



Batman #20
Grant LaFleche

Published: 2007

Categorie(s): Fiction, Fan Fiction

Tag(s): Comics DC2 Superman Batman

Batman #20 - Partners – A Justice League vs. America Special

By Grant LaFleche

Cover and interior art by Sylvain Swimer

Edited By Brian Burchette

NOTE: This story takes place between Batman #21 and #22

I don't like coming here. Never have. I never feel comfortable. Even on the rare occasion I'm invited, I always feel out of sorts. Like I've entered a place that's totally *alien* – and don't think the irony of that is lost on me.

It isn't so much the look of the place. At first blush it's just another trophy room, filled with exotic bits and pieces of the past. The capes and tights crowd is a sentimental bunch. Even *him*. And it isn't the size either. My own place up north dwarfs it. No, it's what this place is. What it *means*. It's not really a museum, or a secret headquarters. Not really. It's a slice of his soul. A place where the dark impulses that drive the man are given concrete shape. It's like stepping into a corner of Bruce's mind, and that not a place anyone wants to be.

More than that, coming here feels like an invasion of his privacy. This has to be the only place where Bruce can be, well, Bruce. Not the urban legend who hangs criminals off of skyscrapers to scare the crap out of them. Not the foppish playboy with more money than god. Just Batman, alone with his demons.

No, I'm never comfortable here. Not in the cave. Not ever. Sometimes I think Bruce would never even have told me about it, if he didn't know I could see it. I see everything, and he knows it.

So I try not to arrive unannounced. He doesn't like it anyway. Which makes him even more anti-social than he is by nature. But I don't have a choice. Not now. Not after what happened with Arthur. Things are getting out of hand. Out of control. Storm clouds are gathering and they bring war. They bring a crisis. And if this is all heading where I think it is, we're going to need Batman. And trust me when I say, if things have

reached the point where we *need* Bruce, it means there is a good chance not all of us are getting out this alive.

I come in through the water tunnel under the cave. This way no one will see my approach, even accidentally. I see the infrared sensors under water, part of Bruce's obsessive security protocols. I don't even try to avoid them. Better he knows I'm coming. Surprising Batman is never good for one's health. Not even mine.

I slip noisily from the water, and slowly rise up to the main level of the cave. I feel the slight tingle of more sensors moving over my body, recoding bio-metric data and no doubt alerting Bruce's computer to prepare appropriate counter measures. Yeah, I said counter measures. Don't kid yourself. People often get it wrong. Batman's isn't James Bond in cape. He isn't really even like Barry, Hal, Diana or me. Batman is the most dangerous man on earth, and if he so chose, he could take us all out. In another life, he could have run the CIA, the NSA or the DEO. Which is exactly why we need him. And need him now.

As always, most of the cave squats in darkness. He only lights up the places he happens to be working in at the moment. The car is here. And that creepy stealth plane of his. I don't think any of the others leaguers have even seen it yet, but he's used it during at least six of our cases.

Since the incident with Arthur, we've been trying to reach him. But he hasn't responded. Not through any of the regular channels. I even convinced Barbra to get her father to up the signal.

But we got nothing but silence. Barbra said Bruce and Dick had words. It got serious. Came to blows apparently, although Dick isn't saying much. He's more like his mentor than he'll admit.

But I know Bruce is here. I can hear his breathing. Feel his heart beat. It's easy to do that in here. Bruce is about the only living thing down here beyond the bats.

I float to the far end of the cave, past the things you would never think he'd keep. The t-rex. The giant penny. That huge playing card. But there

are the other things. The things that are very much Bruce. Dick's old costume. His father's wrist watch encased behind bullet proof glass and set to the moment he was killed. One of his mother's scarves is treated with similar, morbid reverence.

I find him in the forensics lab, dressed in full costume, cowl and all. Never a good sign for his mood. He's peering through a micro-scope at a ragged piece of red cloth. I scan it myself. It's a Nomex/Kevlar weave, similar to Bruce's cape. But it charred on the edges and stained with human blood.

"Knock it off, Kent. You're x-ray vision interferes with my equipment," he says, without looking up at me. "And stop floating. It's annoying."

"Bruce, we've been trying to reach you for days. We used the league signal device to..."

"I shut it off."

"Why would you..."

"What do you want? I'm busy."

Great. He's in full dark knight mode. Most people hate it when he is like this. Moody. Angry. Consumed by his obsession. Given to flights of self destructive ego that would give Luthor a run for his money. He eats little and sleeps less.

Paradoxically, this is also when Bruce is most effective as Batman. His mind is consumed with whatever problem he is trying to solve. Having pushed aside all other distractions, Bruce's mind is at its most creative.

It both awes and frightens me.

"Bruce, things are getting out of hand. The league needs you..."

He finally lifts his head from the microscope and looks at me through the white lenses of his cowl.

"I'm. Busy. Get out."

"I'm not kidding Bruce. This is crisis huge. Maybe the worst we've ever faced. We're under assault. A war could be at our doorstep here and the JLA needs Batman."

Bruce pulls the cloth scrap from the microscope and walks past me toward a bank of evidence lockers.

"Yes, yes. Amazo is back. Or Luthor has created some giant robot. Or some super alien glob from another dimension has landed on earth. Not my game, Kent," he says. "When the Joker is about to take over the world, call me."

Well, at least he has kept some of his sense of humour, gallows though it is.

"You don't answer the emergency signal for two weeks! What the hell is going on, Bruce? It isn't like you to just...vanish."

"I've been out of touch on cases before," he says, opening one locker and pulling out an evidence drawer. Carefully he places the cloth into a static free case.

"Yeah I know. Like during that KGBeast thing last year. But have you brawled with Dick before?"

He says nothing. Just stares at the red cloth. The drawer in the locker is marked "R.W."

"Bruce..."

"My relationship with Nightwing isn't your concern. I'm busy. Get lost."

Get lost. It's been a while since I heard those words from his lips. What was it? Six years ago now? Seven? Shortly after the first time we met. In Gotham. On a roof top. Where else would Superman run into Batman?

It was, truth told, my only my second visit to Gotham City in costume. I

had meant to come by a week earlier after getting a phone call from a colleague of mine about an old murder case I wrote about. But, Metropolis being what it is, I couldn't get away. At least not until Clifford DeVoe, the Thinker, showed up in my town. He was hiring himself out as a consultant to Intergang. Annoying as hell. Anyway, he'd managed to help them cause some serious trouble and after I bagged the gang, I went after DeVoe.

By then he'd fled to Gotham. Word was he'd been hired by a villain in Gotham who was responsible for ghastly killings, even by Gotham's standards. The Joker, he's called.

I had been able to track DeVoe to an old office building in Gotham's north quarter. I figured this was going to be easy. Don't let DeVoe's code name fool you. He isn't *that* smart. All I needed to do is kick down the door, or float outside his window, stare at him until he wets himself and drag him back to Metropolis.

Villains are stupid.

I reached the roof top, and scanned the place. I could see into every room but one. The walls were coated in lead. See what I mean? Which room could possibly be his? Like I said, villains are stupid.

"What do you think you're doing?"

This growl of a voice came at me from the darkness. I spun around to see him. Batman. Perched like a crow on a TV cable line running into the building. It took me a second to realize it. I couldn't hear his heart beat. Or his breathing. Batman snuck up on me. Me! To this day, I still have no idea how he does it. It's annoying, I'll tell you that much.

"Batman, hey. Listen, I'm here to..."

"I know why you're here. This is *my city*. I'm busy. Get lost."

Charming guy.

"Oookay. Listen, we were on the same side last time I was here so..."

He pounced off the wire, flipped through the air, and landed on the roof without making a noise. Surprising given that Bruce is nearly as big a man as I am.

“Listen, Kent, we are not on the same side. Your presence here is going to cost me a whole night’s work. So let me say it again. Get. Lost,” he says, brushing past me and moving toward the service door on the rooftop.

“I’m...wait, what? What did you call me?”

He turned his head slight and grins. One thing you need to know about Bruce. Even his smug grins are scary.

“Kent. Clark Kent. Place and exact date of birth unknown. Adoptive son of Jonathan and Martha Kent of Smallville, Kansas. Apparently started exhibiting meta-human powers sometime in your late teens, although that is difficult to narrow down with any accuracy,” he says, fishing out some lock picking tools from his belt which has more pockets than a pool hall. “To date, you’ve exhibited superhuman strength that has yet to be classified accurately. Laser-like, heat emissions from your eyes, along with some kind of low rad x-ray beams – the exact nature of which remains unknown, probably even to you. The ability to fly and move well beyond the speed of sound. Did I miss anything?”

I stood there with my jaw on the ground. He just broke me down like a paint-by-numbers project.

“Oh and don’t bother trying to x-ray my head to even the score. I figured you’d show up once DeVoe blew into town. I’ve lined my cowl with lead.”

“You...you know who I am? How...”, I could barely get the words out.

“Sure I do. I’m the Batman. I know who *all* of you are,” he says, that smug grin still on his face. “Don’t bother and even try to figure out how. You’re not smart enough. Now, get lost.”

He moved to the door, crouches and started to work on the lock.

“Batman,” I said, pulling myself up into my best ‘Man of Steel’ pose, letting my heat vision fill my eyes making them bright red. It’s the pose that makes most muggers in Metropolis give up without a fight. “I am certainly not pleased that you know any of that. But we can talk about your boundary issues after we arrest DeVoe.”

Batman sighed and looked up at me. “Spare me the pose. And I’m not here to arrest him. I am here to...question him.”

I relaxed a little, but kept my eyes glowing.

“I’m not leaving Gotham without him.’

Batman stood up and stared at me. He said nothing for a long moment. Just stared. Sizing me up, I guess. Trying to figure out how long he was willing to keep up this Bat-jerk routine. Maybe he figured I’d flinch. Whatever sort of men Batman had been dealing with in Gotham, I’m something different. Martha Kent did not raise a cowardly or superstitious son.

“Fine. But this is my town. We do it my way.”

“Ok,” I said, letting my eyes cool. “But breaking and entering isn’t my style.”

“Of course not,” he said, working on the lock again. “Your style would be to float outside his window with your hands on your hips until he wet himself.”

“Well...”

“That won’t work here. Not even with a moron like DeVoe.”

The door popped open, and we noiselessly slipped through. Batman walked. I floated. We moved down the stairs and Batman occasionally knocked out security cameras along the way. He stopped after we made it down one floor.

“Do you have to do that?”, he said in a harsh whisper.

“What?”

“Float.”

“You’re the one who wants to do this all quiet like, Batman...”

He said nothing, but reached up and quietly pulled a vent screen off the wall.

“I’m going in here. You stay here and count to 60. Then stand right in front of DeVoe’s door.”

“Uh, and what are you...”, but he was up the wall and into the shaft without another word.

Sixty seconds later I was standing in front of the Thinker’s door. Little punk screened the door with lead so I couldn’t see anything. I could hear just fine, though. There was a faint sound of metal hitting a carpeted floor. I lost Batman’s heart beat. DeVoe was snoring. Then all hell broke loose.

DeVoe screamed and I could hear Batman laughing this scary as hell laugh. Something broke, probably a table. DeVoe screamed again.

“Wheeeeerree is he DeVoe??”

“I don’t...know...I swear...ahhhh!”

I heard a bone snap. One more stunt like that I was going in, no matter what Batman knew about me.

“Tell me or you’re going to be eating your food through a straw for the rest of your pathetic life!”

“I don’t...god, stop...don’t kill me...”

There was that laugh again.

“Kill you? Oh what I have in mind for you is worse than death! Shall we start with this finger?”

DeVoe didn't need to be asked again. He spilled his guts. Tells Batman everything he knows. It was like an insane confession with every dark secret in DeVoe's head spilling out of his mouth like Niagara Falls. Most of it is useless, but Batman asked specific questions so whatever DeVoe said between sobs, it must have sense to the Dark Knight.

Everything went quiet a moment. Batman muttered, “Go. And if I were you DeVoe, I'd hope we don't meet again,” I heard DeVoe run for the door.

He opened it and smashed right into my chest. I pulled up into my 'super pose', glowing eyes and all, and stared down at him.

“Clifford,” I say, and DeVoe passes out.

I looked up and see Batman standing half way out a window.

“Huh. Look at that. He wet himself,” he said with a snicker. “He's all yours.”

“Thanks,” I said, taking a second to wrap DeVoe in a fire hose that was mounted in the hallway by the fire alarm. “Listen, Batman I think we need to talk...”

“I don't have time. You'll just have to trust me to keep my mouth shut,” he said. He'll never admit to it, but I think in that moment, despite the lead lining in his cowl, I could almost see him wink. “Be seeing you...Kent.”

And he vanished into the Gotham night.

He did keep his mouth shut. I wouldn't run into him again for months, but by then he'd mellowed out a bit. With each meeting, he became less hostile. Although he'd never say this out loud, we became friends and partners. Even when his girlfriend was murdered by the Joker, he wasn't as short with me as he was that night.

Until now.

“Bruce, come on. You know I’m not going to get lost. Save it for the muggers on the street,” I say. “What’s going on?”

He stares for a long time at the red cloth in the evidence locker. Finally closing it. He stares at the floor a long time and takes a deep breath, like it’s the first one he’s taken in weeks.

“Just...dealing with an old case, Clark,” he says, pulling the cowl back off his face and stroking the three days of beard growth on his chin. “An old case and old wounds.”

“Anything I can....”

“No...I...No. It’s fine. It’ll keep,” he says, walking past me and clasping my shoulder. “So you need me for a league case?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s serious then?”

“The worst.”

“And you *need* Batman?”

“Yeah. Max Lord just...”

“Lord? You people *are* in trouble.”

He slumps down into the leather chair bolted to the floor in front of a row of computers. On one screen, bellow the graphic of two identical DNA patterns, are the flashing red words : R.W. ARCHIVE vs. UNKNOWN SAMPLE – EXACT MATCH.

“This makes no sense,” Bruce mutters to no one in particular. “I’m missing something...”

"Bruce, I know you are busy, but we don't have much time."

He leans back in the chair, pinches the bridge of his nose, and then pulls the cowl over his face.

"I'll get the jet ready," he says, holding his hand out to me. "You can fill me in on the details en route."

I squeeze his hand gently. "You know, I don't think Hal has figured out the jet yet. You might be able to sneak up on him again..."

"Clark..."

"Come on, you know you want to."

He almost grins. "You mean like how I sneaked up on you that first time?"

"Yeah," I say. "If I can keep him relaxed, we might just get through this. It's been six years.."

"Seven."

"...seven years. Can you tell me how you do that?"

"No."

"Come on. I won't tell. Not even Hal..."

"No."

"I'll let you interrogate someone..."

"Shut up."

We leave to rendezvous with the others. Bruce is silent most of the way, his mind bent on whatever that scrap of cloth and DNA samples mean. But he understands what we are up against. This is all going to get worse before it gets better. Some of us might fall. But for the first time since this

started, I feel like we might make it out of this mess.

I've got my partner at my back now. So we might just.

We just might.

Follow Superman and Batman over in JL Vs America #1.

Learn what case Batman is working on next month in Batman #21 for the start of Batman: Trauma.

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

All characters are (c) DC Comics and no infringement upon their copyrights is intended. Support DC Comics by buying their monthly comic books and graphic novels.

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 #3 (2007)

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

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 #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!



www.feedbooks.com
Food for the mind