

Marvel Manifestor

- Chapter 301 - 301 – Natasha’s Special Assignment - Novel Fire

Chapter 301 - 301 – Natasha’s Special Assignment

[621 words]

"Three..."

"Two..."

Rumlow and the strike team raised their rifles in unison, aiming at the armed men inside the galley. Through thermal imaging, every hostile position was clearly marked.

"One."

Gunfire erupted.

Bullets tore through the windows with ruthless precision. The mercenaries inside had no time to react before they were cut down.

Boom!

The galley doors exploded inward. Rumlow and his second-in-command breached first. He fired as he advanced—one shot, one kill.

Within seconds, every mercenary in the room was dead.

The man who had been about to execute a hostage lay crumpled at Sitwell's feet.

Sitwell adjusted his glasses, expression blank.

"I told you. S.H.I.E.L.D. doesn't negotiate with terrorists. You just wouldn't listen."

Bridge

Batroc's subordinate frantically worked the radio.

No response.

"Batroc—we've lost contact with everyone."

Batroc's jaw tightened.

Something was wrong.

Suddenly—

A spinning shield burst through the bridge window.

Glass shattered. The shield struck the reporting subordinate square in the chest and embedded halfway into the wall.

Steve vaulted through the broken window.

Batroc was already sprinting for the exit.

Steve yanked his shield free and gave chase.

Rumlow was escorting the freed hostages toward extraction, clearing remaining resistance along the way.

"Captain, hostages secured. Moving to evac point."

Steve pursued Batroc onto the open deck.

Natasha should have been meeting him.

She wasn't there.

"Captain," Rumlow's voice crackled, "hostiles still active. Not all accounted for."

Steve tried Natasha.

No response.

He turned toward her last known position—

—and Batroc exploded from around a corner.

A powerful kick slammed into Steve's shield and drove him backward to the deck.

Batroc pressed the attack, fast and relentless.

Steve recovered instantly. Shield up. Counterstrike.

The fight intensified.

Batroc's technique was sharp, his strikes aggressive—but his stamina began to falter.

Steve noticed.

Every fight eventually became a contest of endurance and will.

Both were his strengths.

He slipped inside Batroc's guard, hooked an arm around his neck, and drove his knee into the mercenary's chest.

Batroc staggered back, coughing violently.

"Super soldier. Captain America," Batroc sneered. "Without that shield, you're nothing."

Steve studied him.

Then calmly slung the shield onto his back.

"I can do this all day."

Batroc lunged.

Steve swept his leg, smashing into Batroc's shin. Pain buckled the mercenary's stance.

Steve sprang upward, twisting midair—

His heel crashed into Batroc's skull.

Batroc collapsed.

Unconscious.

Steve grabbed him and tossed him aside—

The body crashed through a nearby door.

Behind it—

Natasha.

She was at a console, copying files.

Steve stepped inside.

"Well," Natasha said casually, not looking up, "next time you throw someone through a door, maybe give me a heads-up."

"What are you doing?"

"Backing up files. Good habit. Prevents data loss."

Steve glanced at the screen.

Classified S.H.I.E.L.D. intelligence.

All of it.

This "satellite platform" had been gathering global surveillance data.

Natasha removed the flash drive.

Files copied.

The system was already being wiped by a virus.

"You're extracting S.H.I.E.L.D. intel."

"Yes."

"Our mission was to rescue hostages."

"That was your mission. Not mine."

Steve grabbed her arm.

"You compromised the operation."

At that moment—

Batroc groaned.

He was awake.

He tossed a grenade and fled.

Steve pulled Natasha down and covered them both with his shield.

The explosion ripped through the room.

When the smoke cleared, both were bruised but alive.

Natasha coughed, face streaked with soot.

"Okay. Fine. You made your point."

Gunfire echoed outside.

Rumlow burst in moments later.

"You two good?"

"Fine. Batroc?"

"Neutralized. Hostages at extraction. Waiting for pickup."

Steve exhaled and slumped against the wall, letting the shield fall beside him.

S.H.I.E.L.D. Headquarters

Nick Fury sat behind his desk.

Steve stormed in and dropped into the chair opposite him.

"Karl was right about you. You're a black-hearted bastard. Even your missions are lies."

Fury remained calm.

"I didn't lie. You and Natasha had different assignments."

"You sent one team into the field with incomplete information. That's reckless."

Steve's voice was steady—but furious.

"When a team operates together, they need full transparency. That's how you plan properly. That's how you prevent complications."

The grenade.

The diversion.

The risk to the hostages.

All unnecessary.

Fury folded his hands.

"And yet the mission succeeded."

Steve leaned forward.

"That doesn't make it right."

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## **- Chapter 302 - 302 – Project Insight[ 605 words ]**

"They could've died! Do you understand that?!"

Steve's voice rose when Fury didn't answer.

"That's exactly why I sent you," Fury replied evenly, turning to face him.

"But you didn't trust me. You didn't even disclose the full mission parameters."

Steve suddenly slammed both hands onto the desk. The heavy furniture trembled; items scattered and fell.

Fury stood slowly, meeting Steve's stare with his single unblinking eye.

"Listen to me. I know you have lines you won't cross. So I didn't ask you to. Natasha's an operative. That's her job. That's why she handled it."

"If everyone on the team is running their own secret mission," Steve shot back, "then we're not a team."

"It's called compartmentalization," Fury said flatly. "No one knows everything. That way nothing leaks."

Steve shook his head in disappointment.

"Karl was right about you. You don't trust anyone. Not your allies. Not even yourself."

For a moment, Fury's expression faltered.

"You're wrong about me, Steve."

He turned and walked toward a private elevator. After a brief hesitation, Steve followed.

"Take us to the Project Insight hangar," Fury ordered.

"Identity confirmed: Nicholas Fury. Identity confirmed: Steven Rogers. Warning—Captain Rogers does not possess clearance for Project Insight."

"Override authorization. Grant Rogers access."

"Authorization updated. Access granted."

The elevator descended.

---

When the doors opened, Steve stepped out—and stopped.

Before him stretched a vast underground hangar filled with Helicarriers.

Not one.

Not two.

At least a dozen.

Technicians swarmed around them. Massive cannons lined the hulls. Advanced anti-air batteries. Rotary close-in weapon systems. Missile silos—more than ten per carrier.

These weren't the same Helicarriers from the Battle of New York.

These were heavier.

Deadlier.

Hook cranes lifted upgraded Quinjet fighters onto each flight deck—equipped with next-generation stealth systems capable of near-total electronic and visual concealment.

"This is Project Insight," Fury explained as they walked. "The next generation of Helicarriers synchronized with a satellite network. Once deployed, they'll never have to land again."

"The satellites," Steve said slowly. "Launched from that 'satellite platform.'"

Now it made sense.

The ship.

Natasha's data extraction.

"Yes," Fury confirmed. "And they're powered by new anti-gravity engines, capable of sustained suborbital flight."

"Stark build those?"

"Yes. After New York, he offered several improvements."

They stopped beneath one of the carriers.

Steve looked up.

The underside bristled with long-range precision heavy guns—hundreds of them.

"These new systems can fire twenty thousand rounds per minute," Fury said. "One carrier can eliminate a thousand hostile targets in under sixty seconds."

"Hostile targets?" Steve repeated.

"Using satellite data, we can read biometric and genetic markers. Identify threats before they act. Neutralize them before they strike."

Steve stared at him.

"Since when do we punish people before they commit crimes?"

"We don't wait for crime to happen anymore."

Fury's tone was pragmatic. Cold.

"After New York, we convinced the Security Council to expand global threat analysis. We end terror before it begins."

"So you're pointing guns at the entire planet," Steve said quietly, "and calling it protection."

Fury chuckled.

"I've read your WWII files. You and your unit weren't exactly saints."

"We weren't," Steve admitted. "And it still keeps me up at night. But we fought for freedom. Against tyranny. Not to put a gun to everyone's head out of fear."

"That's idealism, Steve. The world doesn't work that way."

"Maybe not for you," Steve said. "But I don't have to accept that."

Without another word, he turned and walked away.

---

Later, Steve rode his vintage motorcycle to the Captain America exhibit at the museum dedicated to his legacy.

Inside were relics from World War II—uniforms, weapons, photographs, newsreels.

A large screen displayed archival footage, recounting the life of Steve Rogers.

Wearing a cap low over his face, he blended quietly into the crowd.

Listening to the story of a man he was no longer sure he recognized.

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- Chapter 303 - 303 – The Attack on Nick Fury - Novel Fire

Chapter 303 - 303 - The Attack on Nick Fury

[675 words]

A massive portrait of Captain America hung at the entrance of the exhibit hall.

The heroic image—square-jawed, resolute, idealized—stood in sharp contrast to the man standing beneath it now.

Steve paused in front of a military-green motorcycle.

His old bike.

The one he rode with the Howling Commandos.

Beside it stood seven mannequins dressed in replica uniforms. In the center was his original suit.

He looked at the uniform.

Then at the others.

Lowered his head.

And walked away.

Inside the small theater, archival footage played on a loop—old interviews, testimonials, wartime clips.

Peggy Carter appeared on the screen.

Young.

Radiant.

Alive with conviction.

Seventy years felt like yesterday.

Steve quietly removed the compass he always carried. Peggy had given it to him before he shipped out. Inside was a photograph of her, smiling in her youth.

He stared at it for a long time.

Later, he visited Peggy's home.

She was bedridden now, her hair white, her body frail.

Time had nearly run its course.

They spoke of old days—Brooklyn, the war, the dance he had promised her.

Her spirits lifted slightly as they talked.

Perhaps because he was there.

S.H.I.E.L.D. Headquarters

Nick Fury inserted Natasha's flash drive into his terminal.

The large display screen began processing.

ACCESS DENIED. INSUFFICIENT CLEARANCE.

Fury frowned.

"Decrypt file."

ACCESS DENIED.

Large red warning text flooded the screen, reflecting across his face.

"Override authorization. Nick Fury."

OVERRIDE FAILED. FILES SEALED. ACCESS REVOKED.

Fury froze.

He had never issued such an order.

This was the first time he had even used this drive.

A cold instinct crept in.

"Who authorized the file lockdown?"

Nicholas Fury.

His eye narrowed.

His worst suspicion had just confirmed itself.

"Council meeting office," Fury ordered as he stepped into the elevator.

After biometric confirmation, the lift ascended to the top floor.

Alexander Pierce was in the middle of a Security Council meeting when his secretary entered quietly.

"Director Fury is here to see you."

Pierce nodded and excused himself.

Moments later, he entered his private office where Fury was waiting.

"Our offices are in the same building," Pierce said warmly. "You don't usually visit unless something's wrong."

"Bad timing?" Fury asked evenly.

"Budget reallocations. It can wait."

Pierce smiled easily. After all, Fury had been his protégé. Even his directorship had come through Pierce's recommendation.

"I need to talk," Fury said.

"About?"

"Project Insight needs to be delayed."

Pierce's expression shifted—just slightly.

"That would require a Council hearing. And a vote. It won't be quick."

"I need time to verify certain details."

Pierce studied him for a long moment.

"...I'll see what I can do."

Fury nodded and left.

The moment the door closed, Pierce's gaze sharpened.

He pulled out his phone and dialed.

"Begin contact with the target."

He hung up.

Washington, D.C. - Later

Fury drove through traffic.

"Activate encrypted line. Patch me to Agent Hill."

Maria Hill's image appeared on the windshield HUD.

"Hill speaking."

"Get to D.C. Immediately. Initiate emergency protocol."

"Four hours."

"You have three."

The call ended.

At the next intersection, a police cruiser rolled up beside him.

Fury glanced at the officers.

Looked away.

The light turned green.

He accelerated—

Another cruiser suddenly barreled out from the side and slammed into his SUV.

The first cruiser rammed him from the opposite side.

Within seconds, three more police vehicles boxed him in.

His car was pinned.

Inside, Fury grimaced. His arm had fractured in the collision. He injected himself with a pain suppressant.

A black tactical van screeched to a stop ahead.

Heavily armed operatives disembarked.

Every officer.

Every tactical unit member.

Weapons trained on Fury's vehicle.

Gunfire erupted.

Bullets hammered against the armored SUV—but none penetrated.

"Engage autonomous driving. Get me out of here," Fury ordered.

Propulsion system rebooting. Armor integrity at 20%.

The HUD flickered as damage accumulated.

One of the attackers stepped forward with a shoulder-mounted breaching device.

Boom.

The impact slammed into the driver-side window like a battering ram.

The vehicle rocked violently.

Window armor compromised. 97% structural failure.

The glass was barely holding.

"Activate weapon system. Now!"

A mounted machine gun deployed from the center console.

Fury opened fire.

The return barrage shredded the tactical line. Fake officers dropped. Operatives scattered.

He launched a grenade round—

Direct hit.

The black van exploded, setting off two adjacent cruisers.

Fire and debris filled the street.

Propulsion system restored.

"Full throttle!"

The engine roared.

Fury slammed forward, plowing through the wreckage of a ruined cruiser and blasting out of the kill zone.

But in the smoke—

A lone figure stood motionless.

Rifle in hand.

Waiting.

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## **- Chapter 304 - 304 – Agent Thirteen - Novel Fire**

### **Chapter 304 - 304 – Agent Thirteen**

**[ 711 words ]**

"Switch to manual. Activate navigation."

Fury tore away the deployed airbag and slammed his foot on the accelerator. The SUV roared down the street, several police cruisers in pursuit.

At an intersection, Fury suddenly braked hard.

The pursuing cruisers shot past him—

—and straight into a semi-truck crossing the junction.

Metal crumpled. Two or three cruisers were instantly totaled.

Fury seized the opening and turned sharply, speeding off again.

"Route me through side streets. Avoid all main roads."

Calculating alternate path.

At the far end of the street—

A lone figure stepped into view.

He held a grenade launcher.

One arm gleamed metallic silver.

He raised the weapon.

Boom.

The grenade struck Fury's SUV dead on.

The explosion flipped the vehicle violently, sending it tumbling and crashing onto its side in a heap of twisted steel.

Inside, Fury grabbed a compact device as the silver-armed assassin approached the wreck.

But when the man reached the vehicle—

Fury was gone.

Only a freshly cut opening in the pavement remained.

He had escaped underground.

---

That night, Steve left Peggy's house and returned to his apartment.

At the top of the stairs, he ran into his attractive neighbor.

"You left your music on," she said casually, gesturing toward his door before walking away with a basket of laundry.

Once she was gone, Steve frowned and pressed his ear against the door.

Music.

Orchestral.

He hadn't left anything playing.

Someone was inside.

He didn't enter through the door.

Instead, he circled the building and climbed in through the window.

The symphony filled the room.

He grabbed his shield from its usual hidden place—he always kept it positioned for quick access.

Moving silently toward the record player—

He saw Nick Fury sitting slouched on the couch, head tilted, looking worn and drained.

"I don't remember giving you a key," Steve said, stepping out of the shadows.

"Do I look like I need one?" Fury replied dryly.

Steve reached for the light switch.

Fury immediately turned it off and typed something into his phone.

Be careful. Someone may be listening.

Steve's expression tightened.

"Sorry to crash here," Fury said aloud. "Got kicked out by my wife."

Another message appeared on the screen.

S.H.I.E.L.D. has been compromised.

"Who else knows you have a wife?" Steve asked evenly.

"Just a friend."

On the phone:

Only you and me.

Fury winced slightly as he stood, one hand pressed against his ribs.

Then—

Gunshots shattered the window.

Fury jerked as bullets tore through him. He collapsed instantly.

Steve dragged him behind cover and scanned outside for the sniper.

Nothing visible.

Fury grabbed Steve weakly and pressed a flash drive into his hand—the one containing Project Insight's data.

"Don't... trust... anyone..."

His head slumped.

Unconscious.

The door suddenly burst open.

A figure entered cautiously, weapon raised.

"Captain Rogers!"

Steve stomped on his shield, flipping it into his hand, using it for cover.

"Captain, I'm Agent Thirteen. S.H.I.E.L.D. assigned me to protect you."

It was his neighbor.

Kate.

"Kate?!"

"I was sent by him," she said quickly, kneeling beside Fury.

"Code F is down. No response. We need emergency evac."

She spoke into her comm.

"Did you see the shooter?" a voice asked over the line.

"Tell them I'm pursuing," Steve said, already moving toward the window.

A shadow flickered across the opposite rooftop.

Steve crashed straight through the glass and charged.

He smashed through the neighboring building's window, barreling through hallways like a battering ram. Doors splintered. Walls cracked. Obstacles disintegrated under his momentum.

He burst through the far window and landed on a rooftop platform—

Face to face with the assassin.

Long hair.

Lower face covered.

One arm metal.

Steve hurled his shield.

It sliced through the air—

—and stopped.

The assassin caught it effortlessly with his metal arm.

With a flick of his wrist, he sent it flying back.

Steve caught it, but the force drove him backward several feet before he regained footing.

The strength—

It matched his own.

By the time he looked up—

The assassin was gone.

Steve rushed to the edge of the roof.

Nothing below.

No trace.

---

Hospital

A black sports car screeched to a halt.

Natasha sprinted inside.

Through the glass of the operating room, she saw Steve and Coulson already waiting. Coulson was on the phone; Steve stood silently, eyes fixed on the surgeons working beyond the glass.

Natasha joined him, breathing hard.

"Do you think he'll make it?"

"I don't know."

The sniper round had passed through Fury's body. If it had tumbled inside, the cavitation alone could have shredded his organs.

"Describe the shooter," Natasha said, forcing herself into professional focus.

Steve replayed the encounter.

"Fast. Strong. One metal arm."

Natasha's face hardened.

She knew exactly who that sounded like.

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- Chapter 305 - 305 – Contacting the Target[655 words]

"The bullets?" Natasha narrowed her eyes.

Coulson had just ended a call and stepped over.

"Forensics is back. Three rounds recovered. No rifling marks we can trace. No ballistic signature. Nothing."

He exhaled. Whoever fired them had erased every possible trail.

Hill pushed through the doors, having rushed straight from the airport.

"They're Soviet-made," she said. "Old stock."

Inside the operating room, alarms suddenly blared.

Fury's heart rate spiked violently—then his blood pressure and oxygen levels plummeted.

"Defibrillator—now!"

"Adrenaline, one milligram!"

The crash team moved fast. A syringe plunged into Fury's chest. The paddles followed.

Five minutes later, the room fell still.

The medical staff stepped back.

It was over.

On the other side of the glass, Steve, Natasha, Coulson, and Hill stood silently.

No one spoke.

The anger in the room was suffocating.

Steve turned away and took out the flash drive Fury had given him, staring at it in thought.

Coulson and Hill exchanged a subtle glance—clearly Fury had given them private instructions before all this. After a brief nod to Steve and Natasha, they left quickly, blending into the hospital traffic.

"Why did Fury go to your apartment?" Natasha asked suddenly.

"I don't know," Steve replied after a pause.

Rumlow approached.

"Captain. You're needed at headquarters."

"I'll be there."

"Preferably now."

Steve's jaw tightened. "I said I'll be there."

Rumlow held his gaze for a second, then turned and walked away. His strike team waited at the end of the corridor.

Natasha watched him with a faint smirk.

"You're terrible at lying. Don't forget what I do for a living."

She turned to leave.

"Where are you going?" Steve grabbed her arm.

"To find backup."

She pulled free and left the hospital.

Steve lingered a moment—then his eyes drifted toward a vending machine in the hallway.

An idea formed.

New York

Karl had no idea what had happened to Fury.

Even if he did, he might have laughed. He'd warned Fury repeatedly that S.H.I.E.L.D. was leaking from the inside. Fury hadn't taken it seriously.

Karl lounged in the office, still half-asleep, watching Skye code at full speed while sipping tea.

He disliked coffee, so the entire office had gradually switched to tea. Wanda, especially, had grown used to it at Kamar-Taj.

Karl leaned closer to the screen, about to ask what a particular block of code was supposed to do when the bell above the office door jingled.

Three men in black suits walked in.

Karl didn't even need to look closely.

S.H.I.E.L.D.

His expression darkened.

"I distinctly remember telling that one-eyed bastard that no S.H.I.E.L.D. agents were to appear in front of me without permission. You've got some nerve. Think you're immortal?"

A crushing wave of pressure descended instantly.

The air thickened.

The three agents felt as if a mountain had dropped onto their shoulders.

Thud.

All three collapsed to their knees, struggling to breathe.

"O-our director... wants... to see you..."

One barely managed to gasp before slumping to the floor, drenched in sweat.

Karl paused.

These weren't Fury's people.

If Fury wanted him, he would've called personally—or sent Natasha or Coulson.

Not random operatives.

"Alexander Pierce sent you, didn't he?" Karl's voice turned cold. "Hydra?"

The three agents stiffened in shock.

Then—

Something like hope flickered in their eyes.

He knew Hydra.

Maybe he was one of them.

They never got the chance to speak.

Mogu drifted lazily through the air and tapped each of them on the head with his staff.

Their eyes burst bloodshot.

Blood streamed from ears, nose, mouth.

They collapsed—dead within seconds.

Mogu floated back into Skye's arms as if nothing had happened.

Skye translated casually, "Mogu says they had hostile intent before they even walked in. He wanted to see what they were planning. Turns out it wasn't interesting."

Karl pulled out his phone to call Fury. He was ready to lecture him about losing control of his own agency.

The phone rang first.

Natasha.

Karl answered immediately.

"Perfect timing. Three idiots from S.H.I.E.L.D. just barged in. I dealt with them. Tell the black egg to send someone to clean up."

Silence on the other end.

Then—

"Karl... Nick Fury is dead."

Karl froze.

He glanced at the caller ID to confirm.

"Fury's dead?" he said slowly. "Since when?"

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## **- Chapter 306 - 306 – Conversation and Probing[ 567 words ]**

"Fury's dead? When?"

Natasha's voice was steady—too steady.

"This morning. He was attacked at Steve's apartment. Three shots. Shooter's unidentified."

Karl said nothing.

His mind rapidly sifted through everything he knew about the timeline of events.

Right.

This was it.

Fury wasn't dead.

He was staging it.

A trap to flush Hydra out of S.H.I.E.L.D.

Karl glanced at the three corpses on the floor.

No wonder these agents had ignored his earlier warning to Fury. With Fury "dead," Hydra had stopped pretending.

"Figures," Karl muttered. "Three agents just came here saying their superior wanted to see me. Guess the clowns finally crawled out of the shadows."

He nudged one of the bodies with his foot.

"And you're calling because...?"

"I need your help," Natasha said. "Help me find whoever's behind this."

---

S.H.I.E.L.D. Headquarters

Steve arrived at the top floor—Alexander Pierce's domain.

When the elevator doors opened, he saw his neighbor—Agent Thirteen—speaking with a man in a suit. She left as soon as she noticed Steve.

"Captain Rogers."

"Neighbor."

Their exchange was polite, but Steve's tone was cool.

He stepped forward.

"Captain," the man said, offering his hand. "Alexander Pierce."

"Sir."

They shook hands and entered the office.

Pierce began by showing an old photograph—himself and Fury decades younger—emphasizing their long friendship.

Then he moved to the point.

"Why was Nick at your apartment last night?"

Steve remembered Fury's final warning.

Don't trust anyone.

"I don't know."

Pierce studied him.

"You were aware the apartment was bugged?"

"Yes. He told me."

"And did he tell you that he was the one doing the bugging?"

The question was sharp.

Steve kept his reaction controlled.

Pierce turned on a large screen.

Footage appeared.

A bound man being interrogated.

Batroc.

Steve's eyes narrowed. Rumlow had reported Batroc killed during the ship operation.

"Is this recent?" Steve asked evenly.

"Yesterday. North Africa. One of my safe houses."

On screen, an interrogator's voice asked:

"Who hired you, Batroc?"

Pierce handed Steve a file.

"Anonymous contract. The satellite launch platform was the target. Payment routed through multiple international accounts before landing in a securities firm. That firm belongs to this man."

Steve flipped through the file. The face was unfamiliar.

"Look at the address."

Steve read it.

Nothing special.

"1435 Hurst Avenue. Fury's mother lives at 1437."

Pierce let that sink in.

"You're suggesting Fury hired Batroc?" Steve asked flatly. "Why?"

"To stage the hijacking. Cover for selling intelligence. Deal went bad. Someone retaliated."

Steve set the file down.

"If you really knew Nick Fury, you'd know that's not possible."

Pierce stood and walked to the window.

"Sometimes," he said thoughtfully, "to build a better world, you have to tear down the old one. That creates enemies. People willing to go into dark places for what they believe is the greater good."

He turned back.

"You were the last person to see him alive. This assassination wasn't random. So I'll ask again—why did he go to your apartment?"

Steve met his gaze.

"I don't know, sir."

He slung his shield onto his back.

"Excuse me. I have matters to attend to."

As he reached the door, Pierce spoke again.

"Nick was my friend. I will find who did this. And anyone who stands in my way will regret it."

"Understood, sir."

Steve left.

---

"Operations."

Inside the elevator, Steve stated his destination.

Rumlow stepped in with four STRIKE team members.

"Forensics," Rumlow added casually.

The elevator descended.

"Good timing, Captain," Rumlow said, angling his body slightly. The others mirrored him subtly. "Forensics found some fabric fibers on the rooftop. They want us to take a look. Should I put the tactical team on standby?"

The confined space felt suddenly smaller.

Tighter.

Four men.

Positioned just a little too carefully.

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**- Chapter 307 - 307 – The Blade Revealed -
Novel Fire**

Chapter 307 - 307 – The Blade Revealed

[694 words]

Steve glanced at Rumlow and the four men beside him.

"No need. Let's see what they found first."

His eyes flicked to one of the agents. The man's hand rested on his holster, fingers repeatedly tightening around the grip of his pistol.

The elevator stopped.

Four more men stepped in.

The space grew cramped.

Steve was gradually pressed toward the back wall.

He noticed the man closest to him—well-dressed, composed—yet sweat beaded across his forehead. The building's temperature was carefully regulated. There was no reason for him to be sweating.

The elevator stopped again.

Three more entered, naturally positioning themselves near the doors.

Steve scanned the tight space.

Not accidental.

He was boxed in.

The doors shut.

Silence.

Thick. Intentional.

"Before this starts," Steve said evenly, looking around, "does anyone want to get off? I'm giving you a chance."

A split second later, the man in front lunged with a silver stun baton.

Steve twisted aside—

—and instantly several others grabbed him, pinning his arms in the confined space.

The man with the briefcase squeezed the handle.

The handle snapped open—revealing a high-powered magnetic restraint that slammed Steve's wrist against the elevator wall.

Steve kicked forward, crushing the man in front of him. With his free hand, he drove a punch backward, knocking out the one trying to choke him.

He pivoted and kicked the baton-wielding attacker so hard the man flew into the reinforced glass wall. The glass spiderwebbed with cracks.

In under fifteen seconds, more than half the men were down—groaning, ribs shattered, limbs twisted at unnatural angles.

Rumlow surged forward with his baton and struck.

The high-voltage charge coursed through Steve's body.

Pain exploded across every nerve.

His muscles locked—

—but he didn't fall.

With sheer will, he endured it.

He slammed his elbow into Rumlow's arm, knocking the baton loose, then hurled another attacker upward so violently the man's head smashed the ceiling-mounted camera.

In the control room, Sitwell barked, "Deploy tactical team to Floor Fifteen. Now."

Inside the elevator, Steve grabbed an attacker's wrist and redirected the stun baton into another man.

The electrical surge blasted the man backward.

Steve kicked him mid-fall and used the momentum to spin and strike another.

Both collapsed.

Seconds later, silence returned.

Everyone else lay unconscious.

Steve braced both feet against the wall and pulled against the magnetic restraint.

The magnet hummed—

Metal groaned—

With a burst of strength, he tore his wrist free.

He flipped backward, landing smoothly.

He stomped on his shield. It sprang upward, ricocheted twice inside the elevator, and locked onto his back.

The doors slid open.

A fully armed tactical squad waited outside.

"Stand down, Captain Rogers! Drop your weapon!"

Instead, Steve hurled his shield upward, severing the exposed elevator cable.

With a thunderous snap, the elevator plunged into freefall.

Steve crouched low as the car dropped several floors before emergency brakes engaged. It screeched to a violent halt between levels.

He pried open the upper hatch and climbed up—

Only to find another tactical unit waiting.

He dropped back inside and sealed the doors.

Every floor was covered.

The elevator wasn't an option.

Through the glass walls of the observation shaft, Steve assessed the distance.

More than ten stories down.

A large roof structure below could break part of the fall.

He stepped back—

—and sprinted straight through the glass.

It shattered outward as he dove.

Shield raised.

He crashed through the rooftop structure and slammed into the pavement below.

Even with the shield absorbing much of the impact, the shock rattled his bones.

Bystanders screamed.

People scattered.

Steve forced himself up.

He had seconds.

He sprinted toward the garage, moving as fast as traffic on the street.

In the control room, Sitwell shouted, "He's heading for the garage! Lock down the bridge! Deploy strike teams!"

Bridge gates began lowering.

Steve burst through the first barrier just before it sealed.

But ahead—

Spike traps rose from the asphalt.

Electrified barricades closed in.

A Quinjet roared overhead and hovered in front of him.

"Captain Rogers, power down and surrender!"

Heavy machine guns deployed beneath the jet.

Steve accelerated.

Gunfire erupted.

Bullets tore the pavement around him.

He weaved through the barrage and hurled his shield.

It arced upward and lodged into the Quinjet's turbine.

The aircraft lurched violently.

Steve slammed his brakes and launched himself upward onto the destabilized jet.

He ripped the shield free.

The aircraft tilted again.

With both hands, Steve drove the shield into the fuselage, anchoring himself against the wind as the jet bucked beneath him.

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## **- Chapter 308 - 308 – Steve Rogers: Wanted[ 577 words ]**

Once he regained his balance atop the Quinjet, Steve hurled his shield again—this time smashing the rear engine.

The aircraft instantly lost stability, spiraling out of control.

Steve retrieved the shield and leapt clear, clearing the second barricade just as the Quinjet slammed into the bridge behind him in a fiery wreck.

---

Inside S.H.I.E.L.D.'s Strategic Command Center—

"Attention all personnel. Immediate Level One alert!"

Sitwell strode in, authority unquestioned.

"Drop all current operations. Switch to Level One readiness. Contact the Department of Transportation—turn every traffic light within a one-mile radius red. Shut down all runways at every D.C. airport. Patch every surveillance feed to the Insight main display."

He checked the time.

"Audit every communication device. Phones, comm units, smartwatches—everything. If anyone receives contact from this individual, report immediately."

Steve's photo filled the central screen.

This was a manhunt.

Agent Thirteen—Sharon Carter—stepped forward.

"With respect, sir, if we're arresting Captain America, we deserve to know why."

Before Sitwell could answer, a deeper voice cut in.

"Because he's deceived us."

Alexander Pierce entered the room.

"Captain Steve Rogers is withholding critical information regarding Director Fury's death. He refuses to cooperate. As of now, he is a fugitive from S.H.I.E.L.D."

The explanation was thin.

Everyone knew it.

But Pierce's presence silenced further objection. Orders were orders.

Only Sharon's expression remained troubled.

---

Hospital

Steve had changed clothes—plain jacket, cap pulled low.

He moved through the hospital corridor unnoticed.

He stopped at a vending machine.

The third row.

Empty.

That slot had held snacks earlier.

And hidden behind them—

Fury's flash drive.

Gone.

Suddenly, Natasha's reflection appeared in the vending machine glass.

Behind her—

Karl, casually opening a bag of chips.

"You dragged me all the way to a hospital?" Karl complained, tossing a snack to Steve. "And these are terrible, by the way. Whoever stocks this machine should be sued."

Steve finally exhaled in relief.

Fury had said trust no one.

Natasha... maybe.

Karl?

Different story.

Karl openly despised S.H.I.E.L.D. He'd suggested blowing the place up more than once. If he was here with Natasha, that meant something.

"Where's the drive?" Steve asked sharply, pulling Natasha into an empty room.

Karl blinked—then immediately pressed his face to the window.

A man. A woman. An empty hospital room.

Now this was interesting.

Except—

Steve pinned Natasha against the wall and demanded the flash drive like an interrogation officer.

Karl clicked his tongue in disappointment and crunched another chip.

Romance was clearly not Steve's superpower.

"Where did you get it?" Natasha asked calmly. "Fury gave it to you?"

"What's on it?"

"How would I know? I haven't opened it. Have you?"

"Stop lying to me!" Steve snapped, smashing a nearby table with a single punch.

Wood splintered.

"I know who killed Fury," Natasha said quietly.

Steve froze. "Who?"

"Officially, he doesn't exist. But some agencies believe he does. They call him the Winter Soldier. Over the last several decades, dozens of assassinations. Zero failures."

Steve frowned. "So he's a ghost story?"

"Five years ago, I was on a protection detail," Natasha continued. "He shot my target. I intercepted."

She lifted her shirt slightly.

A coin-sized scar marked her abdomen.

"Same Soviet round. Same untraceable ballistics."

The room fell silent.

Karl leaned in closer outside the door.

Winter Soldier.

Right.

He'd already killed one before in another timeline.

And if memory served—

This one used to be Steve's best friend.

Bucky.

Natasha handed the flash drive to Steve.

"Can you decrypt it?"

She shook her head.

"But I know someone who can."

Karl rolled his eyes.

Of course.

Skye.

There weren't many hackers Natasha trusted—and definitely none inside S.H.I.E.L.D.

---

Meanwhile—

At the top floor of S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters, Alexander Pierce was in session with the World Security Council, calmly discussing Nick Fury's "death."

The game had officially begun.

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- Chapter 309 - 309 – Unlocking the Flash Drive - Novel Fire

Chapter 309 - 309 – Unlocking the Flash Drive

[619 words]

"Nick Fury was a traitor. He hired pirates to hijack his own ship."

One member of the World Security Council spoke coldly.

"He exploited your friendship to pressure us into delaying Project Insight. That gave him time to conduct his illegal dealings. He knew Insight would expose him."

Another followed immediately.

"The Council has reached a decision. Project Insight will resume at once."

The gavel fell.

No room for objection.

Alexander Pierce did not argue.

He didn't need to.

The moment the meeting ended, a faint smile curved his lips.

They had walked straight into his trap.

He picked up the phone.

"Project Insight is cleared to proceed. Upload the final code to all Helicarriers. Await my next instruction."

"Yes, sir. Hail Hydra."

The line clicked dead.

Pierce turned to the framed photograph of himself and Fury.

"You really made this easy for me, Nick," he murmured. "Watch closely. The world will belong to Hydra."

New York

Karl returned to New York through the Lu Xingniao Space and handed the flash drive to Skye.

"Where'd this come from?" she asked, plugging it in. "Looks interesting."

"From the black egg. He 'died.' Gave it to Steve before he did."

Skye's fingers froze. "He actually died? I thought you were joking."

"Details," Karl waved it off. "He's not staying dead. Guys like him don't go that easy. If he really died, I'd dig him up and scatter the ashes myself."

Karl suspected Coulson and Hill were hiding him somewhere. Neither had shown their faces since.

Skye frowned at the screen.

"There's a tracking protocol embedded in this. The moment it activates, S.H.I.E.L.D. will know."

She slipped on her comms headset.

"How much time do we have?" Steve asked from D.C.

"New York branch? About nine minutes from lock-on to boots at your door. Helicopter response."

"Be careful," Natasha said. "Karl, point the camera at her screen."

"No need," Skye replied. "Find a computer near you. Give me the IP. I'll mirror it to you. I'll mask your location so S.H.I.E.L.D. only sees me."

Steve and Natasha moved to a mall electronics display and relayed the IP.

Skye grinned at the scrolling code.

"Wow. Your agency really loves secrets. This drive is protected by your AI—rewrites its own command strings every five seconds."

At the same moment—

S.H.I.E.L.D. Headquarters.

Alarms blared.

A red dot appeared on the central screen.

"What is it?" Sitwell demanded.

"Sir, the highest-level tracker has been activated."

Sitwell stiffened.

The drive.

"Lock the destination. Deploy strike teams immediately."

The map zoomed in.

Location: Manhattan, New York.

Sitwell stared at it.

Impossible. Steve had escaped less than a day ago. How could he already be in New York?

Didn't matter.

"Alert the New York branch. Full mobilization."

Within minutes, helicopters lifted off.

Back in New York, Skye finally cracked the drive.

"...That's it?"

She blinked.

"It's just a location marker. No files. No data. Nothing."

"Where?" Natasha asked.

"New Jersey. Pretty close to New York. What's there? A stadium?"

Karl already knew.

Steve leaned closer to the mirrored screen.

"Zoom in."

Skye did.

Recognition dawned across Steve's face.

"You know it?" Natasha asked.

"I used to."

His voice had gone distant.

"I need to see it."

"Pull the drive," Natasha said.

Skye ejected it and handed it to Karl.

"So what exactly is going on? S.H.I.E.L.D., New Jersey, manhunts... need backup?"

Karl shook his head. "Stay put. You've got work. This is small stuff."

Outside—

Helicopters thundered overhead.

Armed tactical units surrounded the entire apartment building. Residents peered nervously from their windows.

Karl's phone rang.

Tony.

"Yeah?"

"JARVIS just flagged your building," Tony said, voice sharp. "S.H.I.E.L.D. tactical teams, full perimeter. What did you do?"

"Nothing. S.H.I.E.L.D.'s got a snake problem. Fury 'died.' Internal mess."

There was a long pause.

"...Fury died?" Tony barked. "And that's not a big deal?"

Metal clanged in the background as he abandoned his armor assembly.

"JARVIS, pull everything."

Within seconds, restricted S.H.I.E.L.D. feeds surfaced on Tony's screens.

Nick Fury—deceased.

Captain America—wanted fugitive.

Tony's expression darkened.

"This just became a very big deal."

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## **- Chapter 310 - 310 – The Masks Come Off - Novel Fire**

# Chapter 310 - 310 – The Masks Come Off

[ 506 words ]

"There's more," Tony added with a smirk. "Our moral compass, Captain America, is now a wanted man. Charges? Assassinating Nick Fury."

He gave a short laugh. "Steve killing someone? Sure. Steve killing Fury? Not buying it."

"Hydra," Karl said flatly. "I warned Fury S.H.I.E.L.D. wasn't clean. He ignored it. Now the whole nest has surfaced."

Outside the apartment building, S.H.I.E.L.D. tactical units surrounded the perimeter—but none dared advance past the invisible barrier enclosing Karl's office.

Tony had already moved.

"Something this interesting? I'm in. I'll be there shortly."

He ended the call.

---

Malibu

"JARVIS, prep the armor. Load the new weapons package."

"Yes, sir."

In the lab, a hexagonal arc reactor slid into position, nanotech conduits linking seamlessly into the core system.

"Sir, the new undersuit is ready. Next-generation Stark fiber. Breathable, reinforced, temperature resistant."

A mannequin rose from the floor platform, clad in a sleek black compression suit.

Tony tugged the small button at the sleeve. The suit loosened instantly.

He removed his jacket, slipped into it, and pressed the button again.

The fabric tightened, molding perfectly to his frame.

He flexed.

No resistance.

"Market it," he said casually. "Call it a performance line."

"Yes, sir."

The arc reactor locked into his chest with a precise click.

"Keep the house standing, JARVIS."

Moments later, he blasted skyward, banking toward New York.

---

New York – Karl's Office

Gunfire hammered uselessly against the barrier. Every bullet disintegrated on contact.

Residents leaned out of windows, watching like it was a public spectacle.

Inside, Skye calmly sipped tea and continued typing.

Karl stepped outside.

Gunfire ceased immediately.

"Mr. Norman," the lead agent called out, voice measured. "Return S.H.I.E.L.D. property. Failure to comply authorizes force."

Force.

Against him.

Karl raised an eyebrow.

Back at headquarters, Alexander Pierce watched the live feed.

"Put me through."

Moments later, a portable projector activated.

Pierce's image flickered into view.

"Mr. Norman," he began smoothly. "Alexander Pierce. S.H.I.E.L.D. liaison."

"I know who you are," Karl replied evenly. "Leader of Hydra."

The reaction was immediate.

Weapons snapped back up.

Pierce's expression tightened—just for a second—before the smile returned.

"You're well informed."

"I scattered Strucker's ashes myself."

"Strucker was reckless," Pierce dismissed. "I am not."

He leaned forward slightly.

"Join me. Whatever you want—power, influence, resources—it's yours."

It wasn't an exaggeration.

With Karl's power backing Hydra, global domination would be inevitable.

"What if I want your position?" Karl asked lightly. "Leader of Hydra."

Pierce didn't hesitate.

"Done. You'd take full control of S.H.I.E.L.D. immediately."

Even Karl paused at that.

Madness.

"I'll be visiting headquarters," Karl said at last.

Then he raised his hand.

Dark clouds churned above the building.

Thunder split the sky.

Lightning crashed down in a blinding cascade.

Every Hydra agent on the ground was reduced to ash before they understood what was happening.

On the projection feed, Pierce witnessed it all.

"So this is your answer," he said coldly.

"You'll regret this."

"We'll see."

Another bolt shattered the projector.

Above, three helicopters circled, opening fire.

Karl flicked his wrist.

Razor-sharp wind blades carved through steel.

The helicopters disintegrated midair.

At that moment, Tony descended beside him, repulsors glowing.

"I'm guessing those were Hydra?"

"Hydra's everywhere inside S.H.I.E.L.D.," Karl replied. "Assume no one's clean."

"And our vintage super-soldier?"

"New Jersey. Hydra has something buried there."

Tony tilted his helmeted head.

"Road trip?"

Karl's eyes gleamed.

"Exactly."

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