



Essential Captain America, Vol. 2

Stan Lee , Jack Kirby (Illustrations) , Jim Steranko (Illustrations)

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After volunteering for the government's "Super Soldier" program during World War II, skinny Steve Rogers was transformed into the perfect man and patriot...Captain America! Fighting against tyranny with his super strength and unbreakable shield, Rogers idealized the principles he held dear. Then, years later, he is found frozen in a block of ice, a long forgotten figurehead of a bygone era! Now, with greater determination, Rogers again fights for freedom and democracy as a man out of time--Captain America! **COLLECTING:** Captain America #103-126

Essential Captain America, Vol. 2 Details

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From Reader Review Essential Captain America, Vol. 2 for online ebook

Printable Tire says

I'd say everything in this collection is pretty interesting except for the epic-long red-skull-has-the-cosmic-cube saga that comes towards the middle of it.

For one, Red Skull's always been a boring villain- his NAZI ideology kinda makes him unsympathetic (ya think?) and one dimensional, and he doesn't have a particularly interesting or even coherent origin story (I'm anyway more interested in what set off that throwaway evil scientist who created the Man Brute - what's his deal?). You can tell Stan Lee doesn't even care much for the Skull, as his machinations while possessing unlimited power are scatterbrained and lackluster (I am a big fan of the Nazi Exiles, though- what a wonderful Kirby-concocted collection of freaks!).

For two, it's in this story that Rick-Jones-as-sidekick-Bucky is abruptly dropped like a hot potato, even though he only became one a couple of issues ago, and he's fired by the Red Skull pretending to be Captain America, and the real Cap doesn't even bother looking for him when he's free later to do it.

Finally, it's around this part I became terminally sick of Stan Lee's cornball writing. I mean, how many times can ya read someone say "All it takes is for one of these haymakers to connect and you're finished, Doomed One!"/ "Don't count on it, mister!"?

I appreciate Stan more than most, but his admittedly often limited vocabulary for storytelling are put in stark relief when contrasted with the surrealistic, gorgeous pop art Jim Steranko creates to illustrate Stan's boring drivel. It took a long time for comic writing to catch up with this art in terms of innovation, but to his credit Stan attempts to write goofy acid-test copy to go along with it. Gene Colan takes over the art after Steranko's too brief run, and though I've always been a fan of Colan, I think his art's better suited to the 70's modern horror stories I mostly associate him with. His shading brings a literal darkness to Captain America, which is already plenty dark to begin with.

Ah, American history as seen through comic books. The final panel of #124 is especially telling of the latter's sometimes disconnect from reality: a forlorn Sharon Carter weeps as Captain America slumps away, romance comic book pap in her thought balloons. The bottom panel reads: NEXT: THE INFERNO WE CALL VIET-NAM! The burgeoning crisis reduced to a spicy action adventure yarn. As for the home front, Stan still hasn't figured out what to say about the war protest- in one issue college students are brainwashed dissenters, and in the next Cap is questioning the very establishment he serves ("I've spent a lifetime defending the flag- and the law! Perhaps- I should have battled less- and questioned more!"). And don't even get me started on when Cap comes to Harlem...

Back to Sharon. She's appears quite the women's libber, until 1940's traditional dude Cap orders her to quit her dangerous job and settle down with him. Why do they even like each other, anyway? Ostensibly, Cap is chasing the ghost of some lost love who looks like her, but they're incapable of spending any time alone together, busy as they are saving the world on solo missions that only occasionally intersect, and it's clear if they did commingle they'd realize the other isn't anything more than a makeshift projection of vague, adolescent sexual desires! Boy, is that depressing or what?

As in volume one, Captain America remains a shell of a human being, even going so far as to kill off his secret identity of Steve Rogers at one point. He seems to be constantly in a state of motion to distract himself from the emptiness of his friendless, loveless life. Surprisingly, he is the existential anti-hero par excellence,

a Sisyphus continuously fighting for the freedom of the individual in an absurd world of meaninglessness*. I will probably not remember any individual story in this collection, but Cap's overall mood of loneliness will stay with me.

*OK maybe I need a girlfriend now.

Fizzgig76 says

Reprints Captain America (1) #103-126 (July 1968-June 1970). Captain America continues to adjust to life in a time in which he wasn't born. He takes on Rick Jones as a new Bucky, fakes his death, he faces the threat of the Red Skull and the Cosmic Cube, and meets his future new partner the Falcon. It is all in a day's work for the first Avenger.

Written by Stan Lee, Essential Captain America 2 has the artistic talents of Marvel's classic artists Jack Kirby, Jim Steranko, John Romita, John Buscema, and Gene Colan to back up the tales. The issues, like all of the Essential line, are reprinted in black-and-white.

Captain America has just come into his solo series with issue #100 (it had previously been Tales of Suspense) and the new series is just finding its feet. Captain America spends his most of his time facing his enemy the Red Skull and other Avengers enemies. He has some of his own enemies like Batroc the Leaper...but Batroc the Leaper just isn't the highest caliber of enemy.

The best storyline in this series has to be the issues dealing with the Cosmic Cube. The Red Skull takes control of Steve Roger's body and forces Rogers into his body. This leads to Rick Jones being rejected as Bucky (changing his life again) and Steve's introduction to the Falcon. This is actually a longer run, through a number of issues, and that is a bit unusual for the period.

The Falcon's introduction in Captain America (1) #117 (September 1969) is a significant appearance in comic history. He was the first African-American superhero in mainstream comics (Black Panther was actually African). It was a big step in comics (way overdue), and the fact he became an early co-star of the comic, it is worth checking out this collection just to see how he met Captain America.

Essential Captain America Volume 2 is like many of the older Marvel Comics. They are more developed than DC comics of the time, but also not like modern comics. Captain America feels like a second tier title here and his comic just doesn't measure up to Marvel's big hitters from the period like the Fantastic Four and Amazing Spider-Man. It is worth checking out however for fans of the characters and classic comics from the Marvel Age.

Mike (the Paladin) says

Here's the story I related in my review of Essential Captain America Vol.1 :

When I was 6 or 7 I was reading Superman and Batman. I read them in their various books for a while but when I was about 12 I found Captain America. It was 1964 or so and I had found my niche, my Comic book alter-ego. Other Marvel comics were great, I read Spiderman, I read the X-men, I liked Deardevil, but none of them (for me) approached Captain America.

I recounted this in my review of the Essential Avengers, the Avengers were my second favorite heroes and book, why? Because for a long time and then often later who led them? Captain America. Anyway what I recounted, I faced at a certain point in my life, a finical challenge. I had a collection of Silver age comic books which I had to sell, and I have a times since missed them.

The American culture has in many ways built up it's own version of the "Western Mythos". Notably we added the "Cowboy" and the variations of that character again "notably" the "Mysterious Stranger" or "the Dark Mysterious Stranger" the Hero who rides in from nowhere, with no connections, saves the day and rides away. The Superhero is a later addition to this mythos. To me Captain America (as he was under Kirby and in the days of the early Marvel works) is the epitome. Later there was an attempt to paint that period in a somewhat negative light, but that was ans is a misunderstanding. Cap (as his fans know) would always have stood for what is best in the American ideal and that includes that ALL PEOPLE ARE CREATED EQUAL, no matter race, creed, or belief, Cap has always stood as a proponent of what's best in America.

I find it sad that a later group of writers have (largely because of political expediency and myopia) not understood how to write him. I find that often there comes a time when the fans of a character understand him better than the ones who "own the rights" to the character.

This Volume contains Captain America #103-126. Lots of good stuff here, some of the last Kirby issues, the stories got longer and had more space when the book (changed from Tales of Suspense and) became Cap's alone and Ironman moved over to his own book. They're not all gems but it's still "mostly" Cap.

I rate these books four stars only because the Essentials series is rendered in black and white rather than in color. Beside that it's the only place you'll find some of these (short of shelling out the fortune it would take to get the actual collector's copies.)

This book picks up where vol.1 leaves off. Enjoy.

Gary Peterson says

The continuing adventures of Captain America, living legend of World War II. This volume spans Captain America #103-126, containing 24 comic books originally published from 1968-1970. It's a transitional period for the title, with Jack Kirby leaving for DC Comics after the "album issue" #112 (though he would return as writer and artist in #193). In his wake a number of artists tried their hand at Cap with mixed success until Gene Colan came aboard as regular penciller in #116. Flipping from the front of this book to the end is to see the Silver Age yield to the Bronze Age.

After the Lee and Kirby issues early in the book, a highlight are the three Jim Steranko issues, #110, 111, and 113. They're more enjoyable to look at than to read, however, as Lee's scripting isn't up to Steranko's inspired artwork. I really appreciated seeing these stories in black and white, which suits Steranko and allows his linework to shine through. The color obliterated a lot of the detail. This trilogy had an agenda of reestablishing Cap's secret identity, and Lee goes about it clumsily and unsatisfactorily. Steve Rogers revealed to the world he was Cap in a series of great stories beginning in Tales of Suspense #95. Lee wanted to undo that, and it failed artistically.

While falling short of Essential Cap Vol. 1, there are some good stories here. The Red Skull Cosmic Cube two-parter in #115 and 116 is surprisingly fun reading because the plot of the Skull and Cap switching bodies should be stupid, but Lee somehow pulls it off (as he did with even greater aplomb in Fantastic Four

#51). Lee parlays this plot into the three-part story spanning #117-119 that introduces the Falcon. Cap, in the body of the unmasked Red Skull, teams up with the Falcon to fight the Exiles. This grade-B team of aged villains is actually effective and menacing on their own, instead of serving as window dressing to the Skull. And the Falcon makes an immediate and positive impression on the reader, so great at the time he was soon brought back as Cap's regular partner, playing Alexander Scott to Cap's Kelly Robinson (whom I suspect were the inspiration for this pairing).

"Next: Cap goes to College" reads the promo at the end of #119, and #120 is a tie-dyed-in-the-wool 1969 student revolution story, one part Getting Straight, one part R.P.M., and one part Strawberry Statement. Of course it's not the college radicals to blame, but Modok playing Hate-Monger and messing with their minds. Lee did the student radical bit better in the Spider-Man tablet saga.

The book's remaining issues are lame one-shot stories pitting Cap against lame villains like the Scorpion and a ridiculous looking "cyborg" with giant ears and a funnel for a hat. I wondered if Colan was showing his contempt for the silly scripts he had to draw. Almost as bad was Suprema--a poor attempt at recapturing the allure of Madame Hydra--who clouds men's minds and makes them do her bidding, from gangsters to Nick Fury, who readily gives her control over SHIELD. In this ludicrous scene, Cap leaves Suprema, Fury and a gaggle of agents and henchmen to race off in Suprema's truck to read old newspapers at The Daily Bugle (much to J. Jonah Jameson's consternation) and then to construct a jamming device in the lab Tony Stark is working in (pouring chemicals out of a beaker because that's what one does in labs, right?). Cap then races back to the scene where everyone is patiently standing around waiting for Cap to handily defeat them. Yeah, the title was losing its way. What could be done to correct course?

An answer to that question comes in the closing issue of this volume, #126, which brings back the Falcon for a disappointing and muddled story, but one that points ahead to their promising partnership. That closed this volume out on a high note and left me eager now to press ahead into Essential Cap Vol. 3, which boasts with issue #153 the beginning of Steve Engelhart's celebrated run and its highlight the Nomad saga. I've heard a lot of great things about it over the years, but have never yet read it. I'm grateful for the Essentials making so many comics available affordably to fans eager just to read the stories (as opposed to collectors who "slab" their comics like Jabba did Han Solo).

Mark Short says

I really enjoyed this collection. The artwork and stories are very good.

Brent says

Started strong, but ended pretty weak. Thanks in large part to a rather silly "no continuing story arcs" policy. Still fun though.

Matthew Price says

The second "Essential" volume in the Captain America line collects "Captain America" 103-126, all written by Stan Lee.

The book begins with the action-packed art of Jack Kirby, with whom Lee revived Captain America in the pages of "The Avengers," started his solo stories in "Tales of Suspense," and began his ongoing series with "Captain America" No. 100.

Steranko contributes his eye-popping visuals to a story of Captain America and Madame Hydra, with images that are still oft-referenced today.

After fill-in issues by artists including John Buscema and John Romita, Gene Colan settles in for a steady run. After the Kirby and Steranko issues, the stories become a bit more melodramatic, and perhaps feature a little too much Steve Rogers mooning over Sharon Carter or grieving over the death of Bucky. But there's still fantastic artwork throughout.

<http://newsok.com/article/3789801>

Holden Attradies says

I was pleasantly surprised at how well the stories in this volume held up over time and how enjoyable they were!

Paul E. Morph says

From a comics history point of view this volume is pretty interesting, as it shows the beginnings of Marvel's burgeoning social conscience, touching upon racism and the war in Viet Nam, albeit in a pretty naïve fashion. Baby steps, though, folks...

The Steve Rogers in this volume is almost unrecognisable to the self-assured leader of men we see in today's Marvel Universe (what's left of it anyway). This Cap is still very much a man out of time (*Edison's Medicine*) and is full of angst at his complete lack of a life outside his duties with the Avengers and SHIELD. The contrast is striking and pretty entertaining.

The low point of the book for me is Cap's insistence that Sharon Carter quit her job as a SHIELD field agent if she wants to have a relationship with him. It's all very 'no woman of mine is going to risk her life' get-behind-the-kitchen-sink style misogyny. Very happy *that* side of Cap's personality has gone the way of the dodo.

There's an interesting moment when Sam Wilson puts on Steve's Cap costume as a disguise... It provoked a wry smile from me, knowing they had no way of knowing that forty five years later Sam would be the new Captain America! :-)

Adam Graham says

This book collects Issues 103-126 of Captain America comics from the 1960s.

Artistically, this book is a treasure trove of the best work done on Captain America. Issues #103-109 and 112 are done by Captain America Co-creator Jack Kirby, with Issues 110, 111, and 113 being in the unimitable

style of one of the 1960s most distinct artists, Jim Steranko, Issues 116-128 are done by the legendary Gene Colan (well known for his work on Daredevil) and his Captain America work is equally good. The other issues are done by John Romita and John Buscema.

In terms of writing, there are highs, but also a few mediocre stories tossed in. There are a couple different appearances by the Red Skull including an epic multi-issue story that sees the Red Skull having reacquired the Cosmic Cube and taking on the form of Captain America while Steve Rogers is consigned to the Skull's body. This book also sees the introduction of long-time Captain America ally the Falcon. Beyond that, Cap battles Commies, AIM, Hydra, the Mandarin, and a host of ne'er-do-wells.

The writing suffers mainly in the ongoing Sharon Carter/Agent 13 storyline/love story that is never quite compelling (at least to a modern reader) and is at times annoying. At the same time after the epic Red Skull story, the comic's became one part stories which often felt like they needed more space.

Still, whatever deficiencies there are in Stan Lee's writing are more than made up for by the absolutely dynamic art that graces every page. Overall, this is a great volume of Captain America art and comic book tales.
