



Ultimate Speed Force #2

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Heatwave Top "Max Mercury"

Last Issue:

The Sister Cities of Central and Keystone took their annual holiday to celebrate the legacy of the Speedsters while the Rogues Union exercised absolute control over the cities' criminal underground

Unknown to all, a storm was brewing – manifesting in the near-devastation of a full city block. Thanks to the alert presence of the Flash, and contained by the D.E.O., the Sister Cities could sleep easy knowing all was safe, at least for the moment...

Ultimate Speed Force

Issue Two: Speed Kills

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**Iron Heights Penitentiary
High Security Wing, Section E
"Pandora's Box"**

4:55 A.M.

The horrible sound of prison bars clanging open echoed down the hallways of Iron Height's High Security Wing, causing most of the prison populace to simultaneously wince and sigh in relief.

The unforgiving screech of ancient metal scraping against decrepit concrete meant only one thing: some prisoner was about to have a special visit from the overworked and remorseless prison staff.

The distance of the sound indicated that, at least for today, it wouldn't be them. Ninety-five prisoners could consider themselves that lucky.

The occupant of Cell 74205 could not.

The resulting crack of human skull colliding with floor was audible even in the farthest reaches of Pandora's Box, causing even the hardest criminals to shudder at the sound.

Within the cell, the grey-haired target reeled back from the impact and curled instinctively into the fetal position as his hands rose to protect his battered head. His fingers moved upward to contain a small river of blood that coursed down his forehead, pooling on the floor.

“Now, what’d we tell you in orientation about staying away from the door when a guard enters your cell? I hate repeating myself.”

One guard stood silent over the older man, another stood just barely in his line of vision outside of the cell. He was unable to tell which guard had spoken, and tried in vain to mumble a response.

“What was that?” the guard in the cell asked, cupping his ear and leaning in a little towards the prisoner.

As the older man strained to speak, the guard drilled him in the skull a second time, not reacting as the prisoner coiled his body tighter.

The guard outside the cell quickly pulled his associate out and slammed him up against the wall before slamming the door of the cell shut.

“What’d Wolfe tell you about leaving a mark, jackass!” he shouted, shaking his co-worker violently, “You know the papers are watching our every move...”

“That man damn near destroyed Gardner Street.”

“So?” the second responded, still clutching the first by his shirt, continuing to ram him up against the wall.

“My mother-in-law lived on Gardner Street.”

Losing all momentum, the second guard quickly let go of the first, letting him up from the wall and brushing him off. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

The first furrowed his brow as he stared into the eyes of the second, before triggering the cell door to close. “You’re sorry?” he said as he quickly brushed aside any attempt by the second to dust him off. “She moved in with me last night.”

The first guard watched as the second man's face turned from genuine sympathy to bemusement, before giving way to raucous laughter.

"Yeah, laugh," he said as he grabbed the second and lead him back down the hall, the laughter haunting the battered prisoners throughout Pandora's Box. "Next time you can go into the cells and contain these freaks."

The Corner of Waid Street and Morrison Boulevard Three Blocks from P.S. 004

8:53 A.M.

Carol Bucklen looked up towards the sky as she felt the first drops hit her head. "Just perfect." she sighed aloud as the heavens opened up and rain teemed down onto the streets.

"What is?" Bart asked as he caught up to her and joined her in staring upwards, oblivious to the pelting rain.

She shook her head and started to head down the street again before looking back to see Bart was still standing there, his neck craned upward trying to see the perfect thing in the sky.

"Oh yeah, it's totally perfect," he bluffed, hoping Carol wouldn't realize he had no clue what she was looking at, "almost didn't see it because of the rain."

Carol rolled her eyes and reached back, grabbing Bart by the arm. "We're going to be late," she said as she prepared to drag him down the street.

"Wouldn't want that," he said sarcastically as he moved his gaze from the sky and began to head up the street alongside her.

As they crested the hill and turned off Morrison and onto Waid, Bart and Carol found themselves face-to-face with a wall of blue felt, knocking them back to the ground.

Bart looked up as he saw a dozen hands reach down towards him. He contemplated whether to run or to fight, the decision to fight only intensified when he saw additional hands reaching down for Carol.

At least a dozen blue and black cloaked figures stood before them, they looked no taller than Bart and Carol, but it was hard to tell under the weighty material exactly what gender they were, much less how old.

Before he could fight them off, he realized the men and women in the robes were just trying to help them up, what he thought was an attack was merely an accident.

"Allow me to help you...," the lead figure offered before pulling backwards into the crowd rather suddenly. Bart was perplexed as he bent back down to pick up his backpack, trying to make out what they were muttering, only to make out the phrase "It's the Scion," repeatedly in hushed tones.

"I'm a car?" Bart looked to Carol for answers, and realized he could no longer see her; the crowd of blue-and-black-robed people had completely eclipsed her from his view. "What's going on here?"

One of the robed figures pulled the cloak from her head, revealing a young woman about five years Bart's senior with purple hair and piercing eyes. They stood and stared at one another for a few seconds, until she spoke. "Lay your hands on me, Scion."

He looked at her perplexed for a moment before bringing his hands up from his sides and remembering what he'd seen from those late-night TV preachers, he put his palm to her forehead.

And much like those late-night revivals, his eyes widened as he watched her drop to the ground in fervor. As the group quickly circled around and attended to the young woman, Bart just stared at his hands.

Carol managed to break through and saw the woman on the ground and Bart and asked, "What happened?"

"That's a power I didn't know I had," Bart replied, as he stared. "Awesome!" As soon as he noticed Carol, he immediately wanted to

show off. "Check this out!" he shouted as he prepared to bop another one of the cloaked figures on the head.

But just as he was about to make contact, he felt a hand grasp his, and looked down to see a maroon glove wrapped around his hand.

"You want to tell me what's happening here?" the Flash asked Bart as another woman, clearly taller and older than the rest of the group pushed her way in, the ornamentation on her cloak indicating a higher rank than the others.

"Yes, I should like to know that as well," she intoned, a light Russian lilt to her voice despite her irritation. The irritation seemed to melt as soon as she realized whom she was dressing down. "Oh, my."

The Flash noted she was a redhead like himself, rather striking with a lightning bolt tattooed across her left eye. As he tried to determine what kind of body she had underneath the cloak, it was quickly obscured as the others moved to explain the story of the impetuous girl and how she had "all but accosted the Scion".

The Flash and the young woman both crossed to the center of the now dissipating group, Bart and Carol falling behind him, the rest of the young people filing behind her.

"I must apologize on behalf of the entire Church," she spoke in a hushed tone as if she were almost afraid to make eye contact. "The fever of the young, it can be most... unrestrained."

"This just seems to have been a simple misunderstanding," the Flash stated, with a warm chuckle, "with no harm done. Don't worry about it."

"You're very kind."

"Not to be too much of a killjoy, but we're now going to be seriously late for school," Carol stated, shaking the older two from their reverie.

"Way to ruin it," Bart continued to mumble as he and Carol began to trudge up Waid Street and toward school, the misadventures of the morning already fading.

The Back Room, Gambi's Tailor Shop

The Bowery District

Central City

9:42 A.M.

The Bowery District was about as far away from Gardner Street in both tone and location as you could get in the Sister Cities. There were no traces of red anywhere; even the bricks of the decrepit structures were muddied browns and blacks.

The Bowery was the sort of place that a person went to only when looking for trouble, and Gambi's was the sort of place that catered to them.

"The Back Room" had always been where the trouble-seekers gathered: a former speakeasy from the Prohibition Days, today it was equal parts Criminal Algonquin Round Table and Rogues Museum. Wanted posters tracked the comings, goings and passings of the more popular patrons

With mementos from various heists splayed across the walls, the room looked like a T.G.I. Fridays of crime, featuring the best of the worst that the Sister Cities had to offer.

Several of the Rogues were getting a head start on the day's vices and Leonard Snart surveyed the room like a commander on the eve of battle, tonic water in hand.

Within his line of vision, he saw friends he would bank his life on and reluctant allies he couldn't trust half as far as he could throw them.

He drew his drink to his mouth and took a long sip as he locked eyes with Mick Rory from across the room. Snart's mood usually defined which category the Rogue called Heatwave fell in on a particular day.

Mick Rory was a troubled man with a proclivity for arson. He had come to Keystone nearly a decade ago and made quite the splash, eventually earning a spot with the Rogues Union over Leonard Snart's objections. His induction had been the last act of the previous administration, but Heatwave had earned his keep so far. He played well off the rest of the group and adding yet another threat to keep both the cops and

Speedsters at bay.

As Rory played with his Zippo, alternately entranced and repulsed by the tongue of flame that cropped up, he saw Snart staring him down and returned the intense gaze.

He never knew why the leader of the Rogues had taken such dislike to him, but didn't care enough to find out. "You got a problem?" he asked aloud, not expecting a response. He just muttered under his breath when Snart greeted the outburst with only silence, earning Rory the stares of half the room.

On the other side of the room Digger Harkness was busy entertaining three of the finest women available for rent in The Bowery. He'd been burning off most of the last week's take as he ordered various types of alcohol for the young women.

Digger was shameless when it came to women, especially those he was paying to fawn over him, but it helped him recover from the rigors of serving as the Union's underboss. It wasn't an easy life as the enforcer of Captain Cold's policy but the man carried great respect almost universally with both the Rogues and their underlings because of it.

Overall, it was a typical Monday in the Bowery.

Then Roscoe Dillon walked in the room, and all conversation quickly dropped off and the room went silent as all eyes fell on the door.

714 South Gardner Street

Crime Scene

Central City

9:50 AM

Iris Allen continued to work her way up South Gardner as she had for the last few hours, trying to find any and every angle and perspective on what exactly had happened there.

From what Wally had later told her, a phalanx of state and federal officials swooped down with the latest in D.E.O. gear and contained the

suspect without incident, the criminal simply muttering about how he was “too late.”

Iris had tried to get a few words with the man, but found herself stonewalled by Iron Heights officials who said he was unavailable.

By 10 AM, only a small battery of local police officers remained inside a single apartment, but they too had proved unwilling to let her inside an active crime scene. The pouring rain was doing nothing to sooth her irritation at being stymied.

Iris knew most of them from Barry’s time on the force, and despite their respect for Barry, and for what she had accomplished with the newspaper, there were still some places she couldn’t access. It was almost enough to make her wish she was a speedster.

Nevertheless, observation was her stock in trade, and she realized she hadn’t run out of options and made her way to the side of the street, holding out a lighter as she approached a young man.

“I thought the twins finally convinced you to give this habit up, Julio,” she asked, as she leaned up against the building next to him. Julio Mendez had been Barry’s assistant while he was head of Central City’s crime lab department, and had risen to the role himself after his passing.

“Don’t you start,” the young man responded, with a sigh. “It’s bad enough I have to hear it from Sabrina.”

“What do we have here?” Iris commented as she watched officers carting out vials and burners of various shapes and sizes, filled with liquids and powders of different hues. “It almost looks like a drug lab,”

“Looks like,” the young man continued as he took one last drag off the cigarette before crushing it under his foot.

“Off the record,” Iris muttered, speaking the only words she knew would get Julio to talk.

“But isn’t a sign of any common narcotic in this room.”

Iris was surprised. "Nothing?"

"We've still got a lot of work to do, but everything we've tested has come up negative. I'm not sure what they were doing here, but it was clearly a big operation."

Her eyes were again drawn to the parade of technicians removing chemicals, one carrying a sizable container of a thick, red liquid. "Is that what I think it is?"

"I'm afraid so," he deadpanned as he moved over to step between Iris and the prying eyes of anyone else. "We found a whole cooler filled with it in back"

"What would a cooler of blood be doing in an all-but-abandoned apartment building? There's no record of a Rogue safe house in the area."

"None that I know of..." He paused for a moment as if contemplating what to say next. "Now, how can I put this...?"

"You want me to leave. I didn't get where I am today by taking the first no for an answer, Julio."

"If Garfield catches you anywhere near a closed crime scene again, I'm on Bowery duty for a month."

She smiled and relented. "Okay. We'll meet up later and compare notes?"

"You bet. Sabrina and I will have you and the kids over for dinner one night."

She smiled and waved as Julio went back to his work.

**The Back Room, Gambi's Tailor Shop
The Bowery District, Central City
10:15 A.M.**

Roscoe Dillon surveyed the room, basking in the awkward stares and

general contempt aimed at his presence. Every step forward on the squeaky wooden floors seemed to echo in the silenced room and only served to broaden his Cheshire grin.

Dillon was tall and bookish, with mussed up hair and coke-rimmed glasses. He was sporting a green and mustard colored bodysuit; which meant he fit in well with the rest of the garishly dressed lot, but he didn't slouch and made the most of his frame.

The Top was back in the Bowery.

Leonard Snart and Digger Harkness stood up at the same time and reached for their weapons, though they took no further action. Mick Rory watched the scene unfold with great interest, preparing to take advantage of any opportunities that presented themselves.

"It is so nice to be amongst friends once again," Dillon said warmly, nodding specifically at Rory as the crowd quickly parted before him like Moses at the Red Sea.

Digger Harkness did not miss their exchanged glance, and stepped in between the two former allies. "Screw off," Digger muttered, his voice quickly picking up a more cartoonish affectation as he slipped into his Captain Boomerang persona. "I should kill ye where ye stand."

It was not immediately clear which party he was threatening.

As Dillon walked past the portly Australian, he ran his finger against the razor-sharp blade of the outstretched boomerang, leaving a thin line of blood along its edge. "Acuminous. Very nice."

"Digger, I didn't mean to make you feel left out," the Top spoke warmly, "Of course, I am glad to see you too. All of you."

Having had enough, Snart decided to cut the unwelcome man off and came to meet him face to face at the center of the room. He reached into a pocket and pulled out a pair of goggles, which he slid across his eyes, completely obscuring them from sight.

The rest of the crowd split and moved to the edges of the room.

Roscoe Dillon looked Snart over, "I see you are as much a killjoy as ever, Leonard. Is this really the proper welcome for an old friend?"

"I thought we made it clear; you don't show your face in Central or Keystone, and we don't come after you," Leonard responded succinctly, ignoring the Top's previous statement wholesale. "Why are you here?"

"I'm just here to offer a little advice, one Rogue to another."

Digger couldn't help himself and what started as a barely stifled chuckle became an uproarious laughter that quickly spread across the room.

Only Leonard Snart seemed immune and when he signaled for quiet, the laughter quickly stifled. He raised his cyclotron gun into the air, aiming it between the eyes of the Top.

"Your advice is not welcome here and neither are you. Get the hell out of my city," he said flatly, eyes narrowing behind his goggles and his finger twitching on the trigger of his cold gun.

"As you wish," Roscoe Dillon retorted, and spun on a dime to make his way towards the door. The crowd again parted again as he walked, and he took the same satisfaction of watching them.

As he was crossing the threshold, Dillon turned back towards the group again. "You cannot fathom what is happening out there," Dillon continued as he surveyed the room and the panorama of expressions on the faces of its occupants. "Just keep in mind, whether you like it or not the game is changing."

He paused to let the gravity of the situation sink in.

"I just thought I would show you the courtesy you could not afford me. But do not let me interrupt your reverie, I'm sure you have some great and epic heist in the works and won't be troubled by every local, state and federal agent bringing the hammer of God down on your little operation."

With that, Dillon crossed into the morning air.

Seconds later, a small top spun its way back into the room, heading right towards Leonard Snart. It exploded in a benign puff of smoke, leaving behind a small card with directions to one of the many safehouses The Rogues Union had collected over the years, a simple message written on the back: "You want more information; you know where to find me."

Mick Rory reached down reflexively to grab the card from the ground, and barely heard Captain Cold bark an order of "Leave it!" Hesitating only slightly, he continued to reach down to grab the card, stopped only by a swath of ice that ripped from the barrel of Captain Cold's gun, encasing the card, and just barely missing three of Mick's fingers.

"Everyone out!" Leonard Snart called out, raising his voice only slightly and not betraying any sense of emotion. He pulled Digger to his side as the occupants of the room, Rogues and redshirts alike, filed out.

"Tell Jesse I want him in my office in ten minutes, no excuses." Snart paused a moment before continuing, "and find whatever rock McCulloch is hiding under these days, I've got a job for him."

Infantino Park

Central City

12:45 PM

As Iris walked through the park on her way back home, she stumbled onto one of the paved walkways, notebook flying out of her hand. She felt a gust of wind as a crimson arm reached out and grabbed her, while a second placed the notebook back in her hand.

She looked up and saw her boys, dressed in full uniform as the Flash and Impulse.

"Here you go citizen," Impulse stated in a forced, stilted voice, his natural tone deepened in a vague attempt to sound like the superheroes on television.

They stared at one another for a moment as Impulse smiled, waiting for the praise and compliments on how good he looked and how much of a hero he seemed like, how much like his dad he really was.

“Shouldn’t you be in school?” Iris asked in an annoyed tone, looking at her watch and seeing school was still very much in session.

He was crestfallen.

“But I am in school!” Impulse whined, his voice returning to its normal pitch and timbre. He held up a math textbook that seemed to appear from thin air, then quickly disappeared again when he was satisfied she had seen it. “Oh, Carol says hi.”

Iris just growled and quickly turned to the Flash. “And you are encouraging this?” she spoke in a hushed tone that did nothing to hide her irritation, “You of all people should know better!”

The absurdity of a civilian dressing down to city’s greatest hero wasn’t lost on Wally, even if this was his Aunt Iris. Realizing he would need all of his charm and talent, Wally smiled warmly, his eyes sparkling and prepared to speak, but Iris quickly cut him off.

“Oh don’t you start that with me young man.”

Impulse on the other hand seemed distracted as they spoke about him, an image seemed to dance on the periphery of his vision, but every time he turned to look, it was gone.

He was about to walk away, but then he heard something. It was small and faint, not so much a voice, but something else, a faint imprint of one, a lingered message. He sped over to Wally and Iris, interrupting them mid-conversation.

“You guys hear that?”

“Hear what small fry?” Wally asked as he started to walk over to where Bart had come from.

“I don’t know. Just thought I heard... something.”

“I don’t hear anything except a young man asking for grounding.” Iris offered, the conversation with Wally having done nothing to soothe her

irritation.

Bart paused for a moment in reflection, and seeing the irritated look on his mother's face, he knew when to make a tactical retreat. "You're right," he said, attempting to look more happy-go-lucky than he was feeling, "besides, it's almost lunchtime. See you at home!" Bart called out and quickly disappeared from sight.

"He's a good kid," Wally chuckled.

"Reminds me so much of his father sometimes," Iris said, somewhat absent-mindedly, her voice softening a little before she realized what Wally was trying to pull. "But don't change the subject. You want to tell me exactly what happened this morning?"

"Oh, that?" he said, "it was nothing."

"Nothing? Tell me about nothing."

"He and Carol just bumped into some of the kids from that Church of Speed," but as he saw the look of concern on Iris' face, he offered, "But I took care of it. I don't think they'll interrupt him again."

"I'm not comfortable with them being around my son, Wally. Barry didn't trust them, and neither do I."

"They're harmless, but if it makes you feel better, I'll go again and remind them he's off limits."

Iris was going to continue, but noticed a small crowd had gathered on the opposite side of the park walkway, taking photographs of Wally. He looked over, noticed a few very attractive young women in the crowd, and smiled. "My public waits."

"It's up to you to keep an eye on him," she admonished as he crossed over and began working the crowd, leaving Iris to head back to the apartment on her own.

**Iron Heights Penitentiary
High Security Wing, Section E
"Pandora's Box"**

3:55 P.M.

The dull headache that had plagued the prisoner in 74205 was still there, though the swelling was down and he was no longer bleeding.

He had tried to shove those concerns out of his mind; he had come too far to stop now and redoubled his efforts in meditation despite the challenges in concentration.

"You don't look like much of a threat for a guy that leveled a city block."

The older man looked up, caught by surprise at the disembodied voice, and saw the vague outline of a young man standing before him, dressed in brown and white with a clearly defined domino mask and ridiculously wild hair.

"You'd be surprised son, it's the most benign of things end up the most dangerous," the prisoner responded cryptically. "You're not the one I was expecting but I guess I shouldn't be surprised. You've always been more perceptive than any of us gave you credit for."

The desire to just walk away led Bart to briefly consider abandoning this crazy old man and his weird comments, but the desire to find out more won out. He'd been a public hero for a few years, but still hadn't quite gotten used to the absurdity that came with the job.

"Do I know you?" he offered, vocalizing his thoughts.

"Not yet, but you will."

"Can you at least give me a name?" Bart asked, deciding the direct approach was the best, "Not that I don't like playing Twenty Questions, but I don't usually win that game because I sort of get distracted, like this one time when I was playing with my mom and..."

"I go by many names. Ahwehota, Whip Whirlwind, Quicksilver, Mercury..." the older man said as he cut the youngster off, "but for

simplicity's sake, you can call me Max."

"Ok Max, you called me here. What do you want?"

"I'm here to help. The totality of existence itself may yet rest upon the shoulders of the Son of Allen and the rest of this era's speedsters."

Putting the reference to his father aside, Bart quickly regained his focus. "Was the message left at Gardner Street a test?"

"In a matter of speaking," he replied.

"Did we pass?"

Max ignored the question. "You'll have a chance to prove yourself all too soon my young friend, I fear. Now go, the guards will be back any minute."

Without another word, Max turned his back on the door of his cell and began to meditate once again. Bart lingered for a moment before disappearing from the cell, left with more questions than answers.

NEXT ISSUE

As a ferry accident claims four lives, Wally and Iris begin independent investigations into the Church of Speed and the mysterious safe house found on Gardner Street.

Meanwhile, Bart and Carol take a school trip to Iron Heights, hoping to learn more about the mysterious Max, and the Rogues Union deals with the fallout of the Top's reappearance in the Sister Cities.

Is there more to the Church than meets the eye? Will Dillon's actions spur the Rogues Union to action? And just who is that chaperone that didn't come on the bus with the rest of the tour?

All this and more as Speed Force continues next month in: *Zwischenzug*.

If you enjoyed this story, you can find more alternate universe tales of your favorite DC heroes at DC3 Multiverse.

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From the same author on Feedbooks

Ultimate Speed Force #1 (2008)

Ultimate Speed Force: Family Ties.

Wally West is the Flash, the Rogues are a force to be reckoned with, Iris is struggling to raise her son after the loss of her husband, and the patriarch of the speedsters, Jay Garrick, watches over all in his twilight years. In a flash of lightning and a crack of thunder, it will all change! Come and find out how!

Ultimate Speed Force #3 (2008)

Ultimate Speed Force: Zwischenzug.

Mysteries abound and trouble brews as the Rogues deal a disastrous lesson to the returning renegade known as the Top, the enigmatic Max escaped Iron Heights, Wally investigates the Church of Speed, and Bart goes on a field trip! And you just know, of all those events, Bart's has GOT to turn out the worst!

Ultimate Speed Force #4 (2008)

Ultimate Speed Force: Cadence to Arms.

The boiling cauldron that is Iron Heights has finally exploded, leaving two cities threatened as hundreds of the nation's worst prisoners threaten to spill out onto the peaceful streets of Central and Keystone.

Speedster or Rogue, no one is safe as rival factions join together, but to what end? Is this what Max has been warning about? Bart Allen may find out the hard way!



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