



Batman #6
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Published: 2006

Categorie(s): Fiction, Fan Fiction

Tag(s): Bat-Mite Comics DC2 Batman

Batman

Issue 6: "Identity Theft"

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Water dripped in the cavern in a steady rhythm, the only sound in the quiet, forgotten tunnel. The underground river water flowed lazily through a rust-worn, antiquated iron grate out into the subterranean caves and tunnels that wormholed the earth surrounding Gotham City. Slowly, a menacing figure emerged from the dark water and made his way up to rest on the cave floor, setting a small pack down on the ground in front of him. He opened and unfolded the pack to reveal a small cache of gadgets and accessories before he removed his bat-shaped rebreather and goggles. As he worked, he activated the communication device woven into his cowl.

"Is this a secure channel, sir?" The British accent on the other side was proper, precise and a welcome sound to the Batman's ears.

"It is for the moment, Alfred. I'm inside the far perimeter and about to start working through the security defenses. Were there any warning signs before this happened? Anything unusual?" His voice was gruff and clearly irritated. No one had invaded his home, his sanctuary, before, and whoever awaited him was going to regret being the first.

"No. Nothing at all, sir. I was just going down into the cave to clean up your supper, ah, lunch, rather, when I found the entrance locked tight."

Batman finished his work, unfolded his cape, and clipped in firmly into place. "Right. Keep the channel open, Alfred. I'm going in."

The beam from the flashlight traced along the craggy features of the rock wall. The Dark Knight placed each step carefully as he crept carefully along the branching tunnel. He froze and launched himself backward as a half dozen razor-sharp projectiles lodged in the wall opposite to where he had just been standing.

"There they are. I have to admit, it's difficult to remember where I placed all of these traps."

"Do be careful, sir. I'm running low on sutures."

"Thanks for the concern, Alfred." A wry smile crossed his lips.

Batman continued on, dodging booby traps and jumping pits along his trek. At one point he narrowly avoided a falling stalactite by lunging to the side of the passage.

"Sorry to interrupt your fun, sir. But there was one thing earlier."

"What was that?" He dusted himself off before moving on.

"After I discovered the Batcave was in lockdown, I came back here to the auxiliary monitoring station I use from time to time to see what was going on."

"And did you manage to get a look?" The black-and-gray-clad man hoisted himself up a rock wall to follow the path up into a larger cavern. He looked across the open room to the pitfalls and rocky terrain between himself and the ongoing tunnel on the other side and weighed his options.

"Just for a moment, Sir, before it went blank, I was able to patch into the cameras in the Batcave and did a quick check around..."

"And?" The detective reached down to retrieve his grappling gun and launched it into the far wall with a jump and swung quickly over the shallow chasm.

"There was no one there."

"This is where things get interesting." Batman moved into a long, narrow stretch of cave. "I'm entering the inner defense perimeter now." He stepped carefully, making sure to avoid the light sensors along this passageway.

"I do wish that there was something more I could do. I feel responsible for this. Like I let my guard down..."

"Don't." Batman snapped, almost offended that his long-time friend would consider questioning his own loyalty. "You have an impossible job as caretaker to both the mansion and the cave. Besides, anyone who can crack my security codes would have to be very clever. You've done nothing wrong."

Suddenly, heavy metal doors slammed shut at both ends of the pathway.

"Not good."

"Sir, what is happening? Wha..."

The radio cut off and masked man was left in silence. "Alfred?"

"You ever dance with an anvil in the pale moonlight?" A different voice sounded through the detective's earpiece. "I always ask that of all my prey. I just like the sound of it! Haaahahaaha!"

"What?!" Batman wasn't sure what he was hearing.

"HEE hee hee, your butler can't heear you now!"

The voice was shrill and blasted in Batman's ear before he tapped a sensor on his belt several times to decrease the volume.

"Who is this?!" He demanded. "How did you get into the Batcave?" He growled his demands over the maniacal laughter. Batman tried to pinpoint the voice. It was almost familiar to him. The Riddler? The Joker? Close, but there was something else. The voice was almost... childlike?

“Ooooh no, THAT would be telling Bats! But your ARE the world’s GREATEST detective. I’m sure you’ll figure it out soon enough all by yourself. Come on, show me how you work!”

And on those words, gas hissed into the space through several nozzles in the wall. Batman rushed to one end and ran his hands along the wall around the thick metal door, searching for something.

“The clock’s ticking, Bats! Isn’t it exciting? Well, the clock on your escaping your own little trap here but also on my mission. You see, I’m in your big, fancy Bat-computer here and I’m finding all sorts of interesting little pieces of information on you, Bruce.”

“What’s stopping you from leaving with it?” Batman persisted as he pried open a small hidden control panel with his batarang.

“You’d better hurry, Caped Crusader! I’d say you have about 20 seconds before the gas conks you straight out! I’m pullin’ for ya, buddy! Go! Go! Go!”

“You didn’t answer my question.” The faux rock panel popped off and Batman went to work on the wiring inside as the hazy cloud of vapor thickened around him.

“Aw, don’t spoil my fun, Bats! I don’t get out much. Hee. Besides, that’s not how the game works. I have to decrypt your Great Firewall of China here so my benefactor can hack your Batcomputer! That’s the real race. Can you stop me before I turn over control of your whole operation here to some nefarious-minded nemesis? Weeeelll? Oh, the suspense is going to kill me!”

Brief moments passed. “Batsy? Hello? No way I took you out like that. But time IS up. Oh well, it was cool for awhile. I really was your number one fan you know.” The voice made a fake snuffle.

The door retracted with a loud clang and gas spilled out into the next tunnel. After a second a dark shadow leaped out and moved clear of the dangerous fumes. He stopped to take the rebreather out of his mouth

before going forward.

“Who are you working for?” He was obviously becoming annoyed at his tormenter.

“BATS! I was worried for a moment there! Man, you really are the best aren't you? But you KNOW I can't tell you all my secrets. I mean, what kind of crappy cliché of a bad guy do you take me for? Give away all my secrets all smugly like I know you can't possibly beat me. Puh-lease.”

Batman grumbled to himself.

“Da-nah-nahnah-nahnah-nahnah da-nah-nahnah-nahnah-nahnah, Batman!” The voice chirped happily in Batman's ear.

“Could you... unh... could you stop that!” The Dark Knight advanced slowly through the narrow crawlspace. He could see light ahead from the center chamber of the Batcave.

“But I made it up just for you! Hmph. I guess you're not a music lover. We can get around that, though. See the way I figure it, once all your secrets get out you'll probably just wind up being Batman all the time. No need for any ole stupid secret identity. And since you ran your Robin off, you'll need a sidekick, and I'm really not going to be doing anything... Hey. This is a pretty big file you have on this cat burglar here, um, Seline Kyle. You're not sweet on her are you, Bats?”

“Shut UP!”

“Gruuum-py! You need a cheerful sort like myself around I think. I could help you work on your disposition. Oh look, there goes another code sequence! It won't be long till I get a line out of Bat Knox here. I hope you're close because if you're going to make a move you'll need to do it soon!”

Batman pulled his legs in close underneath his body at the opening of the small grotto and launched himself out in the air. He touched another sensor on his belt and his cape became rigid, and he glided across the

gulf to the landing where the Batmobile waited.

“Yay!”

Batman rolled as he landed, and took off in a dead run toward the small bridge on the other side of the platform. The Batmobile roared to life and the jet engine fired out a straight line of blue flame. The armored vehicle was held tightly in place by maintenance clamps from below and above as the platform itself rotated the intense fire toward the Batman. His boots skidded on the smooth surface as he leapt over the edge. Plummeting, he caught the edge of the metal frame bridge that led to the main level of the cave where his command center was located. He swung his leg up and had just rolled onto the diamond-plated walkway when the pressurized bolts blew on both sides and the bridge plunged into the river below.

“Wow! That’s was too cool! And you almost made it, too! Woo-hoo-hoo!”

“I don’t see anyone. Where are you?” Batman’s voice echoed out into the cavern.

“Hey, no fair! I can’t see you. Where did you go?”

“But I’m thinking I can’t see you because you aren’t real.”

“No fair! No fair!! And how do you know you’re so real? As far as you know you’re just some amped up action hero in cartoons... or... or comic books!”

“Don’t be absurd.”

“Yeah, maybe, but there’s no denying it. You got punked by Bat-Mite!” The giant flatscreen monitor came to life and the image of an imp-like animated avatar appeared on the screen. He was dressed in baggy, ill-fitting clothes that mimicked Batman’s own costume. “And your time is almost up. Just one more minute and I’m outta here!”

"You're a computer program aren't you? A virus. Programmed by Edward Nigma and covertly placed on my hard drive when I was reading clues from his last crime. Probably exploiting some of the Nigma Tech hardware already inside. He planted you here to raid my computer and then send the information back to him. You're a hack!"

"What-everrrr! You're just grasping at straws now aren't you, Bats? It's sad to see you beaten like this. You can't cope at all! Just like you couldn't cope with your parents death." Bat-Mite's voice dropped in tone and mirrored Nigma's more closely. "How can you be so sure you didn't create me? A twisted image of the broken child who died along with his parents that cold night so long ago. Maybe you secretly want to be found out. So you don't have to hide any longer. Maybe I'm your cry for help." The virtual imp's voice jump in pitch again. "Wait! There you are!"

An electric shock caught Batman off-guard and he stumbled back from the computer terminal.

"Pretty clever, Bats! Hiding in plain sight with a digital cloaking device. Well, it may trick a regular digital camera, but I thought to switch the cameras into infrared. And, sure enough, there you are!"

"Don't do it. Nigma's a crook and he's using you like a puppet. You know you want to stay here with me. I'll... take you up on your offer. We can be partners."

"Really?" Bat-Mite's cartoonish expression changed to admiration briefly and then back to distrust. "No. You don't appreciate me. I'm really just a part of you Batman. A little artificial intelligence whipped up from the algorithms floating around in your big, crazy computer here. I'm you from the inside out. I... *complete you*. HAAAhhahahahaha HEE!" His roundish belly shook as he laughed and his bat-ears flopped back and forth.

Batman rubbed his hand and stood upright and watched as the Bat-Mite's image began to digitize and disappear. "Then I guess this is it."

"You bet your butt it is! Game over, Bats. I gotta split but I can't say it hasn't been fun. I'll be seeing you around. Well, all over the news most

likely when the media swarms your little hidey-hole here. Adios, Bat-muchacho!”

And the computer went dark.

“So what are you going to do, Master Bruce? The Riddler will most certainly expose you. I just wish there was some way that little computer imp-thing could have been stopped.”

Bruce Wayne removed his mask and sat back in his chair. He turned around and removed a strange box with a question mark on the side from the terminal of the Batcomputer. “He didn’t get away. I’ve got him right here.”

“What is that, sir?”

“The computer simulation from the ‘Case of the Neverending Puzzle’, one of Nigma’s own little traps. Dick had modified it as a computer game later on.”

“Oh right. I remember that.”

“Right. So I patched it into the port the virus was trying to access while he couldn’t see me and when he left, this is where he went. As far as he knows, right now, he’s completed Nigma’s commands and living out his dream inside this little virtual reality.”

“Trapped in a bottle. Very smart.”

“And good riddance I say.” Batman tossed the box into the trash. “Come on, Alfred. Let’s go have some breakfast. I’m cooking.”

“Sir?”

“Come on. Before I change my mind.”

“Yes, sir!”

As the two men made their way up the stone stairway, neither noticed as the computer screen behind them flickered strangely for a moment before returning to normal.

THE END

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Aquaman #0 (2005)

Aquaman: Kings of Atlantis

A city of legend... of marvels beyond imagination, trapped in an eternal struggle! Learn the secrets of the lost city of Atlantis and its history of triumph, turmoil and disaster. Plus, rediscover the city's greatest king: Aquaman! Will he become Atlantis' last great hope or bring its final destruction?

Aquaman #1 (2005)

Aquaman: The Deep, Part 1 (of 3): Unfathomable.

What is the secret origin of Aquaman? Can the King of the Seven Seas survive a deadly encounter with one of the ocean creatures he's sworn to protect? And who is Captain Krell and what dark secrets lay hidden aboard his ship, The Leviathan? Find out the shocking answers to these questions and much more in Aquaman #1!

Aquaman #2 (2005)

Aquaman: The Deep, Part 2 (of 3): Unfathomable.

Meet the newest player in Aquaman's undersea world, Captain Krell, a man determined to discover and conquer all the mysteries of the deep. But what will happen when he sets his sights on the King of Atlantis himself? Plus, a special guest star!

Aquaman #3 (2006)

Aquaman: The Deep, Part 3 (of 3): Unfathomable.

All the shocking secrets are revealed in the final chapter of this sensational opening storyline! Captain Krell makes a bold move against Aquaman with his daughter, Mariana, caught in between! Plus, a surprise guest-star!

Aquaman #4 (2006)

Aquaman: Shadows Over Atlantis, Part 1 (of 2).

It's time once again for Neptune's Champion Games and Atlantis is full of cheer! But what evil menace threatens to ruin the fabled city's greatest day, and what dark omens will forever change the lives of every Atlantean?

Aquaman #5 (2006)

Aquaman: Shadows Over Atlantis, Part 2 (of 2).

Black Manta and his raiders have launched a deadly strike on Atlantis! Can Aquaman and Aqualad discover their true objective in time? What unlikely hero will save the day and what Atlantean will pay the ultimate price? Find out as surprises abound in this month's Aquaman!

Aquaman #7 (2006)

Aquaman: Sea Change, Part 1 (of 2): Castles Made of Sand.

Aquaman finds his stolen Trident of Neptune and more than he bargains for! THRILL, to a deadly fist fight between Aquaman and a new enemy! SEE, Aquaman's adventure as a teenager! EXPERIENCE, the first thrilling appearance of the Aquacave! All this and more in this month's Aquaman!

Aquaman #9 (2006)

Aquaman: Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea.

Editor's Note: There was no Aquaman #8. It was simply titled "The Lost Adventure" and is ... well... lost until the time that Mr. Herren chooses to revisit the events in the "Sea Change" plotline.

Crisis: The Apokolips Imperative, Part 11!

The war continues under the waves! As parademons assault the undersea kingdom of Atlantis, the New Gods' secret project stands revealed at last! But when the amphibious assassins of Apokolips, the Deep Six, strike, all that stands between them and Darkseid's assured victory is Aquaman!

The Flash #4 (2006)

The Flash: ... As Fast As You Can...

Dr. Spectro unleashes a device that is stealing all the color from Blue Valley! The Flash soon discovers the threat is far more dire than it appears, but is helpless to stop it thanks to Spectro's inescapable Speed Trap! It's the end of the world in this month's Flash so don't miss it!

The Flash #5 (2006)

The Flash: ... As Fast As You Can, Part 2.

Dr. Spectro holds all the cards as he makes his bid for ultimate power! Can Flash free himself from the inescapable Speed Trap?

Join us for high excitement and super science thrills as our hero
faces his Last Day on Earth!



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