

# **“Ill-Begotten”**

## **The Samuel Saga**

**An Eight Issue Limited Series  
Featuring the Avengers**

### **Overview**

1/27/02

## **Ill-Begotten Son**

### **The Samuel Saga**

#### **BACKSTORY:**

Korvac first gained his godlike power by absorbing immense amounts of data—the Key Code to the operating system of the universe, so to speak—from computers aboard the Worldship of Galactus. Immediately, he used his newfound power to restore his lower body. Then, he began to develop a plan to exploit his unique position: he had become one of the elite, cosmic powers in the universe, but by virtue of his sudden, secret and bizarre ascension to vast power, he was *unknown* to the other great cosmic entities. Therefore, he had the opportunity to take them by surprise, subjugate them and, perhaps, become the *sole* cosmic power.

While creating his plan for universal hegemony, Korvac sought human comforts and joys long denied him. This story reveals that before he met Carina and fell in love with her, he met and lived with a beautiful young woman, Susan Porter, in Saddle River, New Jersey.

Korvac deserted Susan Porter when he met Carina. Susan was pregnant.

It is now several years later. Korvac has made many bids for power throughout spacetime. Each time he has been thwarted, and many times he seemed to have been utterly destroyed. But a cosmic power, once made, is difficult to unmake, and at least one iteration of Korvac remains in existence. The (apparently) last iteration of Korvac has secretly returned to Saddle River, New Jersey to find his son, Samuel. By design, Samuel inherited a genetic memory of the Key Code. Power like his father's lies dormant within him. Therefore, Samuel is in a situation similar to Korvac's when he first gained near-omnipotence—Samuel is a (potential) cosmic power that no one knows about. Daddy came back to exploit the opportunity his son represents by bringing him into the family business.

First, Korvac instantly ages Samuel to young adulthood, avoiding, thereby, the uncertain business of raising him. That proves to be a mistake.

## ISSUE ONE—ROUGH PLOT:

“Teach Your Children Hell”

The story opens with Iron Man in pitched battle with a big, immensely powerful superhuman (working name *Bludgeon*) on Main Street in Saddle River, New Jersey. Iron Man is so powerful, so skilled, and for perhaps the first time in Marvel history, so well protected by what is called armor but usually seems to be eggshell that he is winning and looking awesome. His chief problem is trying to protect civilians and property.

Reporters and federal disaster relief people are already on the scene. In the New York area, they're used to this sort of thing.

In a guesthouse behind a large Saddle River mansion, Korvac, in his “Michael” form, keeps track of the battle on CNN. We gather that he is *imprisoned* here and desperate to escape. *He actually tried to contact the Avengers, but couldn't get through!* His calls and letters were, of course, disregarded as preposterous. We learn that he is the one who empowered the pizza delivery boy who became Bludgeon, hoping that the Avengers will track down the source of the trouble—and rescue him! Things are not going as planned, though. He needs *all* the Avengers, not just Iron Man. He calls and orders Chinese...

Soon, two more super beings appear, an empowered Chinese restaurant delivery boy and female postal letter carrier, working names *Snarl* and *Slug*. (I intend to introduce a reporter who, among other things, will offer some comic relief in his attempts to come up with names that aren't already taken, or downright stupid, for new super beings.)

The three new super beings will be real characters with real motivations, not the stock, rampaging dim-bulbs.

One, fine, two, maybe, but *three*? Iron Man calls for backup.

Tigra, Captain America, Wonder Man, and Moondragon are all busy doing other things—I have ideas, but they'll probably have to be tailored to reflect current events in their lives—but without (much) delay, they respond. A few Avengers, most notably Thor, cannot easily respond, and judge it acceptable to pass on this call to assemble.

The Avengers are like the NBA All-Star team. Sure, they work together and rack up points, but they tend to be individual stars rather than a well-oiled team. It's subtle, but discernible—they're a *group*, not a team like the X-Men or a family, like the FF.

In the main house in front of the guesthouse where Korvac is imprisoned, a twenty-something young man, Samuel, sits on the floor with a nine-year-old boy, Karl, watching

Cartoon Network. Karl is idly playing with Avengers and other action figures. Samuel is funny, making lots of jokes, including many “just kidding” threats and mild abuses aimed at Karl. Karl squirms uncomfortably in the unfamiliar role of a victim utterly in the power of a bully, who’s largely benign at the moment, but clearly enjoying his dominance. *Karl* used to be the bully and Samuel the victim, but that changed when Korvac aged Samuel and Samuel came into his universe-shaking power. Several times, Samuel makes out like he’s going to do something truly horrible to Karl, but stops just short. “Psyche!”

A twenty-something, very beautiful woman, Susan, putters with some household chore in the background. She’s clearly distraught, however, and keeps staring at Samuel in disbelief, shock and semi-horror. Samuel disconcertingly calls her “Mom.” (Remember, that Samuel was her toddler son who’s now her age, more or less, thanks to Korvac.)

Samuel does a take as if he’s just picked up a vibe. He thinks he’ll check on Korvac. Clearly, he’s (cosmically) aware that something is up.

After Samuel leaves, Susan enters and tells Karl that she wants him to turn off the TV. Too much violence. Karl does, but the minute she leaves the room, he clicks it on again. Surfing through the channels, he finds a live newscast showing the Avengers battling the superhumans. Cool.

Back to the battle. The Avengers are harder pressed than they expected. The superhumans are way more powerful than first suspected, but they’re, of course, new at this. As they catch on to the extent of their powers, they become more dangerous. Among the issues at least one of the superhumans has is that he tried to contact the Avengers once, seeking help with his or her problem—something like bogus pizza delivery calls, or being ripped off by local hoods—but was ignored. Cap, who has that everyman quality, relates, but for now, all that matters is subduing these guys.

At one point during the fight, Wonder Man is knocked for a loop. Recovering, he attacks the superhuman who clocked him. We, Tigra and Moondragon notice that, subtly, Iron Man and Cap hold back just a sec to allow WM his shot at redemption. It’s a male ego thing...

Wonder Man, indeed, comes up victorious. Redeemed.

Meanwhile, Samuel confronts Korvac. Korvac quickly, foolishly turns off the TV as Samuel enters, but Samuel already knows about Daddy’s scheme, of course. He’s angry with Daddy. Korvac pleads with Samuel, his son, to listen to reason. We learn some of the back-story. Korvac tries to convince Samuel that it’s not too late—they can still keep his, Samuel’s, existence secret, cover up his, Korvac’s, presence in this era, and still wrest control of all the universe.

Nah, says Samuel. He hates Daddy. The high-handed theft of his childhood is only part of it. There's the fact that Korvac deserted him and Mommy. And more. Only the fact that Mommy is still so pathetically in love with Korvac—go figure—has deterred Samuel from killing him to this point. But, you know what? He, Samuel, has decided he hates Mommy too. She took in her sister's brat, *Karl*, and let that nasty little bastard get away with *everything*. Samuel's childhood nickname was "Teller," because the first manifestation of his power was a come-and-go omniscience, a sort of junior Cosmic Awareness, and he often used to rat out Karl to no avail. Samuel was a *good boy*. A *nice* boy. But, Mommy let Karl terrorize him. Karl would do bad things, and even when Samuel told Mommy, she let him get *away* with it. Why, right now, Karl is watching TV, though Mom told him to turn it off—and she knows it—and *she's not doing anything about it!*

Karl, who was three years older (around eight) before Samuel was abruptly aged from around five to about 21, is the out-of wedlock child of Sue's sister, taken in by Sue when his natural mother proved unfit.

Korvac, the unlikely advocate of compassion, offers that Susan must have felt that Karl's screwed up life before he came to live with them was so bad that she felt reluctant to punish him, to inflict more pain on this troubled boy—and besides, that's such a small thing, a petty childhood injustice...! Samuel reminds Daddy that, though physically and in most ways, mentally, he, Samuel, has been forcibly made twenty-something years old, in some ways ***he's still five and it is a very, very big injustice to him***. He lashes out at Korvac...

Korvac and Samuel engage in a battle of their own, reminiscent of the fight between Starhawk and Korvac at the beginning of the first Korvac Saga—and just as one sided in Samuel's favor.

Though the battle takes place largely on imperceptible planes, brilliant light blazing from the guesthouse windows and that ozone tingle borne of the movement of vast stores of energy draws Susan to the guesthouse. Karl follows.

Horrified at the cruel battering Korvac is suffering, Susan begs for his life. Samuel finds injustice in that, too, that she should honor such a monster with devotion.

In town, Tigra takes advantage of a momentary clean break and shortens what could have been a very long fight by reasoning with Bludgeon, as she once did with the Molecule Man. The Avengers would have won—but she convinces the new superhumans that there's no need to play it out. Moondragon tries to forcibly extract info about who these guys are and how they got to be so powerful. Tigra just asks them. Between Moondragon and Tigra they start to figure it out...

Cut to the guesthouse. Samuel is about to destroy Korvac. Samuel seems to sense something. Battered, humiliated and facing utter extinction, Korvac crawls and begs. Samuel pretends to strike—then says “Psyche!”

There’s a knock on the door. It’s the Avengers. (Samuel knew the Avengers were on the doorstep and decided to hold off—not because he was afraid, but because he’s not certain yet of his course.) The Avengers are nonplussed to see Korvac. Korvac starts to beg for help—but a “make my day” look from Samuel shuts him up.

Cap demands to know what’s going on. Korvac calculates the odds. Maybe if Thor were here, but...no. This just hasn’t worked out. He says nothing’s going on. Everything’s fine. A little family argument.

Samuel doesn’t do anything overt to show his power, but makes no effort to conceal it. (Several of the Avengers can sense or detect it.) At this point, it wouldn’t help for long anyway. Iron Man wonders, if this young man is so clearly able to intimidate godlike Korvac, what does that make *Samuel*?

Now what? Other than the fact that there’s a guy here who looks like Korvac/Michael (that they’re pretty sure is Korvac), there is nothing apparent to deal with. They have no proof that Korvac was involved with the super beings, no right, no warrant, no way to take him into custody and no Cosmic Being-proof cell to hold him in anyway. It’s hard, (or should be) even in the Marvel Universe, to arrest someone who, in your timeline, won’t be *born* for many centuries to come—especially because of crimes committed by various iterations of themselves elsewhere in spacetime. Tough situation for the Avengers. If only they had probable cause to act...if they were *attacked*...if someone would just *ask* them for help—but no. They have no choice but to back off and keep an eye on things.

The Avengers leave. Little Karl almost stops them and asks for help—but a glance from Samuel chills that notion.

Later, in the Avengers Mansion, the Avengers ponder what to do about the Cosmic Powers residing in Saddle River. They monitor Samuel and Korvac every way they can.

Meanwhile, Karl, Mom and Korvac, all terrified hostages to Samuel’s power, sit with Samuel in front of the TV—a forced “family home evening.” Samuel is enjoying this, biding his time, thinking about what to do with his life. Samuel—“Teller”—is suddenly aware of being watched by eyes and sensors of all descriptions all over the universe. It’s ironic.

Karl plays with his Avengers figures. Tears roll down his cheeks.

**ISSUES TWO THROUGH EIGHT—SYNOPSIS:** (Haven't settled on all the break points yet.)

Word spreads among the great and powerful of the cosmos, both that Korvac has resurfaced and that his son exists. There is widespread fear.

Samuel frees Korvac. Korvac's choice is to remain with the family he deserted, humiliatingly serving penance under the thumb of Samuel, or get the Hell out. But now that the Great Powers of the universe are aware of Korvac, some of them will be gunning for him. Samuel thinks it'll be fun to watch. Looking nervously, cosmically, over his shoulder, Korvac flees.

Korvac realizes that he needs a redoubt. He shapes vast energies and coalesces them into matter, forming a fortress.

The Avengers watch with great interest. Should they go after Korvac, now that Samuel doesn't seem to be a complicating factor? Just attack him says Tigra? That doesn't seem right. He only seems to be trying to protect himself. The Black Panther is appalled at their hesitation. Korvac is evil. What else do they need to know? There is much dissent, as there was (quietly) when they first encountered Korvac.

On Xandar, Queen Adora and the High Command of the Xandarian StarCorps meet in council. They don't know what to make of Samuel yet, but because of specific atrocities that Korvac has committed in past iterations and because they believe that only they have the will and wherewithal to contain him, they decide to seize him.

Samuel also watches with interest. He apprises Karl of what's going on, sometimes using the TV as a vehicle for showing Karl things that he, Samuel, knows via cosmic awareness.

Part of Samuel is still childlike. He wants to play. Karl offers that they should play with his Avengers figures or other toys. Samuel says, no, he's lost the ability to *pretend* as he could before, as only little children can. Samuel wants to play a game *Karl* taught him—putting various kinds of bugs, spiders, etc. in jars and watching them kill each other. Now, though, they're not limited to what they can find in the yard. Samuel can import some really scary things—funnel webs, black scorpions. He uses these things to terrorize Karl. He, of course, can pick up and handle any of them. They can't hurt him unless he allows it.

Susan, it seems is a major arachnophobe. She's beyond terror when Samuel "playfully" threatens her with deadly spiders.

Meanwhile, Nova, aka Rich Rider—being the First Centurion Prime of our sector—is called upon to monitor but *not engage* Korvac until the entire force of the StarCorps can be brought to bear against him. Nova, being the rash type, of course, engages Korvac. Nova is particularly enraged at Korvac because of what Korvac did to little Samuel, i.e. steal his childhood—a truly heinous crime in his eyes. (Rich Rider has had his carefree youth threatened by the responsibility and power thrust upon him, and has steadfastly resisted adulthood. It's an issue to him.)

A battle ensues. No chance for Nova. However, the Xandarians become aware of what's going down. Unable to reach Earth in force in time to help, they employ their most desperate measure—using their *Doomsday Protocol*. The Doomsday Protocol essentially transmits the power of *all* Centurions, and even that of the High Command, into one Centurion, in this case, Nova. Stars in Xandar's quadrant dim as all power available to Xandar is funneled into Nova. Now, it's a fight.

The Avengers detect the battle. They rush to Nova's aid. Big battle—complicated by the fact that Korvac's fortress has tesseract components. That is, it includes structures that are hypercubic—which means you may find yourself on the roof if you go downstairs, and some of the windows look out on strange, perhaps alien landscapes.

At one point, Nova heroically saves several Avengers from certain death.

The battle rocks the fundamental structure of the universe. On a distant world, the Silver Surfer senses the vast transactions of power.

Korvac, who once wiped out all of the Avengers fairly easily, is fighting with one eye elsewhere, looking out for others (especially Samuel) to join the attack against him, and one hand tied behind his back, holding power in reserve just in case.

Nonetheless, Korvac launches a vicious attack that batters the Avengers and seals them inside an "inescapable" hypercubic prison which he seals, for good measure, in a block of dwarf star matter. He knows better than to think they'll never escape, but he thinks it'll take them a while, and he can now destroy them at his leisure.

He turns again to Nova—and deals him what would be a fatal blow—except that Korvac *forcibly keeps him alive* (ain't godlike power wonderful) so he can make him suffer a little more. As a final cruel irony, Korvac ages Nova's body (as he did Samuel's) until it is withered. Nova dies an old, old man.



Nothing like kicking serious tail to restore your evil self esteem and get your aggressions flowing again. So, the Xandarians dared to attack him, huh? Korvac folds space and vanishes...

The Surfer, too far from Earth to do anything but observe with horror, realizes what is about to happen. He can't stand by and watch any more. *Xandar* is within reach.

The Xandarians know what's coming, too. Their power is exhausted. They broadcast pleas for help. They also activate the final phase of the Doomsday Protocol. The device that beamed vast power into Nova flickers one more time. On Earth, a faint glow briefly flares around Nova's body.

Korvac appears on Xandar. No meaningful resistance can be mounted. He begins to destroy Xandar, its worldsystem and all who abide there.

The Surfer arrives. He fights for Xandar.

Cut to Korvac's fortress. Iron Man's computers have calculated the solution to the dimensional portion of their prison and Thor—to the utter amazement of the scientifically sophisticated types—smashes their way out of the block of dwarf star matter. The Avengers are battered and injured, but alive and free.

They find Nova's lifeless body.

Suddenly, though, Nova stirs ever so slightly (reenergized by the final phase of the Doomsday Protocol). Weak, withered, fading fast, he apologizes to the Avengers. His rashness may have set the end of the universe in motion. *Your rashness, or our reticence*, says the Panther.

Nova is made an Avenger. A battlefield promotion. A dream come true. Then, in Moondragon's arms, he dies.

Dead, indeed. And yet, says Moondragon, *his spirit seems slow to depart...*

Samuel perceives all this with his cosmic awareness and allows Karl to watch it on TV.

On Xandar, the Surfer fights heroically, but is overwhelmed. Korvac leaves the Surfer for dead and wipes out the Xandar System to the last organic molecule.

On Earth, The exhausted Avengers don't know where Korvac is. Their plan is to take Nova's body to a proper temporary resting place, to recover and regroup.

But suddenly, Korvac returns, fresh from his triumph over the Xandarians, elated by his slaughter of the Surfer and feeling invincible. With a burst of searing energy, he blasts Nova's body to quarks. Now, not a molecule remains of any Xandarian or tool of the Xandarians.

Korvac attacks the Avengers at their lowest ebb.

The Avengers fight heroically. This is what heroism is about—to try, when your arms are too weary, etc.

Back in Saddle River, now out on the patio, Samuel and Karl watch on a portable TV. In the (very big) swimming pool, several dolphins fight for their lives against a great white shark. The water is reddened with blood...

Once the thrill of his recent victories wears off a bit, Korvac, of course, is a little weary at this point, too. The Avengers gain a clean break. Korvac, having accomplished enough this day, decides to withdraw. No need to rush. He'll deal with them when necessary. He vanishes. The more human Avengers aren't too unhappy about that. The likes of Thor and human-but-mythic Cap, if they feel relief, would never show it.

Thor destroys Korvac's abandoned fortress with his hammer, leaving only a crater and a Tunguska-like impact zone to mark its place. Awesome. The Avengers head home.

The battered shark and one or two remaining wounded dolphins separate, trying to gather strength. Since the main show's over (Korvac vs. the Avengers) Samuel ends the swimming pool drama by boiling the water.

At a press conference, the Avengers announce the tragic death of Nova—an Avenger.

Nova's supporting cast reacts...

The Avengers wonder where Korvac is. Privately, Tigra hopes he's gone somewhere way out of their jurisdiction and stays there for a long time. The Avengers learn about the total annihilation of Xandar. They're horrified. The hunt for Korvac is intense.

Moondragon wonders if they aren't focusing on the wrong cosmic being. The major thing she sensed from Korvac during their encounter was fear. She believes that the Avengers and Korvac share a common enemy, the greater enemy—Samuel. Moondragon, of course, once had a certain simpatico with Korvac. This kind of talk coming from her is deeply troubling...and the others let her know it.

On the remains of the Xandarian homeworld, the Silver Surfer pulls himself from the rubble. Surveying the devastation, he vows to bring Korvac to justice. He heads for Earth. Reminiscent of *Valdez Is Coming*.

Meanwhile, Samuel also wonders where Korvac has gone. Amazingly, Korvac has given even him the slip. That's a little troubling to Samuel, who was feeling very smug and secure till now. But, ahh, no big deal.

Inspired by Daddy's fortress, Samuel remakes the mansion into a fortress of his own—a tower vaguely (but only vaguely, subtly) resembling a tree fort.

He and Karl go out to play (or *else*, Karl!). They commit grand-scale vandalism for fun. Finally, for his and Karl's amusement, Samuel arranges a high-speed train wreck. That, however, is narrowly thwarted by Wonder Man and Sersi. To make up for it, Samuel equips both himself and Karl with preposterous hand cannons and they blow stuff up all the way home. Mom better have dinner on the table says Samuel, or he'll feed her to the tarantulas. She does.

In a hospital, a young man lies in bed badly injured. It is very late at night. He sleeps, but fitfully. We will learn that the young man was injured in a heroic effort to save others (event to be determined). A fat, very old, bent woman in a hospital gown shuffles in and stands beside his bed. She tells him about a power from the stars that he has been chosen to receive. Oh, the old lady continues, the power comes with a mission—a first mission, anyway. We cut to the hallway outside the room. Brilliant, blue white light blazes inside the room for a few seconds. Then, the bent old woman shuffles out and down the hall toward the morgue. She says, "Tag, you're it." Giggling, and alternately complaining about what terrible condition this body (hers) is in—best available on short notice—she shambles along. She mutters something about putting it—the body—back. "Time to go."

*The spirit of Rich Rider; ("slow to depart," remember) using a borrowed, dead body has passed on the mantle of Nova!*

Korvac, meanwhile, is hiding in plain sight, as he did in the first Korvac saga. He's good at that—knows all the tricks. He ponders his options: flee to elsewhere in timespace (which would delight Tigra), but only postpone the inevitable. That's the trouble with being an immortal cosmic power—unless you're one of the wussies who are content with a passive existence, timespace isn't big enough to avoid trouble for long. Second option—the only real option—find a way to destroy his son. Then, with Samuel out of the way, strive again for cosmic hegemony.

We get a glimpse of the shreds of Korvac's humanity. He's utterly alone. He still mourns for and desperately loves Carina—one of the few cosmic beings who ever was totally, completely unmade, never to exist in timespace again. A little sympathy for the Devil...

Morning at the hospital. The young man, working name Ken Smith, who was visited by the body of the old woman (inhabited by the spirit of Nova) last night, is telling his doctor about a strange "dream" he had. He describes the old woman. Did you know Mrs. Rubio, asks the doctor? Who? An old lady who died early the previous evening—her body is still in the morgue—it'll be picked up by the funeral home today. No, he didn't. Was she kind of flip and funny? You know, making little jokes and wisecracks? Not in English, says the Doc. Didn't speak a word of it. Smith gets up. The Doc is astonished. Smith feels fine. Better than fine. *Super*. His injuries are all healed. A miracle...? The Doc wants him to get back into bed. His recovery is impossible. They've got to examine him, run tests. Nope, says Smith. There's something he's got to do. A mission. Seeya.

Calls pour into the Avengers HQ (and many other places, no doubt) regarding the chaos caused by Samuel. As if Korvac weren't enough to worry about.

Samuel's M.O., meanwhile, is evolving. Children who suffer injustice, abuse or neglect generally react in one of two ways: either they grow up to abhor the horrors they suffered, and cannot abide the thought of such being inflicted on anyone else (the I'll-never-be-like-that syndrome) or, they become perpetrators (the now-it's-my-turn syndrome). Samuel is the latter type in spades. "Now, *I'm* the one who gets away with everything!"

He frees the super beings Daddy created from one of the special holding tanks the government uses for just such threats. Others flock to him. He creates more vicious lackeys, (working names, per our reporter character) *Cur*, *Steel Squid*, *Zaphammer*. They can stay in the modified guesthouse. The bigger, more subhuman ones can stay in the garage.

Samuel's little legion of thugs becomes ever more obviously a major problem. They eat a lot, of course, and take whatever they need. They also shit a lot (we show discretion, of course). Pissed off that they keep using the curtains for TP, Samuel himself leads them on a brazen raid on a local ShopRite—gimme all your Charmin, or else.

Thor stands alone in a high place, contemplating the heavens. Cap approaches and tells him about all the offers of help they're getting. They could deputize an army of super heroes to attack Korvac, if they could find him. Not that all the super heroes in the world on their side would improve the odds much...

Cap, the ultimate man, and Thor the ultimate god, confer. Cap is troubled by the fact that while they're consumed with Korvac, they haven't been able to address human scale

problems—including dealing with the problem people have getting through their switchboard. Cap wonders why, if Korvac is such a universal threat, the other great powers of the universe haven't allied themselves to oppose him. They're afraid, says Thor—of Korvac, to an extent—but even more, of *Samuel*.

Leaving it all up to us, says Cap. Well, we'll find a way.

No doubt, Thor muses. You Earthlings are unique in the universe, he says to Cap. In each human being lies vast potential, *limitless* potential. Witness (Starlin's) Star Thief, the Molecule Man—who frightened the Watcher sufficiently that he broke his vow—and Korvac himself. Or Cap, in whom is realized the absolute maximum potential of will and courage. Created in the image of God, indeed.

Hmm. Be that as it may, Cap is glad Thor is here.

Tigra overhears Cap and Thor. She's in awe of both, of course. And inspired.

Without telling anyone, Tigra leaves the mansion. She means to try to reason with Samuel, as she did with Bludgeon and once with the Molecule Man. Moondragon senses her intent, and while she thinks it unwise, she merely observes telepathically.

Tigra confronts Samuel. He makes no bones about it. He has chosen “wrong” over “right.” Korvac's original goal for the universe was to do right (according to him), to establish order, eliminate suffering, etc., albeit with himself as the benevolent God. Samuel's goal is to indulge his wicked whims. With great power comes great *irresponsibility*. He envisions a world of ass-kickers and kickees, Morlocks and Eloi, if you will, with him at the top of the pecking order. He doesn't want to conquer and rule anything. He just enjoys the game...he likes to play... Speaking of which, *my, what a pretty kitty she is...*

Tigra—and Moondragon—are understandably worried. Moondragon almost sounds the alarm...but, no, Samuel seems to just want to talk. He had his childhood stolen, he was abused and tortured by his cousin, blah, blah, blah...

While Samuel is occupied with Tigra, Mom grabs Karl and flees. Moondragon switches her focus to them. She maintains contact with Tigra while keeping track of Mom and Karl.

As soon as Susan and Karl are a “safe” distance away, Susan finds a pay phone and calls the Avengers, seeking protection and an end to the nightmare. She has trouble getting through. Finally reaching an operator, she is disregarded as a crank. Cut off, she trembles with terror. *What will he do to her if he finds out she ran away?*

Moondragon, of course, knows her plight. She summons the others. They come running.

Meanwhile, Samuel has become bored with chatting about his childhood, which while terrible to him, doesn't seem all that bad to Tigrā. That makes him angry. He seizes Tigrā. She can't get away. Nothing she does seems to hurt him. He snaps one of her fingers...

Moondragon shrieks. She feels Tigrā's pain. It turns out that Samuel's senses are subtle enough that he detected a sort of double presence in Tigrā. He strung her along, talking until he sussed it out. Now *he's* in control...and he's *locking Moony in*. She fights to break her mental link with Tigrā...but to no avail. *She feels everything Tigrā feels*.

The Avengers rush in to find Moondragon writhing on the floor, shrieking, screaming, incoherent with agony.

Meanwhile, on a street corner in Saddle River, a man approaches Susan. It's Korvac. He asks (!) her to come with him. He will try to protect her and Karl. They go.

Moondragon suffers immeasurably. The Avengers are helpless. Iron Man calls for a doctor. It goes on interminably. Moondragon can only scream in pain. Finally, it's over. Moondragon is unconscious, in shock. Physicians rush in to attend her.

Suddenly, one of Samuel's super thugs, having smashed his way in through the Avengers' several layers of security/defenses, walks into the room carrying a suitcase-sized box, which he drops on the floor. Special delivery, he says. The Avengers try to grab him but he is whisked away by Samuel (who learned to fold space by watching Korvac).

Tigrā's in the box, crumpled and crammed in. Every single bone in her body is broken. She's still alive, though—another trick Samuel learned from Korvac.

Sersi tells the others that she can help Tigrā, though it will be difficult. Carefully, she levitates her, straightens her crumpled, twisted body and painstakingly begins to mend her...

No one can help Moondragon, though, who suffered mentally everything Tigrā did physically. She falls into a coma.

In a modest, suburban home in Valley Cottage, New York, Korvac, Susan and Karl enjoy a quiet meal. Karl is sent off to play—mewling because he doesn't have his Avengers toys, or even his GameBoy. Korvac surprisingly handles his new stand-in parent role pretty well—he's firm with Karl, but not nasty, and rewards him for piping down by

creating toys out of thin air. (Actually, he probably “liberated” them from a local Toys R Us with a mini space-fold.)

Korvac and Susan talk. She’s hopelessly in love with him. (Note: She doesn’t quite grasp, of course, that he’s a universe-class bad guy.) He doesn’t and can’t feel that for her. It doesn’t matter to her. It didn’t matter when he was gone and she feared he was dead. Her love for him will always be a part of her.

Later that night, after (as we discreetly suggest) Korvac and Susan have made love, Susan sleeps and Korvac ponders. He recalls how (in the Korvac/Michael saga) the bond between Starhawk and Aleta gave them “...strength to shake the heavens.” Further, he recalls how, as his own bond with Carina grew, their love became the bedrock of his own strength. He realizes that he has blocked out a part of himself, a part of his own power since Carina’s death/unmaking. Susan’s love for him has recalled all the locked up feelings he still holds for Carina...and, perhaps, power long denied as well.

Cut to the office of our unnamed reporter, working late. Suddenly, the Surfer enters, the bitter cold of the void pouring off of his skin, chilling the room. He seeks information. Awed, the reporter goes to the files and gathers every shred of information he can find on Korvac.

In Saddle River, Samuel is furious. After midnight, and still no sign of Mom and Karl. And he knows that only *one being*—Korvac—could possibly hide them so that he can’t sense them. His rage is palpable. Run out on *him*, will they? Worse, run to *Korvac*--! Grrr.

Samuel gathers a few of his super-thugs. We’re going out, he says.

The Surfer roams the skies, straining his awareness and every sense, searching for Korvac.

In Avengers Mansion, several Avengers keep vigil. Tigra is physically intact, again, thanks to Sersi’s strenuous labors, and resting. She wakes up periodically, screaming. She will for a long time to come.

Moondragon lies still in a deathlike coma.

Samuel and his thugs are super-wilding, doing heinous things, committing random, massive destruction. It’s a tantrum, actually.

Word comes to the Avengers about Samuel and company. As hard as it is to tear themselves away, they’d better respond.

Moondragon finally awakens. In raspy whispers she tells the Avengers what happened. It was Samuel who tortured Tigra and made her, Moondragon, suffer the same pain via her telepathic link. They want to get the son of a bitch. Let vengeance wait, says Moondragon. She maintained her link with Susan just long enough (a monumental act of courage) and she knows where Korvac is hiding...

Iron Man calls for the Avengers to assemble. Moondragon starts to rise—still very shaky. She won't be left behind.

Neither will Tigra. She struggles to her feet. Gotta get back on the bicycle...

Cap recalls Thor's words about human potential...

In Valley Cottage, Korvac judges that it is time. He has the element of surprise—his favorite advantage—as well as still-superior skill/experience. And, now that he has allowed himself to embrace the love he still feels for the departed Carina, a painful memory that has long been long locked away inside him, he once again has strength to shake the stars. It has reopened the power born of their oneness.

Susan awakens. He tells her coldly that she and Karl are the bait that will draw Samuel into an ambush. If he should overcome Samuel, he will continue to protect them and they will eventually have a place of honor in his new hegemony. If he falls, well...they will be subject to Samuel's pleasure.

Korvac blinks the cloak of imperceptibility that hides them—just for a nanosecond—as if it were a mistake.

Samuel picks up the “mistake” instantly. He's there in a heartbeat.

Korvac ambushes him. Big fight.

Korvac fights confidently, deliberately. Samuel is increasingly astonished at Korvac's power and his, Samuel's, inability to stop Korvac's relentless advance/attack, let alone crush him. Korvac tells Samuel how disappointed he is in him. All that power, all that opportunity to do something with it, and what does he do? Act out his sadistic whims. Get revenge on the world for the petty traumas of his childhood.

Firing back, Samuel derides Korvac for jerking off with reality and time, “fixing” history. That's all just meaningless diddling with quarks, creating endless iterations of timespace and never getting anywhere. *Reality* is what matters. All righty, then, says Korvac, *I'll* give you some reality. Korvac *clobbers* the brat...



(Note: Here, and in the sequences with Susan, I intend for Korvac to at least reflect and consider whether or not he has erred by striving for godhood. A little melancholy and longing for life in a world he never made—the joy of love, family. Like I said, a little sympathy and humanity for the devil. Don't get me wrong, he's still a heinous devil.)

Meanwhile, the Avengers are on their way to Valley Cottage. Suddenly, they're ambushed too, by Samuel's super thugs. Samuel guessed that if he sensed Korvac's location, the Avengers might also pick it up. Not wanting any interference, he ordered his thugs to intercept them if they came along.

Korvac cleans Samuel's clock. Samuel flees. Not since the last time Karl pounded the crap out of him when he was little has he been so badly hurt, pants-wetting scared and totally intimidated.

Korvac starts to pursue. He's going to *unmake* the little bastard before he can gather himself. Their power is too even. If he doesn't capitalize on this opportunity, if Samuel gets a chance to gather himself, the window to destroy him may close forever.

But—Korvac is cut off by the Silver Surfer. As soon as Korvac emerged from imperceptibility to attack Samuel, the Surfer detected Korvac.

The Surfer attacks with righteous fury. Desperately, Korvac fights back. He's got to get to Samuel before it's too late! It looks like he might—righteous fury notwithstanding, Korvac is too powerful for the Surfer.

Suddenly Nova arrives—the new Nova, Ken Smith. Together, the Silver Surfer and the new Nova battle Korvac.

Samuel is recovering. Fear, shock, pain and intimidation are turning into anger. But, he is content to let others slug it out with Korvac. He hides himself and watches from a distance.

The Avengers, also full of righteous fury, make fairly quick work of the thugs.

Nova and the Surfer have Korvac on his heels. The Avengers arrive. Korvac can sense Samuel's growing strength and rage. He battles back with unbelievable desperation. Once again (as against the superhumans in issue #1), a male Avenger holds back for an instant to give another his "turn" for redemption. That backfires and almost gets *everybody* killed.

Heroics by Tigra and Moondragon save the day. The tide turns again in the heroes' favor.

As despair gnaws at Korvac's will, he is less and less able to fight. Moondragon, though still weak, attempts to invade Korvac's mind. He viciously, painfully repels her probing.

Soon, though, he is defeated. One down...

Defeated Korvac catches pain-wracked, battered Moondragon's eye. There was once some common ground between them. Is it an invitation? A trick? A trap? Moondragon dares reach out...Korvac allows her a glimpse. She learns something.

The Surfer and Thor, between them figure out a way to imprison Korvac. I'll let you know...

Moondragon and Korvac exchange a parting glance—an unseen (or was it?) handshake on an unspoken deal.

Nova departs. His mission is complete (and he doesn't understand enough about himself or the situation to choose to do otherwise). He leaves many questions behind, but the Avengers have no time to worry about such now. The Surfer stays with the Avengers.

Though the battle against Korvac took place some miles away, Susan knows he has lost. She feels the cloak of imperceptibility that concealed her and Karl fading. She quickly gathers up sleepy Karl. They'll make a run for it. Maybe they can reach the Avengers before...

Nope. Samuel appears in front of them. *Wait till I get you home*, he says.

Back in Saddle River, Samuel berates and abuses his already thoroughly thrashed super thugs. He's angry and disappointed. He's had enough of these losers for a while. Maybe someday he'll give them another chance, if they're lucky. He snaps his fingers and they (seem to) vanish.

Mom awaits, terrified, in her room. Samuel enters. He menaces her...the sick folks out there will think I'm doing an Oedipus riff. Nah. Red herring. She disgusts him.

Mom bravely stands up to him. He doesn't have to be like this. She's heard the excuses. They're meaningless. Samuel admits that she's right. He chooses to be evil. The role of the ultimate evil was open—so he took it. He likes it. No goal—it's about the doing. There are lots of victims to be had, and always some of them will rise up and amuse him by striving against him. They'll give meaning to his life, and he'll give meaning to their deaths. Besides, if he chose the side of good, there'd be no more evil as of tomorrow. It would be a dead end job.

Samuel locks her in and seconds later, the walls, floor and ceiling are crawling with 1,000,000 black widow spiders. She screams...

Karl hears Mom scream. His blood runs cold.

Samuel comes into the living room, where Karl is. Karl timidly asks Samuel not to hurt Mom. Samuel says it won't hurt for long—now don't turn into a wimp on me...

Samuel does a take as if he's just sensed something (the Avengers coming). He tells Karl that since his thugs were such losers, he's decided to make Karl his super assistant. He's going to age him and give him a whole bunch of power—which, he's decided, isn't such a bad deal after all. Then Karl will be number two in the pecking order and they can be real friends. Doesn't that cheer him up?

Karl doesn't want to be like Samuel. He wants Samuel to go away. He wants Mom back.

Samuel says, Karl, Karl, Karl. I thought you were my friend. Samuel is obviously deeply hurt—and when he gets hurt, he gets angry...

Samuel is about to do something horrible to Karl.

Suddenly, the Avengers, the Surfer burst in. No hesitation on their parts this time. Samuel is evil. What else do they need to know?

Big battle. Karl screams for someone to help his Mom. Cap smashes into the room. Susan is covered with black widows, trying to stay still, but trembling and on the verge of hysteria. Cap starts in, but Iron Man stops him. I'm better for this, he says. Team play.

Iron Man tells Susan to try to hold still. He's going to generate a high-energy frequency to kill the spiders—especially the ones on her and in her clothing—essentially boiling their nasty juices inside them. It may hurt a bit. He zaps 'em. Susan, still trembling staggers away toward the bathroom and the shower. Iron Man returns to the confrontation with Samuel.

Moondragon is appalled that Iron Man killed all those innocent creatures. Report me to the A.S.P.C.A., says Iron Man.

Samuel erects some kind of barrier that holds the Avengers off for the nonce. He's really not worried about them and determined to deal with that little snot, Karl. Only Tigra, ironically, is on Samuel's side of the barrier. She was actually so terrified when she first saw Samuel again, so traumatized from her past horrifying experience that she shrank away and hid! So focused was Samuel, cosmically and otherwise on the "main" opponents that he didn't notice her on his side of the barrier.

Samuel chases Karl and corners him in another room. He means to rip the little bastard to shreds. Tigra, having had time to screw her courage to the sticking place, goes to the rescue. She leaps to the defense of Karl. Samuel whacks her aside. She rises and attacks again...and again...and again, bloodied but unbowed. She *can't* win...but she's determined to give a good account of herself.

What is it with these heroic types? Samuel winds up to atomize her. Thor finally smashes the barrier. The Avengers swarm in to the attack.

For perhaps the first time in comics history (not to mention martial arts movie history) a battle of many against one will be choreographed so that no one is standing around waiting a turn to attack. Samuel is capable of fighting on many fronts at once, and he will...

...except for a brief one-on-one with Thor, which I will logically engineer. To Samuel, this is what it's all about—kicking Thor's ass, being number one in the pecking order. Thor and perhaps a few other beings are near the limits of possible physical strength—any stronger, and it isn't physical anymore, it's really mind not muscle—that damn playing with quarks thing that Daddy was so enamored of. Samuel can be whatever he wants, and indeed, he is stronger than Thor—but, like Tigra, Thor keeps coming.

Samuel is willing to cheat, though, using non-physical power. He is about to destroy Thor. Cap comes to Thor's aid. Man and god fight side by side. The other Avengers attack, desperately, heroically. Moondragon hangs back.

Finally a moment comes, when Thor gets in one good lick. Samuel is, for a fraction of a second, stunned. That did it. They've "amused" him enough by striving against him. Instantly regaining his senses, overwhelmed with rage, he is about to simply wipe them all away.

Precisely the moment that Moondragon has been waiting for. Her power stabs into his mind and erases a critical bit of the Key Code. (Korvac gave her the info she needed, but we won't spell that out entirely.)

Samuel's power vanishes. He's helpless.

It's all the Avengers can do *not* to lash out and exact a little vengeance against Samuel. Even his mother, through gritted teeth asks the Avengers to kill him.

No. They're the good guys. They avenge injustice, and the way you do that is with justice—not retribution. It's over. Samuel will pay for his crimes the right way.

## **EPILOGUE:**

Korvac is, as seen previously, imprisoned. Samuel is imprisoned.

Susan and Karl move out of the fortress to a home elsewhere, and the fortress is razed. As Susan and Karl are leaving the fortress for the last time, Karl notices some small things in a corner and stuffs them into one of his suitcases.

The Avengers wonder how Moondragon could pull off the coup she did against Samuel. She claims that when he seized control of her for a while, she got a momentary glimpse of his mind, and, eventually, was able to suss out the way to defeat him. Hmm. We suspect that she's lying, that there is something up between her and *Korvac*—but what? The Panther suspects, too—he saw the glance they exchanged.

Karl is redeemed. He's a *good boy* now. He understands that he has a choice. The Surfer departs, but with new purpose. Other threats will emerge. The universe needs him.

The new Nova remains a mystery. Ken Smith ponders his new power.

Samuel, now merely mortal, endlessly writes code on his cell wall, desperately trying to reconstruct that missing line.

New managers and personnel are brought in to handle the Avengers' switchboard, and new super-sophisticated technology is installed. Cap himself stops by to man the phones sometimes. No calls will be missed from now on.

But what happened to the super-thugs?

Karl, at the end is playing with action figures, watching TV. Susan tells him enough cartoons for today, and he dutifully turns the TV off. He gets some more action figures out of the suitcase we saw him put something in back at the fortress—sure enough, they're the *super-thugs*, reduced to toys! Karl has his Avengers figures kick their butts repeatedly.

**The End For Now**