

Marvel Manifestor

Chapter 191 - 191 – The Chitauri Invasion

Everyone immediately understood. Just as Tony had said, Stark Tower perfectly fit Loki's next move.

"Loki may already be setting things up," Tony said grimly. "We have to get there now. We must stop him before he opens the portal."

The team quickly began preparing and soon regrouped on the Helicarrier's flight deck. A brightly colored Quinjet was already waiting there, fully fueled and ready for takeoff.

"Sir, the aircraft is fully prepped. Weapons and propulsion systems are all green. We can launch immediately," a pilot reported to Nick Fury before hurrying off.

The Quinjet in front of them was Lucas's personal craft. After Tony's upgrades, its firepower far surpassed standard S.H.I.E.L.D. Quinjets. Tony had even installed energy weapons identical to his armor's repulsors, powered directly by an arc reactor to fire high-output energy blasts.

Everyone boarded quickly. Natasha and Skye took their seats in the cockpit and powered up the engines.

The Quinjet peeled away from the Helicarrier in a sharp arc, disappearing into the sky. Nick Fury and Coulson immediately headed to the command center, where a terminal awaited them. Skye had left her laptop behind so Fury could manage the Helicarrier, and Agent Hill was already monitoring the system readouts.

"Everyone," Fury said as satellite feeds displayed a full view of New York, his expression deadly serious. "Communications are synced worldwide now. I only have one thing to say."

"Beat Loki so badly his own mother won't recognize him."

Laughter broke out inside the Quinjet. At this point, even his mother wouldn't be spared.

"JARVIS, shut down all reactors in Stark Tower immediately," Tony ordered mid-flight.

With all reactors offline, Stark Tower would lose its power supply completely—making it impossible for Loki to open a portal, no matter what he tried.

Meanwhile, Lucas wasn't inside the Quinjet either. At this stage, only Lucas, Tony, and Thor were capable of true flight. Wanda and Skye still lacked sufficient control over their abilities; jumping and short bursts were fine, but sustained flight was beyond them.

As a result, Lucas and Tony surged ahead, their speed far surpassing the Quinjet.

At the top of Stark Tower's massive rooftop platform, a colossal machine was already humming to life. Dr. Erik Selvig was making final adjustments.

"Notify the NYPD and coordinate with S.H.I.E.L.D. to evacuate civilians," Fury ordered Coulson immediately. "Get as many people out as possible. Minimize casualties at all costs."

Fury had already spotted the towering blue beam of light piercing the sky above New York.

Coulson quickly contacted the NYPD and every relevant agency, including the U.S. Army and the National Guard.

Soon, tanks rolled through the streets of New York. Soldiers moved into position in full combat gear, while police and guardsmen began evacuating civilians outward from Stark Tower.

At Lucas's apartment building, Moguri had already raised a barrier with his staff.

The barrier enveloped the entire building and extended dozens of meters underground. Residents crowded the windows, unable to leave the building due to the barrier.

At the same time, a message appeared in everyone's mind—information about the barrier itself. Moguri reassured them that the apartment complex was absolutely safe. Only then did the residents calm down, quickly turning from panic to excited spectators.

That was human nature: once people knew they were safe, curiosity took over.

Meanwhile, atop the New York Sanctum, the Ancient One stood with the Sanctum's guardian, both fully prepared for the arrival of extraterrestrial forces. Though she wasn't particularly worried, she chose to be present just in case.

Suddenly—boom!

A massive blue pillar of light erupted from the top of Stark Tower, blasting apart the clouds above New York.

As the machine's output increased, a pitch-black裂缝裂开 across the sky. From the other side, countless alien figures poured through—the Chitauri, swarming toward the city like a flood.

"JARVIS, initiate combat mode. All power to weapons," Tony commanded.

The HUD inside his helmet instantly shifted from blue to red. Every thruster on his armor flared crimson.

Lucas released Onion to fight independently, then drew the Ultimate Divine Weapon in his right hand and the Punisher in his left. He shot upward alongside Tony.

His cloak spread wide as Lucas slammed head-on into the Chitauri formation like a meteor.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Gunfire echoed through the sky. Every shot dropped a Chitauri soldier. Individually, they weren't particularly strong—their greatest advantage was sheer numbers.

Worse, the Chitauri lacked independent will. Their consciousness was controlled by a central leader, turning them into fearless expendable troops with no regard for survival.

Purple lightning ignited in Lucas's eyes. Thunder wrapped itself around the Ultimate Divine Weapon as he swung his blade.

A massive bolt of lightning surged forward like a roaring dragon.

Rumble—!!

The sky blazed white. Thunder roared like an ancient beast. Countless Chitauri soldiers were obliterated, their bodies disintegrating into nothingness.

Tony unleashed his full arsenal without restraint. Missiles and shells formed a dense killing net, detonating one after another in the sky. Chitauri troops fell like charred insects, raining down onto the city.

Working together, the two wiped out the first wave completely.

But before either of them could catch their breath, another massive swarm surged forward.

This time, something new appeared.

Leviathans.

These colossal creatures served as troop carriers, their massive bodies covered in Chitauri soldiers. Their sheer size and destructive power dwarfed anything before.

"Damn it—what the hell are those things?!" Tony muttered, momentarily stunned.

Missiles streaked toward the nearest Leviathan—but after a barrage of explosions, it emerged completely unscathed. Its thick metallic armor absorbed everything.

Lucas hovered in the air, sword raised high above his head. Violet lightning burned in his eyes, almost solid.

"Judgment of Thunder."

The moment the words left his mouth, dark clouds gathered instantly. New York's sky dimmed as heavy storm clouds rolled in, lightning crawling through them like living creatures awaiting command.

At the same time, a bolt of blue lightning struck downward.

Thor appeared beside Lucas, hammer raised high.

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Chapter 192 - 192 – The Battle of New York Begins

"I finally understand why Mjolnir favors you more than me," Thor said, lightning flashing in his eyes. "You're more like a god of thunder than I am."

Above them, blue lightning continued to gather in the sky.

At a certain moment, the surroundings suddenly fell into absolute silence. The thunder and lightning that had filled the air just a second earlier seemed frozen in time—then vanished completely.

BOOM—!!

As Lucas swung his sword, heaven and earth changed color in an instant. Whether sky or ground, everything was drowned in a single, blinding shade of violet.

Countless bolts of lightning surged forth from the clouds like an unstoppable army. The moment the thunder touched the Chitauri soldiers, they didn't even have time to react—vanishing in an instant, leaving behind not even a trace of ash.

Above New York, only raging lightning remained. And at the very center of that storm stood Lucas, towering amid a sea of thunder like a god descending upon the mortal world.

At that moment—whether it was Natasha and the others rushing toward the battlefield, the troops standing ready on the ground, or the civilians fleeing through the streets—

Countless people stopped and looked up. The image of Lucas, standing like a thunder god amid the lightning, was burned deeply into their memories. This earth-shattering scene would be remembered by innumerable witnesses for the rest of their lives.

Even the heavily armored Leviathan beasts were incinerated the instant they touched the lightning, disappearing from existence.

The Chitauri soldiers pouring out of the rift didn't even have time to admire New York's skyscrapers before they were wiped away by the storm.

The lightning lasted for nearly a full minute. During that time, not a single Chitauri escaped. Countless invaders perished beneath the violet thunder—yet even more continued to surge forward relentlessly.

When the lightning finally faded, even Lucas was breathing slightly heavier. He looked at the endless Chitauri horde and shook his head inwardly.

He had known from his past life's memories that the Chitauri were countless—but only now did he truly grasp what numbers like a plague of locusts really meant.

At that moment, the Quinjet arrived. Steve was the first to leap out, followed closely by the rest of the team.

The instant Steve landed, he hurled his shield, striking a Chitauri soldier who was about to attack civilians. Without pausing, he charged straight into the enemy ranks.

At the same time, two figures—one red, one white—swung rapidly between buildings, webs firing nonstop as they rescued civilians one after another.

Peter even hoisted an entire car and threw it at the Chitauri. The moment the car smashed into them, an arrow shot through the air, piercing the fuel tank. The vehicle exploded like a bomb.

"Skye! Too many civilians here—clear the area now!" Steve shouted as he saw her arrive.

Behind him were crowds of evacuating civilians. Alone, he couldn't hold back the dozens of Chitauri advancing toward them.

"Got it!"

Skye rushed forward. Shockwaves erupted from her hands, and then she slammed them into the ground.

Boom—!!

Countless spikes burst from the earth. The Chitauri ahead were instantly skewered, turning into grotesque pin cushions. The shockwaves continued outward, collapsing a damaged building in the distance. Massive chunks of rubble fell, blocking the Chitauri's advance.

"Captain, now!" Skye shouted.

Steve instantly understood. He sprinted toward the rubble, leapt into the air, and released his shield.

At the same time, an arrow appeared out of nowhere, striking the shield and ricocheting off it—redirected straight into the remaining Chitauri ranks.

BOOM—!!

A violent explosion erupted, flames shooting skyward as the remaining Chitauri were blown away.

Steve turned and gave Barton a thumbs-up in the distance.

Barton always provided support at exactly the right moment. His arrows never missed, each one delivering a lethal blow.

Rumble—!!

Suddenly, a ten-story building collapsed. Beneath it were evacuating civilians and police officers helping them escape. The rubble was about to crush them.

A surge of scarlet energy appeared. The falling debris froze in midair, suspended by Wanda's power as she held her arms aloft.

"Get out of here, now!" Wanda shouted.

The civilians hurried away, and the Chitauri immediately swarmed in.

Wanda narrowed her eyes and hurled the massive stones at the incoming enemies, smashing them apart.

Army tanks began firing round after round, but their effectiveness was limited. With civilians nearby, they couldn't unleash full-scale bombardments—only controlled, localized strikes.

Natasha piloted Lucas's modified Quinjet through the air, unleashing nonstop fire on the Chitauri army. Thanks to Tony's upgraded weapons and targeting systems, she rarely missed. One major advantage of energy weapons was that, as long as power remained, ammunition was effectively unlimited.

With the arc reactor's immense output, Natasha fired freely, energy cannons raining destruction as if ammunition cost nothing.

"Director, I'm officially requesting we partner with Stark Industries to upgrade all our Quinjets," Natasha said excitedly. "This is way too satisfying."

She'd never fought such a resource-rich battle before—she practically wanted to weld the fire button in place.

"Thor, Loki is yours," Lucas said, glancing toward Stark Tower. "He's at the very top."

A green figure was clearly visible there.

Thor followed Lucas's gaze and immediately understood. Spinning his hammer, he shot off toward Loki.

"Loki!!"

Thor descended from the sky and slammed his hammer down without the slightest restraint.

Loki hastily raised the Mind Stone scepter to block.

Boom!

The ground beneath Loki shattered inch by inch. Forced to one knee, he struggled desperately against Thor's overwhelming strength.

"Look at what you've done, Loki!" Thor roared. "Shut down the Tesseract now, or I'll destroy it!"

Thor increased his power, driving Loki's feet into the ground.

"Hahaha, my foolish brother," Loki laughed wildly. "You can't destroy it. You can't stop me. Now there is only—war!"

Loki suddenly forced Thor back and thrust the scepter straight toward his chest.

Thor dodged and countered with a hammer strike, lightning crashing down alongside it. A translucent barrier flared around Loki, blocking the lightning completely.

With a thunderous blast, a beam fired from the scepter. Thor blocked it with Mjolnir, releasing lightning in response.

The shockwaves from their clash shattered Stark Tower's neon logo. The massive sign tore free and plummeted downward.

On the ground, Gwen kicked a Chitauri soldier away when she suddenly felt the light above her vanish. Looking up, she saw the massive sign falling toward her.

She didn't dodge.

A web shot out, sticking to the sign. Gwen swung hard.

"Die already!!"

The enormous sign changed direction midair under the pull of the web, smashing into the Chitauri below. The residual energy within the sign

detonated, exploding like a fragmentation grenade and shredding Chitauri soldiers one after another.

Chapter 193 - 193 – The Leviathan Beast

"Everyone, I need a higher vantage point."

Barton's voice sounded through the team's earpieces.

"I've got you," Stark replied immediately.

He changed direction, located Barton, and carried him straight to the rooftop of a nearby building before turning back at once to reengage the Chitauri.

At the same time, another Leviathan beast emerged from the rift. Its enormous body smashed straight through a building, reducing it to rubble.

Seeing this, Lucas acted without hesitation. He slashed several times in rapid succession, countless wind blades tearing through the Leviathan's armor. Thick green blood sprayed everywhere.

"ROOOAR—!!"

The Leviathan let out a furious howl and charged straight at Lucas. Its massive jaws opened wide—and in a single bite, it swallowed him whole.

"Lucas!!"

In the chaos, only Tony saw Lucas being devoured. He rushed toward the Leviathan at full speed, laser emitters deploying from his arms.

Just as Tony was about to fire, the Leviathan's abdomen suddenly exploded.

Boom—!!

Countless wind blades burst outward from within, instantly dismembering the creature. Its massive body was torn apart into chunks of flesh that rained down from the sky.

Lucas hovered calmly in midair, his cloak wrapping around him protectively. He was completely uninjured.

"You scared the hell out of me," Tony muttered. "I thought I'd have to wait until that thing digested you before seeing you again."

Lucas smirked slightly. Seeing him unharmed, Tony finally relaxed.

"Where's Hulk?" Lucas asked. "That guy should be smashing Leviathans by now. Why hasn't he shown up?"

Bruce was still aboard the Quinjet. He had Natasha fly them directly above a Leviathan's head.

"Is now good, Bruce?" Natasha asked.

"It is," Bruce replied.

"Then smash away," Natasha said calmly.

Bruce shrugged. "Honestly, I've been wanting to do this for a while."

"ROOOAR—!!!"

A thunderous roar echoed across New York as a green figure dropped from the sky like a meteor, slamming straight onto the Leviathan's head. The impact knocked the massive creature sideways, sending it crashing into a building.

What followed was the sickening sound of tearing flesh. Pieces of armor were hurled out of the collapsing structure one after another. With a final boom, a gigantic severed head flew out—then Hulk emerged, charging headlong into the Chitauri without a second thought.

All the pent-up rage he had been holding back exploded at that moment.

An enraged Hulk was unstoppable—especially against enemies who relied solely on numbers.

At the top of Stark Tower, Thor and Loki were still locked in battle, but Loki was clearly losing ground. After knocking him down with a hammer strike, Thor grabbed Loki by the collar and lifted him off the ground.

"Open your eyes, Loki!" Thor shouted. "Look at what you've done! Do you really think starting a war will let you conquer this world? All you're doing is drowning it in blood—and in the end, you'll gain nothing!"

Thor demanded that Loki face reality. Having lived through war himself, Thor now understood that it brought only suffering—something Loki had yet to realize.

"It's too late, brother," Loki said weakly, his body trembling. "There's no stopping it now."

"It's not too late!" Thor insisted. "Tell me how to shut down the Tesseract, and we can still end this!"

Thor stared into Loki's eyes and saw fear there.

Then Loki suddenly smiled.

A dagger flashed, stabbing straight into Thor.

Everything before that had been an act. The God of Mischief was still the God of Mischief.

"My brother," Loki sneered, "you've always been naïve. I can't believe you still are."

Thor looked at Loki with burning fury—not just anger, but heartbreak. Even now, Loki showed no remorse.

"Loki!!"

Thor kicked him away, then closed the distance in a blur and slammed him violently into the ground.

Loki screamed. The scepter flew from his grasp and skidded across the platform. Taking advantage of the moment, Loki rolled away and landed atop a Chitauri skimmer.

"LOKI!!!" Thor roared, watching him retreat.

At that moment, Barton spotted Loki in the distance. He drew his bow and released an arrow without hesitation.

Loki sensed it coming and casually caught the arrow midair.

"Hmph. How tri—"

The arrow exploded.

Caught completely off guard, Loki was blasted off the skimmer and sent flying—crashing hard onto one of Stark Tower's platforms.

On the ground, Steve continued fighting desperately against the Chitauri. Beside him, Peter, Gwen, and Felicia were visibly exhausted as well.

"This can't go on," Steve said grimly. "There are too many of them. On the ground, we're completely outmatched."

He turned to Wanda.

"I'm counting on you, Wanda. I need large-scale firepower. Skye will support you. You need to unleash your power—no holding back."

After days of working together, Steve understood Wanda's abilities. This was a risk they had to take.

"I understand, Captain," Wanda replied. "But I need the civilians cleared out first. I won't risk hurting them."

She was ready to go all out. The Chitauri were endless. With Lucas, Tony, and Natasha dominating the skies, the ground battle fell to them.

"Skye," Steve said, "use your shockwaves to form a defensive line. Don't let them advance another step."

Behind them was a subway entrance. Steve intended to move all civilians underground, but that meant they had to hold this position at all costs—no Chitauri could be allowed into the station.

"No problem, Captain."

Skye slammed her foot down. Shockwaves rippled through the ground as countless spikes erupted, forming a massive barrier within a ten-meter radius.

"Peter, Gwen, Felicia," Steve continued, "I need you to destroy the other subway entrances nearby. Make sure those aliens can't access the tunnels from anywhere else."

"Got it, Captain!"

The three immediately split off toward the other entrances.

Steve climbed onto a vehicle in front of the police and National Guard, shouting orders.

"Send teams into the surrounding buildings! Get everyone into basements or the subway—keep them off the streets! Then lock down every road in this area!"

Before he even finished speaking, several Chitauri rushed in. Steve raised his shield, blocked their attacks, and took them down with a flurry of punches and kicks. The sight left the officers staring in stunned silence.

"What are you waiting for? Move!!"

Steve barked. The police snapped out of it and immediately relayed the orders.

"Wanda, it's up to you now!"

With that, Steve joined the evacuation efforts, leaving only Wanda and Skye behind.

"Skye," Wanda said quietly, "if I lose control... knock me out with your shockwaves."

The two exchanged a knowing look.

They both understood—Skye wasn't there just to maintain the defense line.

She was there to stop Wanda if things went wrong.

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Skye nodded firmly. "Don't worry. You can do this."

Wanda's expression turned solemn as she faced the dense swarm of Chitauri soldiers descending from the sky.

"Haa—!"

She exhaled sharply and snapped her eyes open. Scarlet energy instantly replaced the natural color of her pupils. The magnetic field around her erupted, and countless fragments of rubble rose into the air.

Under the rampage of Chaos Magic, Wanda slowly lifted off the ground. Anything that came into contact with that power was erased outright—no dust, no residue, nothing left behind.

Suddenly, the Chaos Magic surged outward like a raging tornado. The violent energy swept straight toward the Chitauri ahead. Wherever it passed, silence followed. Everything was annihilated—Chitauri soldiers, wrecked vehicles, collapsed debris, even the asphalt beneath the rubble. In the blink of an eye, the entire street was wiped clean, leaving behind ground that looked as though it had been plowed anew.

The Chaos Magic in Wanda's eyes did not weaken—instead, it grew denser, spreading in all directions. Everything around her vanished in an instant.

"This is bad!"

Skye glanced at the subway entrance behind them. As the Chaos Magic surged closer, she thrust both hands forward. A powerful shockwave erupted, forcibly blocking the advancing energy and diverting it away from the subway station.

For a moment, Skye and Wanda were locked in a stalemate. Wanda could not control the unleashed power, while Skye could only keep countering it with continuous shockwaves.

But for everyone behind them, this meant salvation.

Within the range of Wanda's Chaos Magic, nothing dared to approach. No matter how many Chitauri arrived, the moment they touched that power, they were instantly erased—completely removed from existence.

High above, as more and more Leviathans poured through the rift, the pressure on Lucas grew heavier. Around the spatial tear, violet lightning rained down without pause, yet more and more enemies slipped through. The Chitauri forces seemed endless.

Inside the Quinjet, Natasha looked toward the beam of light atop Stark Tower.

"This can't go on," she said grimly. "We have to shut down the portal."

With that, she steered closer, switched the Quinjet to autopilot, and leapt out, landing directly near the Tesseract.

Loki noticed her at once. He could not allow anyone to interfere with the portal and moved to intercept her.

"ROAR—!"

Before he could take more than a few steps, Hulk suddenly burst upward from below and slammed into him. Loki was sent flying several meters, crashing hard into a wall.

Before he could even stand, Hulk grabbed him by the leg and smashed him repeatedly against the ground like a rag doll. Finally, he slammed Loki straight into the floor and added one more brutal punch before stopping.

Natasha reached the Tesseract platform. Dr. Erik Selvig had regained consciousness and stared blankly at the devastation around him. He never imagined New York could be reduced to such ruin.

Before Natasha could speak, Selvig spoke first.

"Loki's scepter—only that can shut down the Tesseract."

Natasha leaned over the edge. The scepter lay on the lower platform.

In the skies, as the Chitauri numbers continued to swell, more and more slipped past the lightning barrage. Lucas scanned the battlefield—everyone was fighting desperately, but the sheer numbers made it impossible to hold them back indefinitely.

"Tony," Lucas said calmly, "tell everyone to clear out within a hundred-meter radius of the portal. Now."

Tony immediately activated external communications.

"All units, evacuate immediately! Clear out within a hundred meters of Stark Tower—move!"

At Tony's broadcast, everyone instinctively retreated. Even the soldiers and police on the ground began pulling back. At this point, the only ones they could place their faith in were these super-powered individuals.

Tony then glanced at Lucas, suddenly realizing something.

"My building was just finished," he said dryly. "Any chance you can leave me a little of it?"

Lucas turned and smiled faintly. "I'll do my best."

Tony laughed aloud and immediately withdrew. He knew exactly what Lucas was about to do.

Sure enough, once Lucas confirmed that everyone had retreated, the lightning in the sky abruptly vanished. Yet the dark clouds above New York only grew thicker, denser, until the once-bright sky dimmed as if dusk had fallen.

Across the city, countless people looked up at the lone figure suspended in the sky. Something vast and terrifying was gathering around him.

Lucas closed his eyes. Violet lightning coiled around him like massive dragons.

In an instant, overwhelming pressure descended.

All airborne Chitauri were slammed into the ground. The Leviathans roared in defiance, but their massive bodies were pinned in place, unable to move.

"Ramuh!!"

Lucas's eyes flew open. Violet energy surged across his entire body as countless bolts of lightning converged on him. A world-shaking bolt descended from the heavens. Within a hundred-meter radius of Lucas, everything was swallowed by lightning and erased.

"Th-this...!"

Thor stared blankly at the sky. In that moment, he no longer knew who truly deserved the title of God of Thunder. This lightning was far beyond anything he could withstand. Compared to Lucas, he felt unworthy of the name. If anyone deserved to be called the Thunder God, it was Lucas.

At the New York Sanctum, the Ancient One also raised her gaze skyward. Her instincts were never wrong. That dangerous, savage power had appeared again—utterly different from any force she had encountered before, raw and primordial.

As the lightning faded, a colossal figure nearly a hundred meters tall manifested before everyone. Just looking up at it made breathing difficult.

It was a towering giant clad in violet robes, holding a staff like a gnarled tree branch. A snow-white beard flowed down to its chest. Its eyes glowed with purple light, and endless thunder crackled around its body.

The moment Ramuh appeared, lightning rained down across the skies of New York. Each bolt seemed to have a will of its own—every strike claiming the life of a Chitauri soldier.

"Is... is this Lucas's true power?" Steve murmured in awe.

His knowledge of Lucas came from mission files provided by Coulson. They described Lucas's abilities, but nothing compared to witnessing them firsthand.

Thor felt a deep sense of helplessness rise within him. Before Lucas, even he—the God of Thunder—felt insignificant. It was as if he were standing before his father, Odin himself, unable to muster even the thought of resistance.

Loki saw it too—the form Lucas had taken.

At that moment, he realized coming to Earth had been a grave mistake.

All he wanted now was to leave this place and return to Asgard with Thor as quickly as possible.

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Chapter 195 - 195 – Nuclear Strike Incoming

High in the sky, Ramuh suddenly moved.

With a casual sweep of his staff, the ground beneath him turned a deep, earthen brown, the transformation rapidly expanding outward until it covered a radius of nearly a hundred meters before finally stopping.

In the next instant, countless bolts of lightning erupted from the ground. Thunder like coiling dragons surged and slithered across the area, and within moments, the hundred-meter radius had become a vast sea of lightning.

Within this thunder domain, innumerable Chitauri were swallowed by the storm. Under the assault of lightning, they were reduced to dust, utterly unable to flee—many didn't even have time to scream before being wiped from existence.

Beneath the thunder sea, all life was devoured by lightning.

Ramuh lifted his gaze. The spatial rift was still pouring out vast numbers of Chitauri—Leviathans included.

He raised his staff and pointed.

At once, countless bolts of lightning obeyed his command, blanketing the rift itself. Any creature emerging from the tear was condemned the instant it reached New York, instantly disintegrated into powder.

For a time, not a single Chitauri soldier managed to emerge. On the ground, those already present were struck down one by one by falling lightning, and the Chitauri numbers across New York began to plummet at a terrifying rate.

This drastic reduction greatly eased the pressure on Tony, Steve, and the others. Their movements were no longer so restricted, and they began to gain the upper hand.

On the Helicarrier, Nick Fury watched the satellite feed with a grim expression. First, there had been winged, clawed monsters—now this colossal, human-shaped being. How much power did Lucas truly possess that Fury still didn't know about? And this thunderstorm was far more terrifying than the previous tempest—several times stronger. Those alien creatures didn't even stand a chance.

"Director," Hill said as she stepped forward, glancing at the apocalyptic figure on the screen. "The World Security Council is requesting a meeting."

Fury nodded. "Patch them through. I'll talk to them directly."

The video feed connected. Five council members were already waiting, and the moment they saw Fury, they spoke without hesitation.

"Director Nick Fury," a woman's voice declared, "the World Security Council has reached a decision. Effective immediately, you are relieved of your position as Director of S.H.I.E.L.D."

"I expected as much," Fury replied coldly. "You people have always made the most foolish decisions. Which is why I choose to ignore you."

He didn't bother hiding his contempt. These politicians cared nothing for the situation on the ground or civilian lives—only their so-called interests.

"Director Fury, we are aware of the situation in New York. We can immediately deploy fighter jets—"

Fury cut them off sharply. "That's Manhattan. An international hub. Have you even considered the consequences?"

Hill stood beside him, listening to every word. She had been placed at S.H.I.E.L.D. by the Council and was meant to be loyal to them, but their words filled her with disappointment—and anger.

"I will not authorize a nuclear strike on Manhattan," Fury said flatly. "There are countless civilians still there. That is absolutely unacceptable. And besides—"

He pulled another screen closer and pointed to the towering figure displayed on it.

"Do you see that? What do you think that is? After you launch a nuclear missile, are you certain you can bear that thing's wrath?"

His anger was palpable now. In that moment, Fury finally understood why Lucas distrusted S.H.I.E.L.D.—and the government—so deeply.

"I'm telling you this plainly," he continued. "With every weapon currently at our disposal, there isn't a single one capable of restraining that being. All you'll accomplish is enraging it. And the consequences of that... I doubt any of you want to see."

"Director Fury, there's no need for alarmism," an elderly man with white hair said calmly. "There is nothing a nuclear weapon cannot resolve. I believe that applies to this entity as well. Moreover, whether this unknown being may become a future threat remains uncertain. All dangers must be eliminated at the root. If your people fail to resolve this crisis, everything will be lost."

In his eyes, Ramuh—Lucas's manifestation—was also a threat, one that could be erased if necessary.

Fury let out a bitter laugh. "If you launch a nuclear missile, that is what truly becomes irreversible. And your lives will end with it. Don't say I didn't warn you."

He ended the call without waiting for a response. He had no desire to look at their detestable faces any longer.

Turning back, he focused once more on the battlefield over New York.

At that very moment, a fighter jet sat ready on a carrier deck, a nuclear warhead mounted beneath its wing. The pilot had already started the engines.

"Director Nick Fury has been stripped of all S.H.I.E.L.D. authority. All commands will now be issued directly by the World Security Council. Take off immediately and prepare for deployment."

The order came through the comms. The pilot donned his oxygen mask and initiated launch procedures.

As the engines roared, the jet began taxiing toward the catapult.

Boom—!

Nick Fury burst onto the deck, seized a rocket launcher, and fired a single round straight at the aircraft.

Explosion—!

One wing was blown clean off, and the jet skidded to a halt, listing violently.

But almost immediately, another fighter jet launched into the air—also armed with a nuclear warhead.

"Motherf—!" Fury snarled. "Those damned politicians are suicidal!"

He threw aside the launcher and sprinted for the command center.

"Tony! Steve! Do you copy?!" Fury shouted into the comms.

"What is it?" Tony replied from the air, dodging indiscriminate violet lightning while clearing remaining Chitauri. "Make it quick—I'm busy!"

"Tony, a fighter jet carrying a nuclear missile is heading your way. You must intercept it—no matter what!"

Fury spoke at breakneck speed. Every second increased the risk of launch.

"What?!" Tony exclaimed.

The channel was open to everyone. The moment Fury's words were heard, shock rippled through the team. They were on the verge of stopping the Chitauri—and now a nuclear strike? Were those politicians out of their minds?!

Sure enough, a fighter jet streaked in from the distance, white contrails trailing behind it. Tony immediately ordered JARVIS to lock on, then glanced at Ramuh in the sky, staff raised.

Though Ramuh possessed his own awareness, he still obeyed Lucas's will—and thus already knew what Fury had said.

Ramuh turned his head, watching the approaching jet, and also saw Stark racing toward it.

"Target area reached," the pilot reported. "Repeat, target area reached."

The bomb bay doors opened, awaiting authorization.

"Launch approved."

The order was given.

The pilot pressed the button, and the nuclear missile shot forward like an arrow loosed from the bow.

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"Damn it!!"

Tony immediately turned back and chased after the nuclear missile. At the same time, a bolt of purple lightning crashed down behind him, instantly reducing the fighter jet and its pilot to ashes.

"It's over..."

That was the single thought shared by everyone present.

At this moment, they finally understood—people like them, and even all of New York, were nothing more than expendable pieces to those politicians.

Tony glanced back at the spot where the jet had vanished under the lightning.

"Nick Fury, you'd better prepare for the aftermath. Lucas is definitely going to settle accounts with you."

Fury knew it too. That lightning strike was as much a warning from Lucas as anything else. But what choice did he have? All he could do was swallow his anger.

"I don't know what Lucas plans to do next," Fury said. "I've never known, and I've never been told."

That sentence was, in effect, his tacit acceptance of Lucas's future retaliation. Even Fury himself was seething—he wished he could personally put a bullet into those politicians.

Tony didn't respond.

No one did.

Not even Captain America, Steve Rogers, spoke up in defense of the politicians. New York—a megacity with millions of residents—had been so casually abandoned. It was impossible not to feel a chill of shared doom. These people could no longer be described as merely cold-blooded.

Tony caught up to the missile and grabbed onto it, trying desperately to alter its trajectory.

"Natasha, don't close the spatial rift yet," he said quickly. "I've got an idea."

A spark of inspiration struck him. Since he was already carrying a nuke, why not throw it straight into outer space and blow up the Chitauri motherships?

As Tony adjusted the missile's course, everyone else understood his plan.

"Tony," Natasha asked over the comms, "does your armor even support space flight?"

"Uh... probably?" Tony replied vaguely.

In truth, he hadn't considered that at all. His suit didn't exactly come with a proper space-survival system.

As Tony carried the missile closer and closer to the rift, the lightning around him grew increasingly violent and chaotic. Some of it even brushed his armor, but he had no time to worry about that now. He absolutely could not allow the nuke to detonate over New York.

Suddenly, a massive hand descended from above, blocking his path.

Tony looked up—it was Ramuh.

With just two fingers, Ramuh effortlessly pinched the nuclear missile between them.

In his grasp, the missile looked like nothing more than a toothpick. Tony even worried that if Ramuh applied a little too much force, it might explode on the spot.

Before Tony could react, Ramuh moved first.

Clutching the missile, he surged toward the rift at tremendous speed. Countless bolts of lightning followed in his wake. The spatial rift—originally less than a hundred meters wide—was forcibly torn open, ripped apart until it was large enough for Ramuh's colossal body to pass through.

"What is he doing?!"

Everyone looked up.

In the next instant, they understood.

Ramuh plunged straight through the rift. His enormous form vanished from the skies over New York—and with him, the lightning disappeared.

All the violet lightning poured into the rift, leaving New York's sky shrouded only in dark clouds, completely silent.

At that moment, countless people stared up at the rift.

Tony.

Steve.

The surviving civilians of New York.

Even Nick Fury and Hill aboard the Helicarrier.

They all watched as lightning erupted on the other side of the rift—and as the colossal purple figure appeared there as well.

---

In the vacuum of space, Ramuh emerged from the rift, the nuclear missile still in his grasp.

Chitauri soldiers immediately swarmed toward him.

Boom—boom—boom!

Lightning exploded outward without restraint.

Ramuh no longer held back. Thunder like ferocious dragons tore through one Chitauri after another. Even the massive Leviathans were powerless—none of them could withstand the fury of this storm.

In just a few breaths, every single Chitauri soldier was annihilated. Not one survived.

Ramuh then turned his gaze toward the distant Chitauri warships.

With a light flick of his hand, he sent the nuclear missile flying straight toward the central mothership.

However, unlike the scene from the old movie, the nuclear explosion never came.

Instead, when the missile approached within ten meters of the mothership, it melted away like ice under the sun—completely dissolving, without even a spark.

Ramuh saw it clearly.

This was another divergence from the past timeline.

Humanity still arrogantly believed nuclear weapons could solve everything, unaware that the enemy no longer even regarded them as a threat.

Boom—boom—boom!!

With the nuke rendered useless, lightning surged violently around Ramuh once more. Above the Chitauri mothership, a vast field of purple energy began to gather.

As Ramuh swung his staff, thunder answered his command.

The lightning struck.

The mothership's outer shields were pierced instantly, melting away like snow under a blazing sun.

The next bolt hit the ship's core.

In the endless darkness of space, only violet lightning remained—along with the catastrophic explosion of the shattered mothership.

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Back in New York, several minutes had passed since Lucas crossed the rift.

Suddenly, every remaining Chitauri soldier collapsed where they stood, as if their power source had been cut off. They lay motionless, no different from corpses.

The heroes exchanged glances.

They knew—Lucas had succeeded.

The Chitauri invasion was over.

At the top of Stark Tower, Natasha stood gripping the Mind Stone scepter, staring intently at the rift.

She wasn't alone.

Everyone was watching the rift, waiting for that familiar figure to return.

Five minutes passed.

Lucas still didn't come back.

Gwen and Skye clutched Wanda's unconscious body tightly, their eyes fixed on the rift as tears streamed down their faces. They didn't dare blink, terrified they might miss the moment Lucas reappeared.

Steve looked at Gwen and Skye, the heavy sorrow in his eyes impossible to hide.

At this moment, Lucas was the one and only hero.

He had saved New York.

He had saved Earth.

"Natasha... shut down the Tesseract," Steve said, his voice trembling.

He didn't want to accept it—but he couldn't deny the possibility.

Lucas might not be coming back.

Tony stepped closer to the rift and began scanning the other side. But JARVIS reported only normal cosmic matter—no trace of Lucas at all.

Inside his helmet, Tony's expression was filled with grief.

Lucas was one of the very few people he truly considered a friend. They constantly mocked each other, but that bond—only real friends could understand it.

"Skye," Gwen said quietly, "bring Wanda with me."

Together, Gwen and Skye lifted Wanda.

Skye immediately called the Quinjet down. As the hatch opened, the two of them carried Wanda inside.

"What are you doing?! Stop!!"

Steve rushed forward to block them. He knew exactly what they intended to do—and he absolutely could not allow such recklessness.

Skye's face turned cold.

She released a surge of shockwaves from her hands, blasting Steve away. He was thrown backward, crashing into a nearby car.

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Chapter 197 - 197 – The Battle of New York Ends

Peter arrived at that moment and immediately fired webs, binding Gwen and Skye before they could enter the Quinjet any further—Wanda, still unconscious, was caught up as well.

"Don't do anything stupid," Peter said urgently. "Lucas isn't necessarily gone. Charging in like this is just suicide. If Lucas comes back and finds you missing, how am I supposed to explain that to him?"

He hurried forward to persuade them, then suddenly noticed something strange.

Onion.

That bird was casually pecking at a Chitauri corpse nearby, completely unconcerned about its master's fate.

That realization made Peter's eyes widen.

"Gwen, Skye—look at Onion!" Peter pointed excitedly. "If something had really happened to Lucas, wouldn't it be the first one to panic? But look at it—it's still playing with a corpse. That means it isn't worried at all. And if Onion isn't worried, then Lucas must be fine!"

Gwen and Skye both turned to look where Peter was pointing.

Sure enough, Onion was still fiddling with the Chitauri body, showing not the slightest hint of anxiety.

"Natasha, close the rift," Steve said as he got back to his feet.

Natasha acted immediately, driving the Mind Scepter straight into the Tesseract.

Boom!

A shockwave blasted her backward. Her body was flung straight off the top of Stark Tower. At the same time, the Tesseract's energy supply ceased—its beam vanished, and the spatial rift began to slowly close.

"Natasha's in danger!" Barton shouted from his vantage point.

Tony shot over at once, catching Natasha as she fell.

"No need to thank me," Tony said from inside his helmet.

Natasha rolled her eyes and ignored him.

In space, the destruction of the Chitauri mothership marked the true end of the Battle of New York. As Ramuh gazed at the blossoming explosion, his massive form gradually faded away.

With Ramuh gone, Lucas was left completely exposed to the vacuum of space. Suffocation, extreme cold, and the effects of zero pressure hit him all at once.

As if sensing Lucas's condition, the cloak behind him unfurled instantly and wrapped tightly around his body.

At that moment, a ring of fire appeared. A hand reached out and pulled Lucas through it.

In an instant, Lucas was transported from outer space back to Earth.

The one who brought him back was the Ancient One.

The cloak loosened again, but Lucas had already lost consciousness. Even a few seconds of exposure to space was more than a human body could endure.

The Ancient One looked at the unconscious Lucas and gently tapped a finger against his forehead. As energy flowed into him, Lucas regained consciousness.

"Master Ancient One... what happened to me...?"

Recognizing her face, Lucas slowly sat up and looked around, realizing he was inside the New York Sanctum.

"You lost consciousness in space," the Ancient One said with a smile. "I brought you back. You're fine now."

She produced a cup of hot tea from nowhere and handed it to him.

"Drink."

Lucas took the cup and downed it in one gulp, not caring how hot it was.

A breath of icy cold air escaped his lips, and the bone-chilling chill vanished completely.

"Thank you, Master Ancient One," Lucas said sincerely as he stood up.

The cloak behind him even bowed respectfully toward her.

"It is I who should thank you," she replied, shaking her head. "You saved Earth from Loki and the Chitauri."

Lucas had not disappointed her. He had made the right choice, and at last, she could set her heart at ease and continue with her plans.

Leaving the New York Sanctum, Lucas immediately flew toward Stark Tower.

"Yo—! Did you miss me, everyone?"

In the blink of an eye, Lucas appeared near Stark Tower, hovering in midair as he looked down at the crowd.

"Lucas! I knew you wouldn't die that easily," Tony said at once. "They say disasters live forever—looks like they were talking about you."

Tony's sarcasm activated instantly, though only JARVIS could detect the joy in his eyes.

Everyone rushed toward Lucas. Gwen and Skye ran straight into his arms.

"Sorry for making you worry," Lucas said gently, rubbing their heads.

Gwen and Skye couldn't stop crying. Just moments ago, they had truly believed Lucas was gone.

"This isn't the time for tears," Lucas said, lifting his gaze toward the top of Stark Tower. "There's still someone left to deal with."

Up there lay the true culprit.

Loki, who had been knocked unconscious by Hulk's stomp, slowly opened his eyes—only to find several people standing over him, all staring coldly. Barton had already drawn his bow, the gleaming arrowhead aimed straight at Loki's eyes.

Loki's heart sank.

He couldn't even beat Thor alone—let alone face several people on Thor's level at once.

"Um... is it still possible for me to surrender?" Loki asked, forcing an awkward smile.

At this point, all he wanted was to go back to Asgard. Earth was simply too dangerous.

"Atreus," Lucas said with a playful smile, "I actually preferred your arrogant attitude. How about you bring that back?"

Loki rolled his eyes.

Being called Atreus was bad enough—did he really have to rub salt into the wound? Truly killing both body and spirit. Was this guy even human?

Aboard the Helicarrier, Loki was shackled thoroughly—hands cuffed, mouth sealed. Thor grabbed him by the collar, carrying the Tesseract as he joined the others on the deck.

"I'll be leaving now," Thor said, looking at them. "It was an honor to fight alongside you."

For the first time, Thor truly understood Odin's words. Midgard possessed a unique allure—especially its people.

They bid Thor farewell one by one, watching as he activated the Tesseract and disappeared together with Loki.

Only then did everyone return to the conference room.

"So, what are your plans now?" Tony asked, turning to Bruce.

"I think I'll go back to Brazil," Bruce replied. "Life there wasn't so bad."

He still didn't want to work at Stark Industries. After all, the Hulk was a ticking time bomb.

Tony didn't push the matter. Bruce's choice of a quiet life deserved respect.

Everyone chatted and laughed—except Lucas, whose gaze settled on Nick Fury.

"Baldy," Lucas said calmly, "don't you owe us an explanation?"

Fury had known this wouldn't just blow over. Inwardly, he cursed those shameless politicians. Why provoke these people? Did they really think they had long lives?

Fury pulled out a remote and pressed a button. The large screen lit up, playing the conversation between him and the members of the World Security Council.

The entire sequence of events was laid bare. Fury had strongly opposed the decision—but it had been useless. The nuke was still launched.

"I won't explain this," Fury said flatly. "And I was never here."

With that, he turned and left the conference room. As he exited, a relaxed smile appeared on his face.

No matter what, Earth had survived.

And his Avengers Initiative had not been in vain.

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As for whether those foolish pigs lived or died—what did it have to do with Nick Fury?

After watching the video, everyone's expressions darkened to the point that they looked as though water might drip from their faces. Even seasoned agents like Natasha and Barton felt the urge to put a couple of bullets into those World Security Council idiots, let alone the others.

"I can hack into their networks and dig up all their dirt," Skye said, holding the S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued laptop. "Give me an hour, and I'll have everything we want."

"Exposing scandals is useless," Lucas replied coldly. "They control the internet and the news. Any dirt you release will just sink without a trace. I want to teach them a lesson they'll never forget."

Lucas's face was grim. He had never liked America—especially its government.

This time, even Steve said nothing to stop him. Sacrificing civilians was a line Steve could never accept, let alone sacrificing millions in one decision.

[Ding—Congratulations, Host. Mission complete. Reward unlocked: New Summoned Beast—Immortal Phoenix.]

The system's voice rang out suddenly, making Lucas pause in surprise. He hadn't expected a new summon so soon—especially the Immortal Phoenix. A legendary summon passed down through generations of the Rosfield family, one of their core, life-bound summons.

Everyone present suddenly felt the temperature around them spike sharply, the heat clearly radiating from Lucas.

A flicker of flame flashed through Lucas's eyes, then vanished. The intense heat dissipated just as quickly, and the temperature in the conference room returned to normal.

Still, everyone had clearly felt it.

"It's time to make those idiots pay," Lucas murmured.

In the next instant, his figure vanished from the conference room.

When he reappeared, Lucas was already standing on the deck of the Helicarrier. This instantaneous movement was a gift from the Immortal Phoenix—short-range teleportation.

Lucas lifted his gaze toward the sky. Flames burned like solid fire in his eyes as a pair of phoenix wings suddenly unfurled from his back. Accompanied by a clear, piercing cry, he shot straight upward, disappearing into the clouds.

Moments later, the entire sky over New York seemed to ignite, turning a blazing red—like an exquisite sunset—casting a breathtaking crimson veil over the war-torn ruins of the city.

At the same time, far away in Washington, D.C., the sky mirrored New York's fiery hue. But unlike New York, two black dots had appeared within that red expanse—and they were rapidly growing larger.

D.C. was the political heart of America, home to nearly all federal institutions, heavily guarded and fortified.

It was early evening. Fire-cloud sunsets were rare, so pedestrians stopped to look up, many excitedly snapping photos.

Soon, people noticed what looked like two meteors streaking slowly across the sky, their golden trails dazzling against the crimson backdrop.

"Look! Meteors!!"

Many civilians shouted in excitement. Seeing such clearly visible meteors at dusk was an exceptionally rare sight.

But the meteors didn't burn up in the atmosphere.

Instead, they plunged straight downward toward the city.

With thunderous roars like earthquakes, the two meteors slammed into the ground, followed by an overwhelming burst of fire that illuminated several surrounding blocks.

Only then did people realize the meteors had struck something. Crowds rushed toward the impact site—some out of concern, some out of curiosity, and others eager to capture firsthand footage for social media.

To their shock, the meteors had struck the Capitol Building.

In an instant, it was reduced to rubble.

Secondary explosions continued to erupt within the ruins—the Capitol complex covered a vast area, after all.

The entire United States was thrown into panic, especially the citizens of D.C. Rumors quickly spread that God had unleashed divine punishment upon America.

Some people even dropped to their knees in the streets, crossing themselves and praying fervently.

Then, as suddenly as it had appeared, the fiery sky began to fade. The evening sky returned to its normal colors.

This only strengthened the beliefs of those convinced it was divine retribution—the disappearance of the flames was seen as proof that God's punishment was complete.

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Meanwhile, Lucas reappeared on the Helicarrier's deck.

He glanced in the direction of Washington, D.C., smiled faintly, and walked calmly back toward the interior. From his departure to the meteor strike, and then his return, less than ten minutes had passed.

Lucas took out a secure communication device and put it on.

"Skye, delete all surveillance footage related to me from earlier."

In the conference room, a dialogue box suddenly popped up on Skye's laptop. Though it displayed seemingly irrelevant data, Skye carefully scanned everything before closing it. She then began erasing all surveillance footage of Lucas from ten minutes earlier.

After finishing, she reopened the dialogue box, typed in a string of code, and closed it again.

Lucas received confirmation through the communicator that everything had been deleted.

When he strolled back into the conference room, all eyes instantly turned toward him. Everyone stared as if they were looking at a ghost.

"What?" Lucas asked. "Why is everyone staring at me like that?"

He even glanced down at his clothes to make sure he hadn't left any obvious clues before looking back at them.

"Not bad, kid," Tony said, stepping forward and patting Lucas on the shoulder, clearly enjoying the chaos. "That was some fast retaliation."

"Get lost," Lucas replied smoothly. "What are you talking about? Who did I retaliate against?"

He continued the act. This was something no one could have proof of—even if they knew it was him, knowing and proving were two very different things.

"Breaking news," Natasha said, pressing a button on the remote.

The big screen lit up with live footage from Washington, D.C.

"The Capitol Building was struck by two meteors. The scene is catastrophic. Nearly all members of Congress were killed. A handful survived only because they were meeting in an underground facility at the time."

Reporters flooded the scene. Every major network was covering it—this was now the hottest news in the country, even beginning to overshadow the Battle of New York.

After all, those two meteors had effectively wiped out America's entire legislative body. The government itself might be paralyzed by this single event. And with countless civilians witnessing the meteors fall from the sky, there was no trail left for investigators to follow.

"You're not saying this was my doing, are you?" Lucas said, waving his hands dismissively.

"Come on, don't joke around. I was gone for barely ten minutes. There's no way I could've gone from New York to D.C. and back. Besides, I don't even have the ability to summon meteors—and you all know that."

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Chapter 199 - 199 – An Unexpected Visitor

When everyone heard Lucas's explanation, it did seem to make sense. They all knew his abilities revolved around controlling wind and lightning. They had never seen him summon meteors from the sky. That said... who could be certain Lucas wasn't hiding some other power?

"So it really wasn't you?"

The group was still suspicious. Deep down, they were almost certain Lucas was responsible—but there was no evidence.

"Hey, even if it was you, so what?" Tony said casually, utterly unconcerned. "When they decided to launch a nuke without a second thought for millions of civilians, they should've been prepared for the consequences. You might as well just admit it."

Tony genuinely didn't care. He knew those politicians all too well. Whether they lived or died made little difference to America as a whole. The White House and the Pentagon would soon prop up new lawmakers anyway—still the same old capitalists calling the shots. If anything, this was a perfect opportunity to install their own people.

Lucas, of course, had no intention of admitting anything. He kept up his confused act.

"Why would I admit to something I didn't do? If I really had that kind of ability, the Battle of New York wouldn't have been so hard. I'd have just dropped dozens of meteors and blown everything up. Wouldn't that have been easier?"

Everyone paused. That... actually sounded reasonable. Yet somehow, it still felt off. There was an inexplicable sense of discomfort—like something didn't quite add up—but no one could put a finger on it.

Elsewhere, Nick Fury had also seen the shocking news. He immediately ordered Hill to pull up all surveillance related to Lucas.

Nothing.

No abnormalities at all.

That only strengthened Fury's conviction that Lucas was behind it. With Skye around, perfection itself became suspicious—the cleaner it was, the more it felt like a deliberate cover-up.

But there was nothing he could do. Suspicion without evidence meant nothing. Besides, even Fury himself didn't feel like pursuing Lucas over this. No civilians had died—just a bunch of politicians. America had no shortage of those. And now that he was no longer the Director of S.H.I.E.L.D., this was no longer his responsibility anyway.

Three days passed in the blink of an eye.

New York was already deep into reconstruction, especially Manhattan Island, which had suffered the worst damage. Compared to it, destruction elsewhere was almost negligible.

On the street where Lucas's apartment stood—close to Stark Tower and well within the disaster zone—the scene was one of utter devastation. Rubble

covered the ground. Not a single intact brick could be found. Among the ruins, a few Chitauri corpses were still visible.

Only Lucas's apartment building stood untouched.

Not even a patch of paint had peeled off.

The residents had witnessed the Chitauri invasion firsthand. The aliens slaughtered indiscriminately and certainly hadn't spared this area—but the barrier around the apartment had blocked every attack.

After that, the tenants became even more reluctant to leave.

This place was paradise.

They were convinced that even if the world ended, this building would remain standing. They had seen it with their own eyes. As a result, tenants eagerly offered to raise their rent—some even doubling it without batting an eye.

Lucas's apartment building once again became a hot topic.

Not only was it now labeled one of the most luxurious and expensive residences in New York, it also earned a new title: the safest. After all, an entire street had been flattened, yet this single building stood alone, completely unscathed. How could that not spark curiosity?

Before long, it became another landmark of New York—second only to Stark Tower.

Since returning, Lucas had lived like a complete shut-in.

He barely left home—either gaming all day, soaking in hot springs inside the Chocobo Space, or zoning out in the office.

No one came looking for him during those three days.

Tony was busy rebuilding Stark Tower and had generously taken on much of New York's reconstruction. Stark Industries would handle the design and rebuilding of Manhattan Island. Of course, it wasn't charity—the government would provide funding—but the amount was pocket change compared to Tony Stark's annual profits.

Natasha had been absent due to missions. After the Battle of New York, S.H.I.E.L.D. suddenly became extremely busy. No one knew what Nick Fury was up to, but agents barely had a moment to breathe.

Wanda remained with the Ancient One, learning to control the Chaos Magic within her. Her powers had gone out of control once again during the battle, and the Ancient One had sensed it clearly from the New York Sanctum.

As a result, she gave Wanda a condition:

Until she could fully control her Chaos Magic, she was not allowed to return and see Lucas.

It was both a trial and motivation.

The Ancient One understood exactly what Lucas meant to Wanda—and how dependent Wanda was on him. This restriction pushed her harder than anything else, and the results were remarkable. Wanda's progress accelerated significantly.

Gwen had returned to school. Finals were approaching, and academic pressure was at its peak. Once she passed, she could begin her internship at Stark Industries—meaning she wouldn't have to leave New York.

That left only Lucas and Skye in the office.

Life returned to its peaceful routine.

Lucas slouched lazily in his chair. Skye sat at her usual spot, either working on her computer or absentmindedly petting the Moogle.

Thanks to her excellent reputation online, countless companies sought Skye out to upgrade and maintain their systems. Her name spread quickly through the industry. She shed the "hacker" label and became a highly sought-after network specialist. At one point, her income from contracts even surpassed the salary Lucas paid her.

Speaking of salary... Skye couldn't help but feel exasperated.

Lucas had only paid her for the first few months.

After that, he handed all his money over to her for management—and even encouraged her to invest it when she felt like it. From that point on, she never received another paycheck.

He had basically turned his employee into his personal financial manager.

Free labor.

Scumbag.

That day, Skye was working on a website for a cleaning company. Lucas had gone into the Chocobo Space to feed Onion.

Then—

An unexpected visitor arrived.

Reconstruction across Manhattan was in full swing. On the street outside the office, a Cadillac slowly came to a stop.

Ding-ling—

The bell above the door rang as it opened.

"Welcome. How can I help you?"

Skye immediately stood to greet them. No matter what, she was still the assistant here—old habits died hard.

The man who entered wore a black suit and dark sunglasses. At first glance, he looked either like a bodyguard... or an agent.

But the person who followed him inside—

That was the real visitor.

And the moment Skye saw who it was, she froze completely.

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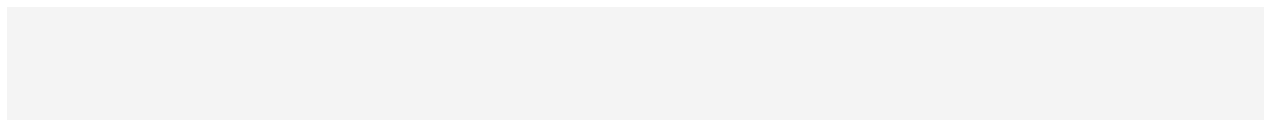
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Chapter 200 - 200 – The Purple Cardinal



The visitor wore a deep purple robe, with a matching purple skullcap on his head. A silver cross hung from his chest, its tip set with a red gemstone.

Skye froze.

A Catholic clergyman... and not just any clergyman, but a Cardinal, the highest authority of the New York Archdiocese.

"May I ask... what brings you here, Your Eminence?"

Skye became extremely polite at once.

In Western countries, the status of clergy—especially Catholic clergy—is exceptional. Showing disrespect to a priest is considered blasphemy.

A nation without faith may be pitiful, but a nation ruled by faith is tragic. When divine authority stands above royal or governmental power, such a country becomes lamentable.

Within Catholicism, hierarchy is strict and clearly defined.

At the very top stands the Pontiff, commonly known as the Pope.

Below him is the College of Cardinals, usually numbering over a hundred members—the Red Cardinals. Appointed by the Pope, they oversee the Church's global affairs and daily operations. They also hold the responsibility of electing a new Pope after the previous one's death. Traditionally, the new Pope is chosen from among the Cardinals.

There is, however, one legendary exception: divine revelation—when all Cardinals, along with the witnessing faithful, are inspired simultaneously to call out a single name. That person would then become Pope. Such events are exceedingly rare and scarcely recorded throughout Church history.

Below the Red Cardinals are the Purple Cardinals, also known as Archbishops or Metropolitan Archbishops. They are typically dispatched across the world to oversee entire dioceses, whose size depends on regional boundaries and the number of churches within them.

In predominantly Catholic countries, almost every district has at least one church—sometimes more—depending on local customs.

Below the Archbishops are Bishops, also senior clergy. Bishops usually wear black robes trimmed with red piping and buttons, along with a red sash. Their role is primarily supervisory—overseeing clergy or officiating large-scale religious events. Their authority is limited to their own diocese and they remain subordinate to the Archbishop.

Below them are the most familiar figures—the priests. They also wear black robes, but without red ornamentation. Each priest is responsible for a single church. Their duties are extensive: weddings, funerals, births, deaths, exorcisms, baptisms, prayers, Mass—everything within Catholic life. They are the clergy most often depicted in films and television.

At the bottom of the hierarchy are deacons. They handle miscellaneous tasks—cleaning, administration, reception, and daily maintenance. Historically, they wore simple robes and held no authority, effectively functioning as church staff.

Nuns exist outside the formal clergy hierarchy. Strictly speaking, they are believers rather than ordained clergy. Their duties often overlap with deacons—assisting priests with prayer, education, and missionary work. Fully ordained nuns wear black habits, while novices wear white. To become a nun, one must take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and undergo at least five years of probation.

Within churches and communities, women and children are usually tended to by nuns, except during baptisms or exorcisms. Because of their gentler demeanor, nuns are often more warmly received by the faithful.

---

The Purple Cardinal standing here was the highest-ranking authority of the entire New York Archdiocese.

Skye had no idea why he had come.

"Won't you invite me to sit, young lady?"

The Cardinal's voice was gentle and kind.

"Oh—of course! Please sit, Your Eminence. I'll pour you some tea."

Skye quickly ushered him to a seat and brought over two cups of black tea.

The Cardinal took a small sip, his eyes lighting up slightly.

"Excellent tea. Thank you."

Skye gave an awkward smile and sat across from him. For someone raised in Western culture, Catholicism held a sacred place in her heart, and a Purple Cardinal was not someone one encountered lightly.

If Lucas were here, he would probably roll his eyes—just another charlatan, what's there to be excited about?

"Are you the owner of this place, young lady?"

The Cardinal set down his cup. He had come with a specific purpose—to meet the owner, Lucas.

Skye shook her head.

"No, the boss stepped out for a bit. If you'd like, I can pass along a message, or call him and ask him to come back?"

The Cardinal waved his hand gently.

"No need. I'll wait for him here, if that's convenient."

"Of course, of course. Please make yourself comfortable."

Skye stood up and brought out a small plate of chestnut ice cream, placing it in front of him.

"You can carry on with your work. Don't mind an old man like me."

Seeing how approachable he was, Skye returned to designing a website for a cleaning company.

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About an hour later, a flash of blue light appeared.

Lucas materialized out of thin air inside the office.

The bodyguards accompanying the Cardinal were instantly alarmed. They drew their guns and aimed them straight at Lucas.

Lucas frowned.

Three wind blades flashed past in an instant, slicing cleanly through the firearms. The guns fell apart into several pieces.

"Who are you savages? Get out. Now. Or I'll end your lives."

His voice was cold, devoid of emotion.

Daring to cause trouble in his office—these people truly had a death wish.

Before the bodyguards could react, an invisible force slammed into them, sending all of them flying straight out the door.

"Kupo—kupo—!!"

The Moogle floated angrily in midair, gesturing furiously as it scolded them.

Skye quickly scooped the Moogle into her arms and soothed it, rubbing its head until it visibly relaxed and began enjoying the attention.

Lucas turned to the Purple Cardinal, who was sitting calmly on the sofa with a warm smile.

Unlike Skye, Lucas felt no reverence at all. Western appearance aside, his soul wasn't Western—and he had no particular respect for Catholicism.

"He bring those people?"

Lucas glanced at Skye.

Skye nodded.

"A commission?"

Lucas asked again.

Skye nodded once more.

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