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Eager to serve his country during World War Two, Steve Rogers was transformed into a physically perfect man by the government's Super Soldier program, becoming the United States' Sentinel of Liberty! Armed with an indestructible shield and the physical prowess of an Olympic athlete, Rogers fought valiantly to uphold the ideals and principles of democracy. At the end of the war, he was accidentally frozen in a block of ice and preserved for decades until discovered and revived by the Avengers. Now a man out of time, he is ever-vigilant in his battle to protect the innocent and uphold the beliefs upon which America was founded. Willing to sacrifice his own life for the greater good, Steve Rogers is the physical embodiment of truth, justice, and honor.



VOLUME 1
#9 – “Hyde and Seek”
Written by Gregg Epstein

It had been nearly a lifetime since Calvin Zabo had ingested the potion that had irrevocably transformed him into the hideous Mr. Hyde. As a youth, he had been fascinated by old horror films, the classics. Dracula, the Wolf Man, Frankenstein, the Mummy, Bride of Frankenstein, and of course, Jekyll and Hyde... they were the films of his youth. What he couldn't figure out was how he could transform himself into one of those creatures of old to commit crimes today. He needed a secret identity, like the new superheroes and villains to have a life of villainy. At first, he needed to ingest the actual potion, a liquid, frothy like substance that he kept in a vial in his laboratory but overtime he learned to transform at will, like the Hulk had done in recent years.

Nothing about Zabo's criminal career could be described as successful. He was a failure in all aspects of his life. He failed as being a criminal. He was always thwarted by at least one such super hero, whether it be Thor or Captain America or the Avengers, as a member of the Masters of Evil. His greatest success was when he and the Masters of Evil nearly killed Hercules and then, when he was recuperating, he and the rest of the Masters taunted and beaten Jarvis, the Avengers' butler. He soon got to live that down. He even tried going into Canada and tried to defeat the Canadian super hero team, Alpha Flight. That was another failure.

His current whereabouts, his current condition, showed his current failure to stay out of any jail. He was in the Vault, the prison for the super powered criminals. He hated to say it, because it sounded so child-like, so blasé, but it was completely, and undeniably, unfair. And he couldn't stand it any longer. He had to be free. Free of this infernal confinement. He was a scientist, for Chrissakes. He was meant for better and greater things. He was destined for greatness. And great people, with great minds, didn't belong in a jail of any sort.

That was how he began everyday when the daylight peeked through the tiny aperture above his cell. There was an electrified doorway leading outside to the other cells of his peers. But to his back, there was a window leading to the waters below and land ahead. The sun nearly blinded

him on his cot when it peered at him at sunrise. It always gave him a headache and made him feel quite queasy.

Last night, he had tried to break free of his confinement. First mistake was not changing into Hyde while he punched his way through the electrified doorway. The thousand volts of electricity nearly fried him to kingdom come. He spent the rest of the night shivering like a leaf and throwing up all over the floor. Maybe that was why he felt queasy in the morning. He forgot.

Now would be different. Now he would make no mistakes. Now would be the time that electrified doorway would not stop Hyde or a bull elephant. Now would be perfect. Now he would make a doorway out of the wall and he would swim to shore. To the city. To New York. To Captain America. To break his vaunted shield and make it his own.

Zabo concentrated and threw his head back. The change was coming over him. It was painful these days. He thought that it was akin to Bruce Banner changing into the Hulk in the early days. He growled like a beast of old. He howled at the moon that hung perched in the sky with its sister, Sol, the sun. His prison grays were ripping, adapting to his new outward appearance. He touched his face, in agony, throwing his specs on the floor and crushing them, only seconds later, when he stepped all over them. He wouldn't need them anymore because Hyde had perfect vision.

The change took place in the span of a few heartbeats but it felt like an eternity. Suddenly, he was Hyde again and he was going to be free. He loved the feel of the new body. He was more powerful, stronger, nearly invincible. And this time he wasn't going to let Captain America or any other hero that interfered make him any less again.

Hyde punched through the brick wall and the sound it made was something akin to a BAROOM! The last thing he heard while he swam to shore was the Vault's klaxons ringing in his ears.

For Captain America, life was looking good. He had adopted a girl named Maria. He couldn't be happier. He always wanted to be a father when he got the time. Burt his career as a super hero and a member of the Avengers, he just never had the time. No he had and everything was just rosy.

It was really a sight to behold to see his daughter playing with her toys that he bought for her this weekend at Toys 'R' Us. She seemed just as happy as he was, watching over her. She had an innocent smile 'pon her face, as she whooshed the train set into a couple of Hot Wheels race cars that would put Nascar racers to shame just for the pure display of it. He returned her smile with one of his own.

The bad news was that Sharon Carter was there with him and she seemed less than pleased. She made it quite clear on a number of occasions that she didn't approve of his adopting this girl. Not that there was anything wrong with adopting a child but with his lifestyle as a super hero, she didn't think he would find the time.

Captain America simply replied, "I will make the time."

She wasn't and still isn't so easily convinced.

"I don't know about you," Cap said to Sharon Carter, "But I'm glad that the events of the last couple of days are over. Working with Undying and Maggott was fun and all but it just wasn't my style. The only team that I like to fight with are the Avengers and probably you, with SHIELD."

"Yeh, I guess you're right there," Sharon responded, still clad in her SHIELD uniform. "So, you're serious about Maria? I mean, really."

"Yes, I am, Sharon. She has no home, no family. I'm all that she's got. Anyway we have this great connection."

All heads turned to the television set when a flash news report came on. "This just in. Mr. Hyde has just escaped from the Vault and he is head toward New York. Repeat: Mr. Hyde has just escaped from the Vault. All New Yorkers are suggested to stay within their homes until this crisis is over..."

"I'm on it, Sharon," Cap said, as he vaulted out the window.

Captain America had to find Mr. Hyde. He could wreak havoc throughout the city if Cap allowed him to escape too long. He could be anywhere by now. But if Cap knew Hyde, he would attack the city before long.

Captain America bounded from rooftop to rooftop to find Hyde. He surveyed the city. People were going to and from work, shopping, or just leisurely walking for exercise. He wished he could take a vacation and enjoy life to its fullest. Maybe when this mission was over he would take one. And take Maria with him. She could see the sights of the city. New York was one of greatest cities in the world and one, even a child, should see it to its fullest. He missed her already. It was a good thing he hired a babysitter for her.

But he better keep his mind on business. He passed an old newstand. He heard a radio blaring in the background when a flash new report came on. The reporter said, "It has just been reported that Mr. Hyde has been spotted near the Neves jewelry store on 57th Street and Madison Avenue..."

"That's where I'm headed," Cap said, as he redirected his path of direction.

When he arrived at the Neves Jewelers store, he saw that it was chaos. People were running down the street, yelling about some sort of super criminal tearing up the store. When he landed in front of the store, he saw that Hyde crashed through the window and was foraging through the glass cases where the jewels were kept for sake keeping. Simple robbery in broad daylight wasn't

his forte, Cap surmised. What then? He usually attacked super heroes, like Thor or even himself. He probably was doing this to bring him out to the open.

Captain America entered through the door and hid in a corner who had his back turned to him. He waited until just the right moment to attack him. "Okay, Hyde, this ends here and now. I'm not going to let you get away with those jewels. I'm going to haul you back to the Vault where you belong."

"Hide if you want to, Captain America, but I will find you!" Hyde yells.

'Obviously this guy is nuts.' Cap thinks to himself. He runs down a side alley and ducks into the back door of a store.

'When that guy first showed up, I was out in the street where he could hurt innocents. Hopefully this little "wild goose chase" will get him away from them.'

He came through the back of the store and noticed that it wasn't a store at all. It was a bar.

"Excuse me," he said walking over to the bar, "But have any of you..."

Just then, a pair of familiar hands grab Cap and throw him through the front window. "Thought ya' could hide from me, did ya'?" Hyde snickered.

Cap stood up, ignoring the screaming from every bone in his body. His lip was bleeding. Swinging his arm back in a graceful arc, he threw his arm at Hyde, hitting him right in the face. The force of the blow sent Hyde flaying over the counter like a rag doll. When he didn't stand up again, Cap assumed that he was unconscious. But as he approached the bar, Hyde suddenly stood up.

Cap easily dodged the flying fist, and was able to kick Hyde in the chest, sending him back against the wall. But Cap underestimated Hyde's speed and agility, and before he could blink, Hyde had leapt across the bar, and had Cap in a headlock.

And with a quick thrusting gesture, he slammed Cap's face into the concrete wall, smashing his nose, breaking his jaw, and rendering him unconscious.

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VOLUME 1
#10 – “Hyde Out”
Written by Gregg Epstein

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE: *After several failures breaking out, Mr. Hyde escaped from the Vault and made it to shore to the Big Apple. Captain America bought some toys for his adopted daughter, Maria, when he heard over the news that Mr. Hyde was on the loose. Cap fought Hyde but the man-monster defeated the star spangled Avenger.*

With a rough-hewn hand upon his head, Mister Hyde is about to unmask Captain America. For as long as he has been a criminal, Hyde has wanted to know what the Captain looked like underneath that infernal mask. He probably was a nobody or the freakin' President of the United States of America. Wouldn't that be a kick in the head? If he was the Prez. But no, he couldn't be. He had to be a celebrity in his own home town and old as Moses.

Captain America is unconscious due to the shock of the blows that Hyde gave him recently. He is about to unmask him when he hears the sirens of the police black and white vehicles nearing him. He is startled out of his reverie. He doesn't want to be caught now. He is sure he could probably wreak havoc on their defenseless forms.

He needs to hide. Bad pun. He defeated the Captain. That is good for now. he could kill him later. The Captain wouldn't like being so easily defeated by a man like Hyde.

Hearing the sirens, the gawkers and innocent bystanders turn their attention to the police. It is the perfect chance for Hyde to change back into Calvin Zabo. The clothes are too big for him.

"Uhhnnn," Captain America groans and moans as he starts to awaken.

"Bring that stretcher over here," a police officer says to the medic arriving in an ambulance.
"This man needs medical attention."

"I'll take over from here, men," Sharon Carter says, arriving on the scene. She is wearing her SHIELD uniform. "The man's with me."

"And who are you?" the police officer remarks, angry that his authority is being usurped. "This guy has just been in a terrible fight. He needs help. I doubt that he would survive the night."

"Do you know who this man is? He's Captain America. The original star spangled Avenger. I'm a SHIELD agent and his best friend." She flashes a bronze badge. Once he inspects it, she pockets it. "He can and has survived much more than a mere scuffle with Mister Hyde. I'm taking him back home."

"I just hope you know what you're doing, lady."

Nodding at the police officer who reluctantly agrees with her, Sharon Carter commands the SHIELD agents to load Captain America into their vehicle.

"Uhhnn... what happened?" Cap asks as he awakens in his apartment with both Maria and Sharon Carter right beside him. His face and jaw are all bruised up and he generally hurts all over. He never thought that Mr. Hyde could give him such a beating. He thought that he would be able to protect himself from such an attack. He was wrong.

"You got whipped like a dog, Cap," Sharon says. Cap notices the cynical tone to her voice. Ever since he adopted Maria and spoiled her rotten, Sharon has a cynical tone that he hasn't noticed before. "I helped you but Hyde got away."

"I have to go after him," Cap said, as he struggles to stand up. He doesn't realize that that is a nigh impossible task since he has been so injured. "There's no telling what he could be doing to the city in my absence."

"You're going nowhere until I have Brian Vesso take a look at you. He's the best doc in SHIELD and I won't take no for an answer."

Cap groans. He hurts all over. "How can I argue with that?"

"Here let me help you up." Sharon offers a hand to help him stand up. She puts gauze on the open wounds that are bleeding. She is no doctor but she knows a little about medicine.

"You're a true friend, Sharon. I don't know what I could have done without you. Makes me think of the good ol' days."

"You should know better than most that those days are over and we have to move on to the present."

"Yes, I do. Our relationship is over but a guy can hope, can't he?"

"Well, here's for old times sake." Sharon pecked him on the cheek. "now, let's get you prepped for Vesso."

"Thanks, Sharon."

Leaning on Sharon's body for support, Captain America walks out of the apartment leaving Maria with a babysitter.

"What's the verdict, doc?" Captain America asks of Dr. Brian Vesso in his office at SHIELD headquarters above the Hellicarrier.

Vesso is giving Cap a complete physical. He weighs him, checks his pulse, listens to his heartrate and blood pressure, all the basics that are included in a physical. Cap is concerned that the structure of the super soldier serum may have been fading. That is why Hyde beat him. Vesso agrees that that may not have been the case but rather Hyde was getting angrier by the second, giving in to his emotions. Like the Hulk, the angrier he gets, the stronger he becomes.

"So, that's it, Vesso. I was just going too soft on him. I may be losing my edge. I didn't think that it was possible."

"I think it's a variation of that," Sharon concurs. "You are used to fighting people and villains that are weaker than you. You have an advantage on them. With Hyde, it is empirically different. He is stronger than you, so you are used to holding back. You couldn't deal with it."

"I won't make that mistake again. This time I will defeat and make sure he stays in the Vault for the time being."

"Cap, you can't go yet. There are tests to be run."

Cap stands up and walks out the door. "I have to go, for the sake of the city."

In the midtown district of Manhattan, Captain America jumps and bounds from rooftop to rooftop in search of Mr. Hyde. For someone that big and powerful, he definitely has plenty of hiding places within the city. But then, Cap realized, he could change into his other identity of Calvin Zabo at will. Cap figured that was how Bruce Banner was able to be on the run and no one knew who he was.

But this time out, he has Sharon Carter and the rest of SHIELD with him. Sharon didn't trust him to go off half-cocked against Hyde all by his lonesome. She wanted him to have backup and there is no backup like the entire SHIELD forces behind him.

"Do you have any idea where he could be now?" Sharon asks Cap. "You know him better than I do. All I have to go on is the Avengers files on him and your word."

"He probably wants to bring me out into the open. I'm not sure what he wants with me this time. It could like all the other times. Just simple revenge."

"Is that it? Revenge? Is it that basic?"

"How else do these villains work? They want a life of crime. They succeed in it somewhat but when they encounter a hero like me who wants nothing more than to stop them and bring the victims of their crime some justice, they want a chance to beat the hero at his or her own game."

"Is it truly a game to them?"

"Yes, a twisted, perverted game where they are the winners and the innocents are the losers. It's a no win situation. We are too evenly matched and-"

CRACK!

Captain America doesn't have time to react when the ferocious Mister Hyde jumps up onto the rooftop where he and Sharon were standing and talking and sideswipes Sharon with a swift left. He screams bloody murder.

"My God! Sharon!!" He sees Sharon tipping over the side of the rooftop and falling to her doom below. Not even thinking of his own personal safety, Cap jumps down to the teeming streets below, hoping against hope to catch her before she becomes a bloody smear on the pavement.

Careful, Steve, don't jump the gun now. You can't be off more than a hairsbreadth. He's flying through the air, as his body becomes one taut machine of a soaring projectile. He reaches both arms outwards, his hands about to grab Sharon as she falls.

Seconds later, he lands on the streets below, cradling Sharon's body in his powerful arms. She looks dazed and a bit out of it.

"Sharon, are you okay?" Cap asks of his once ladylove.

"Hi."

"Hi yourself. Are you okay?"

"Let's get that bastard."

Captain America thinks that the shock may have been too much for her, by soaring through the afternoon skyline and air, and falling too many stories to count. But then, he knew that this was Sharon Carter, agent of SHIELD, and as a member of that government body, she was prepared for every eventuality.

Before he can turn around, Cap sees that Hyde has taken the time to vault from fire escape to fire escape to land mere feet from the two heroes. Hyde is growling like the animal he is, snarling, and drooling and spitting blood from his shining white teeth.

"I'm going to beat you to a bloody pulp like I did before, Captain," Hyde says, clenching his fists and cracking his knuckles at the same time. But Cap shows no fear because unlike previously when Hyde defeated him, he is not afraid. He shows no fear and that is what he suspects will irritate Hyde the most.

"I don't think so, Captain, you're a dead man! Again."

Hyde launches into battle with the Captain. Cap ducks to avoid his hurling fist. Cap punches him back, this time in the stomach. Hyde 'ooofff's as he receives the blow.

Hyde wants the death of Captain America. He wants to break that vaunted shield of his. So to give him what he wants, Cap hurls his shield right into Hyde's mouth. Hyde loses a couple of his permanent teeth. They fall to the ground below. His mouth is a mess of blood and loose teeth. He looks like a parody of his former self.

The battle is over when Hyde realizes that the patriot with the shield can destroy. That and when Sharon Carter shoots him with a stun gun. That gun can stop a herd of bull elephants.

"Thanks, Sharon. But I could have stopped him myself."

"I know. But I didn't want to see you hurt again."

"Don't worry. I will never not use my shield again. It has become a valuable weapon and one that can save my life. Anyway, what say we grab a cup of coffee and call it a day?"

Sharon smiles and as the SHIELD agents haul Hyde into their hellicarrier and then the Vault, Captain America and Sharon Carter walk into the distance.

Steve Rogers' Apartment

"Maria, it's time for you to go to bed. Also, I would like to talk to Auntie Sharon," Cap says, as he asks Maria to clean up her Hot Wheels toys.

Maria nods in agreement because she is getting tired. "G'nite, daddy."

"Good night, Maria. See you in the morning."

Cap and Sharon watch as the little girl walks to her room. She has been using the spare room next to Cap's. When they are again alone, Sharon turns to Cap and says, "Never thought I'd live to see the day when a girl would say that."

"What's that?" Cap asks.

"That a girl would call you 'daddy'. You seem to be the perfect father figure for adults and youngsters alike. But it is kinda strange to me."

Cap laughed out loud. "Hahahaha! It is a little weird for me too. I always wanted to have a child, especially a daughter of my own. I hoped it would be with you but with our strained relationship as it is, since we had a falling out, it just never happened. But then, that reminds me. I have a request to ask of you..."

Captain America removed his mask, placing it in one of his pants pockets, and approached Sharon Carter. Seeing his intentions, she began to back away. One would think that she would never back away from a man's advances but here she was shying away from Captain America. This was Captain America who wanted something more than a friend, more than a lover, he wanted-

"I want you to act as Maria's mother. I know that you are only on temporary status with SHIELD, so you have the free time. Also, we are together almost all the time. You spend your free time with me at my apartment here and when we share time on missions we work well together. Maria needs a mother. I can't be a single parent. We don't have to get married. It doesn't have to be that way. Just think about it and tell me you'll do it."

"Cap, I don't know-I-"

"No, I am not Captain America. Now, I am just plain ol' Steve Rogers. I am asking you as a lover, friend, and the only other person in Maria's life. Please, help me."

"I-Cap, I mean Steve, I would like to but-"

"What's stopping you? I mean, really."

Sharon sighs. "Nothing, I guess. But no way am I marrying you." She pauses and then whispers, 'At least, not yet.'

Sharon notices that she is backed against a corner with Steve Rogers. As she struggles to break free (she never saw him this aggressive before, but then she was privy to aggressive men being with SHIELD), she realizes that she can't.

Steve kisses Sharon full on the mouth and she finds that she responds in kind. She wants him more than she ever wanted any men in her life before. Still kissing her, Steve lifts her up in his very powerful arms and carries her into his bedroom.

Soon, they are both naked, his body on top of hers, and they make wonderful passionate love. It is the best thing that has ever happened to her.

So much for their falling out.

Coney Island

"Should I call you Auntie or Mommie?" Maria asks Sharon Carter while the two girls and Steve Rogers are on the beach, soaking in some sun. Steve is drawing some of the scenery on his sketchpad.

"Aunt is fine," Sharon confides to the child. "I'm not your mother. Steve and I aren't married. But I'll be better than any mommy around. I'll do anything for you."

"I thought that you hated me."

"What gave you that idea, precious?"

"I overheard you talking to Daddy the other day before that Hyde guy attacked the city. You said that it was wrong for him to adopt me. I don't think so. I couldn't be happier. He's my daddy. Why do you hate us being together?"

"Maria, I-"

"Also, last night, when I was trying to go to bed, I heard you moaning and shouting out Daddy's name. What were you two doing?"

Sharon laughs. "Oh, nothing. You'll learn about it when you get older. But just remember that I love you. I was just concerned about Steve being a single parent. But he isn't any more. Do you know what a single parent is?"

"I think so."

"You are a smart one, you are."

"Isn't that right, Steve? Steve?! Steve!!"

Sharon turns to the beach and sees a sketchpad and a bundle of civvies but no Steve Rogers. He must have turned into Captain America. He must have seen a menace attacking the beach but why wasn't she alerted to it? Curse her for talking to Maria like some ditzy mother. She takes out her service revolver and searches for the danger that she knows Cap must be in.

"Come on, Maria, let's find your father."

It didn't take Sharon long to find Cap or Steve or whatever he is calling himself now. She sees Cap on his motorcycle chasing after a man holding a ball and chain and with some old dungarees and no shirt. He looks like he hasn't shaved in a week or two. The man looks like he could take Cap in a second but he is scared stiff of the star spangled Avenger. She knows this man. He is Crusher Creel, the Absorbing Man.

"Don't worry, Cap, I got him!"

"No, Sharon, don't!"

Sharon Carter, Agent 13 of SHIELD, fires a round of ammunition from her revolver but Creel sees it coming in an instant and ducks out of the way to evade the bullets. The round goes into the water.

"Sharon, stop! I just want to talk to him!"

Sharon Carter hears the fears of the beach goers.

"Didja see that? That crazy woman is shooting at people on the beach."

"What kind of idiot brings a gun to the beach?"

Sharon bows her head and follows Cap's lead.

"What are you doing here, Creel?" Cap asks him.

"I was just on a day off with my girlfriend, Mary. She's having trouble at her job at the First National Bank. I thought I'd cheer her up."

"It looks like I jumped the gun, too. When I saw you here, I thought that you may be causing trouble. You may still be doing that. I am going to keep my eye on you. On your way, Creel."

Crusher Creel rejoins Mary at the other side of the beach.

Sharon pockets her gun in its shoulder holster. "I guess we both jumped the gun today. You with chasing Creel and me with firing into the crowd. What was I thinking?"

"Don't worry, no harm done. No innocents were hurt. I think that we should continue with our little vacation and try not to take time away from Maria."

"You're right. C'mon, Maria, want some cotton candy?"

"You bet."

And as the day continues, Cap and Sharon do indeed focus their attention on Maria, who thinks the world of Captain America, Sentinel of Liberty.

Eager to serve his country during World War Two, Steve Rogers was transformed into a physically perfect man by the government's Super Soldier program, becoming the United States' Sentinel of Liberty! Armed with an indestructible shield and the physical prowess of an Olympic athlete, Rogers fought valiantly to uphold the ideals and principles of democracy. At the end of the war, he was accidentally frozen in a block of ice and preserved for decades until discovered and revived by the Avengers. Now a man out of time, he is ever-vigilant in his battle to protect the innocent and uphold the beliefs upon which America was founded. Willing to sacrifice his own life for the greater good, Steve Rogers is the physical embodiment of truth, justice, and honor. He is...

Issue #11

"THE HEiST"

by [Gregg Epstein](#)

It is midnight, the witching hour, as a crime is being committed in the warehouse district of New York City. Three men, dressed in casual clothing, are approaching an alley where a young woman is carrying a leather bound purse that holds all her money, credit cards and other valuables, is on her way home from work. Their motives are simple: to rob this young woman of her belongings and make way with the goods in a clean getaway.

And so, let us begin with the action right away.

"Hey, baby, whatcha got in that pocket book of yers?" one of the men, Charlie Watson says, taking his handgun and pointing it at the young woman. "And don' try anythin' funny, 'cuz I am ready to use this gun on ya."

Before the girl can relinquish the contents of her purse to the three gentlemen, there is a whizzing sound in the air as a circular device is hurled from the shadows to Charlie Watson and his gun hand. The device, seen as a blur, hits his hand, causing him great pain, and makes him drop the gun into the darkness of the alley.

"My-my hand!!" Charlie screams in pain, as he clutches his hand, trying to massage the wound that the device causes.

"Look, above us it-it's-" the other two men say in unison.

On the fire escape stands the proud and regal figure of Captain America, the Star Spangled Avenger. He reaches his hand out and his shield returns to him, the same shield that relieved Charlie of his gun. The other two men aren't carrying guns, they were here for pure muscle.

"And now, to make short work of you," Cap says, as he uses his shield as a battering ram to

smash the three crooks into kingdom come. It takes no hard exercise to drop the three men to the ground into unconsciousness. Once he is done with his work, he assures the young woman that everything is all right and that she shouldn't take this route home again this late at night.

Captain America ties the three thieves in hardware store style rope that he finds in a garbage can and awaits for the police to pick them up. He makes a 911 telephone call from a payphone and is soon on his way.

That was almost too easy, Captain America thinks to himself as he vaults from rooftop to rooftop on his way back to his apartment. I've had a break since that Mr. Hyde fiasco and the Absorbing Man said that he wouldn't cause me much trouble but frankly, I don't trust him. I better head on home now as I prepare for my new job. I wonder what Sharon is doing right now...

In another section of town, in Captain America's apartment that he shares with his foster daughter, Maria Rogers, Sharon Carter is asleep on the couch, while she is supposedly babysitting said daughter. Maria is playing with her new Hot Wheels set but Sharon pays no mind to that as her thoughts flow inward, ever inward, to her recent foul up at Coney Island the other day.

She fears for Captain America since he traded Sharon's cancer and Maria's hump for a lifetime of Cobweb residing within Cap's mind. She wonders when Cap will have a showdown with Cobweb. Soon, she thinks, very soon, she hopes.

Then, the scenery shifts to Coney Island. Sharon is there with Cap and Maria. She is enjoying the time spent there with the two closest people in the world and regrets the words spoken to Cap about him not being a fit father. Is she a fit mother? Or surrogate mother or even a surrogate aunt? Anyways, Cap is drawing sketches on his sketchpad and suddenly, the Absorbing Man attacks Cap. Cap is defenceless against him. Sharon sees Creel pounding his fist into Cap's face, bruising and injuring him until he looks near death.

Then, it happens.

Sharon takes out her service revolver and instead of shooting Creel, shoots Cap in the heart. He screams in pain and slumps to the floor, dead.

"NOOOOOOOO!!!!!"

Sharon is awake. The dream is over, to quote a John Lennon song. At that moment as Sharon is screaming for her life, Captain America enters the room. He sees Sharon startled and scaring Maria even more than she scared herself.

"Maria, would you be a dear and go to your room, while I talk to Auntie Sharon alone?" Cap asks his daughter.

"Okay, daddy."

Seeing Maria leave his presence, Cap approaches Sharon, who is just now cuddled in a ball, trying to wish the pain away.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Cap asks, opening himself up for conversation.

"No, Cap, I don't. I have to deal with this on my own. I have to leave."

Captain America watched as she slammed the door on her way out.

His name is Crusher Creel, but nowadays he goes by the nom de guerre the Absorbing Man. A long time ago, nearly a lifetime ago, he was in prison and the god of mischief Loki gave him the ability to absorb the physical attributes of anything he comes in contact with. Carrying with him his traditional ball and chain, he became the arch nemesis of Thor and soon, Captain America.

He told Cap that he wouldn't harm him because he just wanted to find his new ladylove, Mary. Those days are over. Mary had lost her job as a bank teller in the First National Bank and he now goes there to get the money he needs to support himself and her.

Like many misunderstood men or criminals before him, like the Incredible Hulk, he wants to just be alone. They don't understand the problems he faces everyday as an enemy of the Avengers and its individual members. They don't understand what it means to steal money left and right, without the promise of a job the next day. They don't understand what it means to not have a steady girlfriend or a lover. Plainly, they just don't understand.

"Sarge, what do you think we should do?" a nervous, baby faced cop asks of his superior. Every cop in town was pointing their .44 magnums and rifles at the Absorbing Man, ready to kill him with just a lucky shot. But they all knew that bullets couldn't harm him because he could just as easily absorb the metal from the bullets to become bullet-proof.

"There's not a whole lot that we can do," the sergeant says, keeping his eyes peeled on the criminal, instead of the rookie cop who he is speaking to. "All we can do is hold him until the cavalry arrives. I sent in a call to the Avengers and got Captain America. He should be here momentarily. Sit and wait. God, I love this job."

"I want you to put your hands in the air," the sarge says, as he stands up to point his gun at the Absorbing Man's head. "You are under arrest. Or we'll open fire!"

"You won't get me this time, coppers!" the Absorbing Man yells at the top of his lungs, ignoring the cop's warnings, hurling his ball and chain in the air above his head. He created a gust of wind that blew the cops all backward, ever backward, including their black and white vehicles. He then smashed his ball and chain on the pavement to cause an earthquake.

Captain America first hears of the attack on the First National Bank when he is contacted by the police on his Avengers ID card. He knows that Crusher Creel's promise to not attack the city was a lie in and of itself. So it is now his duty to put an end to the Absorbing Man's reign of terror.

When he arrives at the bank, it is a horror show of epic proportions. The cops have the place surrounded. They have been shooting at Creel but the criminal has been absorbing their bullets making him bullet-proof. He is going on and on about his girlfriend losing her job and now he has to support her with no job to call his own. He is power mad and angry and there seems to be no end to his tirade. He wants to end this quick and now.

"I knew you couldn't be trusted, Creel," Captain America says, as he arrives at the bank. He approaches Creel, with his shield up. If Creel uses his ball and chain to lash out, then Cap will have to use his shield to protect himself and the cops and innocent bystanders all around him.

"Yer not goin' to get me, Captain America," Creel says, turning around and swinging his ball and chain in the general direction of Cap.

Cap sees the weapon and lifts his shield up to block it. There is a resounding clang and both men feel the vibrations from the impact.

Then, Cap hurls his shield at the face of the Absorbing Man but it bounces off his bullet proof head, transforming his entire body from bullet casing to adamantium-vibranium, the strongest metal known.

Now, I've gone and done it, Cap thinks to himself as the shield returns to him. If I can't beat him with my shield, then what hope have I?

Suddenly, to make matters worse, Sharon Carter with her SHIELD compatriots arrive on the scene from the SHIELD Helicarrier. She is dressed in her uniform and is brandishing her service revolver.

"Sharon, don't!!" Cap warns.

Again not listening to him or heeding his warnings, Sharon fires her revolver at the chest of the vibranium Absorbing Man, seeing the bullets bounce off his body.

"Nice broad," Creel says, lifting his ball and chain up above his head and in the air. "Wish she wuz mine. But I guess beggars can't be choosers!!"

With a final action, Creel swings his ball and chain at Sharon Carter, who doesn't have time to duck in any direction. Cap sees the woman fall to the ground, like a deadweight, and rushes to her aid.

"Sharon, noooooo!!!!" he screams as he cradles her unconscious form.

Laughing, the Absorbing Man takes the money he stole from the vault of the bank and departs, ready to fight Cap another day.

Eager to serve his country during World War Two, Steve Rogers was transformed into a physically perfect man by the government's Super Soldier program, becoming the United States' Sentinel of Liberty! Armed with an indestructible shield and the physical prowess of an Olympic athlete, Rogers fought valiantly to uphold the ideals and principles of democracy. At the end of the war, he was accidentally frozen in a block of ice and preserved for decades until discovered and revived by the Avengers. Now a man out of time, he is ever-vigilant in his battle to protect the innocent and uphold the beliefs upon which America was founded. Willing to sacrifice his own life for the greater good, Steve Rogers is the physical embodiment of truth, justice, and honor.



VOLUME 1
#12 – “THE HEIST: Part Two”
Written by Gregg Epstein

What has gone before: After trying to prevent a bank robbery by the Absorbing Man, Captain America fought Crusher Creel, who caused great damage to the bone structure of Agent Sharon Carter.

An alley in NYC

Crusher Creel couldn't believe what he has done. He swung his ball and chain at a SHIELD agent and made her go to the hospital for therapeutic care. He could have killed her. He never wanted to kill innocents, only Captain America or maybe Thor on his good days.

He was carrying his bags of bank dough with him. He needed a place to hide this money from his girlfriend, Mary. He knew that Captain America was busy caring for his ladylove. How would he feel if Cap accidentally hurt Mary? Would he react the same way?

He knows exactly how he would react. He would attack Cap in a fit of rage and probably kill him. No, but that would never happen because Cap had such self-control that he would never kill anyone close or not so close to Creel.

"Hold it right there, Creel!" a voice originated from the frontal section of the alleyway. Crusher Creel turned to the direction and origin of the voice and saw that a group of smartly dressed police officers with one particular officer, whom he recognized as the Sarge, approaching him with their guns and rifles blazing. They were armed to the teeth. "You're under arrest for the brutal injury of Sharon Carter and for robbing this bank. You have the right to remain silent. If you give up this right, anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford one, one will be appointed to you, you have the right-

"You won't get me, coppers," Crusher Creel said as he swung his ball and chain at the cops, scattering them like ten pins. Swinging his ball and chain at Sharon Carter was one thing, swinging it at the cops was another thing entirely. This was different. He didn't care what happened to the cops, if they didn't capture him and throw him back at the Vault.

Crusher Creel walked off into the night, a free man, for the time being.

St. Vincent's Hospital

Dr. Bryan Brendall was standing in the hospital room where Sharon Carter, agent of SHIELD, was unconscious due to her properly responding to her medications.

"Will she be okay?" Cap asked Dr. Brendall.

"It looks like that," Brendall responded firmly. "She has a broken leg and arm. But I've set the bones and they are all on the healing stage. SHIELD has contacted me and she will be transferred to the Helicarrier and be in the care of Dr. Brian Vesso. She should be with her work associates."

"Thank you, doctor," Cap said. "I would like to have a moment alone with her before she is moved and before SHIELD arrives."

"Sure thing, Cap." Then, Brendall takes his exit. With the closing of the door, Cap approaches Sharon Carter, placing his hand within hers, massaging her fingers, and giving her loving support in her hour of need.

"How do you feel?"

She moans awake. "Fine, I guess considering I went toe to toe with Creel. What are you going to do now? Go after Creel, I guess. Don't go on a revenge trip for me. Just get him for the bank robbery thing, okay?"

"I will, Sharon. Though I feel about to kick his butt a little for what he did to you."

"Promise me you won't hurt him too much."

"I promise."

Crusher Creel, the Absorbing Man, walked down the street of Midtown Manhattan, with a bag of bank money over his shoulder. Over his other shoulder he carried his ball and chain. He was on his way to his apartment that he shared with his lady love, Mary. They have been dating for some time now and were in the process of going steady. It embarrassed him to use the word 'steady'

because it felt so high school. But as long as he could still get in the sack with her, he was proud to use the word steady. It suited his needs, more than hers.

She recently lost her job at the bank that she worked for. She was fired because of holiday cutbacks. It really irked him. She was pretty and very smart. If he knew who her bosses were, he would hurt them. Badly. But he was much happier to steal the money to pay the rent. But he couldn't very well enter the apartment with a bag full of money. He needed a way to hide it.

Then, he saw his exit to freedom. A businessman was carrying a briefcase walking probably to his own apartment. This was it. All he had to do was relinquish the briefcase from the kind man and make away with the goods.

"Hey, mister, can I talk to you fra second," Creel said, approaching the man. "You may not know it but you have something that I need."

The man looked nervous and panicky. He reached into his pocket and took out his cell phone. "Back off, before I call the cops on you."

"On what? Your phone? They won't be here in time. I'd be long gone by then."

"No, no, don't hurt me, I'll give you what you want, anything, please!!!"

"You better believe you're gonna give me that briefcase."

Dropping the bag of money to his side, Crusher Creel swung his ball and chain at the defenseless man, knocking him unconscious immediately. The man didn't know what hit him. Then, Creel picked up the briefcase, emptied its contents, and stacked the money he had stolen within it.

"Thanks, chump, you really saved my hide," Creel said, as he made his way back to his apartment.

"Hi, honey, I'm home!"

Crusher Creel used this stereotypical greeting that was seen and heard in old movie pictures because he wanted to keep the appearance of a normal, happy, 'Leave it to beaver' relationship. Mary knew of his criminal intentions but somehow wanted him to have a normal life. Poor girl never knew that he never wanted to give up his life of crime.

"Hi, baby," she said, embracing him, for a kiss and a hug. "What did you do today?"

"Nothin', just lookin' fra job. And I found one."

"Really? Where?"

"Oh, uh, I'm a construction worker. And I, uh, went to the bank where you worked and got yer severance pay for ya."

"Thank you, baby. Thank you."

"Let me get it for ya." Creel went to his bedroom with the briefcase, which she didn't question, and took out some hundred dollar bills to give to his girlfriend.

Creel couldn't wait to get at Captain America. He could easily defeat by absorbing the properties of any metal known. He could absorb the metal in Cap's shield. Cap would be after soon for the bank robbery. He knew if Mary knew about the bank robbery she would leave him. She threatened to leave him many times if he didn't give up his life of crime.

"I hope you didn't get lost in there," Mary said, with a hint of humor in her voice.

"Nope. Just countin' the money I took out from the bank." Nothing like telling a little white lie to his babe.

Creel presented her with the money that he pretended to extract from her bank account.

"I hope you didn't sign my name on the check..."

"Ya got me. I just couldn't wait."

"Crusher, you are sometimes the worst."

"Don't talk like that, babe."

"I could never be too mad at ya for too long." Then, Crusher and Mary kiss like passionate lovers, for that was the role that they played.

"I gotta go out now. My job starts soon."

"Okay."

Placing the rest of the money in his safe within his apartment, Crusher Creel went to rob another bank.

"Give up, Creel, this is your last chance before we open fire on you!" The Sarge yelled through the megaphone to warn Crusher Creel, the Absorbing Man, of his crime and the consequences.

"No way, copper! This is my ticket out of here. No way am I going to go to jail again! And you kin open fire all ya want. I'll just absorb the properties of the bullets and then the metal of your gun barrel."

Another cop confided in the Sarge. "He's right, sir. No way can we haul his sorry, loser ass into jail this time. We're defenseless against him. All we can do is wait for Captain America or the

Avengers to show up. They're our only hope. You did put in that call to the Star Spangled Avenger on his Avenger Priority One card, didn't ya?"

"Sure did, cadet. But we have to do something. I'm not going to let this bastard get away from me this time."

"No reason to, sir!" A voice rang out. All of the police officers looked upward at the source of the voice, including the Sarge with the megaphone and they saw that it was none other than Captain America, the Sentinel of Liberty. He swung down from a rooftop to land in the barricade in front of the Manhattan Bank, between the police black and whites and the Absorbing Man. "I'll handle this miscreant. He's mine, people!"

"He sure is," the Sarge said, glad that Cap was here to take over his job and shift.

Crusher Creel threw his ball and chain in the general direction of Captain America but Cap ducked out of his way, blocking it with his vibranium shield.

"You unmidigated clown! Yer shield is of no use against the likes of Crusher Creel, the Absorbing Man! I kin absorb the metallic properties of any metal or substance known. You know full well what happens when I come in contact with yer shield. I become more star spangled than you, Captain!"

"That is where you're wrong, Crusher. While I know how to wield my shield, you lack the knowledge and the power to control the power. Observe..."

Now, the Absorbing Man changed colors to red, white and blue, like Cap's shield. His flesh and blood body transformed into the metal in the shield, which was adamantium and vibranium, including his ball and chain.

"You won't trap me that easily..."

"Then, try this on for size."

The Absorbing Man punched Cap in the face but at the exact moment of contact, fist to face, Crusher Creel transformed into his human form.

"What did ya do ta me?"

"Simple. When your fist touched my face your body transformed into flesh and blood, instead of the vibranium of the shield. And now, for the coup de grace..."

Then, Cap sucker punched Creel, knocking him into unconsciousness. A van pulled up and out poured the Guardsmen from the Vault.

"He's all yours, boys!" Cap said, as they encased Creel in an energy field that negated his powers temporarily.

"I saw your fight with Creel. It was over all the networks," Sharon Carter, said, lying in her bed aboard the SHIELD Helicarrier. "Now I guess Mary, the significant other, knows about the money that Creel got for her, since she lost her job at the bank."

"Yes," Cap responded. "We raided her apartment that she shares with Creel to find the money and return it to the bank. She seemed genuinely surprised that Creel could have pulled this off without telling her. I didn't think that they came that naïve anymore."

"I guess they do. I'm glad that you took it relatively easy on Creel."

"Anything for you, Sharon. But you get better soon."

Cap kissed Sharon on the lips and he returned to his apartment to check up on Maria who was with a babysitter.

Meanwhile...

"You clowns, you can't hold me here!"

Crusher Creel, the Absorbing Man, was aboard the SHIELD Helicarrier bound for imprisonment at the Vault. He didn't recognize anyone here aboard the ship. But then, the only agent of SHIELD that he knew was Col. Nick Fury, but he heard that he was leading Excalibur now with G.W. Bridge. The other one was Agent 13, Sharon Carter, and at this very moment she was tooling around with Captain America. All he had to do was get at his ball and chain in the holding pen and he was home free.

"Don't be so sure of that," one SHIELD agent said. "Those chains that we have on you are made of adamantium, the strongest metal known. You are going to be with us for a long time."

"Not even adamantium or the metal alloy that makes Captain America's vaunted shield (Ha ha) can stand up against the peerless power of the Amazing Absorbing Man!"

"Try us, Crusher."

"I will at that," Crusher Creel laughed out loud, as he touched one lone finger to the chains and suddenly, his entire body transformed into the same metal that the chains were forged of. Instantly, he broke free of the chains and scattered the men aside, like ten pins.

"I'm free, free, free!! Free to wreak havoc on the city but first I have to pay a visit to a very special young lady. A lovely lady that once had my affections."

Brain Vesso approached Creel. "My precognitive powers predicted what you were going to do but I couldn't warn them in time. You're a dead man, Creel!" Vesso had a .44 magnum pointed at Creel's head. Vesso squeezed the trigger with animalistic intent. The bullets bounced off his body.

"Silly boy, bullets can't harm a man whose skin is composed and forged of adamantium, the strongest metal known."

"Oh, silly me. I forgot. But didn't you say that already?"

"I don't need to say anything because I am outta here!"

Breaking the glass container that held his ball and chain, Creel grabbed his weapon and escaped through an escape hatch in the belly of the beast that was the SHIELD Helicarrier.

New York City was below him. He envisioned his apartment below him where Mary would be. He had to see her again. Just to kill her.

Mary's apartment

Mary Long was watching Nick At Nite on her television, enjoying the comedy routines of Happy Days, Leave it To Beaver, and Mary Tyler Moore. She was laughing along with the laugh track but she couldn't keep her mind off of her former man, Crusher Creel.

She just found out that he was the criminal called the Absorbing Man. She knew that he was a criminal, a super powered one, before he was captured but she hoped that he would turn over a new leaf like she asked him to.

Typical man. Never doing what his woman wanted. All she wanted from him was to lead a normal life, just the two of them, happy together. Yeh, right. Like that would happen.

She heard a knock on the door. The doorman hadn't contacted her like he usually does so it was a strange event, in and of itself.

"Who is it?" she asked the person on the other side. She looked through the peephole and saw a man with no shirt on and wearing purple dungarees. It was Crusher.

"Crusher, my God, what happened?" she said, as she opened the door and quickly let him inside, before someone who could contact the authorities could see him on the lam. She closed the door behind them.

When he finally got settled in the living room, Mary shut off the television, Nick at nite fading into the distance. "What happened? I thought you were going to jail or the Vault or whatever it is."

"I was but I had to see you one last time."

'Are you crazy? SHIELD is just going to press more charges against you at the trial when they catch you."

"Y'see, I wanted to see you... so I could kill you." Crusher grabbed her by the neck and pressed her against the back wall.

"Why would you want to kill me?" she asked, not scared in the slightest. "I thought you loved me."

"Not any more. You're the reason I was caught in the first place. I got soft, weak. If I was with a babe like Titania still, I never would have gotten caught." He kissed her full on the mouth. "You were great, babe. But all great things must come to an end."

CRASH

Before Crusher Creel can literally squeeze the life out of his ladylove forever, Captain America and Sharon Carter, Agent 13 of SHIELD, crashed through the window, landing into the living room where they saw what was transpiring before them.

'Let the girl go, Crusher! She didn't do it. You're the only one to blame and you're going to the Vault, this time for good."

"You better listen to the Captain," Sharon Carter says, her gun inches away from Crusher's mouth. "Otherwise I got this itchy trigger finger that I'm dying to use on you."

Crusher dropped the ball and chain and lifted his arms into the air. "I renege. You win, you patriotic asshole. Take me to the Vault."

"Captain," Sharon Carter ordered to her partner. "Get the other SHIELD agents in her to do their job."

Captain America smiled, another job well done.

Eager to serve his country during World War Two, Steve Rogers was transformed into a physically perfect man by the government's Super Soldier program, becoming the United States' Sentinel of Liberty! Armed with an indestructible shield and the physical prowess of an Olympic athlete, Rogers fought valiantly to uphold the ideals and principles of democracy. At the end of the war, he was accidentally frozen in a block of ice and preserved for decades until discovered and revived by the Avengers. Now a man out of time, he is ever-vigilant in his battle to protect the innocent and uphold the beliefs upon which America was founded. Willing to sacrifice his own life for the greater good, Steve Rogers is the physical embodiment of truth, justice, and honor. He is...

Issue #13

"Of Mad Thinkers and Androids"

by [Gregg Epstein](#)

Editor's Note: This story is set before X-Force #20

The Mad Thinker's Hideout, somewhere in New York City

The man known only as the Mad Thinker sits in a chair in front of a huge array of television screens. On each screen is a different world wide event. He has been watching the events since 9/11, since Osama bin Laden orchestrated the attacks on the WTC. Since the early nineties, he has been watching Iraqi conflict and Saddam Hussein. These were good men who were challenged in each burst of freedom of their countries from the U.S.A.

The U.S. persecuted bin Laden so much that he couldn't stay in one position for any length of time. He had to change his position in the surrounding countries and he could never return to his homeland, Afghanistan. The U.S. persecuted a lot of people, including the Thinker himself.

Since the early sixties, the Thinker has been a wanted man and has been thwarted by such heroes of the American people, like Iron Man, Captain America, and most notably the Fantastic Four. He wanted to turn the tables on him. And the phone call he was waiting for from his Iraqi and Afghan allies would only confirm his latest victory over that patriot, Captain America.

Of recent years, Captain America has entered the war on terrorism. He has killed the terrorist Al-Tariq. Soon, he would find bin laden and that was something that the Thinker would not allow.

That was what the phone call was all about. The phone call would give the Thinker much needed

secrets to bypass the encryption codes of the vault that held the Pentagon's weapons.

That was very promising, indeed.

But he had an ace in the hole to destroy the Captain. His android. His awesome android.

The phone rang.

Before the first ring was finished, the Thinker picked up the receiver and held it to his ear. "Yes? What do you want? You have the password to get the weapons? Let me get a piece of paper and pencil to write it down. A baby could memorize that number, you say? Well, who asked you? Thank you. It shall be done."

He hung up the receiver of the phone.

"Are you ready for battle?"

Without a nod, the Android transformed into a replica of Captain America.

"Good morning, Captain America," the guard at the entrance of the Pentagon said, welcoming the patriot and one other into the war room. "And who is this I may ask?"

"I am Mr. Madde," the Thinker said. He hadn't been wearing his green overalls and shirt as usual but a black three piece suit. He also sported glasses and tied his hair back in a ponytail. "I am an advisor to the justice department. I have contacted the Captain to research the September attack on the Pentagon. There is a loose end we must tie up."

"The Captain I can vouch for, but do you, Mr. Madde have any ID on you?"

The Thinker handed him his badge. The guard took it and examined it for a time. Then, he handed it back to Madde.

"You may pass. Both of you."

Captain America and Mr. Madde walked through the hallways of the Pentagon. Many soldiers and FBI agents passed him saluting Captain America and nodding at his escort. Many thanked him for doing his duty after the events of 9/11 and killing that Al-Tariq dirtbag. He deserved to die, they say, just like bin Laden and they knew that Cap would get him soon enough.

"Here it is," Mr. Madde whispered. "Stop here. I will get out the passcode."

While no one was looking, Mr. Madde pressed a five digit number into the key pad and seconds later, it opened with a tiny swish. The door closed behind them and soon enough, they were all alone in the vault of weapons.

"Amazing how trusting the Americans are," the Thinker said, shedding his Madde guise. "How

foolish they are! A Captain America that doesn't acknowledge the existence of his fellow Americans is an unusual occurrence in and of itself. But they never questioned it."

The Captain tapped an invisible watch on his wrist.

"Of course our time table. Yes, we should hurry."

The Mad Thinker took an explosive grenade and threw it at the opposite wall, taking out the pin. There was a huge explosion and seconds later, there was a massive hole in the wall. On the other side of the wall, a van was waiting for them.

The two figures loaded a vast array of weaponry into the van. As they pulled out onto the highway, the arriving government agents saw Captain America, with shield raised, laughing.

A lone carrier ship flew over Iraqi airspace, heading for a camp down below. It landed nearly effortlessly in the desert sand and Iraqi rebels convened on the strange almost alien ship.

"This is it," Mr. Madde said to his compatriot Captain America. This Captain could not speak one ounce because he was really the Mad Thinker's Awesome Android. "The moment when we will undermine America and destroy the image of the real Captain America. The American public will begin to mistrust and distrust him. He will be public enemy number one. We shall triumph."

The Android disguised as the star spangled Avenger did not utter a word because the Thinker hadn't placed audio servomotors in his neuroreceptors. He heard reports of the Kane robot attacking Alpha Flight nearly two years ago with the same problem. But his would be flawless.

The Thinker put the ship in a hovering position. The hatch opened and out walked Mr. Madde and Captain America. The Iraqi rebels saw Captain America and pointed their rifles at him. All of their guns were set to kill the patriot.

"Relax," Mr. Madde said, waving his arms in the air to halt this act of potential violence. "This is not the real Captain America. He is merely a robot to serve our ends. And I am not Mr. Madde but the Mad Thinker and this is my Awesome Android. Observe."

Mr. Madde pressed a mechanical stud on his wrist watch and the illusion that covered both gentlemen faded to nothingness. He took out the rubber bands in his ponytail and the hair that he was proud to call his own fell gently by his shoulders. The suit that he wore transformed into the green jumpsuit that was the Mad Thinker's union suit. And for Captain America, the red, white, and blue costume faded into the generic grey skin of the Android.

"Sorry. I didn't notice," one of the rebels said. The men lowered their rifles. "What do you have for us? We have been waiting for your arrival."

"I have weapons for you. Procured from the American's Pentagon. We shall use them to attack

American soil."

"Good. Good. We shall begin the attack immediately. Hussein has been waiting a long while to begin his strike force on America, like bin Laden did to the World Trade Center and the Pentagon last year. We shall begin in earnest."

"That was what I'd hope you'd say..."

Then, the Mad Thinker started to laugh insanely. His plan was going exactly according to plan.

"This is bullshit," one soldier says to another in a battlefield in Iraq. "We are here to hunt for that bastard Saddam Hussein because our government thinks that he has nuclear arsenal and we don't see any action whatsoever. I want to go home. I want to see my family. I also want to put a bullet through Saddam's temple."

"I know how you feel," his field commander says. They are in complete military regalia and they are still sweating bullets. "I want that more than anything else in the world. Because killing these terrorists would definitely put my mind and the minds of the free world at rest. But we can't do anything about it until the terrorists show their not so pretty faces."

"And the heat!! It's so goddamn unbearable. How do these Iraqis stand it?"

"I don't know. I just know that we better start killing people soon."

Just then, both soldiers saw an approaching jeep. They couldn't make out who it was at first but then they saw Captain America and an FBI agent in tow with some Iraqi rebels.

"Look, it's Cap'n 'Merica! And some guy. Mebbe they surrendered. Can't be but what other explanation is there."

Captain America took out a rocket launcher from a secret compartment in the jeep and opened fire on the American soldiers.

The ones in the line of fire were killed immediately. The others gathered their rifles and started firing on their hero, Captain America. They didn't want to because Captain America was one American who fought in all the great wars, including World War II and most notably, the war on terrorism. How could a great man like that just turn on his own people like that? It absolutely made no sense.

In moments, it was over. Captain America and Mr. Madde were victorious. All the Americans in this camp were dead.

"And in other news, it has been reported that the Avenger Captain America has been branded a traitor. He has been seen with another government agent, a Mr. Madde, stealing weapons from

the Pentagon earlier today. The FBI has issued a manhunt for the patriot. Wanted dead or alive. Anyone who has clues to his whereabouts should call their local FBI office immediately."

Click.

Sharon Carter shut the television off and faced Steve Rogers. Maria was at preschool right now. How would she feel knowing that her father may be a traitor to her country? she thought.

"So, now what?" she asked.

"Well," Steve began softly gently. "That is definitely not me. There must be another Captain America running away with rogue government agents. I certainly can't go out in public as myself. I'll have to use a disguise and I have just the one in mind."

"Which is?"

"Something that D-man whipped up for me when I stopped being Captain America for a time. I called myself the Captain back then. It may not use the symbol of America but it will have to go right now."

"I'd love to see it on you."

"Sure."

In front of her, Steve took off his civvies and put on the Captain uniform. It still fit like a glove. The perfect fit. Sharon smiled. Even not being Captain America for the time being, he looked good as the Captain. D-man would have been proud, if he were still alive.

"Well, how do I look?" he asked.

"Good but I don't think the terrorists that you fight now are going to care if you make a fashion statement with that union suit you're wearing."

"Right. Let's find those bastards and bring them to justice..."

The Captain and Sharon Carter were aboard the SHIELD Helicarrier above Iraqi airspace.

"Give it to me straight, Sharon."

"Okay. We think that the Iraqi terrorists were the ones responsible for the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon recently."

"What about the Captain America angle?"

"A traitor in the government agency. Our American intelligence officers in Iraq confirmed that they have received weapons imported from the Pentagon. We need you to stop them, retrieve the

weapons and return them to the Pentagon. I will be with you all the way, Cap. Now, let's go."

The Captain and Sharon Carter put on their parachutes and jumped out of the Helicarrier.

The first thing that the Captain saw was the fake Captain America standing by the Mad Thinker. So the Thinker was behind this. The Thinker had shed his Mr. Madde disguise and turned to face Carter and the Captain.

"Destroy them, Captain America!" the Thinker said, at the top of his lungs as a command.

Captain America didn't respond in the slightest as he followed his master's order and launched an attack on the Captain and his female charge Sharon Carter, Agent 13 of SHIELD. Captain America pulled his fist back and hurled it at the shield that the Captain used to defend the injury that he would surely suffer to his facial features.

There was a sonic boom that was heard as the connection between fist and shield was made. Something exuded out of the sonic vibrations. It coalesced into a solid shape. A human body composed of compressurized sound. It was Klaw, the master of sound.

"I want you, Captain America, " Klaw said to the Awesome Android who was still disguised as the leader of the Avengers. "You caused me to be trapped in your shield. Now you die!!"

"You're in trouble now, android," the Captain whispered to his arch nemesis.

Pointing his sonic enhancer at Captain America, Klaw released a blast of pure sonic energy that shattered the stomach of Captain America. The android let go of his Captain America guise and transformed back into the Awesome Android.

"You are not Captain America," Klaw said. "You are just a robot. I will find the true Captain America and kill him if I must."

Then, Klaw dissipated into sound waves and departed for America.

"Call the reinforcements of SHIELD immediately," the Captain ordered. "Tell them we got a destroyed Android and his Mad Thinker."

Next issue: The next battle between Cap and Klaw... Be there.

Eager to serve his country during World War Two, Steve Rogers was transformed into a physically perfect man by the government's Super Soldier program, becoming the United States' Sentinel of Liberty! Armed with an indestructible shield and the physical prowess of an Olympic athlete, Rogers fought valiantly to uphold the ideals and principles of democracy. At the end of the war, he was accidentally frozen in a block of ice and preserved for decades until discovered and revived by the Avengers. Now a man out of time, he is ever-vigilant in his battle to protect the innocent and uphold the beliefs upon which America was founded. Willing to sacrifice his own life for the greater good, Steve Rogers is the physical embodiment of truth, justice, and honor. He is...

Issue #14

"Enter: Klaw"

by [Gregg Epstein](#)

It was a long night. The day before Cap had to fight both the Mad Thinker, his Awesome Android who was disguised as Cap himself, and met with a newly reincarnated Klaw, who wanted nothing more than the death of Captain America. He got a night's rest and now he seemed to be ready for a rematch with Klaw.

"Morning, Steve," said Sharon Carter, laying beside Steve Rogers on their double bed. Maria was in the guest room. "Had a good night's rest."

"Yes, I did. Morning to you too, Shar." He kissed her lightly on the mouth and stood up and changed into his bathrobe. "I'm going to take a shower then I'm going to go out patrolling for Klaw."

"Cool. Need any help?"

"No, I don't think so. You're still recuperating from your bone injury."

"Whatever, you're the Captain, America."

As Steve left the room, passing into the guest room to say good morning to his daughter, Maria, Sharon changed into a white silk nightie and went into the kitchen to fix herself a cup of java.

The doorbell rang.

Sharon let it ring three times before she answered it. She opened the door and saw a very frightening sight. She saw a man in a tattered costume that resembled that of the Looter's. His

mask was off and she could see through his injuries his nice, chiseled features. Beside him was another costumed man, this one not tattered.

"Ohmygod, who are you two? Does Cap know you?"

"N-no," the man who looked like the Looter said. "H-he doesn't but the Fantastic Four do. I'm Crisis and this is my pard, Sonik. Can we come in?"

"Oh, of course. Cap's in the shower, but I could get him."

"Thank you. We would appreciate that."

Closing the door behind him, Sharon led Crisis and Sonik into Cap's apartment. She let them sit on the couch while she got both Cap and the first aid kit. When she returned with both, she put bandages on Crisis' wounds.

In costume, Cap said, "Sharon told me that you both hung out with the FF, but you were kidnapped by Rama Tut. If you have come to recruit me for revenge on Rama, I would have to say that I'm very sorry but I have plans for Klaw right now. After that, I'm all game."

"Actually, we have come to help you, Cap. We heard about your battle with that Faux Cap and we hoped that we could help you put Klaw away forever. Y'see, Sonik here has sonic powers and could imprison Klaw and put him out of your hair for a long time with the aid of the vibranium of your shield, of course."

"Really? Anything else I should know about?"

"That my pardner Sonik can absorb and repel sonic waves from Klaw so that it would be no hard task for him to defeat Klaw by himself. But with your vibranium shield at our side it will be easier."

"Then, let's go patrolling."

The Mad Thinker's hideout

Klaw stood in front of the Mad Thinker and his silent Android. For the past several hours, he has been traveling through radios and televisions to get at the Vault. Break the Mad thinker and his Awesome Android out of their holding pen and transport them to their own hideout.

"You probably want Captain America dead now, as do I," Klaw said cleverly. "I have a plan. He won't be expecting us to rob more weapons. He would think that we would have given up on this particular venue right now, so we have the element of surprise. Also, Cap is probably looking for our hideout, thinking that we would be planning our next move. There is a whole city of

weapons on the loose right now. I say we move now."

"I say you're crazy, Klaw, so called master of solidified sound," the Mad Thinker said, while the Android was silent. "Cap is not stupid. He would know our next move before we make it. I say we attack Cap now and leave the master plan of subterfuge for a later date. How's that sound, Klaw?"

"Even a better plan."

"But I have a question for you," the Thinker said. "What are we going to with Cap's shield? You know that it has vibranium, your one true weakness. If he happens to throw that oversized frisbee in your general direction, our plans of revenge are finished for the time being."

"Then, that means that I would have to make sure that he doesn't hit me with it, don't you think?" He paused. He looked out the window at another clear, fine day spotted with sunshine and light cloud activity. Another sunny day. A perfect day for a New York destruction.

It was a normal day in the midtown district of Manhattan. Despite the recent attacks on the city by the terrorist regimes overseas and the super villains that plagued the city day after day, New Yorkers were ready to carry on life as usual. People walked and drove to and from work. Banks were open, with long lines of people wanting to either deposit or withdraw money from their bank accounts.

Then, there was a huge explosion on the streets and everyone turned to the general direction of the origin of the resounding sound. They saw that it was a whole team of villains this time, like the Masters of Evil or the Sinister Six. They read the Daily Bugle so they knew who these villains and criminals were; Klaw, the Mad thinker, and the Android. They weren't stealing anything, as was their usual modus operandi but instead doing acts of terrorism on the hapless city.

"Check this out, Thinker," Klaw said, as he fired a sonic blast at a building shattering the windows into a million pieces. The shards went on the ground injuring some people and not harming others. "This is how it's done. Y'see, I don't need a bulky android to do my bidding for me. I'm a living powerhouse myself."

The Awesome Android finished the work that Klaw started by punching the building having it collapse into rubble. The Mad Thinker responded by saying, "I see but I'm no slouch in the power department either."

"Put your hands above your head, you are all under arrest!" they heard the Sarge say as he and a whole line of police officers were lined up pointing their rifles and guns at the three villains.

The Mad Thinker smiled and laughed accordingly. "It is to laugh, right? You are joking, right?"

Deal with them, my awesome android."

As per his command, the Android reached down into the pavement, lifted it as a long track, and buckled it. To say the least, the police officers, including the Sarge, fell flat on their faces. It looks like they would have to devise a new plan to defeat these villains, or wait for the heroes to arrive post haste.

A red, white, and blue disc flew through the air and rebounded in front of the Mad Thinker, returning to its master. The three villains, including the Android, saw Captain America catch the disc. He was accompanied by two other heroes that they didn't recognize.

"I would say Avengers Assemble," Cap said, launching into an attack. "But I think that would be a little premature. In other words, attack them!!!"

I Just hope that we haven't bitten off more than we can chew, Captain America thought, as he hurled his shield at the Awesome Android. He knew that this would be a silent battle because the Android couldn't talk. He was indeed very mute. "Just tell me if this hurts, buddy."

The Android said nothing as he caught the shield and hurled it back at Cap. Cap hurled himself in the air, twsited, made a left arc, and caught the shield again, landing mere feet away. He could have sworn that the Android was indeed experiencing emotions at this point in time. He looked angry. There were indeed frown lines upon its featureless face.

As the Android made its final approach, the approach that would be the do or die mission for Cap himself, Cap saw that the other members of his assault team weren't doing so well. He was particularly concerned about Klaw because that was the almost undefeatable foe. He could handle the Android once he put the Thinker out of commission.

It had happened in a matter of minutes and seconds and this lonely street in New York had turned into a warzone. A battlefield where a typical clash between super heroes and super villains took place. He and his team had to end this and end it now.

The Android was going in for the kill. And Cap had to be ready for him and his master. Using his shield as a battering ram, Captain America hurled his arm forward, clashing with the Android's own arm. Captain America actually drew his underneath circuitry and had injured him beyond belief.

But this didn't stop the Android. He used his other available arm to punch Captain America. Cap used the disc as a shield to block the punch. The reverberations of the blow sent shivers up and down Cap's spine.

Out of the corner in his peripheral vision, Cap saw a piece of wood with a lit ember on its end. As the Android prepared to attack him anew, Cap grabbed the wooden stick and hurled it at the

Android.

For a second, it looked like the Android was scared. And then, it was ablaze. Burning up. But Cap couldn't let the Android suffer so he took a blanket and covered the Android with it. Until the flames died.

Now he had to see how Crisis and Sonik were doing.

"Sonik, Crisis, now!"

At this spoken command from Captain America, Crisis finished fighting the Mad Thinker, the former Mr. Madde, punching Klaw into Cap's direct line of attack and Sonik released a burst of sonic energy at Klaw.

"You fool, I can absorb your sonic blasts just as easily as I can shoot them."

"Not this time, Klaw," Cap said, holding an open silver box. Cap threw it at Klaw. Klaw screamed at the top of his sonically enhanced lungs as he realized that the box was composed of the same metal that Cap's shield was; vibranium. And then, Klaw was contained, trapped, within the box. Cap closed the box and locked it shut. He said, "I'll deliver this to the Vault and the rest of us can go home."

Eager to serve his country during World War Two, Steve Rogers was transformed into a physically perfect man by the government's Super Soldier program, becoming the United States' Sentinel of Liberty! Armed with an indestructible shield and the physical prowess of an Olympic athlete, Rogers fought valiantly to uphold the ideals and principles of democracy. At the end of the war, he was accidentally frozen in a block of ice and preserved for decades until discovered and revived by the Avengers. Now a man out of time, he is ever-vigilant in his battle to protect the innocent and uphold the beliefs upon which America was founded. Willing to sacrifice his own life for the greater good, Steve Rogers is the physical embodiment of truth, justice, and honor.



VOLUME 1
#15 – “WEREWOLF BY NIGHT”
Written by Gregg Epstein

Steve Rogers sat in his apartment in front of an old color television and VCR set, watching the midnight news. His daughter Maria had gone to bed hours ago after her early night snack. Sharon Carter, Agent 13 of SHIELD, had read her a bedtime story.

"I could call in the sitter as we go patrolling," Sharon ventured, trying to break his intense concentration on the news.

"Sssshhh. Wait this sounds good. It looks like we won't have to go patrolling. I may have to investigate this all by my lonesome."

"Investigate what, Cap?"

"That." Cap pointed to the fuzzy picture on the television screen. It was a picture of a half man, half wolfen type creature running rampant through NYC. Terrorists were one thing, but werewolves were another. Underneath his picture was the word 'Werewolf by Night'.

"I better go with you. I'll call the sitter. Maria will sleep like a baby and by the time we are done with this mission, she won't know that we're gone." While she was talking this initiative, Sharon Carter had changed into her SHIELD uniform and was cocking her gun.

Cap raised an accusing hand. "Hold your horses, Sharon. There's no reason why you go in there half cocked. I can handle this all by myself."

"But, Cap-"

"But nothing. I need you to look after Maria. She is our daughter, after all. Anyway, I know another super hero who can help me stop Jack Russell. And if I'm not mistaken he clashed with him in the not too distant past."

"Who?"

"Moon Knight."

As he was talking, Steve Rogers had changed into his Captain America costume. He grabbed his shield, hung it on his back and vaulted out the open window onto the nearby rooftop. Sharon saw him bounding from rooftop to rooftop to his final destination.

"Looks like it's just you and me again, Maria," Sharon said silently. "Again alone to worry if your foster father will come home alive tonight."

Captain America realized that if Sharon Carter were in her normal condition he would have brought her along but since she was still on crutches from her bone injury by Crusher Creel she was in no position to be out crime fighting. He could more or less handle a maniac werewolf but with the help of Moon Knight, it was a done deal.

He landed on a rooftop and overlooked the city at large. He tucked his shield on his back and the straps that held the shield was on his shoulders and connected underneath his arms.

Suddenly, he heard a woman scream. Body on alert, he vaulted from the rooftop and landed on the streets below. He searched the streets but found nothing.

Not another scream but this time, he hears a grunt or a moan in pain. He entered an alley and saw a frightening sight. He saw the Werewolf by Knight over an unconscious woman.

"Let her go!"

The werewolf snarled and growled. He looked like a thing inhuman. Drool dripped down from his lips and shiny teeth. Then, the werewolf picked the woman as if she weighed nothing and threw her at Captain America.

Cap launched himself into air to catch her. He caught her and set her at the entrance of the alley. But Cap didn't have long to react when the werewolf charged at him, yelling inhuman growls.

"Don't hurt him!" a voice said that originated from the space above the two combatants.

Cap looked upward and saw whom the voice belonged to. It was a long white clothed figure with a cape and mask. He landed between the two fighters.

"Don't worry, Moon Knight, I wasn't going to hurt him. Much."

"I was talking to Jack. He's not in control of his actions. When he becomes the Werewolf By Night, he becomes an inhuman thing. Something that has been told about in urban legends. We have to try to communicate with him."

"Don't tell me, tell him."

While the whole time that the two crime fighters have been talking, the Werewolf by Night had been preparing himself for the fight that most probably must ensue but the one that the both of them wanted to avoid if at all possible.

"I have an idea, Moon Knight," Cap said to his compatriot, "Let's try to get him to change back to other identity and ask questions later."

"It may not be that easy."

"Why?"

"He's gone already."

Cap looked to where the werewolf used to be and he indeed was among the lost. He must have escaped while the two of them were discussing battle strategies. Fight now, talk later was a better strategy, Cap thought.

"Moon Knight, thanks, I-"

Cap turned around.

Moon Knight was gone also.

Hmm. Vigilantes and their habits.

Later, the Werewolf by Night entered through the window of his hotel room. The room was dark, which was good for him because in his present form he adored the dark. He flicked on his light and he was soon bathed in lamplight. What he couldn't figure out in the dark recesses of his mind was how he knew to come back here. That was the part of him that was human that told him to come back here.

Russell.

Jack Russell.

He hated that name. And the person it belonged to. He loved being a werewolf but Jack wanted to end his gift, what he called his 'curse'. No, it was a gift. What was the curse was changing back into Jack Russell.

No, it's happening again, he thought and this particular thought was a human thought. Not a werewolf thought.

He looked out the window and saw that it was dawn. The sun was coming up. And that meant that Jack Russell would take dominance.

He was no longer Werewolf by Night.

He was Jack Russell.

And he needed help again.

He heard a black southern woman whistling a merry tune and opening the door. It was the maid. She saw him, his naked form.

"If you wanted to be alone, you should have left the 'Do Not Disturb' tag on your door handle. I'll come back later. Sorry, suh." She quickly closed the door.

"Whew. That was close. If anyone had seen my coming into this room in my other form, I would have been a goner for sure. I need help. Serious help. But whom can I call? The Avengers, the Fantastic Four, Spider-man? I remember vague images of Captain America and that Moon Knight fellow. I fought Moon Knight before but can I trust them with my secret not to reveal it to the world at large? I better just leave and think this through.'

After his battle with Captain America and Moon Knight. The Werewolf by Night who had by now transformed back into plain ol' Jack Russell, almost on the power of suggestion walked down midtown Manhattan to an old antiquarian building that was similar to L.Ron Hubbard's Scientology in Boston. He seemed almost hypnotized.

"Come to me, Mr. Russell," the voice called out to him from afar, "Come to me and do my bidding.'

The only answer that Jack could respond to this voice was 'yes, yes, and a resounding yes'.

Clothed in a pair of ripped pants, he entered the building which had a sign on it that bore the legend, 'the Knight of the Wolf.' This building was very important to the killer-werewolf known as Jack Russell. He had joined this organization months ago when he had vacationed in NYC. They had given him solace here, great solace.

"Welcome, Jack, to my humble abode," the man known only as Mr. Satan said as he greeted Jack into this dwelling place. "I am so relieved that you are all right after your battle through the villainy of New York and the criminals known as Captain America and your former adversary, Moon Knight. We have tried to recruit the Moon Knight because you are both knights of the dark moon. Him being cursed by the Fist of Khonshu and you blessed by the moon that transforms you thankfully into the Werewolf by Night. Welcome home, Jack. How goes your progress?"

Jack's eyes were glazed, blank. The influence that Mr. Satan had on him was great indeed. Try as he might, and if he was in his right mind he would be surely fighting it but he couldn't, he couldn't break the hold. "Y-yes, master. Very well, indeed. I killed so many today, but I couldn't those super heroes."

"Good, good. You may retire to your quarters and wait for your next mission and the next full moon."

"Thank you, gracious master."

Jack was sweating profusely as he tried to resist the mental hold that Mr. Satan had on him.

If he couldn't then he might as well kill those two super heroes that stopped his reign of terror.

"This fell out of his pants pocket when last we fought him," Moon Knight said, as he took out a ripped piece of paper and placed it on the table. It was a business card of some sort.

"What does it say?" Cap asked.

They were seated in Steve Rogers' apartment and in front of his mainframe computer. Moon Knight was at the computer console searching for a certain website address. The card had the URL and it took him no more than a few seconds to connect to the internet and AOL.

"It's a business card for an organization. A cult in fact for Knights of the Wolf. They seek solace for mutants, creatures of the night. Werewolves, vampires, gypsies, etc. They promise to cure them of their afflictions and ailments and return them to their families and their normal lives. Fancy that, huh?"

"Amazing. What people would do for a quick cure. Who heads it?"

"A guy by the name of Mister Satan. A colorful name for someone so mischeivous and evil. I've been following them for some time."

"Why don't you tell me about it?"

"I'd love to. Y'see, I have been investigating the disappearance of some runaways and drug addicts in the New York district. The thing that they all had in common was that they had been affiliated with the Knights of the Wolf. Name is misleading. They don't just supposedly help wolves or werewolves, per se. They deal with all kinds of creatures of the night."

"What happened next?"

"Next, before I was able to bust the cult for what they truly were, I was attacked by the Werewolf by Night. It seems that Jack Russell was their first line of defence. I figured that if I could bag Jack I would be one step closer to this cult. "

"I'm sure you did the best you could. What we have to do now is find out where Russell is and find out what he is going to do next."

"I don't understand something. What does the Knights of the Wolf want with Jack Russell?"

"Simple. They need Russell to commit the crimes that they are too scared to commit on their own. The promise they made to Jack is the same that they made to all the rest. Cure him of his curse. But for Jack, there is no cure. He is cursed for life."

"Dear God."

"We better plan our next move."

Captain America searched the city all night long and before dawn, before Maria awoke, he returned to Steve Rogers' apartment. When he got there, he took off his costume and changed into his civvies. He hung up his costume in the closet with all of his spares.

He went into the kitchen and started to make breakfast for his two all-star ladies. Halfway through, Sharon and Maria walked inside. Sharon was dressed (it was obvious to Steve that she had stayed up all night long to wait up for him and slept in her clothes, her SHIELD uniform) but Maria was still in her pajamas.

As Maria ate her breakfast, Sharon took Steve aside and asked him a question. "Did you get Jack? I heard the early morning news. They said that there was a certain ineptitude on the behalf of the super hero community on catching him."

"Yeh. I guess you could say that. I ran into Moon Knight. He was no help. He seemed more intent on talking with the werewolf while he was slaughtering innocents."

"What's your angle, then?"

"Well, Jack wasn't in a talking mood. He had just attacked a young woman and was ready to kill us. We spent our time arguing amongst ourselves rather than helping him. He escaped while we were talking."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I would like to get in touch with Moon Knight again and try to stress the point that we would do better joining forces. I think that we could cover more ground that way. I just wish I knew how to contact him. I doubt that the police commissioner has a Moon Signal..."

"That won't be necessary."

Everyone turned to the open window where the Moon Knight was kneeling and then he jumped inside the apartment.

"Look, daddee, it's Batman."

The caped crusader patted Maria on the head. "That's Moon Knight, young girl."

Steve stepped forward. "How did you know where I live?"

"Once you revealed to the world at large that Steve Rogers and Captain America are one and the same, it was no small task to find your pad."

"I guess. But I'm glad you're here. Saves me the trouble of tracking you down. I think we could work well as a team. But I think we should get one thing straight first. If we have to fight him, then it will be a fight. You can't talk with a homicidal maniac, even though he may not be responsible for his actions."

"Agreed."

"Let me get changed."

Soon, both Captain America and Moon Knight were in costume, patrolling the city for the Werewolf by Night. They hadn't found anything yet so they decided to go to the local police station to have a talk with Cap's friend, the Sarge.

"So, what can I do for you?" the Sarge asked the two super heroes.

Cap stepped forward, while Moon Knight remained silent, for he was more a vigilante. "We're looking for a very specific individual. He is named the Werewolf by Night."

"Yeh, I know the fellow. Me and my men are tracking him, too. He's been on a rampage lately, killing people at random. I can handle perps fine but how a we supposed to fight creatures of the night?"

"That's why we're here. Do you know where he could be--?"

There was another woman screaming. Cap and Moon knight reacted as one, racing to the source of the voice.

"Remember, Captain, I don't want him hurt."

"I'll try my best but I think you should know that we may have to fight him to knock some sense into him."

"Whatever."

When they got to the alley, they saw the Werewolf By Night feasting a young, nubile woman. She was unconscious, probably passed out from the fright of him.

Upon seeing him, Moon Knight took out a gun and fired it at the werewolf. A bolo escaped the gun and whipped around their foe's body, holding him fast.

The Werewolf pulled on the rope and the Moon Knight went flying into the alley. Moon Knight crashed against some trashcans.

Moon Knight scratched his head. "So much for that idea. Any bright ideas, Cap?"

"I do have one. I would like to see if this wolf is shield-proof." Captain America threw his shield at the werewolf but the hirsute Jack Russell caught it, hurling it back at Cap. The shield connected with his stomach, slamming him against the brick wall of an adjoining building.

Then, baring his claws, growling and howling like the wolf he was, the Werewolf by night prepared to go in for the kill.

"I think that we are in sheep dip in trouble, Cappie, don't you think?" Moon Knight asked his partner in apprehending this creature of the night.

"I agree. But let's not talk about it but do it instead!"

The Werewolf by Night was snarling like the ravenous beast that he was. Drool and blood escaped his lips and he bared his fangs for all to see. He slowly edged closer. In his werewolf form, Jack Russell was incapable of normal speech patterns or thoughts. He was an animal now. He was a beast. He was truly a creature of the night. And all he wanted to do now was to attack these two infidels and kills them swiftly.

But strangely enough, Russell was not intent on hurting Cap but Moon Knight instead. He charged at Moonie but the Fist of Khonshu did not move in the slightest. He was immobile, frozen, still.

"I'd move if I were you, Moon Knight!" Cap warned.

But Moon Knight did not do as he was instructed.

He remained in his present position.

The Werewolf was inches away from Moon Knight's mask so Cap blocked the blow with his shield. He swore that he knocked out a few teeth. That stopped the Werewolf temporarily.

Cap threw a serum at the Werewolf. Even though it was still nighttime and moonlight out, he turned back to Jack Russell.

"That should stop your rapid transformations for the time being. Let's go home, Jack, and see what we can find out about Mr. Satan and the Cult you have been running away with."

Captain America, Moon Knight, Jack Russell, the Werewolf by Night, Sharon Carter, Agent 13 of SHIELD, and Maria were all relaxing at Steve Rogers' apartment. But Russell wasn't relaxing because he knew that the device that Moon knight used to transform the Werewolf back into plain ol' Jack Russell would wear off soon and the hold that Mr. Satan had on Jack would be regained.

"I think you are making a mistake. WE could hurt a lot of innocent people," Jack told Cap, who had his mask off to reveal to everyone that he was still Steve Rogers. "But I'm afraid I can't stay here for long. I know that mr. Satan will know I'm here and I may be a danger to the innocents here."

"There are no innocents here," Steve said. "Except for my daughter, Maria, but when we both attack Mr. Satan, Sharon will act as sitter for her as she always does."

"Or until my bone injury heals properly," Sharon Carter said. She was still on crutches.

"Enough, Sharon," Cap said. "We have to know what we're dealing with here. What we're up against, etc. Tell me all you know about Mr. Satan and his cult for the Knight of the Wolf."

Jack Russell took a deep breath and when he again spoke, all people present heard tales of Jack Russell being recruited by a kind and wizened doctor who felt he could cure Jack of his ailment. He was really Mr. Satan and before it was too late, he was hypnotized to perform evil crimes throughout the city. Other creatures of the night were recruited and hypnotized. Even though his memory was shrouded due to the hypnosis, Jack did remember the location of the cult.

"I hope that helps," Jack said.

"Yes. It does," Cap said. "It will have to do for now. That is all the information we need to know to put Mr. Satan and his cult behind bars, where he rightfully belongs."

"Isn't this sort of risky?" Jack Russell asked. "When I change into the werewolf, wouldn't Mr. Satan be able to control me?"

"No, he wouldn't," Cap said.

"And why is that?" Jack asked.

"Because, Sharon has devised a head band for you to wear that will inhibit the control he has on you. Also, the serum we gave you will be able to control your wild, berserker rages as the Werewolf By Night."

"Great, let's do this."

Suddenly, Jack Russell transformed into the werewolf and he was willing to fight Mr. Satan. In the next instant, all three superbeings crashed through the window of the cult house and saw Mr. Satan lecturing before the innocent creatures of the night.

"Ah, it looks like you have found Jack and me," Mr. Satan said, turning to face the heroes. "So, I have only one thing to say to you. Creatures of the Night, attack them!!"

Then, the listeners to his lecture all transformed like Jack Russell had done before into their dark selves.

"I'll handle these jokers," Werewolf by Night said, slashing and clawing at the Creatures of the Night. Obviously, the device that Sharon Carter devised had gained him control of the beast within him. "You get Mr. Satan."

"Will do," Cap said, as he and moon knight chased after Mr. Satan who had been trying to escape.

Moon Knight took out a boomerang and threw it, as it struck Mr. Satan in the back, downing him.

As Mr. Satan started to fall onto the hardwood floor, Cap grabbed him and said, "Why did you do this? Were you too much of a coward to commit those crimes by yourself ? What did you hope to gain? What??"

But by then, Mr. Satan had fallen asleep.

It was over.

After the fight was over and Cap called Code:Blue to clean up the mess, Jack Russell and Captain America reconvened at Steve Rogers' apartment. It was after ten o'clock so Maria was sound asleep.

"So, how did everything go?" Sharon asked.

"Fine, Shar," Cap said. He took off his mask and costume and changed into Steve Rogers. Since there was no action to be had, he felt more comfortable in his civvies. "Mr. Satan is in the vault. Stone decided to go easy on the Creatures of the Night. They only got slaps on the wrists for the crimes they committed under Satan's influence. They returned to their normal lives."

"I'm just glad it's over," Sharon said.

"So am I," Jack said. "And it looks like I may have to take my leave, now, too."

"I wish that you could stay longer, Jack," Steve said. "It's been a pleasure fighting by your side. Tho' fighting against you was not such a pleasure."

"It looks like there is still no cure for me."

"If you stay maybe I could devise a cure for you," Sharon said. "I'm sure I could whip up another serum."

"No, I'm sorry. The full moon would be able in a couple days, and I just can't wait that long. I'll find a cure, Sharon, but I'm afraid it won't be soon."

"Good-bye, Jack," Steve said. "I'll miss you."

Steve shook his hand.

Sharon came over and hugged him. It was a long embrace. "Bye, Jack. Sorry I couldn't fight by your side."

"Me, too," Jack responded.

Jack Russell exited the apartment and started to walk into the distance.

Eager to serve his country during World War Two, Steve Rogers was transformed into a physically perfect man by the government's Super Soldier program, becoming the United States' Sentinel of Liberty! Armed with an indestructible shield and the physical prowess of an Olympic athlete, Rogers fought valiantly to uphold the ideals and principles of democracy. At the end of the war, he was accidentally frozen in a block of ice and preserved for decades until discovered and revived by the Avengers. Now a man out of time, he is ever-vigilant in his battle to protect the innocent and uphold the beliefs upon which America was founded. Willing to sacrifice his own life for the greater good, Steve Rogers is the physical embodiment of truth, justice, and honor.



VOLUME 1
#16 – “BUCKY LIVES”
Written by Gregg Epstein

Steve Rogers' Apartment

Steve Rogers sat in his apartment, reading the Daily Bugle. One particular story caught his attention. It featured an article by Ben Urich about the Ku Klux Klan coming into town; they were led by the Hate Monger. This time he was dressed in his purple robe and hood, similar to the ones that the KKK wore, except those were white. He employed a Hate Gun that could induce hate and anger in the thoughts of any New Yorker or anyone that came close to him. Urich knew this from probing in the files of the Fantastic Four when they battled the recent wave of hate over the city. *

* (See Fantastic four #18-23 and FF Annual 2002-Gregg)

"Hey, Sharon, you hear anything about this?" he called to his live-in room-mate and love interest, Sharon Carter.

"What's that, Cappie?" he asked from the bathroom. She was taking a shower and had now just gotten out. She was drying herself off.

"This Hate Monger thing, that's what. It seems that he's trying another go at it."

"It's a good thing that my bone injury is all healed up from that battle with Crusher Creel*, so that I can help you fight them."

* (See Captain America #11 and 12-Gregg again.)

"No, I don't think that will be necessary. I can handle this all by my lonesome. Any way, someone had to look after Maria." He paused. Then, he changed into Cap. "Stay here, keep an eye on her, while I go patrolling."

Captain America had been patrolling the streets of New York for criminals making their evil ways on the hapless city below. He bounded from rooftop to rooftop, carrying his shield over his back, tied to his shoulders.

It was quiet tonight. Nothing seemed to be happening tonight but Cap was suspicious of that.

But then, he saw a figure wearing a dark blue costume with a little red in it in one of the alleys below. It seemed familiar but he didn't recognize it overmuch. It could only mean trouble, big trouble for Cap and his allies.

He hurled himself from one of the rooftops to land in the alley, confronting the man in the rather dramatic costume. It was dark, so he couldn't see what exactly the costume was and if he would recognize it.

"Hold it, this is Captain America and I want you to stop your activities right this instant."

"Thank God it's you, Cap. I thought that I would never see you again."

Cap stepped into the light and saw a very familiar costume and man behind the mask. It was Bucky, his dead partner. People have worn that costume in the past, including Rick Jones and Nomad. This was obviously a fake. And people who dressed like Bucky had to have some kind of explanation to explain their actions. He would let no one wear the Bucky costume who didn't deserve it.

"Cap, it's me, Bucky."

"I know who you are. But as far as I know Bucky died in 1945 at the hands of Baron Zemo, the original one of course. So unless you have dramatically come back to life and not aged a bit, you have a lot of explaining to do, youngman."

'Bucky' smiled. "I knew that you would be skeptical. In my world, it was you, Captain America who died in World War II. Y'see, I'm, from an alternate earth and I have come to this world to have us go on one last mission together."

"To do what?"

"Why, to fight the Hate Monger."

"Why don't you go for a walk with me and explain yourself?"

The two went for a walk back to Cap's apartment.

"I thought the Hate Monger of my world was incarcerated was imprisoned by the fantastic Four when it was discovered that Doctor Doom was the one man responsible for the wave of hate on the city last year."

"He escaped and traveled to my world. He nearly destroyed the Invaders. I was the last one to escape my world and travel to yours as he did. I need your help, Cap. To fight the Hate Monger and destroy his operations before he invades more worlds."

Cap reached out his hand and Bucky shook it.

"It would be my pleasure to fight by your side like the good old days."

In the workout room of the local gym, Captain America and Bucky were practicing wrestling exercises to perform for their fight against the Hate Monger. In the next room, Sharon Carter was babysitting Maria, whom Bucky had taken an instant liking to, and developing a device to place on the heads of Cap and Bucky to repel the wave of hate that the Hate Monger would be using against any who opposed him. She was successful.

"So, Bucky, tell me about your world, how did I die again?"

"Well, we were fighting Baron Zemo and he had escaped through a jet plane. You hitched a ride on the plane while I stayed behind. I watched the whole thing. You fought Zemo and then, the plane exploded in midair. And then, it was over. The explosion killed both of you that day. After that, I decided to take over leadership of the Invaders and we devised a gas to retard the aging process so that we would retain our powers and live through the decades."

A tear rolled Cap's cheek, as he heard of his 'death'. Even though he knew it was the death of another Cap and not him he felt the pain and grief all the same.

"Where do you think the Hate Monger is now?" Cap asked.

"I heard of his plan while he held me prisoner for a time. He has joined the Ku Klux Klan. They are stationed in New York City and are spreading their hate throughout the city."

'Great Scott. The KKK is the most hate driven group known to man. They have plagued minorities throughout the decades.'

"Yes, I know. The Hate Monger has even donned his first purple cloak and hood. He even has his hate ray."

"What about the Psycho-Man and the rest of his Hate Squad?"

"They have been disbanded since Doctor Doom's defeat at the hands of the Fantastic Four. The Thunder Gods gang has been relegated to just being a street gang. You may have to fight them and put them in their place someday."

"Okay, lead the way, Bucky. The ball's in your court now."

Somewhere, in New York City, a parade of the Ku Klux Klan was marching to find a poor, unfortunate soul to wreak their prejudicial hatred on. They kept tabs on the minorities in the city, so they decided to go to a poor section of Harlem to keep in touch with the African Americans.

Their first thing that they did was lit torches and chant hatred inspired mantras to strike fear into their hearts.

Upon seeing them, several blacks ran away in fear and terror. The Hate Monger in the lead car jumped out of the car and grabbed a black man, sweating like a madman.

"I'm gonna kill you!" the Hate Monger said. "Back in the colonial times, we exported you from Africa and made you into slaves. I'm gonna make you a slave, now."

"You're whacked man! What are ya, trippin' or what? This ain't the eighteen hundreds. We're free of tyrants of you."

"Let go of him, you fucker!" this time an elderly woman, with a shotgun came out of her apartment and started to shoot warning shots in the air above the Hate Monger and the rest of the Ku Klux Klan. "He's my boy! My little boy. Don't you dare harm a hair on his head or I'll fuck you up."

Before the Hate Monger knew it, he and the Ku Klux Klan were all surrounded by a mob of angry black individuals. They all carried weapons, knives, guns, and etc. Suddenly, a disc with the colors of the American flag swung in the general direction of the Hate Monger and then returned to its owner.

It belonged to one man.

Captain America.

"My Hate Ray should make short work of you," the Hate Monger said, as he fired a gun at both Captain America and Bucky. A purple beam shot in the air at them. They felt the effects of the ray wave over them. But it had little to no effect on them because they were wearing their hate-inhibitor bands over their heads.

Cap threw his shield in the air and it connected and shattered the hate gun, weakening the Hate Monger.

Cap and Bucky went to see about the black citizenry of Harlem, if they were harmed in any way or not. But the Hate monger and the Ku Klux klan had already escaped while Cap was talking to them.

Captain America and Bucky knealt in the bushes outside of a little shack that Bucky thought that the Hate Monger and the Ku Klux Klan were headquartered at.

"So, this is where you believe that the Hate Monger has taken up residence?" Cap asked his partner.

"Yes. He and they are here. All we have to do is break in there and bash their heads in."

They had been wearing the headbands that Sharon had rigged up. Now, they would be free of the Hate monger's hold, as long as they didn't fall off.

"Then, let's do it."

Both men stood up and raced into the shack, crashing into the window. Landing on the floor, they saw the most horrific sight set before them. They were in a room full of men with white sheets and hoods. Cap thought that their families would be devastated to find out what their husbands and boyfriends were doing in their spare time. At the center of the crowd, was the Hate Monger, in a purple sheet and hood.

"You are foolish to think that you can attack us here, Captain,' the Hate Monger said, whipping out his hate Gun and setting it for high intensity. He set it for primal hate and confusion. But he didn't use it on Cap and Bucky but on the members of the Ku Klux Klan themselves.

Instead of simply defending themselves against intruders the KKK dropped a couple notches in their rational mind and attacked Cap and Bucky with a savagery and primal thought that for a second Cap and Bucky couldn't possibly defend themselves.

But wearing the headbands would protect them from the Hate Ray, so Cap knew that he would have to hold back. He plowed through them, pushing them into the back corner.

Cap threw his shield at the Hate Monger, shattering his Hate Gun.

Then, spotlights from above shone down on the members of the Ku Klux Klan. The door slammed open and Sharon Carter and several other SHIELD agents entered.

Sharon's service revolver was loaded and set to kill. "You are all under arrest. Your evil ways have come to an end, Hate Monger."

As the SHIELD agents led the KKK members including the Hate Monger into the airship, Sharon turned to Cap. "Well, in case you're wondering, Maria is with as sitter."

"Thank you, Sharon," Cap said, lightly kissing her on the mouth. "You're a godsend."

"I think we better get back to your apartment, Cap, so that I can go back to my world," Bucky said.

"How will you get home to your world?" Cap asked the alternate Bucky.

"Easy. The Mr. Fantastic of my world gave me a miniature device that is a replica of Doc Doom's time machine. I have already set its coordinates. It's time to say good-bye, Mr. Rogers."

"I know, Mr. Barnes. You have proven to be a good ally and I will miss you as I know that you may never enter my world again. Farewell, Bucky."

The two shook hands.

Next up was Sharon Carter.

"It's good to see you again, Agent 13. Too bad you couldn't fight in the battle with us. Maybe next time."

"Next time it is then, Bucky," Sharon said, hugging him deeply.

Then, with a flash of light, Bucky vanishes from their sight, never to return again.

Cap took off his mask and started to cry. Tears streamed down his face and try as he might, he couldn't them back. The fact that in another world Bucky was and still is alive. Why had his Bucky died and another lives?

"Oh, Steve, I know, I know. It is painful but you must let it go and let it go now. What is past is past and you must live for the future. The future is bright and you can embrace it as one whole man."

"I still hurts Sharon. It still hurts."

Suddenly, Maria entered the room. "Why is Daddy crying?"

Steve knelt down to be at eye level to Maria. "I am sad. Because That was a good friend of mine who will probably be gone forever. You know what it would be like if your father was gone.'

'Yes, I think I do. I am an orphan. But you're the best dad in the world. You're Captain America you can do anything."

"Hmm. That sounds like something I would say," Steve said. "Yes, I need to forget about Bucky. I need to move to the future, like Auntie Sharon said. Why don't you go to bed now, Maria?"

"Okay, daddy. G'nite, dad, Auntie."

They said their good nights to Maria and for a while, Captain America thought that everything was right with the world.

Eager to serve his country during World War Two, Steve Rogers was transformed into a physically perfect man by the government's Super Soldier program, becoming the United States' Sentinel of Liberty! Armed with an indestructible shield and the physical prowess of an Olympic athlete, Rogers fought valiantly to uphold the ideals and principles of democracy. At the end of the war, he was accidentally frozen in a block of ice and preserved for decades until discovered and revived by the Avengers. Now a man out of time, he is ever-vigilant in his battle to protect the innocent and uphold the beliefs upon which America was founded. Willing to sacrifice his own life for the greater good, Steve Rogers is the physical embodiment of truth, justice, and honor.



VOLUME 1
#17 – “A THUNDER GOD’S TALE”
Written by Gregg Epstein

A warehouse in New York City

Since their defeat at the hands of the Fantastic Four*, the Thunder Gods gang had to pool their efforts to gather more weaponry, more members to create an even greater fighting force. Right now, they called the whole gang to have a meeting of the highest order and decide what their next move would be.

* (See FF Annual 2002-recapping Gregg.)

Even though that Rocky was their most supreme member, the master of all their special weapons, it was Bull who was their leader. And he who should command them.

"Listen to me, ya yahoos," Bull said, standing in front of the gathered gang members. "Sure we had our letdowns at the hands of the Fantastic four. Sure they defeated us and there was little we could do about them. We took away the Thing's powers and orange hide, but that was only on a temporary level. But we can win, we can do better."

There was applause and cheers and hoots and hollers from every gang member, including Rocky.

"But the Thing is nothing but an overrated muscleman. He can defeat us because he has the strength on his side. What we need to do now is concentrate on Cap'n 'Merica. He has had recent troubles with Mr. Hyde, the Absorbing Man, and then, the Mad Thinker, his Awesome Android, Klaw, the Werewolf by Night, Mr. Satan and his cult, and our old friend the Hate Monger who joined forces with the Ku Klux Klan*. He won't be expecting an attack by us and our super weapons."

* (See Captain America #9-16-Gregg.)

They applauded in response to his careful words.

"How will we defeat Captain America? Are you saying we just attack, because if you do I think that you are mistaken? 'Member he don't got no super powers, like the Thing!"

"Of course, I remember that minute detail. WE shall use other weapons to defeat him. But I was referring to our modus operandi."

"And that is?"

"He has been known to be friends with a police officer called the Sarge. We will get at Cap, through him."

The clapping and cheering was replaced with insane laughter.

Captain America sat with the Sarge at a coffee shop, having breakfast and genuinely relaxing, as Cap talked to him about the crimes infesting the city while he read the Daily Bugle.

"Sounds like you have everything under control?" the Sarge said, as he looked over the top lip of the folded paper. "If you have any problems you let me know and I'll sic Code:Blue on them. They may not be the NYPD but they're good fighters and good men and women."

"I've met them. They are. I guess us super types make your lives easier for you, by mopping up the mess that the criminals spill."

"But they're not without their cost, eh?"

"That's right."

Suddenly, there was a flurry of activity at the entrance of the coffee shop and there were a group of leather clad individuals entering the restaurant. Cap and the Sarge immediately looked to the activity and the Sarge recognized them.

"That's the Thunder Gods gang. I wonder what they want. Cover me, Cap, while I deal with them." The Sarge took out his revolver and pointed it at the leader of the gang.

"No," Cap whispered. "I would like to know what they want first. Violence is not always the way."

"Everyone, hug the floor!" The Thunder Gods' Gang Leader said with force in his voice. "No cries for help, no sudden religious conversions. We just want one man and that man is you!!" he said, pointing at the gun-toting Sarge.

"Me?!" The Sarge said. "What do you want with me?"

"Wouldn't you like to know, smart fella?" the leader of the gang said. "Rocky, get 'im!"

Upon hearing his leader's orders, Rocky rushed forward, slinging his gun over his shoulder, and approached the Sarge. He grabbed his arm and started to inch forward, away from the throng of people laying down on the floor.

"I'm afraid I can't allow you to do that, Rocky!" Cap said, separating the two men.

"Who's gonna stop me? You?! Captain Whitebread?! Yer no match for us." Rocky said in one breath as he took out his machine gun and fired it point blank at Cap's chest. Thankfully, Cap's costume was made of kevlar and he swirled out of the just in time to avoid the blast. He fell backward, ever backward, to the other side of the coffee shop, knocking the wind out of him.

"Why, you bastard--!! That's my friend that you wasted just there," The Sarge yelled, as he pointed his revolver at Rocky's face.

Rocky smiled.

Another Thunder God nerve-pinched him into unconscious, as he dropped the gun.

As he regained consciousness, Cap saw the Thunder Gods carry the Sarge away into their van. He was helpless to save his friend.

Steve Rogers' Apartment

"Just tell me what happened from the top?" Sharon Carter asked Cap when he returned to his apartment. "Because, babe, you look beat."

"I was in the coffee shop with the Sarge when this street gang, clad in leather attire, came in and kidnapped him."

"And there was nothing that you could do to stop them."

"No, I was helpless. They were a couple steps above a regular street gang because they were employed with hi-tech weaponry. I've seen its like before. They must have gotten them off the black market. I don't know what I'm gonna do."

"You have to stop them of course. Listen, I've been in SHIELD for a long time and I may be able to pull some strings."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going to use my computer to get into the SHIELD encrypted website to see if they have a file on these guys."

"Go to it, Sharon. If I wasn't so hurting I could kiss you."

"Save your kisses until we save the Sarge." With that said, Sharon open the SHIELD website and typed in the Thunder Gods name for a search and when she got the results, she printed it out. "Okay, this is what I got. Their headquarters is the old Acme Warehouse and they fought the Fantastic Four during that wave of hate last year."

"I can't wait for my wounds to heal. We have to move now. The Acme is probably where they're holding the Sarge. Let's go."

The Acme Warehouse

"Okay, now that you got me all hogtied here, you mind telling me what you want with me?" the Sarge ordered, leaning against a series of crates, tied in hardware store style rope. His gun was taken from him and kept with Rocky, for safekeeping. "I have plenty of friends out there, which include Code: Blue and Captain America. I'm sure they're combing the city looking for me."

"In fact, we are counting on that," the Thunder Gods leader said, proudly.

"And why is that? What do you have planned for them and me?"

"Why, we just want to prove to Captain America and the NYPD that we are a match to be reckoned with. We took away the Thing's powers for a time* and we want to do the same to Captain America."

* (See Fantastic Four #18-Gregg.)

"That's all we wanted to hear," Cap said, as he and Sharon Carter, who brandished her service revolver, entered the warehouse or what was left of it. "Now that we know your plans for destruction we can end it here and now."

"And Cap didn't come alone this time," Sharon said, pointing her gun at them. "You are all under arrest by the authority of SHIELD." More SHIELD agents entered the warehouse, brandishing their own brand of weaponry.

"Rocky, hit them wit' that gun!" The leader said, barking out orders like he was born to do that little thing.

Rocky took out his machine gun but before he could fire, Cap hurled his shield and chopped the gun in two.

"I don't think so, Thunder Gods. This is over, here and now."

As the SHIELD disarmed the Thunder Gods gang and led them as prisoners to the Helicarrier above them, Cap untied the Sarge and gave him back his revolver.

"Here you go, Sarge. This is better in your hands than mine," Cap said.

The Sarge took it. "Thanks, Cap. Now you know that this whole things could have been avoided if you handled them to begin with or let me use my ways to deal with them."

"I guess you're right."

"You're right, Cap. Violence is not always the answers to life's problems but sometimes it could be useful. Next time you need to have a little faith in me, yer old pal, the Sarge."

This was something that Cap had to ponder on.

Eager to serve his country during World War Two, Steve Rogers was transformed into a physically perfect man by the government's Super Soldier program, becoming the United States' Sentinel of Liberty! Armed with an indestructible shield and the physical prowess of an Olympic athlete, Rogers fought valiantly to uphold the ideals and principles of democracy. At the end of the war, he was accidentally frozen in a block of ice and preserved for decades until discovered and revived by the Avengers. Now a man out of time, he is ever-vigilant in his battle to protect the innocent and uphold the beliefs upon which America was founded. Willing to sacrifice his own life for the greater good, Steve Rogers is the physical embodiment of truth, justice, and honor.



VOLUME 1
#18 – “REVENGE”
Written by Gregg Epstein

NOTE: This issue takes place shortly after Marvel’s Captain America #24 when Crossbones and the Absorbing Man were both working for Hydra. But the Absorbing Man doesn’t appear in this issue.

New York City

For the past several months Crossbones has been in hiding, ever since he has been ousted from Hydra after his blunder with the Absorbing Man. Creel has never been one of a master planner and quick on his feet but Crossbones should have known that when getting into a partnership like that.

Now, Crossbones only wanted revenge on one man and one man only; Captain America. The one man to have halted his plans for greatness. And he was going to tear this great city apart to find him.

He heard that Cap was known to hang out in Brooklyn. So that was where he was headed.

If it was only that easy.

He saw some kids playing with a fire hydrant across the street, trying to get wet, to deal with the heatwave. Oh, he was going to help them all right.

He knocked off the top of a fire hydrant on his side of the street and spashed a stream of water on their chests hard. Very hard indeed. They all fell down in pain and went home to cry to their mothers and fathers about the bad man in the skull mask.

Crossbones laughed.

That felt good. He wondered if that would work as well on the real Cap. Probably not. He was a sissy, but he was more man than that.

“Hey, man, that wasn’t nice.”

Crossbones looked below him to see a little girl directing that question to him. “Izzat so, l’il girl? And who’s gonna make me stop? You? Fat chance of that, girlie.”

“My dad will beat you up.”

“And who’s yer dad?”

“He’s Cap’n ‘Merica.”

“What’s yer name, sweetie?”

“Maria Rogers.”

“Good. Yer comin’ wit’ me, Maria girlie.”

Crossbones grabbed the little girl by the arm and dragged her to a payphone. Holding her arm, he dialed a specific number. A number that hasn’t been in use for several years.

“Captain America’s Hotline, please state your name and message after the beep...”

“Yo, Cap. I have your little girl, Maria. If you want her back alive, you will come for me at a time and a place of my choosing. I will keep in touch.”

Click.

Steve Rogers’ Apartment

In costume but with his mask off, Captain America bowed his head in shame, while holding Sharon Carter’s hand on the bed. He was crying. He was beside himself.

“Where could I have gone wrong, Shar? I thought this city was safe for young girls and children to play in. I was going to pick her up from school today but I was late. I feel terrible. Where could she have gone? Who could have taken her?”

With both hands, Sharon took Cap’s head, massaged it, and smothered it in her breasts. “Don’t worry about it, Cap. We’ll find her. We just have to figure out who took her and wait for the call.”

Harshly, Cap stood up. “Well, I can’t wait. Do you know how much this little girl means to me? She means more to me as if I impregnated a girl and she was born the old traditional way, not by adoption.” He paused. “I don’t care. I have to go out to find her. I’m going to look for her.”

Cap pulled on his mask and opened the window.

Sharon reached out her hand to stop him. “Don’t, Cap. That’s crazy. What if this maniac calls again and gives us demands? I need you here, Maria needs you here.”

“Wait, huh? I’m not used to waiting. I need action.”

“I know, Cap, Steve. I know. Me, too. Don’t you think I’d rather be out there kicking this guy’s butt.”

The phone rang.

“Speak of the devil,” Sharon said.

Cap walked slowly. over to the receiver and picked up the phone. “This is Captain America.”

“Hey, Cap. It’s me, yer ever-lovin’ pal, Crossbones. I’m back and I have yer daughter. Never figured you to be the sexual type.”

“If you’ve harmed one hair on her pretty head, I swear I’ll—“

“You’ll nothing. I’ll give your daughter back, if you meet me at the place we had our last fight, tonight at midnight. Be there. Or yer l’il girl dies.”

Click.

An anonymous rooftop

Captain America and Sharon stood atop a rooftop where Cap and Crossbones last fought along with the Absorbing Man when the two villains were members of Hydra. For the past several minutes, Cap had been looking in all the hidey-holes to see where Crossbones and Maria could be hidden. But he found nothing.

“This is the place,” Cap said, still looking around. “So I guess we wait. But you know as well as anyone else that I hate to wait for anything in my life.”

Sharon Carter looked at cap and then, back at the area. “Yeh, me, too. Waiting still drives me buggy.”

They both heard oncoming footsteps and they turned to the back of them. Cap's eyes nearly popped out of his eye sockets when he saw Crossbones carrying a gagged and bound Maria underneath his arm.

"I'm here, Crossbones. Now let the girl go."

"Not yet, Cappie." Crossbones placed the girl by an air vent and approached Cap. "WE still have business to conduct. Because of you I was kicked out of Hydra, one of the cushiest jobs I had besides being the Red Skull's bodyguard. But he's dead now."

"So what do you want now, revenge? That's awful petty, Crossbones. Revenge will get you nothing but instant satisfaction. It will fade with time."

"I don't care. I want to kill you." Crossbones raced across the rooftop at Cap and crashed him into a steam pipe. Steam exuded from the pipe as they hit it and crashed it.

Cap took his shield off his back and slammed it against Crossbones' face. He reeled back in pain and gripped his jaw. Crossbones clenched his fist, threw a punch, and slammed it against Cap's shield. The reverberations knocked him through a loop.

Then, Sharon shot him in the shoulder. He growled in pain like an animal.

Blood pouring from his shoulder wound and spitting on the ground, Crossbones looked up at Captain America. "You won this round, Cappie. But the war belongs to me." Crossbones then escaped through the fire escape. Cap didn't bother to chase after him.

"Why don't you go after him?" Sharon asked.

"I don't care about him. I just care that my daughter is safe."

"Good point."

Cap walked over to where Maria was struggling with her bonds. He loosened the ropes and took off the duck tape from her mouth. "Are you all right?"

"Yeh. I think so. He didn't hurt me any. I don't him that my dad would beat him up."

Uh, Maria, it's not a good idea to brag about that that your father is Captain America and he can beat everyone up."

"Why not? You are and you can. Yer the greatest, daddy."

"I know, but I'm just concerned for your safety. I don't want you to be hurt or kidnapped again."

"Ok, daddy. I'll try not to do it again."

Sharon entered the fray. “Ok, enough lecturing. Let’s just go home and have some ice cream.”

“What flavor you got?” Maria asked.

“All they had in the super market was vanilla.”

“Yay, I love vanilla.”

Cap joined in. “Hey, Maria, how about tomorrow I teach you how to defend yourself so that this little thing never happens again?”

“Dad, that would be the coolest.”
