



Batman: City of Crime #1
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Batman: CITY OF CRIME
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Prologue:

Gotham.

The city with its soul on fire.

People will tell you about Gotham. They talk about it like it's a Spillane novel. They'll say it's rough. You shouldn't walk alone at night. They haven't got a clue.

Not one goddamn clue.

Gotham is a dark, devil's furnace. It's a biting arctic desert. It's a ravenous beast with a hunger that can't be satisfied. It is a city of shadows and its stories are written in blood. Its soundtrack is a chorus of screams that no one hears, even when they do.

Even the name of the city.

Gotham.

Say it. Say it out loud. It sounds like it climbs out of your throat from that place in your belly you save for your darkest impulses you don't tell anyone about.

Yeah. I know all about Gotham City. The city of crime.

If that all sounds like the ratings of a bitter old drunk, well, that's not far

from the truth. I didn't always think so. Once, I thought I was making a difference. Once upon a time. But I've since learned that the only way to stomach this city is with a belly full of Jacks.

The city was already hard and nasty when I first started work at the Gotham Gazette. Back then it was just mobs, bosses, and leg breakers. The bikers and the pushers. The girls of Hooker Alley and cops at Dead Man's Gorge.

It was a real holiday back then.

But that was before. Before this whole goddamn city turned into something found in the worst places of Steven King's nightmares. Before the freaks.

Before the Joker.

Before the Bat.

Once crime in this city was organized. Predictable. Now it's chaos. Mobsters were just looking to make a buck and not have to pay two bits to Uncle Sam. Now Zsasz and Crane compete with the clown to see who can pile up the most bodies.

I won't even tell you the rumors I hear about a group of killers calling themselves the League of Shadows. You gotta sleep at night.

The Bat? Yeah, we all hear the stories. Started about two years ago. An avenging creature of the night. A vampire. A monster. A hero.

Vale even thinks she saw him once. I don't buy a word of it. This "Batman" is probably a creation of GCPD Captain Jim Gordon to scare criminals and justify police brutality. He's nothing but a fiction, a boogeyman story parents tell their kids at night.

The Batman. That'll be the day.

I know all this because I have spent my life in this town, writing about its greasy soul. My name is Fynn. Marv Fynn. But most folks call me Mickey.

Yeah. I know Gotham City, the city with its soul on fire.

The city of Crime.

Chapter One: *Shadows*

The Gargoyle isn't the classiest bar in town, but isn't a rat hole either. In Gotham City you could do worse, a lot worse.

It's out past by the main drag, close to the frontier of Hooker Alley. The bar is bad enough to keep most prying eyes away, and just good enough so you can drink your fill without being spit on. So long as you keep to yourself, no one asks any questions.

Which suits me fine. My editors wouldn't dare come calling for me here, even if I have missed deadline. Which I do all the time. Like right now.

It's 7:30. The sun's gone down, but the air is still a heavy, sweaty blanket. I've been drinking for an hour now and I'm just warming up. The Bull has asked to meet me here. And it's always a good idea to numb your brain when you are dealing with the Bull.

I swallow down the better part of my malt liquor when I hear it.

"Heya, Sarah. Where is he?"

The Bull's voice is deep and so rough it sounds like he eats broken glass for breakfast. It pierces through the Gargoyle like hot bullet. Leave it to the Bull to draw attention to himself in a place like this.

A cop. At the Gargoyle. Getting everyone to notice his entrance.

What a moron.

"He's in the back Harv, his usual table," says Sarah. She's served drinks at the Gargoyle for as long as I can remember but never seems to age. Not like me. She winks at the Bull before she walks away all wiggles and

high heels. The big lummoX stops in his tracks and takes in an eye-full. Don't judge him too harshly. I've seen guys who need a cigarette after one of Sarah's winks.

Then he sees me. Thank god he has enough sense not to call out or wave one of his meat hooks in the air to get my attention.

Harv Bullock. Detective Harvey J. Bullock of the Gotham City Police Department Homicide squad, to be exact. Known to most as the Bull. He's twice as big as one and about half as smart.

But he's also an honest cop. Almost. As honest as Gotham gets. And if you know anything about Gotham, you'll know that is about as rare in this town as a virgin in Vegas.

Still, I hear rumors about the guy. The kind of rumors only Gotham creates.

He squeezes himself into the wooden chair with the peeling paint across from me. It isn't easy. He shifts his miles of flesh from one side to the other to shimmy in. The joints in the wood creak. By the time he settles in, puts his weather-beaten fedora on the table and his water stained brief case on the floor beside his size 12s, Harv is panting.

"Huff... .heya... .huff... .Mickey... .thanks for... huff meeting me."

"Sure Harv. Anytime. Drink?"

It's a goddamned dumb question. Even under that elephant hide of a trench coat the Bull is wearing I can tell he is packing. A 9mm glock that in his hands looks like one of those cheap toys in little plastic bubbles you get when you put a quarter into the machine. Detective Bullock is on duty. And I just feel like being gadfly.

"I'm on duty... huff," he says, wiping his expansive forehead with a coffee stained tie. "But I got somethin' for ya."

He reaches into the brief case and pulls out a manila folder marked with so many coffee rings it looks like it has chicken pox. He puts on the table and covers it with one of his paws.

"You know that murder? The one at the Grand?"

I nod and light a Camel.

"Sure. Dead woman in one of the city's more posh hotels three weeks ago. Cops won't say who she is. Won't say how she was killed. Won't even confirm there was a murder," I say, blowing a couple of smoke rings over the Bull's baldhead. "Sure you don't want a drink, Harv?"

"No thanks. Listen, the case is stuck. It ain't goin' anywhere," he says, waving the incoming smoke rings from the air. "But I had to keep it a tight lid on it because... listen, I just had to. But I need help, you know? I figured you run a name in the Gazette? Maybe a story will get us some leads, you know?"

I get it. The Bull can't solve a murder. Shocking. So he figures he's throwing me a bone. Toss the down on his luck reporter a scoop and he can try to get some witnesses to come forward, and maybe he keeps the commissioner from tearing him a new one.

Then that thing happens to my stomach. A hot twist that starts in my belly and climbs into my throat. It's not heartburn. Not really. It's like my early warning system. My BS detector. It only goes off when something is out of place. And something IS out of place.

The Bull hates me. Has for years. Ever since that bloody screw up on that story I did on that Falcone story. The mafia boss is still at large and the Bull blames me.

And he's right.

So why come to me?

"I'm not on the crime desk anymore. You should talk to Claydon. They gave him the beat," I say. "Seriously, let me get you a drink... ."

"Really, no thanks." Bullock says, his fat fingers drumming heavily on the cover of the manila folder he hasn't so much as cast a glance at. "Look, Fynn, I am trying to you a favor."

What's going on here? The Bull actually sounds desperate. He's sweating, and not just because he's a bigger than a rhino.

He's nervous.

Maybe I am overthinking this. Maybe he is just trying to help out a once upon a time friend. Maybe I should just take his tip and shut up about it.

I should just leave this alone. Take the tip, stupid. Take it and phone the story in. But for that blazing knot in my stomach, I would.

I'm one typo away from the welfare lines and this tip would keep my editors off my back for a while. I should just take it. But I'm not built that way.

I have to know.

"Since when are you interested in doing me favors, Bull? You were the one who had Commissioner Loeb revoke my media pass," I said, this time blowing smoke right at his stubby nose. "You know, they serve the best Canadian Club here."

"No drinks, goddamn it!" he says, trying to lean forward. His gut gets in the way. "And don't blame me. You blew that story, Mickey. I was just doin' my job!"

That's it, Bull. Get angry. Get angry and stupid and careless and tell me why you really wanted to see me.

"Sure you were, Harv. Sure you were. And now you've come to me because you're stuck? You always did have problems with the thinking part of the job," I mash the cigarette out into the cracked glass ashtray and light another. "Highball?"

"Damn it, Mickey! You goddamned lush! What do you know?"

"I know I'm amazed you haven't been busted back to traffic duty," I say.

"God damn it! They are shutting me down, Mickey! Gordon is nowhere near this case and they are shutting me down! If I had anywhere else to go other than a punk who drowned his career in a bottle, I would," he says. "Loeb is pulling the plug on me. The case is dead in the water."

"What do you mean?"

"They don't want it solved!"

"Who's 'they'?"

The Bull tries to shift in his seat. He didn't want to go here. He wanted me to be grateful, take the story and leave it at that. No questions. Makes sense. I screw up, and it's no skin off the Bull's hide. Just the ranting of a broken down drunk.

"What's in the folder, Harv?"

"You're interested?"

"That depends what's in the folder."

His fingers stop drumming on the manila folder. He still hasn't looked at it.

"This didn't come from me. Got it? No screw-ups this time. Because I swear to God almighty and all the saints, I will... ."

"Yes, yes. I know what you will do. Now, show me the folder. I got places to be."

Bullock stabs a single thick finger into the center of folder and pushes it across the table.

Slowly.

His eyes never leave mine.

The coffee stained cover is stamped at the top in bold, blood red letters:

GCPD: HOMICIDE 345-001. HARTIGAN, NANCY. CONFIDENTIAL

I can't place the name exactly, but I know it. Something swimming in a pool of booze is tickling the back of my mind. Nancy Hartigan. I know that name.

The file isn't thick. Even after a couple of days, most homicide files start to look like a Metropolis phone book. Not this one. I ask the Bull about it. He tells me some upper ups in the GCPD have cleaned his files out. He won't say exactly who. I can guess. This is was all he managed to keep, and he'll have to turn this in by first light.

Someone doesn't want this case solved. Figures. For every clean cop like the Bull, there are ten who aren't.

I peel back the coffee stained cover. The Bull takes in a sharp audible breath. I feel like I'm cracking the lock on Pandora's box.

When I see what is inside, I wish I had.

"Sarah! Four drinks. Canadian Club. Neat," I shout across the bar. "Two for me and two for my friend here."

Bullock doesn't object. He just stares at his size 12s, best as he can see them anyway.

When Sarah brings the drinks to the table, I cover the folder up with the Bull's umbrella of a hat.

"Here you go boys," she purrs. "You ok, Mickey? You look a little pale."

"Sure, Sarah. Sure. I'm fine. Just bring us another round in a couple of minutes, babe."

"Ok, Mickey," she says. She stares hard at me for moment. Glances down at the Bull, walks off. "You boys go slow now, ya hear?"

We both take the first drinks in one shot. It gloriously burns my throat and chest. I push the Bull's fedora back across the table, exposing the

folder and the photograph inside.

"Harv... how did... ," I say. Hell, I need another drink and so does he. We each down a second glass. Harv drinks it a little too fast and coughs a bit.

"Harv, where are her hands?"

Bullock wipes his lips with his tie and finally looks up at me. His eyes are watery and a little bloodshot.

"We think... aw hell," he says, swallowing hard. "We think he kept them. You know, as trophies."

"Jesus... ."

"She wasn't killed there, at the hotel," he continues, sounding stilted, like voice mail, or the robot from Lost in Space. "The, uh, arrangement of the body was deliberate. Including the ... the state of undress. But that happened afterwards. We think anyway."

"The bruising on her neck?"

"Caused by some kind of cord or scarf with regular knots."

You cover Gotham long enough, you see things. Things you don't forget. Things that stay with you. Lots of things stay with me. I had thought I had seen it all and it wouldn't bother me anymore. I saw what Falcone's men did to those celebrity twins. Cops couldn't even use dental records to identify them. I saw those 55 people the Joker killed last year with that laugh gas of his - their faces frozen in those grotesque, fun house mirror grins.

But this? It's going to take a decade of booze to scrub this from my memory.

We go through two more drinks each as I read through the skinny files under the photo. Forensics came up with nothing. The body was washed

clean before it was laid out the hotel room floor like a crucifix. The room was cleaned too. The only trace elements the lab boys found was bleach.

Hotel manager didn't even rent that room to anyone. It was supposed to be empty.

Most anything else of interest was removed from the file before the Bull brought it here. No personal history on his Nancy Hartigan. (I know that name). Nothing to tell me who she was, or who she would have been.

The only thing left is sticky note, the last item in the file. It contains only four letters: DEVI.

"What the hell is DEVI?"

"Dunno.. *BUUURP*. I could never figure it out. It was written on the carpet by the body. In her blood.'

I close the folder and slide it back across the table. He fumbles with it and shoves it back into his beaten leather brief case without looking at it.

His liver isn't as conditioned as mine. The booze has got him and he's getting dopey. He's already too drunk to tell me anything about Nancy Hartigan. And the last thing you want to be around in a drunken bull. So I have Sarah call him a cab. I tell him I will call in a couple of days and leave him at the Gargoyle.

I step outside in the sickly humid air. I should be under the table too. But I'm not. I feel sharp. Frosty. And that single thought keeps replaying in my head. Nancy Hartigan. I know that girl.

I *KNOW* that girl.

I start walking. Start trying to fish out memories blurred by too many nights of boozing and not enough sleep. I'm sure I know her. Even though the face in that photo was mask of horror, I recognize it. But when I saw it before it was smiling. Well, sort of. Something was bothering her. Something about her sister?

Then it hits me like a grenade. The memories aren't clear. I was on a hell

of a bender. Four days I think. Jesus. Got suspended from the Gazette for a week for that one. I was at the Inferno. Dante's Inferno, over on O'Neil and Kane. Did she come home with me?

No. No, I went home with her. Damn, it's hard to remember. So I do the only thing I can do. I call a cab, and head for the Inferno.

Back in the 50s, Dante's Inferno was a hot jazz club. Everyone who was anyone played there. Louis. Chick. Bird. Dizzy. But times have changed. Today, to a quote a wise man, you'll never find a greater hive of scum and villainy.

Three years ago it was bought from mob boss Falcone by an ex-jewelry thief and ex-gun runner with delusions of grandeur named Cobblepot. Oswald Cobblepot. Sounds like he should be the president of a high school chess club. Yeah, he used to be a low level importer of lethal merchandise from the world over. Nothing special. There were dozens like him in Gotham.

But after Gotham became a freak parade, Cobblepot got an idea. He needed a gimmick. A name. Like the Joker. Or the Scarecrow. He needed to be a "the" something. Something that would make him a known and feared criminal in a town of known and feared criminals.

So he called himself The Penguin.

I'll allow you a moment to recover from the horror the image of small, flightless bird conjures up.

So now he wears a tux everywhere he goes, and runs his business out of the Inferno. His business? Anything you want.

But that doesn't help me at the moment. Walking into the Penguin's joint isn't easy. Not for me. Cobblepot hates me more than the Bull does. He didn't take it too kindly when I printed a story about a sex-slave operation in the Inferno. The cops had to raid the place for PR if nothing else.

He's made it clear should I ever return, I would leave be missing a part

of my anatomy more than one woman has complimented me on.

I make a couple of phone calls to track down the man who can get me in. He says he'll meet me at the front doors. But when I get there, the only person at the door is Frank the Tank. Six foot five inches, 250 pounds of bald, tattoo covered, albino Frank the Tank. The Penguin's bodyguard, leg breaker and if the rumors are true, his cook. Apparently the Tank makes a mean omelet.

He's not happy to see me.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Fynn, but it would most unwise of you to attempt to gain entry into this establishment. Surely my employer has made this most simple of facts crystal clear to you," the Tank says in his smooth baritone. His arms are cross high on his barreled chest, making them look the size of large watermelons.

"Yeah I know Frankie, but I have to talk to him."

"Mr. Fynn, my name is Frank. Not Frankie. There is no excuse for rudeness. I am afraid if you do not leave I will have the long delayed gratification of removing your body from these premises."

I hear the snap of a flint strike me behind, and sharp Irish voice cuts through the night air.

"Aw, laddie, you'd best let him in. He's my guest tonight."

I wheel around and see him. He never changes. Eyes hidden behind a pair of dark sunglasses he never takes off anytime day or night. Oversized, double breasted, red suit. Patent leather shoes. Howard Hughes mustache. And a habit of playing endlessly with matches.

Matches Malone. Don't know if he even has a first name. The ghost of Gotham's underworld. Rumored to be connected to nearly everyone, but owes no one a damned thing. If half the stories about this guy are true, he knows where all the bodies are buried and where all the money goes.

And tonight he is my ticket to scum central.

"Heya Matches," I say, lighting a Camel on the match he just struck. "You're late."

"Had other business, dontca' know," he says, flicking another match to life before tossing it in the gutter. "But if ye got business in here tonight, lad, then yer gonna need me."

Damn right. Even with Matches at my back, there is a pretty good chance I'll be coming out of the inferno in a body bag.

Or something smaller.

-End Chapter One -

If you enjoyed this story, you can find more tales of your favorite DC heroes at DC2 Universe.

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From the same author on Feedbooks

Lobo: Dirty Deeds - Done Dirt Cheap (2007)

Hey you! Get yer greasy paws offa my space hog! Naw, I don't care that ya didn't touch it yet. Ya might have later and ain't but nobody touches my ride!

Aw, yer a human ain't ya? No offense, but the Main Man thinks you ain't nothing but a pack of naked monkeys. Yes he does. Hell, 'bout the only thing ya ever done right was AC/DC. Righteous that is. Cranked up on my space hog whenever I'm on the road....what's that? Ya can't hear hard rock in space? Why not? Cause ya can't hear in space? Stupid monkey! Don't push yer luck! I'd probably kill ya right here, right now, but I got a business-type appointment. Can't figure why a soft skinned chimp like yerself would dare walk into a place like Vogon's Cantina. But I'm in a forgivin' mood, chimp. So ya can come along and watch the action. And there's always action at Vogon's. Just stay outta my way and keep yer head down.

My name? Ya better not forget it ya fraggin bastich. It might be the last name ya ever hear.

Lobo!

Batman: City of Crime #5 (2007)

Batman: City of Crime, Part 5 (of 5): Wrath

Batman: City of Crime #4 (2007)

Batman: City of Crime, Part 4 (of 5): Knight Fall

Batman: City of Crime #3 (2007)

Batman: City of Crime, Part 3 (of 5): Towering Heights.

Batman: City of Crime #2 (2007)

Batman: City of Crime, Part 2 (of 5): Into the Inferno.

Reporter Mickey Fynn's investigation into the ghastly murder of Nancy Hartigan takes him to the one place he knows he shouldn't go - the lair of the Penguin! Oswald Cobblepot might provide a critical lead on the case...if Fynn lives long enough to hear it.

Batman #20 (2007)

Batman: Partners.

The Justice League's world is coming down around them, so they desperately need their key strategist ready for action. Only Batman hasn't been seen in weeks! Superman is dispatched to find his long time partner - only to find he is in no mood to help the League!

Batman #21 (2007)

Batman: Trauma, Part 1.

Batman #22 (2007)

Batman: Trauma, Part 2.

Batman frantically tries to hunt down the Wrath, who has kidnapped Vicki Vale! Meanwhile, when another Gotham villain turns up dead, Batman is forced to come face to face with his greatest failure as a crime fighter.

Batman #23 (2007)

Batman: Trauma, Part 3.

Finally, the fate of Batman's first partner is revealed! What happened to Jason Todd, aka Redwing, after the events of City of Crime? Why doesn't Nightwing know who Redwing was?

Batman #24 (2007)

Batman: Trauma, Part 4 (of 5).

In the second to last story in Batman: Trauma, Batman, Nightwing and Alfred go on the offensive against the Wrath. But in doing so they find themselves trapped in the cross fire of lethal agendas. The ultimate fate of Jason Todd is revealed and stakes for Batman and Gotham are raised.

Batman #25 (2007)

Batman: Trauma, Finale.

The sequel to City of Crime ends here, shaking the foundation of Batman's world. 'Nuff said.

Batman #27 (2008)

Batman: A Mirror, Darkly Part 1.

Gotham City is under assault. Crime has changed and the old rules of the game no longer apply. Before Batman can even adjust to his new status quo, a ghost from his past returns threatening

everything the Dark Knight has ever built or cared for. Be prepared for the DC2 debut of Batman's most lethal enemy.

Batman #26 (2008)

Batman: Agoge.

Things in Gotham are changing. A strange new twist to the Joker's behavior leaves Batman puzzled, but he isn't the only one keeping tabs on the homicidal clown. As Batman past and present collide we learn for the first time how Jason Todd became the Dark Knight's first partner.

Batman #28 (2008)

Batman: A Mirror, Darkly; Part 2.

The history of Ra's Al Ghul's connection to Bruce Wayne is revealed while Batman tries to protect Gotham from his former master. An unlikely alliance is formed under the city streets and the Joker comes face to face with...himself?

Batman #29 (2008)

Batman: A Mirror, Darkly Part 3.

War! The battle between Batman and Ra's spills onto the streets of Gotham City, causing Jim Gordon to question the actions of his long time masked ally in the war on crime. As Ra's makes a hard final push to take control of the city, Batman's new allies led by Black Mask strike back. And as if that wasn't enough, the Joker has decided it's time to go wild.

Batman #30 (2008)

Batman: A Mirror, Darkly Part 4.

It all ends here! The war between Ra's Al Ghul and Batman comes to a head as Gotham city burns! At stake is nothing less than the future of Batman and the fate of the city of crime! Nothing will ever be the same for DC2's Dark Knight after this!

Batman #31 (2008)

Batman: My Kingdom for a Horse.

During the climax of Ra's Al Ghul's attack on Gotham City, Batman's criminal allies led by Black Mask, Two Face and the Penguin were tasked with defending City Hall from the League of Shadows.

Batman #32 (2008)

Batman: The Grey Ghost.

Gotham's new Batman is determined to follow in his mentor's footsteps....if he survives. Dick Grayson is about to learn the cost of wearing the cape and cowl as he faces his most lethal enemy while being chased by the ghosts of Bruce Wayne's past. Meanwhile Black Mask and Harvey Bullock are forced to come face to face with their own demons....and each other.

Batman #33 (2009)

Batman: Sins of the Father.

As the Grey Ghost continues his assault on the criminal element of Gotham City, Dick Grayson learns about the price to be paid for wearing the cape and cowl. Meanwhile, on the run from Killer Croc, Black Mask and Bullock come face to face with a new player in Gotham!



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