



Batman #7
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Published: 2006

Categorie(s): Fiction, Fan Fiction

Tag(s): Comics DC2 Batman Clayface

Batman

Issue 7: "Clay Beginnings"

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Gotham City. 1:45 A.M...

He can hear the cries of the baby as he lands on the rooftop. His near-silent landing has not awakened the child—its parents' loud argument has done that.

He waits, but the fighting never reaches the level of physical confrontation, so he does not intervene. The Batman has other business to attend to. This area has been plagued with burglaries lately. The Dark Knight is here to end the string of crimes.

From out of his utility belt, he takes his grappling hook and fires it off to a building across the street. It hisses as it soars through the air.

Batman lands as quietly and gently as before. Before he can make his next move, he hears a woman's scream.

It is only two blocks away. He can get there in seconds. Batman assures himself that no blood except maybe that of the perpetrator will be spilled.

He quickly takes in the details: A woman is trapped below him in an alley. She casts about desperately for an escape as a man in dark clothing approaches with a gun.

The Caped Crusader quickly makes a decision, and descends with arms out and cape uplifted. Anyone in Gotham, or in the world for that matter, would recognize the heroic, muscular figure ready to save the day. He is the Batman, and his mission is to clean the streets of Gotham City

of scum, like this gunman.

The Dark Knight lands between the frightened woman and the would-be mugger. Startled, the criminal quickly fires a shot at the Batman. Batman dodges it with ease, but the woman behind him is apparently not so lucky, for she falls backwards, and hits the cold, hard ground.

How did that bullet hit her? He thinks. It went by my left shoulder, but she was at my right side. Something isn't right, here.

Wanting some answers, Batman quickly grabs two batarangs from his belt and pitches them at the gunman. One of the batarangs knocks the gun from his hand, and the second one takes off a piece of the gunman's skull. A brown substance now lies on the ground.

Clay? This is a bigger pr- "Uggh!" His thought is interrupted by a thunderous blow to his back, which sends the Caped Crusader into a nearby trashcan. Now, almost unconscious, Batman figures it out. *It isn't just the gunman! They're both-*

Before he can finish that thought, the Batman looks up and sees the form of the woman swirl together with the gunman. Clayface, the man who was once called Matt Hagen stands before him.

"Fooled ya, didn't I?"

Teddy Lupus' Apartment, 4 hours earlier...

Although he holds the title of "Doctor", Doctor Lupus' apartment does not reflect his earned degree. Saying he lives in a bad part of town is being generous, and the number of times he has been robbed certainly reflects that. His life wasn't always like this, though. He once had a good job, lots of money, and a nice apartment. That all changed the day he was fired from Dagget Industries...

Dr. Lupus was one of the developers of a new line of cosmetics at Dagget Industries, a foundation cream that would eliminate the need for facial reconstruction.

Even he couldn't believe the outstanding results when it was first tested. The cream, which would be called Renew-U, could eliminate any facial disfigurement: including welts, bruises, indentations, scars, and even burns. There were of course some drawbacks; its results were only temporary, it seemed highly addictive, and an overuse could result in various side effects. In the early stages of development, some subjects experienced what was described as "loose skin." The skin on the test subjects' faces looked severely wrinkled. Others suffered from burning, itching, and rashes. Most of the side effects were thought to have been eliminated by making new formulas and doing more testing.

Because of the chemicals in it, the cream was highly expensive. The marketing department was sure, though, that the outstanding results of the cream would eliminate any concerns of the price. As long as the side effects continued to decrease as more testing was done, Dagget Industries was sure to begin shipping the cream soon.

Teddy Lupus' life began to slope downhill the day he read an article in the *Gotham Gazette* one morning. He couldn't believe the words before his eyes. His longtime friend, actor Matt Hagen, had been in a severe car accident. The report stated that Matt's face had been shredded by glass, making him almost unrecognizable. The journalist also claimed that Hagen's acting career was now over, because it had been his face that had drawn crowds to the theaters, not his acting.

A few weeks later, Ted got a call from Matt, asking him if he thought facial reconstruction was the right way to fix his problem. Teddy knew the risks involved in this type of surgery. Because of the recent success in the development of Renew-U, Teddy revealed the alternative to this surgery that Dagget Industries was developing. Matt liked the sound of this new cream, so he asked Teddy if there was some way that he could try some of it.

The next day, Lupus went up to Roland Dagget, the head of Dagget Industries. He asked Mr. Dagget if the company would supply small amounts of the cream to Matt Hagen. Teddy explained to Roland that if the Matt's condition cleared up because of Renew-U, the company could use Matt as a spokesperson for the new line of cosmetics. Ted of course didn't mention that he had already told Matt about the product because

that could well have resulted in Lupus's termination.

Mr. Dagget accepted the proposal, and Matt was supplied with a small weekly test sample of Renew-U. Matt used his weekly dose very fast though. He had been applying the make-up more than twice a day, and his supply of it always ran out quickly. Nearly a month after that first call, Teddy received another call from Hagen, but this was a call for help. Matt had become addicted to the Renew-U cream. He thought he needed more of the cream, than was being supplied to him by Dagget. Knowing that Teddy worked for Dagget, Matt asked his lifetime friend to sneak out small supplies of the cream on a daily basis. Teddy had never stolen anything in his life, not because he thought it was wrong, but because he got nervous very easily, and if questioned, he knew he would confess the moment he was asked. Teddy reluctantly began to steal the cream anyway, but only because Matt was such a good friend.

Everything went smoothly at first. No one noticed the small samples Teddy stole daily from Dagget Industries, but after two weeks, Matt wanted more of the make-up. Teddy did begin to steal more, but the more he stole, the more Matt wanted. Teddy knew Matt was experiencing more than just physical problems, but feared to confront him about it. Matt seemed so much different than he used to, angry, but at the same time pitiful. Having been asked by Matt to steal a whole beaker of cream one day, Lupus nervously waited until everyone else had left one the developing rooms in Dagget Industries. Teddy was sure he was nearly out the door when he heard "Going somewhere with that, Dr.Lupus?" It was Mr. Dagget, accompanied by two thugs. Teddy stood still in fear, trying to come up with something to say, but all thought left his head when the wind was suddenly taken from him by a blow to the stomach. Another fist hammered his chin, sent him reeling and knocked him off balance.

As he lay on the floor, Teddy distinctly heard Mr. Dagget say, "You're fired, Ted." The two thugs hurled him outside onto the cold concrete, leaving him without the make-up and without a job.

The drive to Matt's trailer was a haze, and when he finally reached his destination, Teddy had to tell his best friend that he couldn't get the make-up he so sorely needed. For this, Lupus received another blow to

the chin, but unlike the last one, this strike hurt on an emotional level as well, because it seemed to end a friendship that had lasted nearly 15 years.

In a frantic mess, Matt Hagen ran into Teddy's car and, after seeing that the keys were in the ignition, started the car and began a reckless drive to Dagget Industries. When he arrived, Hagen parked the car in an alley by the side of the building and abandoned the vehicle to search for the make-up he needed to fix his disfigured face. Filled with rage, he kicked a locked door open and ran into an unlit hallway, unaware of the alarm he had set off. After a few minutes of searching, Hagen found a room containing beakers and other glassware, most filled with the Renew-U that scientists had been working on.

Dipping his hand in the fresh batch of make-up, Hagen was filled with relief. He started to apply the cream to his face, but a hand grabbed his arm before he could finish. It was one of Dagget's thugs. While that one held his arm, the other thug elbowed him in the head and threw him to the ground.

"You want this stuff that bad, huh?" taunted the one man. "Let's give the man what he wants, Bell."

Hagen was too badly hurt to get up, so the two thugs began to pour large amounts of the make-up onto Matt's face and body.

He was completely covered in a dark peach pool of the make-up. It was in his eyes, his nose, his mouth. It seeped into his clothing and coated his hair. Unable to stand, speak, or even move, Matt lay still on the ground. The two men picked him up and carried him outside to the alley where Matt had left the car. They threw him on the front seat, and left him there.

"Let's leave him out here with the rest of the trash," the man called Bell said as he and the other man walked back to the building.

Back in Matt's trailer, Lupus wondered where Hagen had run to. An awful suspicion took root. If he needed the cream that badly... Teddy leapt

to his feet in horror. If Dagget and his crew caught Matt, they would kill him. He dashed out of the trailer as fast as his legs would carry him.

When he arrived, he saw police cars outside the building. From overhearing the cops' conversation, he discovered that an alarm had been triggered.

Nervous for his friend, Teddy ran through the police and into the alley. He stopped running when he noticed movement in the front seat of car.

"Matt? Is that you?" he questioned nervously.

What Teddy saw was not easy to take in. His lifelong friend was a mud-like blob lying in the front seat. Matt had no neck, and his face consisted of two yellow circles that seemed to be eyes, and a monstrous hole that stretched across his face and mimicked a mouth. His body was still dripping a little, and was so thick that he barely could sit upright in-between the passenger seat and the dashboard.

"Jesus, Matt. What the hell did they do to you?"

"Ugh" was the only response Matt could manage at the moment, and that did not sit well with his friend.

"Let's get you out of here." Teddy started his car and left the alley through the opposite side of the building before the police could stop him.

He decided to bring Matt back to his trailer, as he feared to bring the monster that was once his friend into his own house.

When they arrived at the movie set, Matt seemed to be feeling better. He didn't talk, but he had walked from the car to the inside of his trailer with no trouble. Eyes on the floor, Hagen walked slowly toward the mirror. He sat down in a chair, and lifted his eyes toward his reflection.

"L-look at me," he uttered after what seemed like a forever of silence. "I thought I looked bad before. Who's gonna hire me now?! What am I

gonna do?!" Matt swung a hard fist and broke the mirror, shattering it into pieces. He wanted to cry, but no tears came from his eyes.

He began to stare at his old movie posters hanging on the wall. Suddenly, his face morphed into an exact replica of what he looked like in a futuristic movie he had done in the past.

"Matt, look! Your face changed!" Getting no response he decided to continue. "Don't you see? You can still act. You don't have nothing to—" Teddy stopped as he saw Matt's face change back to the monstrous one he barely recognized.

"You idiot! You broke my concentration!" Matt yelled with fury. "It's like flexing a muscle, I can't keep it up for too long. I can't act again. I'm not even human!" With that said, Matt stormed out of the trailer. Teddy tried to follow him, but when he ran outside, Matt was nowhere to be found.

A few nights went by, and Lupus had still not heard anything from Matt. A newspaper caught Teddy's eye, though, for it said that a man by the name of Germaine Wolfman was found badly beaten and taken to Gotham General. A picture accompanying the article revealed a man who looked very much like one of Dagget's thugs, the one without the headphones. The article went on to say that the police were still investigating the beating of Germaine Wolfman, and that those possessing any information regarding the crime, were enjoined to contact the GCPD.

Unbeknownst to Teddy, Bruce Wayne had read that same paper and had decided to question Germaine "Germs" Wolfman at the hospital that night to see who had assaulted him. Batman wanted to take measures now to ensure that such violence would not be repeated. As Bruce viewed the paper, Alfred decided to question his employer and longtime friend.

"I can see by the mark on your cheek that you have had a another adventurous night. And how do you plan to explain this bruise to the ever-

curious media? Another fall down the stairs this time?"

"Nope, I'm taking up boxing. It was my second day and I wasn't too good at blocking," answered the billionaire playboy.

"Ah, brilliant as always sir. And an impenetrable explanation if I do say so."

"Never mind that. Did you read the paper today Alfred?"

"Yes, sir," responded the butler.

"Well, then you'll know I'm more concerned with the bruising of this man." Bruce held up the paper with the picture of 'Germs' Wolfman. "I want to know why this man was so brutally attacked. It could have something to do with his boss."

"And who is that, sir?"

"I don't know who it is at the moment. Wolfman has held 'jobs' with various 'businessmen'. I plan to find out who his current employer is, when I make a visit to him tonight."

"But he's at the hospital sir," replied Alfred.

"Your point?"

"He shall likely be well-guarded due to his attack. The door to his room would most certainly be off limits."

"You should know by now that I don't intend to use the door," bluntly stated the billionaire.

"I see. And I assume because of your window-entering escapades that your date with Ms. Madison will be cancelled."

"Just tell her I was called out of town and I'm very sorry as usual.

"Are you, sir?"

“What?”

“Are you truly sorry or is that a lie too?”

Shocked by this, the Dark Knight stormed out of the room and headed for the Batcave. “... I have work to do. I’m too busy to deal with this right now.”

“As usual, sir.”

That night, ‘Germs’ was resting quietly in his hospital bed when he heard the window open. He looked over, but no one was there.

“‘Germs’ Wolfman,” a dark voice said. Startled, ‘Germs’ began to scream, but a gloved hand covered his mouth. “If you tell me who did this, it won’t happen again. And maybe I’ll forget about all those accounts of assault against you.” The dark-clad figure started to remove his hand, and ‘Germs’ was about to yell, but he suddenly decided not to. The thing that put him in here was scarier than the thing standing in his room right now.

Maybe, he thought, if I tell him, they’ll kill each other.

“It was a guy named Hagen. Matt Hagen.” He stated.

“The actor? Are you sure it was him?” asked the voice.

“Yeah, he told me I was the one to blame for what he had become. He wanted me to know who was beatin’ me.

“What he had become? What’s that supposed to mean?”

“What? Nothin’, nothin’,” he said nervously.

“What did you do to him ‘Germs’?” the Batman asked coldly. Given no response, the Dark Knight spoke again. “If you don’t talk now, I have ways of making you talk.” Batman hit the broken leg of ‘Germs’ Wolfman, making ‘Germs’ yell in pain and reach out in the air. His scream

went unheard, for Batman had his other hand over Wolfman's mouth.

"Alright! I'll tell ya. He was stealing a product from my boss. We had to stop him, so we roughed him up a little. Then, we covered him in the stuff he was trying to steal."

"Who's your boss? And who's we?"

"Me and Bell. Dagget's my boss." he said reluctantly. "But now Hagen's changed. He don't look human no more."

"If you're lying to me Wolfman, I'll find out about it. Believe me, you don't want me coming back here," the Batman threatened.

"I'm not lying! It's the truth! Hagen's this pile of gloop now!"

The door to "Germs'" room opened, and a doctor walked in. The Batman hid out of sight in the dark room. The doctor made no attempt to turn on the light, as he quickly made his way to the bed.

"Mr. Wolfman, I think it would be best if you got some air," the doctor said in a flat voice.

"What? I have a broken leg. I can't-" A brown strip suddenly covered the mouth of 'Germs', making him unable to speak. The Batman stepped forward as the "doctor" grabbed the patient, but he was thrown back into the wall with a thunderous blow from an outstretched arm of the "doctor". Turning back into the mud-like form, Hagen stormed to the stairs and onto the room with 'Germs' in his arms.

He walked out onto the roof and headed to the edge, lifting his victim high above his head.

'Germs' Wolfman would have been nothing but a stain on the pavement if the Batman hadn't swooped in and grabbed him from Clayface's clutches.

"Hagen, stop this. I can get you help. Don't throw away your life like this" the Batman yelled.

"I'm not Hagen anymore. It's Clayface!" Saying this, his fist became a

brick wall and he hurled it at the Dark Knight. Trying to jump away from the blow, the Batman was struck violently on the left shoulder, sending him back and onto the ground. Sirens grew louder in the distance.

Nervously, Clayface decided to leave the scene. He jumped off of the roof of the hospital and plummeted down to the hard road below. He turned into a puddle when he struck the ground. He dragged himself into a drainage hole and into Gotham's sewers.

Several hours later that night, Hagen entered Teddy Lupus's apartment through the sink.

Still concerned for his friend, Teddy opened his mouth to ask Matt where he had been all this time. He was interrupted by Hagen's rant.

"I need to something bigger Teddy. Dagget hasn't made any response since I took out 'Germs.' I don't know what he's been doing."

He sat on Lupus's couch, and began to think. "I need to get Dagget, not his thugs. They might have done this to me, but I bet the jerk was the one who ordered it done."

"Matt, you can't go after Dagget. The cop's will-"

It's not Matt, okay?! It's Clayface! You got it? Clayface!" Clayface was now leaning against Teddy and had him pinned in-between his bulk and the wall.

"I need to think and I can't have you interfering with everything I say. Let me just think okay?"

Trying to calm down, Clayface turned on the television. He caught the last fifteen minutes of a talk show. Just before the closing credits rolled, the host invited his audience back the next day when his special guest would be...

"... Roland Dagget, head of Dagget Industries. He'll be here to discuss

his new product, Renew-U!

Good night everybody, and thanks for watching!” Clayface couldn’t believe what he had just heard.

“Perfect. This is perfect. I’ll go to that show tomorrow and humiliate Dagget in front of the world. Not only that, I’ll kill him!”

Later on, Teddy would remember this night and try to forget what came next.

He hadn’t accompanied Clayface to the show, so all he knew about the show was what had originally aired, and what had subsequently been reported on the news. It wasn’t good. Matt had gone through with his initial plans to humiliate Dagget on live television, but his schemes were put to rest when the Batman intervened. The Batman must have had knowledge of recent events at Dagget Industries, but Teddy never learned how he gained such information.

During Dagget’s live interview Matt walked on stage from the audience, where he was disguised as a “normal’ person. He then revealed his new hideous form, and the crowd gasped in horror. Matt exploded in anger, and started throwing chairs, stage lights, cameras, whatever he could find, all aimed at Dagget. The live feed of the show was cut off, and the rest was reported, without accompanying film, on the 6 o’clock news.

Dagget had run backstage in fear of his life, and was cornered in a control room filled with monitors and control boards. A witness reported seeing the Batman kick the ‘clay-pile’ in the back, which gave Roland Dagget time to escape from the control room. The onlooker then claimed to see the monitors fill with pictures of different characters, which he claimed were all the same person: ‘Hagen’. The ‘clay pile’ then began morphing and swirling, screaming in pain and confusion. It took a swing at the legendary figure of the Batman, and was electrocuted when its hand hit a control panel. This caused a large explosion, and the entire studio burned down. The witness did not see Clayface or the Batman make it out of the room. Recent reports suggested that the Batman was still alive.

Images of these events ran through Teddy Lupus' head as the brown behemoth stood in front of him. He had no more time to reminisce. He had to convince Matt to do this, despite his gut telling him not to.

"Th-Thanks for coming up Matt. I would have got in touch with you, but you're kind of hard to track down. If you wouldn't have said something on the street down there, I wouldn't have even recognized you"

"Yeah, well, you know I can't keep in one form for too long. Unless you count this one."

There was a silence after this comment, and then Teddy continued.

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about Matt. I've been working on something. It's a cure for... um... your... condition. It's--"

"A cure! You have a cure! Teddy how--"

"Just listen Matt. I don't have the cure. But I know how to make it. The only problem is, well, the chemicals to make it are kind of expensive. And as you can see," Teddy motioned his hand around the apartment, "money is kind of a problem for me."

"It won't be Teddy! I can get you as much as you need! I'll just rob a couple of stores and banks! It won't be too hard! I mean, look at me! Nothing can stop me!"

"Listen Matt, I don't need you to do anythin--"

"Wait a minute. I can't just go out and rob places. He'll get me like he did last time.'

"Who?"

"The damn Batman, that's who! But if I take out the Batman first, he can't stop me from taking the money."

“Matt, I don’t think you should get Batm-”

But Clayface was not listening. “It’s perfect! I’ll think of a plan to trap the Batman, and then go and rob a few places. I’ll get you the money, you get the chemicals, and then make the cure!”

Clayface hurried out the door.

“Matt, wait!” Teddy saw his friend walk down the hallway and into the elevator, trapped in his own thoughts.

Gotham City, Now

The Batman lay nearly unconscious in front of the monster known as Clayface.

“You’re not stoppin’ me this time. Teddy and me can’t fail.”

As fast as he could in the condition he was in, the Dark Knight reached for his grappling hook in his utility belt.

“Bye Batman, nothing personal, but I want my life back.” Saying this, Clayface raised his right hand high into the air, with his shaping it into the form of a hammer. Before he could bring his hand down, the Batman propelled his grappling hook directly up at the monster. The hook shot straight through Matt Hagen, and then caught the edge of the rooftop. Batman then pushed a button on his end of the line, which sent his body soaring into and out the other side of Clayface.

Batman was then on the roof as the big brown beast screamed, half in pain and half in anger.

“No!” he roared. “Lupus and me are doing this and you can’t stop us!” Batman now had a full name of the accomplice of Matt Hagen: Teddy Lupus. After he dealt with Clayface, Batman would track down and deal with Lupus.

As Clayface scaled the building, Batman jumped the gap to the building on the other side of the street. When he landed on the next rooftop, he hit

a button on his belt. Clayface followed Batman's lead, and soared across the night sky and onto the next building, landing with a tremendous thud. It was now a strange version of follow the leader, and today the follower was in for a big surprise.

Batman quickly made his way down to the ally between this and another building, and had only a few more seconds to get Clayface where he wanted him to. Making his way to the street, the Batman was again followed by Clayface, who made his way into the open street. Safely on the sidewalk, the Batman turned and saw the mud monster struck violently by his trademark vehicle, the Batmobile, which sent clay everywhere. The car stopped on a command from Batman's belt, and for a few seconds, there was nothing but silence.

Then, slowly, the mud began to regroup.

Thinking quickly as always, the Batman grabbed for a Batarang and quickly hurled it at a nearby fire-hydrant, which fired tons of water at the the yet formed clay. Much of the clay was sent into nearby drainage gates, but Batman managed to secure a vast amount under a trashcan from the ally, which would make sure Clayface couldn't fully reform when he regrouped somewhere in the sewer.

The Dark Knight, hearing the police cars on the way, stayed in the darkness of shadows. He would inform the police of what had happen, and ensure that the remaining clay would be kept at the police station.

Epilogue One

Teddy Lupus was a mess in his apartment. He didn't know what to do. If he left and Matt came back, he would no doubt have to be on the run for the rest of his life. And if—

It suddenly was very cold in Teddy's apartments. He didn't open the window did he? Probably just his nerves. It was time to pack a suitcase and get out of here. He was making his way toward his closet when he heard it.

“Teddy Lupus. We need to talk.”

The shadows seemed to be talking, but Teddy had a feeling about who it was.

“Wh-? I-?”

“You’re a friend of Matt Hagen. An accomplice. You had something to do with what he did tonight.”

“No! I didn’t! I was trying to help! I had a cure for him you see. I was going to change his life. But we needed money, and... ”

“And Hagen was going to steal it. Not a big surprise. But you didn’t have a cure, did you?”

“What? How-”

“I’ve been here longer than you think. I’ve done some searching, and there’s no cure. There’s not any scientific work. You just needed money, but you didn’t want to steal it yourself. You knew Hagen would be desperate enough to get it without any real proof. You were his friend Teddy, how could you do that?”

Teddy Lupus was crying as he struggled to find the words. “I just needed some money. I thought I could find a cure afterwards. I-”

“Save it. Just to let you know Teddy, I’ve been recording this. I’m going to drop the tape off at the police station, and let them work out the charges. I suggest you don’t try to run, because you don’t want me to come find you again. Is that clear?”

Teddy was shocked, and only answered after thirty seconds of horrible silence. “Please, I don’t want to go to jail.”

There was no one around to hear his plea.

Epilogue Two

Gotham Sewers

A half of a man is waiting in the darkness and filth of the Gotham sewers. He feels empty and barely has the strength to stand. Even though he is incomplete, he is sure it will not always be so. The rest of him will catch up. All he can do now is wait...

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Food for the mind