

I COULD HAVE BEEN THIS MAN.

HE WAS VULNERABLE. VULNERABLE AND **DESPERATE**, AND SOMEONE TOOK ADVANTAGE. SOMEONE **PREYED** ON HIM, AND OTHERS LIKE HIM. GOTHAM'S HOMELESS, GOTHAM'S **FORGOTTEN**.

THEY ALL KEEP TELLING ME HOW THEY'RE GOING TO **LIBERATE** GOTHAM. HOW THE ONLY WAY TO **SAVE** GOTHAM IS TO FIRST SEE IT **CONSUMED** BY THEIR RIGHTEOUS FLAMES.

BUT MY PARENTS WERE GONE, AND AS I LOOK INTO THIS MAN'S EYES, I KNOW WE'RE NOT THAT DIFFERENT.



WHERE IS THE BOY?

BELIEVE... I BELIEVE...



...GOTHAM... BELIEVE IN... I DO...

SOMEONE MADE THEM **TOOLS**.



TELL ME WHERE I CAN **FIND** HIM.

...THE **CURSE**... GOTHAM...IT'S CURSED...

THEY'VE ATTACKED CITY HALL. THEY ATTEMPTED TO BOMB THE GOTHAM BRIDGE. AND NOW **THIS**-- KIDNAPPING A YOUNG BOY. NO OLDER THAN I WAS WHEN MY PARENTS WERE **TAKEN** FROM ME.



TELL ME WHERE THEY'VE TAKEN **JOSHUA**.

...THE **GOTHAM CURSE**... WE MUST...SET IT **FREE**...I BELIEVE THIS...

I COULD HAVE BEEN HIM. I COULD HAVE BEEN SOMEONE'S **PREY**, BUT I'M NOT...

I'M
BATMAN.

YOU WILL
BELIEVE
IN *ME.*

The
CURSING
of **GOTHAM**
CITY!

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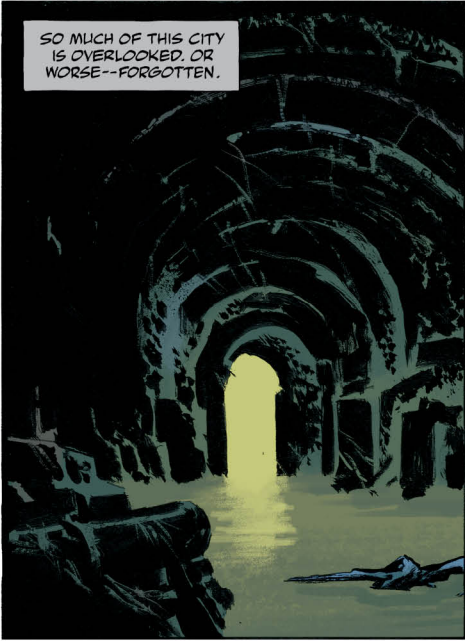
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SO MUCH OF THIS CITY IS OVERLOOKED, OR WORSE--FORGOTTEN.



I WAS JUST A BOY WHEN THIS SUBWAY LINE WAS PLANNED, AND I REMEMBER HOW IT WAS GOING TO CONNECT UNDERSERVED GOTHAM NEIGHBORHOODS TO THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN.

THE PROJECT WAS ABANDONED, TIED UP IN BUREAUCRACY, RED TAPE, ALLEGED LACK OF FINANCES. SOON ENOUGH, PEOPLE STOPPED CARING. PEOPLE WERE HAPPY TO MOVE--



**SPLISH
SPLISH**

SOMEONE'S CLOSE.



GRRGH



BATMAN.

BATMAN...



...I'M SO GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT. I'VE BEEN **WAITING** FOR YOU.



GAAAH




NNNGGH

MY HEART IS RACING. MY MIND IS...CLOUDED. SOMETHING IS HAPPENING TO ME.

SOMETHING... SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT.

I'VE BEEN COMPROMISED.



YOU'RE FEELING MY INFLUENCE ON YOU, AREN'T YOU, BATMAN? YOUR INSTINCTS ARE TAKING OVER. TELLING YOU TO **FIGHT**. TELLING YOU TO **ENDURE**.



LET ME ASSURE YOU...

...THERE IS **NO ESCAPE** FOR YOU. NOT THIS TIME.

DEACON BLACKFIRE.

HE MAY BE A GHOST; HE MAY BE A DELUDED METAHUMAN. I'VE NEVER TRULY KNOWN. THE LAST TIME HE EMERGED, THE SPECTRE CLAIMED TO HAVE **OBLITERATED** HIM FROM EXISTENCE. YET SOMEHOW HE'S HERE--POWERFUL ENOUGH TO RETURN.

THE THOUGHT SENDS A SHIVER UP MY **SPINE...**

...AS I KNOW THIS IS EVEN MORE DANGEROUS THAN I THOUGHT.

YOU'RE MINE. **GOTHAM IS MINE.**

