

Marvel Manifestor

- Chapter 311 - 311 – The Underground Bunke - Novel Fire

Chapter 311 - 311 – The Underground Bunke

[536 words]

"Skye, Tony and I are heading to Steve. Send me the New Jersey coordinates," Karl said.

She didn't even look up from her screen, merely waving a hand in acknowledgment.

A second later, Karl and Tony shot into the sky, streaking toward New Jersey.

Meanwhile, Steve and Natasha drove a stolen pickup toward the same location.

"Just curious," Natasha asked lightly, "where did Captain America learn to steal cars?"

"Nazi Germany," Steve replied dryly. "And we're borrowing it. Also—feet off the seat."

Natasha rolled her eyes but complied.

They drove nonstop from D.C., arriving at dusk.

The location led them to a fenced compound. Rusted wire mesh. A crumbling guard post. A broken sign barely readable:

Camp Lehigh.

"This is where I started," Steve said quietly, gripping his shield.

The place where he trained.

Where Project Rebirth turned him into Captain America.

They slipped inside cautiously, unsure if anyone still guarded it.

The barracks stood abandoned but familiar. Steve could have navigated the grounds blindfolded.

"I trained here," he said. "This is where I volunteered."

"Does it look different?" Natasha asked.

"Not much."

For a moment, he could almost see his younger self—small, stubborn, always the last in formation, never giving up.

Natasha's voice broke the memory.

"No signal. No thermal signatures. No radio frequencies. Nothing."

She sat atop an old obstacle structure, phone raised in frustration.

Steve scanned the area—and spotted a reinforced concrete bunker marked in faded paint:

Quartermaster Supplies

He frowned and moved toward it.

"See something?" Natasha asked.

"Regulations forbid storing munitions within five hundred meters of barracks," Steve said. "This bunker's in the wrong place."

He smashed the lock with his shield.

Inside, Natasha found the lights.

An empty warehouse.

Dusty tables. Broken chairs.

On the far wall—an old eagle insignia.

"This S.H.I.E.L.D.?" she asked.

"Looks like the original," Steve replied.

Around the emblem were the words:

Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division.

S.H.I.E.L.D.'s beginning.

They searched further and entered what appeared to be a conference room.
Photographs lined the wall.

A thin man with a pencil mustache.

Howard Stark.

Beside him—a beautiful young woman.

"And that's Tony's father," Steve said.

Natasha studied the woman's photo. "Who's she?"

Steve didn't answer.

It was Peggy Carter.

He turned away.

A sudden roar echoed outside.

The bunker door opened.

Two very familiar voices.

"So this is the coordinate?" Tony called out. Two hovering drone cannons illuminated the room like searchlights. "Looks like a museum."

"More like S.H.I.E.L.D.'s birthplace," Karl said casually. "Your dad helped build this place."

Steve and Natasha stepped out. No need for caution—those voices were unmistakable.

"Tony," Natasha said, pointing to the office, "you might want to see this."

Tony entered—and froze when he saw Howard's photograph.

"Well, I'll be damned."

He stepped forward, studying it.

"Young, handsome... so that's where I get it."

He removed the photo carefully and stored it inside a concealed armor compartment.

"And who's the gorgeous one?" he asked, pointing at Peggy's photo. "Dad's side project?"

"Tony!" Steve snapped sharply.

Tony blinked. "Whoa—what?"

Karl sighed.

"That's Peggy Carter. Co-founder of S.H.I.E.L.D. And Steve's girlfriend."

Tony and Natasha both stared.

Natasha had met Peggy—elderly and frail.

Tony, meanwhile, looked between the photograph and Steve with open disbelief.

"You?" he said. "No offense, Cap, but... impressive."

Realization dawned.

"Sorry," Tony added sincerely. "Didn't know."

Steve waved it off, though the emotion in his eyes hadn't faded.

Peggy didn't have much time left.

And he still didn't know how to face that.

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## **- Chapter 312 - 312 – Dr. Zola[ 582 words ]**

"We should keep looking," Natasha said, smoothing over the tension. "There has to be more than this."

"Oh, now this is my specialty," Tony grinned. "Treasure hunt mode activated."

Six drone cannons detached from his back and began sweeping the bunker with red scanning beams. Inside his helmet, real-time data streamed across his display.

A few minutes later, Tony smirked.

"Found it. And it's right inside this sad little office."

He strode to a filing cabinet and yanked it aside, revealing a hidden door fitted with a surprisingly modern keypad.

His helmet retracted.

"Seriously? A keypad? No retinal scan? No biometric encryption? What is this, 1985?"

Nanotech flowed from his fingertips into the lock.

Click.

The door opened smoothly as the nanometal retracted.

"And that," Tony said, striking a theatrical pose, "is how it's done."

Steve entered first.

Inside, the room looked like a technological graveyard—towering reel-to-reel tape drives, ancient storage modules, even older-than-floppy magnetic systems. Dust coated everything.

"Wow," Tony muttered. "Did we time-travel? This stuff belongs in a museum. No offense, Cap."

Steve ignored him. His attention was fixed on three bulky CRT monitors in the center of the room. A dusty keyboard sat beneath them.

Suddenly, a square camera rose from the central console.

Machines whirred to life.

"You've got to be kidding me," Tony said. "These antiques still work?"

Text appeared on the screen. A flat, synthetic voice followed.

"Initialize system?"

The voice was monotone—pure, primitive synthesis.

"This is like JARVIS's prehistoric ancestor," Tony quipped.

"Sir," JARVIS replied calmly, "while I am an artificial intelligence, I do not believe that device surpasses me. Also, I have no ancestors."

"Yes, yes. Metaphor."

Natasha stepped forward and typed YES.

The screens flickered.

A face formed—green lines arranged into a crude, pixelated human visage.

"Steven Grant Rogers. Born 1918..."

The camera turned toward Tony.

Silence.

No data.

Tony raised an eyebrow. His records had been sealed by Fury—classified beyond even Pierce's reach.

"Glitch?" he muttered.

"Who are you?" Steve asked firmly.

The digital face shifted.

"Captain. You may not recognize me. I am no longer the man you imprisoned in 1945. But I am still myself."

An image appeared on a neighboring screen—a gaunt man with glasses and a massive forehead.

"You know this guy?" Tony asked.

Steve stared in disbelief.

"Arnim Zola. HYDRA scientist. Worked for the Red Skull. He died decades ago."

"No, Captain," the voice corrected. "Swiss, not German. In 1972 I was diagnosed with terminal cancer. My body could not be saved—but my mind could. My consciousness was preserved across two hundred thousand feet of data storage. You are standing inside my brain."

Natasha spoke quietly. "After the war, S.H.I.E.L.D. initiated Operation Paperclip. They recruited former Nazi scientists deemed strategically valuable."

"HYDRA was destroyed," Steve insisted.

"Cut off one head," Karl said calmly from the back of the room, stepping forward, "two more grow back."

He folded his arms.

"Paperclip brought HYDRA into S.H.I.E.L.D. They didn't infiltrate later—they were invited. S.H.I.E.L.D. isn't compromised. It's been infested from the beginning."

"Correct," Zola confirmed. "HYDRA has flourished within S.H.I.E.L.D.'s shadow."

Steve's jaw tightened.

"Prove it."

"Accessing archives."

The screens filled with archival footage—HYDRA symbols, covert meetings, manipulated crises.

"HYDRA's founding principle," Zola narrated, "was that humanity could not be trusted with freedom. Yet we learned that freedom cannot be taken—it must be surrendered."

Images shifted: World War II battles. Steve leading troops.

"War taught us that fear compels surrender."

The footage transitioned to post-war treaties, the founding of S.H.I.E.L.D.

"They believed they were creating guardians of peace. Instead, they nurtured us. Within S.H.I.E.L.D., a new HYDRA was born."

The green digital face flickered steadily.

"And now," Zola concluded, "we are everywhere."

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- Chapter 313 - 313 – Buying Time - Novel Fire

Chapter 313 - 313 – Buying Time

[537 words]

The screens shifted again.

Photographs flashed past—files on politicians, generals, intelligence officers... even Nick Fury's personnel record.

"For seventy years," Zola droned, "HYDRA has fueled wars across the globe, profiting from chaos. When individuals resisted our vision, we altered the course of history."

The image changed.

A figure with a metal arm aimed a sniper rifle from a distant rooftop. Political leaders fell one by one.

"That's impossible," Natasha said sharply. "S.H.I.E.L.D. would have stopped this."

The footage transitioned again—Howard Stark. Nick Fury. More wars.

"HYDRA cultivated a world in disarray," Zola continued. "As fear spread, humanity willingly surrendered freedom in exchange for security."

Satellites launched into orbit. Surveillance cameras filled city streets.

"Absolute freedom breeds instability. Fear makes control acceptable."

Then came the helicarriers—massive aerial warships rising into the sky, heavy cannons locking onto countless targets.

"We have already won, Captain. The future belongs to HYDRA."

Steve smashed his fist into the monitor.

The screen shattered.

All those sacrifices. All that loss. And HYDRA had survived inside the very organization built to stop it.

Another screen flickered on. Zola's digital face reappeared.

"Your sacrifice was unnecessary, Captain."

"What's in the drive?!" Steve demanded.

"I designed an algorithm," Zola said. "Project Insight."

There was unmistakable pride in his mechanical tone.

"What does it do?" Natasha pressed.

"Excellent question, Agent Romanoff," Zola replied. "Unfortunately, you will not live to hear the answer."

Heavy blast doors slammed shut. Steel sealed the exits. Underground—no windows.

Steve hurled his shield at the door.

No effect.

"Sir," JARVIS announced calmly, "a missile is inbound. Impact in thirty seconds."

Tony's expression hardened. "Source?"

"Launch origin: S.H.I.E.L.D."

"My apologies," Zola said. "I have been delaying you since your arrival."

"Need help?" Karl asked casually.

The bunker posed no real threat to him—or to Tony.

"You've got something?" Steve asked.

Karl grinned. "It's just a missile."

And vanished.

Zola's pixelated face flickered. "Impossible. The bunker is fully reinforced. No one can exit."

No one answered him.

High above, flames flared into existence.

Karl materialized midair, facing the incoming missile. He raised a hand and launched a blazing fireball.

BOOM.

The two collided three thousand meters overhead, exploding harmlessly in the sky.

Karl reappeared in the bunker.

"Handled. Didn't even leave debris."

Natasha smirked. "Having overpowered teammates is convenient."

"Sir," JARVIS added, "three aircraft inbound. One minute to arrival."

"They noticed," Tony muttered.

"We move," Steve ordered.

"And Zola?" Natasha asked.

Tony lifted into the air. Six drone cannons deployed and locked onto the main server banks.

"What do you think?"

The cannons fired.

Blinding beams tore through the ceiling as Tony blasted an exit path. Karl and Tony carried Steve and Natasha upward as four additional beams lanced downward—

Incinerating Zola's server core.

The bunker erupted in flames.

Three Quinjet aircraft hovered overhead, surrounding them.

Ground forces advanced.

Brock Rumlow stepped forward.

"Captain Rogers. Agent Romanoff. Surrender immediately."

Rifles snapped into position.

Tony hovered calmly. "Bullets don't work on me, just so we're clear."

Steve's gaze hardened. "Rumlow. You too?"

"No personal grudge, Captain," Rumlow replied coldly. "I follow orders."

HYDRA loyalty ran deep—absolute and unquestioning.

"Then I'm sorry," Steve said quietly.

Storm clouds rolled in above.

Purple lightning coiled within them.

"Open fire!" Rumlow shouted.

Gunfire erupted from every direction—ground troops and Quinjets alike.

For a full minute, the barrage continued. Smoke and dust swallowed the four figures at the center.

When the firing finally ceased, nothing could be seen inside the thick cloud of debris.

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## **- Chapter 314 - 314 - Sam's House [ 753 words ]**

Rumlow signaled for ceasefire.

All eyes turned toward the smoke-filled clearing.

As the dust settled, a blue energy barrier shimmered into view.

Tony stood in front of Steve and Natasha, one arm raised. A square, three-meter-wide energy shield glowed in front of him, every bullet flattened harmlessly against it. The barrier remained intact.

"Well, Cap?" Tony glanced back with a grin. "Got the inspiration from you."

It was his newest defensive system—capable of blocking most ballistic and explosive attacks. The stronger the impact, the greater the energy consumption.

Behind them, a red cloak wrapped around Karl. When the gunfire stopped, the cloak unfurled slowly. He was completely unharmed.

"My turn."

Karl raised his hand.

The storm above intensified instantly—lightning coiling and gathering.

He lowered his fingers.

Thunder crashed down.

Blinding bolts struck the three Quinjets simultaneously. They didn't even have time to maneuver before being torn apart midair, erupting into massive fireballs.

Lightning rained across a hundred-meter radius, turning the battlefield into a crackling sea of electricity. Tactical agents were struck one after another—body armor and weapons melting in an instant. Their bodies disintegrated the moment the lightning touched them.

The storm came as swiftly as it had formed.

When it faded, the air reeked of ozone.

Only scorched earth, blackened ash, and wreckage remained.

Tony whistled softly. "Remind me not to stand on your bad side. That was... intense."

Karl's expression remained calm. "Time to settle accounts. Alexander Pierce—the head of HYDRA inside S.H.I.E.L.D. We should pay him a visit."

"Pierce?" Steve and Natasha both froze. "He's HYDRA's leader?"

It was almost impossible to believe. One of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s highest-ranking officials... was HYDRA's true commander.

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That night, in Pierce's villa.

A long-haired man sat silently in the kitchen's corner, partially concealed in shadow.

Pierce sat across from him.

"I'll keep this brief. Project Insight has been accelerated. We're short on time. Two targets—priority level one. They cost us Zola. I want them dead within twenty-four hours."

He slid a phone across the table.

"Their files are inside. One of them is extremely dangerous—powerful. I need a clean kill. Use anything within your authorization. Including high-yield explosives."

The long-haired man remained silent.

On the phone screen were two photographs.

Steve Rogers.

Karl.

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Back in Washington, D.C., Karl had initially suggested storming S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters and leveling the building outright.

Steve and Natasha stopped him.

"There are still classified archives inside," Natasha argued. "Not everything deserves to burn."

Karl looked visibly irritated.

"Fine. But the building still goes down. I need that."

Neither Steve nor Natasha understood his fixation on blowing up headquarters.

They didn't object to destroying it—most personnel inside were HYDRA. Steve's morality didn't extend to terrorists. And Natasha, a former spy, had long accepted the weight of necessary casualties.

---

Now the four of them sat in a warm, modest living room.

Across from them, a Black man stared at the group with resigned disbelief.

"So... you only thought of me because you ran out of options?"

Sam Wilson.

The man Steve used to jog with.

Karl and Tony were casually eating apples from Sam's kitchen like they owned the place.

"Sorry to drop in," Steve said sincerely. "But everyone in D.C. who knows us is trying to kill us."

"Yeah," Sam muttered, tossing a tablet onto the table. "You guys really know how to stir up trouble."

On the screen were two wanted notices.

Steve Rogers.

Karl Norman.

Karl leaned in—then blinked.

"Why am I on this?"

Sam shrugged. "Charges say you assassinated senior S.H.I.E.L.D. officials. It's public now."

Karl bit viciously into his apple.

"HYDRA... I swear I'm blowing every last one of you sky-high."

---

Meanwhile, in New York—

Skye had already seen the wanted notice.

She printed Karl's poster and pinned it prominently on the office photo wall.

"Not bad," she said, adjusting it slightly. "What do you think, Moogles?"

"Kupo~ kupo~"

The creature on her back chirped indifferently.

Skye snapped a picture and sent it to Karl.

Karl's communicator buzzed mid-bite.

He opened it.

His own wanted poster.

Captioned:

"Congratulations to the DevilMayCry Agency's boss for unlocking the Premium Fugitive Package~"

Karl sent back an eye-roll emoji.

---

"I thought joining S.H.I.E.L.D. meant leaving my past behind," Natasha said quietly. "Turns out I was working for HYDRA."

She had been raised in the Red Room. Espionage was her entire life. S.H.I.E.L.D. had seemed like redemption.

Steve shook his head gently. "Look at it this way. At least now we know who the enemy is."

He had never allowed despair to define him—not in World War II, not now. Hope was fuel. Without it, defeat came quickly.

Sam walked out from the kitchen.

"I made breakfast," he said. "You guys eating, or what?"

He looked mainly at Steve and Karl.

Tony and Natasha were normal humans.

The other two definitely weren't.

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- Chapter 315 - 315 – The Falcon Pack[706 words]

Karl's abilities had long since been exposed during the Battle of New York and the London incident. Only his civilian identity had been suppressed by S.H.I.E.L.D. The public knew his face—but not who he really was.

As for Steve, he was Captain America. A super soldier.

The real question was whether Sam understood that either of them actually needed breakfast.

Sam looked at them with clear—and somewhat clueless—eyes.

Steve sighed.

Karl gave him a look that practically said seriously?

Breakfast was surprisingly hearty: toast, milk, fried eggs, and a large bowl of salad. A classic American spread.

They ate while discussing their next move.

"Anyone with the authority to launch a missile domestically has to be Alexander Pierce," Natasha said, tearing off a piece of bread. "And he's not acting alone. If Zola's algorithm was on that ship, then everyone aboard is compromised."

"Sitwell," Steve said immediately. "He was on that ship. We find him."

Karl had already told them Sitwell was HYDRA. That made him the most accessible lead.

Storming Pierce directly would be faster—but Natasha was concerned about S.H.I.E.L.D.'s archives. Destroying headquarters outright could erase critical intelligence.

Without those files, S.H.I.E.L.D. would truly cease to exist.

She had no desire to go back to living as a rogue spy.

"Found him."

Tony removed a bead from his bracelet and tossed it onto the table. A hologram sprang to life, displaying Jasper Sitwell's full profile.

"He's having dinner again with that garbage senator," Tony muttered. "Knew that guy was dirty."

The image showed the same overweight senator who once tried to force Tony to surrender the Iron Man armor.

HYDRA, almost certainly.

"The problem," Tony continued dryly, "is that we're wanted fugitives planning to kidnap a high-ranking S.H.I.E.L.D. official in broad daylight, downtown D.C. Sounds totally reasonable."

He personally didn't care about witnesses—but the aftermath would create complications.

"Then don't go," Sam said suddenly.

He stood, disappeared briefly, and returned with a stack of documents, dropping them on the table.

"Consider this my résumé."

Steve flipped to the first page.

A photo of Sam in tactical gear.

"Steve," Natasha said, recognizing the operation, "you never mentioned he was airborne rescue."

She remembered the mission—an anti-terror operation. Air support had been impossible due to low-altitude defense systems. The team had relied on high-altitude insertion.

"You used stealth parachutes?" she asked.

"No," Sam said calmly. "We used this."

He opened the next file.

Karl didn't bother looking—he already knew.

Tony, meanwhile, had JARVIS pull Sam's complete military history within seconds.

Projected on the table was a compact jetpack with folded metal wings integrated into the frame.

The Falcon flight pack.

"This looks like an Osborne prototype," Tony said dismissively. "I've seen similar designs. This one's... primitive."

Compared to an Iron Man suit, it might as well have been a toy.

"That thing hasn't been retired yet?" Tony added, scanning performance specs. "Feels like a museum piece."

"I thought you were just a pilot," Steve admitted, squinting at the projection.

Sam smirked. "Not exactly."

"But I can't ask you to do this," Steve said after a moment. "You're retired. No need to jump back into this."

"Helping Captain America isn't reason enough?" Sam replied with a grin.

Steve hesitated—then nodded.

"Where is it?"

Tony expanded the projection. A large red marker pulsed.

"Fort Meade military base. Last remaining unit stored there. Twelve-inch reinforced steel vault. Heavy security."

Satellite feeds provided a crystal-clear view of the facility.

"That's nothing," Tony said casually. "I don't even need to go in person."

Sam frowned. "And how exactly are you planning to—"

"JARVIS. Deploy Marks 20 through 30. Retrieve the pack."

"Confirmed, sir. Units deployed from orbital platform. Target: Fort Meade."

Low Earth orbit.

Stark satellites locked onto the target. Ten Iron Man suits were launched simultaneously, streaking through the atmosphere.

Within ten minutes, they were hovering above Fort Meade.

The base scrambled anti-air defenses immediately—but conventional systems were no match.

The suits advanced with overwhelming superiority. Weapons installations were dismantled, radar arrays destroyed, infrastructure neutralized.

Soldiers opened fire.

The bullets did little more than scuff the paint.

Ten minutes later, the Iron Legion stood before the secured vault.

Sensors confirmed it—twelve inches of reinforced steel on all sides.

Then—

BOOM.

A massive silver suit smashed straight through the wall.

This model was bulkier than the others, equipped with battering-ram assemblies mounted on both arms—designed specifically for demolition.

Inside the reinforced chamber, the Falcon pack rested quietly, untouched.

Not for long.

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## **- Chapter 316 - 316 – Sitwell[ 779 words ]**

Boom—

The armored suit drove its fist forward. The twelve-inch steel plating dented inward instantly.

The suit paused, assessed the damage—then deployed the twin breaching rams from its forearms.

BOOM!

Both spikes punched straight through the reinforced steel. The tips began spinning at high speed, generating intense heat. Metal shrieked as it was torn apart, molten edges dripping downward. Within seconds, a man-sized opening had been carved through the vault wall.

The suit stepped inside.

Racks of weapons lined the chamber, but Tony had no interest in any of them.

At the far end sat a large metallic case, isolated and secure.

The armor opened it.

Inside lay the Falcon flight pack.

"That's it," Sam murmured, eyes clouded with memory. "Can't believe it's still in this condition."

Once, it had been his closest partner. After retirement, it had existed only in dreams.

"Target secured. Awaiting extraction orders," JARVIS reported.

"Pull out," Tony said casually. "Nothing else worth taking."

Under heavy gunfire from base personnel, the suits launched skyward. One streaked toward D.C., carrying the case. The rest ascended vertically, vanishing back toward orbit.

---

Twenty minutes later—just as breakfast wrapped up—a red-and-gold suit landed outside Sam's house.

"Delivery complete, sir," JARVIS announced.

Sam opened the door.

The Iron Man suit stood there, holding the large silver case.

Sam stared at it... then at the armor.

"Okay," he admitted, "the jetpack suddenly feels less impressive."

Real men piloted machines like that.

No wonder Tony called the pack a toy.

He took the case. The suit immediately launched back into the sky.

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Meanwhile, outside an upscale restaurant—

Agent Sitwell stepped out beside the overweight senator. Security personnel gathered around them.

"Appreciate the recommendation, Sitwell," the senator said. "I know what to do next."

"Nice lapel pin," he added, adjusting the insignia on Sitwell's suit.

"Thank you, Senator."

They embraced briefly.

"Hail HYDRA," both whispered into the other's ear.

After the senator departed, Sitwell's phone rang.

Caller ID: Alexander Pierce.

He dismissed his bodyguards and answered.

"Sir?"

"Agent Sitwell," came a cheerful male voice. "Enjoy your lunch?"

Sitwell stiffened. That was not Pierce's voice.

"Who is this? What do you want?"

"Look to your right. The handsome guy in sunglasses."

Sitwell turned.

Across the street, at an outdoor café, Sam sat casually with one leg crossed, raising a hand in greeting.

"What do you want?" Sitwell demanded.

"Simple. Walk to the corner of the building on your right. There's a car waiting."

Sam gestured lazily.

"Why would I?"

"By the way," Sam added lightly, "that tie doesn't match your suit."

He hung up.

Sitwell looked down.

A red laser dot glowed on his chest.

Panic flashed across his face as he searched for the source.

High above, Tony hovered in midair, palm raised. A targeting module embedded in his wrist tracked Sitwell precisely.

"You guys couldn't handle this yourselves?" Tony muttered over comms. "It's a laser pointer job."

"Quit complaining," Steve replied. "Proceed to extraction."

---

Sitwell reached the building corner.

Before he could identify the vehicle—

His body lifted violently into the air.

He shot upward toward the rooftop.

THUD.

He landed hard on the roof.

Steve, Natasha, Karl, and Sam were already waiting.

"Tell me everything about Zola's algorithm," Steve said, advancing.

Sitwell scrambled up, backing away.

"I've never heard of it."

"What were you doing on that ship?" Steve pressed.

"I was seasick! I was throwing up!"

He reached the roof's edge.

Karl shrugged.

"Called it."

Without hesitation, he kicked Sitwell off the building.

"Villains never talk the first time."

Several seconds later—

Metal wings burst upward from below.

Sam soared into view, released a screaming Sitwell onto the rooftop, and circled once like a falcon before landing. The mechanical wings folded neatly into the compact backpack.

Sitwell collapsed to the ground, trembling violently. His gold-rimmed glasses were gone. He looked ready to faint.

Tony landed beside them, eyeing the pack.

"Not bad. When this is over, I'll upgrade it for you. Free of charge."

"That'd be great," Sam said. "It's a little tight. Stability's not perfect either."

After years away, flying again felt intoxicating.

Natasha crouched in front of Sitwell.

"Ready to talk? This is your only chance."

"I'll talk!" Sitwell gasped. "Zola's algorithm—it's a program. It identifies and selects targets for Project Insight."

"What targets?" Steve demanded.

"You... a senator... the Deputy Secretary of Defense... him..." Sitwell pointed shakily at Karl, then Tony, then Natasha. "Anyone who could threaten HYDRA. Now—or in the future."

"Future?" Steve frowned. "How can you predict that?"

He glanced briefly at Karl.

Sitwell gave a pale, almost hysterical laugh.

"Captain Rogers... this is the twenty-first century. Every person is data. Everything is numbers. Bank records. Medical history. Emails. Calls. Messages. Childhood reports. Political leanings. Purchasing habits..."

He forced himself upright, voice trembling.

"Zola's algorithm reads the patterns. It calculates probabilities. Who might resist. Who might inspire others. Who might become a problem."

His breathing steadied slightly.

"Project Insight doesn't wait for enemies to act."

He looked up at them, eyes hollow.

"It eliminates them before they ever get the chance."

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- Chapter 317 - 317 – Killing Bucky[644 words]

"Zola's algorithm evaluates a person's past... and predicts their future."

"And then?" Steve asked coldly. He already knew.

"Then the Insight Helicarriers compile a list and eliminate every target. Millions at a time..." Sitwell's voice trembled. "Pierce will kill me for telling you this!"

Even Karl, who already knew the outcome, felt a chill hearing it spoken aloud.

"Jesus—" Tony snapped. "Are you people trying to wipe out humanity? That's genocide."

Steve had seen those Helicarriers. He knew their firepower. Under that kind of saturation strike, no one would survive.

"Get up," Steve said, hauling Sitwell to his feet. "We're going to S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters."

Natasha drove. Steve and Sitwell sat in the back.

"Pierce will kill me," Sitwell muttered. "HYDRA secrets can't leak."

"Insight could launch at any time," Natasha said, pressing the accelerator harder as the car sped across the overpass.

"Once we're inside," Steve said, reviewing the plan, "Natasha, you back up all the files. Sam and I get onto the Helicarriers. Karl and Tony provide aerial support."

"What? That's not a plan—that's improvisation," Sitwell protested. "You're just walking into the lion's den."

He didn't finish.

The passenger-side window exploded inward.

A metal arm reached in, grabbed Sitwell, and hurled him out of the moving car.

He hit the pavement—and an oncoming truck dragged him under before he could even scream.

"Uh... you guys got a metal-armed friend riding your roof?" Sam's voice came over comms from above.

Natasha slammed the brakes. The Winter Soldier, thrown by inertia, flipped cleanly through the air and landed smoothly on the asphalt.

Karl hovered high above.

He recognized him instantly.

Bucky Barnes.

The man who killed Tony's parents. The assassin HYDRA had turned into a weapon. For seventy years he had been nothing but a programmed executioner.

Steve believed Bucky died decades ago.

If Steve never saw his face... would he even know?

Karl hesitated.

Keeping Bucky alive would mean future chaos. The Civil War. The fracture between Tony and Steve. Bucky wasn't the only cause—but he was the final spark.

Below, gunfire erupted.

HYDRA vehicles boxed Steve and Natasha in. Bullets tore through the air. The Winter Soldier fired a grenade launcher at Steve.

Steve raised his shield—

A beam of energy lanced down from the sky.

The grenade melted midair like ice cream under a blowtorch.

"Careful, Cap," Tony's voice crackled as he streaked overhead. "I can't save you every time."

Repulsor blasts scattered HYDRA agents.

Sam dove, dual SMGs blazing. Ammunition fed directly from the Falcon pack. In seconds, over a dozen HYDRA operatives were down.

Pressure eased.

Steve and Natasha pushed forward toward the Winter Soldier.

High above, Karl made his decision.

He descended slowly, red cloak billowing before settling behind him.

The Winter Soldier stood opposite him, rifle raised, masked and goggled—face concealed.

He fired.

Karl vanished.

A flash of fire ignited behind Bucky as Karl reappeared at his back.

Karl placed a calm hand on his shoulder.

"You should have died seventy years ago," he said quietly. "You've borrowed enough time."

Flames erupted.

They engulfed Bucky instantly.

The heat washed across the overpass in a violent surge. There was no scream—only a brief silhouette consumed in white-hot fire.

When the flames died, nothing remained but drifting ash.

Karl looked down at the blackened residue without expression.

For Steve.

For Tony.

Perhaps this was the cleaner ending.

The remaining HYDRA agents were neutralized.

Natasha had taken a round through her left shoulder—a clean pass-through, fortunately missing bone. Tony used nanomedical foam to stabilize and stop the bleeding, but she needed proper treatment.

A nondescript van rolled up.

Phil Coulson stepped out.

"Everyone in," he said calmly. "We need to relocate."

They drove to the entrance of a dam facility.

Inside, Maria Hill met them and moved quickly to Natasha's side.

"She needs treatment now. And someone wants to see you."

They followed her deeper into the structure.

At the end of a corridor stood a makeshift enclosure of plastic sheeting.

On a white cot inside lay a familiar figure.

Black leather coat.

Eye patch.

Shaved head.

Nick Fury.

Very much alive.

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## **- Chapter 318 - 318 – The Resurrection of Nick Fury[ 739 words ]**

Nick Fury looked up as they entered. Seeing the shock on their faces, he gave a faint chuckle.

"Took you long enough."

He was extremely weak—each word strained, every slight movement deliberate.

Maria Hill was already tending to Natasha's shoulder wound nearby. A through-and-through gunshot required stitching.

"Spinal trauma. Cracked sternum. Comminuted fractures. Liver perforation. Splitting headache. Collapsed lung." Fury spoke dryly. "Other than that, I'm in perfect health."

"I watched them cut you open," Natasha said from the chair, anesthetic taking effect. "Your heart stopped."

"Pufferfish toxin," Fury replied. "Slows the heart and pulse to almost nothing. Banner developed it—meant to help him control his transformations. Didn't work on him. Worked fine on me."

He shifted slightly, searching for a more comfortable position.

"Why keep it from us?" Steve asked.

"So people would believe the Director was truly dead," Coulson answered.

"A dead man can't be assassinated twice," Fury added. "And I didn't know who I could trust. Karl was right—HYDRA had already infiltrated my inner circle. S.H.I.E.L.D. was rotting from the inside."

He looked at Karl.

Karl only gave a quiet laugh.

"I warned you," he said evenly. "But you opted for cosmetic cleanups—cutting off a few expendable limbs while the head stayed untouched."

Fury's expression darkened.

"I thought I had control," he admitted. "I didn't dig deep enough. I never imagined the biggest snake in the nest would be a friend of thirty years."

Alexander Pierce.

The betrayal still weighed heavily.

"We have to stop the Helicarriers from launching," Natasha said.

They gathered around a table. Fury, now upright but confined to a wheelchair, placed a briefcase on the surface and opened it.

Inside were three chip-like modules.

"What are those?" Sam asked.

"When the Helicarriers reach their designated altitude," Fury explained, "they'll sync with the satellite network and form a targeting matrix. Once that happens, their onboard servers go fully operational. We replace their targeting chips with these."

Hill brought up a simulation on an encrypted laptop—three Helicarriers forming a lethal web in the sky.

"And replacing one isn't enough," she added. "All of them have to be swapped."

"So we still have to infiltrate," Natasha concluded.

Fury picked up one of the modules. It was roughly the size of a large coin.

"We assume everyone onboard is HYDRA. However we get in—storming or sneaking—we swap the chips. That's the only way to salvage the carriers."

"I don't see the need," Karl said flatly.

All eyes turned to him.

"I'll destroy the Helicarriers. And S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters."

His voice was calm, resolute. This was the moment he'd been waiting for.

Fury opened his mouth—

Karl cut him off with an impatient wave.

"You're not in a position to negotiate. S.H.I.E.L.D. is HYDRA now. I didn't listen to you when you were Director. I certainly won't now."

Silence fell.

Fury's jaw tightened, but he said nothing.

Karl turned to Tony.

"Interested in blowing up a few Helicarriers?"

Tony's eyes lit up immediately.

"Blowing them up feels... unimaginative," he said thoughtfully. "I could have JARVIS infiltrate their systems, reverse the targeting parameters. Let the carriers aim exclusively at confirmed HYDRA personnel."

He grinned.

"Poetic justice. Efficient. Genius-level thinking, really."

It was ruthless—but effective. HYDRA planned to slaughter millions in the name of control. Let them face their own machine.

Karl and Tony weren't bound by S.H.I.E.L.D. protocol. Natasha was unlikely to object. Steve stood silent, thinking—but he would never allow the carriers to remain operational. Sam would follow Steve's lead.

Every operative capable of acting supported destruction.

Fury exhaled slowly.

"Fine," he said at last. "I'm a patient full of bullet holes. Command authority goes to Captain Rogers."

Then Karl spoke again, casually:

"Skye. You heard that. You can come in."

"Copy," came her voice through comms. "Gwen and I are five minutes out."

High above, a sleek black Quinjet cut through the sky. Skye piloted, speaking with Karl as the aircraft descended. Its hull shimmered faintly—the result of Stark's

newest bio-mimetic cloaking system, developed with Gwen's lab. Near-total visual suppression.

Minutes later, under Coulson's guidance, Skye and Gwen entered the facility.

They wore streamlined suits—sleek, adaptive, unmistakably Wakandan in design.

Tony narrowed his eyes immediately.

"That looks suspiciously like vibranium nanotech."

They exchanged a casual shrug.

Steve stepped forward.

"Skye. Gwen. You're with Natasha and me. We secure and preserve all S.H.I.E.L.D. data. Nothing gets lost."

Fury nodded weakly.

"My retinal scan is required for system override. I assume you can replicate it remotely."

He looked at Skye with undisguised interest. He'd tried more than once to recruit her into S.H.I.E.L.D.—and been firmly rejected every time.

Skye smiled faintly.

"Oh, I can handle it."

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- Chapter 319 - 319 – Assault on Headquarters[843 words]

Nick Fury had always known Skye had left a backdoor in S.H.I.E.L.D.'s system.

He had allowed it.

He'd told himself it was insurance—a contingency. Today, that contingency finally paid off.

Though he rarely admitted it aloud, Fury trusted Karl. That was precisely why he had tolerated Skye's quiet manipulations in the network.

Power required balance.

S.H.I.E.L.D.'s authority had grown too vast—so vast that only the World Security Council could issue it direct orders. Not even the U.S. government could command it outright.

Unchecked authority bred arrogance. And temptation. Even without HYDRA, Fury knew S.H.I.E.L.D. would eventually lose its way.

In his mind, Karl was the sword of Damocles hanging above the organization.

Karl had no interest in controlling S.H.I.E.L.D.—and that was the key. If the agency strayed, Fury had no doubt Karl would destroy it without hesitation.

As he was about to do now.

Karl possessed the strength to erase S.H.I.E.L.D. completely—root and branch. And no one would dare seek revenge afterward. Not unless they had a death wish.

Old and calculating as ever, Fury had maneuvered Karl into this role without ever saying so directly.

Today's outcome was, in many ways, exactly what he had anticipated.

"Karl, Tony, Sam," Steve said decisively, "your job is to draw fire and destroy the Helicarriers."

The plan was simple.

One team infiltrates S.H.I.E.L.D. to secure the necessary data.

The other team breaks things.

With Karl and Tony involved, Steve had no doubts about the Helicarriers' fate.

"The rest of you stay here and receive the data," he continued, looking at Coulson and Hill. "Once the transfer is complete, evacuate immediately."

They would escort Fury to a new secure location.

Inside S.H.I.E.L.D. Headquarters, Alexander Pierce sat in his office, radiating satisfaction.

A massive screen before him displayed real-time telemetry from the Helicarriers.

"Sir, final calibrations are complete. The Helicarriers are ready for launch."

The report sounded like music to his ears.

At last.

The day HYDRA would rise again.

"Begin guidance sequence," Pierce said smoothly, taking a sip of his drink.
"Launch immediately."

In the Strategic Command Center, personnel made final adjustments.

Three-minute countdown.

Once airborne, Project Insight would officially begin.

In the control tower, technicians directed Quinjet squadrons into position, coordinating with the Helicarriers' ascent.

Suddenly—

A piercing screech of static erupted through every communicator. Personnel cried out, tearing earpieces from their heads.

BOOM!

The steel doors exploded inward, slamming against the far wall. The heavy metal bent grotesquely, as if softened like melted chocolate.

Captain America stepped in first, clad in blue and red.

Behind him followed Ghost-Spider—Gwen—in a sleek black-and-white suit.

"Everyone," Steve said calmly, scanning the room with a gaze sharp as a blade, "stop what you're doing. This facility is now under my control."

Before anyone could react—

Thwip! Thwip! Thwip!

Webbing shot across the room in rapid succession. In seconds, every technician was pinned helplessly to the walls.

Steve moved to the communications console and activated the broadcast channel.

"All S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, this is Steve Rogers. You've heard stories about me these past few days. Some of you have even been hunting me."

He paused briefly.

"S.H.I.E.L.D. has been compromised. It is now controlled by HYDRA. Alexander Pierce is their leader. Everyone involved in Project Insight is HYDRA. They're in this building—possibly standing beside you right now."

His voice hardened.

"If the Helicarriers launch today, HYDRA gains the power to kill anyone, anywhere. For freedom, we have to fight back. Even if I stand alone."

He shut off the broadcast.

"From this moment on," Steve said over team comms, "anyone who fires at us is HYDRA. Anyone who doesn't is S.H.I.E.L.D."

Tony's voice crackled back, amused.

"I'm not sure we've got many friendlies left, Cap."

Outside the main entrance, Karl, Tony, and Sam strode forward openly.

They weren't hiding.

They wanted attention.

"Ready?" Karl asked.

Tony smirked. "Pretty sure that's my line."

He flicked his cufflinks. His loose athletic wear compressed into a form-fitting layer as nanotech flowed from the arc reactor across his chest, enveloping him in armor.

"I've been ready."

Sam's Falcon pack hummed to life, thrusters glowing red.

Karl merely shrugged. His crimson cloak billowed outward.

The three launched skyward simultaneously, splitting into separate vectors toward headquarters.

Alarms blared.

"Warning! S.H.I.E.L.D. Headquarters under attack! All personnel engage combat protocol!"

Automated defense systems pivoted toward them.

BOOM.

Multiple bolts of lightning crashed down from the sky.

In an instant, every automated weapon system was annihilated. Violet arcs of electricity surged through the defense grid, frying it completely.

Inside his office, Pierce's composure shattered.

"Damn it! Launch all Helicarriers immediately!"

Outside, the artificial lake surrounding headquarters began to drain as massive gates opened.

One by one, dozens of Helicarriers began rising into the sky.

Pierce slammed his fist on the desk and activated comms.

"All personnel mobilize! Kill Captain America on sight!"

His office door opened.

"I said no one is to disturb—!"

"Calm down, Mr. Pierce," Natasha's sultry voice interrupted. "At your age, anger could burst a blood vessel."

She and Skye stepped into the room.

Meanwhile, in the Strategic Command Center, Sharon Carter watched as everyone shifted into full combat mode.

Her heart sank.

There were no allies here.

Only HYDRA.

As Pierce's orders echoed through the facility, not a single person hesitated. No one objected. No one resisted.

Every hand moved efficiently, directing the Helicarriers' ascent.

And Sharon understood.

The building had already fallen.

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**- Chapter 320 - 320 – Face to Face with Alexander Pierce [ 735 words ]**

Sharon knew she had to leave.

She had to find Steve.

Slipping quietly out of the Strategic Command Center, she made her way toward the control tower. The corridors were filled with heavily armed agents and tactical squads. With every step she took, her heart sank further.

Everywhere she looked—HYDRA.

Aside from herself, there might not be a single true S.H.I.E.L.D. agent left in the building.

---

Outside, dozens of Helicarriers were already ascending.

Karl and Tony had each taken one down, but the rest continued climbing.

"Karl," Tony said as he rocketed higher into the sky, climbing above the fleet, "I've got a move that can wipe out a chunk of them—but after that, I won't be able to use high-output weapons. My efficiency's going to drop."

"Understood," Karl replied. "Leave the rest to me."

His cloak flared as he shot toward the nearest Helicarrier. The Ultimate Divine Weapon flashed in his hand, cleaving cleanly through one of its primary engines.

Meanwhile, Sam weaved through the air, several Quinjets on his tail. He dodged dense waves of gunfire while steering toward a Helicarrier, intending to use the pursuing jets' firepower against it.

High above, six floating cannons hovered behind Tony.

"J.A.R.V.I.S., let's do it."

"Yes, sir."

At his command, the six units shifted forward, transforming midair. They locked together in front of Tony's chest, forming a massive particle cannon.

"Charging particle cannon. Fifty percent... seventy percent... fully charged."

A low hum vibrated through the sky as brilliant blue energy condensed at the barrel. The light grew blinding, almost tangible.

BOOM!

The beam erupted downward.

The entire S.H.I.E.L.D. complex was bathed in blue-white radiance. One Helicarrier after another detonated mid-ascent. Explosions rippled through the sky, firestorms blooming as wreckage rained downward.

In seconds, over a dozen Helicarriers were reduced to burning debris.

"Energy reserves at forty percent," J.A.R.V.I.S. reported.

The cannon separated back into six autonomous units, resuming independent fire.

"Karl, you're up. I can only suppress them now," Tony said, streaking toward another intact carrier.

"I've got it."

Another Helicarrier exploded behind them—three of its four engines destroyed. Sam shot upward from the final engine in a blaze of sparks, a swarm of Quinjets still chasing him.

"Woo! This is insane!" Sam whooped, dodging fire with exhilaration. "Way better than my old tours!"

---

At the top floor of S.H.I.E.L.D. Headquarters, Natasha stood before Alexander Pierce.

Skye had already dropped into Pierce's chair, laptop open, running the backdoor program she had embedded long ago.

"It's ready," Skye said. "You just need a scanning device on your end."

She was fully connected to S.H.I.E.L.D.'s system.

Elsewhere, Coulson had prepared an ocular scanner linked to a secured laptop.

"Mr. Pierce," Natasha said smoothly, standing poised before him, "we're going to need your eye."

With her reflexes, Pierce wouldn't survive even the slightest hostile move.

"To override the protocol requires an executive order," Pierce replied calmly. "You know the rules—two Level Ten officials must authorize it."

He had no idea Skye had already solved that problem. Confidence returned to his expression. There was no second Level Ten.

The only other one was dead.

"Don't worry," Natasha said, gesturing toward the laptop.

On the screen appeared Nick Fury's dark, grim face.

"Surprised to see me?" Fury said coldly.

A flicker of disbelief crossed Pierce's eyes—but it vanished almost instantly.

"Why did you choose me as Director?" Fury asked. "If you were HYDRA, why appoint someone who hated HYDRA as much as I did?"

Pierce gave a thin smile.

"Because you're the most ruthless man I've ever known, Nick."

"I did what I did to protect people—not slaughter them!" Fury shot back.

"Don't be naive," Pierce retorted sharply. "My enemies were your enemies. No one can guarantee safety. Tomorrow, D.C. could be vaporized by a nuclear strike. Chaos and war—that's humanity's default state. Look at history."

He leaned forward slightly.

"Sacrifice a few million to impose order for billions. That's true salvation. Not childish faith in diplomacy built on lies and self-interest."

His smile sharpened.

"You taught me that. Or have you forgotten Mexico?"

Fury's face darkened further.

Mexico.

The stain he could never erase.

The memory that still robbed him of sleep.

"Proceed, Natasha," Fury said quietly. "We're out of time."

Without hesitation, Natasha seized Pierce by the collar and forced him toward the display panel as the retinal scanner activated.

"Initiating retinal scan."

A targeting ring locked onto Pierce's eye.

"You think I left your permissions intact?" Pierce scoffed. "All your access—revoked. Including retinal authentication."

"I expected that," Fury replied evenly. "Every permission. Every scan record."

His tone didn't waver.

Calm. Unshaken.

Steady as stone.

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