



Batman: City of Crime #3
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Batman: CITY OF CRIME

Issue 3 of 5: "Towering heights"

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You have to love this guy.

Really.

You can try not to. Hell, I'm trying not to right now. I'm having all the luck of Quasimodo in a beauty contest.

You have to love the guy.

Bruce Wayne. The Prince of Gotham.

"Thing is Lucius, I thought turkeys were the way go," he says, holding his cell phone between his ear and shoulder while sending an email from his laptop. "Everyone loves turkeys."

I've been in here for 20 minutes. Waiting. Listening. And more waiting. Suits me fine. My head feels like a tank has rolled over it. A tank did roll over it. I've got a screaming five alarm hang over. Either from the booze I drank at the Inferno or the beating that Frank that Tank gave me.

Or both.

Still it was worth it. Cobblepot coughed up what I was looking for. A lead. A lead on Nancy Hartigan. Well, almost. A lead on her sister, Tess. Used to work for Wayne. One of his army of assistants it turns out. When I called about her, I was passed right to the big man himself. Strange. Like he was expecting the call.

"Really? Lucius are you sure? Because it made sense to me. They have

wings, you know. I checked," Wayne says, grabbing the phone before it slides off his shoulder and swinging his size 10s wrapped in a pair shoes made by some Italian designer whose name I can't pronounce up on his desk. Those shoes look like they cost more than my car. Even the laces look like they cost more than my suit.

And my car.

"Ok, seriously? But they have wings," Wayne says. "Lucius, as God as my witness, I swear I thought turkeys could fly!"

I try not to laugh. Mostly because my ribs feel like they crack a bit when I do. But I can't help it. Like I said. You gotta love the guy.

He waves me toward a small bar in the far corner of his office. It's only 10:30 a.m. and I haven't eaten, but a belly full of Canadian Club will at least kill some of the pain.

"Well what about chickens? They can't fly either? Seriously?"

I know what you are thinking. "How does a moron like this end up with more money than God?" I'll tell you a secret. Something the guy on the other end of that phone call once told me. Lucius Fox. Wayne's Joe Friday.

See, I had to do a profile on Fox for the Gazette a few years back when I had really annoyed my editors. They know I hate puff jobs. When I asked Fox what it was like working for a fop like Wayne, he looked right at me. Hard. Like he was looking into my heart.

"I'll tell you something, Mr. Fynn," he said, never taking his eyes off of mine. "Bruce comes across as fool a lot of the time. I know. But he isn't. He knows exactly what he is doing."

"Ok, Lucius, no turkeys. Good call. Listen I have the press here so I... ..no, no, nothing about the Swedish bikini ski team. I hope not anyway," he says, casting a questioning look my way. I shake my head, stifle another giggle, wince, and take my Canadian Club in single shot. "Yeah, nothing about the girls. I'm sure it's nothing serious. Ok. Yes, board of directors at noon. Ciao, baby."

Wayne jumps up from his desk and floats across the floor to the bar. Grabs a bottle of water and takes me by the arm to lead me to a conference room.

"How long as it been, Marv," he says. "Three years?"

"Four, Bruce."

"Right. Four. That's right you came to see me about that weapons program story you did. Good piece that."

"Thanks."

"Don't see your byline as often anymore, though," he says.

"They, uh, keep me busy. Long term stuff, you know."

"Hmm."

We enter a conference room. It's not a conference room. It's the Sistine Goddamn Chapel. The ceiling goes on forever. The floor is marble. There is a huge stained glass window with an image of winged creature rising from some ruins.

"The phoenix rising," Wayne says, ushering me past to an outdoor patio beyond the window. "Hope that rises from despair. Catchy, dontca' think?"

"Sure, Bruce. Sure."

And then we're there. The top of the world. Or the top of Gotham, anyway. Wayne's patio sits on the top floor of Wayne Tower. A 135-storey monster of glass and steel that rises out of the filth of this city.

Like a phoenix.

The city doesn't look so bad from up here. Almost livable. If the view

didn't make my knees weak.

"Jesus... "

"You ok, Marv?" Wayne says.

"Yeah. *ulp*. I just don't care for heights much," I say, backing slowly away from the edge finding my seat in a reclining chair. "How do you not get dizzy up here?"

"Oh, well... " Wayne says, standing right on the edge of the ledge. Right on it. Like it's the most natural thing in the world. I get vertigo just looking at him. "You get used to it. So, you wanted to talk about Tess Hartigan?"

"Yeah, Bruce. I'm following up on her sister's murder."

Wayne tenses at the word "murder". Not quite a flinch. Not really. But noticeable.

"How do you know she was murdered?" he says without turning around to face me.

That hot twist happens to my gut again. It's the way he says it. He knows she was murdered but he's playing me. Doesn't want me to know he knows. He's good at it too. Bruce here should take up poker.

"I saw the GCPD photos of her body."

For the next several minutes Wayne listens to what I know. He only asks a few questions, but they are detailed and specific. Then he goes quiet. Still. Like he is the only thing in the universe.

"So, uh, Bruce," I say. "Tess worked for you?"

"Yes. Admin assistant to Lucius and then to me for a while," he said. "Until she vanished."

"Nancy recommended her?"

"I think so," he says. "Nancy worked as a VP in our acquisitions department. Pleaded with Fox for three weeks until he gave Tess a job."

"Bruce, did anything happen with either Nancy or Tess, you know, before they vanished?" I say, unwrapping a new pack of Camels I had stuffed in my pocket.

"No smoking in this building, Marv. Did I ever tell you that you smoke too much?" Bruce says. "Anyway, they didn't vanish. At least not exactly. I didn't see Nancy much, but Tess was in my office once or twice a day. She was working out great until about week before the police called to tell me Nancy was found dead. Tess was showing up late. Always looked tired and was short tempered."

"And that wasn't in her character?"

"Not so far as I knew. Then she really did vanish. Didn't show up for work. Didn't answer her phone."

"And you didn't think to follow up?"

"I had Fox take care of it. My schedule is... busy."

"Hmm. I bet it is," I say, tapping the pack of cigarettes on my thigh. Nervous habit. Damn I need a smoke. "Tell me, did the cops tell you Nancy was murdered or just plain dead?"

"They said he was suicide," he says, with a slight rumble in his voice I've never heard before. Something that actually makes my blood run cold.

"Who called you? Which cop?"

"It was Captain Maddox."

Mad Dog Maddox. Small world.

I ask Bruce if he has any contact information for either of them. He says he pulled their records before I got there. Gives me addresses for both them, but says he can't release any other personal information. His board meeting is coming up so he escorts me out, reminds me twice more I

can't smoke in the building and sends me off.

"Listen Marv, if you learn anything, call me ok?" he says. "Wayne Industries looks after its own you, you know?"

"Sure, Bruce. Likewise, ok?"

I hop into a cab and call my editor on my cell. I haven't actually been in the newsroom for two days so I have to suffer through a blue streak of cursing that would make Howard Stern blush before I can tell him I have a juicy story. Probably saved my job. He stops yelling long enough to tell me to get in and write it for the noon edition deadline. Front page, he says.

I get inside the Gazette, taking the back stairs to avoid running into my editor. That old windbag would love to blow my eardrums out. I just want to write my story, and get back out on the street. Check out those addresses Bruce gave me.

No dice. When I get into the newsroom, she's there. Looking good. Like she knows everyone is watching her. Like that is what she's there for.

Vicki. Vicki Vale.

"Where the hell have you been?" she asks.

Vicki is giving me the look. Her look. Her hands on her hips. The bridge of her nose is all scrunched up from the scowl she is giving me. She only gives me that look when I've done something that proves how irresponsible I am. And I prove that a lot.

"Workin'."

"Uh huh. Two days, Marvin. Two days you haven't been here! And now you wander in looking like you were in an accident... ."

Aw crap. She's calling me 'Marvin.' I am in trouble.

"Do you have any idea how hard it is to keep the chief from firing you? I had to run interference for you for two days, and you don't even call, you dumb bastard."

"Why, Ms. Vale, I didn't know you cared," I say.

"Yeah well... the newsroom would be a lot more boring if you were gone for good."

Yeah, there is a history here. We were an item once. A while back. Things were good for a while and then the little things got in the way. A thousand little things. Some important. Most stupid. Some of it her fault, most of it mine.

There is a thousand things we should have said. A thousand things I should still say. Instead, I do what I always do. I wink and slip a Camel between my lips.

"Aw. I bet you say that to all the boys."

Vicki grabs the cigarette out of my mouth. Snaps it and tosses it in the trash.

"I'm serious Marvin. You can't just disappear like that."

"Ok, ok, Vic," I say, pulling another Camel out of the pack.

"And you have better met deadline today. Seriously," she snatches the smoke from my lips. "There is no smoking here in Marvin. And you smoke too much anyway."

I slip into my desk, push aside piles of coffee cups and old sandwich wrappers and something that looks like it might have been a banana once off the computer keyboard. Getting the story done will be easy, but I do a quick search of the archives to see if there is anything I missed.

No hits in the Gazette archive. But there are three in another paper's listings. The Daily Planet.

A few years back the powers that be at the Gazette decide it costs too much to buy online archive stories from other papers. Damn bean counters. So I can only read the first paragraph of the Planet's stories. The first paragraphs and the bylines. And this byline catches my eye.

I laugh as I dial the Planet's number. This will be fun.

"Planet, Kent speaking."

"Howdy farm boy," I say. "How's life in Hog town?"

"Wha... Mickey? Mickey Fynn?"

"You got it Clarkie," I say. "How's tricks?"

We catch up for a few. It's been years since we graduated from journalism school, nearly as long since we last saw each other.

"Listen, Mickey, I would love to talk all day. But Perry is in full panic mode. Early deadline for the noon edition. What's up?"

"A couple of years back you wrote some stories about some really freaky killings. Women murdered, laid out on the floor like they had been crucified... ."

"... and had their hands cut off. Yeah. It was the strangest thing. Three killings in two months. Then nothing. It just stopped and the trail went cold."

Bad news. I was hoping Clark would have something I could follow up on this end.

"Who investigated the killings Clark?"

"Hmm... let me check," I can hear Clark typing like mad through the phone. I've said it a million times, I have never seen a typist as fast as Kent. "Here we go... Yeah, I thought so. Primary investigator was Lt. Maddox."

Bingo!

"Maddox? Max Maddox?"

"Yeah. But he never really got anywhere with it. Transferred to the Gotham City Police Department four months later."

Damn. Double Damn. Maddox. Maddox was the guy closing Bullock's investigation into Hartigan's murder. He was at the Inferno. There is that hot twist in my stomach again.

"Mickey... ."

"Sorry, Clark, my mind wandered. Listen, was there any unusual markings or writing at the murder scenes in Metropolis? Graffiti, anything like that?"

"Yeah," Clark says. "A nonsense word. DEVI."

"Any idea what that means?"

"I checked with a egghead friend of mine. Dr. Hamilton. Anyway, he thought it was a Sanskrit word meaning, 'Goddess,' " he says.

"Goddess?"

"That is what he said. Listen, Mickey, what's going on over there, anything I can help with?"

"No worries Clark. We're both on deadline here. I'll fill you in later."

I write the story in record in time. Details of Nancy's murder. Tess's disappearance. The Inferno. The "Goddess" murders in Metropolis and Maddox's investigation. It smells like page one. Been a long time since I wrote anything for page one.

I have to admit, I missed it.

After the story is filed I sack out in the lunchroom couch for a few hours.

I'm still exhausted from my run in with the Penguin. Just a few hours rest and I'll be good to go.

By the time I wake up, the sun's down and Gotham, the real Gotham, comes to life. I've got that itch. The smoker's itch. Haven't had a puff in hours. Or a drink. I'm getting a headache. I need a walk, a smoke and a drink and then everything will be right with the world.

I wander two blocks into Old Downtown before I decide to light up. The first drag is going to be heaven. Heaven in a stick. Too bad they say it'll kill me.

"Evenin' Mr. Fynn"

Before I can turn around, there's a beefy arm wrapped around my throat and I'm being dragged into Crime Alley.

I struggle as best I can, but I'm still a mess from the beating I took last night. I haven't had a smoke all day or a drink since my breakfast meeting with Wayne.

I'm six bags of messed up right now and it's about to get worse. Much, much worse.

My shadow attacker slams me against a dumpster and drives some brass knuckles into my ribs.

I drop. Hard. I roll over onto my back and look up. It's Maddox. Mad Dog.

I'm screwed.

"Heya, Max," I say, waiting for the army drum corps in my head to stop playing.

"Mr. Fynn. I am sure you know why you are here," he says, waving a copy of the noon Gazette.

"You just missed me that much, sweetie?"

His patent leather boot ends up in my groin so fast I don't even have time to flinch. I tell myself not to howl in pain. But I double over and hear something that sounds like the scream of a hyena slip past my lips.

"That's how we handle a smart ass in Gotham, Fynn," he says, polishing his brass knuckles with his tie. "A smart guy like you outta know that."

"*Cough*... I'm a slow learner, peaches"

Another kick. This one to the head. I nearly black out.

"Funny man. Always the funny man. Here is the deal Mr. Funny Man. You drop your investigation into the Hartigan case. And you get to go back to covering dog shows and live for the rest of your short pathetic life. Otherwise... "

"Otherwise what, pumpkin?"

Another kick. To the stomach. This time I do black out for a second.

"I'm sorry... *cough*... I missed that."

"I said, otherwise the garbage man will find your body with morning pick up."

"That's the deal?"

"That's the deal."

"Oh... well... *cough*... then I guess this is a bad time to ask you to say hello to Mrs. Maddox for me? Oh, and can you ask her if wants those panties back because... "

The brass knuckles smash my left temple with a sickening thump. Like a bat hitting a sack of wet cement. Black sparks jump out before my eyes and my ears start to ring. I was screwed the moment this alley ape dragged me back here. But I'll be damned if I'm going to give this bastard the satisfaction of seeing Mickey Fynn squirm.

"Ok, garbage pick up it is," Maddox says, pulling out his glock. "Don't say I didn't... "

There's a whistle. High pitched. Like a blade cutting the air. Then a sound like a dart hitting a board. A wet board. Maddox screams. His gun hits the asphalt. I should get up and run, but my body is happy right where it is. Maddox drops to his knees and I see it. A black knife with scalloped edges. Stuck in his hand.

"You bastard!" he shouts, picking his gun up with his good hand. "Come on out you freak! Come on out!"

There is that whistle again. Maddox screams again. Another blade.

He doesn't drop the gun this time but empties his clip into the air.

"Come on, freak! Come on!"

A shadow falls over the alley. Over Maddox. I can't see anything clearly. It's dark as hell in this alley and that shadow is blocking the bit of light from the street. And I'm still seeing black spots before my eyes.

I can hear ok, though. Something is laughing. Like the devil himself, something is laughing. It isn't Maddox. He's too busy screaming like a girl in a horror movie. Begging really. I think I hear a bone snap like dry timber.

And then a voice. Like pure, cold hate given life.

"Why do people with authority always abuse their power," it says. It's more a statement than a question. I don't think it expects an answer.

"You crazy mother... "

Another snap. Maddox howls and I hear what must be his body slam against the alley wall..

"A word to the wise officer Maddox," that voice says. "Retire!"

I hear footsteps take off down the alley. The shadow vanishes up the wall in a flash and then everything is still.

I coax my legs into standing up but the alley spins like I'm on the tilt-a-whirl. Jesus, how long has it been since I had a drink. A drink. A smoke. That would steady my nerves. Surely. A drink and a smoke.

I try to walk, but I am moving like a mangy three-legged dog in a car wash. I slump to one knee and try not to puke.

There is a flap of leather behind me and the crunch of a boot grinding into the asphalt. And there is that voice.

"Fynn. We need to talk."

I turn around. And I am convinced I need that drink worse than I thought.

There he is. Like a slice of blackness cut out of the night. Looking at me. Jesus. It's looking right at me.

The Batman.

He's REAL.

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 Feedbacks

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 #1 (2007)

Batman: City of Crime, Part 1 (of 5): Shadows.

Gotham. The city with its soul on fire. A city of victims. A city of villains. A city of heroes.

For years Gotham Gazette reporter Marv "Mickey" Fynn has allowed the dark corners of Gotham to ruin him. Once a reporter who rivaled Lois Lane and Clark Kent, Fynn has become a lost in an alcoholic haze.

With his job hanging by a thread, the jaded Fynn takes on one last story. One last chance to see his name on front page. But when he investigates a murder that would turn even the Joker's stomach, Fynn enters a world he never thought he would.

The world of The Batman - a mysterious vigilante that has only just begun to appear in Gotham City.

Neither Fynn, nor Gotham will ever be the same again.

Set during the first years of Batman's career, Marv "Mickey" Fynn tries to keep his job by investigating a murder that is ghastly by even Gotham City's standards. Convinced he knows the dead woman, Fynn starts his investigation in the roughest part of Gotham, in it's roughest bar. The only person who might keep the jaded reporter alive is the mysterious underworld figure, Matches Malone!

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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