

# Marvel Manifestor

Chapter 171 - 171 – Banner Joins the Team

Wanda clung tightly to Lucas, rubbing her cheek against his chest like a kitten marking its territory.

"Well, if the Ancient One sent you... looks like you really did learn a lot."

The fiery portal vanished.

Time resumed its flow.

Gwen and Skye immediately saw Wanda—and pounced.

"WANDA! You're back!!"

They dragged her straight out of Lucas' arms for a three-way hug.

Wanda laughed happily and explained why she had returned.

Soon the three girls and Natasha entered the elevator together.

Lucas raised a hand.

"Cloak—looks like this'll be our first official mission together."

The cloak swooped to him instantly, wrapping itself around him.

Two golden clasps clicked shut over his chest—golden light flashed—and Lucas' black-and-gold long robe materialized, giving him the aura of a celestial immortal descending to earth.

Moments later, Gwen and the others returned from upstairs in full gear:

Black-and-white Ghost Spider, emerald-and-black Quake, and the deep crimson Scarlet Witch.

Three beauties, three styles—each dazzling in her own way.

"Let's go. The Quinjet is already waiting," Natasha said.

But Gwen tugged her back.

"No need—we'll take our plane."

Everyone rode the elevator to the rooftop, where a multicolored, custom-painted Quinjet awaited.

They boarded, and under Skye's control the jet rose smoothly into the air.

"Where to?" Skye asked.

Natasha patched into S.H.I.E.L.D.'s secure network.

Coordinates appeared on the display—not to the Helicarrier, but to a small location in Brazil.

"Director, Lucas has agreed. We're already en route," Natasha reported.

Fury's bald head popped onto the screen.

The moment he saw Lucas had joined the mission, he finally exhaled in relief.

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## Brazil – The Hidden Scientist

The Quinjet descended near a slum.

Lucas took one look and immediately knew who they were here for—

Only one particular genius-turned-monster would hide somewhere like this.

Following Natasha, they entered a safehouse arranged by S.H.I.E.L.D.

Brazil's slums were shockingly impoverished—many homes didn't even have windows.

Natasha soon found a little girl, handed her some money, and had her guide someone over.

In places like this, danger meant nothing.

Poverty was the true killer—and money cured all hesitation.

They waited openly.

Natasha originally planned to hide everyone until Banner arrived, but with Lucas present, there was no need.

Even if the Hulk exploded, Lucas and the girls could suppress him before he blinked.

Soon the little girl returned—with a thin, nervous man behind her.

Dr. Bruce Banner stepped inside, saw Lucas and Natasha—and his face went pale.

He instantly turned to flee.

"Dr. Banner, wait. We're not here to capture you," Natasha called. "We need your help."

She handed him a tablet.

Banner hesitated, eyeing Lucas.

It was Lucas and Tony who had let him escape last time.

Now... he needed to see Lucas' stance.

Lucas nodded.

"It's fine, Bruce. No one's here to arrest you. I guarantee it."

Only then did Banner cautiously accept the tablet.

The footage showed Loki stealing the Tesseract.

Banner knew exactly how dangerous that cube was.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

He didn't believe he could help—Hulk rarely helped anyone.

If the green idiot didn't smash everything within reach, that already counted as a miracle.

"You'll hear the details at S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters," Natasha replied.

Then she asked gently,

"Dr. Banner... how much control do you have over the Hulk now?"

Banner lifted an eyebrow.

"If I say I can't control him... are you going to lock me in a cage?"

"No one wants to lock you away," Natasha said quickly.

CRASH!!

Banner slammed both hands onto the table.

The tablet shattered instantly.

Natasha nearly jumped out of her skin.

She drew her gun on instinct and didn't dare breathe.

Gwen and Skye both flinched—only Wanda remained calm.

Banner raised both hands peacefully.

"See? I think I'm doing pretty well. He's not even trying to come out."

Lucas noted that this time—unlike in the movie—there was no special forces team outside.

But they didn't need one.

Lucas and the girls alone outclassed an entire battalion.

Natasha holstered her gun, exhaling shakily.

"Then... Dr. Banner, will you join us?"

Banner looked at Lucas again, then nodded.

"I'll come. But if Hulk loses control, you have to stop him."

With that settled, everyone boarded Lucas' Quinjet again—next stop:  
S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters.

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Fury vs. the World Security Council

Fury was drowning in chaos.

He had agents searching the globe for Loki and the Tesseract, while simultaneously dealing with endless interrogations from the World Security Council.

At that moment, he stood in a video-conference chamber before five massive screens.

Five blurred silhouettes were yelling at him.

"You've crossed the line, Fury. You're dealing with lunatics!"

The speaker was a man, though none of them permitted their faces to be shown.

Fury stood with hands casually behind his back.

"Has any of you ever seen actual combat? Real war? Gunfire and blood?"

Silence.

Of course not.

They were politicians—experts in pushing pens, manipulating systems, and starting wars for resources.

But real soldiers? Never.

After a long pause, the same man spoke again:

"You truly believe this so-called 'Asgardian' intends to go to war with all of us?"

"I need to correct you," Fury said flatly.

"Not Asgard. Prince Loki. One man."

"You expect us to believe an Asgardian prince can declare war alone? Who is his accomplice?"

This time, a woman's voice cut in.

Fury's one eye narrowed slightly.

And the room fell silent again, awaiting his answer.

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Chapter 172 - 172 – The Video Conference

"Loki, as you describe him, cannot possibly wage war on humanity alone. He must have allies."

The voice belonged to a woman—her silhouette the only distinct figure displayed across Fury's wall of screens.

"That brother of his—what's-his-name—Thor? Is he assisting Loki?"

Her tone made it clear she didn't even bother remembering Thor's name.

In her eyes, "Asgard" was little more than a myth.

They had nuclear warheads and weapons of mass destruction.

What god could they fear?

Human arrogance paired with political short-sightedness—nothing was more dangerous.

Some of these council members genuinely believed aliens could be defeated with simple bombs.

After decades of sitting in high chairs, they'd forgotten what threats looked like.

Forgotten vigilance.

Forgotten humility.

All they could see now... was profit.

Fury was running out of patience.

All he wanted was authorization—a mandate to coordinate Earth's defenses.

Yet these fools were still circling the topic, blinded by ego and bureaucracy.

"Our intelligence shows Thor has no hostile intent," Fury said, pacing.

"But we can't count on him to save us. We have to rely on ourselves."

"So we encouraged you to escalate your weapons program. Move to phase two—"

Fury cut him off sharply.

"Phase two isn't stabilized. And we're out of time. The threat is already here. What we need isn't another weapon—we need a team."

His tone was ice.

"These individuals are too dangerous," the woman snapped. "We already rejected your 'Avengers Initiative.'"

The council had dismissed that file without hesitation.

To them, gathering a group of "dangerous individuals" looked like building a private army.

A coup waiting to happen.

Rejected immediately.

"This isn't about the Avengers. This is—"

Again, he was interrupted.

"We've seen your so-called roster," another voice barked. "We've granted you top-level authority, given you the best military force on Earth—and you want to hand humanity's fate over to unstable freaks?"

The accusation was sharp—almost furious.

Fury didn't flinch.

"I haven't handed anything over. And since when is human survival the property of a handful of politicians?"

His single eye burned with disdain.

"We need a team built for threats like this. Yes, they have flaws. Some are reclusive, some reckless, and some couldn't care less about government orders—but they're the only ones capable of stopping what's coming."

Silence filled the room.

Finally, the woman spoke again.

"War isn't fought with intuition, Director Fury. Not with your 'belief.'"

Fury nodded slowly.

"You're right. It's fought by soldiers—bleeding, fighting, and dying. Not by politicians whining in a room and pulling each other down."

"Watch your tone, Fury!" a man snapped. "You're just the head of S.H.I.E.L.D. We can remove you at any time."

Typical.

People who lived above the clouds hated being reminded they were only human.

Fury shrugged.

"You can take my job anytime. Doesn't matter."

He ended the call mid-sentence, turned, and left without a backward glance.

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Elsewhere – The First Avenger

In a training gym, a tall blond man hammered at a sandbag.

Each punch sent the heavy bag swinging violently, the chain creaking in protest.

Punch after punch, harder each time.

Steve Rogers—Captain America—was exorcising ghosts.

Memories of the war...

Memories of comrades long buried...

Memories of the one woman whose face he could never forget.

CRACK!

The sandbag tore free, slammed into the far wall, and burst—sand exploding across the room.

Steve inhaled raggedly, grabbed a fresh bag, and hung it up.

A neat row of untouched bags lay at his feet—clearly not his first tonight.

From the doorway, Fury watched.

"Still not adjusting to the modern world, Captain?"

Steve turned slightly.

"Director, I slept for seventy years. I think being a little out of place is understandable."

Fury folded his arms.

"Then you should get out more. See the world you woke up in."

Steve steadied the swinging sandbag.

"I'm not used to peace. Not like this. Last time I was awake... the whole world was at war. They told me we won. But I wasn't there to see it."

"Plenty of people didn't get to see victory," Fury replied softly.

"In war, there are no winners. Just casualties... and what's left after."

Fury had survived real battlefields—he knew exactly what Steve felt.

"And now, another war is coming, Captain."

Steve stopped.

"You're asking me to go back to the battlefield?"

"Yes," Fury said simply. "And this enemy is stronger than anything you've fought."

Steve looked down for a moment, thoughtful.

"You're sure the world wants me back? To walk among them again?"

"I don't want you back on magazine covers," Fury said.

"I want you to save the world. Again."

He handed Steve a file.

Inside—reports on Loki, his powers, the Tesseract... and classified details of the current crisis.

Steve froze when he saw the cube.

"So... the thing I died trying to bury... is back. And this time, it's our people meddling with it."

A bitter smile tugged at the corner of his mouth.

Then he flipped to the next page.

"His name is Loki," Fury said. "Not from Earth.

If you choose to join us... consider this your refresher course."

Steve's fingers tightened around the folder.

War had found him again.

And he knew he would answer.

"His name is Loki. He's not from Earth. If you decide to join us, consider this some advance preparation."

Nick Fury continued, looking at Steve,

"I've already placed the detailed mission brief in your apartment. The world has changed far more than you can imagine, Captain."

Steve had finished reading the file. He slung a sandbag over his shoulder and walked out of the gym without looking back.

"At least when it comes to the Tesseract,"

he paused at the door and said,

"you should have left it at the bottom of the ocean."

With that, he left.

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At the same time, deep beneath the sea, a hexagonal glow suddenly appeared.

Tony Stark's armor.

Inside the suit, Tony casually fired a laser, severing a thick power cable with ease. Then he rocketed straight out of the ocean, water exploding behind him as he headed toward Stark Tower.

"So that's it? Completely disconnected? No more testing?"

Pepper's voice echoed through the helmet as they video-called.

"No need. I'm done down here. The rest is up to you."

Tony sounded relaxed, almost smug.

"You really cut the external power? We're off the grid?"

Pepper asked, glancing around.

The moment she finished speaking, everything around her plunged into darkness.

"Stark Tower is about to become the brightest landmark in New York—no, the world."

Tony hovered high above the city, looking down at the pitch-black skyscraper.

"I'm starting now," Pepper said, her fingers flying across the keyboard.

The next instant—

Stark Tower lit up.

Every floor, every window burst into brilliant light, and the massive STARK logo at the top blazed like a beacon, instantly becoming the most eye-catching sight in the city skyline.

"Yes!! It worked!!"

Tony pumped his fist in the air.

"We really did it, Tony! The Arc Reactor is stable—your clean energy is finally ready for mass use!"

Pepper's eyes were red with excitement.

The entire tower was now powered solely by the Arc Reactor beneath it—true, clean energy. Stark Industries had once again stepped ahead of the world.

"We need a press conference," Pepper said eagerly.

"The whole world needs to know!"

"I'll fly to Washington tomorrow to pick locations for—"

"Hey, Pepper," Tony interrupted gently.

"Relax. This was always the natural next step. No need to get too worked up."

He landed smoothly on the rooftop platform designed specifically for armor deployment.

A circular magnetic ring rose from the floor, locking onto the suit. Since the armor no longer required mechanical assembly, the system simply absorbed it and lowered it beneath the platform. The surface sealed seamlessly.

Pepper was already waiting in the penthouse, ready to celebrate this historic moment with him.

Just then, JARVIS spoke.

"Sir, Agent Coulson from S.H.I.E.L.D. is requesting to speak with you."

"Tell him I'm not home. Which is true—I'm not."

Tony answered instantly.

Coulson was currently at Tony's Malibu residence, greeted only by JARVIS.

"Sir, Agent Coulson says he will not leave until he sees you."

"Please," Tony sighed.

"I have an important date. Nobody gets in."

Tony stepped inside. Pepper stood by the bar, holding a glass of champagne, a floating screen displaying voltage stability and reactor output.

"Everything's stable. No fluctuations at all," she said brightly.

"Of course it is," Tony grinned.

"I'm Tony Stark. My designs don't fail."

He wrapped his arms around her from behind. For a moment, neither of them spoke.

The top floor was technically Tony's office, but it felt more like a luxury lounge—an oversized bar, shelves of rare liquor, plush seating, and greenery placed just right.

"Sir... there's an incoming call. And I believe my systems are being breached—"

Before JARVIS could finish, Coulson's voice cut in.

"Tony, we need to talk."

Tony hung up immediately.

The phone rang again—this time without JARVIS's alert.

"I'm afraid you're speaking to a hologram," Tony answered coldly.

"Please leave a message."

"This is extremely urgent, Tony."

"Then leave an extremely urgent message."

The elevator doors slid open.

Coulson stood inside, phone in hand, staring straight at Tony.

"JARVIS—damn it! You were hacked and didn't warn me?"

Tony shouted.

No response.

"Coulson, please, come in," Pepper said warmly, already pouring him champagne.

Coulson ignored it and handed Tony a black tablet.

"You need to see this."

"I don't like being handed things," Tony replied flatly.

Pepper took the tablet and dropped it into Tony's hands, then confiscated his champagne.

Tony rolled his eyes.

"Agent Coulson, official consultation hours are nine to three."

"This isn't a joke," Coulson said grimly.

"This is a level-seven emergency."

"I already told you—I'm not joining your boy band. And last I checked, that plan wasn't approved anyway."

Tony tossed the tablet onto the table.

The display activated instantly, holographic files unfolding in midair.

Multiple folders opened at once.

Footage of the Hulk in combat.

Files on Captain America.

Detailed intelligence on Tony himself...

Lucas, Gwen, Skye, and everyone connected to them.

Tony's expression finally changed.

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Chapter 174 - 174 – Convergence

As Tony looked at the footage, his expression changed instantly. He turned to Coulson.

"I distinctly remember you saying this information would be kept confidential. What—have you decided to go back on your word?"

Previously, Nick Fury had classified everyone's files at the highest level, storing them under his personal authorization. No one else was supposed to have access.

"Keep watching,"

Coulson said calmly, offering no explanation.

Tony opened every folder at once. This time, new data appeared—Thor, the God of Thunder; Loki, the central figure of the incident; and the glowing blue Tesseract.

The moment Pepper saw the information, she knew Tony wouldn't have time for her tonight.

"I might as well head to Washington now," she said lightly.

"It's obvious you won't have time for anything else."

She pulled out her phone and made a call with practiced ease.

"Notify the jet. Prepare for takeoff in one hour."

After hanging up, Pepper kissed Tony, then stepped into the elevator and left.

Tony was nearly furious. A rare date—completely ruined by the ever-annoying Coulson.

Suppressing his irritation, he refocused on the projection. His attention slowly fixed on the Tesseract.

With a grasping motion, the holographic image floated into his hand. Tony examined it closely, his expression growing increasingly grave, deep in thought.

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The next day, a Quinjet sped over the open ocean.

Inside the cabin, Steve Rogers studied the files in his hands with intense focus—dossiers detailing every individual involved in the operation. Coulson sat beside him, providing explanations as they went.

Steve's gaze stopped on Bruce Banner's profile.

"He was researching the super-soldier serum too?"

Steve asked.

Coulson nodded.

"Yes. The military never stopped that research. Dr. Banner believed gamma radiation might be the key to recreating the formula."

The footage shifted, showing Bruce transforming into the Hulk.

"Looks like he failed," Steve said quietly.

"That's one way to put it," Coulson replied.

"When he's not transformed, Dr. Banner is one of the smartest minds alive. But once the Hulk emerges, he becomes the most dangerous one among us."

Steve continued watching. The screen suddenly showed a massive tornado linking sky and earth. When it dissipated, a colossal winged creature—nearly a hundred meters tall—stood revealed.

"This... is one of ours too?"

Steve asked, stunned, as he watched the creature casually destroy buildings with wind blades.

"Yes," Coulson said.

"He's not with S.H.I.E.L.D., but he is one of your teammates for this mission."

"His power looks even more terrifying than the Hulk's," Steve said solemnly.

"Compared to him, the Hulk doesn't seem like the strongest anymore."

Coulson nodded.

"His name is Lucas Norman. The Director has tried many times to recruit him, but Lucas has always held S.H.I.E.L.D. in open contempt. If Natasha weren't his friend, he probably wouldn't be helping us this time either."

When it came to Lucas, S.H.I.E.L.D.'s feelings were complicated—especially for Fury, who both relied on him and ground his teeth over him.

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Lucas and the others soon arrived at their destination: a heavily armed aircraft carrier. Lucas already knew this thing would be airborne soon enough.

Stepping off the Quinjet, he looked around with curiosity. The flight deck wasn't much different from a conventional carrier—just significantly larger.

"You finally made it. Smooth trip?"

Coulson approached, with Steve Rogers walking beside him in casual clothes.

"Fairly smooth. We've brought Dr. Banner,"

Natasha replied with a nod.

"Hey, Coulson," Lucas said, grinning.

"Where did Fury get this monster of a ship? Think you could get me one too?"

He was clearly eyeing the Helicarrier. If he had one of these, why would he ever mooch off Tony's yacht again? And this thing could fly. Tony's yacht certainly couldn't.

Coulson's face went dark.

Give him one of these and S.H.I.E.L.D. Headquarters would be rubble by tomorrow, he thought. If he got annoyed, even the White House wouldn't survive.

He wisely chose not to respond and instead made introductions.

"This is Steve Rogers—Captain America."

"Captain, this is Lucas Norman. These are Gwen, Skye, and Wanda. You've already reviewed their files."

Steve shook hands with each of them in turn, then with Lucas.

As Steve released Lucas's hand, the cloak behind Lucas suddenly extended a corner of itself, clearly demanding to be introduced as well.

"Oh—this is the Cloak,"

Lucas said casually.

"He's shaking hands with you."

Steve hesitated, then carefully shook the extended fabric.

"Nice... to meet you."

The cloak fluttered proudly, then retracted.

"Incredible," Steve said.

"Is that magic too?"

"Close enough," Lucas replied.

"He's a magical construct—with a mind of his own."

He gave the cloak a light pat, and it settled back into its usual resting form.

As they headed toward the bridge, Lucas chatted casually.

"Did Coulson almost pass out from excitement when he found you? He's a huge fan."

Steve blinked.

"Did he... ask me to sign something?"

"Little collectible cards," Lucas shrugged.

"Captain America promo cards. He treasures them."

Bruce, meanwhile, was staring intently at a nearby fighter jet, his attention fixed on the missile mounted beneath it.

"Bruce, what are you looking at?"

Lucas asked.

"Oh... does S.H.I.E.L.D. carry nuclear weapons too?"

Bruce replied uneasily.

The missile was unmistakably capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. Years on the run had made Bruce painfully sensitive to things like this.

Lucas followed his gaze and thought silently: So that's probably the nuke.

"We should head inside,"

Natasha said at just the right moment.

"Breathing out here is about to get difficult."

As she spoke, alarms began to sound. The loudspeakers announced the evacuation of the flight deck.

Lucas smiled faintly.

The Helicarrier was about to take off.

Chapter 175 - 175 – The Helicarrier

Once everyone had entered the bridge, the aircraft carrier's outer armor plates began to separate automatically. Massive turbines extended from beneath the deck—two on each side, four in total—furiously expelling seawater. The enormous vessel finally lived up to its name, achieving true flight and becoming a genuine aerial carrier.

Led by Natasha, the group made their way to the combat command center. Nick Fury stood at his command platform, watching streams of data and readouts, while rows of researchers below him monitored vast quantities of information and complex parameters in real time.

Lucas whistled softly as he took in the scene.

As expected of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s most advanced Helicarrier—pure technological spectacle.

In fact, aside from Bruce, everyone present was visibly amazed by S.H.I.E.L.D.'s sheer scale and ambition. Skye, in particular, was so excited that she practically leapt onto the platform beneath the command console, pulled out her laptop, and immediately began attempting to connect to the Helicarrier's network.

Her actions startled all the technicians on duty.

Where did this girl come from?

She had just walked in and was already trying to access the system. And the Director wasn't stopping her?

Seeing that Nick Fury made no move to intervene, the staff had no choice but to stay silent and watch Skye work.

Moments later, a massive holographic screen materialized in midair above them, displaying the Helicarrier's complete system overview—propulsion, power supply, defensive systems—everything integrated into a single, clean interface. All of the ship's functions were now visible at a glance.

"Done!"

Skye said smugly, glancing proudly at Lucas.

"Your operating system was way too complicated. It made my head spin. This is much better—simple and clear."

She stepped away from the console and returned to Lucas's side.

Nick Fury's face darkened.

So many specialists under his command, yet none of them could do what this girl had just done in minutes. And a top-tier genius like Skye refused to join S.H.I.E.L.D. no matter what.

That damn Lucas... why does he insist on keeping her around?

Infuriating...

"Ahem."

Fury cleared his throat.

"Get back to work. All of you. Not one of you can outperform a single young woman. When this is over, half your bonuses are gone."

Once again, Director Fury lived up to his reputation.

"Director, all systems are ready,"

Agent Hill reported as she stepped forward.

"Very well. Activate the reflection panels. Prepare to vanish."

At Fury's command, light flared across the Helicarrier's surface. Piece by piece, the massive vessel faded from sight, blending seamlessly into the sky until it was completely invisible.

Just then, the command room doors opened again.

A familiar, endlessly chatty voice echoed through the room.

"Wow—see? I knew this carrier could fly! My imagination is unmatched! Felicia, you owe me dinner—Mexican food this time, the place near my school, I heard—"

The nonstop chatter continued without pause.

There was only one person who could talk this much without suffocating.

Peter Parker.

"Lucas!! You guys are here too?! Am I dreaming? When they invited me, I thought it was just me! This is awesome—we're fighting side by side again! Oh, and wait till you see my new gear—Mr. Stark gave it to me yesterday, he said—"

Before he could finish, Felicia clamped a hand firmly over Peter's mouth.

The unfortunate Peter could only flail his arms helplessly, muffled protests escaping as he struggled for air.

"Felicia? Why are you here?"

Gwen and the others stared in shock.

Peter being there made sense—annoying as he was, he was Spider-Man.

But Felicia was just a normal civilian... or so they thought.

Felicia smiled mysteriously.

Peter tried to speak again, only for Felicia to silence him once more. He could do nothing but gesture frantically, his meaning completely lost.

Leaving Peter behind, the four girls headed off to find Natasha, leaving a group of grown men standing there exchanging awkward looks.

Among them, Bruce was clearly the most uneasy. He paced back and forth nervously, frequently glancing toward the armed agents stationed by the doors. His anxiety was obvious to everyone.

Nick Fury approached and extended his hand.

"Thank you for coming, Dr. Banner."

Bruce shook it hesitantly.

"So... when can I leave? High altitude, thin oxygen—it accelerates my heart rate."

Fury replied calmly,

"Once we recover the Tesseract, you're free to go. We'll send you back."

Bruce nodded.

"Then how far along are you?"

"We've scanned every networked camera on Earth,"

Coulson said, stepping forward with a tablet in hand.

"That includes phones, computers—anything connected to the internet."

"That's too slow,"

Bruce said, rubbing his chin.

"You need to narrow the search. How many spectrometers do you have?"

Fury spread his hands.

"As many as you need."

"Good. Deploy them all outdoors and scan simultaneously for gamma radiation. I'll recalibrate the signal and tracking filters. That should eliminate several regions. And I'll need a lab."

Bruce laid out his requirements without hesitation. He wanted to locate the Tesseract as quickly as possible—and get out just as fast.

Fury nodded and signaled Coulson.

"Someone will take you to a laboratory that meets your needs."

He waved a hand, and an agent stepped forward.

"Escort Dr. Banner to the lab."

Bruce followed the agent and left the room.

Lucas sat casually on a set of steps, half-listening to Peter ramble on endlessly. Mostly, Peter talked. Lucas listened.

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Elsewhere, at a hidden base...

Dr. Erik Selvig was leading a team as they reconstructed a Tesseract energy amplification device. S.H.I.E.L.D. once had such a machine at their secret facility, but it had been destroyed, forcing them to rebuild it piece by piece from scratch.

"Doctor, we've found a lead on the material you requested,"

Barton said, approaching with a tablet and handing it over.

"Yes—this is it. Iridium."

Selvig's eyes lit up.

"It can generate antimatter. Extremely rare, and the core component of the entire machine. If S.H.I.E.L.D. discovers this, acquiring it will become much more difficult."

He handed the tablet back to Barton and resumed assembling the components.

At that moment, Loki strolled over leisurely.

"So," Loki said with a smile,

"you've found what you were looking for?"

Barton nodded.

"Yes. We have a lead."

"Do you need anything else?"

Loki asked.

He could hardly wait to sit upon the throne and rule Earth.

What Loki didn't realize was that his ambition was doomed from the start.

Even without S.H.I.E.L.D. or Lucas and his allies, the Ancient One alone would be enough.

Against her, even Odin himself might not prevail—let alone Loki.

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Chapter 176 - 176 – Locating Loki

"I need you to draw their attention."

Barton took out his bow and tested the tension.

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On the Helicarrier, most of the team had gone to rest. Only Coulson and Steve remained on duty.

Suddenly, a sharp alert sounded from one of the agents' computers.

"Sir, facial recognition has a match. The target has been identified at a museum in Germany."

Coulson immediately gestured, and the image was projected onto the main screen.

"It looks like he has no intention of hiding,"

Steve said, watching Loki on the screen, dressed in a tailored suit.

At that moment, Nick Fury entered the room and walked straight to the command platform.

"Captain, it's your turn to take the field."

Fury activated the communicator and briefed the situation.

Hearing the alert, everyone in the lounge quickly gathered in the command room. The final frozen frame on the screen showed Loki standing at the entrance of the museum.

"Tsk, tsk... this guy really has guts,"

Lucas said, still holding half a bag of snacks, paper slips stuck all over his face—clearly the aftermath of a game.

"You go ahead. I'm not going."

He tore the paper slips off his face and dropped into a chair.

"Why?"

Steve asked, puzzled.

"With you there, our odds are much better."

"I'm worried that if I show up, he'll just run,"

Lucas replied calmly.

"And I'm not wrong. He's seen what I can do—he watched me smash the Destroyer armor to pieces with a single blow. If he sees me again, he won't hesitate to flee."

Then Lucas looked at Fury.

"Besides, I'm worried Loki is pulling a feint. Barton is still under his mind control. But the footage only shows Loki alone. Where's Barton?"

Lucas's reminder hit the mark. The possibility of a diversion couldn't be ignored.

In the end, Fury decided that Steve would lead the mission, accompanied only by Natasha. Skye volunteered to go as well.

Lucas agreed. With her vibranium arm bracers, Skye could fully protect herself. It would also be a good chance for her to gain real combat experience.

---

Meanwhile, at a museum in Stuttgart, Germany...

A private gala was underway, attended by influential figures from various circles. The host was a bald man—and Loki's true target.

Dressed in a sharp suit, Loki descended the staircase slowly, scepter in hand. Soft violin music filled the hall as the elite mingled in small groups, completely unaware of his presence.

Soon, Loki spotted his target. The bald man was laughing and chatting animatedly with others.

Loki stepped forward, grabbed the man by the collar, and lifted him into the air with barely any effort before slamming him hard onto a nearby stone platform.

"Ah—!!"

The bald man screamed. Before anyone could react, Loki produced a device designed specifically to extract eyeballs and drove it mercilessly into the man's eye.

The intense burning sensation instantly shut down his brain. Under the laser's effect, the eyeball was destroyed in seconds.

At the same time, in a remote warehouse elsewhere, Barton was holding an identical device against a security scanner by a massive door. Bodies were scattered all around the warehouse.

The scanner registered the eyeball, and Barton used it to unlock the door. Inside lay the most critical material required to open the portal—iridium metal.

Back at the museum, Loki discarded the bald man's lifeless body and walked out calmly, ignoring the screams erupting behind him as the guests fled in panic.

Outside the museum, Loki had already changed into his iconic green robes and horned helmet.

Just as the crowd attempted to escape, Loki's projections appeared, blocking every possible exit.

"Kneel."

His shout carried overwhelming pressure. At the same time, multiple images of Loki appeared around the crowd, sealing off all escape routes.

With nowhere to run, the panicked crowd gathered together.

"I said—kneel."

The scepter flared with blinding light. An invisible force pressed down on everyone present, forcing their knees to buckle. One by one, they collapsed to the ground.

Loki spread his arms and laughed.

"Pathetic, spineless creatures. See how easy that was? Humanity's nature is submission. You long to be conquered, to kneel before power."

He looked down at the crowd.

"The darkness in your hearts drives you to chase authority and dominance, until you lose all trace of goodness. You want to be ruled. You were born to be ruled. You will always bow your heads—eager to be enslaved."

He swept his gaze across the kneeling figures. Not a single person dared to meet his eyes.

"Look at yourselves. You don't even have the courage to raise your heads. You've accepted slavery as your fate. You've forgotten how to resist. Look at how pitiful you are."

Loki walked slowly among them, continuing coldly:

"Among humanity, you consider yourselves the elite—the exploiters who rule over the masses. And now? Look around you. Look at your fellow 'elites.' Every last one of you is kneeling. Not a single soul dares to stand."

"You cherish your lives. You fear death. You've forgotten how to resist, indulging yourselves in decadence and excess. You only know how to oppress the weak, yet you're too cowardly to oppose those stronger than you."

"You deserve to be enslaved. You deserve to be the servants of the strong."

Loki's eyes were filled with contempt, as though he were looking at insects.

And he wasn't wrong.

These people—so finely dressed, so proud of their status—didn't dare to lift their heads, let alone resist. They feared death. If they died, their luxurious lives would end. Worst of all, they'd die before spending all their money.

Better to let the "foolish masses" rush forward and die first. Then they could reap the rewards.

It was precisely this mindset that made them kneel so willingly.

Loki despised them.

In Asgard, only those who dared to resist were worthy of respect.

In his eyes, these so-called elites were the true parasites.

Then—

An elderly man with white hair slowly stood up.

His body trembled like a leaf in the wind, as though he might collapse at any moment. Yet the resolve in his eyes surpassed everyone else present.

He wore plain, unremarkable clothing—nothing like the luxurious attire of the so-called upper class.

But he possessed something they lacked entirely:

Courage.

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Chapter 177 - 177 – Surrender Without Resistance

A trace of appreciation flashed through Loki's eyes.

At last, someone had dared to stand up and resist him. This was interesting. If everyone were nothing more than obedient lapdogs—spineless, pitiful creatures—he would have been deeply disappointed. Fortunately, not everyone had lost their backbone.

"Look at you miserable cowards,"

Loki sneered.

"You're all inferior to this old man. A bunch of useless trash."

His contemptuous gaze settled on the elderly man.

The old man shook his head.

"You're wrong. They deserve this, because they've never lived through an age of humiliation. Some of them were born with silver spoons in their mouths. They don't understand how this era came to be, and they've never truly tried to."

He paused, then continued:

"But in every age, there are always bastards like you—people who take pleasure in enslaving others. People just like those kneeling at your feet now. And there will always be people like me, who dare to resist tyranny, resist enslavement, and pursue freedom."

At that moment, everyone understood—this old man was likely a veteran. Only those who had lived through the darkest times truly understood how precious freedom was, and why resisting oppression and dictatorship mattered.

"Hahahaha!"

Loki laughed loudly.

"Well said! Among all of you, only you resemble a human being. I respect you—and I will personally send you on your way. I'll use you as an example."

As he spoke, Loki raised his scepter. A beam of light shot out instantly, reaching the old man in the blink of an eye.

The old man had already accepted his death. His face showed no fear as he stood ready to meet it.

Suddenly—

A figure descended from the sky. A shield intercepted the beam, deflecting it straight back at Loki.

Loki was knocked aside, rolling across the ground. The man with the shield rose to his feet.

It was Captain America.

"The last time I came to Germany,"

Steve said solemnly, stepping forward,

"there was someone like you—someone who believed himself above everyone else. We had a disagreement back then."

"And in the end, I won."

Some of the people behind him slowly stood up when they realized who he was, though most still knelt, too afraid to move.

"And nothing has changed."

As Steve spoke, a Quinjet appeared in the air behind him. The hatch opened, and Skye leapt down, landing beside him. Waves of energy rippled from her hands, the surrounding air vibrating visibly.

At the same time, Natasha maneuvered the Quinjet, heavy machine guns deploying and locking onto Loki.

"Loki, drop your weapon and surrender immediately!"

Natasha's voice boomed through the loudspeakers.

Loki suddenly raised his scepter and fired another beam. Reacting instantly, Natasha pulled the jet aside to evade it.

At the same moment, Steve hurled his shield, while Skye thrust both hands forward. A massive shockwave erupted.

The shockwave struck Loki first, catching him off guard and blasting him backward. Steve caught the returning shield and rushed in, delivering a powerful punch that sent Loki crashing to the ground.

With a loud bang, Loki slammed down. His scepter fired again, and Steve blocked with his shield, the tremendous force driving him back several steps as Loki regained his footing.

Then—

Skye appeared out of nowhere. Another shockwave detonated, compressing Loki's body painfully and sending him flying once more.

Skye dropped into a crouch, both palms pressed against the ground. A second shockwave rippled outward. The earth beneath everyone's feet shook violently, like an earthquake, as jagged spikes burst from the ground and surged toward Loki.

Just before reaching him, the scepter's light flared again, slicing through the spikes and redirecting the attack toward Skye.

She raised her arms to block it. Thanks to the vibranium, she wasn't injured, but the sheer force still hurled her backward.

Rat-a-tat-tat—

Natasha opened fire from the Quinjet. Earlier, Loki had been surrounded by civilians, and she'd held back to avoid casualties. Now that he was clear of the crowd, she didn't hesitate.

Even so, the bullets did little. Most were either dodged or deflected by the scepter's energy.

Then, a familiar, frivolous voice crackled over the comms.

"Yo~ Agent Romanoff, miss me?"

At the same time, loud, driving heavy metal music blasted across the square.

Natasha didn't need to look.

Only one person would make an entrance like that.

A red-and-gold armored figure streaked down from the night sky, thrusters blazing. Twin repulsor blasts slammed directly into Loki.

Loki was sent flying yet again. Seizing the opening, Skye lunged forward and punched him, the explosive shockwave shattering the ground beneath him.

Above, Tony hovered with arms spread wide. Every weapon on his suit deployed at once, red targeting lasers locking onto Loki.

Pinned by Skye's shockwave, Loki couldn't even stand. He lay on the ground, completely restrained.

"Ohhh,"

Tony drawled.

"So you're Loki? I think Bambi suits you better."

A flash of light rippled over Loki's body. His horned helmet and green robes vanished, replaced by a dark green armored suit. Slowly, he raised both hands in surrender.

Seeing this, Tony finally powered down his weapons.

"Mr. Stark?"

Steve said.

"That's me, Captain,"

Tony replied.

Skye dispersed the shockwave, and Loki regained his freedom of movement. He made no attempt to resist, allowing Tony and Steve to escort him onto the Quinjet.

Inside the aircraft, Natasha had already contacted headquarters.

"Did he say anything?"

Nick Fury asked.

"No. He hasn't said a word since boarding,"

Natasha replied, glancing back at Loki—tightly bound and completely still—before refocusing on piloting.

"Bring him back as soon as possible,"

Fury said.

"We're running out of time."

The transmission ended.

Inside the Quinjet, Tony walked over behind Skye, who was seated in the copilot's chair.

"How come it's just you?"

Tony asked.

"Lucas really ditched you? That doesn't sound like him."

Skye flipped a few switches, then turned around.

"He didn't come. He said if Loki saw him, Loki would just run."

"Huh? Loki's met him before?"

Tony frowned. He'd been locked away in his lab during the New Mexico hammer incident and had no idea Lucas was involved.

"Yeah. Back during that hammer event in New Mexico."

Tony shrugged.

Just then, Steve walked over, his expression serious.

"I've got a bad feeling about this."

Steve's brow was furrowed. Something still didn't sit right with him.

"What, because Bambi got caught a little too easily?"

Tony replied casually, clearly unconvinced by premonitions.

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Chapter 178 - 178 – Thor Arrives

"I don't believe he could be captured so easily,"

Steve said, voicing his doubts.

"According to S.H.I.E.L.D.'s intelligence, he's a god from mythology. He shouldn't be this weak."

As Steve pointed out, no matter what, Loki was still a god. It made no sense for him to surrender after taking only a few hits. He wasn't even injured—there was no sign that he'd lost the ability to fight.

Tony shrugged, still unconcerned.

As the two continued their awkward back-and-forth, lightning suddenly erupted across the sky, thunder crashing violently.

"Where did this lightning come from? The forecast said clear skies today,"

Natasha said, glancing outside.

The lightning and thunder grew more intense, sending an instinctive chill through everyone.

Loki raised an eyebrow and looked out the window. Steve noticed the movement immediately.

"What's wrong?"

Steve asked.

"Afraid of lightning?"

Steve's uneasy premonition grew stronger.

"No,"

Loki replied calmly.

"I just don't like the guy who usually comes with it."

He looked outside again. The lightning became even more violent, several bolts detonating not far from the Quinjet.

Suddenly—

Boom!

Something slammed into the top of the aircraft. The Quinjet lurched violently. Steve and Tony exchanged a glance at once—Steve grabbed his shield, and Tony snapped his helmet into place.

Outside, kneeling on the roof of the Quinjet, was Thor. He looked down as if he could see straight through the hull, his gaze fixed on Loki inside.

Tony immediately hit the hatch controls. The door opened, and just as he was about to fly out, a blond man wielding a hammer appeared in the doorway.

The God of Thunder—Thor.

The moment Loki saw his brother, he drew in a sharp breath, a flash of panic crossing his face.

Without hesitation, Tony raised his hand to fire a repulsor blast—but before it could launch, Thor smashed him aside with a single swing of Mjölner, sending Tony crashing back toward Natasha and Skye in the cockpit.

Thor then grabbed Loki by the collar, hauled him up, and hurled him straight out of the aircraft. A heartbeat later, Thor himself followed, leaping out after him.

Tony struggled to his feet, rolling his shoulders with a grimace.

"Great. Another freak. One wasn't enough, huh?"

"That guy's from Asgard too?"

Natasha asked, glancing back.

At the same time, Skye stood up from her seat, clearly preparing to jump after them.

Tony reacted instantly, grabbing her arm.

"Hey, hey—what do you think you're doing?"

"You can't fly. Jumping out now is suicide. You really ready to leave Lucas behind?"

Skye froze. She knew she'd acted on impulse. She didn't actually think she'd die—she could use her shockwaves to slow her descent, canceling out gravity just before landing.

But Tony didn't know that. To him, it looked like she was about to leap to her death, which also startled Steve and Natasha.

"Oh, right—I forgot to mention,"

Skye said casually.

"I can use shockwaves to cancel out falling momentum. I can't fly yet, but with enough practice, I probably could."

Tony cut her off immediately.

"No. You stay on the plane. End of discussion."

"If anything happens to you, how am I supposed to explain that to Lucas?"

If Skye were seriously injured, Tony had no doubt Lucas would tear New York apart.

With that, Tony flew out of the hatch, heading after Thor. Steve moved to the edge as well, shield in hand.

Strapping on a parachute pack out of habit—whether he'd need it or not—Steve gave Skye one last warning not to act recklessly, then jumped out after them.

"They're all like this,"

Skye muttered, slumping into Loki's former seat.

"I'm really strong, you know. The two of them together might not even beat me."

Natasha smiled faintly.

"They just don't want you getting hurt. This is thousands of meters in the air."

"Besides, isn't it better staying up here with me? You'll have plenty of chances to shine later."

Unlike Skye, Natasha knew her limits. This wasn't something an ordinary human should jump into, and she had no intention of pretending otherwise.

Skye pouted but didn't argue, finally settling back into the copilot's seat.

---

Thor slammed Loki down onto a rocky mountaintop, smashing the stone beneath him into a crater.

"Where is the Tesseract?"

Thor demanded, hammer in hand, his expression grim.

"Oh~ isn't this my dear brother?"

Loki said with a smile as he lay there.

"Did you miss me?"

"I'm not joking, Loki."

Thor's voice hardened.

"Tell me where the Tesseract is—now!"

Lightning crackled around Mjölmir as Thor pressed it against Loki's throat.

Loki remained unfazed.

"You destroyed the Bifrost,"

he said lightly.

"So how much of Father's power did it take to send you to Earth this time?"

Thor hauled Loki up by the collar, sorrow filling his eyes.

"You know, I thought you were dead. Do you know how devastated Mother was when she heard?"

"She sits in your room every day now, staring at your childhood toys."

At the mention of their mother, grief flickered in Loki's eyes as well. She was the one person in all of Asgard who had always cared for him—and the one he cared about most.

Tears welled up. He regretted many things, especially that he never got to say goodbye to her.

"Father was heartbroken too,"

Thor continued.

"He sent countless people across the cosmos to search for you."

"Come home with me, brother. Think about our past—how we played together, fought side by side. Have you really forgotten all of that?"

Thor looked at him as if the Loki of old were still standing before him.

"Your father—Odin—is your father,"

Loki snapped.

"Not mine."

The moment he learned the truth of his origins, Odin had ceased to be his father. Loki's feelings toward Odin were painfully complex. As a Frost Giant, Odin was—by blood and by history—the enemy of his people.

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Chapter 179 - 179 – The Clash Erupts

On the other hand, aside from the issue of succession to the throne, Odin had always treated Loki and Thor exactly the same since childhood, never favoring one over the other, raising Loki as his own son. This was precisely why Loki's hostility toward Odin had always been so conflicted and unclear.

"Loki, give up that unrealistic fantasy of yours,"

Thor continued to persuade him.

"Come back to Asgard with me. Come home."

Thor truly believed that Loki was not evil by nature.

"Heh... I don't have a home,"

Loki said with a self-mocking smile.

"That place stopped being my home a long time ago."

Ever since learning the truth of his origins, he had never considered Asgard his home again. It was the home of the Asgardians—not the home of Loki the Frost Giant.

Thor froze. Loki's words pierced him deeply. He instinctively tightened his grip on Mjölfnir.

"Listen to me, Loki, I—"

Boom!

A beam of light suddenly slammed into Thor, blasting him backward and carrying him straight up into the sky.

"?? I'm listening~~"

Loki tilted his head at the now-empty cliffside, cupping his ear theatrically.

Tony drove Thor higher and higher before plunging headfirst toward the forest below. At the last moment, Tony braked sharply. Thor, carried by inertia, smashed into the ground, carving a ten-meter trench before finally stopping.

Tony landed directly in front of him. Thor stood up unscathed, the two staring each other down.

"You will pay for this, Midgardian,"

Thor said coldly, summoning Mjölhnir back into his hand.

"You took something that belongs to us. It needs to be returned."

Tony showed no fear whatsoever.

"And you—what opera troupe did you crawl out of?"

"That cape of yours is even more dramatic than someone I know."

"And that outfit—no undershirt? Doesn't that chafe?"

Tony's verbal barrage was in full swing. As he said, Thor's armor left both arms completely exposed, his upper body resembling a metal vest. The scaled soft armor he once wore was gone.

"Midgardians,"

Thor said imperiously,

"Loki will face judgment in Asgard. This world is not worthy of imprisoning him."

Tony snorted.

"Sure. Once he hands over the Tesseract, you can take him wherever you want. Until then, he's not going anywhere."

His faceplate snapped shut as Tony raised both hands, adopting a combat stance.

Thor sighed helplessly, glancing down at Mjölfnir.

"Midgardians are as unreasonable as ever."

He hurled the hammer without another word.

Mjölfnir smashed into Tony, the tremendous force sending him crashing through more than a dozen trees before he finally hit the ground.

That single strike caused five percent damage to the armor. Although Tony's suit was vastly upgraded and plated with vibranium on the exterior, the internal components were still high-strength alloys—no match for the raw impact of Mjölfnir.

"Sir, armor damage at six percent. No critical issues detected. All systems operational,"

JARVIS reported immediately.

"Alright... guess he's got some bite,"

Tony muttered.

The thrusters ignited, lifting him back into the air.

Thor recalled Mjölfnir, their battle unfolding clearly under Loki's watch from the distant peak.

Spinning his hammer rapidly, Thor summoned a violent gale.

Tony fired a repulsor blast, knocking Thor off his feet and slamming him into a tree.

Seizing the moment, Tony rushed in at high speed. A boosted knee strike sent Thor flying again—so hard that even Mjölfnir was knocked from his hand.

Boom—crack!

Lightning split the sky. Thor was genuinely furious now.

Mjölfnir returned to his grasp as he slowly raised it overhead. Countless bolts of lightning converged on the hammer, illuminating the pitch-black forest. Stray arcs obliterated every tree around him.

Tony stared, momentarily stunned.

This felt... familiar.

Then it clicked.

"JARVIS, get ready."

"All systems ready, sir."

Boom!

The lightning slammed directly into Tony—but instead of being destroyed, he calmly raised one hand. The electricity was absorbed completely, funneling into the hexagonal arc reactor on his chest.

"Sir, energy output has reached four hundred percent. It appears the experiment was a success,"

JARVIS reported.

"Wow—nice,"

Tony grinned.

"Looks like Lucas officially became my charging station."

Not only had his depleted power been instantly restored, it had overflowed massively.

Tony raised both hands. Three blinding energy beams fired simultaneously, converging midair into a single massive blast that slammed into Thor.

Thor didn't even have time to react. He was blasted backward, tearing through countless trees as the ground was churned up behind him.

Tony didn't waste the opening. He grabbed Thor mid-flight, soared upward, and smashed him straight into a mountainside.

Boom!

The impact gouged a massive crater into the rock. Tony kept going, dragging Thor upward along the cliff face, sparks flying as stone scraped violently against armor and flesh.

With immense effort, Thor braced himself, kicked off the rock, and broke free. Using his overwhelming physical strength, he reversed the hold and drove Tony straight back toward the ground.

Trees snapped like twigs as they plowed through the forest before crashing to a stop, both rolling across the ground.

Thor rose first and slammed a punch into Tony's helmet with a thunderous clang. Without vibranium, the helmet would have caved in.

Tony countered with a punch of his own—but Thor caught his wrist effortlessly. The two locked into a raw contest of strength.

Despite the armor's enhancements, Tony was clearly losing. Thinking fast, he fired a point-blank repulsor blast into Thor's face, forcing him off-balance.

Tony followed up with another punch, thrusters flaring at his wrist—but Thor caught him again.

Thor twisted and delivered a crushing blow, sending Tony flying. In sheer strength, Thor held an overwhelming advantage—far beyond what the armor could match.

Tony stabilized midair and charged back in.

The two collided once more, fists slamming into flesh and metal alike, the fight erupting into a brutal, no-holds-barred brawl.

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Chapter 180 - 180 – Bringing Loki Back

Suddenly, a shield flew in, striking both combatants at the same time before snapping back into its owner's hand.

"Are you two done yet?"

Steve leapt down from a broken tree trunk, fixing his gaze on the furious Thor.

"What exactly did you come to Earth for? Just to fight us?"

Facing Steve's questioning, Thor immediately retorted, "I am here to shatter Loki's scheme and take him back to Asgard to stand trial."

Steve nodded. "Then you should put down your hammer. Our objectives are the same—we are not enemies."

Steve remained calm and rational. He had already guessed Thor's purpose. Since both sides shared the same goal, there was no reason to fight each other.

But then Tony stirred the pot again.

"Well... he really loves that hammer of his. Practically inseparable."

Thor, who had been about to end the confrontation, flared up once more and swung his hammer, smashing Tony away with a single blow.

"You want me to put down my hammer?!" Thor roared. "Are you provoking me, Midgardian?!"

Enraged, Thor shot into the air, his hammer wreathed in terrifying lightning, and brought it crashing down toward Steve.

Steve raised his shield to meet the attack.

Boom—!

Thunder and lightning exploded as an invisible shockwave erupted outward. Everything within a hundred-meter radius was flattened. Trees were not only uprooted—they were pulverized into dust.

As the smoke cleared, Steve still stood with his shield raised. In front of him now stood another figure, holding a long sword that blocked Thor's strike. The violent shockwave had burst from the point where their weapons met.

Karl had appeared.

Wielding the Ultimate Divine Weapon, Karl stopped Thor's blow. Purple lightning coiled around his blade like living serpents, steadily suppressing the lightning surging from Thor's hammer.

"It's you again! Are you with them?" Thor demanded.

The moment Thor recognized Karl, a surge of resentment flooded his chest. The memory of having his hammer taken from him resurfaced, igniting his fury.

"Relax," Karl said calmly, withdrawing his sword to show he had no intention of fighting. "Our goals are the same. There's no need to fight—unless you want your brother to laugh at you."

Karl hadn't planned on coming initially. He had simply forgotten that Thor would intercept Steve and Tony during Loki's transfer. Once he remembered, he rushed over immediately. He couldn't be sure Loki wouldn't seize the opportunity to escape—after all, he was the God of Mischief. Leaving behind an expendable duplicate while the real body slipped away would have been entirely in character.

Tony walked over and positioned himself beside Karl, ready to react if Thor attacked again. At the same time, Onion had silently appeared behind Thor, staring straight at him. If Thor so much as tried to harm Karl, Onion's razor-sharp beak would pierce his skull without hesitation.

Steve also held his shield at the ready.

"Fine," Thor said at last. "I will accept cooperation. But Loki must face judgment in Asgard. You Midgardians have no right to judge him."

Thor remained adamant. On one hand, he had promised Odin and Frigga to bring Loki back. On the other, he was protecting Loki—if left on Earth, Loki would likely end up dissected in a laboratory.

"That's acceptable," Karl replied. "I can decide that much. Once this is over, you may take your brother back. We won't stop you."

Steve was about to object, but Tony stopped him and shook his head. Steve fell silent.

"Agreed," Thor said, extending his hand.

Karl extended his as well. The two clasped hands, sealing the agreement.

"And now—"

Karl suddenly changed his tone and opened his palm.

Hummm—

Mjölfnir began to tremble violently. Thor could clearly feel the hammer's delighted response. Right before his eyes, it flew out of his grasp and landed firmly in Karl's hand.

Crackling purple lightning replaced Thor's blue arcs entirely. Empowered by the violet energy, Mjölfnir appeared even more mysterious and profound. Even the runes etched into the hammer glowed purple.

"No—damn it! That's my hammer!!" Thor shouted.

Thor felt his connection to Mjölfnir severed once again. This wasn't the first time—it had happened before. His hammer seemed closer to this Midgardian than to him.

Karl casually weighed the hammer in his hand, then hurled it toward a distant peak—the very mountaintop where Thor and Loki had spoken earlier.

Just as Karl had anticipated, Loki was trying to flee. The hammer descended from the sky and slammed him to the ground, pinning him in place.

Karl controlled the force perfectly. It wasn't enough to kill Loki—only to injure him slightly and immobilize him beneath the hammer.

"What are you doing?! Loki!!" Thor shouted.

Thor desperately tried to summon Mjölfnir, but no matter how hard he tried, it did not respond.

He sprinted toward the peak. Even without the hammer, his body was still formidable and his divine power intact. After several massive leaps, he reached the summit and found Loki.

Seeing that Loki was unharmed, Thor finally grasped the hammer and hauled his brother up.

That moment had terrified Loki. He had truly thought Mjölfnir would crush him to death—especially with that violent purple lightning, far more ferocious than Thor's. Blocking it would have taken considerable effort.

Soon after, Tony and Karl also arrived at the peak. Riding atop Onion, Karl finally faced Loki properly for the first time.

"So you're even more famous than the rumors suggest... Atreus."

Karl smiled at Loki.

Both Loki and Thor froze.

Atreus? Whose name was that?

"Atreus?" Thor looked at Loki in confusion. "Is that what you're called on Midgard? Why do you have two names?"

Loki rolled his eyes. My idiotic brother...

If I knew, I'd have told you already. I'm confused too.

"Uh... are you talking to me?" Loki asked cautiously.

"Yes. I'm talking to you—Atreus," Karl said with a nod.

In Karl's previous world, the name Atreus was known to everyone—chosen by the Ghost of Sparta himself for his son. In Norse tradition, Atreus was another name for Loki, given by the giantess Laufey.

This world simply didn't know that yet.

"Why are you calling me Atreus?" Loki asked, curiosity getting the better of him.

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