

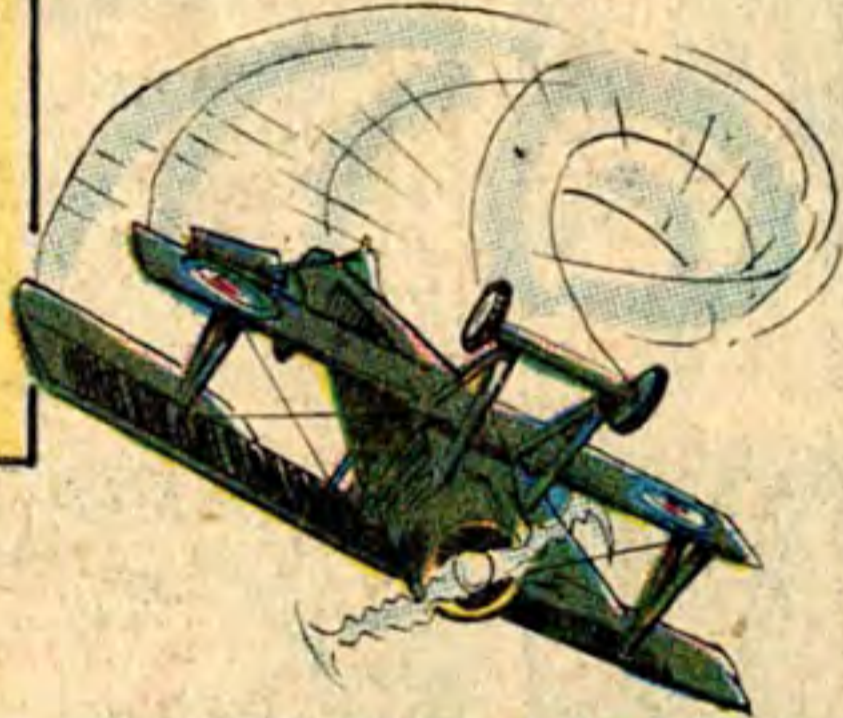
YOU ARE STANDING ON A WINDSWEPT CLIFF SOMEWHERE IN CENTRAL SPAIN, LOOKING THROUGH THE EYES OF A SOLITARY WATCHER... OBSERVING A SPECK OF AN AIRCRAFT IN THE DISTANCE...



IT IS CLOSER, AND YOU HEAR ITS ENGINE SPUTTERING--YOU SEE THAT IT IS A FRENCH-MADE NIEUPOINT 17-- A MOTORIZED KITE THAT WAS USED IN THE WORLD'S FIRST AIR-COMBAT IN 1916...

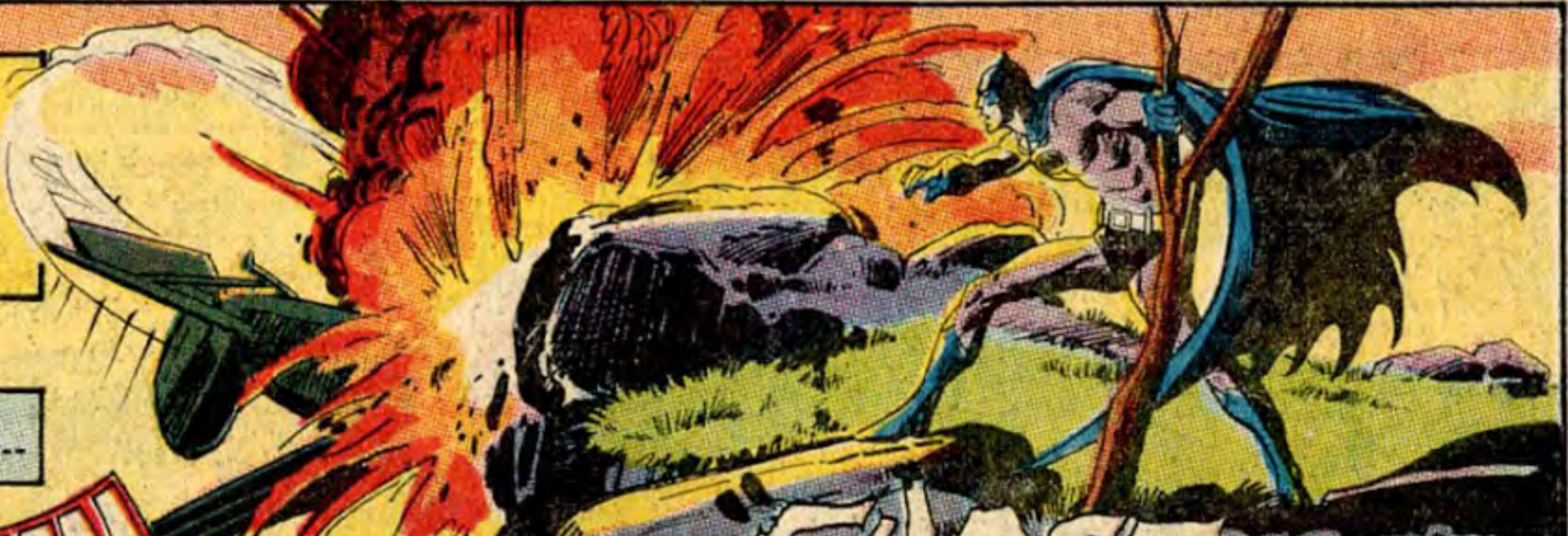


SUDDENLY IT FLIPS OVER AND HURLS TOWARD THE ROCKS BELOW YOU... AND YOU KNOW, WITH CHILL CERTAINTY, THAT YOU ARE WITNESSING A MURDER--



S-456

THE GROUND SHUDDERS AS THE PLANE SPLINTERS AGAINST THE CLIFF'S SNOWY FACE...



LEAVE, NOW THE EYES OF THE DREAD--

BATMAN

AND FOLLOW THE CAPED AVENGER THROUGH A TANGLE OF CRIME AND INTO THE BLEAKEST CORNER OF A MAN'S SOUL... A MAN WHO MUST BECOME...

GHOST OF THE KILLER SKIES!

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SWIFT AS HIS FLYING NAME-
SAKE, THE **BATMAN**
SWOOPS TO THE BROKEN
CRAFT...



...AND HEEDLESS OF PERSONAL
DANGER, PULLS FROM THE
WRECK A BROKEN, LIFELESS
THING THAT HAD BEEN A MAN-
CRAFT...



INCREDIBLE--!
I SAW THERE'D
BEEN FOUL PLAY...
BUT NOT THE
KIND I THOUGHT!

THE PILOT'S BEEN...
STRANGLER! HE MUST
HAVE BEEN DEAD BEFORE
THE CRASH...

STRANGLER IN MID-AIR... IN A
SINGLE-SEATER PLANE...

UP THERE,
MR. ANSON!

YOU THINK I
DON'T KNOW,
BOOB? SO
WE CLIMB!

THE FILM
CREW--! IT
WON'T DO TO LET
THEM SEE THE
BATMAN HERE IN
SPAIN... AT LEAST
NOT JUST YET!

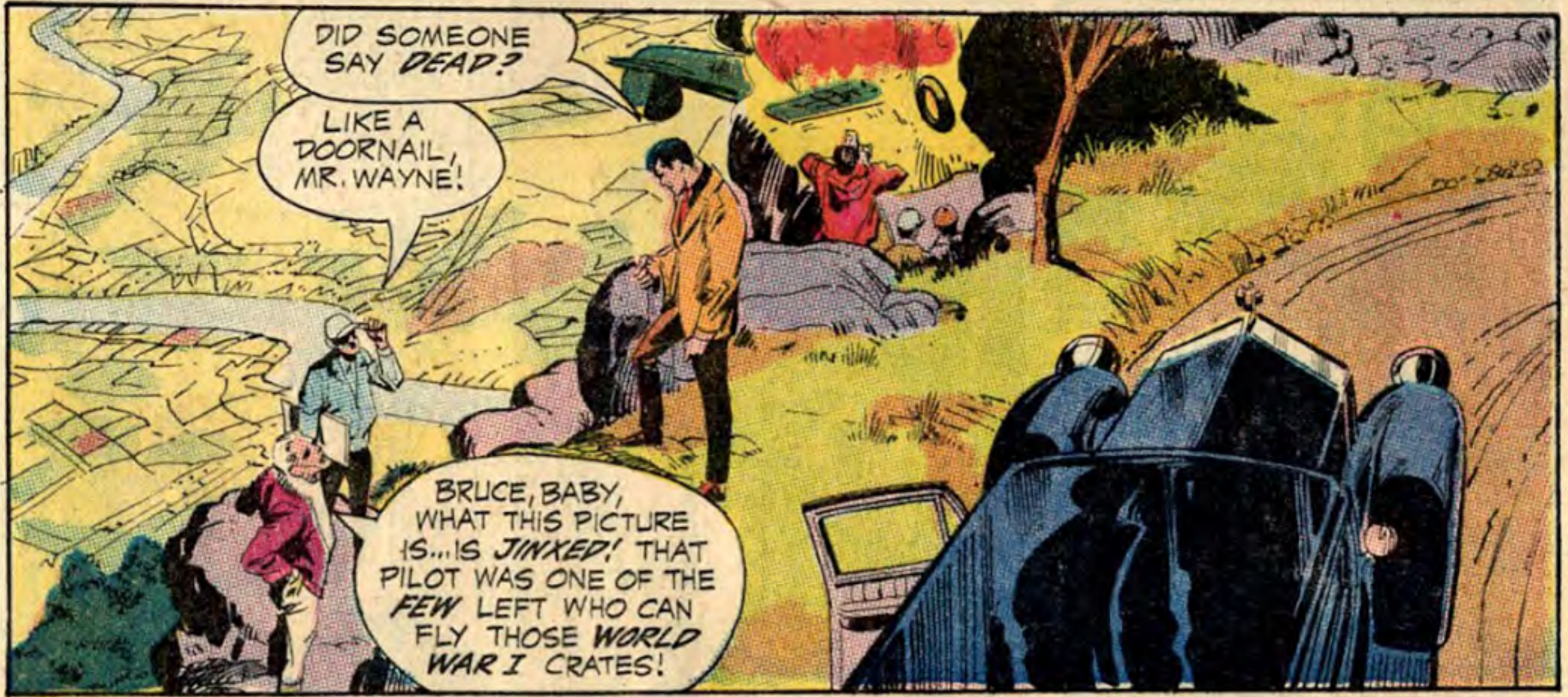


LESS THAN A MINUTE LATER...

ARE YOU A
CAMERAMAN OR
A PIECE OF THE **SCENERY**,
GAVIN? YOU GOT A **FIRE**, GET
SOME **FOOTAGE** OF IT!
MAYBE WE CAN
USE A **FIRE--!**

CHECK, MR.
ANSON!-- ONLY
I'M **SPOOKED--!**
THE GUY'S BEEN
STRANGLER!





DID SOMEONE SAY DEAD?

LIKE A DOORNAIL, MR. WAYNE!

BRUCE, BABY, WHAT THIS PICTURE IS... IS *JINXED*! THAT PILOT WAS ONE OF THE FEW LEFT WHO CAN FLY THOSE *WORLD WAR I* CRATES!

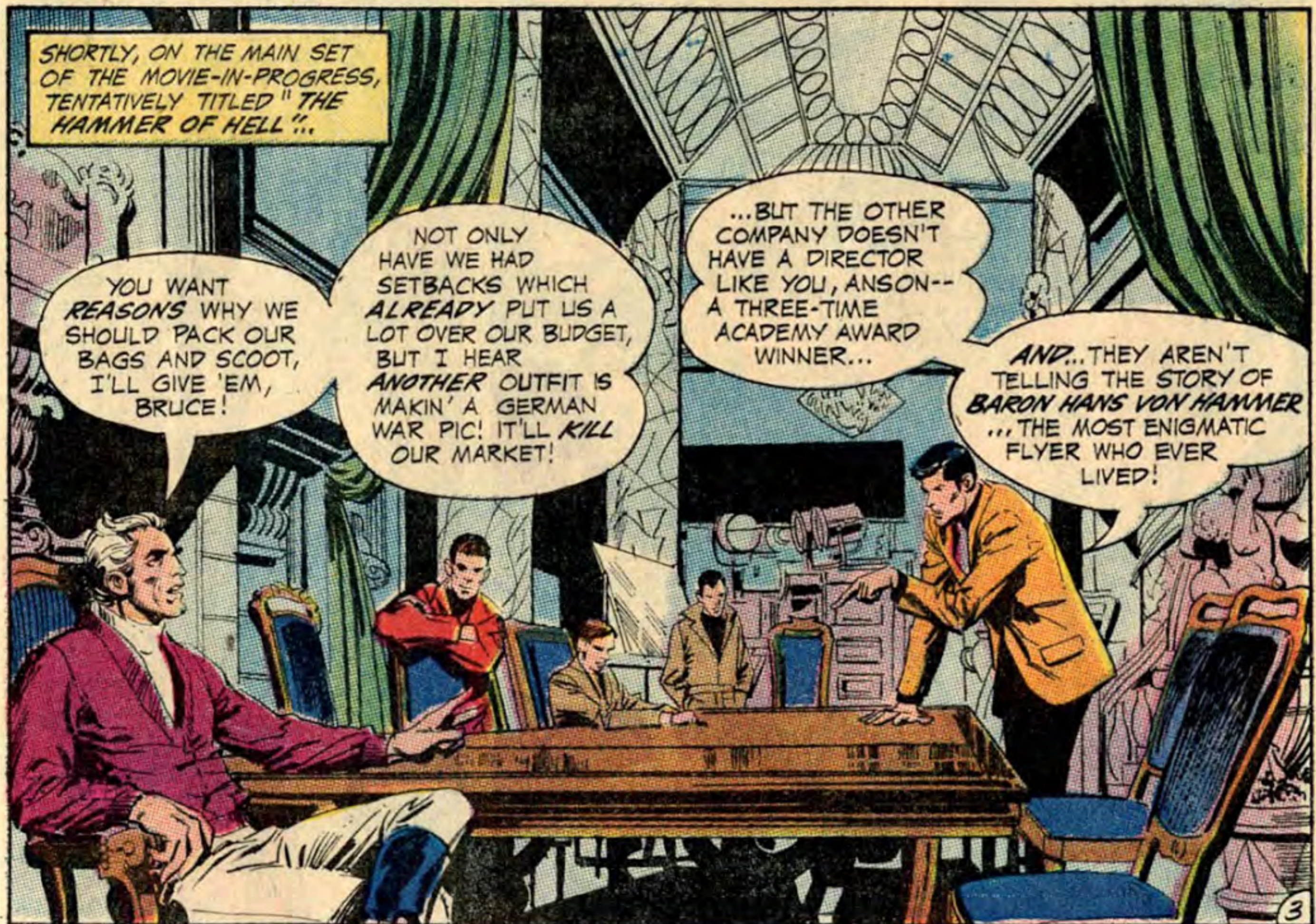


NOTHIN' BUT *TROUBLE* SINCE WE STARTED--! WE COME TO *SPAIN* 'CAUSE WE CAN MAKE IT *CHEAP* HERE, AND WHAT HAPPENS?

PROPS ARE MISSING... FILM-STOCK CATCHES FIRE... SOUND TRACKS GET ACCIDENTALLY ERASED... AND NOW *THIS*!

I'M READY TO *GIVE UP*!

PERHAPS WE SHOULD RETURN TO THE SET AND CALL A *MEETING*!



SHORTLY, ON THE MAIN SET OF THE MOVIE-IN-PROGRESS, TENTATIVELY TITLED "*THE HAMMER OF HELL*"...

YOU WANT *REASONS* WHY WE SHOULD PACK OUR BAGS AND SCOOT, I'LL GIVE 'EM, BRUCE!

NOT ONLY HAVE WE HAD SETBACKS WHICH *ALREADY* PUT US A LOT OVER OUR BUDGET, BUT I HEAR *ANOTHER* OUTFIT IS MAKIN' A GERMAN WAR PIC! IT'LL *KILL* OUR MARKET!

...BUT THE OTHER COMPANY DOESN'T HAVE A DIRECTOR LIKE YOU, ANSON-- A THREE-TIME ACADEMY AWARD WINNER...

AND... THEY AREN'T TELLING THE STORY OF *BARON HANS VON HAMMER* ... THE MOST ENIGMATIC FLYER WHO EVER LIVED!



AND SO, IN BRUCE WAYNE'S HOTEL ROOM...



I THOUGHT THERE WAS SOMETHING FAMILIAR ABOUT FRANZ... THE RESEMBLANCE IS UNCANNY!

HE LOOKS ALMOST EXACTLY LIKE THE MAN IN THIS OLD PHOTO... THE REAL BARON HANS VON HAMMER!



AS ALICE SAID, "CURIOLUSER AND CURIOLUSER..!"

NIGHT, THICK AS A VELVET CLOAK, ENSHROUDS THE CARDBOARD AND CANVAS CASTLE, AND THE MAKE-SHIFT AIRFIELD WHICH LIES NEARBY...

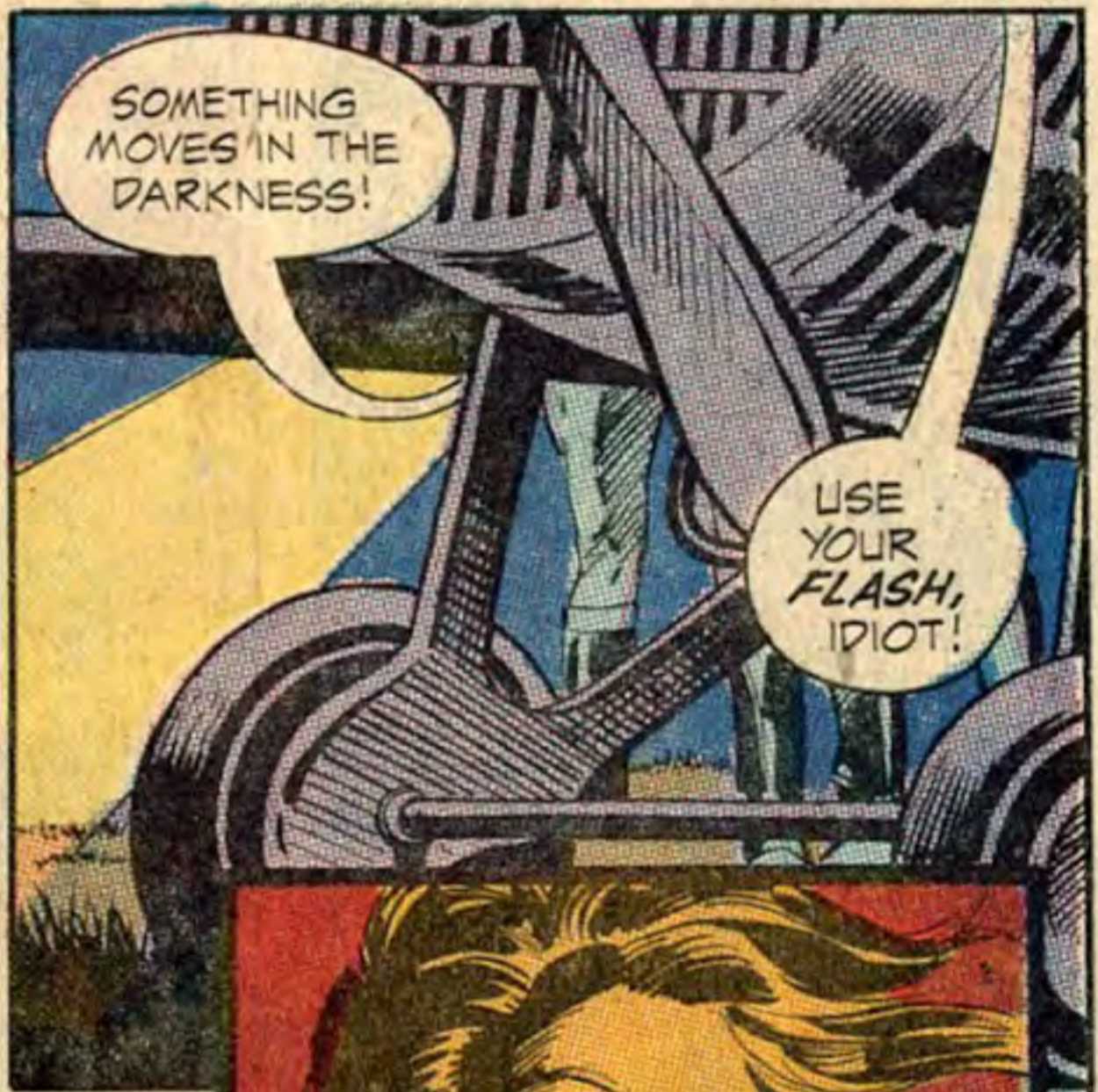


HURRY... LIGHT THE FUSES AND RUN--

SI, SEÑOR HAMMER!

THEN YOU WILL GIVE US THE PESOS YOU PROMISED, SEÑOR?

SOMETHING MOVES IN THE DARKNESS!



USE YOUR FLASH, IDIOT!



AIEEE! EL HOMBRE MURCIÉLAGO!*



MY ASKING YOU TO SURRENDER-- IN ENGLISH OR SPANISH-- WOULD DOUBTLESSLY FALL ON DEAF EARS-- SO...

* TRANS: LITERALLY, THE BATMAN!



MARTINEZ... THE FUSE! DESTROY THE PLANES!

SI, SEÑOR HAMMER!

AND I SHALL PLACE MY BLADE IN THIS... THIS MONSTER!



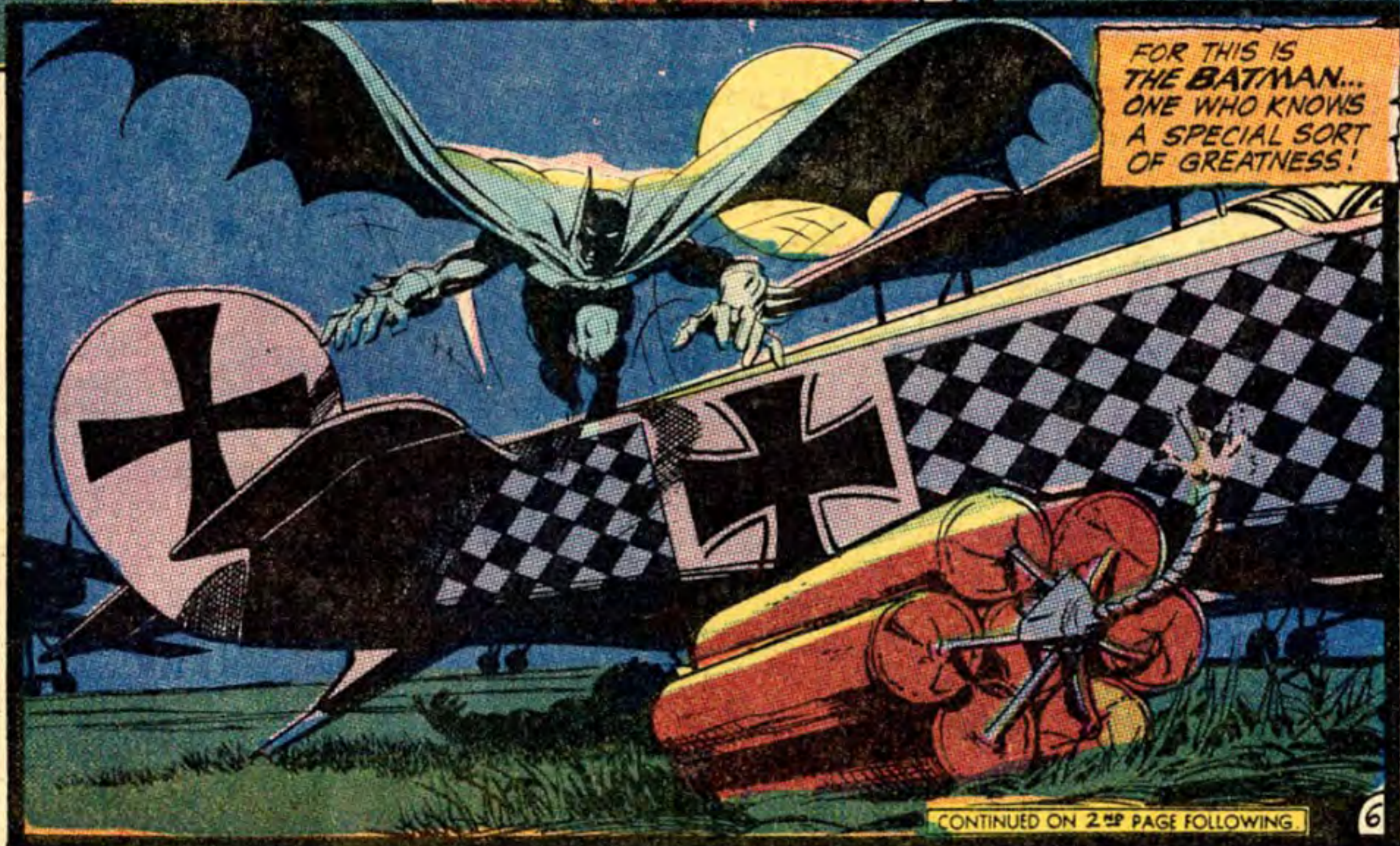
UGGNH HE MOVES SWIFTLY AS THE SHARK--!



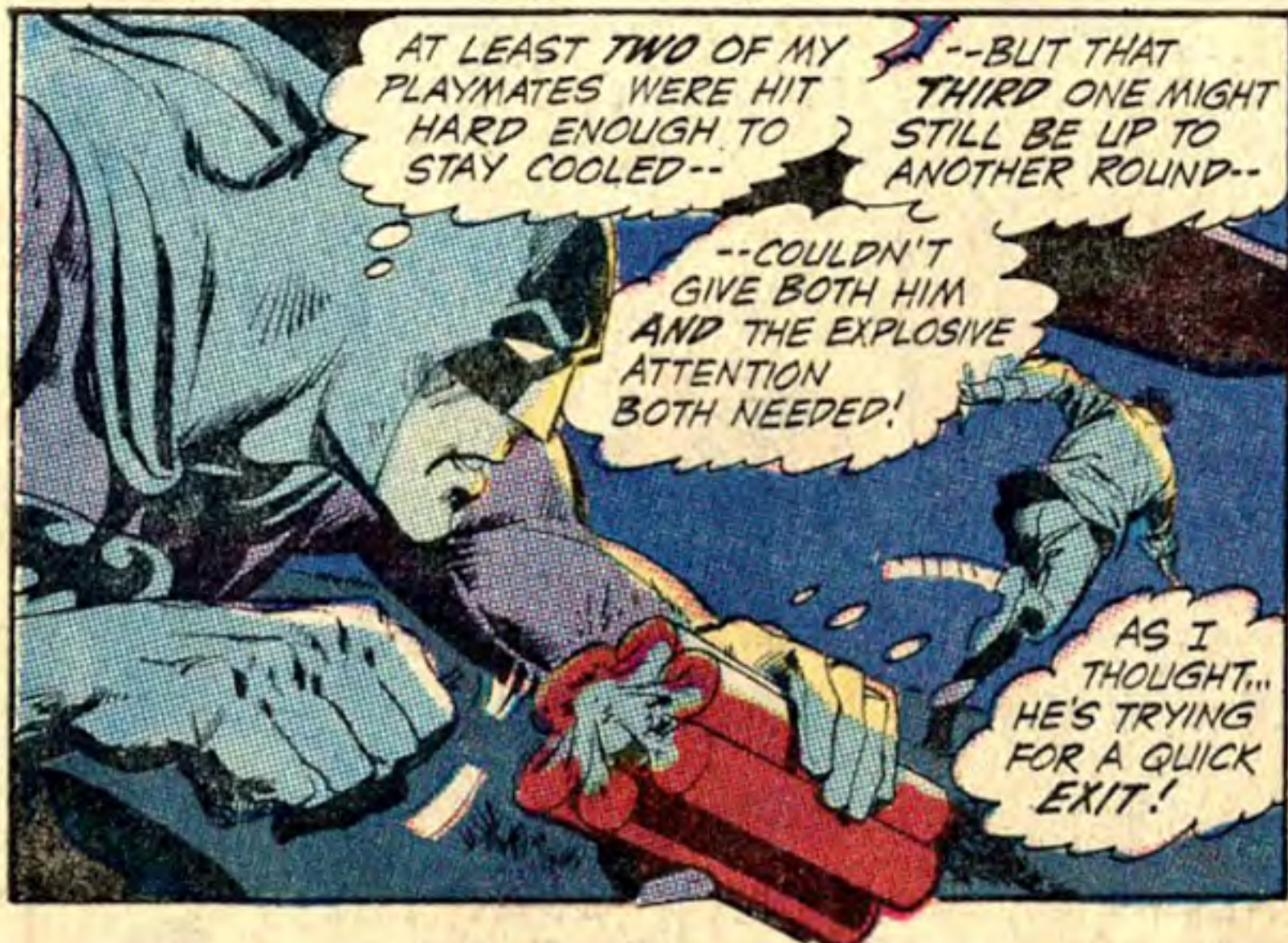
NO... MORE SWIFTLY THAN A SHARK, THIS RELENTLESSLY TRAINED BODY, POWERED BY UNQUENCHABLE WILL... STRIKES--



...AND STRIKES AGAIN, WITH DEVASTATING PRECISION...



FOR THIS IS THE BATMAN... ONE WHO KNOWS A SPECIAL SORT OF GREATNESS!



AT LEAST TWO OF MY PLAYMATES WERE HIT HARD ENOUGH TO STAY COOLED--

--BUT THAT THIRD ONE MIGHT STILL BE UP TO ANOTHER ROUND--

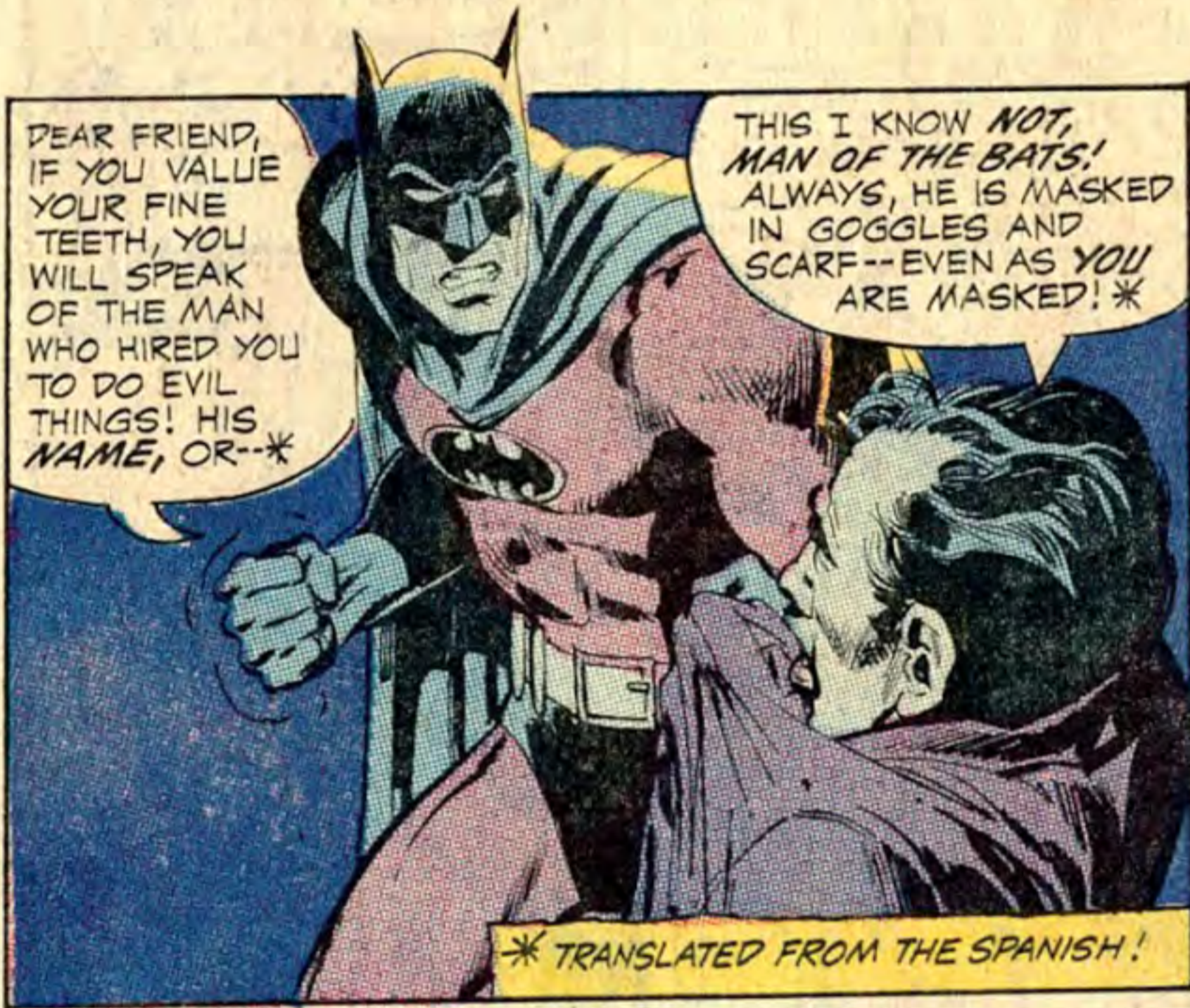
--COULDN'T GIVE BOTH HIM AND THE EXPLOSIVE ATTENTION BOTH NEEDED!

AS I THOUGHT... HE'S TRYING FOR A QUICK EXIT!



HE RUNS LIKE A REJECT FROM AN OLD FOLKS HOME--

UN MOMENTO, HOMBRECITO!



DEAR FRIEND, IF YOU VALUE YOUR FINE TEETH, YOU WILL SPEAK OF THE MAN WHO HIRED YOU TO DO EVIL THINGS! HIS NAME, OR--*

THIS I KNOW NOT, MAN OF THE BATS! ALWAYS, HE IS MASKED IN GOGGLES AND SCARF--EVEN AS YOU ARE MASKED! *

* TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH!

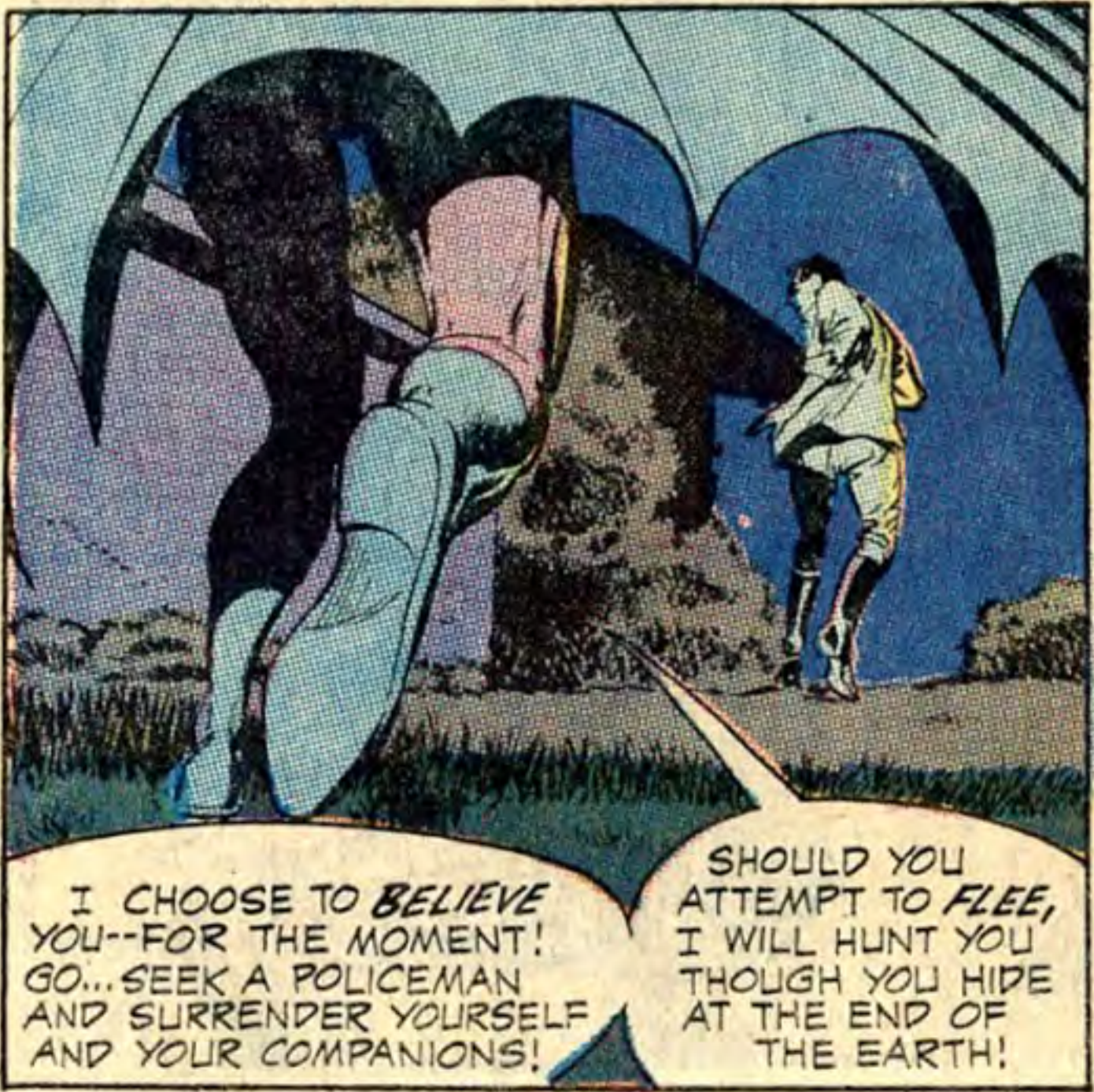


HE PAYS US MANY PESOS TO RUIN THE WORK OF THE AMERICAN FILM-MAKERS--

--BUT I SWEAR ON THE GRAVE OF MY MOTHER, I HAVE NOT HIS TRUE IDENTITY!

DID HE REQUIRE YOU TO TAMPER WITH THE AIRPLANE?

THIS WE DID NOT DO...



I CHOOSE TO BELIEVE YOU--FOR THE MOMENT! GO...SEEK A POLICEMAN AND SURRENDER YOURSELF AND YOUR COMPANIONS!

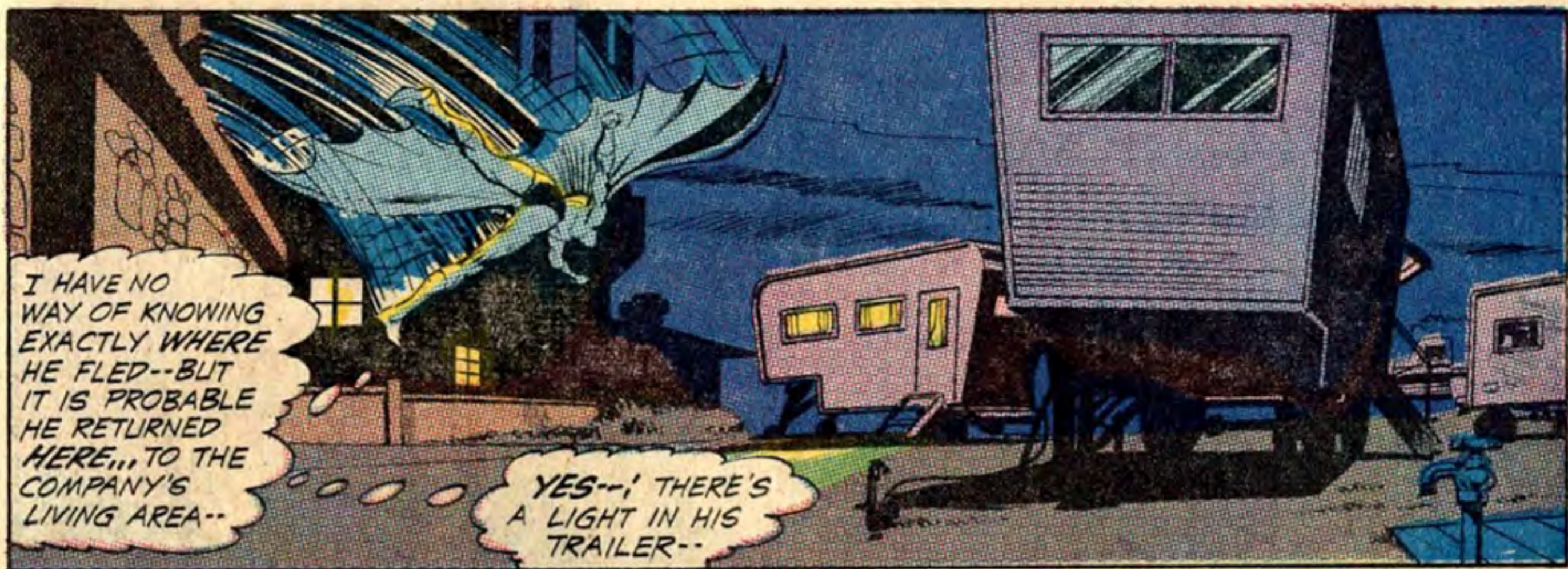
SHOULD YOU ATTEMPT TO FLEE, I WILL HUNT YOU THOUGH YOU HIDE AT THE END OF THE EARTH!



MOTIVE... OPPORTUNITY... } AND ONE VERY BAD SLIP OF THE TONGUE--

IT'S GOT TO BE HIM MASQUERADING AS "VON HAMMER"--

SO, THE BATMAN IS CERTAIN HE HAS SOLVED THE MYSTERY! ARE YOU AS CERTAIN...?



I HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING EXACTLY WHERE HE FLED--BUT IT IS PROBABLE HE RETURNED HERE... TO THE COMPANY'S LIVING AREA--

YES--! THERE'S A LIGHT IN HIS TRAILER--



AS I HOPED... HE'S STOPPED TO COLLECT HIS BLOOD MONEY--



FINISH COUNTING... I'M CURIOUS TO LEARN EXACTLY HOW MUCH THE RIVAL MOVIE OUTFIT PAID YOU TO SABOTAGE "THE HAMMER OF HELL"--

THE BATMAN?



GAVIN-- THE CAMERAMAN!

I DON'T UNDERSTAND... HOW COULD YOU HAVE KNOWN...?

YOU MADE ONE HOWLING MISTAKE... IN FRONT OF WITNESSES! AT THE SITE OF THE PLANE CRASH... YOU MENTIONED THE PILOT WAS STRANGLERED --BEFORE YOU WERE CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE BODY TO SEE!

YOU WERE BUSY TAKING PICTURES... SO MUST HAVE ALREADY KNOWN HOW HE DIED!



BUT... I WASN'T ANYWHERE NEAR THAT PLANE...

NO... BUT ONE OF THOSE SPANISH GOONS YOU HIRED COULD'VE HIDDEN IN THE COCKPIT OF THE NIEUPORT 17 PUT A GUN ON THE PILOT, FORCED HIM TO TAKE OFF-- THEN STRANGLERED HIM IN THE AIR AND BAILED OUT BEHIND THE MOUNTAIN! YOU ALSO HAD A THUG SABOTAGE THE PLANE AS INSURANCE! I NOTICED THAT ONE OF THE NIEUPORT'S FLAPS WAS STUCK IN THE HALF-DOWN POSITION...



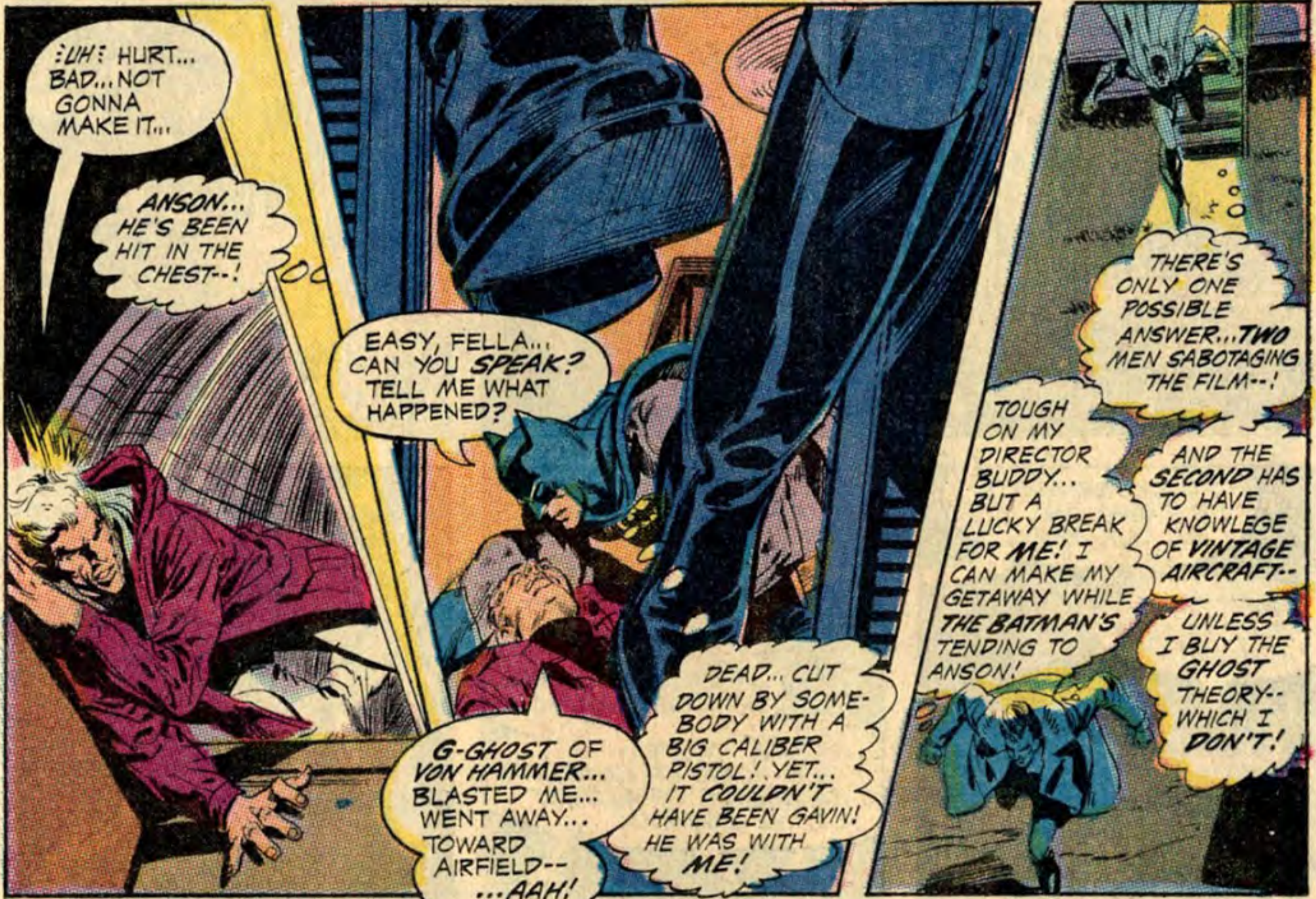
THAT'S WHY THE CRAFT ROLLED JUST BEFORE THE CRASH...

I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING TO THE PLANE... I HAVE NO REASON TO LIE--NOW!



SHOTS--!

BLAM
BLAM



UH! HURT... BAD... NOT GONNA MAKE IT...

ANSON... HE'S BEEN HIT IN THE CHEST--!

EASY, FELLA... CAN YOU SPEAK? TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED?

G-GHOST OF VON HAMMER... BLASTED ME... WENT AWAY... TOWARD AIRFIELD-- ...AAH!

DEAD... CUT DOWN BY SOMEBODY WITH A BIG CALIBER PISTOL! YET... IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN GAVIN! HE WAS WITH ME!

THERE'S ONLY ONE POSSIBLE ANSWER... TWO MEN SABOTAGING THE FILM--!

TOUGH ON MY DIRECTOR BUDDY... BUT A LUCKY BREAK FOR ME! I CAN MAKE MY GETAWAY WHILE THE BATMAN'S TENDING TO ANSON!

AND THE SECOND HAS TO HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF VINTAGE AIRCRAFT--

UNLESS I BUY THE GHOST THEORY-- WHICH I DON'T!



POW

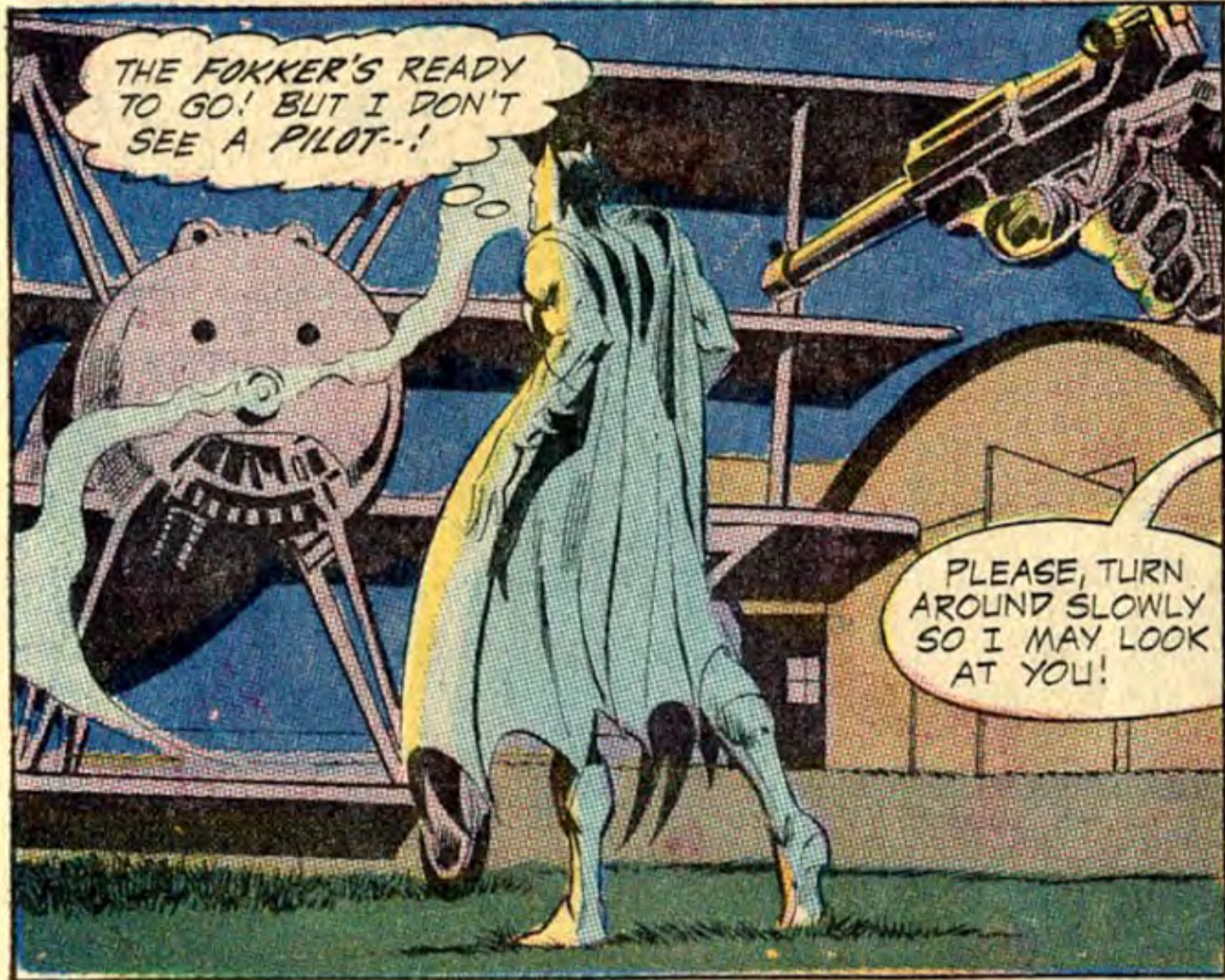
GAVIN'S EVEN WORSE AT THE 100-YARD DASH THEN HIS EMPLOYEE...

HE'LL STAY PUT UNTIL I GET AROUND TO COLLECTING HIM--



SOMEBODY'S STARTING AN ENGINE... SOUNDS LIKE THE OLD FOKKER TRIPLANE--

ANSON SAID HIS KILLER WENT TOWARD THE STRIP... GOT TO RUN LIKE I'VE NEVER RUN BEFORE!



THE FOKKER'S READY TO GO! BUT I DON'T SEE A PILOT--!

PLEASE, TURN AROUND SLOWLY SO I MAY LOOK AT YOU!



YOU ARE THE AMERICAN LAWMAN-- **THE BATMAN!**

YES... I DON'T BELIEVE WE'VE MET!

YOU MAY CALL ME THE **GHOST OF HANS VON HAMMER--!**



I'D RATHER NOT--! I'D RATHER CALL YOU BY YOUR NAME!

HEINRICH FRANZ AT YOUR SERVICE!

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S BEEN SABOTAGING THE MOVIE!



GUILTY AS CHARGED! THIS... FILTHY AMERICAN FILM IS AN **INSULT** TO THE MEMORY OF GERMANY'S FINEST HERO--

--**VON HAMMER** WAS AS A **GOD!** THE AMERICANS SHOW HIM AS A SOFT, SNIVELING WEAKLING...

...PUTTING INTO HIS MOUTH WORDS OF **COMPASSION** ...OF **MERCY**... OF **RESPECT** FOR THE **ENEMY!**



BAH! HE WAS **RUTHLESS**, WAS MY ANCESTOR-- **MAGNIFICENTLY RUTHLESS!**

NOT THE WAY I READ HIS STORY! I SEE THE **BARON** AS A MAN CAUGHT BETWEEN HIS FEELING OF DUTY AND HIS OWN BEST INSTINCTS... A TRAGIC, TORMENTED AND SOMEWHAT **PITIFUL SOLDIER--**



AS YOU WILL! I AM NOT GOING TO ARGUE HISTORY! RATHER, I AM GOING TO KILL!

SHOOT AN *UNARMED* ENEMY? IS THAT HOW *VON HAMMER* WOULD'VE ACTED? OR WOULD HE HAVE WELCOMED A FAIR FIGHT?



YES, YES... YOU ARE RIGHT! A CONTEST OF SKILL--THAT IS THE WAY OF *VON HAMMER*!

THE *NIEUPORT* IS FUELED AND READY--

I SHALL MEET YOU-- IN THE *KILLER SKY*!



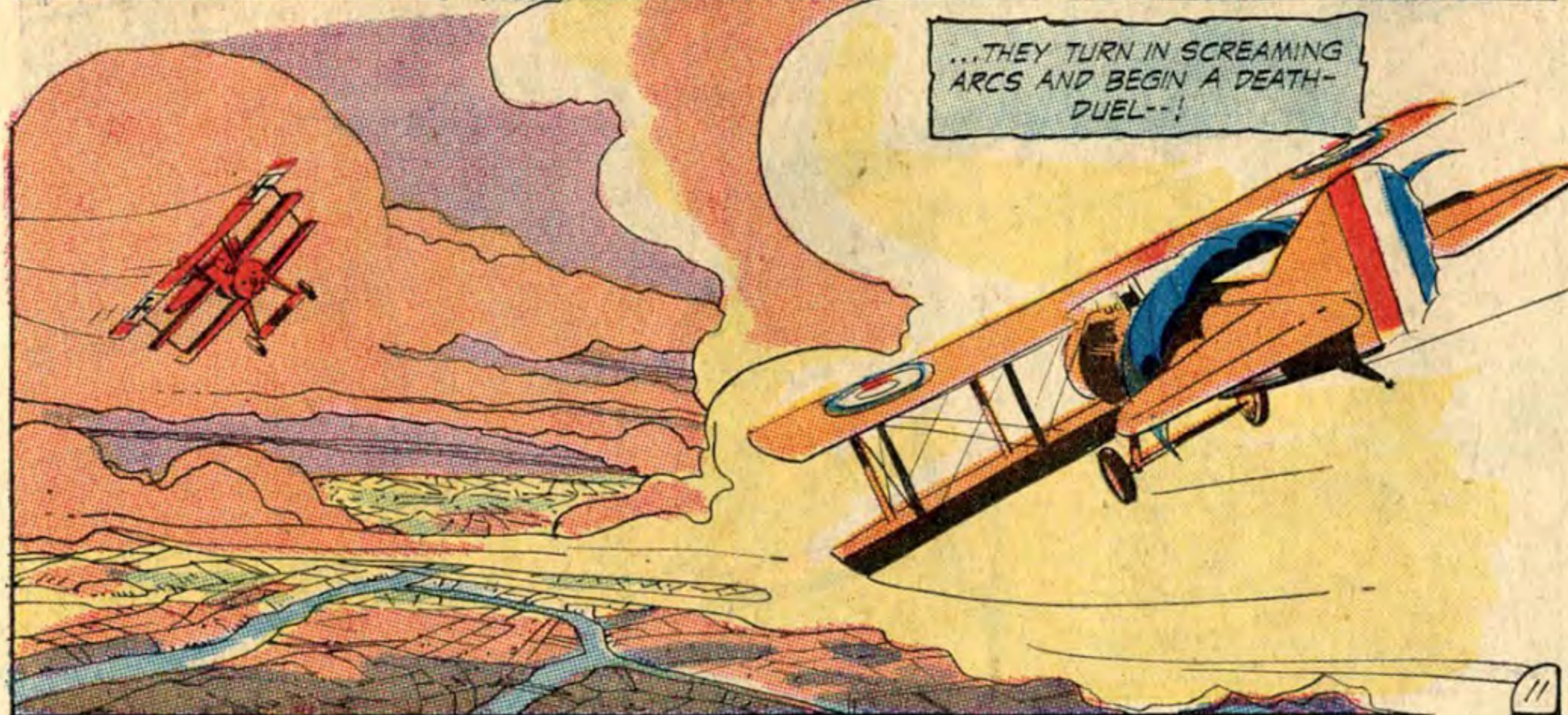
ONCE, A LONG TIME AGO, AN OLD STUNT-PILOT SHOWED ME HOW TO FLY THESE CRATES...

I HOPE I REMEMBER ALL HE SAID! BECAUSE IF I DON'T--

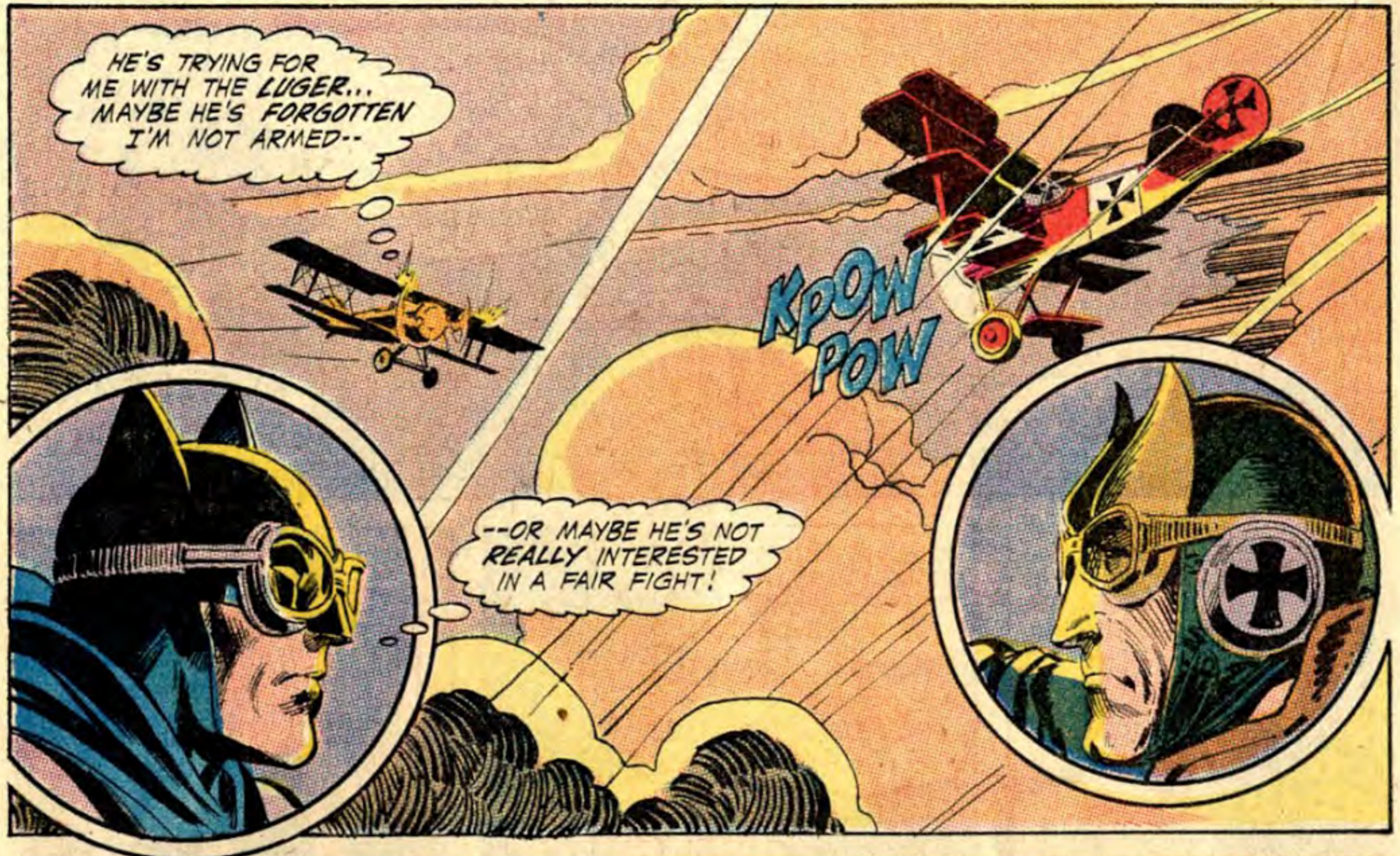
THAT MANIAC WILL GO FREE... AND I'LL BE DEAD!



AS THE FIRST LIGHT OF THE DAY BREAKS OVER THE CLOUDS EAST OF THE FIELD, TWO FRAIL THINGS-- BARELY MORE THAN STICKS COVERED WITH CANVAS-- CLIMB SLOWLY AWAY FROM THE EARTH...



...THEY TURN IN SCREAMING ARCS AND BEGIN A DEATH-DUEL--!



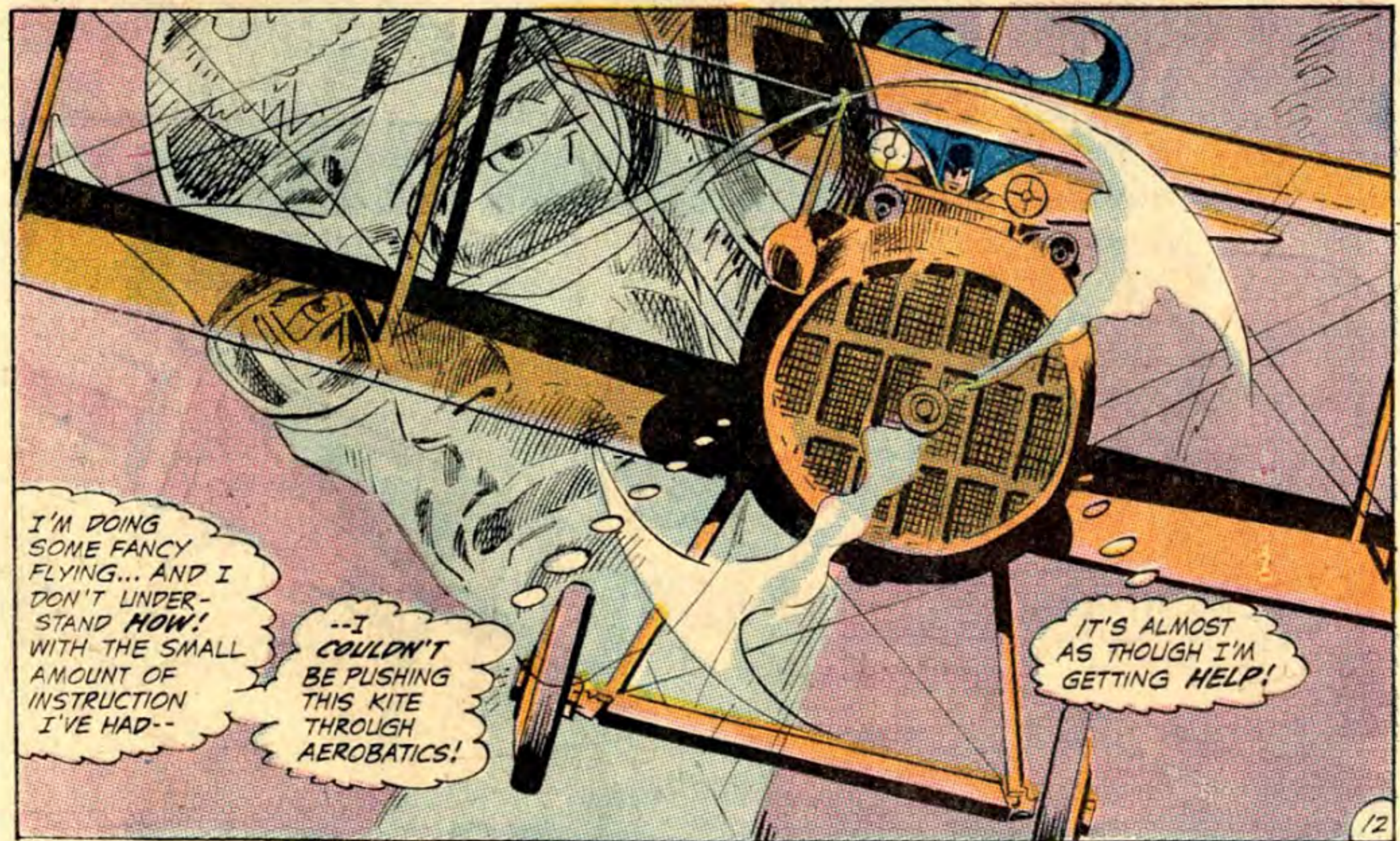
HE'S TRYING FOR ME WITH THE LUGER... MAYBE HE'S FORGOTTEN I'M NOT ARMED--

--OR MAYBE HE'S NOT REALLY INTERESTED IN A FAIR FIGHT!

KPOW POW



IN EITHER CASE, I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF RANGE--!



I'M DOING SOME FANCY FLYING... AND I DON'T UNDERSTAND **HOW!** WITH THE SMALL AMOUNT OF INSTRUCTION I'VE HAD--

--I COULDN'T BE PUSHING THIS KITE THROUGH AEROBATICS!

IT'S ALMOST AS THOUGH I'M GETTING HELP!



HE'S DIVING... STRAIGHT AT ME--! DOES HE PLAN TO CRASH--?



NO... HE'S USING HIS PROP TO CAUSE TURBULENCE... HOPING THAT I'LL BE BOUNCED AROUND UNTIL I MAKE A MISTAKE...

-- A FATAL MISTAKE!

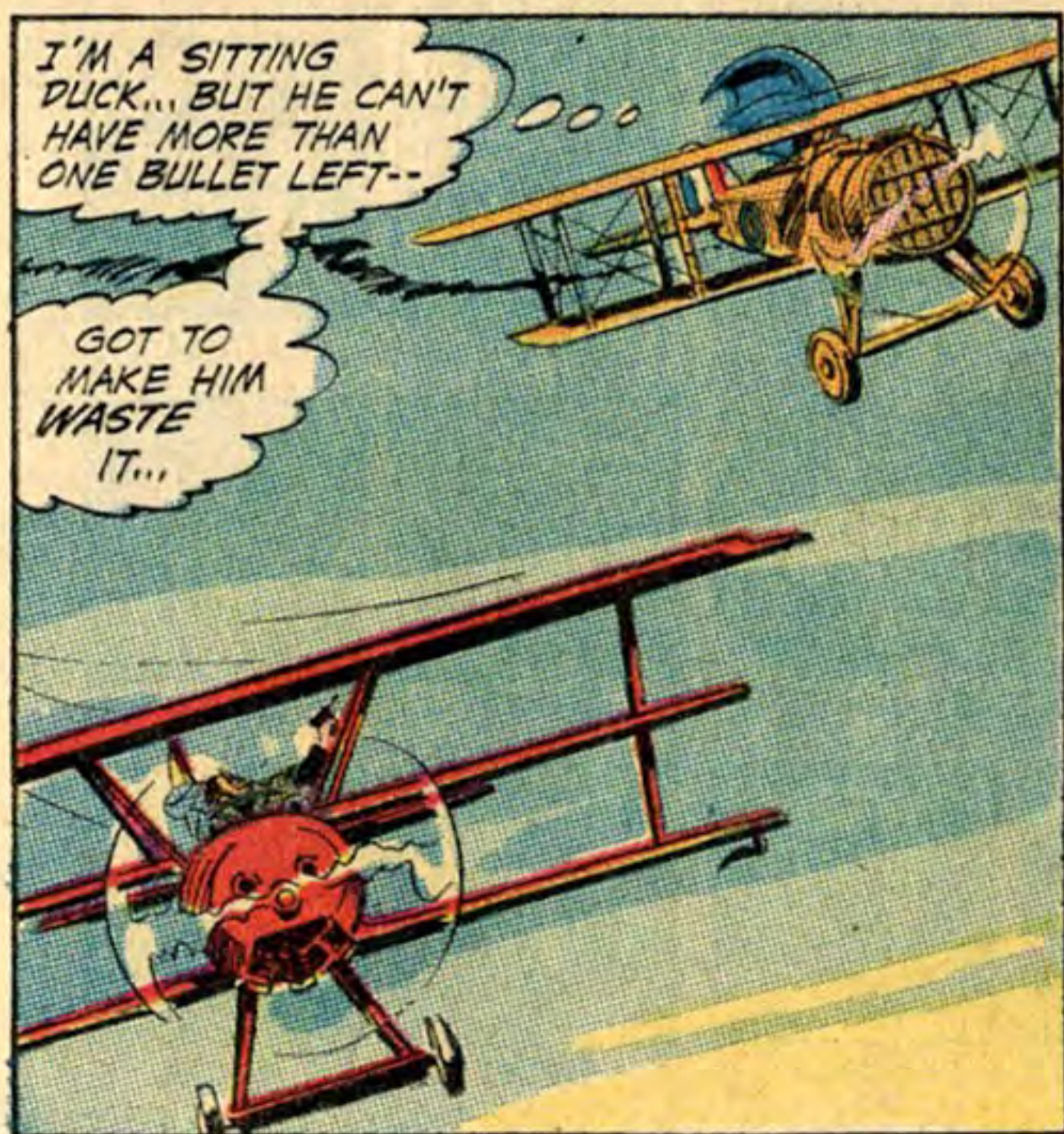


IF THE PLANE CAN TAKE IT--SO CAN I! FIRST JOB IS TO GET OUT OF HIS BACK-WASH... BY GOING UPSTAIRS--



...AND THEN I'LL TRY A STUNT OF MY OWN--HUH? THE ENGINE'S QUITTING...

ONE OF THE SLUGS MUST HAVE CUT THE FUEL-LINE...

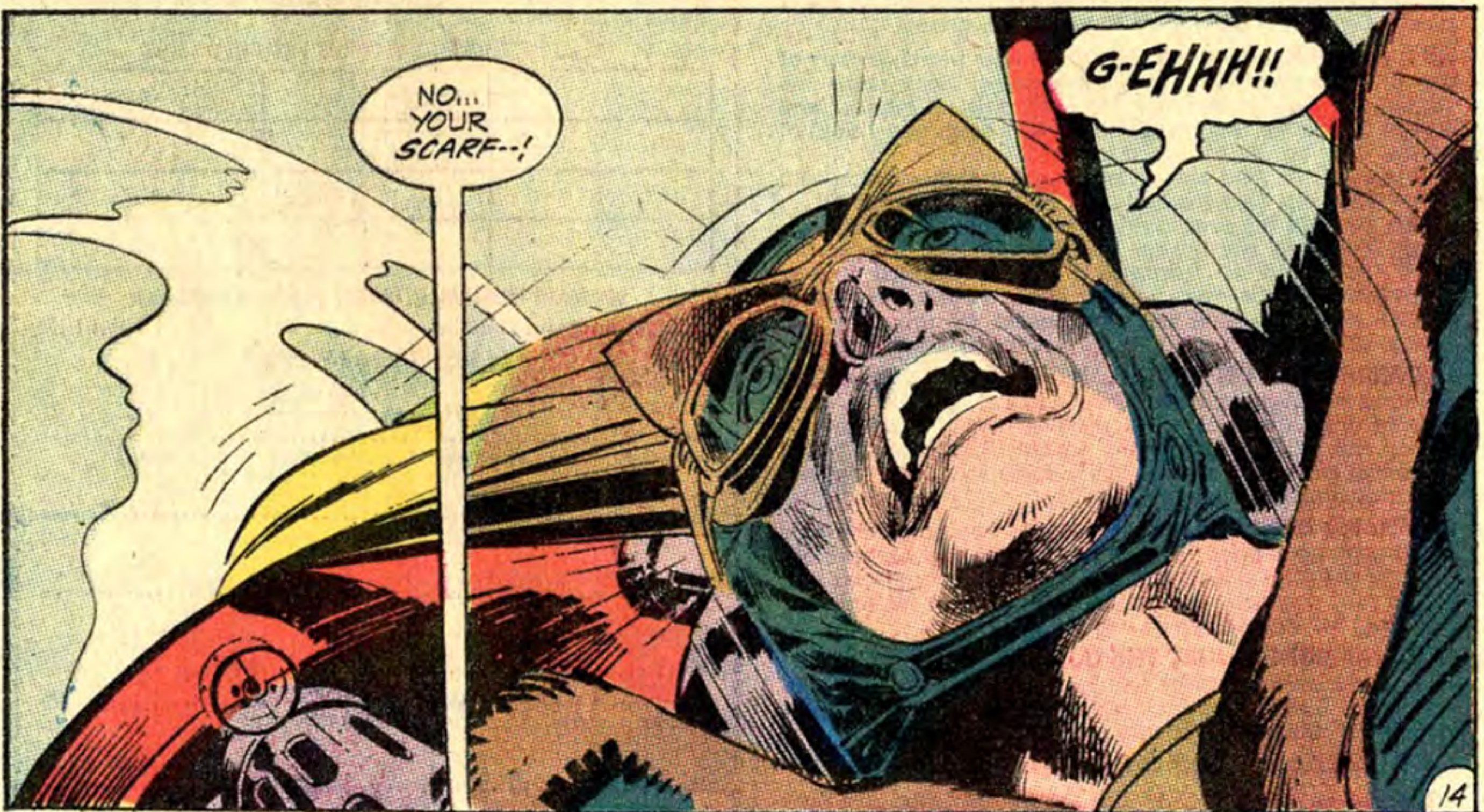
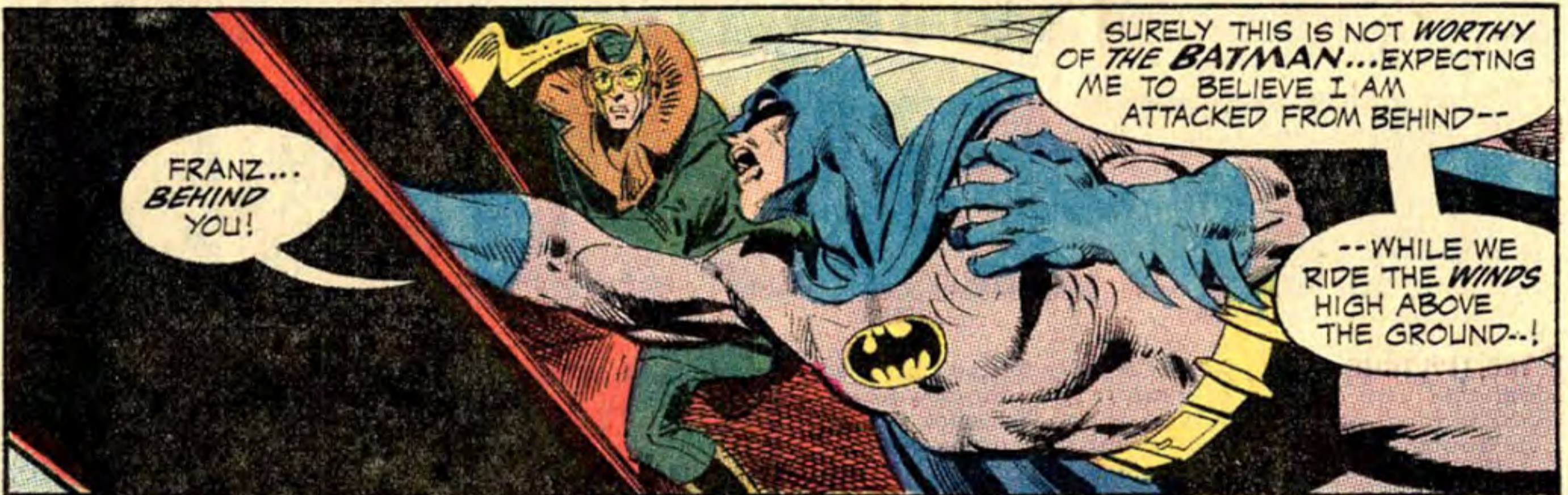


I'M A SITTING DUCK... BUT HE CAN'T HAVE MORE THAN ONE BULLET LEFT--

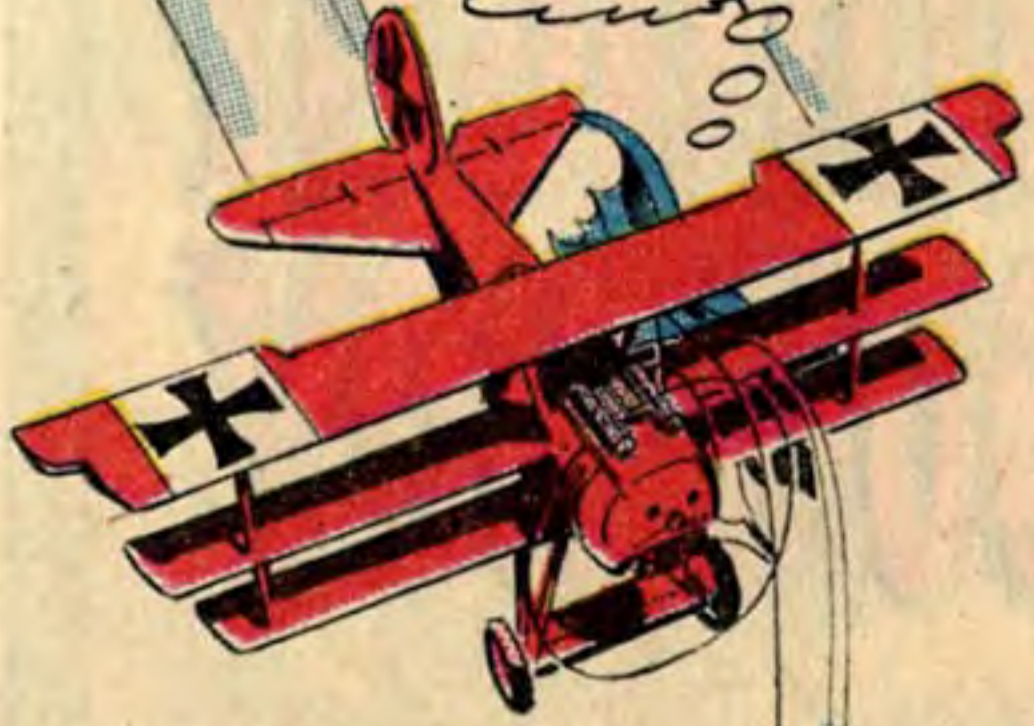
GOT TO MAKE HIM WASTE IT...



--BY DOING THE TOTALLY... UNEXPECTED!



IT CAUGHT IN THE
PROP... YANKED HIM
OUT OF THE
COCKPIT--

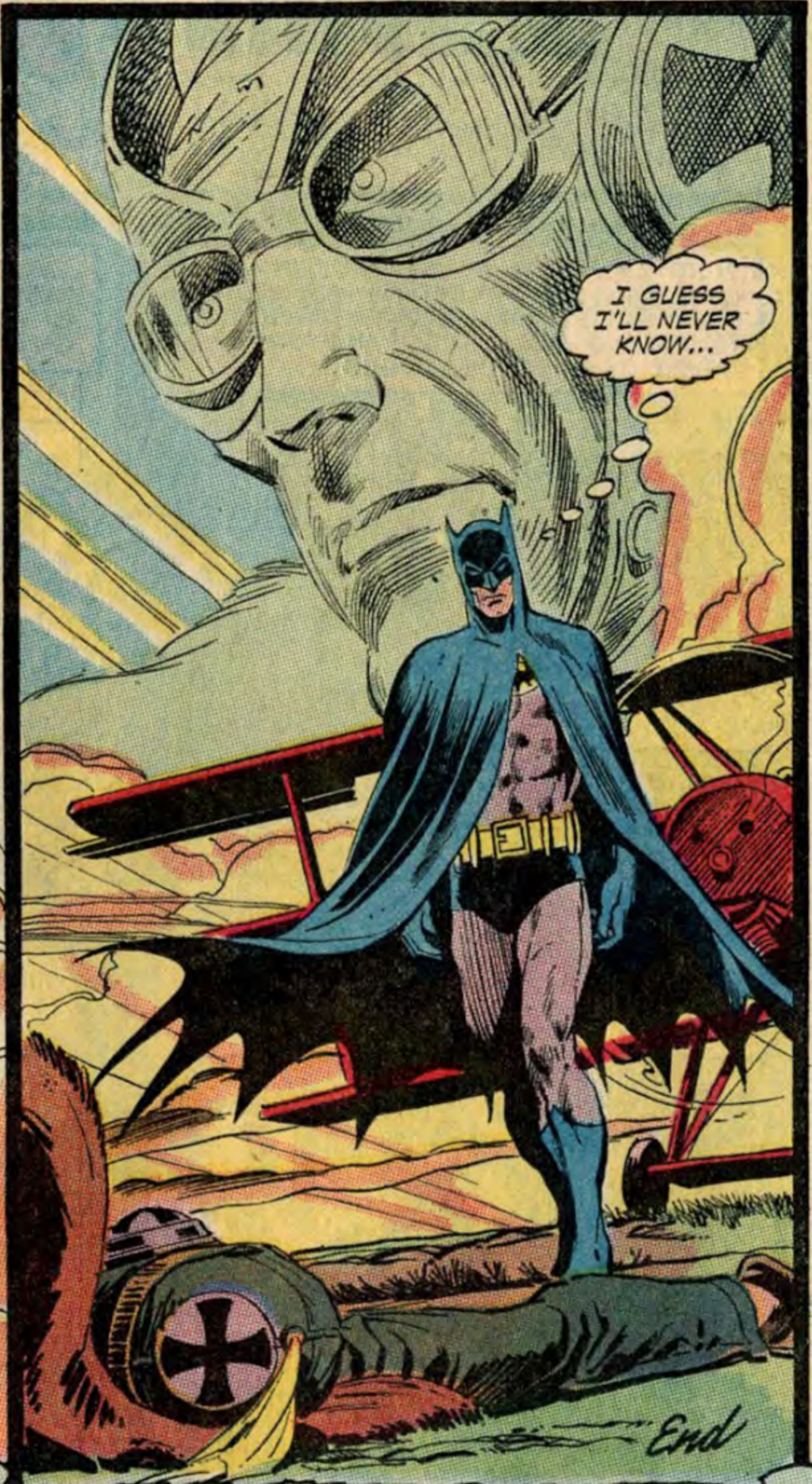
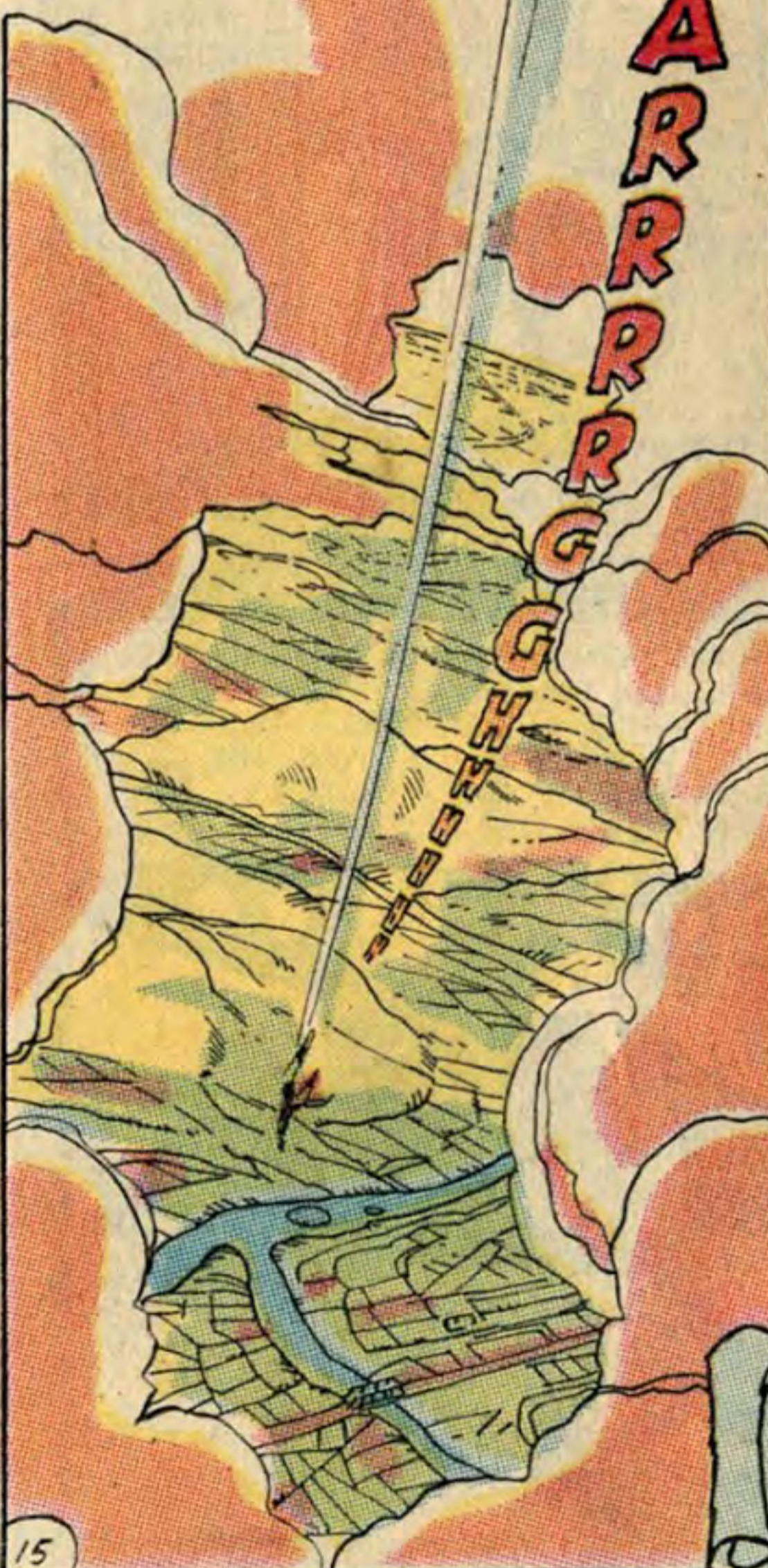


I WONDER IF FRANZ WAS
REALLY VON HAMMER'S
DESCENDANT-- OR JUST
ANOTHER VICTIM OF THE
MOST TERRIBLE
OF LOVES--

--THE
LOVE OF
WAR!



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I GUESS
I'LL NEVER
KNOW...

End

A TRIBUTE TO THE GREAT
Joe Kubert & Robert Kanigher

FROM
DENNY O'NEIL (SCRIPTER) NEAL ADAMS (ART) JULIUS SCHWARTZ (EDITOR)
DICK GIORDANO (ART)