



**Nightwing #3**  
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*Nightwing*

Issue 3: "The Great Unknown, Pt 3: Decisions in the Dark"

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**A/N: Gotham City landmarks culled from Batman: No Man's Land, novelization by Greg Rucka, published by Simon & Shuster (2000).**

*Suddenly you're in this fight alone  
Steppin' out into the great unknown  
And the night's the hardest time  
When the doubts run through your mind  
'Cause suddenly you find yourself alone*

Desmund Child and Andreas Carlsson, "Suddenly"

*Daddy told me when I was young  
He said it's a long road you've begun  
Sometimes it's easy  
Sometimes it's hard  
But as you walk the road remember who you are*

*You've got to roll with the punches  
You've got to aim to hit the mark  
You've got to follow your hunches  
And try to finish what you start  
And when you come to the crossroads  
And you're deciding in the dark*

*You've got to listen to the whisper of your heart*

*Chuck Cannon, "The Whisper of Your Heart"*

*When I was fourteen, Bruce took me skydiving. Don't blame him for that. The whole thing was my idea. Even so, he drilled me in the proper jumping and landing techniques for three months before we chartered that Cessna.*

*I wasn't worried. Considering that I was an aerialist before I ever put on the Kevlar, considering that I spent a good portion of my nighttime activities swinging from high-rise to high-rise, you'd think that would've been a breeze. Most nights, I got my jollies by diving off the Babylon Towers. Then, I'd loop my grapnel around the statue of the Zion Lion that sits on top of the GCBC building 2 stories below my launch point. It was vital to build up enough momentum for the next move: once I had the line extended as far as it could go toward Victory Square—I'd drop. Newton's first law of motion would kick in: inertia keeping me going at the same speed and in the same direction, letting me land on one of the rooftops of the Paris Mews Apartments. I only had two chances to make that leap. I usually did it in one. After that, the line would lose too much velocity, the arc would shrink too much and I'd end up dangling like a yo-yo. Literally.*

*Skydiving just sounded like more high-rise hopping to me, only a bit more exciting. A freefall leap from a plane maybe a few hundred feet higher than Wayne Towers didn't sound any scarier than the usual flight from roof to windowsill. And, when you think about it, the consequences of getting it wrong in either case were about the same: pavement pizza. Usually, I didn't think about it.*

*Until I was standing at the exit door to the plane, more than a half-mile up, the wind whipping my hair back, blowing it out straight... and below me, the cloud cover thinned enough that I could see farmland and forests, checkerboards of dark green and light. I thought I was ready. I thought I was up for it. I was a Flying Grayson, for crying out loud—that's what I told Bruce when he tried to talk me out of it. This was supposed to be routine. It wasn't. Much as it pains me to admit it, I froze.*

*Bruce pushed me out of the plane finally. I still remember the shock when my*

*feet plunged into empty air. I was going to kill him. Then, realization hit. To do that, I'd have to land safely, first. Training took over. My hands remembered when to pull the ripcord. My mind remembered how to steer my descent away from the trees. My body assumed the proper positioning for a smooth landing. Bruce touched down about fifteen seconds after I did, and he looked—for him, anyway—apologetic. I think I cursed him out about seven ways to Sunday before I asked him whether I could try it again. He blinked at me and asked me if I was sure I was ready. I nodded. Now I was.*

*Flashing forward to now, it looks like I might have just pulled something like that again. In other words, I think I manoeuvred myself into a position where the only choices I left myself were jump or be pushed. I left the Titans because I didn't know what I was doing and they couldn't figure it out. We'd already had some close calls. Sooner or later, I was going to get them killed. Or they were going to stop listening to me. Roy had already stopped. Truthfully? I didn't know how to handle it. Oh, I knew how Bruce would handle it: glower, say something biting and sarcastic that made it clear he'd already assessed the situation and was five moves ahead of the sap arguing with him (and nine times out of ten, you guessed it folks, that sap was me). But when I tried glowering, Roy either laughed or blew up. And it felt like the others were humouring me. If I tried option number two, I ended up hating myself. I got elbowed in the gut a few times, too, but mostly I just ended up hating myself.*

*So, for the good of the team, I decided to take some time off. I did everything I was supposed to: officially withdrew from most of my classes, assigned a replacement—two actually—to lead the Titans, sold my Honda so I could finance my travels without tapping Bruce... I took care of everything. I thought I was ready for that next big leap. But right at this moment, while I'm standing in line at the ticket counter at the Port Authority bus terminal, I'm freezing up again.*

*This is the first time in I don't know how long that I haven't planned out every step. The only plan I had in my head was to look up at the departure board and pick a destination. There's a bus to Hub City leaving in 30 minutes. I could take the express to Keystone and be there inside of four hours. But who do I know there that I'd want to look up? There's only one person ahead of me in the queue, now. I glance again at the board. The Greyhound to Vegas leaves at noon. I'd be in transit for over 24 hours. And...what am I supposed to say to Babs when I get there? She made it clear before she left that she needed some time away from everything; that she wanted to make a fresh start. I've called her once or twice. She's always on her way out the door. Is she seeing anyone? Do I really want to*

*know? If I do...*

*Someone gives me a little push. Seems to be the story of my life. I see that a new window has just opened up. The man behind it is beckoning impatiently. I apologize and dash over. "Metropolis. One-way," I say. My voice is steady, but my mind reels. Of all the places I could pick, why did I choose Superman's home turf?*

When he got back to Hudson, Dick thought, he was *definitely* going to sign up for another psychology class next term. He smiled to himself.

He glanced around him at the colourful street signs and marquees covered with pictograms. Bruce had taught him some Chinese, but that had been several years ago and Dick hadn't used it for a while. Experimentally, he scanned the symbols, while making an effort to avoid their English translations. He estimated that he recognized perhaps three words in ten. Around him voices called out loud greetings, and sales pitches, mostly in Cantonese, which he understood somewhat, Mandarin, which he understood somewhat less, and Vietnamese, which he understood not at all. Suddenly, he paused. *That particular conversation* sounded like trouble...

The youth sneered as she unhooked a set of nunchukus from her waistband. "Oh, you did, Choi," she smirked, as she twirled the linked clubs in her right hand. "You did. But," she added, as she reached a heavily gloved hand into her pocket, "I don't believe you have the power to stop me." With that, she withdrew her left hand from her pocket, holding aloft three shuriken throwing stars, their points barbed and razor-sharp. A quick snap of her wrist sent all three flying.

Choi, who had been distracted by the spinning nunchukus, cried out as one star embedded itself below the hollow of her throat. Another sank into her shoulder. The last tore into the opposite arm. "You're going to freakin' die, you little \$%#!#" She shouted. She tore the shuriken from her

flesh, ignoring the fresh pain, and the blood that flowed freely from her wounds. Blindly, she charged her opponent.

Ling stepped aside, smoothly. "One of us will today, Choi, but not I."

The larger woman howled as she launched herself a second time toward the lithe teen.

"Slowing down, Choi?" The girl taunted. "Feeling sick to your stomach? Drooling?"

The woman's eyes grew wide. "What did you do?" she gasped. At Ling's giggle, she lunged. "Answer me, you—!"

Casually, Ling moved out of Choi's path of attack and disdainfully planted her boot in the bigger woman's face. "Coated the shuriken with cane toad venom," she said mockingly, as she returned the nunchukus to the hook on her belt. "Take a good look at the sun, Dog's Daughter, for it is the last time you shall ever see it!"

Dick had heard enough. He had heard more than enough. Under most circumstances, upon seeing a teenaged girl accosted by a woman, older, heavier, and presumably stronger, he would have instinctively joined the fight in defence of the younger opponent. That would have been a mistake, he realized.

He reached into the pocket of his pants for his mask. There was neither time nor place to change fully into costume. It didn't matter. In Metropolis, Dick Grayson's face was hardly likely to elicit recognition. The mask was a precaution, nothing more—a safety measure in case Bruce's chief business rival was keeping tabs on him. It was unlikely, Dick admitted. Luthor, in all likelihood, neither knew nor cared where Bruce Wayne's ward was, at any given time. Still, Dick reflected, displaying his skills openly probably wasn't the brightest move he could make.

It only took a second to don the mask, which suited Dick fine. Assuming that the girl was telling the truth, he needed to get Choi to a doctor,

quickly. Cane toad venom was nasty stuff. *One of the poisons that certain ninja orders prefer*, he remembered suddenly. Was Ling...

Dick charged toward the melee, dropping into a fighting crouch as he drew near the battling women.

Without skipping a beat, Ling deployed two more shuriken in his direction. Faster than thought, Dick flung himself to one side to evade the metal projectiles. "Nice to know I don't have to go to Hollywood to see the stars," he quipped. If he'd had any doubts about whose side to join in, they were vanishing quickly.

With a snarl, Ling seized hold of the nunchukus.

Dick groaned inwardly. His escrima sticks were sheathed in the holsters built into the Nightwing costume, behind his back, under his shirt and ski jacket. Getting them out was going to be next to impossible. He only had two 'nightarangs' on him (the rest were stored in one of the compartments of the gauntlets he was not wearing at the moment), and he wasn't at all sure he wanted to use them up now. After all, he thought as he plunged a hand into his jacket pocket, he did have other tools at his disposal...

Resigned, he flipped over Ling's head to land behind her. As she turned, he seized her wrist, pinning it against his chest with one hand while he relieved her of the linked clubs with the other.

"Let go of me!" She snapped.

Dick tossed the weapon aside and twisted her other arm behind her back. The girl brought her foot down hard on his instep. He winced. That was a street-fighting move. After observing her attack on Choi, he'd had a feeling she might try something like that. Although Ling demonstrated more than a cursory knowledge of ninjitsu weaponry and combat techniques, she was clearly no ninja if she employed such a move. Fortunately, he was prepared for it.

"*Poq gai!*" Ling shouted as he relaxed his grip on her.

"You kiss your mother with that mouth?" Dick rolled his eyes.

Ling was about to respond when a meaty hand came down on her shoulder. She whirled directly into a sucker punch, which connected with her jaw. Ling fell to the ground. Choi followed up the punch with a kick to the ribs.

"You frelling poisoned me!" Choi shouted, aiming another kick.

Ling rolled away from it and toward a fire escape. Quickly she regained her footing, and bounded up the metal stair.

Dick let her go, turning to the angry woman left behind. "You okay?" He asked Choi.

"Get her!" Choi replied angrily.

"I'd better find you a doctor," he said, ignoring her. "That toxin—" he dodged as Choi lunged for him, barely evading her grab.

"Do I look like I need a frigging doctor?" She demanded. "Go grab the little skank before she gets away!"

Choi had a point, Dick realized. She seemed to have shaken off the effects of the cane toad venom in moments. *How was that possible?* He wondered, as a possible answer suggested itself. He looked around. The teenaged girl was nowhere to be seen. "Too late," he said. "What was all that about, anyway?"

For a moment, he thought that she was going to try to slug him again, but then she shook her head, wearily.

"Her name is Ling," Choi nearly spat the name out. "She leads the Ghost Dragons. Does the name 'Dorance' mean anything to you?" Seeing Dick's blank expression, she sniffed. "Of course it frigging doesn't. He's the stinking piece of garbage that gets the heroin into the Ghost Dragons' hands. They get it out on the street for him." Her eyes went flat. "Not this bloody street, though. Not while I'm alive. And that little two-bit whore knows it." She launched into a stream of obscenities so virulent that they probably would have made Dick's hair curl, if it didn't already do so naturally.

"She knows you're meta?" He hazarded a guess.

Choi flinched, then shrugged. "You look like me, it's no freaking secret," she replied. "'Course now she just frelling found out that frigging poisons don't work on me for long." She scowled. "It means they'll probably try something else next time. There's only one person in this city who bounces bullets off his chest and it ain't me."

Dick nodded. "So, what happens now?"

"Now?" She sniffed. "You take off the Halloween mask, go back to the safer parts of town and forget you saw me or her or any of this. I'm going to hit them before they hit me."

His eyes narrowed. He started to say something, but she turned her back. "Go on. Get the frig out of here. This has nothing to do with you."

Silently he nodded, and retreated the way he had come.

It was perhaps fifteen minutes later that Choi stepped out onto the main thoroughfare. The sun was setting, as a masked figure in blue and black strode forward to meet her.

"I thought I bloody told you..." She began.

Nightwing held up a small electronic device. "I slapped a homing beacon on Ling when we fought, before," he grinned. "Now we know where to look."

Choi scowled at him. "Freaking kids with their freaking toys think they know so freaking much," she muttered. "I suppose you have some stupid 'I-don't-kill-the-freaks-no-matter-how-freaking-much-they-freaking-deserve-it code of honour too, right?"

Nightwing held his palms out at shoulder height. "Afraid so."

Choi sighed. "That just about freaking figures."

As the two proceeded down the street a figure slipped into a phone booth nearby and furtively dialed a number.

*How do I get myself into these things? Seriously? I was in street clothes, this time. It was broad daylight. I was walking in plain view in a public space. Was I looking for trouble? Did I flash a wallet full of cash in Suicide Slum? Was I spoiling for a fight? I guess it's true what Bruce says: crime never takes a vacation... so crime fighters don't get to do it either. I thought he was just being obsessive, but maybe it goes beyond that. Maybe it's that if you spend enough time in a Kevlar suit, you just don't get out of the mindset. If I could turn back the clock to when I heard Choi and Ling shouting at each other, knowing that if I interfered, less than an hour later, I'd be off to deal a major blow to Metropolis' illegal drug industry, would I decide I didn't want to get involved after all? Maybe. I **don't** want to get involved right at this moment, come to think of it. Doesn't change anything though. I **am** involved. Metropolis isn't my home, but it doesn't matter. I can't leave things for Superman to deal with any more than I could walk away from something in Gotham and trust that Bruce... or Alan Scott, for that matter, would deal with it. It's not a question of whether Superman could handle the situation—I know darned well he could. But right now, he's not around, and I am.*

*Choi's told me about the Ghost Dragons. From her description, it's going to be like fighting the Triads in Gotham: tricky, but doable. They're martial artists, hand-to-hand combat fighters first and foremost, but they also use bladed weapons. That's going to count against me. The Nightwing suit is bullet-proof, sure—but Kevlar isn't much good when it comes to slashing and stabbing. And these people aren't above using poison. I've got a snakebite kit on me, not to mention some standard anti-toxins and an epi-pen. The problem is, in order to use any of the antivenins, I need to know ahead of time exactly what the 'Dragons are using on their blades—it's not like there's a universal anti-poison vaccine. The epi-pen isn't a cure for anything, but it'll buy me an hour or so to get to a hospital. Of course, I could just play it smart, and not let them get close enough to cut me.*

*Dorance is going to be the main problem, though. He's a relative newcomer to the city—arrived in '97 after Hong Kong reverted to China. Over the course of the next three years, he virtually cornered the Metropolis heroin market. In the*

*over five years since, nobody's been able to launch a credible challenge to his position. From what Choi's said, the ones who try... either end up working for Dorance, or they end up lying in an alley dead of an OD.*

*I'm used to dealing with the costumed crazies. Dorance doesn't wear a costume. And his methods, brutal though they are, sound all too sane to me. Yet, here I am, about to track him down and take him out. It's just me, my weapons and gadgets, and some muscled backup who's going to be only too eager to finish Dorance off permanently. I'll probably have to hold her back.*

*Now, just in case you're wondering why I'm bringing her along in the first place, three reasons. One: I know what it's like to take a pounding. I'd want a rematch, and she's entitled. Two: as long as I know where I stand with Choi, I'd rather keep her where I can keep an eye on her and stop her from doing something drastic. I know. It's going to be fun. Sigh. Three: call me nuts, but I don't want to engage a gang of street-fighters and a heroin kingpin without backup. And at least it doesn't look like I'm going to have to worry about Choi getting herself killed so easily. In this line of work, sometimes you have to take who you can get.*

The blond man sat erect in a velvet-upholstered armchair, his bare feet sunk into the rich-textured carpet. His elbows rested on the grooved teak armrest. His hands were clasped together and steepled against his breastbone.

"I am puzzled, Ling," he said softly. "I sent you to neutralize the woman, Choi, after you yourself alerted me to the threat she posed to our organization. I offered you the assistance of your fellow Ghost Dragons in defeating this opponent. You declined their aid, however, did you not, Ling?"

"I did, Sir Edmund," Ling replied calmly. Her palms were sweating, but he would hear her, were she to wipe them on her pants. It would never do to display weakness before such a man.

"And yet, Grace Choi lives, Ling." His whisper sliced across the room like the lash of a whip.

"She does, Sir Edmund."

"As do you." The whisper grew dangerous. "How is this so, Ling? You failed... and yet you return to me... alive and whole. Pray. Enlighten me."

Ling swallowed. "Choi had help, Sir Edmund. A youth intervened. We fought."

Sir Edmund leaned forward. "A youth, you say," he murmured. "Elaborate. You were no match for him?"

The danger was past, for now. Ling fought not to sigh in relief. "I could have taken him myself, Sir Edmund. Or I could have taken Choi. I was ill-prepared for the two together."

Her interrogator mulled the words over. "Possible." He raised his head suddenly, giving Ling a full view of his opaque, sightless eyes. "Tell me, Ling: what skills does this youth possess? Jujitsu? Aikido?"

Ling considered. "Difficult to assess, Sir Edmund. His attack began swiftly and ended with equal speed. But..." Her voice trailed off.

"Continue," Sir Edmund said. "But... what?"

"He attacked to subdue," Ling proclaimed triumphantly. "He did not seek to kill! That's his weakness!"

Sir Edmund Dorance did not share in her excitement. "That may well be, Girl," he replied dryly. "However, it does beg the question... if his interest was only to subdue, while yours was to kill, how is it that he continues to walk free while you do as well? If his refusal to kill is his weakness, then Girl, where was *your* strength?" His hand gestured negligently toward her.

Ling's mouth dropped open. "Sir Edmund, I—" She cried out as wiry arms pinioned her arms behind her back. "No!" She kicked back frantically to no avail.

"You failed me, Ling," Dorance decreed. "I relied on you and you abrogated your charge. You have disappointed me. I am not a man who takes disappointment lightly."

"Give me another chance," she pleaded. "I will deal with them—both of them, Sir Edmund! I swear it!"

Dorance considered. "It is possible," he reflected. "Oftentimes, an early setback pushes the defeated one to strive harder to overcome the obstacles placed in his—or her—path. Yes," he nodded to himself, "you might indeed be able to accomplish your mission in a second attempt." He lowered his head for a moment, then raised it again.

"However, it does leave me with a dilemma. To allow you a second opportunity to prove yourself could be construed by my rivals as a show of weakness. And, should you fail again, it would make my own position almost as precarious as yours is at this moment."

Despite herself, Ling shuddered.

"And yet... "

She glanced up, a wild hope in her eyes. Dorance never saw it, but he understood her sudden intake of breath, and its slow release. He smiled.

"And yet, a gentleman cannot kill a lady. That's just not on. Still, I cannot allow your discretion to go unpunished. Bobbo?"

Ling struggled desperately as her captor replied. "Yes, Sir Edmund?"

"Punish her Bobbo. Memorably. And Bobbo? Nothing *too* dire."

"Yes, Sir Edmund."

Nightwing and Choi approached the glass-and-steel construction cautiously. "Hold it," he ordered as he stretched out an arm to block Choi's progress, and drew her beneath the awning of a nearby office tower.

"Let's get our bearings." Nightwing studied the Dorance Tower building intently. "Ritzy place," he remarked.

Choi sniffed. "Word on the street is he could build one of these in Gotham and another in New York and still not hurt for cash. Plenty of money to be made in his business, if you don't care who you hurt."

There was a brittle edge to the bitterness of her tone. For one instant, she reminded him a little of Roy. "You okay?"

Nightwing was almost positive that she was going to lash out at him again. Her body tensed, and he braced for a physical assault. Choi stood, bristling. Then, she subsided. "I ran away when I was about ten," she said tonelessly. "Things... happened. The same kinds of things that statistics tell you generally happen to kids on the street. I got... hurt. And I started using."

Clearly, she didn't anymore. "And?"

"Freaking meta power showed its bloody self when I was twelve. You saw how fast I got that poison out of my system before? It works that way for goddamned drugs too. It... " She sniffed. "I'd try OD-ing. I thought if I put enough of that garbage in my veins fast enough, maybe I'd outrun my frigging power. Never happened. I tried slitting my wrists. Cuts healed right up. Couldn't get my hands on a gun. Maybe I was wrong about bouncing bullets before. I just—"

"Never stayed still long enough to see if you were bullet-proof?"

"What the hell kind of a freaking moron do you think I am?" She demanded hotly. "You think I want to take that kind of bloody chance?"

Nightwing shook his head, smiling. "Just checking. Glad you're over the death-wish. I wanted to know that *before* we went inside."

Choi snorted. "I still have the death-wish," she retorted. "I'm just wishing it on someone else these days. How do you plan on getting in?"

He'd been wondering the same thing. "I don't suppose you're any good at scaling the walls, are you?"

"Hell, no!"

He nodded. "Alright. Stay put." He took a few steps away from the shelter of the awning. Choi watched his progress. Her eyes widened. She hadn't looked away for an instant, but somehow, impossibly, he had vanished into the shadows.

Thirty-eight minutes later, Choi jumped as a gauntleted hand touched her elbow. She started swearing. "You're going to give me a goddamned heart attack!"

Nightwing grinned. "You'd get over it."

"How the hell do you know? What took you so freaking long, anyway?"

"I was checking out the security systems," he explained. "I rigged the cameras at the main entrance so they're looping the same footage: a clear front walk and empty foyer. I was also able to tap in and reset Dorance's computer clock from pm to am."

Choi blinked. "What good's that gonna do?"

"At 8:38 pm," Nightwing explained, nobody can get into the building without a key card. At 8:38 *am*, on the other hand... "

"The main doors are unlocked. Crap." She shook her head in wonder. "So what happens, now?"

Nightwing hesitated. "We go in. Separately. You start at ground floor. See if you can find out where Dorance is keeping his product. If it's actually in the building—and it might not be—just take note of it and get out fast. If the... Ghost Dragons are around, or rentacops, or what have you... "

Choi scowled. "You want me to freaking stick to your goddamned rule-book and not kill 'em, right?"

"Yes."

"And if I tell you where you can shove that goddamned rulebook? What the fuck you going to do about it?"

*Good question. The kind of question Speedy might have asked him last week. And he wouldn't have had an answer beyond 'or else'. But Choi wasn't Speedy. They had no history, and she had no real reason to trust him. Plus, if he slugged her, she'd probably break him in half.*

Nightwing sighed. "I can't do anything about it, Choi," he admitted. "I don't want to fight you. I sure as hell can't stop you. But I really hope you won't. It'll mean that deep down where it counts, you're exactly like the people you're trying to stop."

Choi opened her mouth to protest. Nightwing continued.

"I know, Choi. It's not like you've got a... a difference of opinion with them. They're scum, pure and simple. Maybe they don't deserve to live. Maybe, the world *would* be better off without them. But answer me this: do *you* deserve to become a killer?"

She was silent. At the very least, she seemed to be considering his words. Encouraged, he went on.

"You know, if you do follow through, one of two things is going to happen when word gets out. First possibility: the police will arrest you. There'll be a trial. And I gotta tell you, whatever the justification, if you kill someone when you're breaking and entering, there's a very strong chance you're going to do some serious time. If they charge you with felony murder, you could be facing the death penalty.

"Or, second possibility: they'll *try* to arrest you. You'll resist, and in the scuffle, maybe someone else will die. Maybe you. Maybe a cop. Maybe an innocent bystander. That kind of thing can destroy a person.

"Choi, I can't force you to follow my rules. But I can ask you—and you don't have to answer me, as long as you answer yourself." Dick drew a deep breath. "If the only way to beat them is to kill them, and if by killing them, you end up destroying yourself, *who really beats who?*"

The words had come out more plaintively than he had intended. He

waited for her to laugh in his face, or tell him what he could go do with his ideals. She didn't. Barely perceptibly, Choi nodded. "I go in at ground level," she repeated his earlier statement. "And you?"

Nightwing exhaled. "I'm going to start at the roof and work my way down."

Dick watched Choi enter Dorance Tower without mishap. Once she disappeared past the foyer, he skirted the outer perimeter of the building, searching for a place to pitch his grapnel. His eyes narrowed. He *loathed* these towers with windows for walls. The risk of smashing one when he tossed the grappling hook was too great. The building next door, however, had possibilities. It was an older brick edifice, with cornices, stone projections... and exterior fire escapes. True, it was about eight stories lower than Dorance tower, but Nightwing wasn't overly concerned. In moments, he had reached the roof of the brick building.

He looked across at his destination and smiled. He cast his grapnel and it sailed straight and true to loop around the aircraft beacon light on the roof of Dorance Tower. As he had done for years in Gotham, Nightwing sailed across the gap between the two buildings, retracting the monofilament cable as he went, so that it pulled him inexorably upwards. He landed on the roof in a neat somersault and moved at once to inspect the door leading inside. It yielded easily to his lock pick and opened to reveal a flight of stairs. Cautiously, he descended.

A moment later, he emerged from the stairwell into what appeared to be an opulent suite of rooms. Nightwing frowned. From the contours of the furnishings surrounding him, he seemed to be standing in someone's living quarters. He waited for his star-lite nightvision lenses to compensate for the darkness. All at once, he froze. Someone was coming.

He heard an elevator open and someone stepped out. Nightwing ducked behind one of the ornate pillars supporting the ceiling of the room and

waited nervously for the lights to flicker on, but they never did. After a moment, a solidly-built man strode purposefully into view. He stalked past Nightwing and into a kitchen beyond him. Nightwing watched as he opened the refrigerator and removed several jars. He then opened one of the cabinets and, without looking, extracted a small canister.

Realization struck. The man was blind. That would probably work to his advantage, Dick reflected. As long as he was quiet, he should be able to observe the man in his quarters, and leave once the man either departed or retired for the night. Dick watched as the man put together a sandwich and salad, finished both, and left his plate in the sink. The man nodded to himself, and placed his hand against the kitchen wall. And the room suddenly plunged into blackness.

It took Dick a moment to realize that every window-blind in the apartment had suddenly unfurled to its full length. In total darkness, his night-vision lenses were useless. Still, they automatically adjusted to their maximum setting—to no avail.

The darkness was nearly tangible in its intensity. In his mind, it seemed that the ceiling was but inches overhead. Nightwing kept the palm of his hand upon the pillar, finding its solidity somehow reassuring.

Without warning, the light surged back onward at maximum intensity. It blinded him as it stabbed into lenses meant for near-absolute blackness, and Nightwing could not keep from crying out as his world shifted from inky blackness to impenetrable yellow.

"I *thought* I had a visitor," an Oxford-accented voice declared as Dick slapped a hand protectively over his eyes. "Attacking the King Snake in his lair is a foolhardy move."

Nightwing heard soft footfalls approaching.

"I only wish I could see you die."

**To Be Continued!**

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Nightwing #1 (2006)

Nightwing: The Great Unknown, Pt. 1 (of 7): Breaking Down. Exploding from the pages of Detective Comics and Teen Titans! What caused Robin to leave Gotham and strike out on his own? Return to the night that shattered three lives, and spun them in directions they had never before considered.

Nightwing #6 (2006)

Nightwing: The Great Unknown, Part 6 (of 7): Rolling With the Punches.

Still reeling from the revelations last issue, Nightwing plans to continue on to Loma Linda. But leaving Las Vegas may not be as easy as he thinks!

Nightwing #2 (2006)

Nightwing: The Great Unknown, Part 2 (of 7): More to Me. Robin is no more! In his place stands Nightwing. He's left Batman and Gotham far behind him... or has he?

Nightwing #4 (2006)

Nightwing: The Great Unknown, Part 4 (of 7): Beyond the Shadows.

Nightwing must fight an enemy he can't see! While he and Grace battle King Snake and the Ghost Dragons, someone from Dick Grayson's past takes a new interest in his current activities!

Nightwing #5 (2006)

Nightwing: The Great Unknown, Part 5 (of 7): Little Acorns. What exactly is "Project Venom"? Dick's off to California to find out. And with Loma Linda only two hours away from Las Vegas, this might be the perfect time to hook up with a former teammate! Guest-starring the New Outsiders!

Nightwing #7 (2006)

Nightwing: The Great Unknown, Part 7 (of 7): One More Mile, One Step Back...

Nightwing has a plan to find the missing scientist. Unfortunately, he never counted on some old enemies penetrating his cover. Be here for the conclusion of the epic first arc!

Nightwing #8 (2006)

Nightwing: Giants at the Door.

Crisis: The Apokolips Imperative, Part 6!

Entrusted with a mission from Batman, Nightwing flees Gulag Gotham with the one man Darkseid wants the most: Scott Free! But can the two refugees reach the open city of Metropolis before Deviance the Pursuer catches up to them? It's a pulse-pounding flight out of the frying pan--- and into the fire!

Nightwing #9 (2006)

Nightwing: Rebuild.

In the aftermath of Crisis, Nightwing and Batman are aiding Gotham in its recovery. It's a time for renewal, and reconciliation as two heroes ponder what the future might hold!

Justice League vs. America #2 (2007)

Justice League vs. America: Heroes or Traitors?

The Crisis heats up as the revelation of who or what is behind President Lord's actions comes to light. But an attempt to stop the villain's plan turns sour and the League is wanted more now than ever. And one member takes the ultimate stand for his actions, in the second chapter of this year's big event!

Nightwing #27 (2008)

**EVERYTHING CHANGES WITH THIS ISSUE!**

Nightwing: Historic Continuity.

A frantic call from Alfred sends Dick speeding back to Gotham to deal with the fallout from Batman's climactic battle with Ra's Al Ghul. The landscape has changed, and Dick will face more than one critical decision before the story's done!

Nightwing #28 (2008)

Nightwing: Twisted Logic, Bleeding Hearts.

There's a serial killer on the loose, and Batman won't rest until he's brought to justice. But will his determination prove his undoing?

Nightwing #29 (2008)

Nightwing: Heart of a Hero

Cornelius Stirk has Batman in his clutches! Robin's hot on the trail, but even if he gets there in time, can he prove a match for Stirk's metahuman powers? Tune in for the thrilling finale... and see!



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