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*Detective Comics*  
Issue 5: "Old Foes, Part Three: Showdown"  
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It's about one-thirty A.M. I watch the streets as I stand on the side of a skyscraper facing Waynetech. The Mad Hatter is here. I know it. I can feel it.

The Mad Hatter has been a thorn in my side since the lunatic got a job at Waynetech. After attempting to investigate his reasons, I decided to confront him. He was ready for me. He created a machine that allows him to beam mind-controlling signals, like those found inside his hats, within an entire city radius. I discovered that the Mad Hatter used a prototype of his machine to hypnotize Max Schneider, Vice President of Waynetech, and forced Schneider to find a job for him at Waynetech. The Hatter used Waynetech's money, my money, to fund his project. Schneider then restrained me as the Mad Hatter turned his prototype mind-controlling device on me.

After I lost consciousness, I awoke to find myself in a very strange place. My parents were there. They told me that the Mad Hatter had Schneider murder me in cold blood, and that I was now in the Realm of the After-life. They were upset that I had wasted my life trying to wage a one-man war against all the crime in Gotham. They were disappointed that I never settled down with a family, that I failed to carry on the family name.

Then, they suddenly disappeared, and I woke up in a run-down Gotham City alley, miles away from the Waynetech building. After I took stock of my injuries, I decided I had to get back to the cave. I hadn't traveled very far before I was intercepted by the police, who had an arrest warrant on me for the attempted murder of Mayor Hill. After a long and grueling

chase, I was finally able to make it back home, where Alfred awaited me.

And now, it comes down to this: I have to stop the Mad Hatter before he brainwashes an entire city, and I have to do it alone. I'm still aching from my encounter with the police. *"No one man can stop all crime, how foolish could you be?"* I hear my father say.

I try to stay in the shadow of the building even more than usual. I hold my cape to keep it from blowing and revealing my position. I look down towards the streets. A police car drives by.

As I was sneaking through the air shaft on my last visit to Waynetech, I noticed a vertical path that seemed to lead directly to the roof of the building. I decide to use this for my entrance this time, as the police are out in full force looking for me and this way seems to be the most discreet. I will need about twenty seconds unobserved to make it onto the roof of Waynetech using my grapple.

The rain comes down slightly harder than before. I pull out my binoculars. I look as far in the distance as I can for any police patrol. I notice the guard positioned at the back door of Waynetech. I look around the corner of the building, and check the skies for police helicopters.

When I feel satisfied, I take a deep breath and fire my grapple onto the building behind Waynetech. I swoop towards the roof of Waynetech, almost instinctively pushing my weight in the direction of the building as I attempt to glide faster. When I land, I quickly pull out my lock pick and secure its screwdriver attachment. I locate the air vent, and hastily remove the hinges and screws on the grate. I quietly remove the grating and climb into the shaft. I use my legs to brace myself against the sides of the vent, as I attempt to replace the grate. I only attach it at one point, to keep the wind from blowing it off again. I then slowly make my way down the vertical shaft, bracing my back against one side and descending heel under heel on the other. My legs begin to shake and my back begins to hurt, due partly to my earlier injuries and partly to my current activity. I attempt to block out the pain, and continue downward slowly and carefully. When I get about 85 per cent of the way down, my agony becomes too intense. My legs give, and I land on a horizontal portion of the shaft with a thud that must've woken up half of Gotham City. I surrender to the pain for a moment, but realize that I have no choice but to

continue on. I crawl through the vent until I reach the drop down to the first floor. As I go to drop down, memory takes over and I recall what happened the last time I came through here. I blindly send a batarang out in the direction of the security camera, and hear it shatter the lens. I drop down and land on my feet.

I walk into the elevator and hit the sixth floor button. The elevator door slowly shuts. I really wish there were some other way to get into the Mad Hatter's laboratory. It has no windows, only the one door. He must've picked that lab on purpose, knowing that it would be near impossible for anyone to see what he was doing in it. He knows I'm coming, so how can I get the drop on him?

The lights in the elevator suddenly begin to flicker. The car comes to a screeching stop, and I grab onto the rails to prevent myself from falling. A power outage when it's not even thundering? *Yeah, and the Mad Hatter's out to save all of Gotham.* I look around trying to plan my next move.

"Greetings, Batman," the unmistakable voice of the Mad Hatter issues forth from a speaker in the elevator. "I trust you had a restful sleep. I've been waiting to see you again."

"The only thing you'll be seeing for the next few years are the stone walls of Arkham Asylum," I fire back.

"Oh? You're still cranky even after that snooze?" the Mad Hatter remarks. "Oh well. I'm just going to have to send you back to bed again! Good night, Batman!" He chortles evilly.

I look around, wondering what I should do next. Suddenly, I hear the sound of decompressing air coming from the ceiling. A green gas filters in through the vent. I fumble for the respirator in my utility belt, but it is too late. Too much gas flooded into my nostrils. I feel myself slowly pass out.

"How foolish could you be?" I hear my father say.

I feel my eyes open. My head hurts. I'm sitting on old wooden chair. My

arms are tied behind by back, and my torso is bound to the chair with thick rope. I don't feel my belt under the bindings. I look at my surroundings. The floor is smooth, but slightly dirty. A table near the door to my right has some machine parts and computer chips on it. The table in front of me holds some other oddities: a welder's mask, a large lightning rod, multicolored light bulbs, neon lights, and cans of paint. However, it isn't until I see the large, telescope-like gizmo that I realize where I am. The still-hypnotized Schneider is standing right behind my chair. I see two brown shoes sticking out from the other side of the machine. The shoes are quickly pulled in towards the machine, and the body that is in them jumps up.

"Ah, you're awake!" the Hatter pronounces as he comes towards me holding a wrench with an evil smirk on his face. I am so sick of being knocked unconscious by this guy.

"You!" I say angrily. "You tried to turn me into a murderer while I was unconscious," I say to inform him I know what's going on.

"I wonder if I've been changed in the night?" he says. "Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'who in the world am I?' Ah, that's the great puzzle!"

"Enough, Hatter!" I say as I attempt to wriggle out of the ropes binding me to the chair. Because my muscles were relaxed while I was unconscious, the ropes have almost no slack at all; even normal breathing makes them dig into my skin.

"Brainwashing me and forcing me to attempt to kill the Mayor—it was all part of your original plan, wasn't it?" I say. "The second your name hit the papers you knew I would be coming after you. Brainwashing me and having me nearly assassinate the Mayor accomplished two things for you. One: the police concentrated their efforts on finding me, so your own activities went ignored. Two: it kept me off your back.

"Ah, the great detective has done it again! Well done, Batman! My machine is nearly complete and doesn't it look simply smashing? I've been waiting for this day for a long time, Batman! My dream is almost complete! Soon, I will use this machine to brainwash all of Gotham!

Everyone from the common street punk to the average family with its 1.4 kids will be under my control! The entire GCPD and the doctors at Arkham will obey ME for a change!! I will have a powerful army of millions at my disposal and then the world will fear the name of the MAD HATTER!! Every thought I think will become a reality! And you, Batman, will be right here with me, watching the city you dedicated your life to protecting go up in smoke!" A deep, bellowing laugh issues forth from the Mad Hatter's mouth as I hear my father repeat his last line.

The Hatter glances down at his timepiece-free wrist. "Oh my ears and whiskers, how late it's getting! Better get started!" He walks to a desktop computer on a table near his machine. The computer is obviously used for one purpose only, as the display that shows when the Mad Hatter presses the "Enter" key on the keyboard appears archaic— a simple black background with green text. The words "Project: Masterpiece" are displayed at the top of the screen.

The first word that comes up on the screen below that title is "Angle:". The Mad Hatter types in "75" and presses "Enter". The giant telescope-like machine immediately raises itself until its firing angle is 75 degrees from the floor. The next word displayed on the monitor is "Radius:". The Mad Hatter types "330 sq. miles" and presses "Enter". The neon lights on the machine turn green. To my horror, the next word displayed on the Mad Hatter's computer screen is "Species?"

"Species?" I ask.

"Of course," the Mad Hatter responds, with the same evil grin that seems to be fixed on his face. "Every species' brain waves are different."

I watch as he types the word "Humans" next to the word "Species". After pressing "Enter", the word "Arm?" shows up. After the Mad Hatter confirms his directions, all of the lights on the mind-controlling machine turn a bright blue, and the energy conductors begin to flash.

"Password:" appears on the monitor next. The Mad Hatter looks at me, smiles, and squints. He then positions his body in front of the computer so I can't see what he's typing. When he moves aside, I see three asterisks next to "Password:" "Initiate Process?" is displayed below. The Mad Hatter looks up at me one more time. "Say ta-ta to your city, Batman!"

He presses the "Y" key on the keyboard.

"FREEZE!" I hear as the door into the room bursts open. Lieutenant Gordon and Detective Bullock stand in the doorway with their guns pointed at us. They are backed up by three members of the SWAT team. Schneider immediately leaves the room.

"Batman!" Gordon yells. "You are under arrest! Your hide-and-seek games are over. You've made fools of my police department long enough. Your vigilante days in this city are ended."

"Don't worry officer, I caught him for you," the Mad Hatter says innocently, realizing the opportunity to get himself out of his predicament. "He came in here and tried to kill me too. But I was able to stop him and tie him up so that you could take him... "

"Shaddup creep," Bullock interrupts. "Yer under arrest too. Ya think no one's noticed the hefty amount of money you've been stealin' from yer new little comp'ny here? This little game'a yours is over."

"That's utterly ridiculous!" the Mad Hatter says, acting insulted. He looks up at his giant flashing machine. "Well... "

"Enough fooling around," Gordon says. "Let's go". He and Harvey begin to move towards us.

"Officers, why are you being so... whoops!" the Mad Hatter says as he 'accidentally' hits the "Enter" key on the keyboard with his elbow. He immediately turns towards me and slams a top hat down onto my head that he appears to pull from thin air. The words "PROCESS INITIALIZED" flash on the computer monitor.

"Nooooo!" I yell as I realize what is happening to my city.

The mind-controlling waves emanate from Waynetech and quickly blanket all of Gotham. On every street, in every house and in every car the evil waves are felt. The minds of every man, woman, and child in all of Gotham are now under the dominion of one sick, twisted mind.

I watch as the waves rush through the bodies of Gordon, Bullock, and the three SWAT team officers. They freeze, their faces in total shock as they think their final independent thoughts. I think of myself, still able to think because of the gadget on my head.

After almost a minute of silence, the Mad Hatter jumps up and down. "It worked!" he exclaims, "Oh my plan worked! This is indeed a marvelous day!" The Mad Hatter throws his hands in the air like he's just conquered a country. "My loyal subjects!" he yells, as the transmitter in his hat sends his message across the entire city. "This is your master speaking! From now on you will obey only MY thoughts. You are now bound to my will! You're only mission in life is to serve me! I will now perform a little test!"

The Mad Hatter closes his eyes and concentrates. The looks of shock from the members of the police department disappear, replaced by blank stares. All five of them suddenly drop their weapons.

"You made them drop their guns?" I question in confusion.

"Of course," he responds joyfully, "it makes what I'm about to do a lot more fun!"

"Good job, my faithful servants!" the Mad Hatter yells. "Your lives as my slaves have just begun! Your next task is a very simple, yet meaningful one. This is one I've been waiting a lifetime for! He has foiled my marvelous plans time and time again. He has made my life as a human being utterly miserable! Time and time again, he has thrown me into the cold, dark place we call Arkham Asylum! So now, with great pleasure, I command you! KILL THE BATMAN!!" His maniacal laugh echoes through the room.

Gordon, Bullock, and the three SWAT team officers slowly move towards me from the other end of the room. Their vacant eyes focus only on me. I try to wriggle free from my bindings. They're too tight.

"See how eagerly the lobsters and the turtles all advance!" the Mad Hatter taunts. "They are waiting on the shingle—will you come and join the dance? Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the

dance?"

I try to break the ropes binding me to the chair. I decide I have to break the chair, so I can slide the ropes off of it. I rock back and forth furiously, slamming my weight down onto the back of it. I hear one of the legs crack as the dark shadow of Lieutenant Gordon looms over me.

I panic, and hurl my weight down even harder. I look up just as Gordon aims a haymaker punch at my head. Holding my hat down, I throw myself onto the ground as Gordon's fist barely misses my head and crashes through the empty table behind me. The pain of the impact doesn't even faze him.

The force of my landing broke the chair. I slip out of the bindings and roll just as Bullock's huge fist whizzes past my head and into the remains of the chair.

"Kill him! Kill the Bat I say!" the Mad Hatter shouts.

I run to the table with the computer parts on it. I hurl the parts at the policemen. They don't even flinch. Realizing that my efforts are worthless, I flip the table at them. It knocks them back, but after about two seconds, they come at me again.

I notice three unarmed security guards coming in through the door. Is the Mad Hatter just going to order citizens to attack me until I'm dead? It seems that way. Bullock attempts to slam me through the wall, but I dodge, and slide by him. My hat flops on my head, but I push it back on before it can fall off. I run towards the door and slam it shut on the security guards. I move a table laden with heavy computer parts in front of the door. I really hope that holds, but I'm almost positive it won't.

I run towards the computer the Mad Hatter is sitting at before the police can catch up with me. Thank God, controlled as they are, his thralls can't move very fast. I yank the Mad Hatter out of his seat, and throw him at the hypnotized cops. "Oohh!" he yells as his body collides with theirs. "Hey!"

I furiously push buttons on the keyboard. The words "PROCESS IRREVERSIBLE" flash on the screen. I turn and duck one of the SWAT

team officers throws a punch that sails past my head and goes through the monitor of the computer. When he takes his hand out, pieces of glass are embedded in his knuckles and blood is running down his wrist. I roll away from another bone-crushing blow from Gordon. This one strikes the floor. I attempt to throw myself under Bullock to escape, but Gordon's hand grabs my cape and pins me to the wall. The cape digs into my neck. I reposition it so it doesn't choke me. The door gives way, and dozens of hypnotized citizens rush in. They immediately target me. Schneider enters from the other room and joins them. The rich, the poor, the loved, the hated, the young, and the old of Gotham City are all here to take me down. I recognize a few people in the crowd. Vicki Vale, with her beautiful red hair, is one of my attackers. Lucius Fox is also present. I even notice my date of a few nights ago.

Gordon aims his fist at my head. I attempt to kick him and try to escape his grasp, but it is no use. I really don't see any way to break his hold on me. I wait for Jim's blow to finish my life. Jim, why does it have to end like this?

"Oh, the irony of it all!" the Mad Hatter says as he pushes through the crowd and walks towards me. "One of the only cops who actually trusted you as protector of this city is here to finish you for good!"

"You're responsible for this, Hatter," I say determined to correct his statement, "not Gordon."

"Let's not get technical, Batman," the Hatter replies. "Let me ask you this: How does it feel to have your whole city turn on you? The city you've fought so long and hard to protect! Don't you feel like you've... wasted a lifetime?"

I'm hearing my father way too much in the Hatter's words tonight. Was my father right? Is this the result of all my hard work?

"This city is all mine now. You can no longer stop me. And who says you can't have everything? Goodbye, Batman!"

The Mad Hatter turns and Gordon's fist reels back further. "Wait!" I yell.

Gordon puts his fist down.

“What?” the Hatter asks annoyed as he turns back towards me.

“I have one question,” I say, trying to buy some time for me to think of a way out of this. “Why didn’t you leave me hypnotized after I attacked the Mayor? You couldn’t’ve been absolutely sure that I couldn’t stop your plan.”

“Ah, Batman, you don’t understand do you? Half of the fun is just watching you see your city crumble to the ground! After all the misery you’ve caused me in life, I couldn’t pass up an opportunity like that. And, seeing the position you’re in now, I doubt I had reason to worry about my plan being foiled by you. But I saw what I wanted to see, so there’s no reason for me to allow you to live anymore. Goodbye, Batman.” He turns around.

I have to think of something. I can’t let it end like this.

Gordon raises his fist again.

Mom... Dad... I’m... sorry. I have failed you, and your name. The events of tonight run through my head. I think about how much more I could’ve enjoyed my life. I think of the sad fate of Gotham. I never expected it to end this way. “Every thought I think will become a reality!” I hear the Mad Hatter saying in my head. I think of how sick and twisted this city will become with a madman in control. I think about the number of deaths that will occur before someone finally can stop the Mad Hatter. I ... *wait! That sentence!*

“Hatter!” I yell. Gordon brings his fist down again.

“Batman, you can’t do this all night!” he responds. “I have a city to rule!”

“I was thinking,” I say cunningly. “Wouldn’t it be crazy if ... oh, I don’t know.”

“What?!” the Mad Hatter says furiously.

“Okay,” I respond innocently. “Well ... I was thinking. What if our roles

were suddenly reversed? What if all of a sudden, Gordon dropped me and everyone in this city turned on you and your machine?"

The Mad Hatter looks at me questioningly.

Suddenly, Gordon drops me on the ground. Half of the people in the overcrowded room turn their attention to the Mad Hatter, and the other half focuses on his machine. They begin to slowly march towards their destinations.

"Uh... what ... no!" the Hatter says, panicking. He knows inside that he's the one controlling his attackers, but is too scared to stop thinking about their advance towards him. They continue to close in on him and on his machine.

I watch as fists pound into the Mad Hatter's invention. Parts fly. Lights shatter. The energy beams are literally ripped apart.

"Noooo!" the Mad Hatter yells as he realizes what is happening to his machine. An older man, still hypnotized, picks the Mad Hatter up by the collar and slams him onto the wall.

"No! What am I doing?!" the Mad Hatter yells. A fist flies towards the Mad Hatter, but stops inches before his jaw. The eyes of everyone else in the room roll shut, and they all collapse to the floor.

I menacingly walk towards the Mad Hatter. "N... no! Don't... I... I mean... I... nooo!" he screams as I pick him up by the collar and slam him against the wall. I remove the ridiculous looking hat from my head. "You... you can't do this!" he declares. "I... I must be tried in court before you can punish me!"

"Sentence first," I say in a deep voice with a crack of a smile on my face, "Verdict afterwards." I pick up where the old man left off and slam my fist square into his jaw. I let his unconscious body fall to the floor.

I look at all those lying around me. The Mad Hatter almost had total control of this city. I just can't believe it. I think about the vision of my

parents, and what they said. My real parents wouldn't have given up on me like that, not after tonight. The Hatter would've put this plan into action with or without me, but my presence here allowed Gotham to continue on. I realize that what they said was nothing more than thoughts that had been running through my subconscious mind and brought to life by the waves from the Mad Hatter's machine.

I locate Gordon on the floor. "Jim! Wake up!" I say as I lightly slap him to try to help him regain consciousness.

"Barbara! NO!" he yells as he jumps up. He notices me. "B-Batman? What? Where am I? Why are you here?"

"You're in the Mad Hatter's lab at Waynetech," I explain. Gordon rubs his head. "The Mad Hatter has been stealing funds from Wayne Enterprises since he began his job here. He used them to build a machine to hypnotize the city and put it under his total control."

"B-but you," he says, "you're supposed to b-be in jail. You almost killed the Mayor."

"I was under the Hatter's control," I continue. "I couldn't let your force capture me, I had to stop the Mad Hatter from destroying the city. You have to understand, Jim."

"I understand," he says. "And you did save the city, again," he says like it's all I ever do. "I don't know why I doubted you."

"You had two eyewitnesses," I say, "there was no reason for you to doubt my actions. You did what you had to do."

"And so did you," Gordon says proudly. I decide not to tell him about how he had me pinned me up to the wall and about how he almost killed me. He's been through enough already.

"So what do we do now?" Gordon asks.

"The Mad Hatter is over there," I say as I point to his unconscious body. "He'll be out for a while."

“And everybody else?” Gordon asks.

“They should be okay. Just help them get home when they come to. Only Gotham City was affected by the madness, so you should be able to get help from the suburbs.”

I turn toward the doorway. “Batman,” I hear Gordon say behind me. I turn around.

“Thanks,” he finishes, “I don’t know what this city would do without you.”

“You either, Jim,” I say as I walk out the door.

### **EPILOGUE: ONE WEEK LATER**

I stand cloaked in shadow on the roof of a twelve story apartment building on Main Street. The night, made even darker by the thick rain clouds is broken by the illumination of streetlights and the bright headlights of cars as they drive up and down the road. The street lamps and headlights of passing cars brighten a night made all the darker by the heavy rain clouds massing overhead.

I can’t believe it’s only been one week since this city was brought to its knees by the Mad Hatter. It amazes me how fast everyone’s returned to normal. People are going back to their daily business, and crime continues to run rampant throughout the city.

Although I understand it wasn’t real, the vision I had of my parents still haunts me. When I first saw them, as shocked as I was, their presence made me feel almost ... normal again. It gave me a sense that I hadn’t experienced since I was eight years old. I finally felt like things could be okay again.

Then, they began to ridicule me. They belittled my quest for justice. They told me I had wasted my life. Hearing my own parents tell me that I was a failure made me feel like I was useless. I wonder what they really think about what I do.

I wonder what they really think of me...

**The End!**

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