

# DETECTIVE COMICS #801

## “The One That Got Away”

Years back I wrote and did breakdowns for a 12-issue Batman run on *Detective Comics* called *City of Crime*. The original artist for the run was supposed to be the otherworldly Bill Sienkiewicz. We were going to bill it “Stray Bullets meets Stray Toasters!” Bill drew this incredible first issue, but then there were some delays and for various reasons that I'm not 100% sure on, Bill wasn't going to be able to finish the complete run. Because his style is so singular (even greats like Sam Kieth were reluctant to follow Bill), then Batman editor Bob Schreck and DC Comics decided to start over from issue 1 with a new artist. Those artist were Ramon Bachs and Nathan Massengill who drew the hell out of the book, and I'm super proud of the final product.

This is just a look at an alternate path the book may have taken.

Back then, Maria and I had just started a family and did not have the time as a two-person team to devote ourselves to Stray Bullets like we had been, and so, I went out in search of the dreaded “freelance work”. Right out of the box—jackpot! I felt like I had just walked out of the dream of doing SB right into the next *Dark Knight Returns*! Bill is one of those legendary artists who even while you're working with him it seems surreal-- “Is this really happening...to me?” constantly runs through your head. The comics industry's collective brain was going to melt when this shit dropped. It didn't work out that way. I love every inch of our final product, but unfortunately without Bill's marquee that screams “Important Event! Genius at work!” (and also I think because some of the higher ups at DC became frustrated with the project after its early delays) it ended up basically coming out unnoticed and was quickly forgotten. Years later I had heard DC was thinking about printing Bill's pages as a stand alone, and I contacted them about having Maria and I rewrite the dialogue to make it a self-contained story (which is, of course, our specialty). Again, it was a no go. DC had long ago dumped the files off of their server, and Bill had sold the art and later had a hard drive meltdown. The art to this was effectively gone. All I have (and what you'll see here) are a set of smaller-than-comic-sized printouts from low-res scans. They're incredible to look at, but nothing printable for a professional comic. So, unless the art turns up one day, or someone finds some fine photocopies, this is as good as it gets...and that's still pretty damn good.

I did breakdowns/layouts for the entire series including this issue. Ramon very much followed my breaks, which I am eternally grateful for, because it called for a hell of a LOT of drawing. Bill (and I wished for no less) did Bill. I'd like to think my drawings helped communicate the feel of issue along with the script and helped Bill create his masterful interpretation of the story. I still have the breakdowns for issues 2-12 of the series, but for some reason I don't have issue #1 (either misplaced or I vaguely remember them not making it back to me), but if you want to know what they looked like for this issue, go see Ramon's final version of #801.

There were a number of classic and new villains in the run, but the *real* antagonist of *City of Crime* is Gotham City herself (she's really Batman's only true equal), and when you look at the pages, you'll see how much Bill took that to heart. It's the most Byzantine, dark, grimy, and evil Gotham *ever* presented in *any* medium. Bill said he wanted the reader to be able to “see into the blackness”, and he poured his heart into it. The double spread on page 8/9 Bill drew 3 times. There was a single-page splash, a double-page B&W wash painting, and then this final. Each was better than the one before as he really worked to nail the city with surreal mounting aqueducts, crisscrossing wires, and twisting mazes of dark streets. (I'll update this PDF if I ever come across those alternate versions.) Bill's presence was felt throughout the run as his Gotham inspired and informed me in writing and laying out the rest of *City of Crime*.

Enjoy!

-David Lapham



# CITY OF CRIME



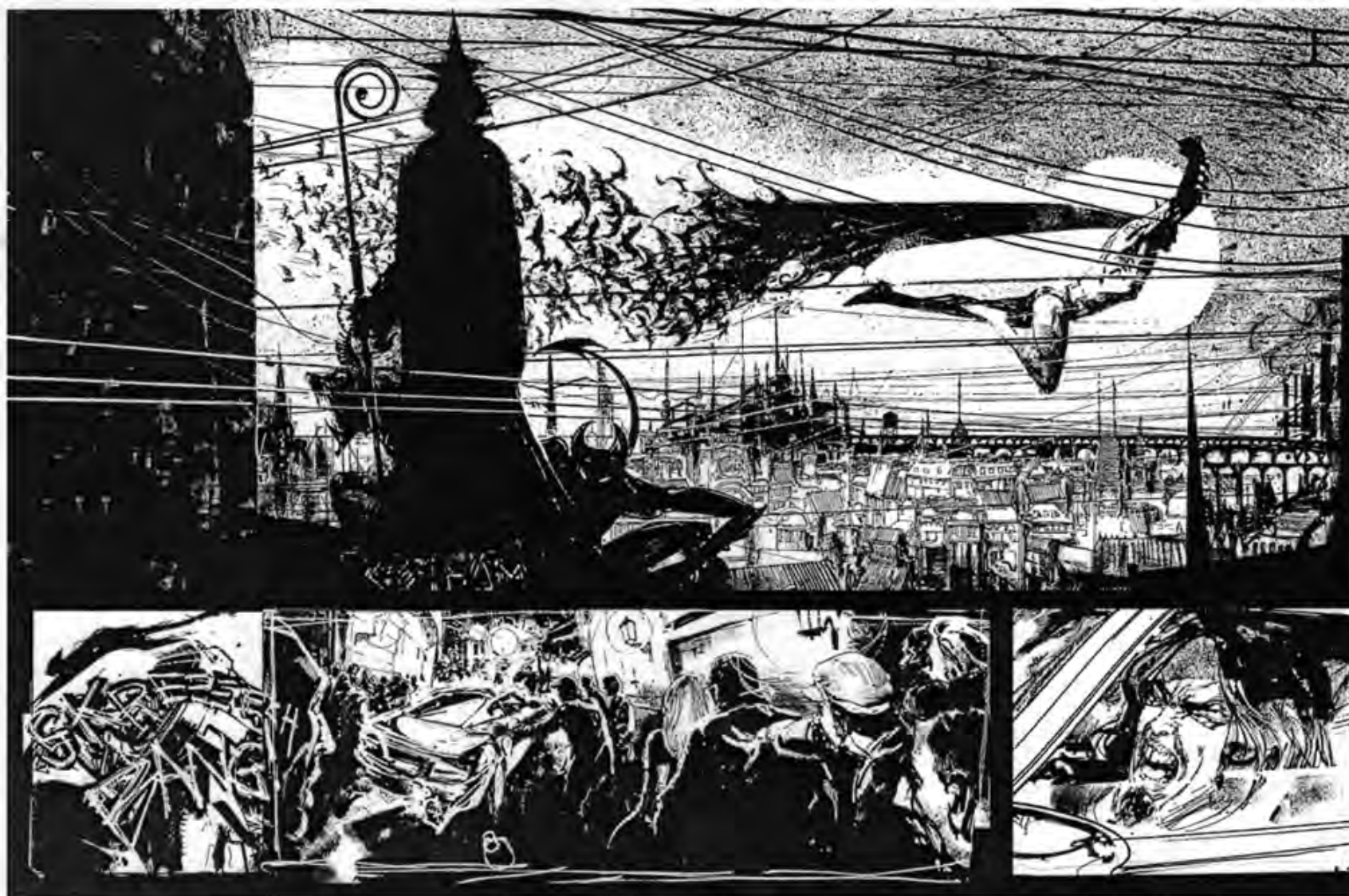








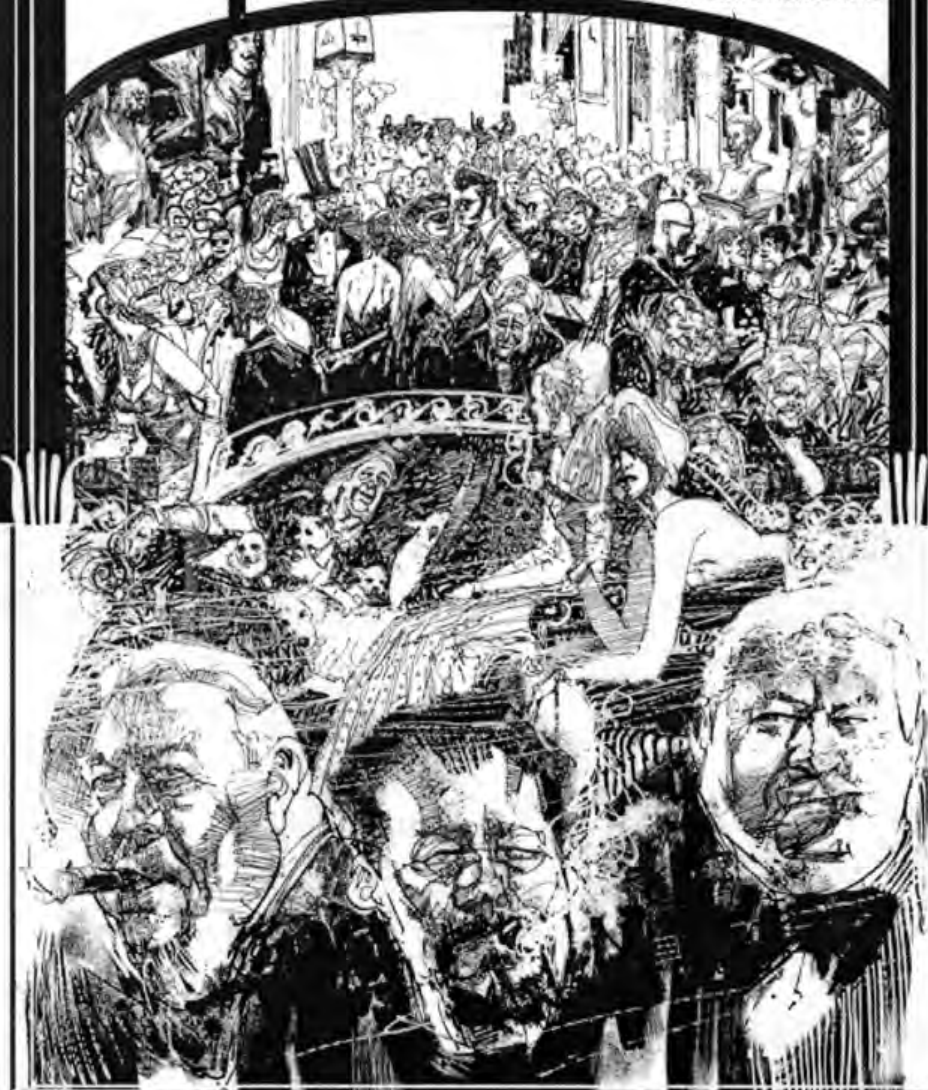








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## **-EXTRA ART-**

**The following are two alternate versions Bill did for the page 8/9 splash before arriving at the brilliant final.**



