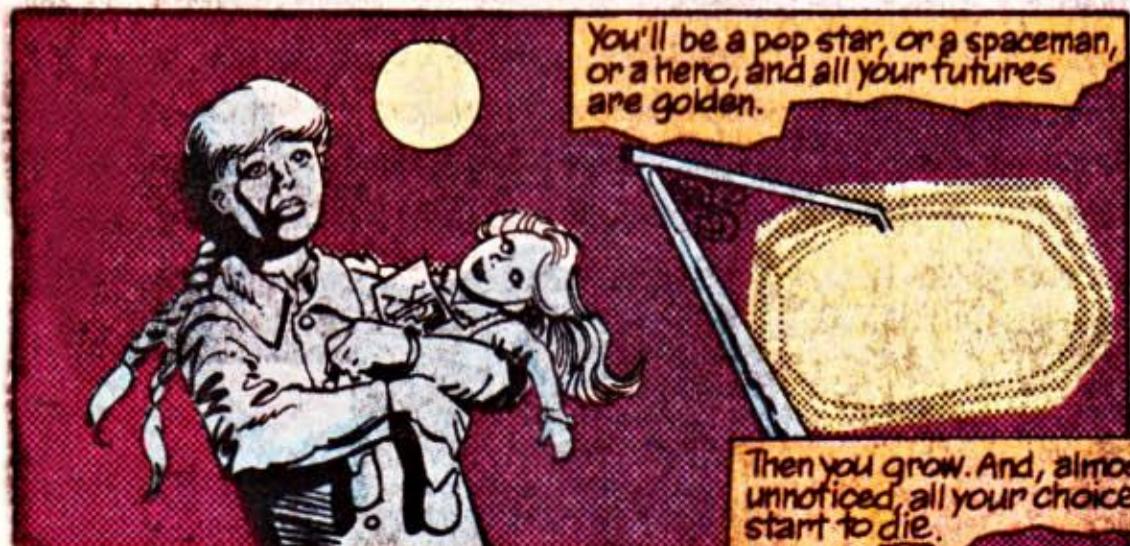


How the hell does he manage?

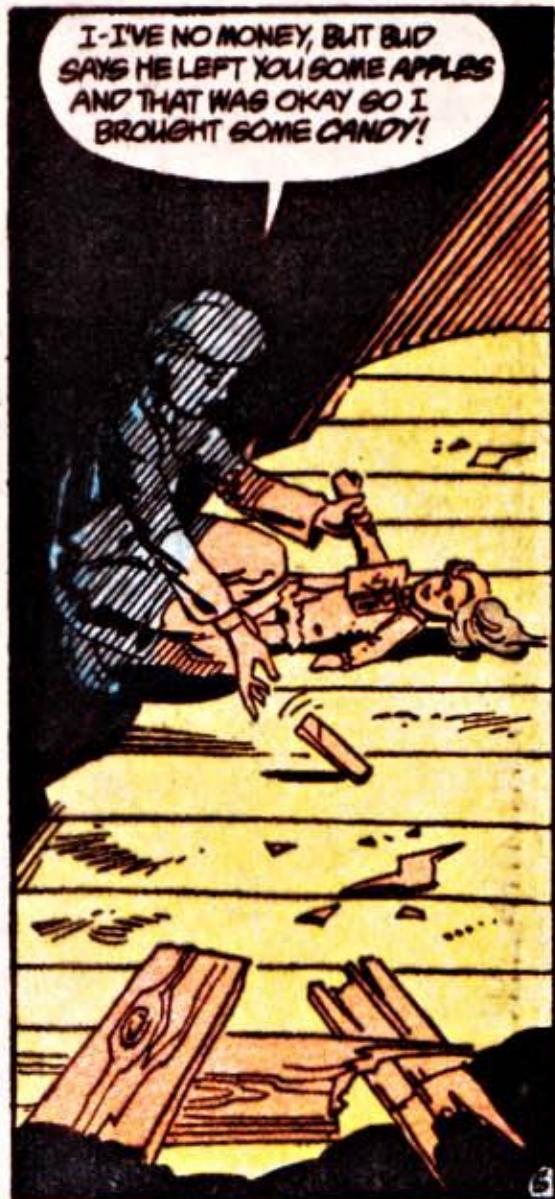
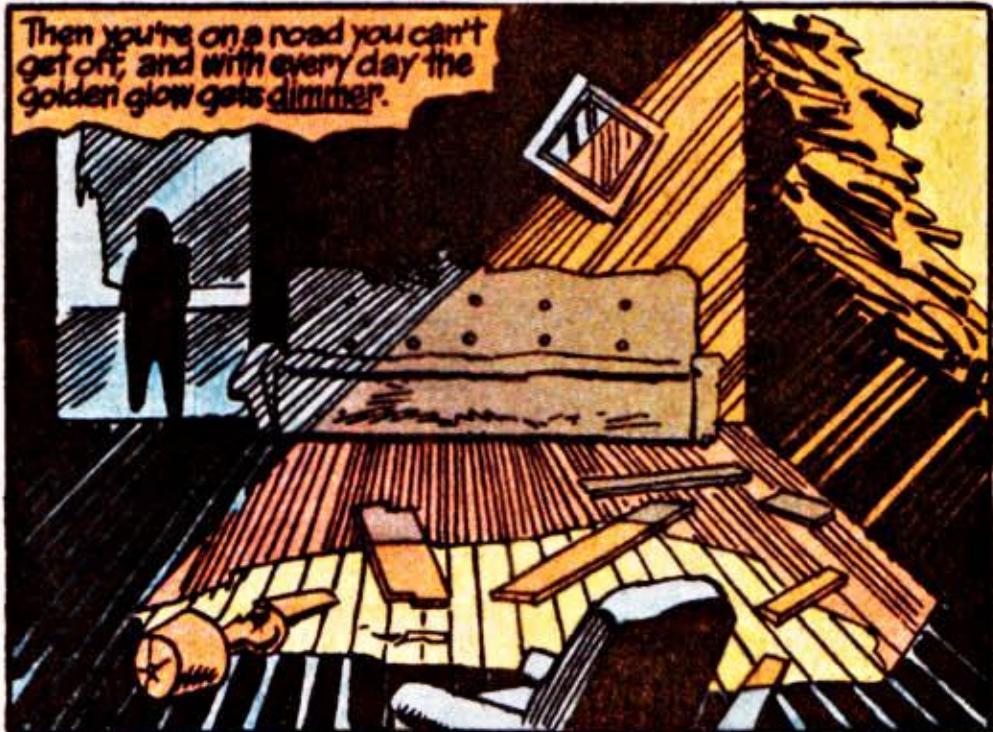


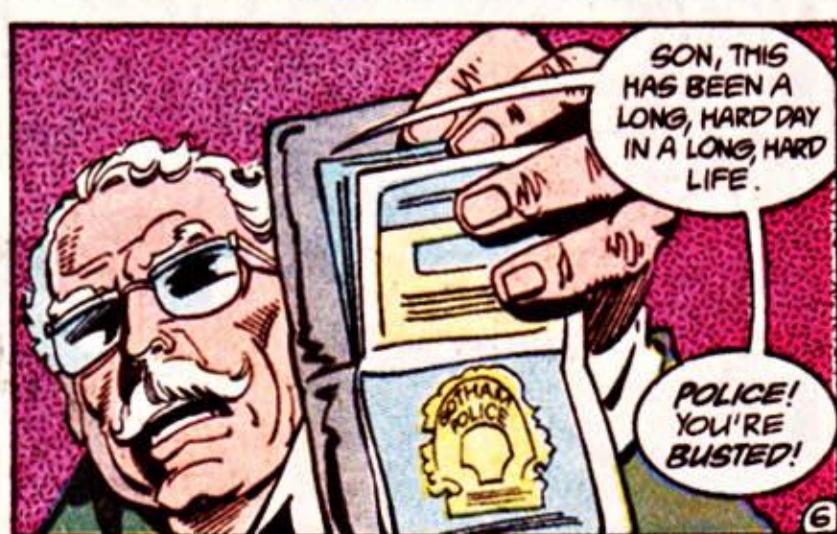
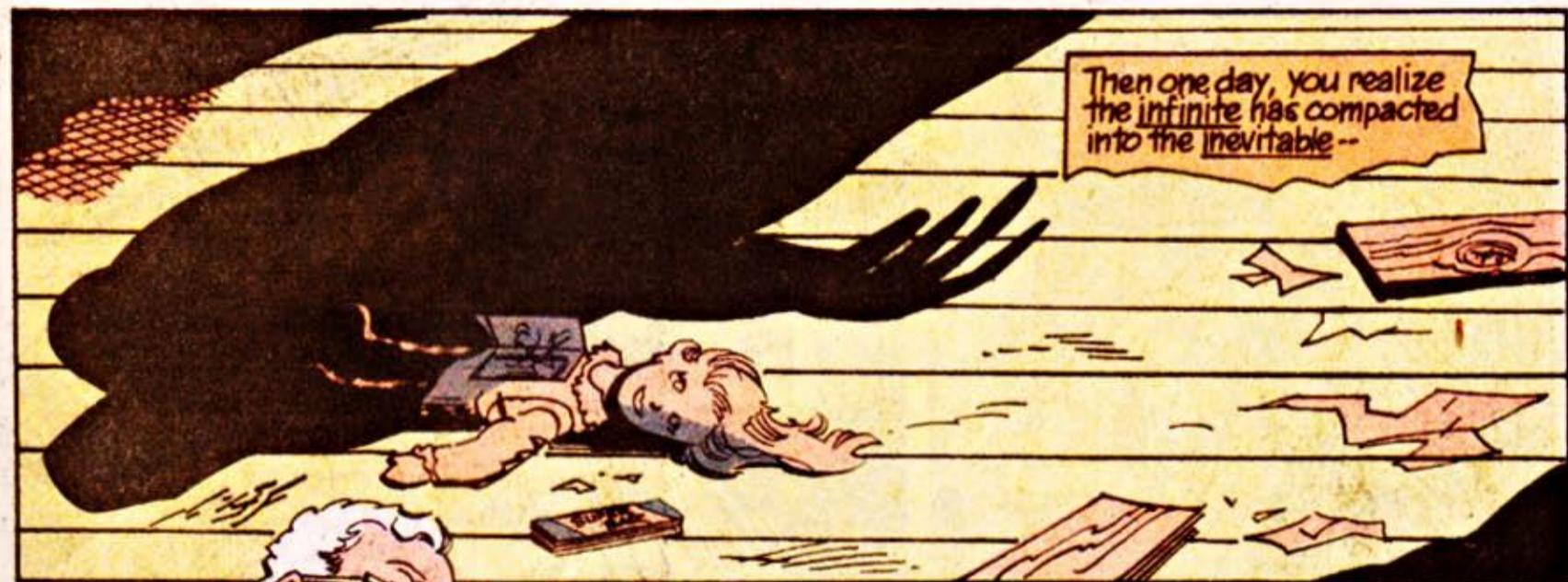
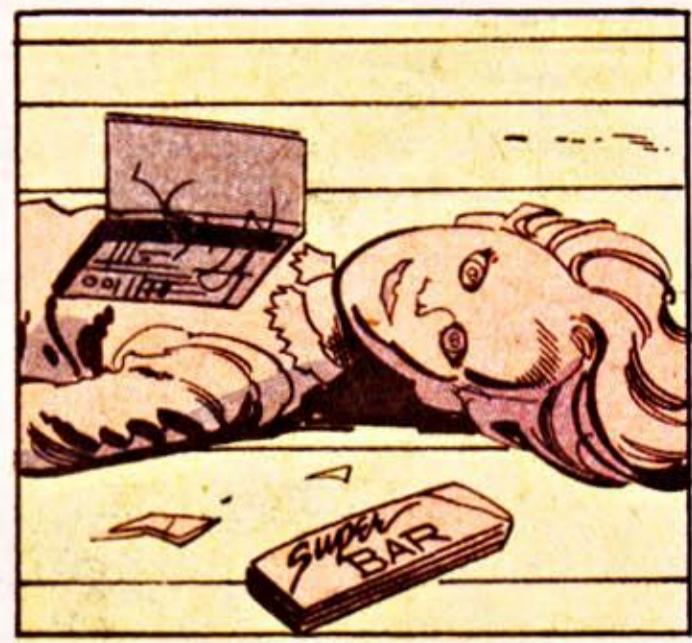
Crazy! I just put in a double shift. I start again in under six hours. My chest's on fire, my head aches, and sometimes--



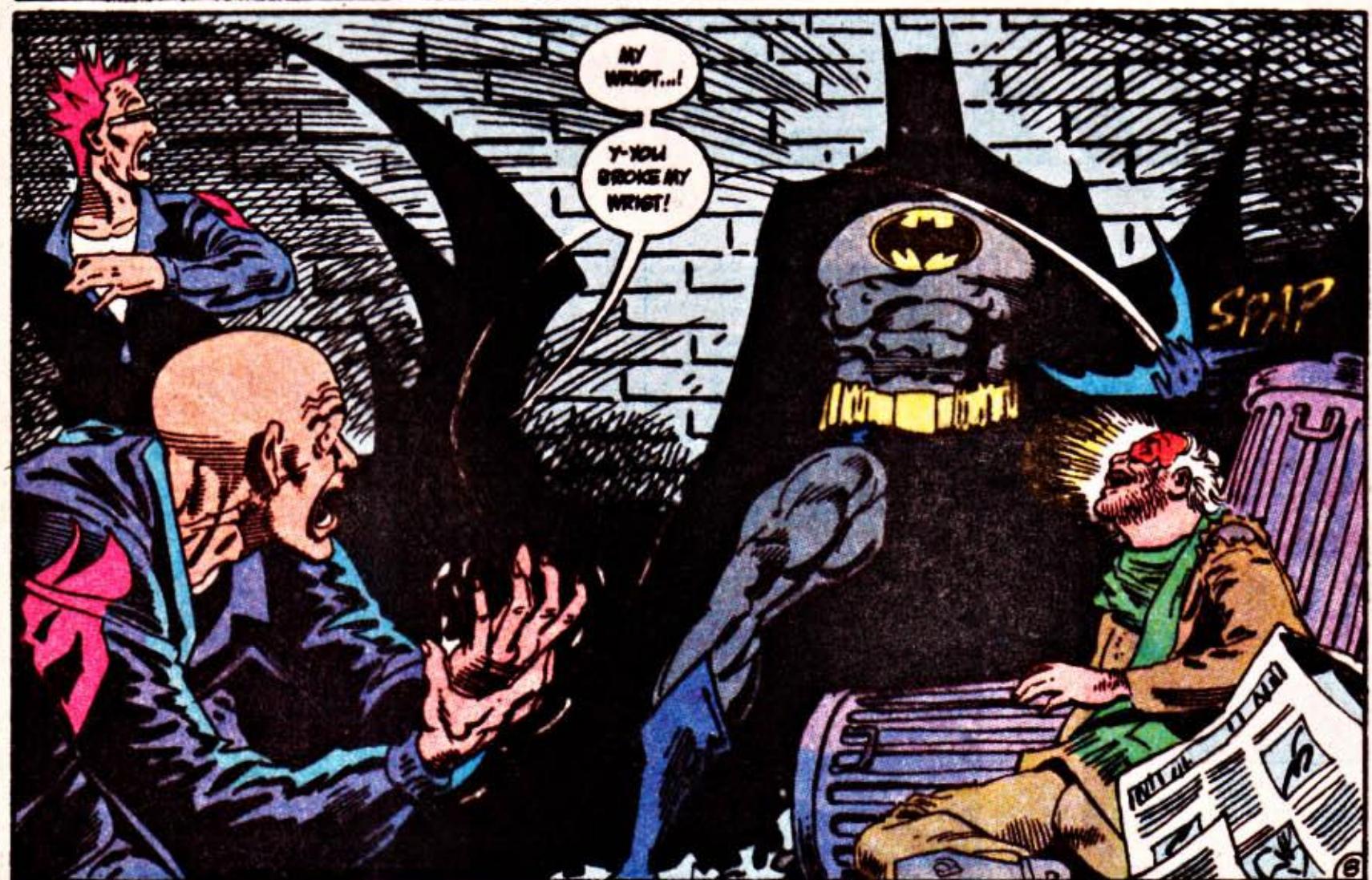


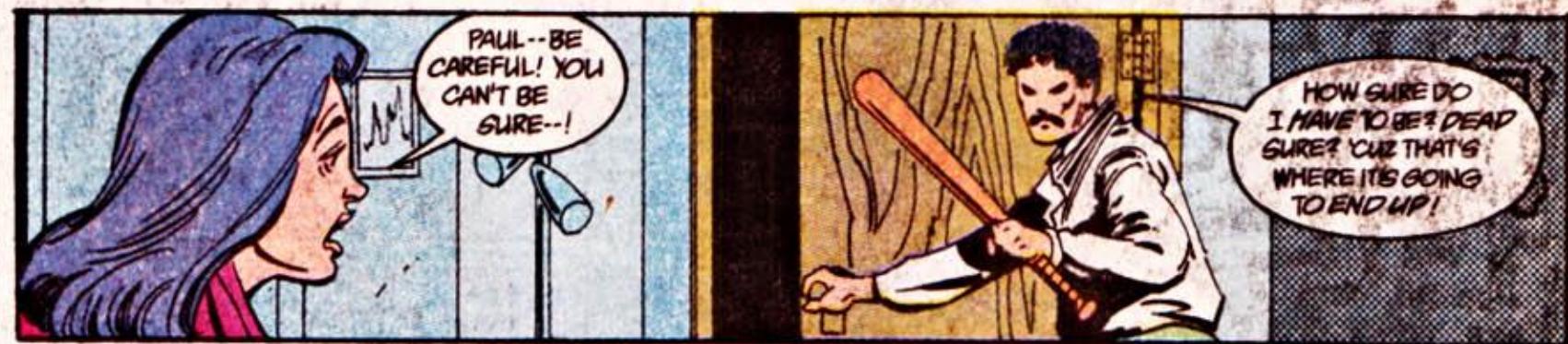
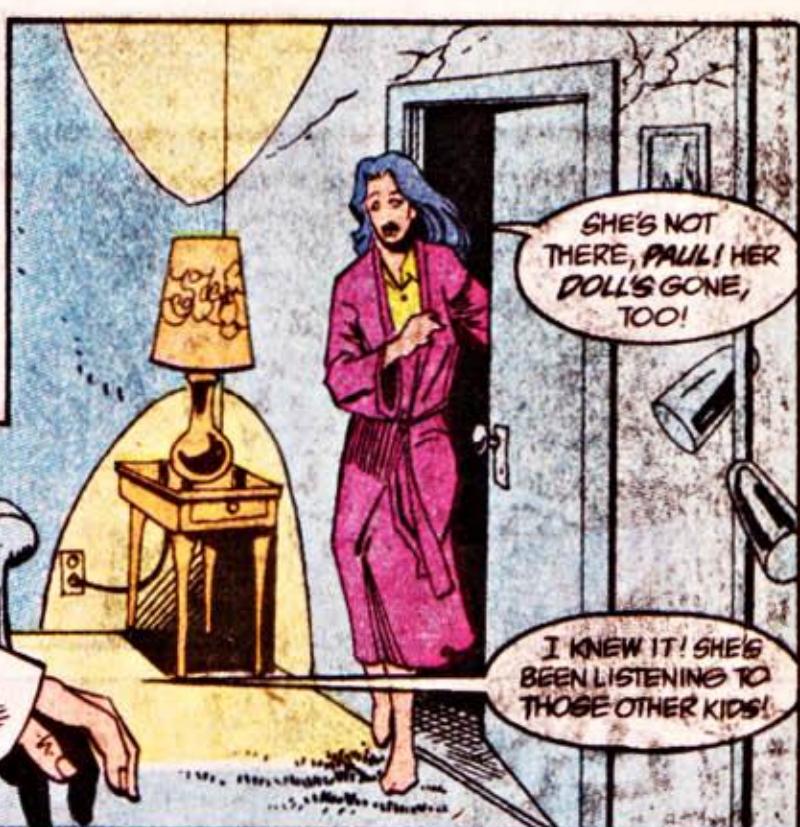
Five years old? You'll never be
the Gerber Baby. Eleven? Too
late to be a world-class gymnast.

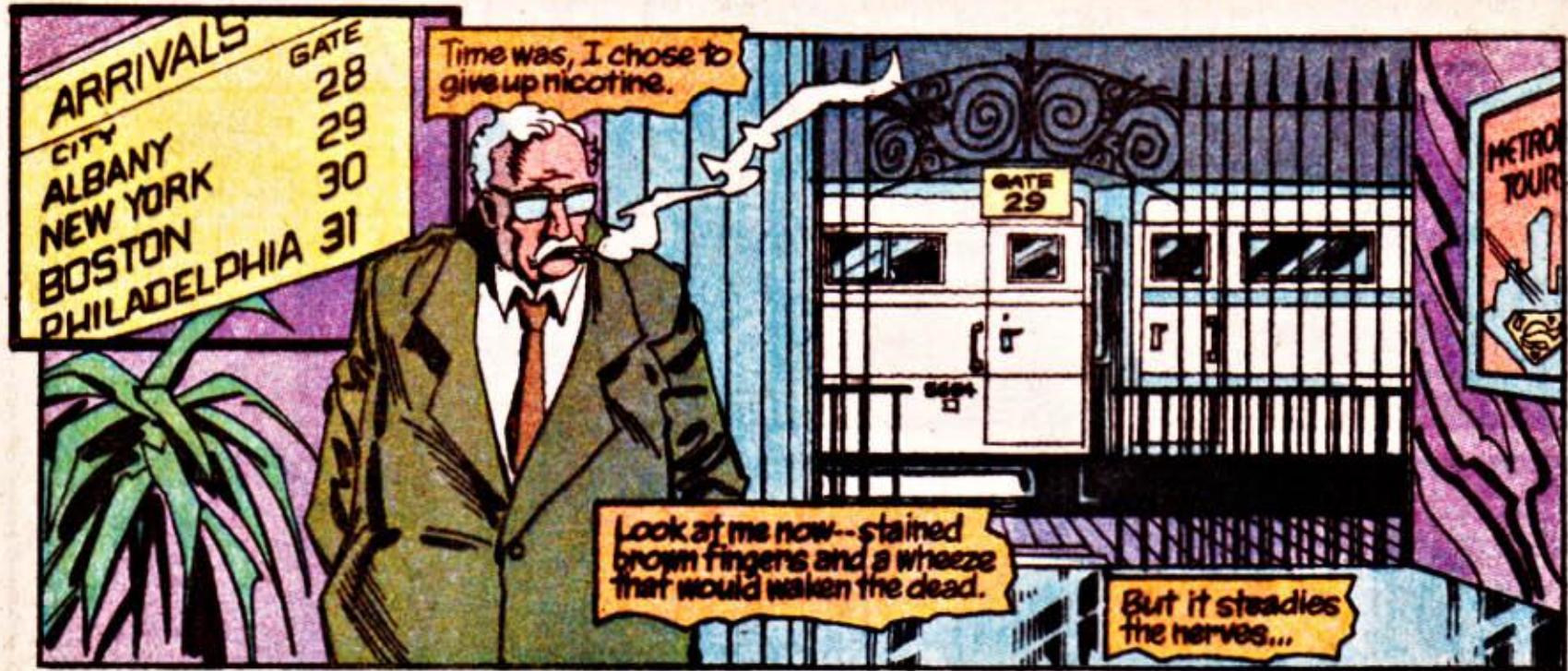


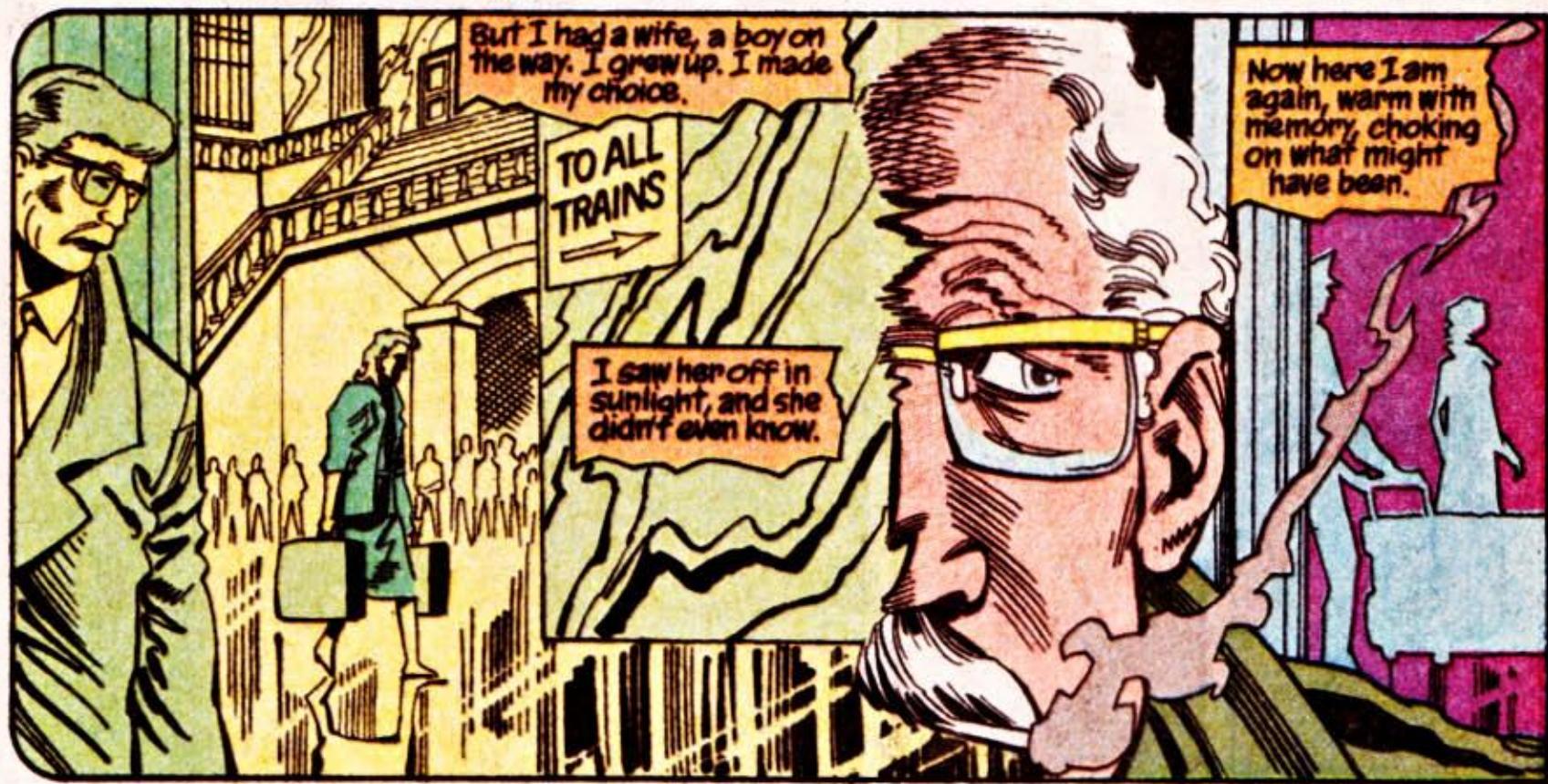
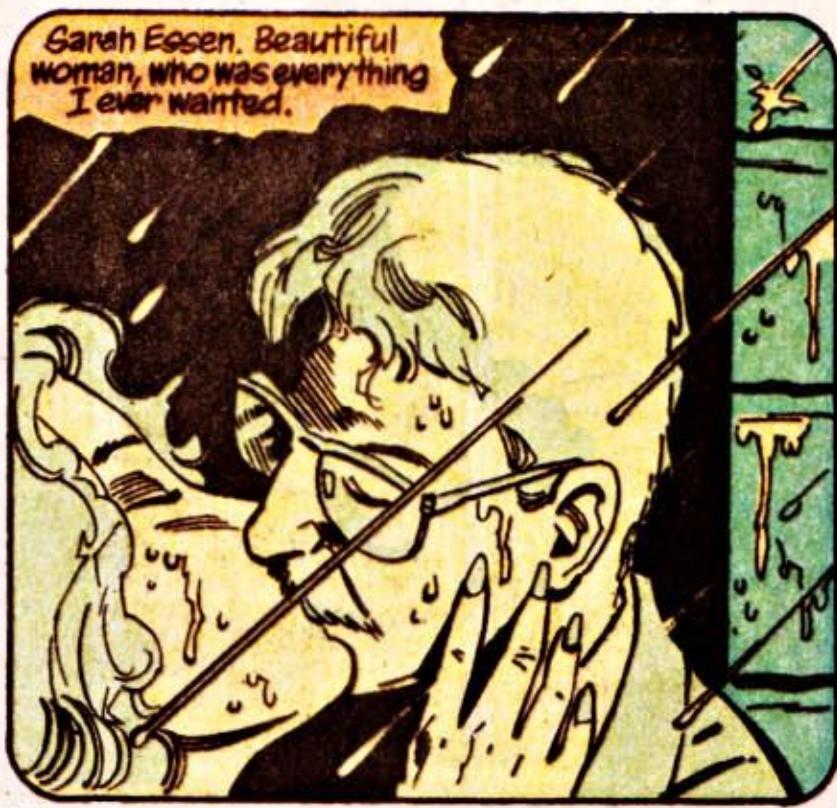
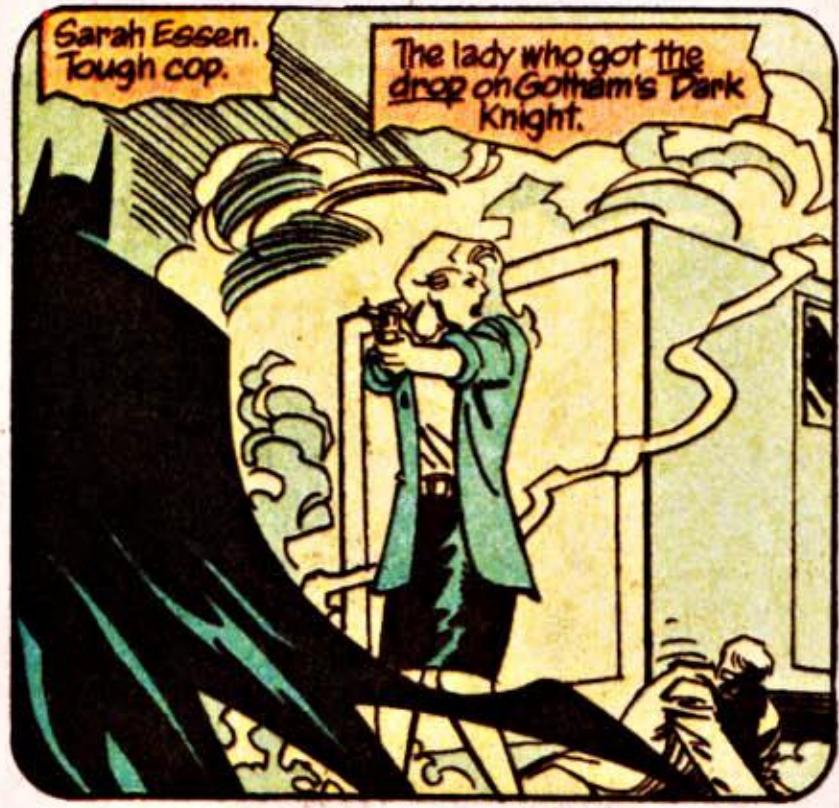












HE HEARS VOICES...

...RAISED
IN ANGER.

COUPLE OF
BLOCKS AWAY...

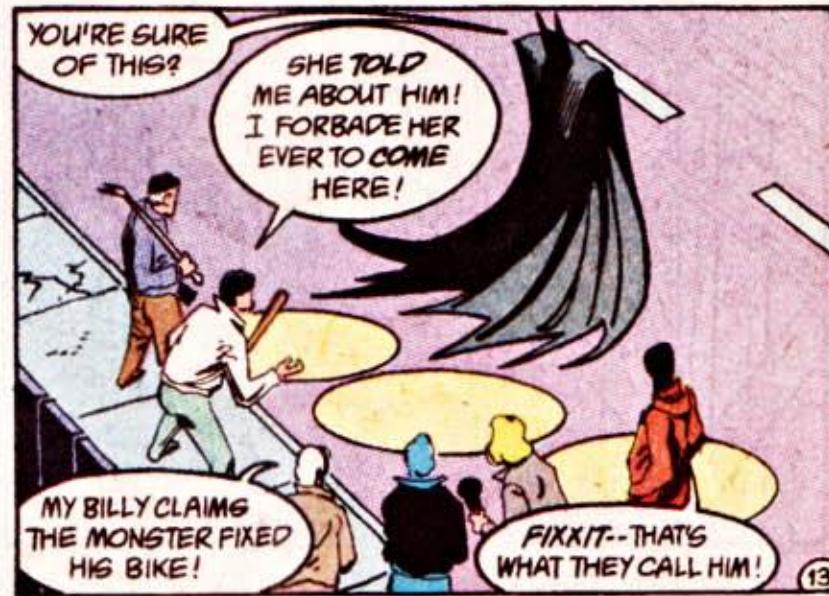
PAT
ZWEEEEEE

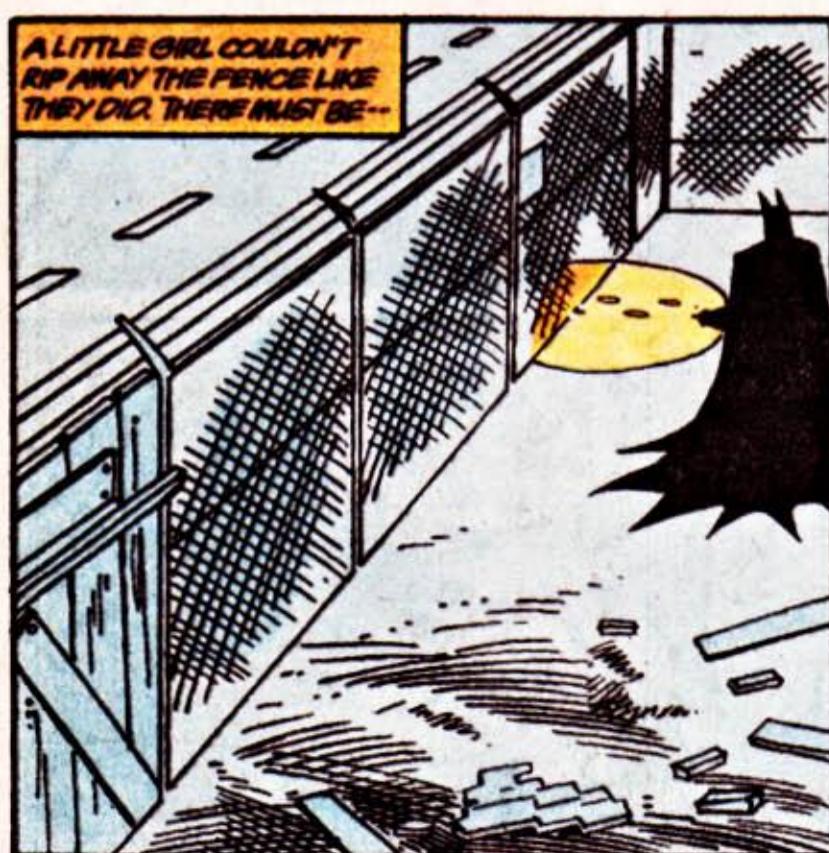
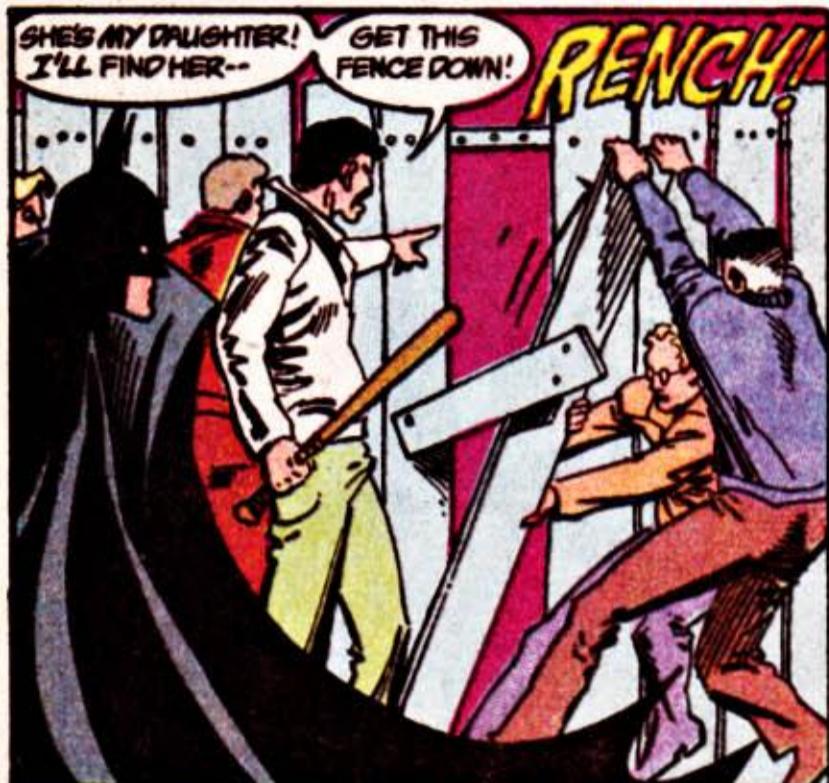
MELISSA!

MELISSA!
IT'S DADDY!

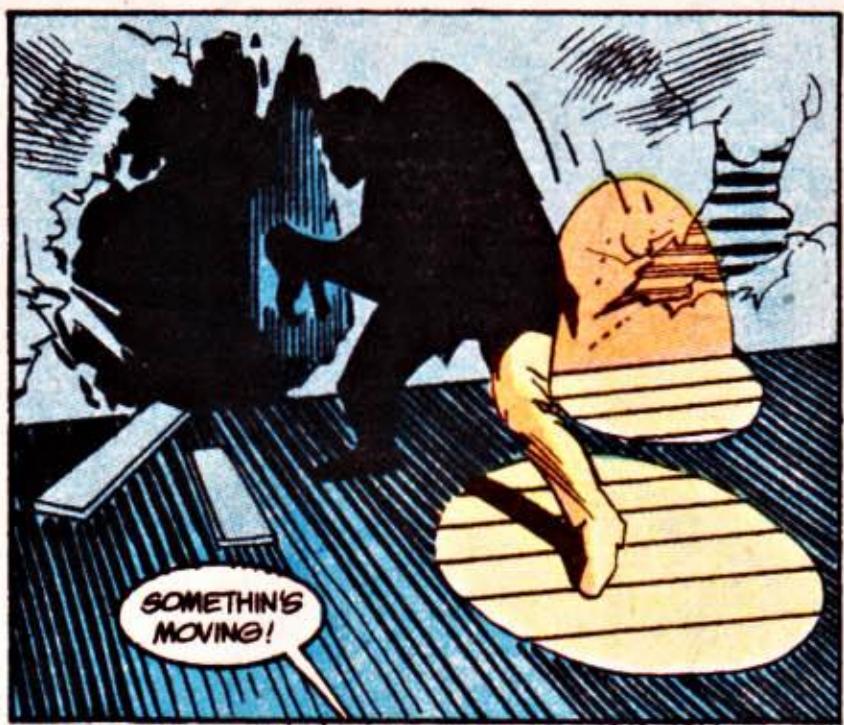
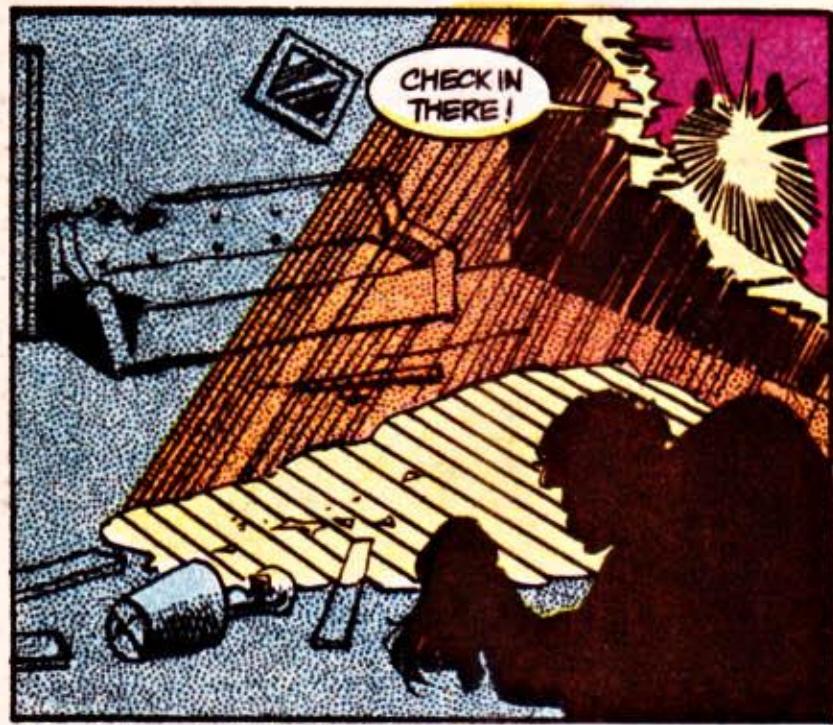
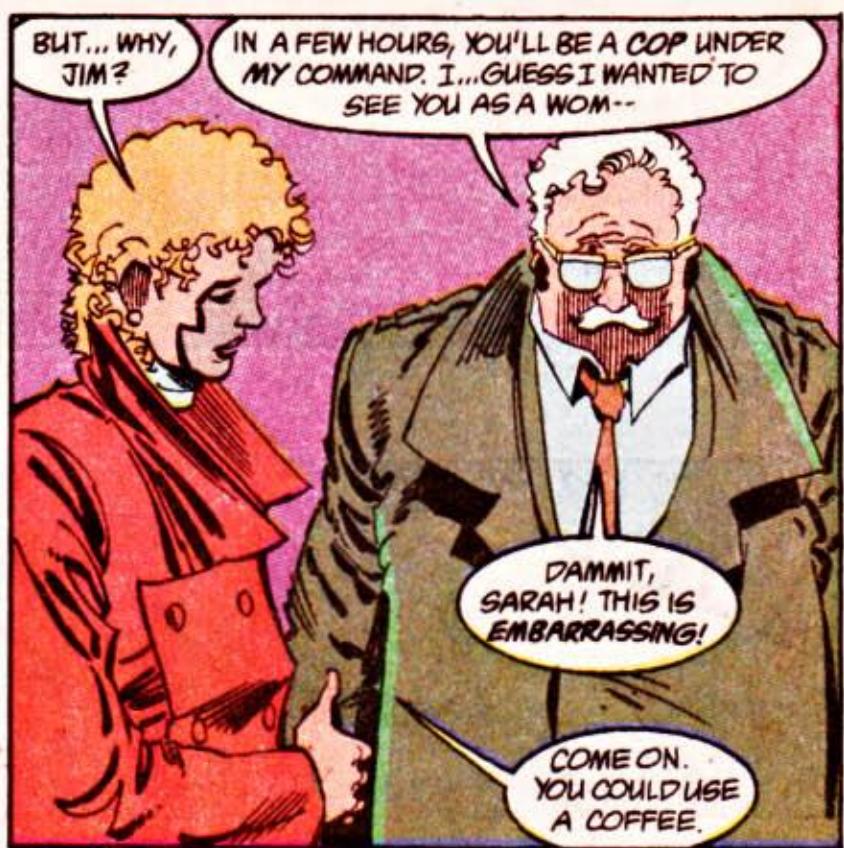
ARE YOU
IN THERE,
HONEY?

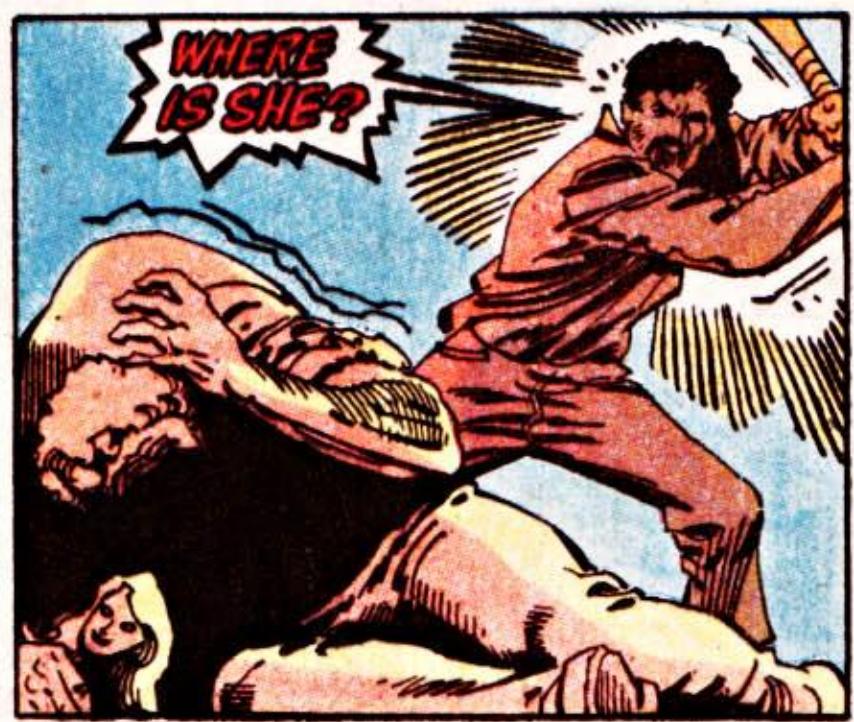
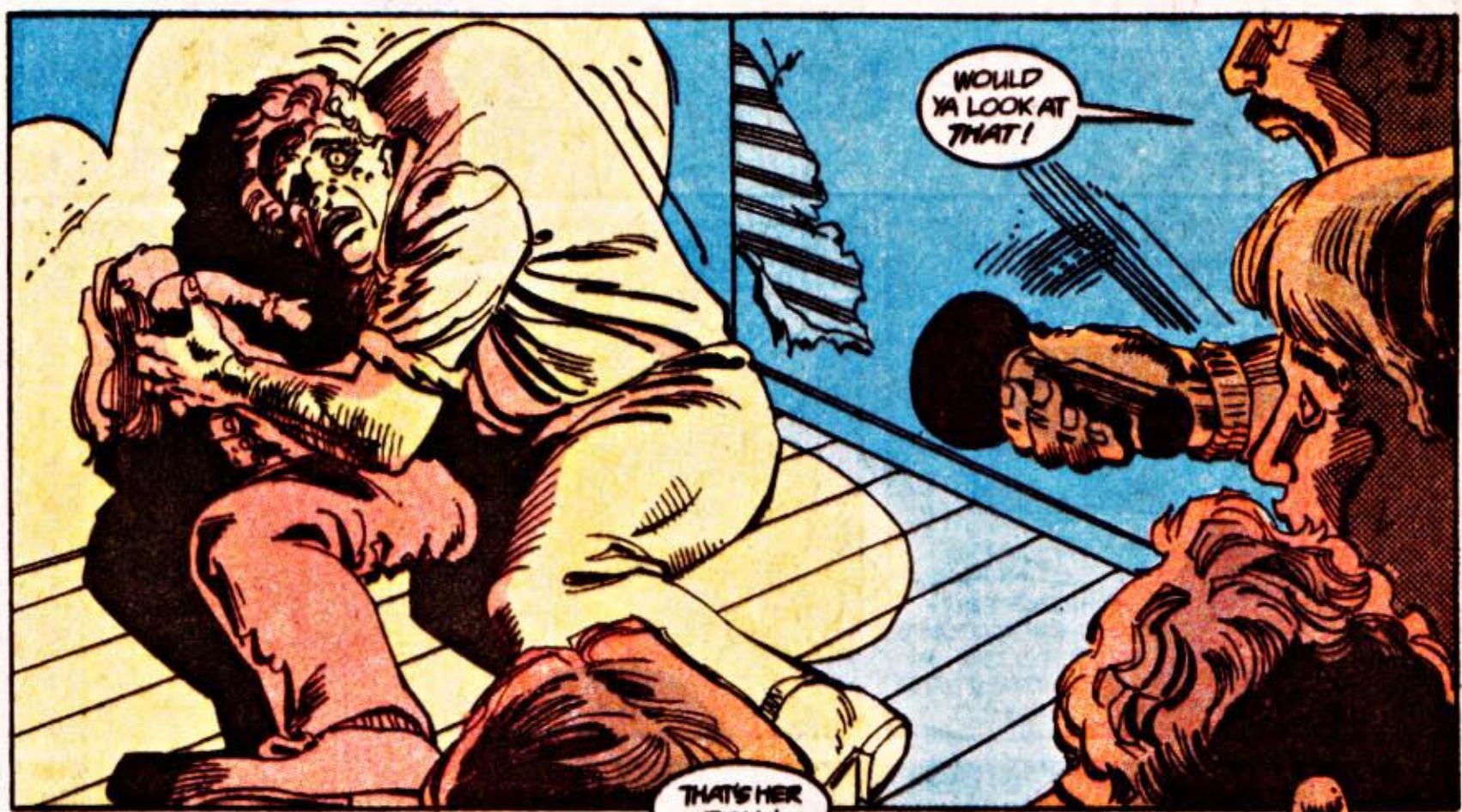
DON'T WORRY, BABY!
WE'RE COMING TO
GET YOU!

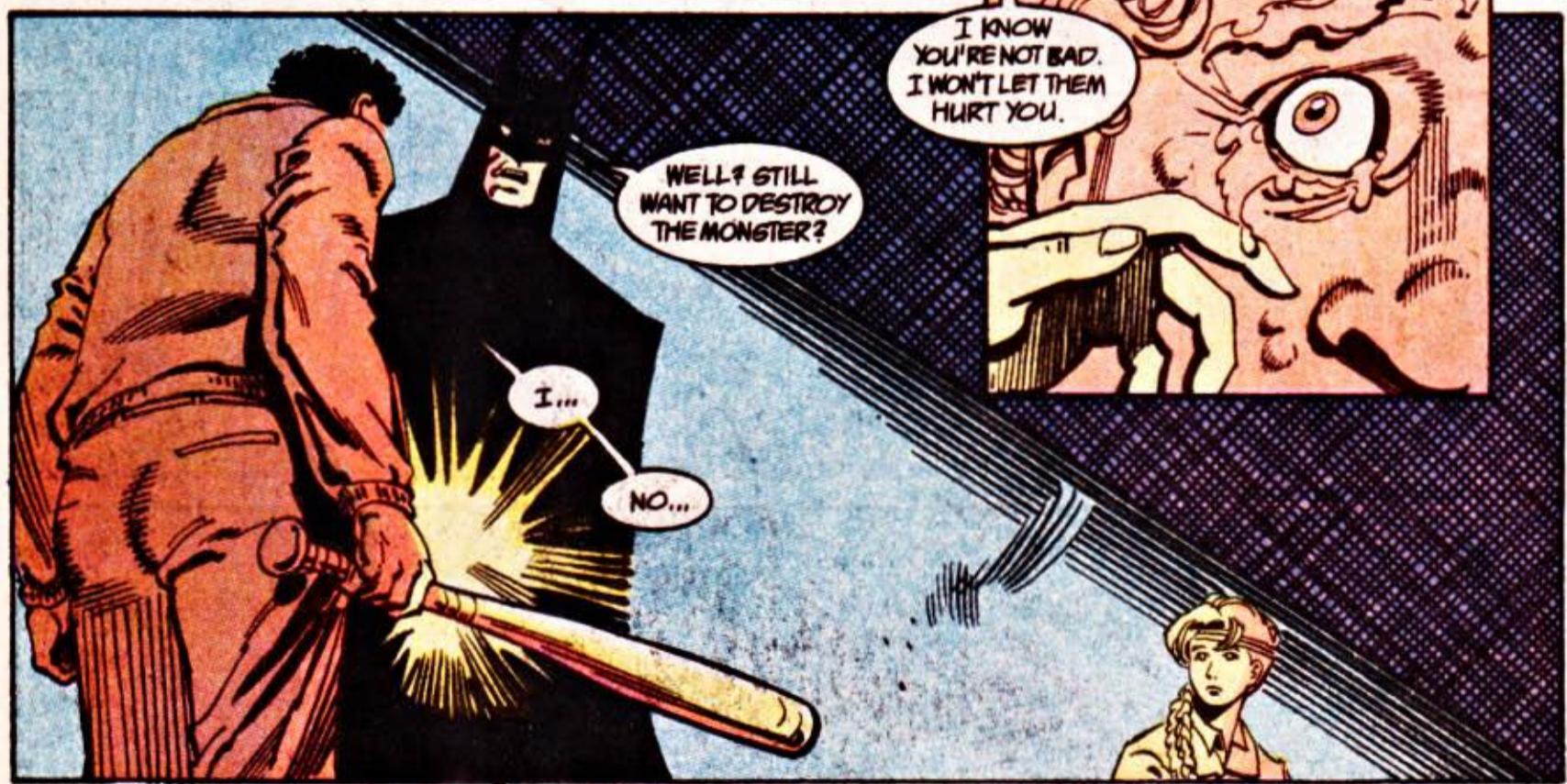


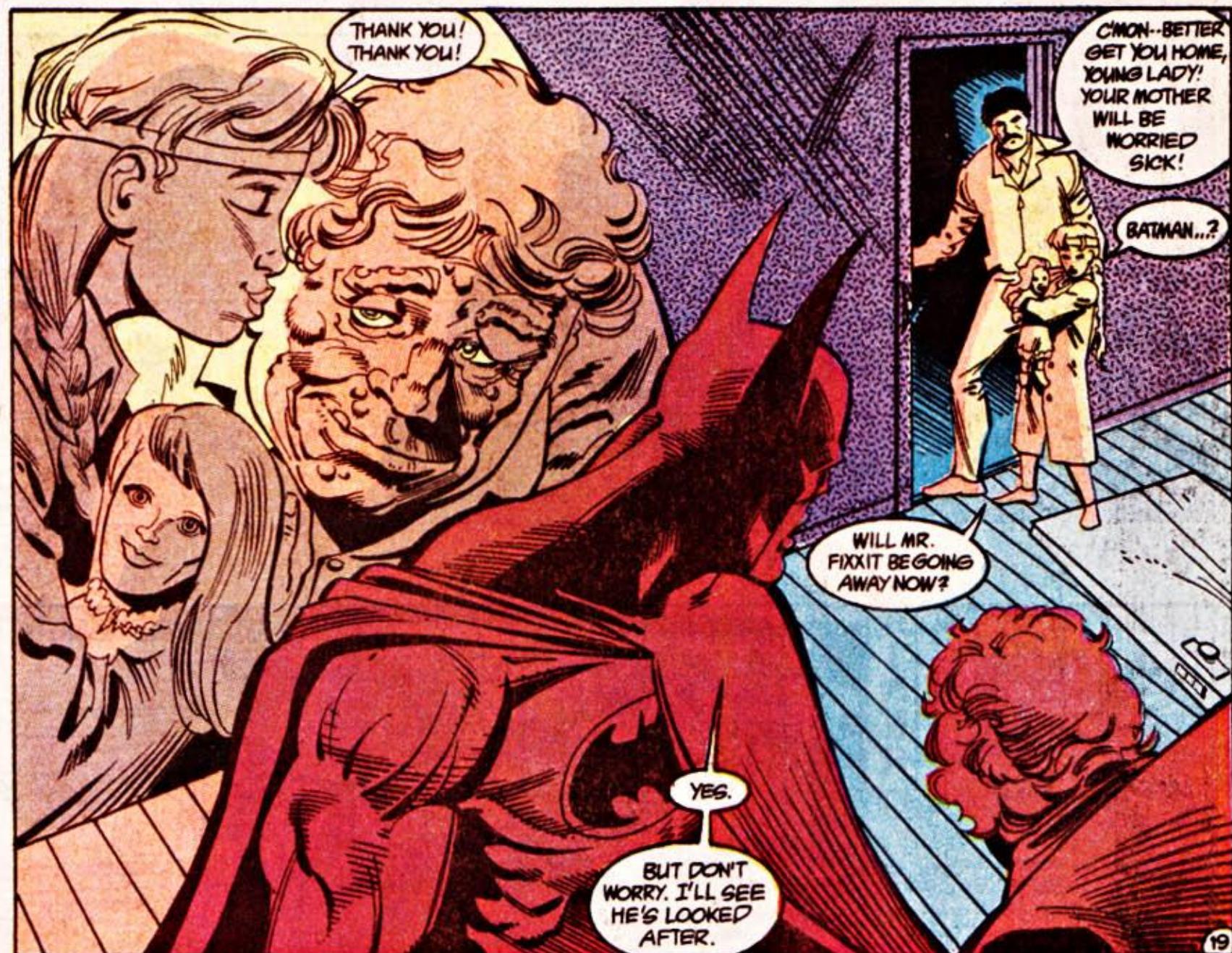




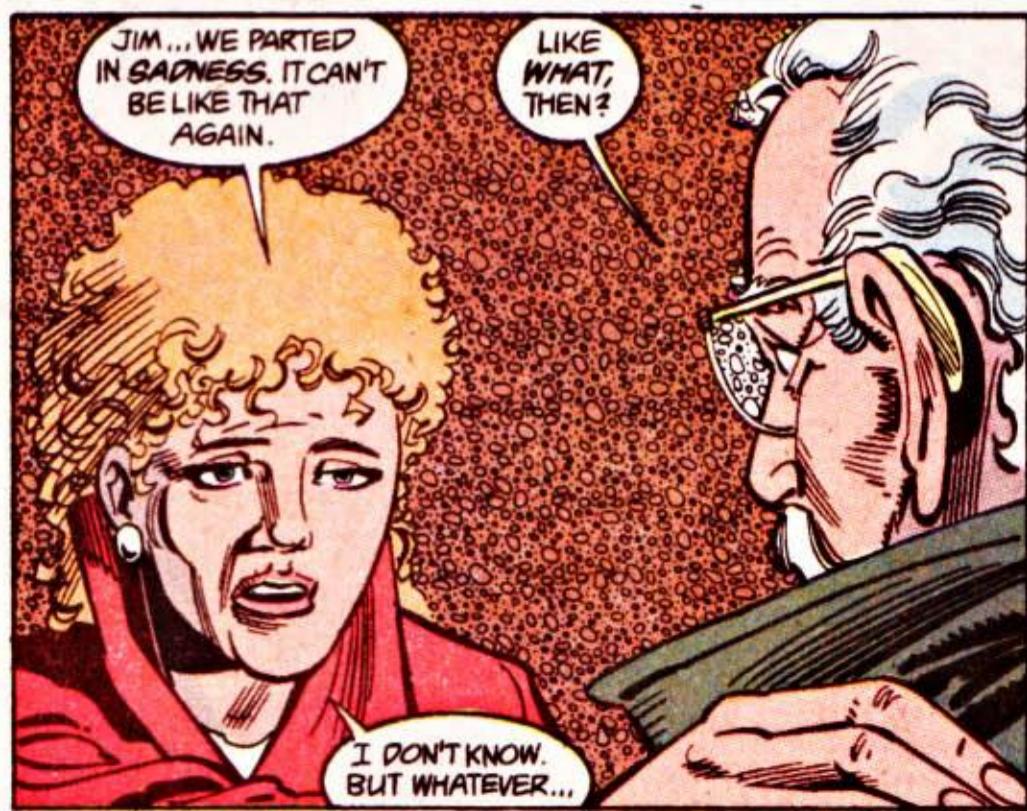
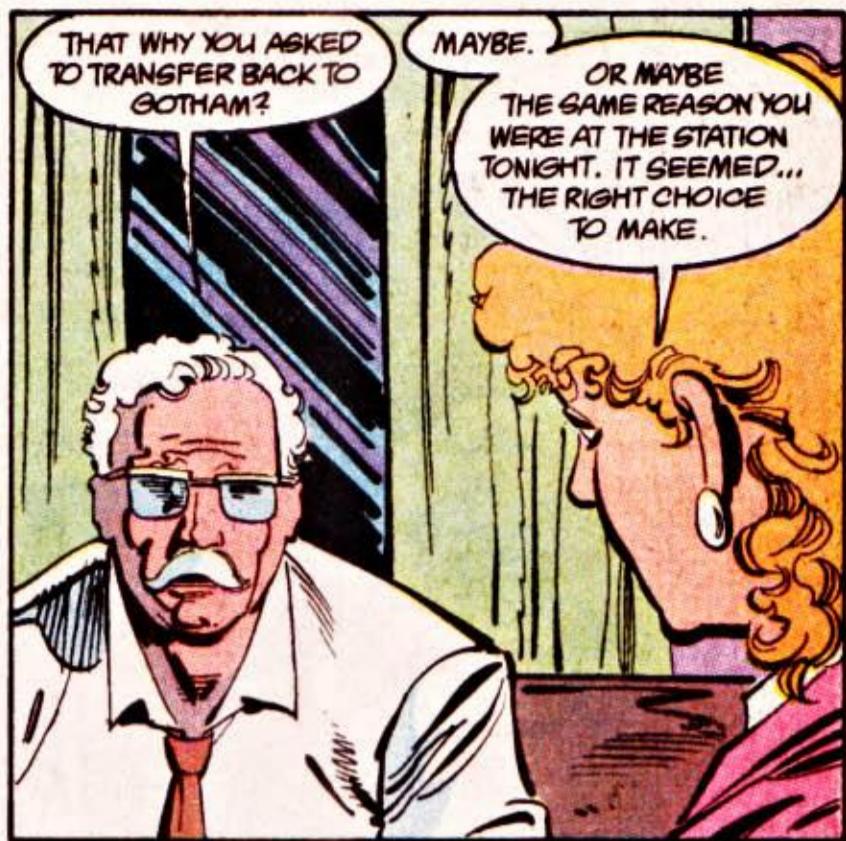
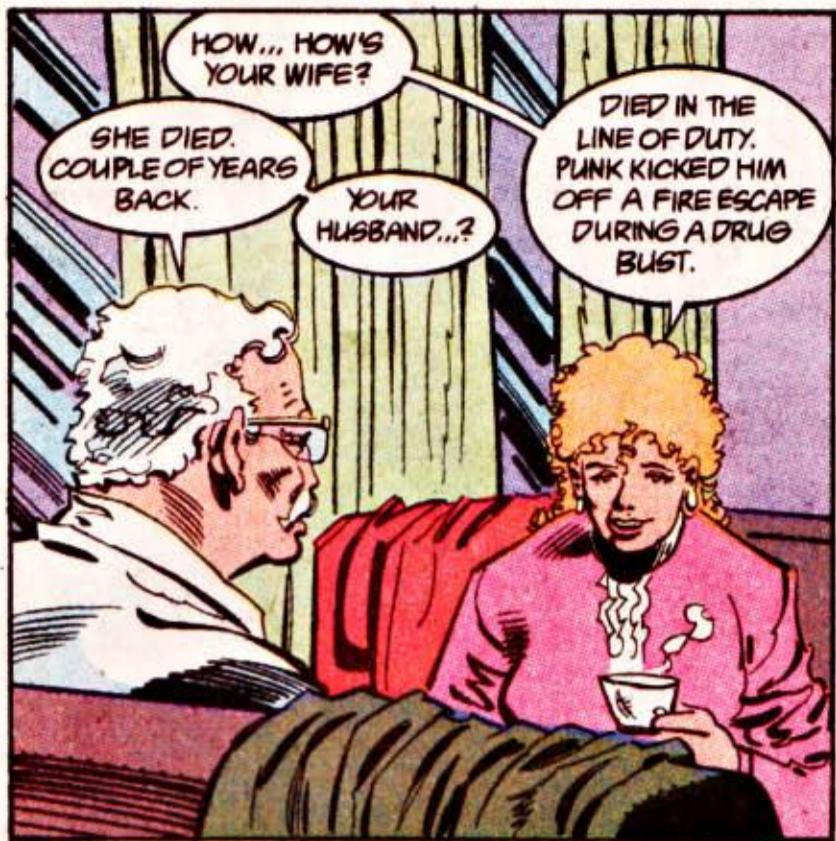


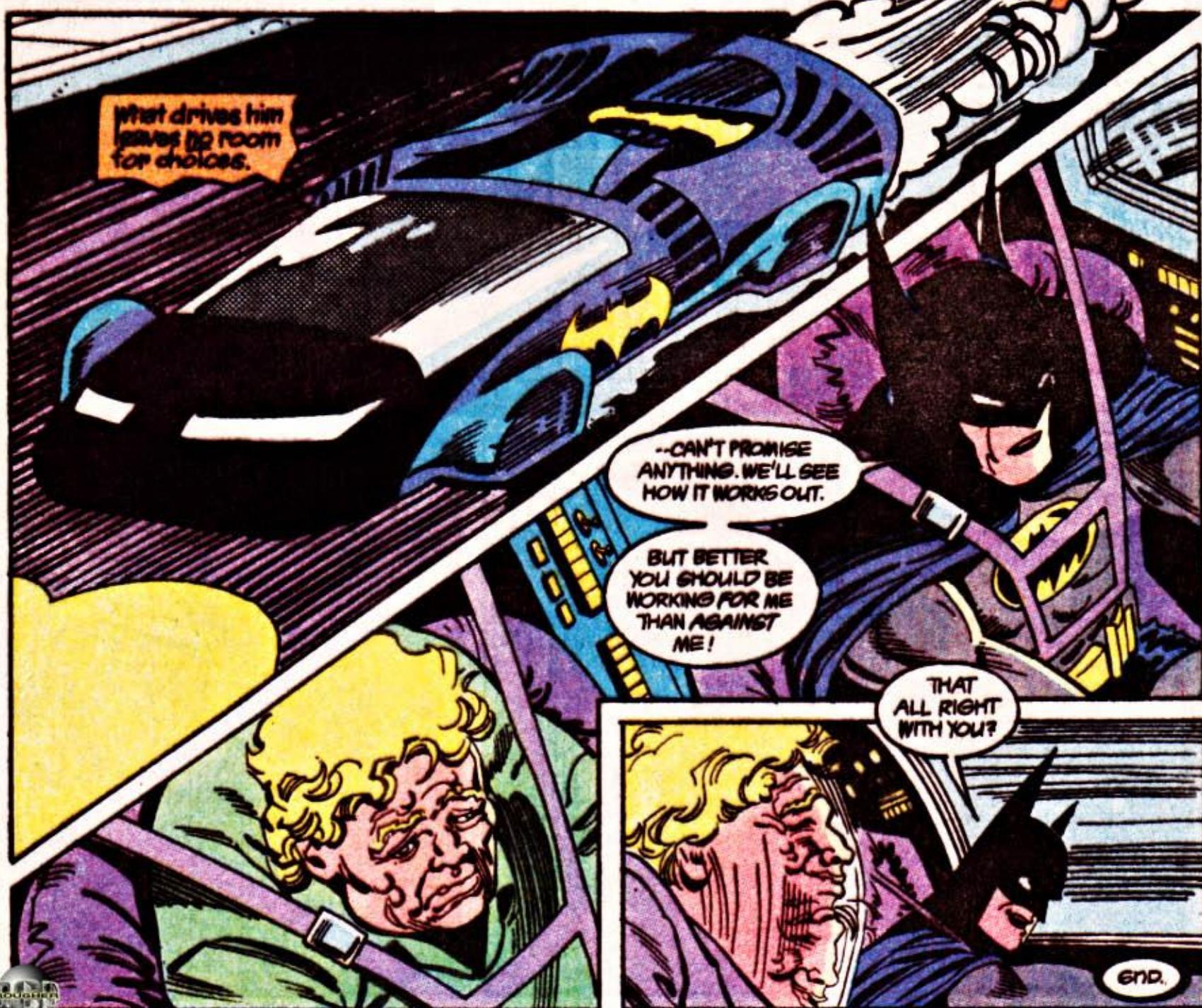
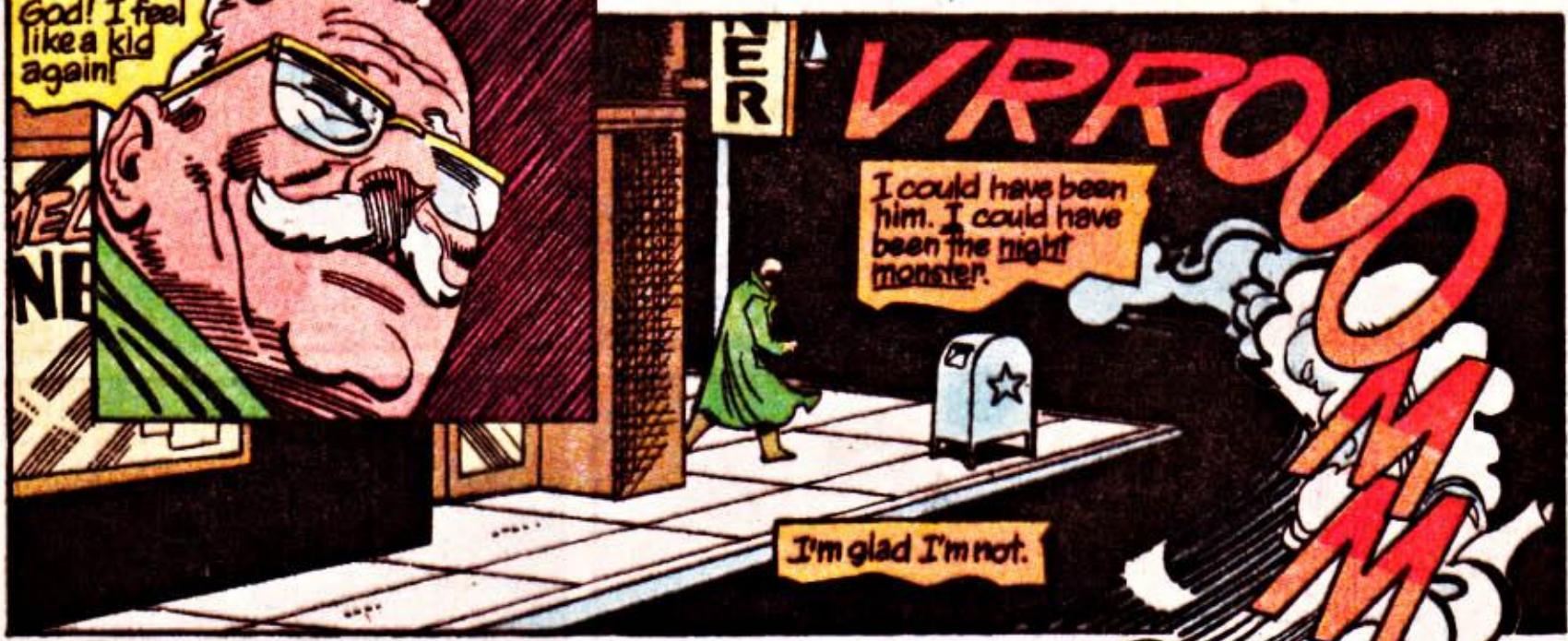
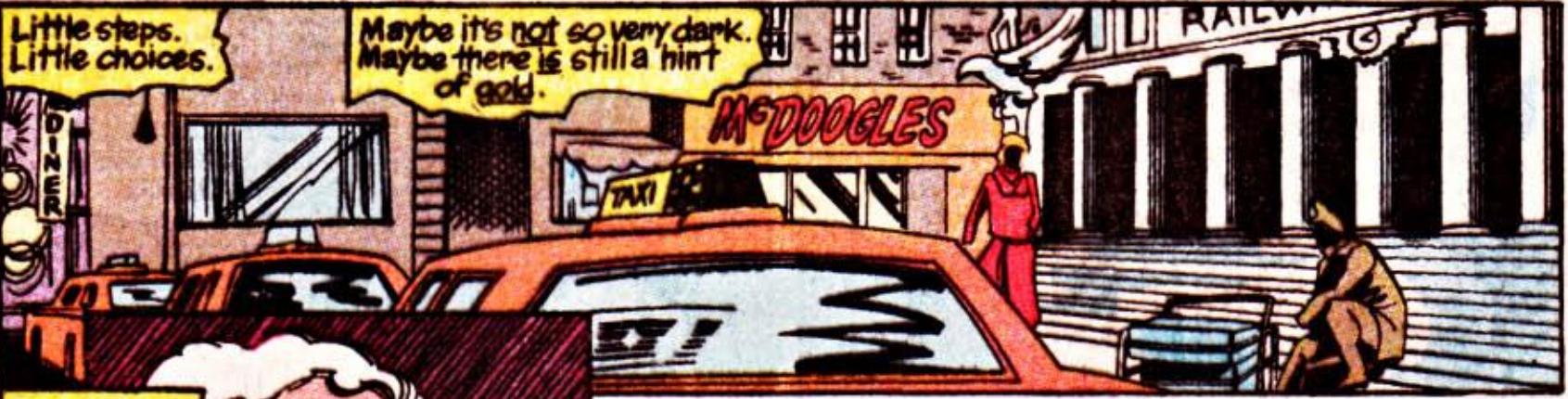












BAT-SIGNALS

Dear Bat-People,

Re: BATMAN #452-454

Oh, dear Mr. Nigma has finally gone over the edge.

The Riddler has always been obsessive, but at least he's managed to avoid a trip to Arkham. From all appearances, it doesn't seem like that track record is going to last. There's no turning back. Can a team-up with the Joker be far behind?

Seriously, though, when I last wrote, I mentioned a similarity between the Riddler and Shakespeare's Iago. That description has never been more apt. In fact, if Iago had read Machiavelli's THE PRINCE and had a subscription to *Games Magazine*, he would have been the Riddler. Peter Milligan's interpretation of him is one of the best I've seen.

Julio Diaz

8713 Linda Court
Tampa, FL 33604

We had a feeling that 'most everyone would enjoy this new interpretation of the Riddler. Little did we know that there would be a NEW controversy lurking underfoot . . .

* * * *

Dear Batty Ones,

"Dark Knight/Dark City" ended in BATMAN #454, but it is a story I shall remember for a long time. There have been many memorable Batman tales in the three books recently, but this one is special.

Peter Milligan excelled in plot and script. The story of the Riddler's reenactment of Jacob Stockman's dark ritual unfolded in this final chapter will chill your conviction. Just as Batman was baffled by the Prince of Puzzler's actions, so I was at a loss to figure out just what the scheme was. (At least I'm in good company!). Then, as the villain explained, my reactions were similar to those of the Dark Knight. Shock. Horror. Disgust. The Riddler's ultimate role as pawn to the demon Barbatos was some little satisfaction. But I was most impressed with the final sequence, and Batman's rescue of the ghost of the tragic Dominique. The macabre has returned to the Batman mythos in a big way recently, but never with such poignancy as here. The last page was intense, as Peter gave us the man in Batman as only the best writers have done before. I really loved the thoughts that read, "I'll look down at him as my parents must once have looked down at me. I might even make a funny face."

Kieron Dwyer and Dennis Janke were not outdone by Peter on this thrilling tale. The art throughout has been superb. The shadows were used effectively but never allowed to distort the heroic figure of the Batman. There was a fine sense of detail in the art, and the pages were positively

oozing atmosphere. I hope it won't be long before this team is allowed an encore.

One final point. I prefer to believe that Barbatos merely bent his (its?) will toward encouraging the climate in Gotham City that eventually brought about the killing of Thomas and Martha Wayne, and the birth of the Batman. Anything more direct would be too much of an infringement on the legend. What do you think?

Best,

Dale Coe

56 Whitecross Road, Warrington
Cheshire WA5 1LR
ENGLAND

Well, we'll plead the Fifth on that last point (for now), but many other readers had opinions on recent "additions" to the Batman mythos. Witness . . .

* * * *

Dear Denny,

Sandwiched between Mike Mignola's stunning cover and the final panels in which we realize that even Batman is troubled by self-doubts, issue #453 was a fine Bat-tale. Perhaps the "Dark Knight/Dark City" trilogy should be subtitled "The Riddler Comes Of Age."

Unfortunately I have a complaint to make. Actually it's not just a criticism of this issue, but of a recent trend amongst writers: to keep adding to the origin story. As it was first conceived, it was a sudden and brutal act which drastically altered the life of a whole city. It's always been the most effective and believable hero origin; however, as more and more detail is added to that fateful day/night, all of the impact is being lost. Rather than being an event that lurked in the dark recesses of the reader's mind, it is in danger of becoming merely an overused psychological plot device.

Yours sincerely,
Martin Simcox

84 Barnett Lane, Wordsley
Stourbridge, West Midlands
DY8 5PX ENGLAND

Thank you, and please step down. Next witness, please . . .

* * * *

Dear Bat-People,

Well, I guess I owe you guys an apology. I thought that you were going to just magically re-invent the Riddler to be even crazier and nastier than the Joker. When the Riddler's thug said "What's happening to the boss? Never seen him so crazy. Or so bloodthirsty, for that matter," and then later "You're starting to make the Joker look absolutely sensible," I felt a lot better. At least you were going to acknowledge that he wasn't acting in character. I see, now that I have read part two of "Dark Knight/Dark City," you are at least trying to

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explain this change by having the Riddler influenced by demonic forces. I think I can accept this explanation, but I can't quite decide whether I'd like him to stay this way permanently.

This is developing as a clever and genuinely scary story with a Gotham City history lesson at the heart. The idea that there is an ancient Bat-Demon (and I assume this is where you're going) imprisoned beneath the very street where Batman's parents were killed has a lot of interesting ramifications. Did the demon influence Joe Chill to kill the Waynes? Did he influence Bruce to become an earthly expression of his vengeance? If so, does this perhaps put into question whether Batman is a true force for good?

If all this is true, I have one objection. Please don't keep adding these incredible bat-influences into Batman's origin. In recent months it has become so complicated that it is getting cumbersome. We have Bruce falling into a bat-infested cave, Bruce's encounter with the story and ancient bat-mask from "Shaman," the bat that flew into the window of Wayne Manor, and now this bat-demon. It's fine to get into the parts of Batman and young Bruce Wayne's history that may have contributed to his becoming what he is today, but the essential Batman origin should be able to be told in one comic book page. Please see if you can resist making the Dark Knight's origin even more elaborate than it already is.

Actually, now that I think of it, all these "coincidences" involving Bruce and bats may have been influenced by this bat-demon. Am I on to something? I guess I'll just have to buy the next issue of BATMAN and find out.

Sincerely,

Larry Feldman

841 S. Corona Street
Denver, CO 80209

Would anyone like to come to our defense? Or do most of you feel the same way as our witnesses above? Actually, the basic Batman origin can STILL be stripped down to its essentials. The real question is whether the embellishments are overwhelming the base. Comments, anyone?

* * * *

Dear Batty Ones,

I hate to say it, but the "Dark Knight/Dark City" saga wasn't my favorite Batman story by a longshot. It seems that everywhere Batman turns these days, he's dealing with the supernatural. We were given a good tale of such in the first storyline for the LEGEND OF THE DARK KNIGHT comic, and Bats is having personal problems with the Obeah Man over in DETECTIVE. Please don't give us any more spook stories. I like Dark Shadows and old horror flicks, but I don't

think they mesh with Batman. He isn't really a creature of the night, he is a man—a good man who loves justice and hates seeing weak and innocent people hurt. He may let people THINK he's supernatural, as it helps put fear in the hearts of criminals, but that's about it.

The second problem was the treatment of the Riddler. Does EVERY costumed foe of Batman have to be a homicidal maniac? I agree with those who said similar things about the Penguin: there are some villains who are best treated lightly, almost (dare I say it?) campy. I have no problem with evildoers like Joker and Two-Face going on killing sprees and terrorizing everyone in sight, but goons like Riddler and Penguin should be more amusing than deadly. There is no reason why Batman should have to face a mass murderer every issue.

The final complaint (yes, the end is in sight) is one I'll bet you've already heard enough of—the use of Thomas Jefferson as a Satanic worshipper. I'd hoped in this issue we would learn that he wasn't really involved—maybe he was spying on the group or something. I just don't feel comics should use historical figures in such a strongly negative light, unless it might be someone universally despised, such as Hitler.

Yeah, I know. Complaints, complaints... Hey, you can't please everyone.

Live Long,
Steve Davis

Indianapolis, IN

P.S. Forget what I said about the supernatural. I just realized what DC's address is...

Better luck this time, Steve? We hope the current storyline is more to your liking...

Dear Denny,

I've just finished BATMAN #454, part three of "Dark Knight/Dark City," and I'm in awe. The story was fabulous. Mr. Milligan has created a story that, like BATMAN: YEAR ONE and "Blind Justice," builds a history and an atmosphere which Batman is a natural part of. With the advent of LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT, I had almost given up hope of seeing such powerful stories about Batman's background in BATMAN or TEC. The only thing I would have changed about the story would have been to make it longer. I realize that my last letter asked for shorter stories and fewer miniseries, but if you keep producing stories of this quality, I'll be happy no matter how long they are. I also complained about the recent treatment of Alfred, but I enjoyed his role in "Dark Knight/Dark City." Before I forget, let me congratulate Mr. Dwyer, Mr. Janke and the rest of the team as well. The visuals were every bit as compelling as the story, and I believe if either of your current creative teams depart, these guys could fill their shoes (no easy task!).

I'm surprised to learn that the creative teams will be swapping books, though I'm certain both will continue to produce the high quality work we've come to expect. I'd been half expecting to see one or both of the teams leave since Grant and Breyfogle have been on TEC together since #583 and Aparo has been on BATMAN since #414, and I'm glad to see they'll be staying on for a while.

'Till next time,
Clint Ragsdale
1116 Collinwood Street
Opelika, AL 36801

P.S. Of course Batman knows who killed Laura Palmer. He just doesn't want to ruin ABC's ratings.

By the time this sees print, we will all have found out who killed Laura (or else I'll be convinced that this whole Twin Peaks thing is some kind of sadistic mind-control. You know, like comic books...)

* * * *

Dear DC,

The new Riddler has finally made it. He can now be considered a major Batman villain. All he needs is the Frank Gorshin laugh and he'd be perfect! I hope to see more of this new, psychotic Riddler.

There is one problem I had with the story, though: the pit bull scene. You would think that an industry that, for decades, has been the object of mindless stereotyping would be the LAST ones to do the same. Yet, that's just what you did with the pit bulls. My grandparents owned a pit bull—they acquired him when he was over 2 years old, from total strangers. Within a month, Sparky was comfortable with his new owners. Whenever I went to their house, I'd play with Sparky. He barely knew me, but he was as playful, friendly, and gentle as a dog comes.

I would have enjoyed the Riddler saga a lot more if the Batman had sliced and diced some mad house cats instead.

Lee Soloman
Sterling Hts., MI

Pit bulls HAVE gotten a bad rep, mostly from the news media (and stand-up comedians). Obviously, all members of a particular species will not have the same temperament; however, pit bull terriers CAN be driven to a frenzy (as can virtually ANY animal) by means of drugs or even simple irritation, as the dogs in our story were. Having them labeled as pit bulls was simply a story short-cut and we DO regret the stereotyping.

* * * *

NEXT ISSUE: Batman confronts a vicious killer on the very spot where his parents were killed. Plus, things heat up for Jim Gordon and Sarah Essen. BATMAN #459 is by Alan Grant, Norm Breyfogle, and Steve Mitchell and is a long 30 days away. Also next month, there will be someone new selecting and answering your letters, as I prepare to move back to my home state of Wisconsin. The real "Gotham" has its advantages, but I miss trees and fresh air and quiet. Anyway, I had a great deal of fun working on this lettercolumn and enjoyed meeting many of you at various conventions. See you in the funny books!

—KC Carlson
Typing into the sunset...

From the Den

Last time, in this space, we discussed ego. The subject might be worth a few more paragraphs.

For about 20 years, comics fans didn't know who created the adventures of their favorite characters. From the early '40s through the late '50s, with very few exceptions, stories weren't bylined. Oh, an artist might sneak a signature into

his work somewhere, but there were no credits. A brief investigation—exceedingly brief, I must admit—into why did not reveal any company policies to that effect, and if there were any, they were almost certainly informal. Bylining was simply something that wasn't done.

Most people would argue that this wasn't fair to either readers or creators. After all, if nothing else, bylines serve as consumer guides. If Charlie Prose did a yarn you liked this month, chances are you'll like next month's Charlie Prose piece, too.

As for Charlie himself... well, there is always the matter of money. If enough readers enjoy a Charlie Prose job and show their appreciation by buying the magazine it appears in, Charlie's boss might decide he has to keep Charlie happy when raises are discussed. For this to happen, of course, the readers must be able to immediately identify Charlie's work. Charlie must acquire some kind of identity in the audiences' mind, even if that identity is limited to the three syllables of his name.

Money is seldom more than part of a creator's engine, however. The other parts are a desire to please and a desire for recognition. Maybe even—whisper this—a desire to be loved. And that is why it might be possible to argue against bylines. Because if Charlie's desire to be loved becomes a fear that Charlie won't be loved should his story be less than wonderful, he might worry, either consciously or unconsciously, about that, rather than concentrating on plot, pacing, characterization, invention—all the myriad and complex components of his craft. The ironic result could be that the story, indeed, isn't the best that Charlie's capable of writing.

Charlie might worry that if his popularity wanes, so will his ability to put Charlie Jr. through taxidermy school, something that wouldn't happen if his income depended solely on productivity. Or that recognition might become disdain; Charlie may be canny enough to realize that the folk who hail you as genius today might be damning you as dullard tomorrow. These things, too, might get between him and the murky interior region wherein stories live.

Shadows are cool and comfortable. In a spotlight, many people sweat.

And in the end, it's the tale, not the teller, that's important.

Am I suggesting a return to the bad old days? No, not at all. I'm merely observing that blessings are seldom unmixed, and the blessing that enabled you to be an informed consumer when you bought this magazine is no exception.

DENNY