

A COLD NIGHT.

A DARK NIGHT.

AN UNFORGIVING WIND.

A MERCILESS CITY:

GOTHAM.

AT THE WATERFRONT.

GOTHAM'S DISTANT ROAR.

THE LAPPING OF BRINY WAVES AGAINST ROTTED WOODEN PILING.

STARTLED CURSES.

MUFFLED GUNSHOTS.

HORRID POUNDING.

SHRIEKS OF PAIN.

DULL MOANS.

NO TRESPAS

NEAR SILENCE.

INSIDE A WAREHOUSE.

SALTY SMELLS OF BLOOD AND SWEAT.

A SILENT SHADOW OF A MAN.

A COLD NIGHT.

A DARK KNIGHT:

BATMAN

MUSTY AIR
SUCKED INTO
LUNGS FILLED
WITH FIRE.

BLOOD SURGING
FROM HEART
TO SHOULDER
AND STREAMING
HOTLY DOWN
HIS ARM.

NOT A MOMENT
SPENT
ACKNOWLEDGING
THE PAIN.

NOT A MOVEMENT
WASTED.

BATMAN.

PROTECTOR.

AVENGER.

DETECTIVE.

CHAMPION.

PUNKS...

... YOU'RE
LUCKY I WENT SO
EASY ON
YOU...

TONIGHT'S FOES
ARE LEFT BEHIND
HIM, BROKEN THINGS.

BUT THE TRUE
HORROR LIES
AHEAD.

WEAPONS-- SOLD BY
AGENTS OF A FALLEN
DICTATORSHIP TO
GOTHAM STREET GANGS.

WEAPONS-- BUILT
FOR A WAR THAT
NEVER HAPPENED.

GUNS.
GRENADES.
ROCKET
LAUNCHERS--

--AND STRANGE,
HIGH-TECH DEVICES
THAT HINT AT THE
SMALLER HORRORS
THAT WOULD HAVE
FOLLOWED THE
NUCLEAR
NIGHTMARE.

A PAIR OF
BATTLE
GLOVES,
HUMMING
WITH THE
PROMISE
OF
POWER.

THEN--
A SUDDEN
HISS, NOT
HUMAN...



UNHH!

K
L
A
N
G!

SHCHAKK!



GAAA



GRAAA

THE ROBOT
PAUSES, STUPID
AS IT IS LETHAL,
THINKING
BATMAN DEAD.

NOT HUMAN-- NO
CHANCE AGAINST
THIS THING.

NO CHANCE--
UNLESS...

MOVE SLOWLY.

STAY CONSCIOUS.

IGNORE THE PAIN.

STAY CONSCIOUS...

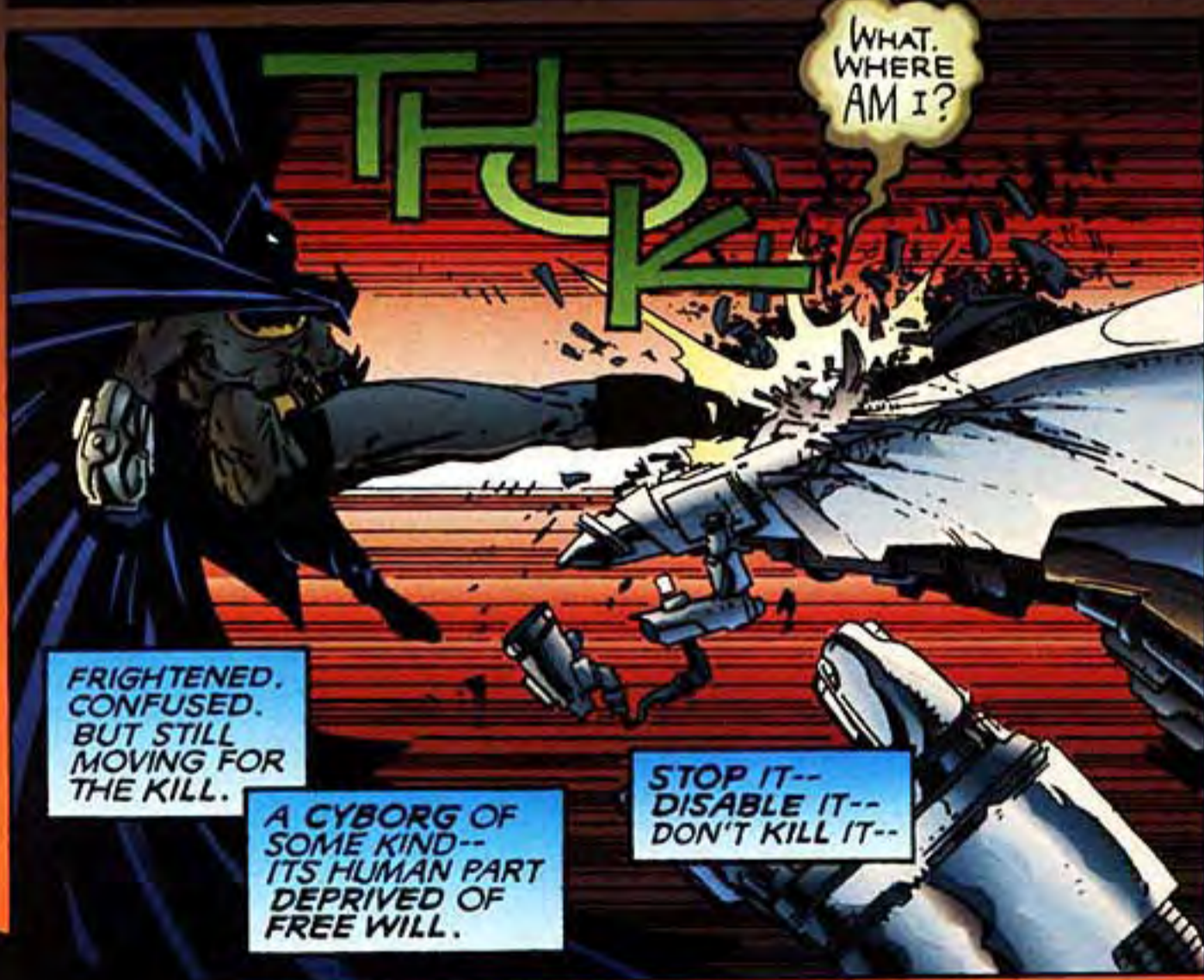


THE ROBOT STAGGERS, CONFUSED-- A VISOR SHATTERS, THE SOUND ALMOST PRETTY--

--REVEALING SOMETHING WARM AND SOFT AND FRIGHTENED INSIDE.

AT LEAST PART OF THIS THING IS HUMAN.

Khoff
-- WHAT. WHAT.



WHAT. WHERE AM I?

FRIGHTENED. CONFUSED. BUT STILL MOVING FOR THE KILL.

A CYBORG OF SOME KIND-- ITS HUMAN PART DEPRIVED OF FREE WILL.

STOP IT-- DISABLE IT-- DON'T KILL IT--



I DON'T KNOW WHERE I AM.



GET INSIDE-- GET PAST IT--

--TO HIM.

IT'S LIKE WRESTLING A JACK-HAMMER.

I DON'T KNOW WHERE I AM.

I CAN'T FEEL MY ARMS.

SKRUK

--AND IT CAME AS NO SURPRISE THAT DR. MARGARET LOVE, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF HEAL THE WORLD, WAS AWARDED THE LAIMBEER PRIZE FOR HUMANITARIAN ACHIEVEMENT "OUR WORK HAS ONLY BEGUN," SAID DR. LOVE, "I ACCEPT THIS HONOR--

"-- NOT IN MY OWN NAME, BUT ON BEHALF OF THE THOUSANDS OF CARING AND SHARING VOLUNTEERS WHO HAVE BROUGHT THE REWARDS OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION, EMPOWERMENT, AND ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT TO THE DISENFRANCHISED OF OUR TROUBLED PLANET..."



A DAMP PLACE, WHERE SOUNDS ECHO, UPWARD, TILL THEY ARE LOST IN THE ENDLESS DARKNESS.

THE BATCAVE.

I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF PREPARING HERB TEA FOR YOU, MASTER BRUCE.

IT'S CHAMOMILE. THE TEA, THAT IS. UTTERLY RENOWNED FOR RELIEVING STRESS IN VIGILANTES SUFFERING FROM OBSSIVE DISORDER.

NOT RIGHT NOW, ALFRED. JUST PATCH UP MY SHOULDER. THE BLOOD'S GETTING IN MY WAY.

VERY GOOD, SIR-- BUT YOU MIGHT CONSIDER REMOVING YOUR COWL, SO AS TO FACILITATE MY EFFORTS. AFTER ALL, YOU'VE NO NEED TO CONCEAL YOUR IDENTITY HERE.

SOMETIMES I'M MORE COMFORTABLE WITH THE MASK ON.

Hmm... NO FINGERS, SO NO FINGER-PRINTS. BUT HE'S STILL GOT HIS TEETH...





... SCANNING FOR DENTAL RECORD MATCH-UP... HERE WE GO...

REALLY, SIR. THE TEA...

... LOUIS BACCHUS. AGE 42. VAGRANT. ACUTE ALCOHOLIC. LAST SEEN 42nd STREET MISSION, MID-MANHATTAN. PRESUMED DEAD.



WHAT'S THE BRAIN OF A NEW YORK BUM DOING INSIDE OF A SOVIET CYBORG?

ONE SEVERED HEAD'S AS GOOD AS THE NEXT, ISN'T IT?

PITY...



... ABOUT THE TEA, I MEAN...

THE ANSWER'S GOT TO BE IN NEW YORK...



... THEY SAY CHAMOMILE IS SURE TO PREVENT NIGHTMARES.

EVEN THE SELF-INFLICTED VARIETY.



I DON'T GET NIGHTMARES.

I GIVE THEM.



NO NEED FOR PUNCH-LINES, SIR. YOU'RE AMONG FRIENDS.

PUT THIS ON ICE.

THESE GLOVES GO IN THE VAULT. BE CAREFUL WITH THEM.



AS YOU WISH, SIR.

A PLEASURE SPEAKING WITH YOU, AS ALWAYS.



NEW YORK CITY.

THE HUNT BEGINS.

BUT VERY SOON A WOMAN'S SCREAM SPLITS THE NIGHT--

-- AND BATMAN REMEMBERS A LITTLE BOY WHO WATCHED IN HORROR AND DISBELIEF AS A MUGGER'S BULLETS TORE THROUGH THE FLESH AND BONE OF THOMAS AND MARTHA WAYNE--

-- AND HE KNOWS THE HUNT MUST WAIT, IF ONLY FOR A MOMENT...

--AS HEAL THE WORLD'S PILOT PROGRAM PROVIDES NEW YORK'S HOMELESS NOT JUST WITH FOOD AND SHELTER, BUT WITH HOPE FOR A BETTER LIFE, THROUGH THE WONDERS OF ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT AND SOCIAL REALIGNMENT--

-- REPORTS ARE FLOODING OUR DESK FROM THROUGHOUT MIDTOWN OF MUGGERS STOPPED COLD IN THEIR TRACKS -- OF INNOCENT NEAR-VICTIMS RESCUED BY A SHADOWY SAVIOR. COULD IT BE THAT A CERTAIN CAPED CRUSADER HAS COME TO THE BIG APPLE?



I HAD IT ALL. BUT I FORSAKE THE MATERIALISM OF OUR AGE AND FOUND SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT. PASS THAT BOTTLE, WILL YA?

...I SAW IT, MAN! THERE WAS AL, A HOLE RIGHT THROUGH HIM, STILL STANDING THERE LIKE HE DIDN'T NOTICE! NEXT THING I KNEW THE OTHER GUY WAS TOAST!

AMONG THE DREGS OF HUMANITY, BATMAN LISTENS-- FOR ANY SCANT CLUE.

MOSTLY, HE HEARS SOB STORIES AND OUTRIGHT NONSENSE.

BUT NOW AND THEN HE HEARS LEGENDS OF ONE OF THEIR OWN NAMED "AL"-- A BUM POSSESSED WITH MAGIC POWERS.

NONSENSE, HE THINKS.





**BUT BATMAN
IS WRONG.**

**ANOTHER NIGHT CREATURE
GLIDES THROUGH
MANHATTAN'S CONCRETE
CANYONS, ON A QUEST OF
HIS OWN.**

**HE IS A DEAD MAN
BROUGHT TO WRETCHED
LIFE-- A SLAVE OF HELL
WHO SEEKS REDEMPTION.**

**AND SOME OF
HIS FRIENDS
ARE MISSING.**

SPAWN

NOT FAR AWAY.

A COUPLE OF SICK JERKS OUT FOR WHAT SICK JERKS CALL A GOOD TIME.

I'M GONNA DO IT, GORKY. I'M GONNA DO IT.

DO IT, MAN. DO IT.

Z



YOU'RE GONNA LOVE THIS. YOU'RE GONNA LOVE THIS.

DO IT, MAN.

Z



LOOK AT HIM. DOESN'T EVEN WAKE UP. GALLON OF GASOLINE ON HIM AND HE DOESN'T EVEN WAKE UP.

DO IT, MAN.

Z

Snort

Z



Z

SNAP!

DO IT, MAN.

GIVE ME A MATCH. WAIT'LL YOU SEE THIS. HE'LL BE HOPPING. GIVE ME A MATCH.



I'M DOING IT. I'M DOING--

--HEY. FIRE CAN'T DO THAT.

COMING AFTER US. IT'S COMING AFTER US.

YAAAAA



URS



IT'S WEIRD, MAN. MAGIC OR SOMETHING--

OOF!

OOF!

YES. MAGIC.

MAGIC BREWED IN THE DEPTHS OF HELL.



WHICH IS WHERE YOU TWO ARE GOING--UNLESS YOU GIVE ME A DAMN GOOD REASON NOT TO SEND YOU THERE.

HURK!

DUST THIS FREAK, GORKY!



I SAID DUST HIM, MAN! DO IT!

YOU'RE BEING STUPID.



BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!

LIKE I SAID.

STUPID.



WHEN YOU MEET SATAN--

--SAY HELLO FOR ME.



A TINY BURST OF HELLBORN POWER SQUANDERED...



YAAA

GAAA

TO SPAWN, A FIT OF PIQUE--



--BUT TO THE EYES OF THIS LATECOMING WITNESS--



--A WANTON ACT OF MURDER.



YOU MUST BE AL.

THERE'S ONE GOOD THING ABOUT MURDERERS-- YOU DON'T FEEL BAD ABOUT TAKING A CHEAP SHOT AT THEM.

LIKE GETTING GOOD MOMENTUM FROM A THIRTY FOOT DROP-- AND DRIVING YOUR HEEL INTO THE MURDERER'S KIDNEY.

SHOULDN'T CAUSE TOO MUCH DAMAGE.

SIX MONTHS IN THE HOSPITAL AND HE'LL BE READY TO FACE THE JUDGE.

A comic book page showing a fight between Batman and Al Brown. Al Brown is a large, muscular man with a red mask and a black cape, wearing heavy chains. He is in a dominant position, holding Batman by the neck. Batman is in a defensive stance, looking up at Al. The background is a dark, industrial setting with debris and chains.

THIS IS MY TURF, BATMAN.

BACK OFF!

IMPOSSIBLE-- THIS "AL"-- HE SHOULD BE JUST THIS SIDE OF CRIPPLED--

--BUT HE PIVOTS, EXPERTLY--

--DELIVERING A KICK OF HIS OWN THAT MAKES ALL THE AIR LEAVE BATMAN IN A RUSH.

KEEP HIM OFF-BALANCE-- DON'T BOTHER TO CATCH YOUR BREATH--

--PRESS THE ATTACK.

KUNK!

OOF!

LIKE KICKING A SLAB OF GRANITE.

YET STILL HE HISSES LIKE A MAN, "AL" DOES-- HE BREATHEES LIKE A MAN--

--WHAT IS HE MADE OF?

IT'S LIKE PUNCHING A BRICK WALL.

**KLU
D
DI!**



SNAK!

SNAK!

SNAK!

"AL" CAN TAKE PUNISHMENT-- OF THE SUPER-HUMAN VARIETY.

NO REASON TO BE NICE.

BATMAN AIMS FOR THREE WOUNDS--

--THE RESULTS SHOULD BE JUST SHORT OF LETHAL--

KNOCK IT OFF, BATMAN. I'M NOT IN THE MOOD-- AND I DON'T HAVE THE TIME.

CHING!

CHING!

CHING!

GOT TIME FOR THIS, PUNK?

ANOTHER KICK AT THAT SLAB OF GRANITE-- THE SPINE OF A MAN WOULD SHATTER--

-- BUT HE ISN'T EVEN BREATHING HARD--

-- BREATHING -- THAT'S IT--

-- WHATEVER HE IS, HE STILL BREATHES--

-- HE STILL NEEDS TO BREATHE--



-- GIVE THE MAN SOME NERVE GAS--

-- ENOUGH TO MAKE A MOB TAKE A NAP.

-- THERE'S A REASON YOU CARRY YOUR UTILITY BELT YOU IDIOT, BATMAN TELLS HIMSELF-- USE IT--

GET SOME DISTANCE--



KHOFF

KHAKK



IT SEEMS TO SLOW HIM DOWN.

IT SEEMS TO SOFTEN HIM UP.



HAD ENOUGH?



IN YOUR DREAMS.

IT FEELS LIKE CHEATING, THINKS SPAWN--

-- IT IS CHEATING--

-- USING THE MAGIC--

-- TO MAKE HIMSELF STRONG--

-- TO BEAT THE CRAP OUT OF BATMAN.

WHUK!

SWAK!

KRAK

SMEK SMEK
KOOUGH

THUD

POK!

TUNCH
TUNCH
TUNCH

KAK

WHAP

WHUK!

I'M OVERPOWERED, BATMAN REALIZES-- IT'S RETREAT OR DIE--

-- AND IF I'M DEAD, HE TELLS HIMSELF--

-- I'M NO USE TO ANYBODY.

SHOWED HIM. I SHOWED HIM.
JESUS. THAT GAS. WHAT WAS IN IT?

HUK HUK HUK

BLAGG G

... AND DON'T YOU COME BACK HERE-- YOU GOT YOUR TURF-- AND I GOT MINE--

KHUFF

I'LL BE BACK ALL RIGHT, YOU LITTLE PUNK... COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS I LET YOU OFF SO EASY...

KHAGG

SPAWN RELAXES HIS MAGIC-- AND HIS STOMACH.

IT'S WORSE WHEN YOU HAVEN'T EATEN. IT TAKES THAT MUCH LONGER TO CONVINCE THE OLD GAG REFLEX THAT THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO PUKE...

BATMAN GETS TEN BLOCKS BEFORE HIS KNEES GIVE OUT.

HE SPENDS THE NEXT FEW MINUTES TEACHING HIMSELF HOW TO BREATHE WITHOUT COUGHING. THEN HE GOES TO WORK ON HIS RIGHT ARM, FITTING IT BACK INTO ITS SOCKET. THEN HE TWISTS HIMSELF AROUND UNTIL THE BONES OF HIS SPINE ARE A BIT LESS TANGLED.

ALL THIS IS VERY PAINFUL, WHICH IS GOOD. IT KEEPS HIS MIND OFF THE HUMILIATION.

THE PUNK WAS HOLDING BACK.

MEANWHILE.

THE BUILDING IS OLD AND CRUMB-LING. THE DOOR LOOKS LIKE IT WOULD BREAK IF YOU LEANED AGAINST IT.

BUT ONCE YOU SCRAPE OFF THE FAKE RUST-- THE LOCK IS A BRAND NEW PATAKY.

STATE-OF-THE-ART SECURITY-- FOR A MISSION?

BACK WHEN HE WAS A SOLDIER-- BACK WHEN HE WAS ALIVE-- AL SIMMONS COULD PICK ONE OF THESE BEAUTIES IN TEN SECONDS FLAT.

NOW IT TAKES HIM TWELVE.



A JUNKIE NAMED SYLVIO LED SPAWN HERE. HE SEEMED TO KNOW SOMETHING.

"YOU CAN CHECK IN," SAID SYLVIO, "BUT YOU CAN'T CHECK OUT."



WHATEVER THIS PLACE IS-- IT'S BUILT FOR MORE THAN FEEDING PEOPLE.



BEHIND HIM-- OILED SERVOS WHIRR, ALMOST SILENT...





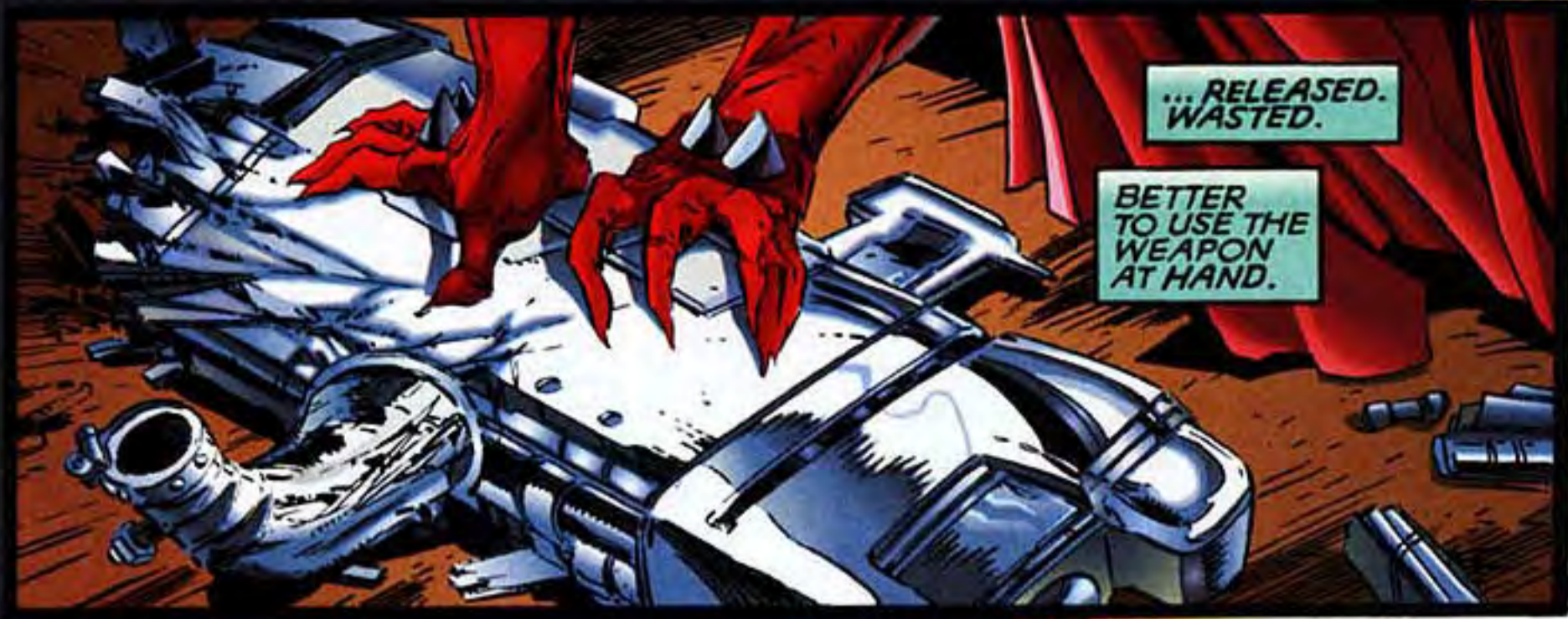
POOM!

RAKKA
RAKKA
RAKKA
RAKKA
RAKKA

WHUMPI!

ZURK

ANOTHER
PRECIOUS LITTLE
PIECE OF HELL
RELEASED...



... RELEASED.
WASTED.

BETTER
TO USE THE
WEAPON
AT HAND.



BOOM!



BOOM!



FROM THE WRECKAGE--
SOMETHING LIVING--

WHAT.
WHAT.



...CHUCK.



CHUCK. WHAT
THE HELL...
...WHO
DID THIS
TO YOU,
PAL?

I DON'T
KNOW
WHERE I
AM.

I DON'T
KNOW
WHO
I AM.

THE LAST
MOVING
PIECE
OF THE ROBOT
STAGGERS
INTO
A WALL.



CRASH!

CIRCUITS
HUM TO LIFE.

MY DEAR,
DEAR
FRIENDS...



... YOU'VE WORKED
SO VERY HARD, ALL
THESE MONTHS. I'M SO
VERY PROUD OF YOU. YOU
ARE READY, NOW-- FOR
THE FINAL STAGE OF
YOUR REHABILITA-
TION...

I CAN'T
FEEL MY
ARMS.



HER VOICE IS
LIKE MUSIC.
HYPNOTIZING.

THEN-- LIKE
A THUNDER--
CLAP--

-- A FRAGMENT
OF MEMORY--
THE MEMORY OF
AL SIMMONS--
SOLDIER-- ON
SOME GHASTLY
FOREIGN
BATTLEFIELD--

-- SHE WAS
SMILING.

...PREPARE
TO SHED YOUR
POISONED BODIES
AND BECOME
PERFECT SERVANTS
OF SOCIETY. FREE
FROM GUILT AND
PAIN. FREE FROM
CHOICE...

MEN
SCREAMED
AND DIED
AND SHE WAS
SMILING.

I CAN'T
FEEL MY
LEGS.

AND NOW--
HERE-- HER SICK
EXPERIMENTS
CONTINUE.

THE HELLPOWER
SURGES, BEGGING
FOR RELEASE.

SPAWN
DOES NOT
FIGHT IT.

THE PUNK WAS
HOLDING BACK.

HUMILIATING.

DON'T DWELL
ON IT.

PATCH
YOURSELF
UP.

YOU'LL BE
READY--

--WHEN
DUTY
CALLS.

A STRANGE
SIGHT-- THE
BAT SIGNAL
OVER THE
SKYLINE OF
MANHATTAN.

A STRANGE
SIGHT-- BUT
A WELCOME
ONE.

IF BATMAN
IS STILL IN
PAIN, HE
DOES NOT
KNOW IT.





A MAKESHIFT
BATSIGNAL--
A PLEA FOR HELP--

-- FROM AN
EXQUISITE ANGEL
OF MERCY.

HIS HEAD
ALMOST SPINS,
LOOKING AT
HER, LISTENING
TO HER.

WERE HE NOT
WHAT HE IS,
HE WOULD CALL
THE FEELING
DESIRE.

BUT HE IS
WHAT HE IS.

A SECURITY
CAMERA SPOTTED
THE THING THAT
DID THIS, BATMAN.
IT WAS ALL RED
CAPE AND CHAINS--
IT REDUCED MY
BEAUTIFUL MISSION
TO RUBBLE--



HE WILL
BE STOPPED,
DOCTOR. HE
WON'T GET
ANYWHERE
NEAR YOUR
SHIP.

THE PUNK WAS
HOLDING BACK.

BATMAN HAS TO
EVEN THE ODDS.

A PHONE CALL
TO ALFRED--
AND, TWO
HOURS LATER,
A PACKAGE.

AND BATMAN
IS READY.

...oh,
BATMAN--
ALL MY
DREAMS
ARE IN YOUR
HANDS.

--AND NOW I
FEAR IT WILL DO
WORSE. TONIGHT--
A FUND RAISER ABOARD
THE HEAL THE WORLD
SHIP-- IT'S RUMORED
THE PRESIDENT MAY
ATTEND. IF ANY-
THING SHOULD
HAPPEN...

IN THE FILTHY ALLEY
SPAWN CALLS HOME.

BATMAN'S NERVE
GAS PROVES TO BE
THE GIFT THAT KEEPS
ON GIVING.

THAT'S RIGHT.
JUST LET IT OUT.
DON'T FIGHT IT.
IT'S THE ONLY
WAY.

BLAGG

COUNT YOUR
BLESSINGS, AL.
THE REST OF US
FEEL LIKE THAT
EVERY DAY.

KHOFF

YEAH. I
GUESS
YOU DO.

THE CREEP
WHO DID THIS
TO ME...

IT'S NOT JUST
A STORY. IT WAS
BATMAN. AND IF HE'S
WORKING FOR NADIA
VLADOVA-- OR
MARGARET LOVE,
AS SHE'S CALLING
HERSELF--

--THEN HE'S
NOT THE HERO
EVERYBODY
SAYS HE IS...

KINDA
LIKE "ELSE-
WORLDS," huh?

WHAT'RE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT,
MICK?

HEY--
LOOK...

...AND
I'LL DO TO
HIM WHAT
I'LL DO TO
HER...

Uh, AL,
MAYBE
YOU OUGHT
TO TURN
AROUND.

...BATMAN...
IF HE'S NOT AN
IDIOT, HE'S
LEARNED HIS
LESSON...

BATMAN.
RIGHT. YOU
TELL THE
BEST STORIES,
AL...





WHUDD
WHUDD
WHUDD
WHUDD
WHUDD

THE POWER OF THE GLOVES-- IT STREAMS THROUGH BATMAN--

-- HE CAN LAUGH AT WOUNDS THAT, JUST HOURS AGO, LEFT HIM HELPLESS--

-- AND, MOST DELIGHTFUL OF ALL --



-- HE FACES AN OPPONENT WHO CAN TAKE A WORLD OF PUNISHMENT.

NO NEED FOR THE USUAL RESTRAINT.

THOKK



WHUMP

IDIOT. YOU'RE AN IDIOT. I'LL TEAR YOU APART.



IN YOUR DREAMS.

KRAK!

KRAK!



CRACK!

BACK WHEN HE WAS A SOLDIER--
BACK WHEN HE WAS ALIVE--

-- AL SIMMONS DIDN'T NEED MAGIC--




-- AND NOW--
WITH LITTLE MAGIC TO SPARE-- HE
FIGHTS THE WAY HE WAS TRAINED
TO FIGHT:

DIRTY.



SKRAK!

GAAA



BREAK
YOU IN HALF.
I'LL BREAK YOU
IN HALF.

SLOPPY
FIGHTER.
STUPID
FIGHTER. NO
DISCIPLINE.

TALKING
TRASH. YOU'RE
TALKING TRASH.
IT WON'T HELP
YOU.



TUNCH!

CRACK!

NO
DISCIPLINE.
STUPID
FIGHTER.
STUPID
PUNK.



HAD IT.
YOU'VE HAD IT.
YOU'RE DONE.

JUST
WARMING UP
YOU STUPID
PUNK.

CHUD

C
H
A
K
K

KRUNCH

CHUD

KAW
GGG



KRUKK

SNAT

TACH

KOK

KRAN



huff
huff



UNFF

huff
huff



GIVE IT UP, PUNK. YOU'RE FINISHED. JUST LOOK AT YOU. YOU'RE FINISHED.

LOOK AT YOU. YOU CAN'T EVEN GET UP. YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S FINISHED.

KHOFF



I'LL RIP YOU TO PIECES. UNDISCIPLINED SLOB.

KHAGG



CATCH MY BREATH. JUST CATCH MY BREATH AND I'LL BREAK YOU IN HALF.

Kheff

CLANK! CLANK! CLANK! CLANK!

AND, JUST WHEN THEY'VE BEATEN EACH OTHER NEARLY SENSELESS--

--THE ALLEY SHUDDERS.

CYBORG MIND SLAVES-- SENT BY MARGARET LOVE--

--TO MAKE SURE THERE AREN'T ANY LOOSE ENDS.

SHE CAN'T BE EXPOSED-- AND SHE CAN'T BE STOPPED-- IF BATMAN AND SPAWN ARE DEAD.

THEY CAN'T GET UP.

THEY CAN'T FIGHT.

BATMAN'S JAW SHATTERS LIKE GLASS.

COLD STEEL LANCES HIM.

AN ARTERY BURSTS.

A MORTAL WOUND.

AS BATMAN FEELS A FINAL COLDNESS FILL HIM--

-- AND HEARS THE WET SOUNDS OF WHAT THEY DO TO HIM--

KILLING HIM. CHRIST, THEY'RE KILLING HIM.

-- SPAWN REACHES DEEP WITHIN HIMSELF TO FIND THE STRENGTH TO STAY CONSCIOUS--

-- TO FIND THE WILL TO RISE--

-- AND HE REACHES ALL THE WAY TO HELL TO FIND THE POWER.



I JUST HOPE YOU APPRECIATE THIS, BATMAN.

STUPID PUNK. UNDISCIPLINED.

YOU'RE NOT MAKING SENSE. YOU'RE IN SHOCK. IT LOOKS REALLY BAD.

MAGIC TRICKS. NO WAY TO FIGHT. NO DISCIPLINE--
HUKKK



HIS HEART STOPS.

THERE'S ALMOST NO BLOOD LEFT IN HIM.

IT WOULD TAKE A MIRACLE TO SAVE HIM.





WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

SAVING YOUR LIFE--
AND DROPPING IN
FOR A VISIT.

GET OUT OF MY HEAD.

HEAR THAT, BATMAN? THAT'S
YOUR HEARTBEAT. YOU DIDN'T
HAVE ONE FOR A WHILE THERE.
YOU'RE WELCOME.

GET OUT OF MY
HEAD YOU TWIT.

I COULD DO THAT. BUT
THEN I'D JUST HAVE TO
BEAT THE CRAP OUT OF
YOU ALL OVER AGAIN.

YOU DIDN'T BEAT ANY-
BODY YOU PUNK. YOU
WERE ON THE ROPES.
YOU WERE FINISHED.

MAN, I FLATTENED YOUR
ASS. I ONLY LET UP OUT
OF PITY. A STRAY CAT
WOULD'VE GIVEN ME
MORE TROUBLE THAN
YOU DID.

AT LEAST I
COULD KEEP MY
DINNER DOWN.

OKAY. YOU MADE
ME PUKE. I'LL
GIVE YOU THAT.
BIG DEAL.


GET OUT
OF MY
HEAD.

NO.

NOT UNTIL
WE'VE HAD A
LITTLE CHAT.

SWAPPED
A FEW
STORIES.

TRADED A FEW
PIECES OF
EACH OTHER.



MURDERER, YOU'RE A
MURDERER. A HUNDRED
TIMES OVER. YOU'RE
DETESTABLE.

I WAS A SOLDIER-- I
FOUGHT AND I DIED-- I
WASN'T SOME RICH KID
WITH A HANGUP ABOUT
BATS.

A SOLDIER--
FACING BULLETS--

--BULLETS--
YOUR PARENTS--

GET OUT OF
MY HEAD!

NOT UNTIL
YOU KNOW!

LOOK AT HER, BATMAN!
LISTEN TO THE SOLDIERS
GIBBER LIKE IDIOTS AND
SCREAM AND DIE! THAT'S
MARGARET LOVE AND
HER DAMN MIND
EXPERIMENTS!



SHE SMILED,
DAMN HER!

SHE
SMILED!

DO YOU
GET IT,
NOW?

YES.

I MEAN, I KNOW
YOU'RE A LITTLE
THICK, BUT DO YOU
UNDERSTAND WHAT
SHE IS-- AND WHAT
WE HAVE TO DO?

YES.

NOW GET
OUT OF MY
HEAD, YOU
TWIT.

NOTHING
I'D RATHER DO.
IT'S NOT A VERY
NICE PLACE.


YOU EVER
THOUGHT ABOUT
GETTING
HELP?

IF THERE'S
ONE THING I
CAN'T STAND,
IT'S A DEAD
PUNK THAT
WON'T
SHUT UP.

WE'VE
GOT WORK
TO DO.
LET'S GO.







DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUES. HONORED GUESTS. MY DEAR, DEAR FRIENDS. GOD BLESS YOU ALL.


WHEN I WAS JUST A LITTLE GIRL, I SAW THE SADNESS AND SUFFERING AROUND ME--AND I DECIDED TO DEDICATE EVERY HOUR OF MY LIFE TO HEALING THE PAIN OF OUR TROUBLED PLANET. AS YEARS PASSED, AN ACHING EMPTINESS FILLED MY SOUL... A VAST, HOPELESS BLACK HOLE...

MEANWHILE, THE PRESIDENT DIDN'T COME TO THE FUND-RAISER, BUT EVERYBODY ELSE WHO'S ANYBODY DID.

MARGARET LOVE INSISTS THAT EVERYONE TRY THE PUNCH.


THE PUNCH IS A NON-ALCOHOLIC DELIGHT THAT TICKLES THE NOSE AND MAKES THE MIND VERY OPEN TO SUGGESTION.

HER VOICE DOES THE REST, SMOOTH AS SILK AND SWEET AS HONEY...



... FOR EVERY MOUTH WE FED, THERE WERE MILLIONS, STILL HUNGRY. FOR EVERY MIND WE TURNED TO LOVE AND JOY, THERE WERE NATIONS OF SLAVES TO BIGOTRY AND HATRED. IT ALL SEEMED POINTLESS, IMPOSSIBLE--

--TRULY, HOW CAN ANYONE HEAL THE WORLD?



A SYMPATHETIC SOB FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.

LOW MURMUR OF SAD AGREEMENT FROM A SENATOR.


THEN, ONE DAY, AN EPIPHANY. LIKE A LIGHTNING BOLT IT STRUCK ME. ALL THE CONFUSIONS AND COMPLICATIONS FELL AWAY. IT'S ALL SO SIMPLE, SO OBVIOUS.

THE VICE PRESIDENT NODS VIGOROUSLY.

THE PROBLEM IS PEOPLE.

PEOPLE. SWEATING, FARTING. MEAT-EATING, LAND-DESTROYING, CRUEL, STUPID, MURDEROUS PEOPLE.

PEOPLE. SPRAWLING ACROSS THE PLANET, CLUTTERING ITS NATURAL PERFECTION WITH ENDLESS FLESH, COUNTLESS FACTORIES AND DINERS AND MINI-MALLS AND TOXIC WASTE DUMPS AND CONCENTRATION CAMPS...



WITH A RUMBLE A TWELVE TON HATCH GLIDES OPEN...

... PEOPLE.
COMMITTING
ENDLESS
HORRORS.
RUINING
EVERYTHING.

THE PROBLEM
IS PEOPLE.

...IN THE HOLD,
AN ARSENAL--

-- BUILT FOR
A WAR THAT
WAS NEVER
FOUGHT.

A HUSH FALLS
OVER THE CROWD.
TWO GENERALS
TRADE HIGH-FIVES.

WE STAND
AT THE BRINK
OF A GREAT
DESTINY, MY
FRIENDS.

THEN, WHEN THE
FIRES HAVE DIED, OUR
HISTORIC WORK WILL
TRULY BEGIN. USING A
TRINITY OF METHODS--
THERAPY-- TECHNOLOGY--
AND FORCE-- WE WILL
OFFER FREEDOM FROM
CHOICE TO EVERY
LIVING SOUL.

WE WILL
FREE THE
WORLD!

WE WILL
HEAL THE
WORLD!

JUBILANT
APPLAUSE.

ARRIVING TWENTY
MINUTES LATE,
THE PRESIDENT
OF THE UNITED
STATES TAKES
HIS FIRST SIP OF
PUNCH.

WE HAVE
A GLORIOUS
OPPORTUNITY--
TO USHER IN A NEW
WORLD-- A WORLD
FREE OF PAIN AND
FEAR AND WAR AND
CRIME AND ALL THE
OTHER EVILS
OF HUMAN
WILLFULNESS.

AND ALL
IT WILL TAKE
IS A WAR THAT
WILL GROW AND
GROW UNTIL THE
FIRE IS EVERY-
WHERE.

HIS FRIENDS
BEGIN TO
FILL HIM IN.





MOVE IT, BATMAN!
YOU'RE TAKING TOO
LONG WITH THE
GUARDS!

WHAT THE
DEVIL ARE
YOU DOING
BACK IN MY
HEAD?

I THOUGHT WE SHOULD
COORDINATE OUR
EFFORTS AND THIS SEEMED
LIKE THE BEST WAY,
ALL RIGHT?

JUST FOLLOW
MY LEAD,
BOY. I'VE BEEN
AT THIS A FEW
YEARS LONGER
THAN YOU
HAVE--

-- AND I'M A WHOLE
LOT *SMARTER*
THAN YOU. FROM
ALL *INDICATIONS*,
YOU'RE *DUMBER*
THAN *CLARK*.

WHO'S
CLARK?

NONE
OF YOUR
BUSINESS.



WE'RE IN--
WE'RE
THROUGH
THE HULL--

--NO THANKS
TO YOU.

YOU'RE A *BLUNT*
INSTRUMENT, KID-- SO
GO *AHEAD*-- KICK UP
ALL THE NOISE YOU
WANT--

--THOUGH IT'S A
WONDER YOU CAN
EVEN MOVE WITH
ALL THOSE STUPID
CHAINS.

THAT WAS A
CHEAP SHOT,
MAN.

YOU MAKE *NOISE*.
I'LL DO THE REAL
WORK.

JESUS-- LOOK AT ALL THIS
SHIT. IT COULD LEVEL A
CONTINENT.

JUST SMASH
CYBORGS AND SHUT
UP. I'LL DO THE
THINKING HERE.



Oh, GREAT. PERFECT.
THAT WAS EXPERT,
BOY--





-- YOU WERE A SOLDIER. YOU SHOULD'VE KNOWN THAT EXPLOSIVES TEND TO BLOW UP IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL WITH THEM.

YOU BE CAREFUL, OLD MAN--

-- YOU BE NICE AND SWEET AND CAREFUL.



THAT WOMAN'S OUT TO END EVERYTHING AND I'M STOPPING HER AND I DON'T CARE IF IT KILLS ME ALL OVER AGAIN TO DO IT.



NO-- YOU FOOL--

-- SHE DOESN'T HAVE TO DIE!



WHY NOT?

BATMAN HAS NO ANSWER.

HE MOVES TOWARD THE DYING WOMAN, HEARING HER LAST, PATHETIC GASPS...

...NOT REALIZING UNTIL IT IS FAR TOO LATE--

MY DREAMS.

ALL MY DREAMS.

A BETTER WORLD.

A PARADISE.

--THAT SHE HAS ONE LAST OPTION LEFT TO HER, THIS MADWOMAN--

-- ONE LAST WEAPON.

AN OLD WEAPON.

A FINAL WEAPON:

A NUKE!

HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THE CENTER OF TOWN!

DO SOMETHING, YOU TWIT!

BAILING YOU OUT AND I'VE GOT TO PUT UP WITH THIS ABUSE.

HOLD ONTO YOUR GUTS, BATBOY. THIS IS GOING TO SUCK.

A SURGE OF HELLPOWER.

TELEPORTATION.

IT'S THE WORST.

BATMAN AND SPAWN ARE RIPPED TO ATOMS.

RIPPED TO ATOMS.

SHREDED.

REBUILT--



-- AND REGURGITATED FROM THE ETHER TO THE SIDE OF A SPEEDING SOVIET MISSILE THAT PROMISES THE DEATH OF ALL NEW YORK'S MILLIONS.

BATMAN'S HANDS STOP SHAKING. THEY HAVE TO.

HIS MIND CLEARS. IT HAS TO.

IT'S A MESS. REDUNDANT CIRCUITRY.

WATCH IT-- I KNOW THIS MODEL-- THAT'S NOT A REDUNDANCY--

-- IT'S A TRICK-- TOUCH IT WRONG AND EVERYBODY DIES!

I WON'T TOUCH IT WRONG. AND DON'T YOU TOUCH MY CAPE. EVER. NOBODY TOUCHES MY CAPE.

GENIUS AT WORK.

A MIND SO BRILLIANT IT MIGHT HAVE REVOLUTIONIZED THE FIELD OF PHYSICS.

HANDS SO SKILLFUL THEY COULD HAVE SERVED A CONCERT PIANIST-- OR A SAFECRACKER.

BATMAN.

DETECTIVE.

VIGILANTE.

SAVIOR.



THAT'S IT. IT'S DEAD. GET US OUT OF HERE.

AL--

--GET US OUT OF HERE.



HARMLESS, NOW--

--THE MISSILE CUTS THE WATER OF THE EAST RIVER.

THE CITY IS SAVED.





THE ALLEY SPAWN CALLS HOME. THAT VERY INSTANT.

ANOTHER ROUND OF AGONY AND NAUSEA.



YOUR METHODS ARE *REVOLTING*. YOUR *DISRESPECT* FOR HUMAN LIFE IS *DETESTABLE*. YOUR LACK OF *DISCIPLINE* IS NOTHING SHORT OF *EMBARRASSING*.

WE'LL MEET AGAIN.

YOU'D BETTER HOPE WE DON'T. I COULD HAVE YOU FOR BREAKFAST-- AND IF YOU STEP ON MY TURF AGAIN, I WILL.

I DON'T HAVE THE POWER IN HAND TO BRING YOU DOWN RIGHT NOW, BOY-- BUT I'LL GET IT--



-- AND WE'LL MEET AGAIN.



WOULD YOU JUST KNOCK IT OFF? FOR JUST ONE SECOND?

YOU AND ME, WE JUST SAVED THE WHOLE CITY-- MAYBE THE WHOLE WORLD. WHEN THE CHIPS WERE DOWN, WE WOUND UP ON THE SAME TEAM. AND NEITHER OF US COULD HAVE PULLED THIS OFF ALONE.



WHAT DO YOU SAY WE JUST BURY THE HATCHET?



BURY THIS.



The END