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Music from the motion pictures *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) composed and conducted by Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard.

G R A P H I C

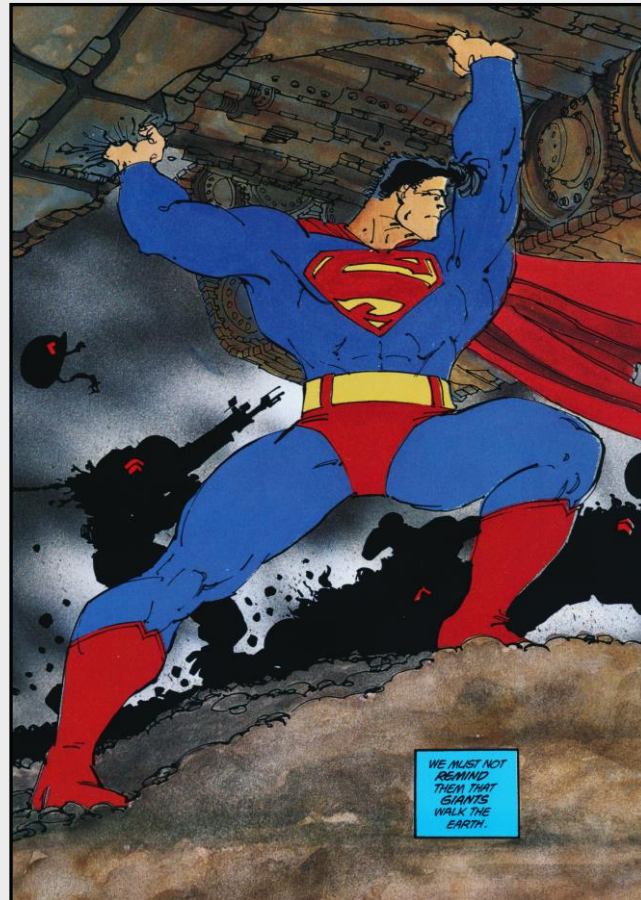
N O V E L S

POSTMODERN
LITERATURE
FALL 2014
MR. QUERINO
A.R.H.S.

Artwork from THE DARK KNIGHT
RETURNS by FRANK MILLER

The image features a dark blue background with a large, jagged black silhouette of the Batman logo on the left side. A bright yellow lightning bolt strikes diagonally across the center. In the top right corner, a small black silhouette of a hand is visible. The text "BATMAN created by BOB KANE" is printed in a black, sans-serif font on the right side of the image.

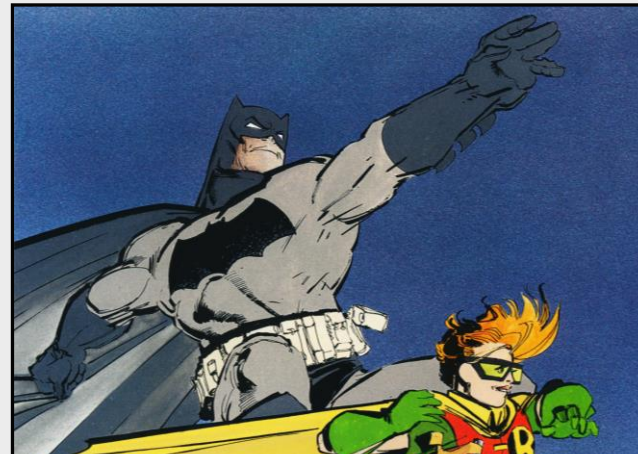
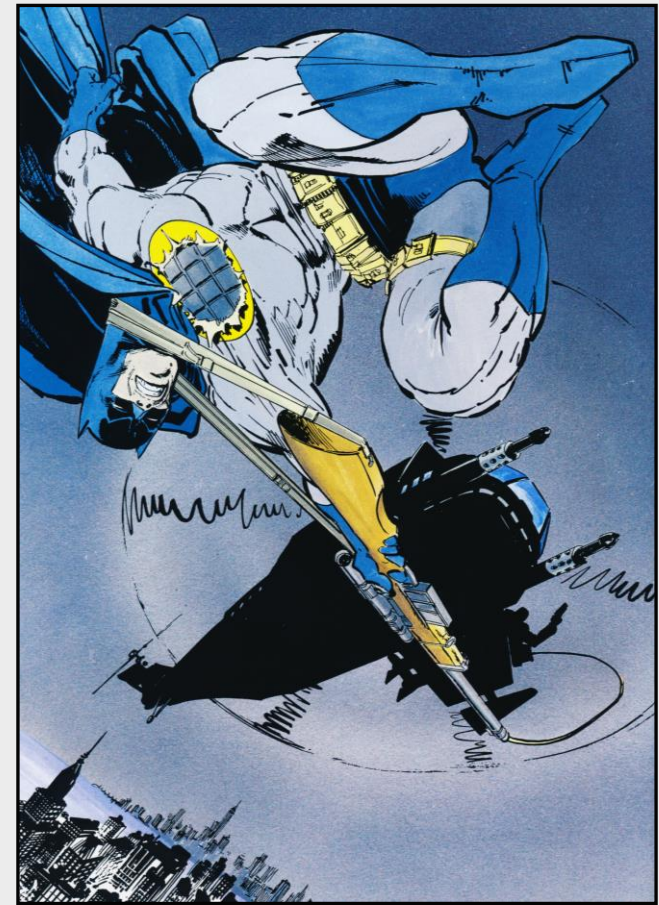
BATMAN created by
BOB KANE

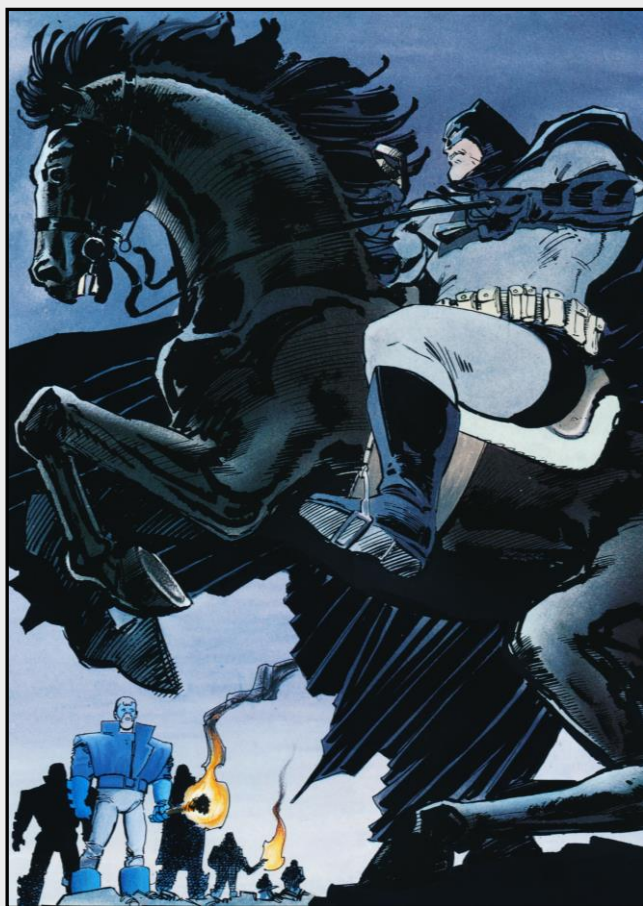
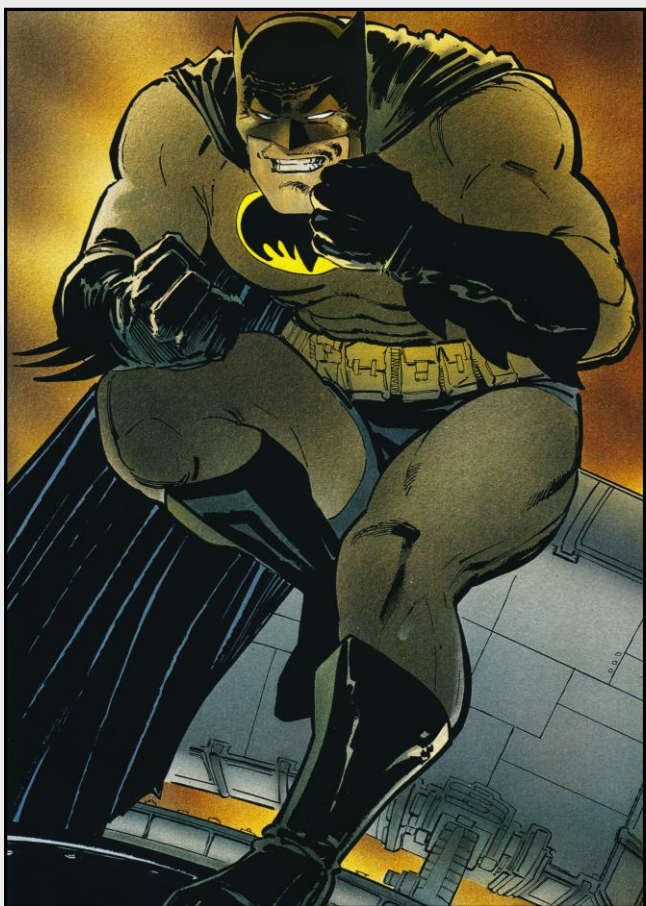


FRANK MILLER'S THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS 1986

DC Comics | 1 volume | 192 pages

The Dark Knight Returns was a landmark in comics writing and the most influential Batman story ever published. Frank Miller's re-imagining of comic book icons established the tone and character of DC Comics in general and of Batman specifically for the two decades since its publication. Glowing reviews in *Spin* and *Rolling Stone* helped Miller's work bridge the gap between comic shops and mainstream book stores.

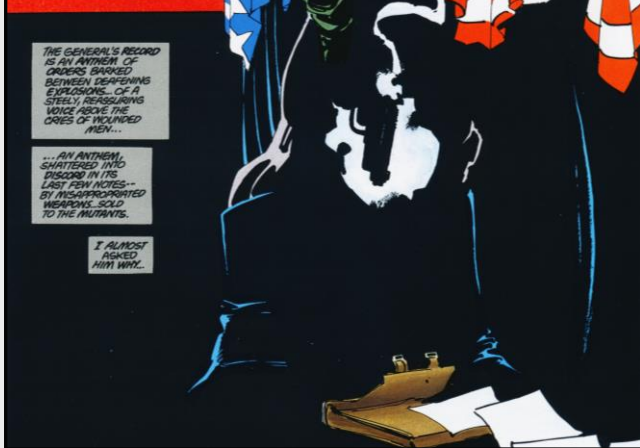




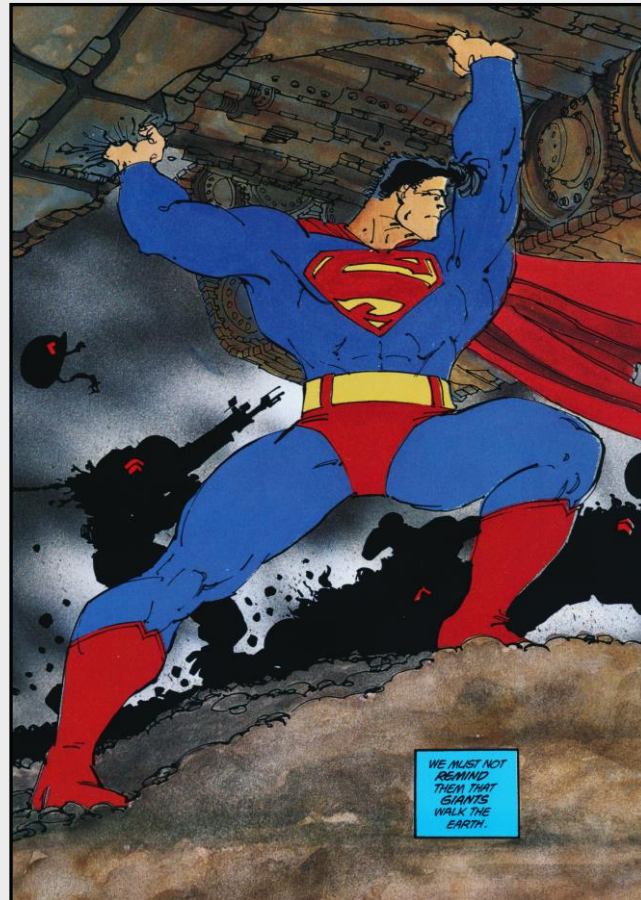
BEHIND THE BRIGHT COLORS AND CLEAN LINES

The Dark Side of Gotham

The Gotham City underworld is a dark and dangerous place, filled with crime and corruption. It is the dark side of Gotham, the side that Batman must face to protect the city.



The stylized artwork and new production standards for *The Dark Knight Returns* serve as well as the narrative to question the traditional superhero story. Impressed by the quality of French albums, Miller insisted on the best production values ever seen in American comic books: card covers, good paper and printing, and moody, fully painted colors by his wife Lynn Varley, which raised the bar—very high.





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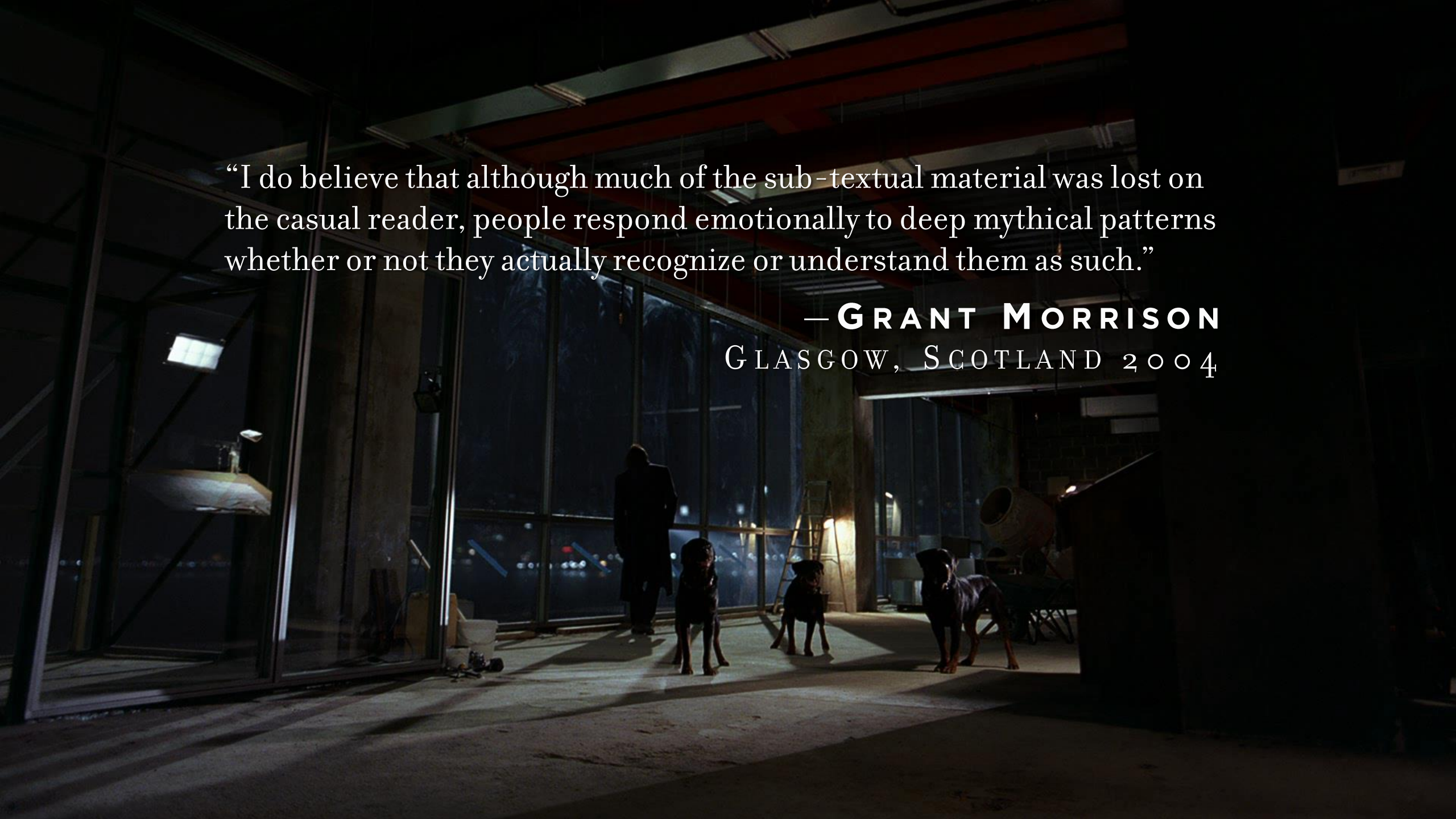
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“More than any other villain, the Joker reflects Batman himself as a funhouse distortion, a converse of who and what he is. The laughing, jesting, brightly colored Joker contrasts with the grim, dark Batman. The Joker is the Joker, no alter ego. Under the surface there’s only more Joker. He gives no history except inconsistent lies. When he finally considers the impact of his demand that Batman unmask, he retracts the threat and demands that Batman’s identity remain undisclosed. He wants a Batman who has no other self, a Dark Knight whose only deeper layer is further darkness.”

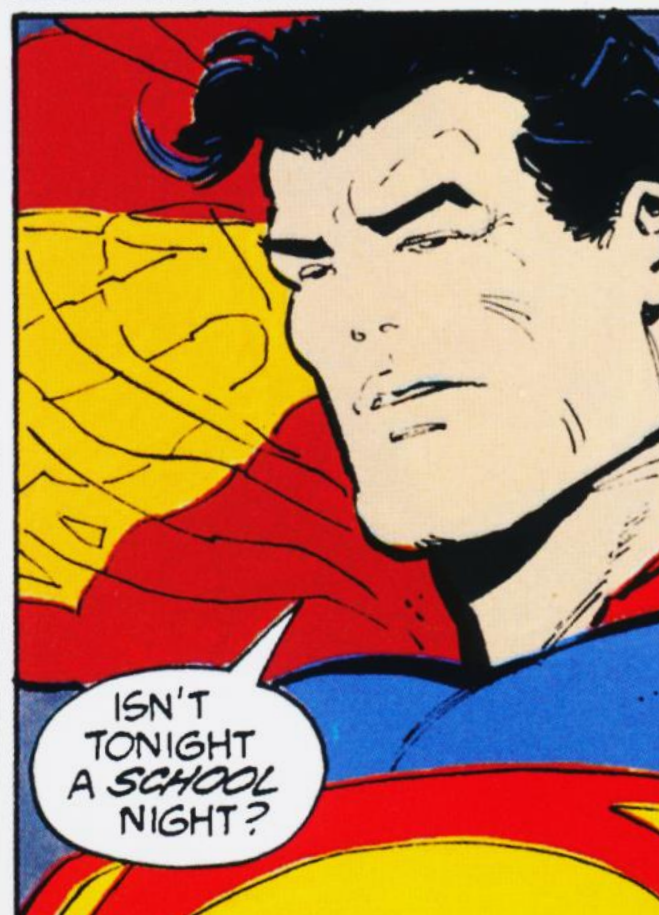
—**TRAVIS LANGLEY**

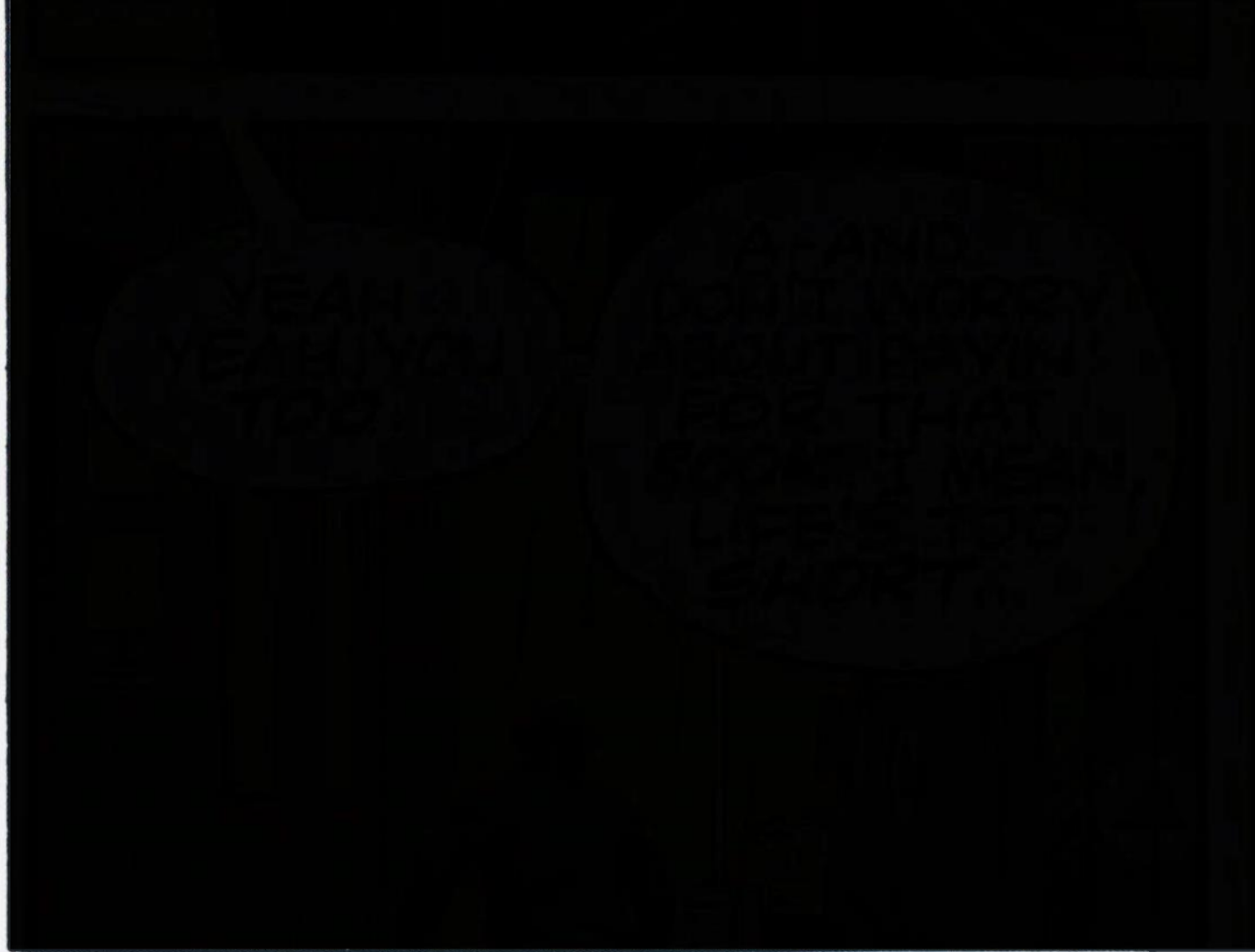
BATMAN AND PSYCHOLOGY, 2013

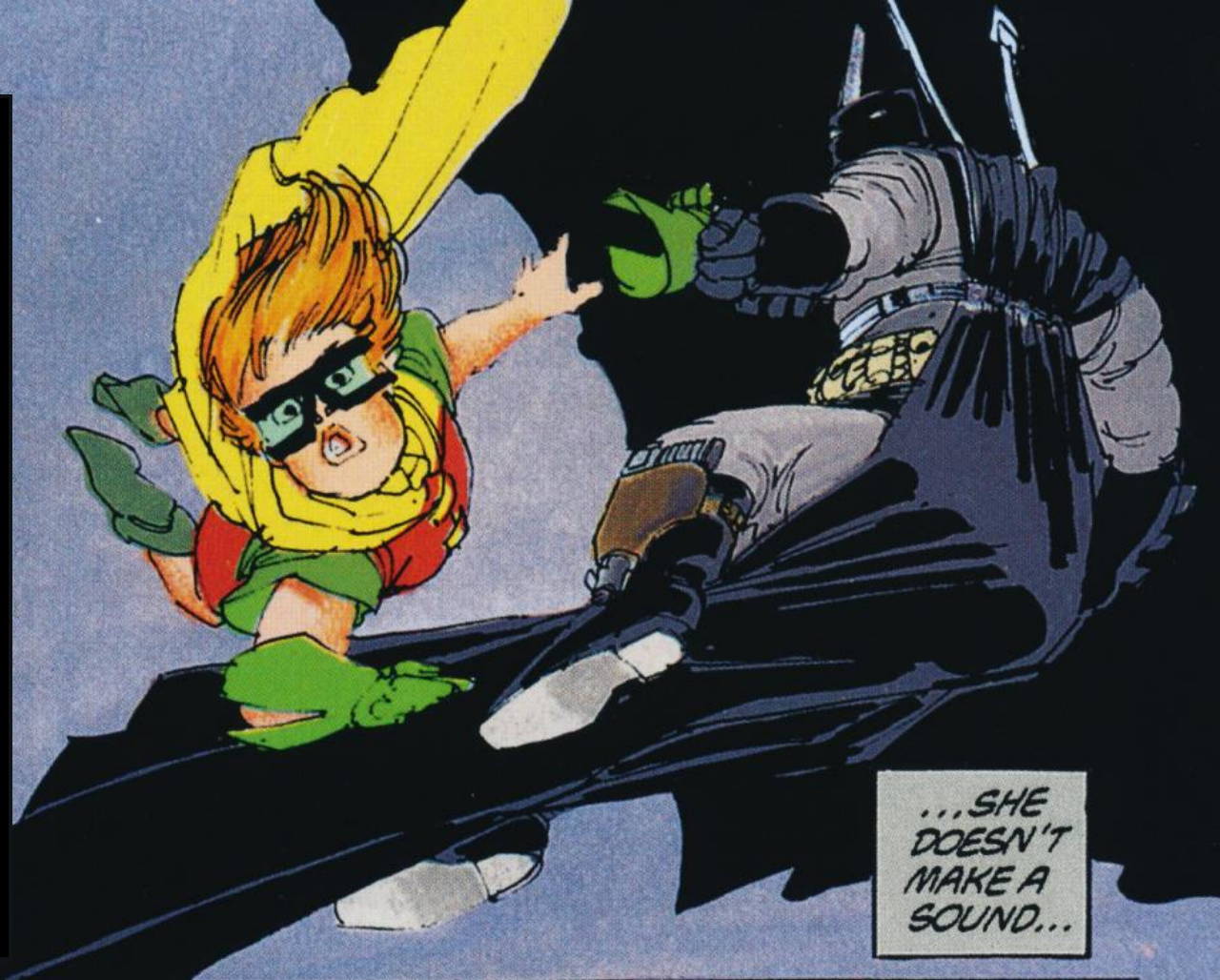


“I do believe that although much of the sub-textual material was lost on the casual reader, people respond emotionally to deep mythical patterns whether or not they actually recognize or understand them as such.”

— **GRANT MORRISON**
GLASGOW, SCOTLAND 2004





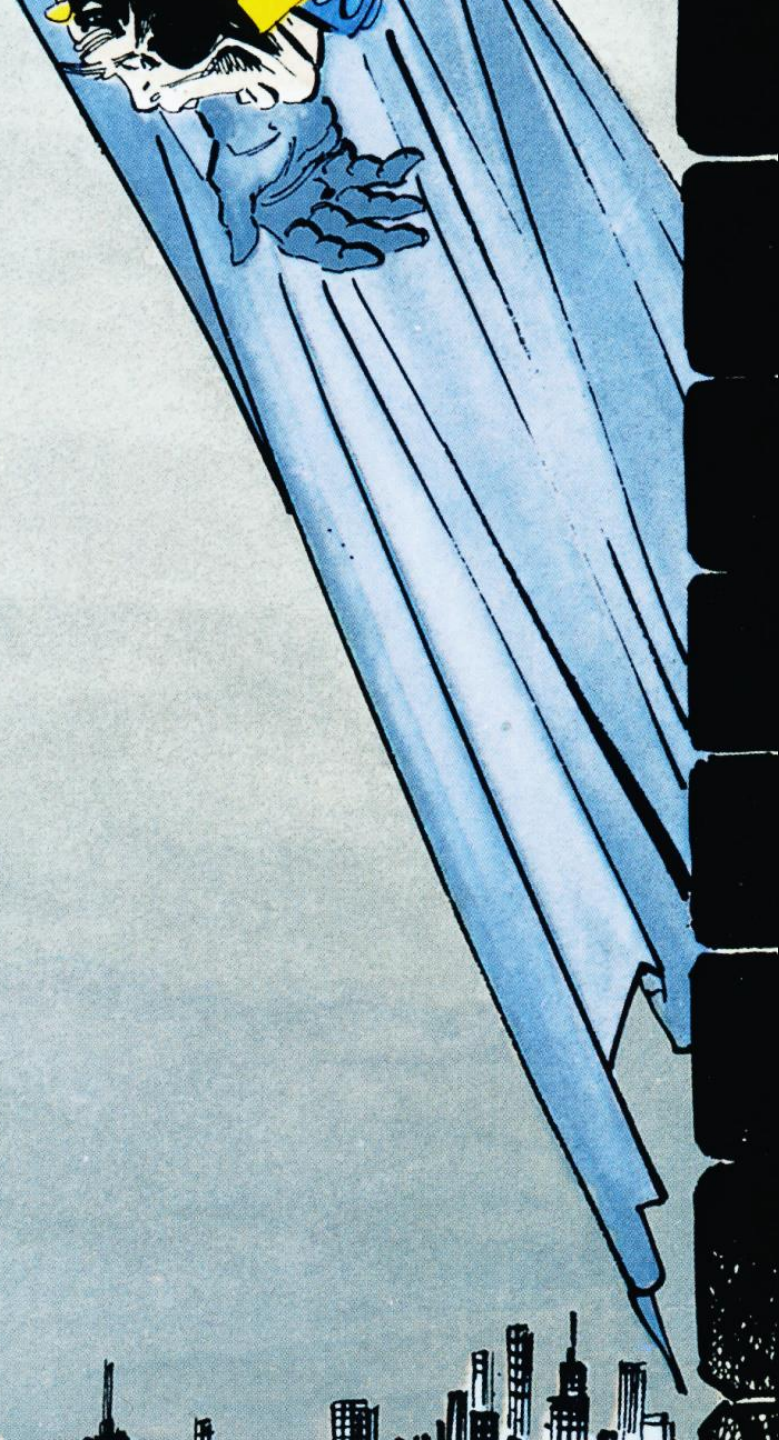




THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

Graphic novels are not easy to define, as they are interdisciplinary, indeed antidisciplinary, phenomenon, nudging us usefully out of accustomed habits of thought and into productive gray areas where various disciplines—such as literature, art, and mass communications—overlap and inform one another.

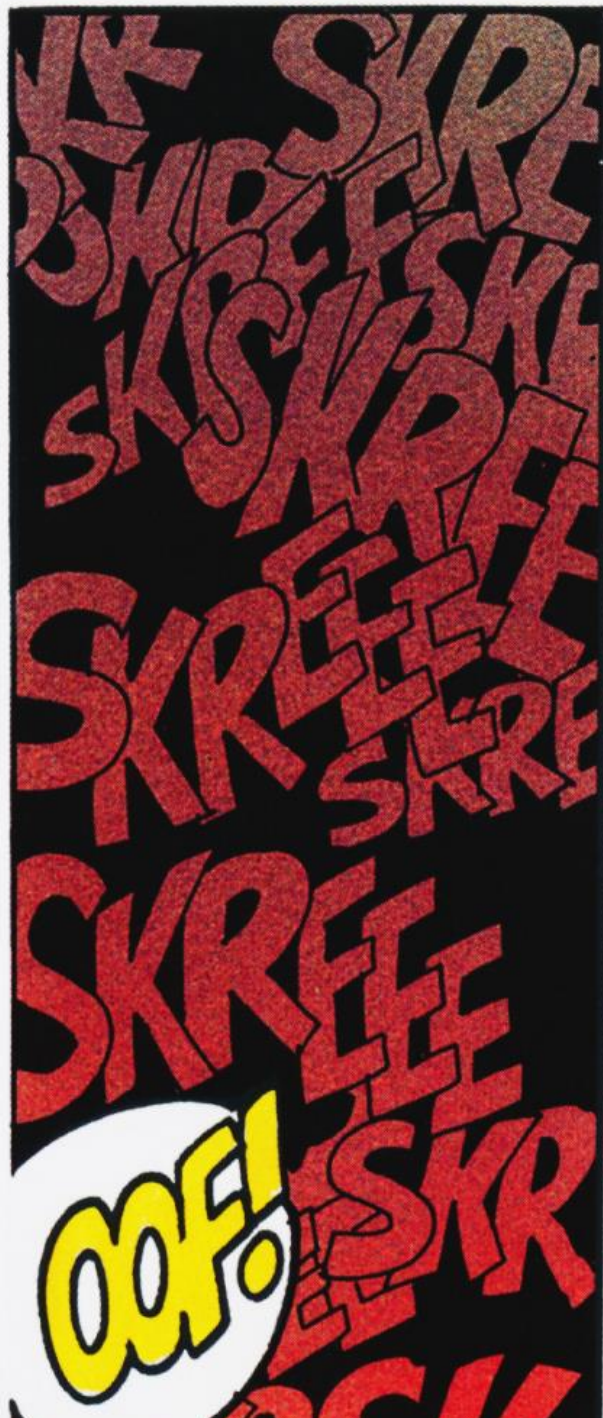
Unlike other words invented in the past in an effort to overcome the stigmas of humor and childishness of the word “comics,” like “illustories,” “picto-fiction,” or “sequential art,” the term graphic novel has caught on. It has been around since 1964, when American comics critic and magazine publisher Richard Kyle coined it. Kyle was among the first to import and champion European comics. These came as revelations to him compared to the disposable, monthly stapled pamphlets on cheap newsprint that made up most of the American comic books. Kyle came up with “graphic



novel” to galvanize American creators and readers to aspire to similar ambition and sophistication. In America and internationally, this process has taken a long time.

When Will Eisner stepped off of America’s endless assembly-line of daily strips, he threw down the gauntlet to his peers in 1978 with his graphic novel, *A Contract with God*. Although the modern graphic novel, using words as well as visuals, began with Eisner’s *A Contract with God*, it was not until 1986-87, with the publication of Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’s *Watchmen* that this new, extended comics form reached a substantial readership.

Eisner left us in 2005, but he had the chance to see graphic novels resurface in this new century. This time it seems different. Their diversity and quality are stronger, the readership more curious and receptive, the media less hyperbolic. No passing craze or graphic novelties this time; a medium is coming into its own.





THEN...



...SOMETHING
SHUFFLES.
OUT OF SIGHT...



...SOMETHING
SUCKS THE
STALE AIR...



...AND
HISSES.

YOU LOVED IT SO MUCH...YOU
JUMPED AND DANCED LIKE A
FOOL...YOU REMEMBER...

...YOU REMEMBER THAT NIGHT--





TRUTH TO POWER

By JAMES OLSEN

There's this little saloon you'll find up and running and packed with patrons before most of us are ready for our morning coffee.

The joint's two subway levels beneath the streets of downtown Metropolis.

Step out at the Shuster stop on the southbound side, take two lefts, walk maybe fifteen feet and you're right on top of it.

But you could just as easily walk right past it and never know it was there.

There's no sign up. Not even a door. Just a dark hallway that looks like a good place for a murder.

Take a breath. Follow the cigarette stink and the bluesy jukebox sounds inside.

It's a tolerable little gin mill. Get there before the morning rush, and you're likely to find a stool.

Your first clue that there's something wrong about the place is the bartender. You'll never forget his face. He's a hulk of a guy who's seen way too much. A broken man with laser-red eyes. His forehead's a fractured cantilever, an avalanche waiting to happen. His skin's gone a little gray from its natural char-
treuse.

He's got a voice like Coke bottles getting ground up under a door.

James (Jimmy) Olsen is a fictional character who appears mainly in DC Comics' Superman stories. He is a young photojournalist working for *The Daily Planet*. An unnamed office boy with a bow tie makes a brief appearance in the story "Superman's Phony Manager" published in *Action Comics* #6 (November 1938), which comics historians say is Jimmy Olsen's first appearance.

Continued from page A1

tures, nefarious world conquerors, you name it.

He never stops snapping his damn fingers. And he never stops sucking back the sauce and jabbering about the old days. The glory days.

The "Golden Age" he calls it.

The age of heroes.

And all the other old farts, they grunt and nod and grumble at each other, swapping old jokes they've

up under a door.

His name is Jones.

He says he's from Mars.

And nobody tells him he's nuts, not one of these sad old barflies. It's not that they're scared of him, either.

They've seen and done things that are supposed to be impossible.

They're not the kind to out-and-out brag about being able to bench-press cars or run faster than a speeding bullet or jump up into the air and stay there. Nah. Not these guys.

These guys, they've got nothing to prove. Been there. Done that.

Except for old "Snapper" always at the same stool at the end, living up to his nickname, snapping his fingers in time to the music and rattling on and on and on about mighty powers, globe-spanning adven-

Continued on page A24

swapped a thousand times. Even fat, beet-red old "Penguin" chirps out a curse or two before bursting into tears.

Then they get talking. And if you've got half a brain, you listen.

They talk about amazing adventures, sounding like a bunch of retired car mechanics the whole time.

They talk about a Man of Steel. An Amazon Princess.

But they never talk about the mean one. The cruel one. The one who couldn't fly or bend steel in his bare hands. The one who scared the crap out of everybody and laughed at all of the rest of us for being the envious cowards we were.

No, they never talk about him. Say his name and watch Dibny's face sag so bad his jaw hits the bar.

Not a man among them wants to hear about Batman.

Was he quietly assassinated? Or did he just decide we weren't worth the grief?

The question hangs in the air for a moment or two, then Jones springs for a round for everybody and himself.

They get talking again. About the old days. The glory days.

They remember.

They were right there. In the thick of it.

Back then.

It wasn't so long ago.

We had heroes.

TRUTH TO POWER

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He's got a voice like Coke bottles getting ground up under a door.

Jones the Martian Manhunter, Lucas "Snapper" Carr, and Randolph Dibny were all members of The Justice League of America and fought alongside Superman and Batman.

Comics historians divide the history of American comic books into ages. These eras include the Golden Age (1938-1950), the Silver Age (1956-1970), and the Bronze Age (1970-1986). Although Miller couldn't have known it at the time, his "Dark Knight" would officially end the Bronze Age and usher in the Modern Age (1986-Present).

Continued from page A1

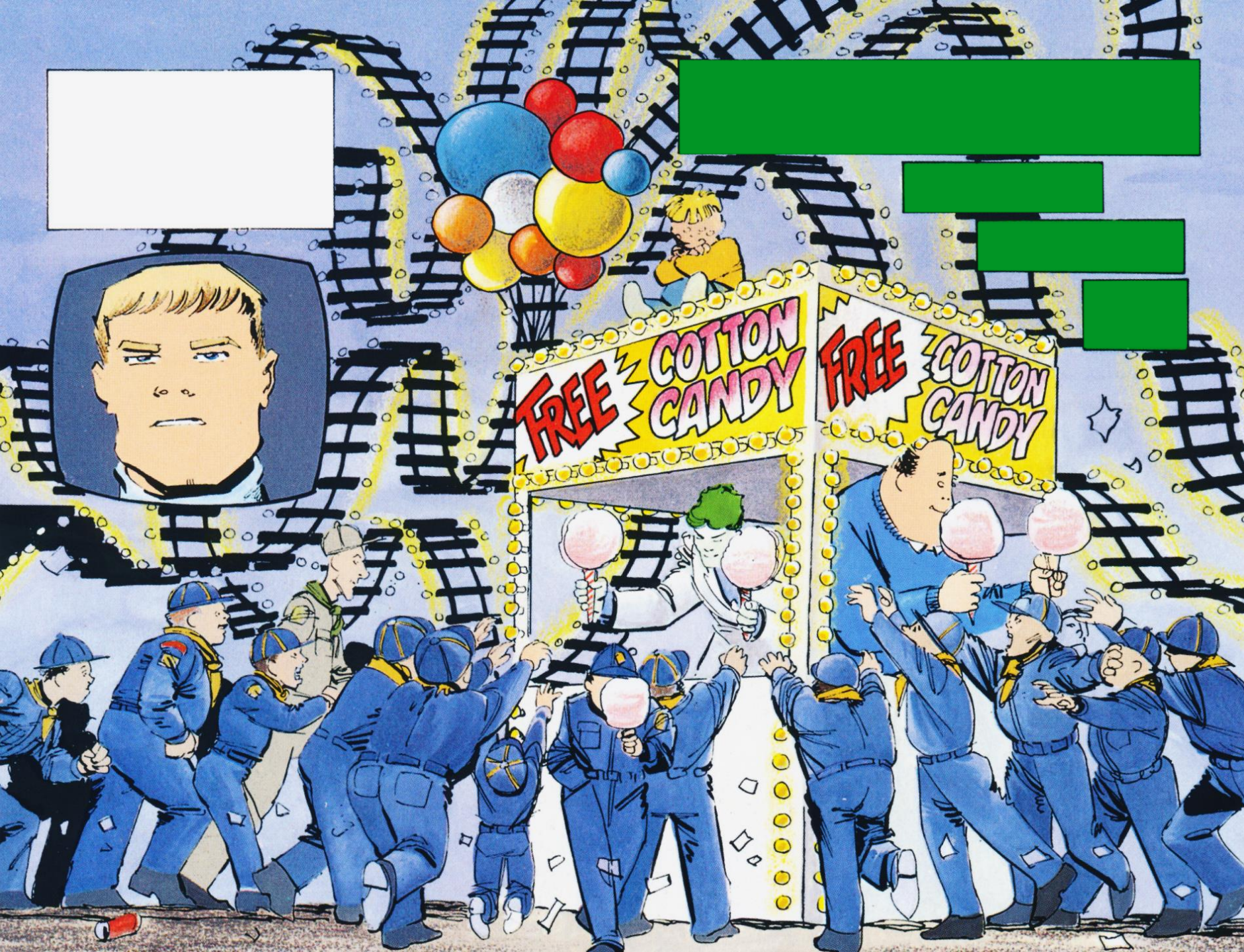
tures, nefarious world conquerors, you name it.

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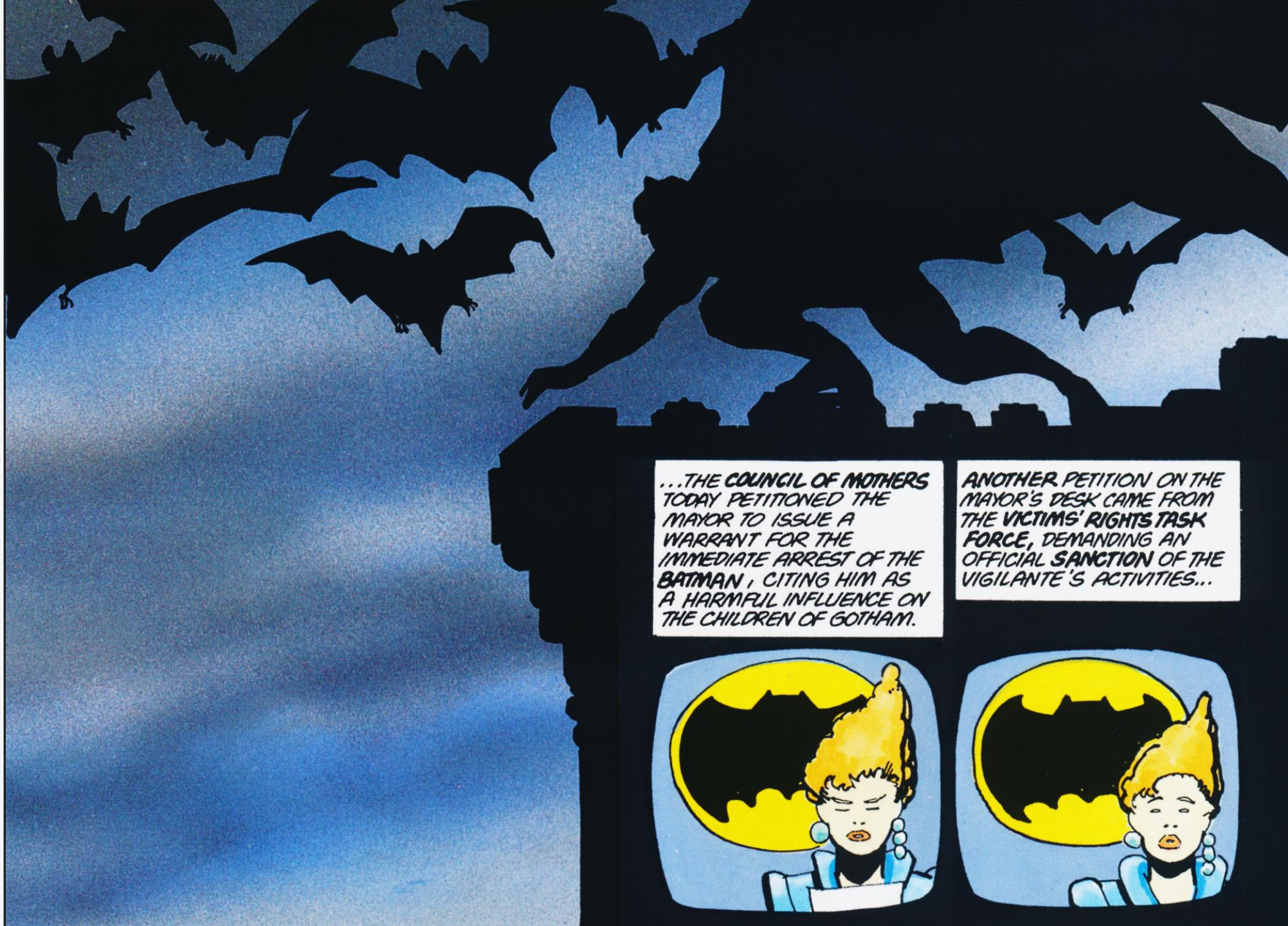
IN THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS, MILLER REPLACES THOUGHT BALLOONS WITH BOXED INTERIOR MONOLOGUE AND FURTHER FRAGMENTS THE NARRATIVE WITH CLIPS FROM TELEVISION BROADCASTS. THE CAPTIONS ALLOW THE READER TO HEAR THE CHARACTERS' THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCE THEIR EMOTIONS WHILE BEING ABLE TO SEE THE ACTION TAKING PLACE IN THE ILLUSTRATIONS.

IN THE PANEL TO THE LEFT, TRY TO NOT ONLY FIGURE OUT THE ACTION, BUT ALSO FILL IN THE DIALOGUE FROM EACH CHARACTER. WHAT IS THE NEWSCASTER REPORTING IN MILLER'S ALTERNATE 80'S HISTORY? WHAT IS THE JOKER THINKING AS HE HANDS OUT COTTON CANDY TO A TROOP OF BOY SCOUTS?

THE **AMERICAN PRESIDENT**, WHEN VIEWED OVER MILLER'S **SATIRICAL PEN**, IS A **REAGAN-ESQUE** FIGURE WHO MASKS HIS HAWKISH INTENTIONS BEHIND A FOLKSY, MEDIA-FRIENDLY VENEER.

MILLER'S USE OF **SATIRE** CAN ALSO BE SEEN IN THE COMIC BOOK'S **MEDIA** OUTLETS, WHICH ARE MORE CONCERNED WITH SENSATION-ALISM THAN WITH INFORMING AND ADVISING THE PUBLIC.

THE CHARACTER OF DR. BERNARD WOLPER CARICATURES POP PSYCHOLOGY, WHILE IN BOTH **DARK KNIGHT** BOOKS, MILLER SATIRIZES THE VACUITY OF MUCH YOUTH CULTURE AND OF MUCH OF THE **AMERICAN PUBLIC** IN GENERAL.



...THE COUNCIL OF MOTHERS TODAY PETITIONED THE MAYOR TO ISSUE A WARRANT FOR THE IMMEDIATE ARREST OF THE BATMAN, CITING HIM AS A HARMFUL INFLUENCE ON THE CHILDREN OF GOTHAM.

ANOTHER PETITION ON THE MAYOR'S DESK CAME FROM THE VICTIMS' RIGHTS TASK FORCE, DEMANDING AN OFFICIAL SANCTION OF THE VIGILANTE'S ACTIVITIES...



A close-up, stylized illustration of a man's face. He is wearing a dark fedora with a black band and round, thin-rimmed glasses. His expression is serious, with a slight frown. He has dark hair and is wearing a dark suit jacket. The background is a textured, grey stone wall. A red banner runs horizontally across the bottom of the image, containing a large white number '2' in a circular frame on the left and the text 'CHANNEL 2 NEWS' in yellow on the right.

2

CHANNEL 2 NEWS

YET FOR ALL THEIR **SATIRICAL** MOMENTS, MILLER'S DARK KNIGHT BOOKS OFFER A SERIOUS TREATMENT OF **SOCIAL** AND **POLITICAL** ISSUES. HIS WORKS CRITIQUE AN AMERICAN CULTURE, A CAPITALIST CULTURE IN WHICH ENTERTAINMENT TRUMPS INFORMATION AND POLITICIANS PURSUE DESTRUCTIVE POLICIES WITH LITTLE OR NO REGARD FOR THE WELFARE OF LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE. ADDITIONALLY, MILLER REFLECTS THE COLD-WAR ANXIETIES OF THE 1980S. IN THE MIDST OF THESE CONCERNS STAND **SUPERHEROES** WHO ARE CONFLICTED AND CONFLICTING FIGURES, TRYING TO DO WHAT THEY BELIEVE IS RIGHT WHEN THE MORAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES THAT SEEMED SO SIMPLE IN EARLIER COMICS ARE NO LONGER CLEAR-CUT.



SO MANY
FACES--SO
DIFFERENT
FROM ONE
ANOTHER...

...SO FEW
SMILES...

CLASS DISCUSSION

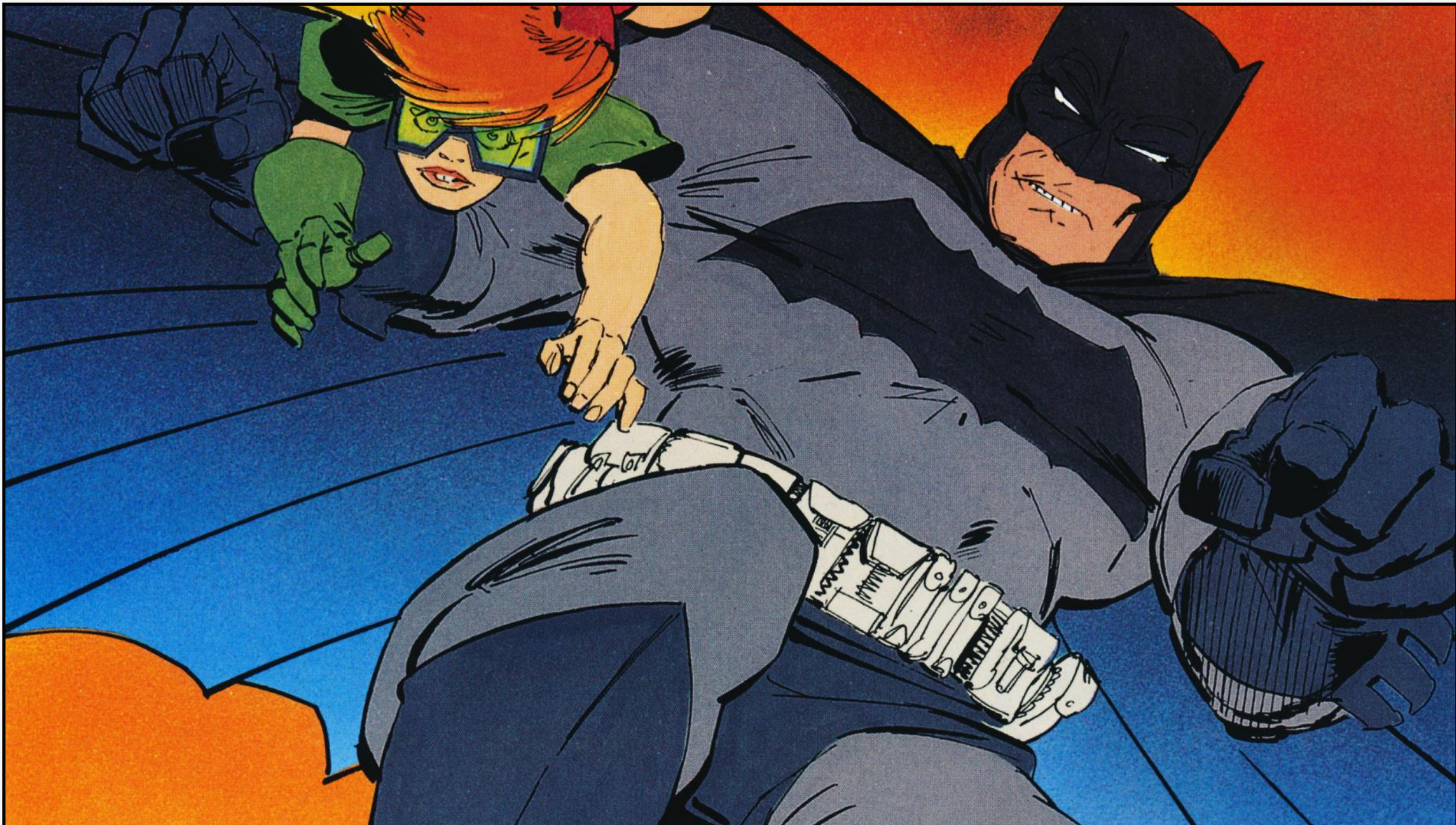
Why do you think Frank Miller chose to have a girl be Robin when all previous Robins were boys?

Much like the dual nature of good and evil, that one cannot exist without the other, was the Joker's recovery fully possible without Batman's return?

Miller portrays Superman as being something of a sell-out to the government, doing whatever is asked of him without question. Do you believe that Superman has sold out, or do you think that he is merely working within the system to accomplish what he otherwise could not?

Why does Batman so strongly oppose the use of lethal methods—particularly guns—to fight crime? Do you agree or disagree with his stance?







GRAPHIC POSTMODERNISM

The arrival of comics into literary study reflects and intensifies a larger movement in the discipline, away from modernist notions of purity and toward a postmodern sense of how literary and artistic forms impinge on and interact with one another, making firm divisions impossible. By using a superheroeic image-narrative to illustrate a set of relatively sedate, non-action-

packed reminiscences, Miller employs the postmodern practice of pastiche, best described as a blank parody or neutral mimicry. Graphic novels display an impressive pastiche of styles: from the mix of intricacy and black-and-white starkness to the subtle, saturated stylistics; from realistic representations to iconic cartoons; from ornate extravagance to bleak

minimalism; from large, simple, linear panel arrangements to complex, multidirectional flowcharts of tiny panels best read with a magnifying glass. Because graphic novels feature a rich yet accessible array of postmodern characteristics, the texts are especially useful in illustrating key concepts of postmodernism for students of literature.

Another key element of postmodern texts is a newfangled disbelief in metanarratives, overarching stories or theories that claim universal properties of social life. In a vast variety of ways, Miller's work dismantles and repurposes the most dominant metanarrative in comics, that of the powerful superhero fighting for truth and good—the metanarrative that promises safety and salvation through faultless superheroes.

METANARRATIVE



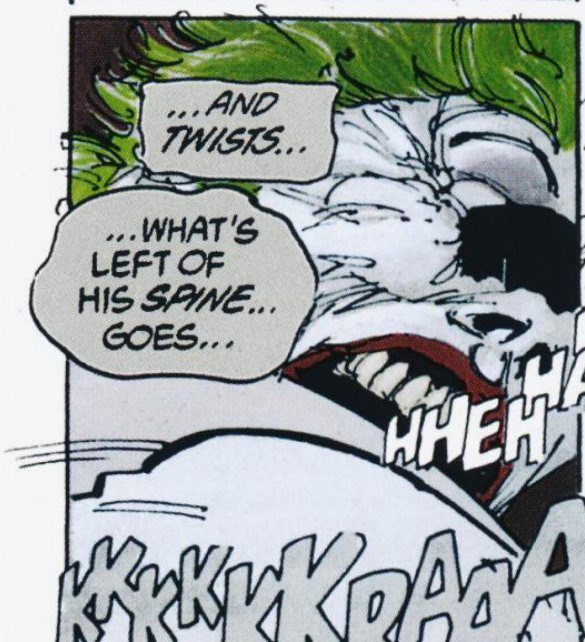
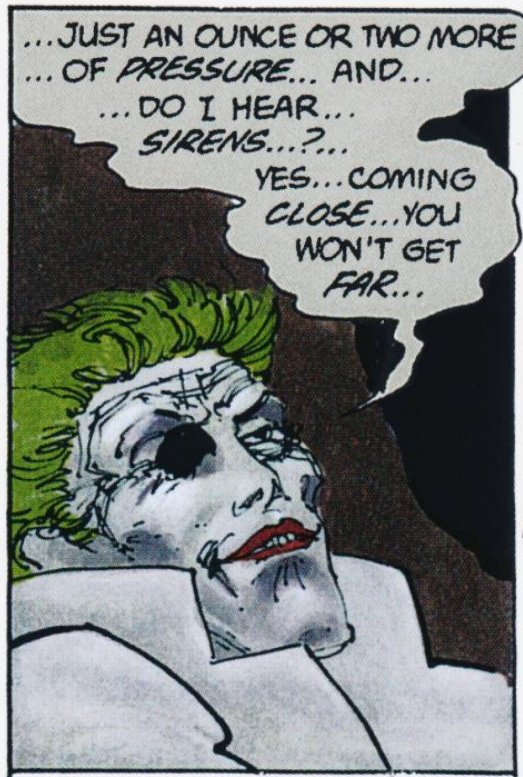


READING COMICS

You might be an avid book reader, but still genuinely “comics-illiterate.” In graphic novels, images and text arrive together, work together, and should be read together. There is no one rule, but in some combination you read words and pictures in tandem and in cross reference, one informing the other. Part of the knack of reading comics is being able to enter and move your eyes around inside

each panel, the equivalent to one sentence or more. You scan the text in every caption box, speech balloon, and thought cloud, moving within them from top left to bottom right. In *The Dark Knight Returns*, Miller uses a dense, four-by-four grid to instill claustrophobia and an adrenaline-pumping pulse. He interrupts this pace with full-page splashes and art bleeds to maximize the effect.

Panels
 Gutters
 Tiers
 Grids
 Speech
 Balloon
 Caption
 Sound
 Effects

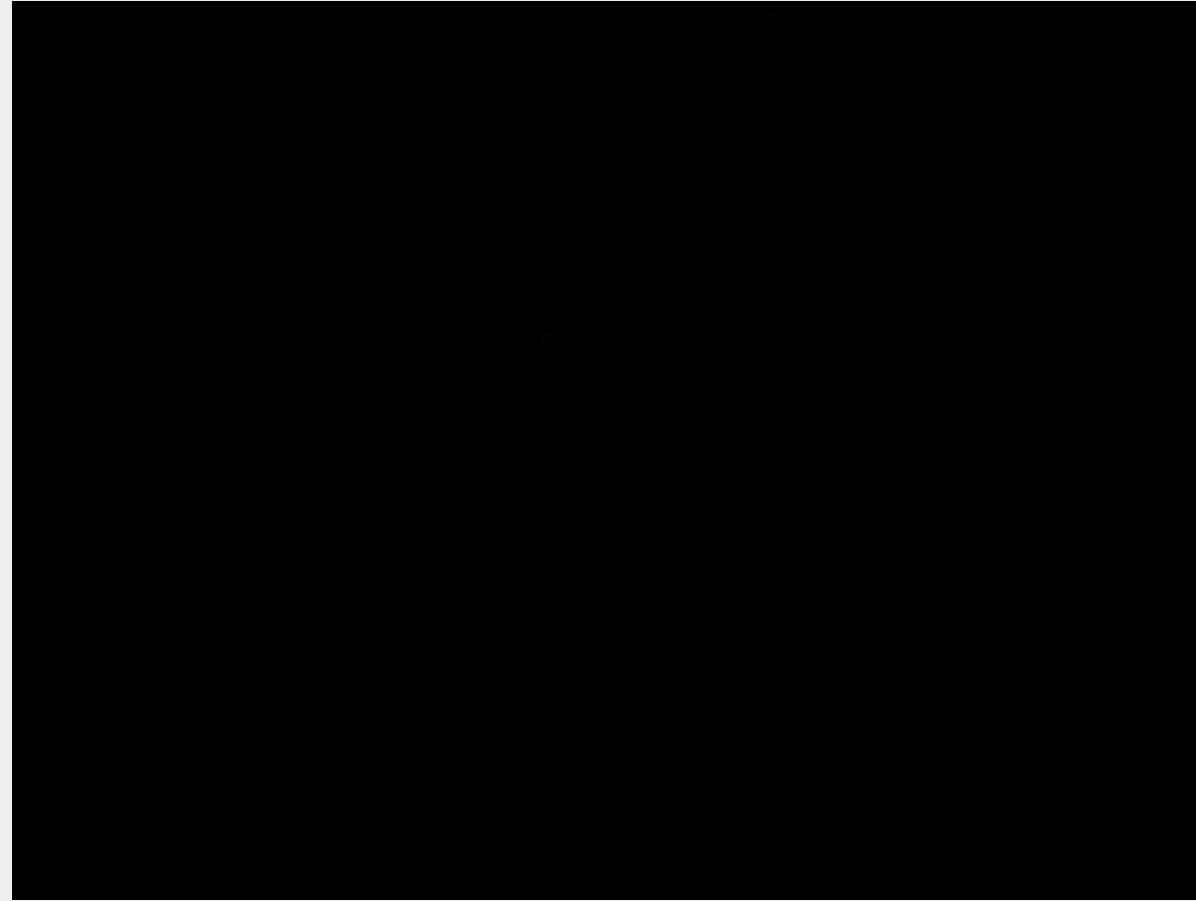
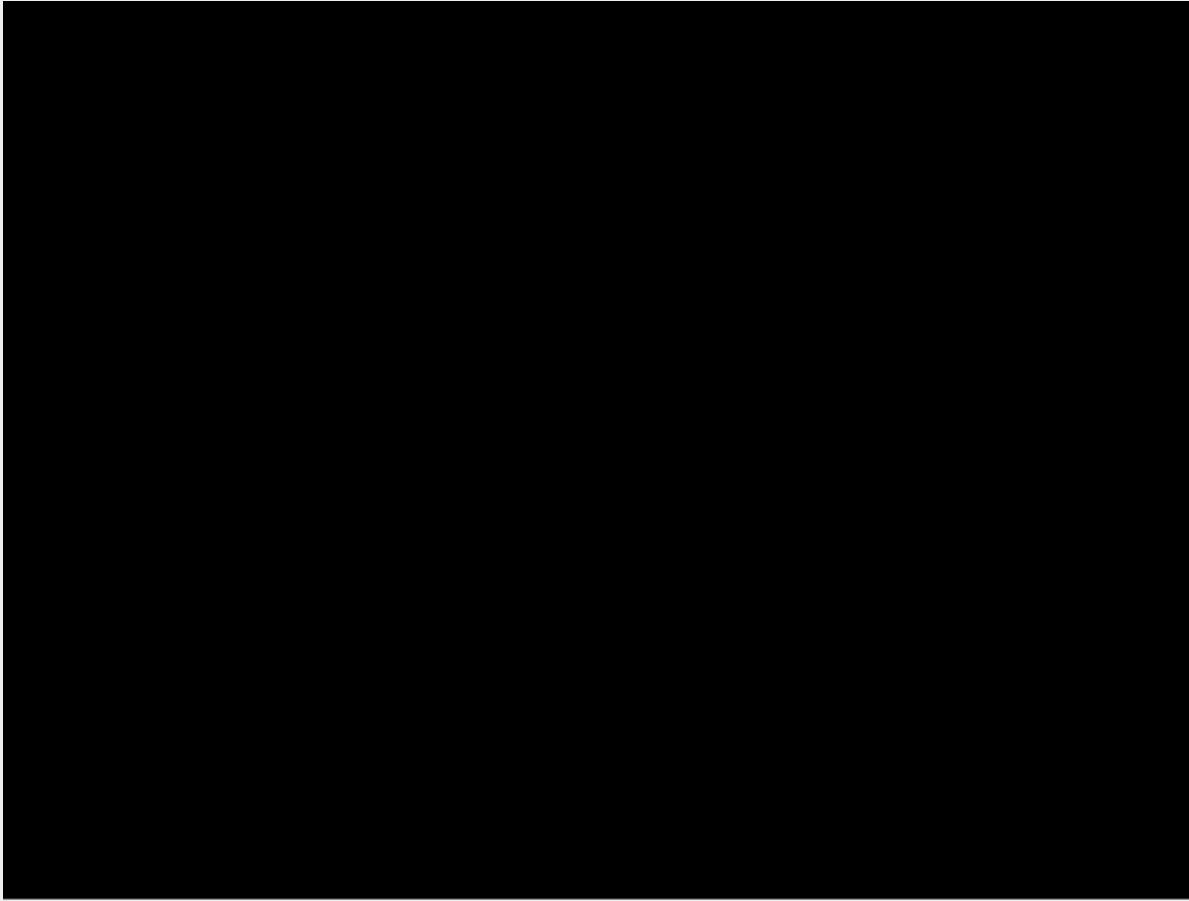




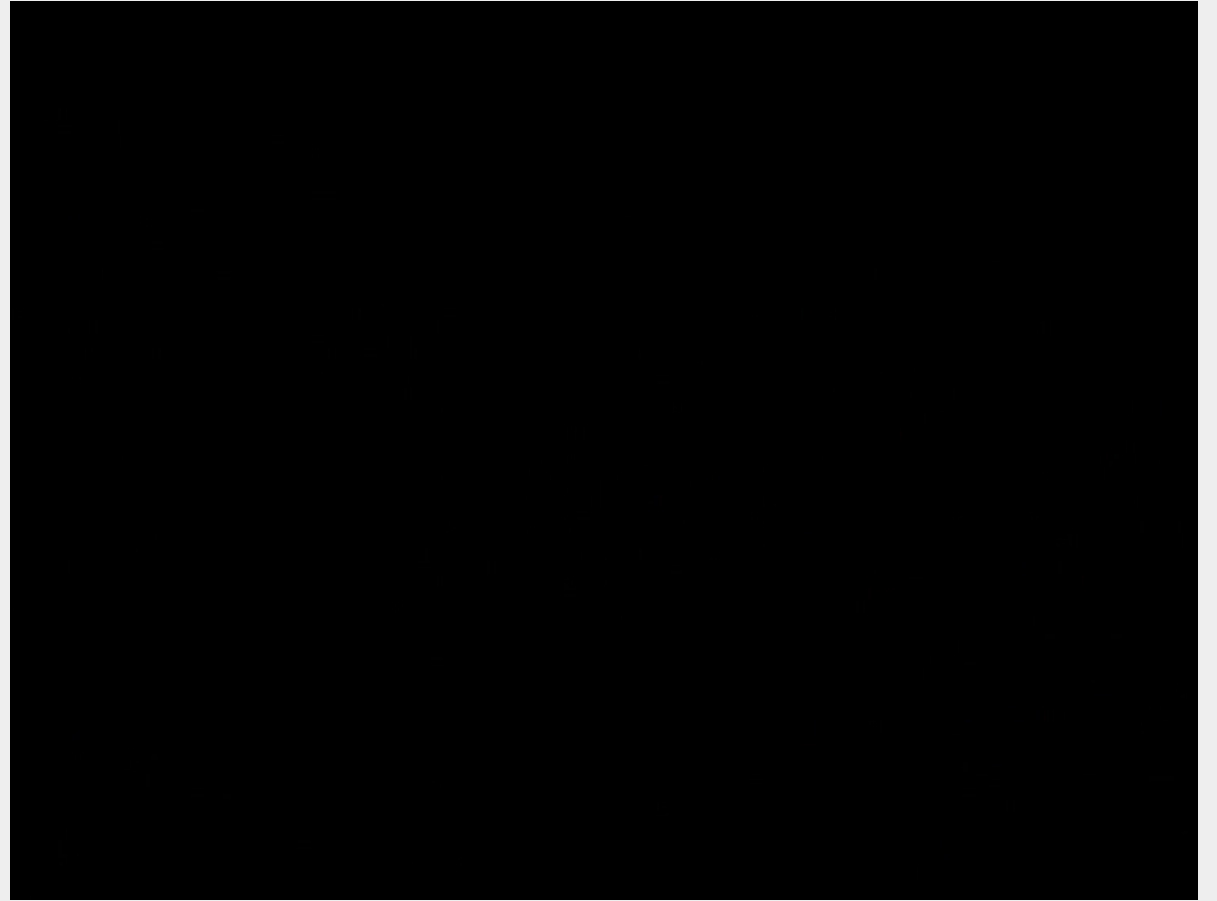
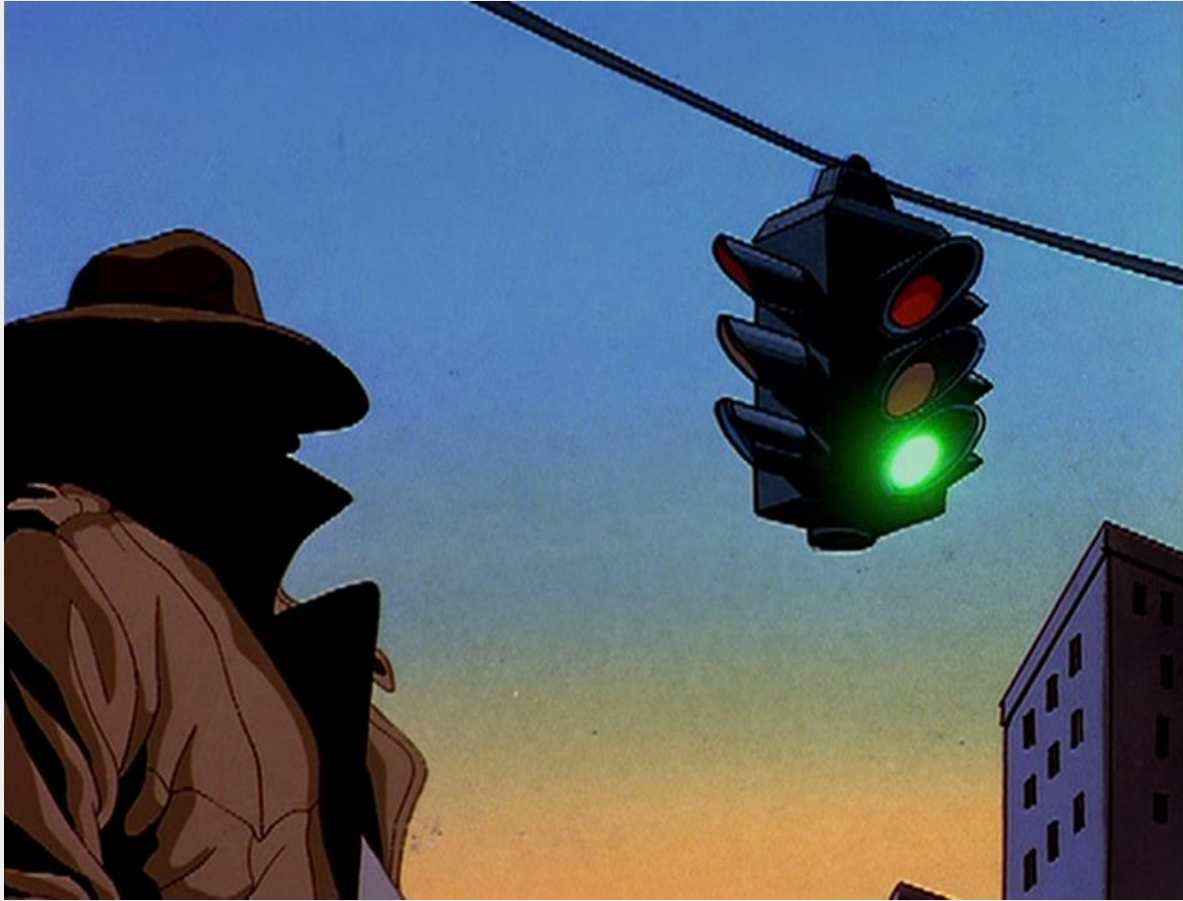
... WHATEVER'S IN
HIM RUSTLES AS
IT LEAVES.

...THE SIRENS ECHO
THROUGH THE TUNNEL...
TIRES SCREECH...
...THE WORLD
...IS GROWING
DARK...

... AND
COLD...



A **clown figure** working in continuous opposition to the well-wishing creator very often appears in myth and folktale, as accounting for the ills and difficulties of our existence in the world. Behind the makeup and costume, it is possible to see that the one cause yields within the frame of the world dual effects—good and evil. The Joker's story is not as naïve as it appears, and it is a conception inherent in every myth.



Universal too is the casting of the antagonist, the representation of evil, in the role of the clown. Devils—both the lusty thickheads and the sharp, clever deceivers—are often clowns. Though they may triumph in the world of space and time, both they and their work simply disappear when the mythological hero reappears from the darkness. What are other examples of this **devil-clown figure** in popular culture?



WHAT ARE ICONS?


Ours is an increasingly symbol-oriented culture. In the twenty-first century, visual iconography may finally help us realize a form of universal communication. Society is inventing new symbols regularly, just as comics artists do, and these icons demand our participation to make them work. What do you see in the picture to the left? Few of you would say, “Just a drawing, pencil and ink.” Readers, not just Frank Miller, recreate the Batman symbol projected over Gotham moment by moment.

The word “icon” has many meanings. For the purpose of our study of graphic novels, “icon” means an image used to represent a



person, place, thing, or idea. This definition is significantly broader than the definition in your dictionary, but it is sufficient for helping us understand and define comics. The images we usually call symbols are one category of icon. These are the images we use to represent concepts, ideas, and philosophies. Then there are the icons of language, science, and communication—icons of the practical realm. And finally, the icons we call pictures: images designed to actually resemble their subjects.

But as resemblance varies, so does the level of iconic content. In other words, some pictures are just more iconic than others. Unlike letters and other non-pictorial icons, in pictures meaning is fluid and variable according to appearance.

A nighttime photograph of the New York City skyline, featuring the Manhattan Bridge in the foreground and the city's skyscrapers illuminated against a dark sky.

“The Batman thrives on continual reinterpretation, but I hope that the work of these three movies is ambitious and cohesive enough to stand the test of time as a distinct and notable interpretation of the great icon.”

— **CHRISTOPHER NOLAN**
NEW YORK CITY, OCT. 2013

