

Batman and Robin: The Chinese Connection.  
By J.M. Stephens

Commissioner Gordon, with his hands behind his back and his forehead furrowed, paced back and forth in his office. Chief O'Hara stood by the desk, rubbing his chin and shaking his head, deep in thought. Suddenly, the dynamic duo burst into the room.

"Thank God you're here, Batman!" exclaimed the Commissioner.

"Begorrah!" said O'Hara, looking to the Heavens. "Praise Jesus!"

"We came as soon as we could, Commissioner," said Batman. "What's the emergency?"

"There's been a prison break, Batman. The Riddler escaped custody last night."

"Holy Houdini!" said Robin, "but wasn't he in Gotham Maximum Security Prison? I thought it was impossible to escape from there."

"He outsmarted us," said O'Hara, shaking his head, and lowering his eyes in embarrassment. "When his minions were visiting, they smuggled a jackhammer, wheelbarrow, and some dynamite into the prison, and that devil escaped through a tunnel."

"Our prison guards are highly trained," added Commissioner Gordon, "the best in the world, but what chance do we stand against an evil, criminal genius like the Riddler?"

"Don't worry, Commissioner," said Batman. "We'll find out what they're up to. Rest assured. Did they leave any clues?"

Commissioner Gordon held out a piece of folded paper. "Only this. We've had our top experts trying to decipher it, but we're stumped."

Batman unfolded the paper. Robin watched intently, his right fist squirming in the palm of his left hand. "What does it say, Batman?"

"Riddle me this," said Batman, reading the note. "What comes from bats and is Wuhan's biggest export?"

"What comes from bats and is Wuhan's biggest export?" mused Robin.

Batman looked to the ceiling, deep in thought. "What comes from bats and is Wuhan's biggest export? We'll run it through the Bat Computer. That should give us some answers."

"We place ourselves in your hands, Batman," said the Commissioner.

"Come Robin! To the Batcave!" said Batman, and he and Robin ran out of the Commissioner's office, their capes billowing behind them.

"God save us all!" O'Hara called after them.

"If anyone can save us, it's the Caped Crusaders," said Commissioner Gordon. "If Gotham City ever needed saving, it's now."

Back at the Batcave, our heroes stood before the Huawei Batcomputer. Red and green lights, surrounding the built-in display screen, blinked randomly and intermittently. Batman fed the riddle into a slot at the top of the machine.

"Holy Big-Brother!" exclaimed Robin. "The webcam just turned to face us!"

The computer whirred and rumbled, and the lights flashed faster. It ejected a ribbon of paper from the bottom slot.

"What is it Batman? What does it say?"

Batman raised the paper to eye-level.

"It says, 'Fools. You've just added another 10 percent tariff to your exports to China.'"

Robin punched his palm. "Darn! Looks like we'll have to solve the riddle ourselves."

A few moments of silence followed as the duo pondered the riddle.

“Wait! That’s it, Batman!” said Robin, snapping his fingers. “The Chinese delegate for the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ is meeting with the city’s officials today at Gotham Towers!”

“But what does that have to do with Wuhan and exports?” asked Batman.

Robin punched his palm. “Don’t you see, Batman? It’s all a ruse to divert our attention from their real plan! Those scheming fiends!”

“Of course!” said Batman. “The delegate is here to hand over \$10 billion dollars for the city’s infrastructure. Well done, Old Chum! Quick! To the Batmobile! There’s no time to lose!”

The defenders of Gotham leapt over the Batmobile’s doors into the front seat. Batman fired up the engine.

“Atomic batteries to power,” said Robin, flicking a toggle switch on the dashboard. “Turbines to speed.”

With a roar, a long flame shot out of the exhaust, and the cave door lifted ahead of them. The tyres screeched, and the Batmobile catapulted from the large turntable onto the road, leaving a thick layer of rubber behind them on the tarmac, and the car fishtailed as they accelerated toward Gotham City.

About 10 miles down the road, Batman heard a siren behind them and looked up at the rear-view mirror to see the flashing red and blue lights of a highway patrol car. He pulled over to the side of the road. The whining turbochargers of the Batmobile slowed down until there was silence.

Two minutes passed before the patrol officer, a 6’2”, 250lb law enforcement giant with mirrored sunglasses, got out of his car and approached the Batmobile. He gave the car a quick glance-over and moved to the driver’s door.

“I’m Officer O’Reilly. Do you know how fast you were going back there?”

“Ninety-eight miles per hour, Officer,” replied Batman.

“That’s right. Ninety-eight miles an hour—in a sixty zone,” said O’Reilly. “Any reason for that?”

The officer looked across at Robin, glanced at the front floor, and then turned his attention back to Batman.

“It’s imperative that we get to Gotham City,” said Batman. “It’s a matter of urgency.”

“May I see your license, sir?”

“Yes, of course, officer.”

Batman searched his utility belt and took out his wallet with the image of a bat etched into the leather. He rummaged through, found his license, and handed it to the officer, who looked at Batman’s photo complete with Bat mask. He looked at Batman, then back to the photo, and back to Batman.

“Wait here,” said the officer. He took the license back to the patrol car and spoke on the radio, conveying the license’s information. He returned to the Batmobile.

“Does this car belong to you?”

“Yes, Officer. It’s the Batmob—“

“Did you know there’s a flame coming from the exhaust?” O’Reilly interrupted.

“Holy police harassment!” said Robin. “Don’t you know who we are?”

“I know who you are,” the officer replied. “Do you think that puts you above the law?”

Before Robin could respond, Batman raised his hand to calm him down. “He’s right, Robin. The laws are for everyone, including us. What kind of evil, anarchic world would we live in if everyone flouted the law? We need to set a good example for the citizens of Gotham City.”

“Gosh, Batman,” said Robin, “You’re right. I didn’t look at it like that.”

“Perfectly understandable, Robin. Even crime fighters are ordinary under our costumes.”

“The reason I pulled you over,” said the officer, “is your excessive speed, but your left-hand rear brake light is out, and it seems we may have more serious problems here. I see a button on the dash that’s marked ‘NOS’. Do you have a compliance plate for that?”

“Yes, it’s under the hood,” replied Batman. “Would you like to check it?”

“No need, I’ll trust you. After all, you’re Batman, right?”

The dynamic duo exchanged glances as the officer walked around the Batmobile.

“Did you know the rear tyres are down to the low-tread indicators?” the officer asked.

“No,” replied Batman. “I’ll get that seen to as soon as we get back to the Batcave.”

“You’ll have to leave the car here, I’m afraid. You’ll need to have it towed, and I’ll have to write you a ticket, and make sure you get that rear light fixed before you drive it again.”

“Of course, officer,” said Batman. “Thank you. You should be commended for your service to the people of Gotham City.”

The caped crime fighters stood by the Batmobile as the officer wrote up the ticket.

“Have a nice day, Sir,” said the officer, and returned to his patrol car. He talked on his radio for a minute or so, and then performed a U-turn and disappeared into the distance.

“What now, Batman?”

“We’ll have to walk the rest of the way, Robin.” He checked his Batwatch. “The meeting is taking place at 2 o’clock. It’s about an hour’s walk. If we don’t stop along the way, we should get there just in time.”

The heroes set off. The midday sun beat down on their heat-absorbing spandex costumes. About 20 minutes into the journey, they felt the effects of fatigue and heat exhaustion.

“I...don’t think... I can... go on,” said Robin, puffing.

Batman struggled to answer. “Don’t...give up...Old Chum.”

At that moment, they heard the distinctive rattle and chattering of a VW Kombi van approach. It was pink, with white and yellow daisies and peace signs, painted all over the panel work. It pulled off the road directly in front of them and the side door opened. A girl of about 19 years old stuck her head out. She wore a headband to control her long, frizzy blonde hair. Her knee-length, tie-dye dress did nothing to disguise her long thin legs and slim body.

“You guys need a lift?”

“Are... you going to... Gotham City?” panted Batman.

“Sure, Man,” called the driver, a man of about 30 years, with long dreadlocks, and excessive acne scars. “Jump in.”

“Thank you, good citizens,” said Batman.

The Duo climbed into the back of the Kombi. The only seat was the front bench seat, occupied by the driver and a teenage girl. In the back were a bare mattress and 3 girls and another young man in his twenties. They were all dressed similarly in tie-dye clothing and wore beads around their necks.

“Say, aren’t you Batman and Robin?” asked one of the girls. “The Dynamic Duo? The Caped Crusaders? I’m Skye.” She put her hand on Batman’s shoulder and felt the texture of his costume. “You guys are even hotter in the flesh,” she purred.

Batman blushed.

Another girl shuffled across to Robin and ran her fingers through his hair.

“So,” she began, “what does the ‘R’ stand for? Randy, I hope.”

Robin gulped.

The driver spoke up. "So, what's going down at the 'Goth'? Ya got some crime to fight? Some bad guys to pummel?"

"Yes," said Batman, "but there is no cause for alarm. Robin and I have it well in hand."

"Groovy," said Skye, and nuzzled into his neck. "You're so brave and so hot!"

"Umm...err...I umm..." he stammered, as she ran her hands over his shoulder and arm, and down to his thigh.

"Batman!" she continued. "Is that your Bat-a-rang, or are you just glad to see me?"

"Umm...I...I..."

The girl in the front passed something to the driver, who put it to his mouth and blew a cloud of smoke after holding his breath for a few seconds. He passed it to the guy in the back, who did the same, then passed it to Skye. With the windows up, the van soon filled with smoke. Skye offered it to Batman, who declined the offer, as did Robin. The driver found it difficult to see through the windshield and had to keep wiping the condensation with the back of his hand. He constantly waved his hand to clear the smoke in a vain attempt to clear the air.

'Squeeky', the girl next to Robin, ran her hand over his body. She leaned in and kissed him. Robin froze, and his wide eyes looked sideways to Batman, seeking guidance. Batman giggled. Then they all giggled, including Robin.

"We just have to make a little detour," said the driver. "You dudes ok with that?"

With no response from the Dynamic Duo, apart from uncontrollable giggling, the van suddenly veered into a gravel side road. The passengers in the back were thrown from side to side as the van zig-zagged down the road, finally arriving at a small farmhouse.

A dozen or so young hippies streamed out of the house to greet them. The Kombi door slid open, and they peered in.

"What's this, Scratchy?" one asked the driver. "You brought the law? Not cool, Man!"

"Chill out," said Scratchy. "These dudes are ultra-cool. Hey Batman, you and Robin want to party a little?"

"Thank you," said Batman, "but we must get to Gotham before 2 o'clock."

"Don't sweat it. All work and no play drives Batman batty, you dig?"

A group of girls dragged a reluctant Batman and his faithful sidekick from the van and led them into the farmhouse. Jimi Hendrix's 'Purple Haze' was playing on the record player. A girl in her mid-twenties was swaying, trance-like, in the middle of the room, randomly moving her arms around in the air, completely out of rhythm, and revealing her unshaven armpits. Implements were passed around, again declined by our heroes. The dancing girl took Batman's hand and led him to the middle of the room. His inhibitions all but gone, Batman proceeded to perform the 'Batusi' dance. The graceful twirling of his cape resembled batwings in flight. His hypnotic, bloodshot eyes peered from the beneath his mask and his slow, rhythmic, almost erotic movements mesmerized everyone in the room.

"Batman!" shouted Robin. "We have to go! Who knows what those fiends are up to by now!"

Batman shook his head to clear his thoughts. "Yes, you're right, Old Chum. Scratchy, we need to get to Gotham City!"

Scratchy lay on the sofa, his bloodshot eyes almost closed. He threw the keys onto the coffee table. "Take the van, Batman. I'm too wasted to drive, Man."

Batman picked up the keys. "Quick Robin," he said. "To the Kombi van!"

"Hey, Batman!" called Scratchy. "Can you bring some food back with you? I could eat a horse, Dude!"

They ran to the van. Skye ran to Batman and planted her lips on his.

“Come back to me, Batman. I’ll be waiting for you.”

Squeeky waved to Robin and blew him a kiss. “I love you, Robin!”

The duo jumped into the Kombi and a cloud of blue smoke escaped from the exhaust as the engine burst into life.

“Let’s hope we’re not too late,” said Robin.

Squeeky was waving with both hands above her head. “I want to have your babies!” she shouted as the Kombi drove out the gate and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Once again, they rattled down the highway. They saw Gotham City in the distance; a huge dark storm cloud hanging low over the city. A loud roar approached from behind, and the Batmobile hurtled past them at more than 100 miles per hour. The gust of wind from the Batmobile rocked the Kombi from side to side. In the car were 2 boys aged about 15 and a girl of similar age sitting on the passenger’s lap. An empty whiskey bottle was thrown from the vehicle and bounced along the roadside.

“Holy grand theft!” shouted Robin. “Those filthy thieves have stolen the Batmobile!”

“They’re just misguided teenagers, Robin,” said Batman, “but one day they’ll be useful citizens of society. Who knows... perhaps even Mayor of the city. They need understanding and guidance, not condemnation. The Wayne Foundation is running programs for those less fortunate than ourselves, just like these lost souls.”

“Gosh, you’re right, Batman! I guess I need to show more compassion.”

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Twenty minutes later, the Kombi crawled through the traffic down Gotham Street. The citizens pointed and waved to the duo as if they were royalty visiting the city. Gargoyles gazed down on them from Gothic buildings to the left and right. Up ahead stood Gotham Towers, a 24-story building that dwarfed the rest of the city.

“Look!” said Robin and pointed to their left.

The Batmobile, sprayed with graffiti, sat just off Gotham Street, down an alley. It was sitting on blocks. The chromium mag wheels, with bulletproof, low profile tyres, had been removed, and the raised hood revealed that some of the engine was missing.

“Holy sh...”

Batman interjected. “Compassion, Robin,” he growled, fists clenched “Compassion.”

They circled the block 3 times before they found a parking spot near Gotham Towers. Batman dropped a coin into the parking meter. He looked up at the sheer walls of the building. They took their Bat-a-rang launchers from their Utility belts and pointed them upwards, shooting the Bat-grapples and securing them to the top of the building on their first attempt. They looked at each other in silent understanding and, clutching the Bat-ropes, began to slowly ‘walk’ up the side of the building.

A window opened when they reached the 15<sup>th</sup> floor, and a man’s head appeared. “Batman and Robin!” exclaimed the man, aged in his mid-twenties. He had black, oily, slicked back hair and wore a tight, purple shirt with the top four buttons undone, revealing a hairy chest and a bulky gold chain around his neck. A gold tooth was visible when he spoke. “Fancy seeing you here. You looking for some bad guys?”

“We’re in Gotham City on business,” said Batman, “but there’s no cause for alarm.”

Robin looked past him into the room, and saw 5 young women at a long table, measuring white powder into plastic bags.

“Holy eyeful!” said Robin, his eyes wide with astonishment. “Those women are wearing nothing but their underwear!”

“Umm...err... not underwear,” corrected the man. “Bikinis. Err...They’ve just come up from the pool.”

“What are they doing?” asked Robin.

“Ahh...umm,” stammered the man. “Oh, yeah! They’re just packing sugar into individual serves. You know, for the Gotham soup kitchen—for the homeless to use in their coffee.”

Robin stared, wide eyed, at the women.

“You’re an inspiration to the people of Gotham,” said Batman. “It’s citizens like you that make a difference in the world with your charitable work.”

“Ahhh...yeah. Thanks, Batman.”

“Keep up the good work. Come, Robin,” said Batman, and resumed his climb.

“Good luck finding those criminals,” said the man.

Robin hesitated, unable to take his eyes off the scantily clad women.

“Robin!”

Robin was jolted from his trance-like stare.

“Sorry, Batman. I was just...just...”

“No need to apologise,” said Batman. “You’re growing up. Becoming a man. I’ve noticed. But with manhood comes responsibilities, Robin. We mustn’t ogle the fairer sex.”

“Gosh, Batman, you’re right. I’ll treat them with more respect in the future.”

They were exhausted by the time they reached the 24<sup>th</sup> floor. They peered through the dusty window. Inside, in the corner of the room, was a man of Asian appearance, alongside two Gotham City officials, all dressed in black suits. Their legs and wrists were tied with rope, and duct tape covered their mouths. The room was otherwise deserted.

“Careful, Robin; it could be a trap,” whispered Batman. “Are you ready?”

Robin nodded. Clutching their ropes, they used their feet to push off the wall, and broke through the window, landing on their feet inside the room. They quickly looked left and right to confirm the Riddler was gone, and then ran to the three men. They removed the duct tape and cut the ropes with a Bat-knife.

“Are you alright?” asked Batman.

“Yes, but they’ve taken the money,” said the Chinese official. “He said you would come. He gave me a message to pass on.”

“A message? What is it?”

“What travels around the world,” said the man, “but stays in one spot?”

The duo exchanged glances. Robin rubbed his chin, deep in thought.

“What travels around the world yet stays in one spot?” pondered the Boy Wonder. He snapped his fingers. “The Sun travels around the world once every day, yet it’s the Earth that moves, not the sun!”

“I’m glad to see you’ve been paying attention in astronomy class, Robin,” said Batman, “It’s the obvious answer, but perhaps a little too obvious.”

A minute passed as they concentrated on the puzzle.

“A stamp!” exclaimed Robin. “A stamp can travel the world, but never leaves the corner of the envelope!”

“Of course, Robin! The old post office in downtown Gotham closed down last month! It must be where those crooks are holed up! Quickly! There’s not a moment to lose!”

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Meanwhile, at the recently closed Gotham Post Office...

Riddler, dressed in his favourite green costume with a large question mark on the front, paced back and forth across the room.

"Bratman and Boyblunder should be along any minute now," said a grinning Riddler, his eyes sparkling in excitement through the slits in his mask. "We better get ready."

"Gee, Boss," said Goon number 1, "Why do we always leave clues for Batman? Why don't we just take the money and run?"

"Run? Run?" replied Riddler. He approached the goon and slapped him three times. "The Riddler doesn't run! Especially from that caped rodent."

"But Boss..." said the goon, cowering under the blows.

"He's right, Babe," said sultry, blonde-haired Molly. Dressed in tight, pale yellow slacks and an orange button up blouse, Molly was Riddler's long-time girlfriend, and his biggest fan. "You always leave clues, and he always catches you."

"Oh, so you're all ganging up on me?" said Riddler. "You think I'm not smart enough to defeat Batman?"

"No, Babe. It's just that...we got 10 billion here in cash. Let's just get out of Gotham. Let's go to Paris or the Greek Islands."

"Do you think it's just about the money?" asked Riddler. "I spent a year in that dump of a prison because of those two. It's time for the caped cretins to get what's coming to them. If we can get rich at the same time...all the better. Now take your positions!"

The Kombi pulled up outside the post office.

"We'll have to be on our guard, Robin." said Batman. "It may be a trap."

Our heroes crept to the window and peered inside. In the centre of the room was a table with a large bag of money easily distinguished by the large gold '\$' sign embossed on it. Molly was taking out bundles of notes and piling them neatly on the table, and Riddler was behind her, pacing the floor. His cronies were nowhere to be seen. The duo crept to the door.

"Ready old chum?" said Batman.

Robin punched the palm of his hand in angry anticipation.

"Ready, Batman!"

Together, they shoulder-charged the door, leaving it hanging askew on the broken hinges. Riddler looked up in feigned surprise. His minions appeared from behind the Duo, and a fight ensued. The goons stood no chance against Batman's low Karate-like kicks and slow-motion, telegraphed punches. Robin's acrobatic and evasive skills caused the goons to collide with each other, head-first. They soon lay scattered around the room moaning and writhing in pain.

With a panicked expression, Riddler ran through an exit door, chased by Batman and Robin. They panicked when they heard a metal door close behind them. At the same time, Riddler exited through a door ahead of them, slamming it shut, and they realised they were in a steel shipping container. They ran from wall to wall, like caged rats, and then looked at one another in defeat.

"Holy claustrophobia, Batman! We're trapped!"

"So it would seem, Robin. So it would seem."

The shipping container suddenly lurched into the air, causing the Crusaders to stumble and crash into the walls. Riddler, operating a forklift, loaded the container onto the back of a truck. Batman and Robin bashed on the walls of their prison.

"Let us out, you maniac!" shouted Robin.

Riddler climbed down from the forklift. Giggling gleefully, he rubbed his hands together, and danced around from one foot to the other. "Get comfortable Batman, you've got a long voyage ahead of you. Send me a postcard from China!"

"What will happen to them?" asked Molly.

"Batman will fetch a princely sum at the markets," replied Riddler.

"What about Robin?"

"Oh, don't worry your pretty head about the Boy Runt. He'll be taken care of. I've organised a scholarship at the best re-education camp in China. He'll graduate in about 10 years as a loyal citizen of the regime."

Robin continued to bang on the wall as Riddler climbed into the truck's driver seat. Molly climbed in next to him followed by one of the goons. The others stood on the steps on the side of the truck and hung on to the doors as the heavy vehicle lurched out of the post office loading bay and sped down the road toward the docks.

The truck stopped and the Caped Crusaders heard voices outside. There was a loud metallic banging sound as hooks were attached to the shipping container, and they felt themselves being hoisted into the air. They had the sensation of travelling sideways and then being lowered gently onto the ship's deck.

"What are we going to do Batman? We can't go to China and leave those dirty criminals to run loose in Gotham City!"

The deafening blast of the ship's horn shattered the air, and the enormous vessel lurched.

Batman looked around the interior of the container, studying the walls and ceiling.

"Unless I'm mistaken, this shipping container was manufactured by the ACME Steel Fabrication Company in 1969," said Batman. "If my memory serves me correctly, the lever outside is exactly 4'2" from the top, and 3'11" from the left."

He reached to his utility belt and produced a large horseshoe magnet. He placed it on the wall at the exact spot and grunted as he pushed it up the surface of the wall.

"Just...a little...more," he said, as the outside lever edged upward, eventually clearing the latching hook.

They burst through the door and shielded their eyes from the bright sunlight. A ship hand turned and spoke in Chinese. Batman replied in fluent Chinese, and they had a short discussion.

"Gosh, Batman! I didn't know you could speak Chinese!"

"Never underestimate the value of learning a foreign language, Robin. And who knows? It may be very advantageous in the future if we all learned Chinese."

"So, what did you discuss?"

"I told him we must return to Gotham," replied Batman. "He gave me the address of his brother's restaurant. He said it's the best in town."

"Gee, Batman. I'll definitely work harder in my language classes!"

Batman pulled a transmitter from his utility belt and flicked a toggle switch. 200 yards away, the Batboat left the dock and headed for the cargo ship.

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Meanwhile, back at the post office, Riddler and Molly were sitting at the table, with his goons close by. Riddler smoked an unlit cigar and giggled as he threw handfuls of \$100 notes into the air, which then descended like rain on their heads.

"At last," laughed Riddler, "we're free of that meddling menace!"

"Gee, Babe," said Molly, "did we have to send him to China?"

Riddler abruptly stopped giggling. “What? You going soft on me? We’ve got complete control of Gotham without those two.”

“But Babe,” she pouted, “aren’t we going to Paris? Or the Caribbean or somewhere? Can’t we just get out of this place?”

A voice called from behind them. “The only place you’re going,” said Robin accentuating his words with a fist to the palm of his hand, “is back to prison!”

“Get ‘em, boys!” shouted a startled Riddler.

As the battle ensued, Riddler stashed as much money as he could back into the bag. He lifted it onto his shoulder and he and Molly ran for the exit just as Commissioner Gordon, Chief O’Hara and six policemen appeared and blocked their path. Riddler’s minions were strewn around the floor by this stage, in various states of consciousness.

“Take them!” said Commissioner Gordon. “Get them out of my sight!”

Two officers grabbed Riddler by the collar.

“You’ll be an old man by the time you see the light of day, Riddler,” said O’Hara.

Molly ran to Batman and threw her arms around him.

“Please, Batman, don’t let me go to prison. I’ve learnt my lesson. I never wanted this life of crime!”

Batman’s eyes fluttered and almost closed as he took in her alluring scent. He snapped back to reality.

“I’m sorry,” he said, “But perhaps in 30 years or so, you can take your place back in society. Everyone is entitled to a chance for redemption.”

Molly’s shoulders slumped, and she nodded, defeated. She looked up at Batman. “When I get out, do you think maybe there’s a chance that you and I can get together, sometime?”

“We’ll see, Molly. We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

Molly gave him a coy smile. An officer slapped handcuffs on her, and she was led away.

“Holy Hotlips!” exclaimed Robin. “Did she just hit on you?”

“It goes with the territory, Robin, but we mustn’t let our temptations and personal needs get in the way of our duty. We have other avenues for that.”

Robin nodded. “What now, Batman?”

“We need to return the van. We’ll pick up some takeaway for Scratchy on the way. Let’s hope he likes Chinese.”