

# MARVEL MANIFESTOR

## Chapter 271 - 271 – The Dark Elves

As he spoke, the police officer reached out to grab Jane by the arm.

Boom—!

Without warning, a surge of crimson energy erupted from Jane's body. The shockwave sent the officer flying, along with the police cars behind him and everyone nearby. Bodies were hurled across the ground, their fates unknown. Jane herself was thrown back, collapsing unconscious.

Thor rushed forward at once, catching her and calling her name over and over.

Jane slowly came to, looking at Thor with confusion.

"What... what happened to me?"

Thor frowned. The residual power within her felt profoundly wrong.

"Hold on to me," he said softly, having already made a decision.

Raising Mjolnir high, Thor called out Heimdall's name. Instantly, the Bifrost descended, enveloping him and Jane in radiant light. With a flash, they vanished.

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Asgard.

A beam of light flared, and Thor and Jane appeared before the Observatory.

"Jane Foster, welcome to Asgard," Heimdall said with a gentle smile, studying her closely. He had been watching her actions for some time and knew her character well—otherwise, his sword would already have been at her throat.

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Elsewhere in the Nine Realms, on a desolate world—

This was once the home of the Dark Elves. Long ago, when they attempted to conquer the Nine Realms using the Aether, Asgard's gods and the Bifrost had reduced their world to ruin. Now it was nothing but blackened sand stretching endlessly in every direction.

Malekith, leader of the Dark Elves, crouched and scooped up a handful of the dark sand.

"Our world has become this," he said quietly. "I can scarcely remember what it once looked like."

Behind him, the towering Dark Elf Algrim stepped forward and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Our people survived only because of you. Otherwise, we would have been exterminated by those selfish Asgardian bastards."

"I will make Asgard suffer as we have suffered," Malekith growled, crushing the sand in his fist. "I will reclaim the Aether. I will reduce Asgard to ash. I will see it utterly destroyed!"

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Asgard.

Jane lay on a stone bed, golden energy flowing around her in slow currents. Four women stood at her sides, chanting and weaving spells.

A spectral projection rose from Jane's body, suspended in midair by their magic. Runes—ancient and indecipherable—circled it, glowing with arcane power.

Within the projection, crimson energy pulsed and flowed, seemingly fused with Jane herself, impossible to remove by ordinary means.

"How is she?" Thor asked anxiously, standing beside one of the women.

"It's unclear," she replied softly. "The energy within her is vast. Her body may not be able to endure it."

She glanced at Thor before quietly withdrawing.

Thor's sense of dread deepened. Whatever resided within Jane was neither ordinary nor safe.

"It seems you have chosen to ignore my warnings," a voice said coldly.

Odin stood in the doorway, gazing at Thor and the unconscious Jane.

"She's ill, Father," Thor said.

"She is mortal," Odin replied impassively. "Mortals fall ill. That is the natural order."

"I brought her here because we can save her," Thor insisted, lowering his head but holding firm.

"She does not belong in Asgard," Odin said sharply. "A third of her lifespan is already gone. She is like a piece of lamb cooked only halfway—unfit to be served."

"What did you just say? Who do you think you are, old man?!" Jane suddenly snapped awake, sitting up despite her weakness. Being compared to lamb and dismissed so casually enraged her.

"I am Odin," he said calmly, golden light flickering in his single eye. "All of Asgard lies under my dominion."

Jane froze. "...Oh. I'm—"

"I know who you are," Odin interrupted. "And I care not."

Turning back to Thor, he spoke firmly.

"So you told your father about me?" Jane asked Thor, incredulous.

"Father, there is something inside her," Thor said urgently, pointing to the crimson energy. "I have never seen anything like it."

"Midgard has healers," Odin replied dismissively. "They call them doctors. Return her to her own world."

He waved his hand. "Guards. Take her back to Midgard."

Two golden-armored soldiers entered and moved toward Jane.

The moment they touched her, the red energy erupted again, hurling both soldiers across the chamber.

Thor rushed to Jane's side, but her head slumped—she had lost consciousness once more.

Odin's expression darkened. He stepped forward and examined her closely, seeing the red energy coursing through her veins.

"This is impossible," he murmured, his voice betraying shock.

"It's protecting her?" an elderly healer asked.

"No," Odin said quietly, eyes fixed on the crimson glow. "It is protecting itself."

"You two—come with me."

He turned and strode from the chamber. Thor lifted Jane and followed.

They arrived in another hall. With a gesture from Odin, the space around them dissolved into an endless vision of the cosmos.

"Some things in this universe predate creation itself," Odin began. "What resides within her appears to be one such relic."

The stars above shifted, revealing ancient galaxies.

"The Nine Realms are not eternal. They were born from primordial chaos."

Odin opened an ancient tome. Golden runes rose from its pages, forming words and images.

"Before the dawn, all was darkness. From that darkness came the Dark Elves. Before light existed, they ruled the Nine Realms unchallenged."

The pages turned, revealing their history.

"Born of darkness, stealing from the light."

"Mother used to tell Loki and me stories about them," Thor said quietly.

"These were not mere stories," Odin replied. "Their leader, Malekith, obtained a weapon from the darkness itself—what they call the Aether."

He turned another page.

"Many relics born at the dawn of the universe exist in solid form. But the Aether is different—it is a mutable, living fluid. It alters the nature of reality itself. It seeks a host, feeds upon their life force, and endures through them."

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On the pages of the ancient book, a Dark Elf held aloft a substance resembling living flame, while countless others knelt in worship around it.

"Malekith sought to use it to plunge the entire universe back into darkness," Odin said gravely. "And the Aether does indeed possess such power."

He turned another page, golden runes once more sketching vivid scenes.

"After a prolonged and bloody war, my father, Bor, finally prevailed. He drove Malekith and the Dark Elves into the unknown, and only then did the Nine Realms enjoy thousands of years of peace."

The runes formed the image of a towering warrior wearing a horned helm, plunging a sacred blade into a Dark Elf.

"Legend says that the Aether was destroyed along with them," Thor said, frowning. "Then why has it appeared again?"

"In the stories we heard, the warriors of Asgard eradicated the Dark Elves and annihilated the Aether itself."

Jane cut in immediately, her concern far more practical.

"Does the book say how to get this... Aether out of my body?"

She had no intention of being drained into a withered husk by some ancient cosmic relic.

"I'm afraid not," Odin said, closing the book. The golden runes faded away.

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Aboard a blade-shaped warship, Malekith stood before a massive display showing nine planets—the Nine Realms under Asgard's protection—slowly aligning into a single straight line.

"The Convergence approaches," he said coldly. "And you, Algrim, will become the final Curse Warrior of the Dark Elves."

He produced a glowing stone dagger and approached the towering Algrim.

"You will merge with darkness. You will become darkness. And you will remain so until your final breath."

With a swift motion, Malekith drove the dagger into Algrim's body and forced a crimson-glowing stone deep into the wound.

"I will destroy Asgard," Algrim growled through the pain. "I will destroy every Asgardian and return the universe to darkness."

Another Dark Elf stepped forward with a horned mask. Algrim took it and placed it upon his head.

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The Bifrost activated once more. This time, the Warriors Three and Sif returned to Asgard, escorting prisoners—including one wearing a long-horned mask.

The captives were locked into individual cells. From one side of the prison, Loki slowly rose, watching them with faint amusement.

"Odin always sends me new friends," he said lightly. "Such a considerate father."

"Did you not like the books I sent you, Loki?" Frigga asked gently, seated nearby with a tome in her hands.

"Is this how my life ends, Mother?" Loki replied, sitting beside her. "Reading books until I die?"

No matter how deeply he despised Odin, Loki had never hated Frigga. She had raised him as her own, and before her, he could never muster resentment.

"I have done everything I can to make your confinement comfortable," Frigga said softly. "But you know your father—stubborn as stone."

"Mother, you always told me I was born to be king," Loki said quietly. "Now I see it was nothing but a lie. I'm just a prisoner, aren't I?"

"A true king would never slaughter the innocent," Frigga said, closing her book and meeting his gaze. "Look at what you did on Midgard. How many lives were lost?"

"Compared to the old man?" Loki scoffed. "What I've done is nothing at all."

From childhood, he had heard endless tales of Odin's conquests—of uniting the Nine Realms, of exterminating giants—stories soaked in blood.

"You have always seen through others, Loki," Frigga said, holding his hand.  
"Yet you have never truly seen yourself."

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Thor accompanied Jane through the splendor of Asgard, showing her its wonders.

"When you came to find me," Jane asked as they sat beside a fountain, "did you already know I was in trouble?"

"Heimdall lost sight of you in an instant," Thor replied. "That's how I knew you were no longer on Earth."

He continued, explaining patiently:

"The Nine Realms are bound to the World Tree, with Asgard at its center—just as Earth orbits the sun. Every five thousand years, the realms align in a

straight line. We call this the Convergence. During that time, the boundaries between worlds weaken. Travel becomes possible anywhere."

"That's why Heimdall couldn't see you," he said softly. "You were caught in that state. It was sheer luck that you returned—had the passage closed, you might have been trapped forever."

"And what will happen to me?" Jane asked quietly. "Your father said there was no solution..."

"My father is not omniscient," Thor said, trying to reassure her. "To know everything is also to face the unknown."

He was careful to keep his voice low—Odin's ignorance of certain things, like Karl's origins or the true nature of summoned beasts, was proof enough.

"Try not to let your father hear you say that," Frigga said as she approached, having just left Loki.

"Jane, this is my mother, Frigga—Queen of Asgard," Thor said quickly.

Jane immediately pulled her hand from Thor's, flustered, and nodded respectfully.

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At the agency office, Karl sat slumped in his chair, deeply troubled.

The system's mission had left him at a complete loss. He didn't know when the Convergence would occur, where Jane was, or what was happening in Asgard. Worse still, the convergence point wasn't even in New York—it was in London.

Completely in the dark, irritation gnawed at him.

"Let me think," Karl muttered. "If I remember correctly, Malekith first attacks Asgard, kills Frigga... and then ends up in London..."

The pieces were there—but the clock was already ticking.

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The more Karl thought about the events of Thor: The Dark World, the more irritated he became. He couldn't even get close to Asgard, so how was he supposed to "save the Nine Realms"? Waiting passively until Malekith arrived on Earth to deal with him would be far too reactive. Worse still, he didn't even know when the Convergence would occur.

What was he supposed to do—gather a group of people and have them wait around in London indefinitely?

After much deliberation, Karl thought of one person: the Ancient One.

The Convergence would affect Earth's cosmic balance, which clearly fell under her jurisdiction.

With that decided, Karl resolved to seek her out—not only to ask how to reach Asgard, but also to check on Wanda's progress. After all, everything was for the sake of that cursed mission.

Skye stayed behind to watch the office, while Karl headed alone to the New York Sanctum.

The moment he stepped up to the door—before he could even knock—it slowly opened.

It was as if they already knew he was coming.

The guardian of the New York Sanctum stood just inside the doorway.

"Please come in, Mr. Norman."

Karl nodded and stepped inside. As soon as he crossed the threshold, the red cloak slipped free from his shoulders and began floating around the Sanctum on its own, clearly delighted to be back in familiar surroundings—almost like returning home.

"The Sorcerer Supreme informed me that you would be coming," the guardian said as he led Karl to a sofa in the sitting room. "So I've been keeping an eye

on the entrance these past few days. I didn't expect you to actually arrive today."

He reached out, and a teacup appeared in his hand. A moment later, fragrant hot tea poured itself into the cup.

"Please wait a moment, Mr. Norman. I'll notify the Sorcerer Supreme."

With that, the guardian set the cup down and departed to summon the Ancient One.

Karl sipped the tea and glanced around. Nothing had changed since his last visit—everything was exactly as he remembered.

Before long, the guardian returned, this time accompanied by Wanda, dressed head to toe in red.

"Karl!"

The instant she saw him, crimson energy flared around her, and she blinked straight into his arms. She wrapped her arms around his neck and planted a loud kiss on his cheek.

"You finally remembered to come see me!" she said indignantly. "You didn't even message me once all this time. Jerk!"

She puffed up her cheeks in mock anger. Karl couldn't help but smile and gently pinch her face.

"I've been busy," he said. "Didn't Skye tell you?"

He knew full well that Wanda, Skye, and the others chatted constantly in their group chat. His movements were practically transparent to them.

"I know!" Wanda replied. "But you weren't busy all the time. You could've sent a message. I'm mad!"

She wriggled free from his arms and crossed her own, deliberately turning away from him.

Karl chuckled and pulled out a bracelet from his spatial pack. It was something he'd bought in Wakanda, richly styled with distinctive African tribal motifs.

"Here," he said, holding it up. "Got this in Wakanda—Africa. Like it?"

The bracelet immediately caught Wanda's attention. Her eyes lit up, and she instinctively extended her wrist.

Karl fastened it for her. She smiled brightly, kissed him again, and clung to his arm, clearly appeased.

"The Ancient One asked me to bring you," Wanda said cheerfully. "I'm almost done with my studies, you know. I'll be graduating soon—then I can come back."

Without waiting for a response, she dragged Karl straight toward a portal.

As they passed the second floor, the blue Cloak of Levitation was still floating quietly inside its glass display case, patiently waiting for its destined wearer.

Karl's red cloak hovered nearby, waving enthusiastically as if chatting with it. The blue cloak responded now and then, calm and restrained.

"We're leaving—heading to Kamar-Taj," Karl called out.

The red cloak tapped the glass twice before finally returning to Karl's shoulders.

They stepped through the portal and instantly arrived in Kamar-Taj. It was just as Karl remembered—eternal spring, unchanged by time.

Along the way, they encountered Wong and Mordo, who were instructing a new group of sorcerers in the courtyard. Both greeted Karl warmly.

"Wong, Mordo—long time no see!"

Karl stepped forward and hugged them both. Even the usually stern Mordo couldn't help but smile.

"Indeed," Mordo said. "You really should visit more often."

"I've just been too busy," Karl replied casually. "But I brought some good stuff this time. Let's get together tonight—call Casilius too."

Karl glanced around, not seeing Casilius anywhere.

"Where's Casilius?" he asked. "Off wandering again?"

"Where else?" Wong said. "The library. He practically lives there."

Wong always felt Casilius was better suited to be the librarian—he genuinely loved reading, unlike Wong, who grew sleepy the moment he opened a book.

"Alright," Karl nodded. "Let him know—he's not allowed to skip tonight."

With plans made, Karl and Wanda continued toward the Ancient One's meditation chamber.

She was already waiting.

When Karl entered, the Ancient One opened her eyes and smiled.

"I knew you would come," she said calmly. "I've been waiting for you for several days."

With a wave of her hand, a tea table and a full tea set materialized. The teapot poured steaming tea into their cups on its own.

Wanda remained respectfully at the doorway, not entering. This was a private conversation—if she were needed, they would call her.

"How did you know I'd come?" Karl asked. "Did the Eye of Agamotto tell you?"

He glanced at her chest—she wasn't wearing it. Presumably, it was stored away.

The Ancient One shook her head.

"No. The Eye can no longer see your future. Your fate is blurred—so much so that it affects the entire timeline."

"Then how did you know I would come?" Karl pressed, genuinely curious. His visit had been spontaneous, driven by the system's mission—something the Ancient One couldn't possibly know about.

"Because of the Convergence," she replied, taking a sip of tea.

"When the Convergence occurs, the other eight realms will align with Earth. At specific locations, gateways connecting all nine realms will appear. During the last Convergence, the Dark Elves invaded Earth."

She continued evenly:

"The Asgardians never truly eradicated the Dark Elves. They merely exiled them into the cracks of the universe. This time, when the Convergence returns, the Dark Elves will inevitably return as well."

Karl frowned. "And what does that have to do with me?"

"Because you are a variable," the Ancient One said calmly. "Your existence has completely disrupted the current timeline. You will intervene in the Dark Elf invasion. That is why I have been waiting for you."

Her tone was unwavering—and she was absolutely right.

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"You're right, Master Ancient One. I do intend to intervene in the matter of the Dark Elves."

Karl did not hide anything and nodded frankly.

"I knew I hadn't misjudged you," the Ancient One said with a smile. "When Earth faces a crisis, you will always step forward to defend it. That is one of the reasons I have always trusted you."

In truth, Karl wasn't acting out of some lofty desire to protect Earth. He was motivated entirely by the system's mission—and the reward of a new summoned beast. Otherwise, he would have happily stayed home doing nothing. But that was something he naturally kept to himself.

"Master Ancient One, I want to know how to get to Asgard," Karl said, getting straight to the point. This was his real reason for coming.

"To Asgard?" the Ancient One asked in mild surprise. "Why?"

After all, her duty was to protect Earth. What happened to Asgard was not really her concern.

Karl paused.

Right—why did he want to go to Asgard?

Originally, it was because he didn't know when the Convergence would begin, so he thought of going to Asgard to wait and see. But now that he was already here with the Ancient One, couldn't he just ask her about the timing directly?

"Because I don't know the exact time of the Convergence," Karl replied honestly. "So I thought I might try my luck in Asgard and wait it out."

The Ancient One chuckled softly, clearly amused.

"Wanting the exact time is quite simple," she said. "Karl, do you know what happens when the Convergence occurs—when the nine realms align?"

"Of course," Karl said instinctively. "They line up in a—"

He stopped mid-sentence, eyes widening.

That's right.

When the Nine Realms align... that means an eclipse.

Karl nearly slapped himself. How could he have forgotten something so obvious? When the realms align into a straight line, an eclipse naturally occurs—and eclipses can be predicted with precision. A simple astronomical forecast would give the exact time.

Seeing the look of sudden realization on Karl's face, the Ancient One smiled again.

"So now you know the timing," she said. "Do you still wish to go to Asgard?"

Karl thought for a moment, then nodded firmly.

"Yes, Master Ancient One. I still want to go. If the Dark Elves can be stopped in Asgard, then Earth won't have to suffer the consequences."

But there was another reason he didn't say out loud.

In his previous life, watching Thor: The Dark World, Karl had always felt uneasy about Frigga's death.

Thor and Loki's growth had relied heavily on Frigga's guidance—especially Loki. No matter how much Loki denied it, Frigga's death was the blow that hurt him most, even more than Odin's eventual death.

Karl had always admired Frigga as a character: a wise and gentle mother who guided a foolish eldest son and a cunning second son, prevented them from becoming true enemies, balanced the relationship between her children and Odin, and restrained Odin's more stubborn and reckless tendencies.

Using Frigga's death merely to accelerate Thor and Loki's development had always felt unnecessary to Karl. Thor didn't truly become a worthy king until Ragnarok, and Loki didn't truly reconcile with Asgard until then either—when he finally abandoned the shadow of his Frost Giant heritage.

In Karl's eyes, Frigga's death was entirely avoidable.

He had crossed into the Marvel world—if he didn't change anything, then what was the point? To relive the same tragedies as a spectator? That would be no different from watching a movie.

This time, he wanted to change things. To rewrite regrets.

So yes—he would go to Asgard. To prevent Frigga's death, and also to see Asgard with his own eyes. The golden palaces and magnificent scenery had

always looked breathtaking on screen. If he didn't visit before Asgard's eventual destruction, it would be a real shame.

The Ancient One nodded after hearing him.

"Very well. I will need Odin's consent. I know you have your own arrangements, so wait for my message."

Karl nodded gratefully. What followed was casual conversation—some idle chatter and discussion about magic theory. Nothing serious, just relaxed talk.

That evening, Karl arrived as promised, carrying good food and fine wine.

Mordo, Wong, and Kaecilius were already waiting at a cliffside platform in Kamar-Taj. Calling it a cliff was generous—it was more like a small raised terrace. Once the four gathered, Karl waved his hand, and the drinking began.

It was rare peace.

They talked freely, laughed openly, and forgot the troubles of the day. Sharing drinks with a few close friends, letting go of worries—this simple joy was its own kind of bliss.

By dawn, the four were finally spent.

Looking down, they realized the ground was littered with fruit peels, nut shells, an entire fish skeleton, and empty bottles scattered everywhere. All four were so drunk they walked like waddling ducks.

Arms slung over each other's shoulders, they staggered back toward the dormitories. Surprisingly, Mordo was the most sober among them—his tolerance was far better than the rest.

After settling Wong and Kaecilius into their rooms, Mordo half-dragged, half-carried Karl—who was drunk like a cat—to Wanda's door. He knocked, unceremoniously handed Karl over to her, and then returned to his own room.

Wanda helped Karl onto the bed and shook her head helplessly. It was already near dawn—clearly, those men had been drinking all night.

After tucking him in, Wanda left the room and began her new day of training.

Her control over Chaos Magic had been improving at an astonishing pace. Except for spells of overwhelming power—which still risked backlash—she could now cast most magic without losing control.

In fact, even the Ancient One had begun to consider whether she should allow Wanda to study the Darkhold.

The Darkhold was written by ancient dark sorcerers who worshipped Chthon, the very entity that had granted Wanda her Chaos Magic. Wanda and the Darkhold were frighteningly compatible—the spells within it seemed almost tailor-made for her.

The Ancient One had considered this more than once.

But observation was still necessary.

Only when she was certain that Wanda would not be consumed by dark magic would she allow her to read the Darkhold.

For now, Wanda was not yet ready.

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Chapter 275 - 275 – S.H.I.E.L.D.'s Actions

When Karl finally woke up, it was already evening. He had slept an entire day straight. As he opened his eyes, Wanda was sitting in the room reading, with dinner neatly placed on the table.

"You're awake," Wanda said with a smile, setting her book aside and sitting next to him. "Get up and eat something."

Karl washed up briefly and then ate the food Wanda had brought back. The meals at Kamar-Taj weren't elaborate, but they were exceptionally good.

After saying goodbye to the Ancient One, Karl returned to the office with Wanda via the Chocobo Space. Skye was still in her usual spot, furiously typing away at her keyboard, earning money to support both Karl and the office.

In truth, Karl wasn't short on money at all, but on the surface it really did look like Skye was the one bringing home the income. Karl—and Tony as well—had essentially become useless mascots. Tony, lacking a proper lab to continue developing his armor, had been idle as well. A few days earlier, he had even gone to participate in a rally race. He didn't place, and his car flew off a cliff midway through, but at least he had found something to do. Unlike Karl, who spent all day lying around the office.

Karl and Wanda's sudden appearance didn't surprise Skye or Natasha in the slightest. Yes—missing-in-action Natasha had returned. Nick Fury had sent her to a small European country where intelligence suggested someone was secretly building a nuclear weapon. Natasha infiltrated to investigate, confirmed the situation, and—under various international treaties forbidding nuclear weapons production—acted as the investigator. Barton and Steve followed up as the strike team and wiped out the entire operation.

With the mission complete, Natasha had some free time and returned to the office to resume her role as a freeloader—doing nothing but eating and drinking on someone else's dime.

Tony was playing the latest game release when he saw Karl and Wanda reappear. He immediately dropped the controller and rushed over.

"Where the hell did you go? I've been looking for you all day!"

Since recovering from his injuries, Tony had fully reverted to his old rich-kid behavior—minus the playboy reputation.

"I went to Kamar-Taj," Karl said calmly as he sat down on the couch. "What I'm about to say is important."

Tony's playful expression vanished at once. Natasha and Skye also put aside what they were doing.

"What's so serious?" Tony asked.

"Do you remember Asgard and Thor?" Karl began. "Before long, the Dark Elves will invade Earth. In the past, they—"

Karl proceeded to explain everything in detail: the Dark Elves, the Convergence, and the Nine Realms.

Everyone's first reaction was disbelief—it sounded like mythology. But Asgard and Thor had already proven to be real, which meant the Dark Elves were very likely real as well.

"So you're saying that during the Convergence, the Dark Elves will invade Earth?" Natasha asked, her expression grave. Protecting Earth was S.H.I.E.L.D.'s core mission.

"That's right," Karl nodded. "And not just Earth. All Nine Realms will become their battlefield. They want to unify the Nine Realms."

"In that case," Natasha said immediately, pulling out her phone, "I need to report this to Nick Fury."

"Where's the passage?" she asked as she dialed. "New York?"

"No," Karl replied. "Earth's convergence point is in London—at the Royal Greenwich Observatory."

As soon as he finished speaking, Tony projected images of the Royal Greenwich Observatory and its surroundings.

The call connected, and Nick Fury had already heard Karl's explanation through Natasha. Tony split off a screen, projecting Fury's face.

"Karl," Fury said with a deep frown, "I need to know your source. This involves another country. S.H.I.E.L.D. needs a legitimate reason to intervene."

"There is no source," Karl replied without hesitation. "I foresaw it. My magic allows me to occasionally glimpse the future."

He made it up on the spot—yet to his surprise, Fury accepted it without question.

"I understand," Fury said. "What's the exact time?"

"When is the next solar eclipse?" Karl asked in return.

Fury paused, then realization dawned on him.

"The day after tomorrow, around two in the afternoon."

Tony pulled up another projection—an official forecast from the meteorological bureau confirming the time.

"During the eclipse," Karl said, "the passage connecting the Nine Realms will open. That's when the Dark Elves will invade Earth. The exact location is the former site of the Royal Greenwich Observatory."

Fury nodded. "Leave the rest to me. The entire area will be sealed off, and all civilians within a two-kilometer radius will be evacuated. Your job is to keep the battle confined to the Observatory and minimize collateral damage."

Karl nodded in agreement. Fury then ordered Natasha to return to S.H.I.E.L.D. immediately and ended the call.

"Tony," Karl said, turning to him, "I'll need you to take Skye, Wanda, Gwen, and the others to London with S.H.I.E.L.D."

"What about you?" Tony asked in surprise. "Why am I taking everyone? What are you doing?"

"I'm going to Asgard," Karl replied. "I'll try to deal with the Dark Elves there first."

"Asgard?!" Tony shot to his feet. "You're going somewhere that awesome and not taking me with you?"

The idea of Asgard—the golden realm of Norse legend—instantly ignited Tony's curiosity. Of course he wanted to see it.

Tony's reaction stood in sharp contrast to Skye and Wanda's calm expressions. They weren't surprised at all. Any place Karl had been before would be marked by Chocobo Space. Asgard would be no exception. If they wanted to go, it would take nothing more than a thought.

Karl considered it for a moment. Bringing Tony along wasn't impossible, and Tony would be a powerful ally. The only concern was Kamar-Taj. The sorcerers had always kept a low profile, protecting Earth from the shadows. Karl wasn't sure whether the Ancient One would approve of Tony learning about their existence.

"Wait here," Karl said. "Let me ask first."

With that, he used Chocobo Space to travel to Kamar-Taj, where he found the Ancient One overseeing the training of sorcerers in the courtyard.

"Master Ancient One," Karl said, "about the trip to Asgard—I'd like to bring someone with me. Would that be acceptable?"

"Tony Stark?" the Ancient One asked, smiling as usual.

Karl wasn't surprised in the slightest. Coming from her, nothing ever was.

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"It's fine. When the time comes, just bring him to the New York Sanctum with you."

With the Ancient One's approval, Karl finally felt at ease. She didn't seem surprised at all that Karl could suddenly appear in Kamar-Taj, and Karl didn't bother explaining. He returned directly to the office.

"All right, Tony—you're coming with me," Karl said.

Once he got confirmation, Tony immediately began servicing his armor. Although it was a nanotech suit, routine maintenance was still essential. Tony even went so far as to replace the arc reactor with a brand-new one.

That evening, Peter and Felicia arrived at the office with Gwen. They had also heard about the Convergence and came to help.

S.H.I.E.L.D. moved quickly. The very next day, Natasha returned to the office and briefed Karl and the others on S.H.I.E.L.D.'s plan.

Nick Fury's strategy was extremely thorough. Not only would the Royal Greenwich Observatory and a two-kilometer radius around it be completely sealed off, but a large quantity of heavy weapons would also be deployed—including missiles. Steve Rogers, Clint Barton, Natasha, and Coulson were all assigned to the operation. Coulson would handle perimeter security and lockdown, while the others prepared for direct combat with the Dark Elves.

Except for Natasha, everyone else had already gone ahead to London. Natasha returned specifically to bring the remaining group over to rendezvous.

Gwen and Skye piloted the flashy Quinjet, carrying everyone toward London. Meanwhile, Karl took Tony straight to the New York Sanctum.

To ordinary people, the New York Sanctum looked completely unremarkable—just another nondescript building among countless others. No one passing by would give it a second glance. Most people subconsciously ignored its existence.

This was the result of enchantments laid down by the sorcerers of Kamar-Taj, designed to conceal the Sanctum's true purpose. To outsiders, it appeared to be an utterly mundane building—the kind even a stray dog wouldn't bother looking at twice.

Tony looked up at the plain building, baffled. He had never noticed a place like this in New York before.

"So this is the New York Sanctum you were talking about?" Tony said disdainfully. "What's so 'sanctum' about this dump?"

"Don't judge by appearances," Karl replied with a grin. "It's a magical sanctum. Not drawing attention is kind of the whole point."

Karl stepped forward to knock, but the door opened on its own. The guardian of the New York Sanctum stepped out first.

"Mr. Norman," the guardian said, "the Ancient One has already informed me of your purpose. Please follow me."

Karl and Tony entered the Sanctum. The moment they stepped inside, the antique and elegant décor immediately caught Tony's eye.

"Didn't expect this," Tony muttered. "Looks like a wreck on the outside, but the inside's got taste."

He clicked his tongue as he looked around curiously. The magical artifacts scattered throughout the Sanctum opened up an entirely new world for him.

They made their way to the second floor and stopped in front of a magical door. The guardian reached out and twisted it slightly. The scenery beyond the doorway shifted and transformed, finally settling on the image of a towering golden palace.

"Mr. Norman," the guardian said, "passing through this door will take you to the Rainbow Bridge in Asgard. Someone will be there to receive you."

Karl nodded and turned to Tony—only to find him staring intently at a suit of armor nearby. The armor shimmered faintly, its scale-like plates opening and closing rhythmically, almost as if it were breathing.

"How was this thing made?" Tony murmured. "What kind of process did they use?"

He reached out to touch it, but the armor's scales instantly flared outward, bristling toward his hand.

"Please don't touch it, Mr. Stark," the guardian said quickly. "That armor does not wish to be touched. It will attack."

It was obvious the armor had taken offense; the raised scales were a clear warning.

Tony immediately withdrew his hand, and the armor's scales slowly returned to normal.

A thoughtful look appeared in Tony's eyes. Staring at the armor, a new idea began to form—one he fully intended to test in his next suit.

"JARVIS," Tony said, "create a new file. New armor designation: Darkscale. Record the mechanism of that armor. I've got a new concept."

"Understood, sir," JARVIS replied at once. "New file created: Mark 52, Darkscale Armor."

The bracelet flickered softly, pulsing like a steady breath.

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Asgard

Thor was waiting at the far end of the Rainbow Bridge, near the Observatory platform. Odin had just informed him that two Midgardians were arriving in Asgard—friends of Thor's—and instructed him to receive them.

Thor was completely baffled. Aside from Jane, what friends did he have on Earth? The idea sounded absurd. Curious, he came to see for himself.

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### Asgardian Prison

Inside the prison, Loki lay sprawled on his bed, idly tossing a small ball into the air out of sheer boredom. In a nearby cell, the horned, masked prisoner quietly plunged his hand into his own abdomen. With skin and flesh tearing, he ripped out a black stone about the size of a plum. Dark blood streamed from the wound, yet he showed no sign of pain as he stared down at the stone in his hand.

Suddenly, the stone began to glow red, the light flowing as though it were alive. The masked man gazed at it, then seemed to steel himself and crushed it in his fist.

The red light surged instantly, spreading from his palm throughout his entire body. His skin looked as if it had been ignited, veins bulging as crimson energy—alive and writhing—rushed toward his heart.

Other prisoners noticed what was happening. At first, they watched in stunned curiosity, but soon panic erupted. They began screaming and pounding frantically against the golden energy barriers of their cells.

The masked man's body appeared to burn like living fire. Red energy raged uncontrollably as he trembled violently, as though enduring unimaginable pain.

Loki suddenly stopped tossing the ball and listened closely. He heard the screams echoing from deeper within the prison. Rising from his bed, he walked to the energy barrier and peered into the distance.

Inside the masked man's cell, the transformation reached its peak. With a thunderous explosion, red light engulfed the entire cell. Thick black smoke billowed outward. When it cleared, everyone inside—except the masked man—had been reduced to heaps of black sand.

The masked man knelt on the ground in agony. His body, glowing like burning coal, began to swell in size. The horned mask slowly fused with his flesh, until at last he transformed into a massive, horned, spike-covered monster.

The deafening roar drew the attention of the prison guards. Several rushed toward the source of the noise. Loki, equally intrigued, watched from behind his energy barrier as the chaos unfolded deeper within the prison.

With a violent crash, the monster smashed through the energy barrier with a single punch. The guards charged forward with swords drawn, but Asgardian blades were utterly useless against the creature.

The monster effortlessly caught a sword, yanked the guard off balance, and in the next instant drove its hand into the man's chest. With a brutal squeeze, it crushed the guard's heart.

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Chapter 277 - 277 – Prison Riot

The surrounding guards immediately raised their swords and charged at the monster, but its skin was far too tough. Every strike only produced a spray of sparks—there was no penetration at all.

The creature seized two guards by the necks, one in each hand, and tightened its grip. With a sharp crack, both necks snapped instantly.

Tossing aside the limp bodies, the monster strode to another cell and smashed the energy barrier with a single punch. The prisoners inside erupted with excitement and rushed out.

It continued toward the prison exit, shattering every barrier it passed and freeing the inmates within. The released prisoners poured out of their cells, killing anyone they encountered.

Loki stood behind his own energy barrier, watching as the prisoners flooded out of the prison. Among them, the massive monster was impossible to miss. It eventually stopped in front of Loki's cell.

The two stared at each other for a moment. In the end, the monster did not break Loki's barrier. Instead, it turned and began to leave.

"Trust me," Loki said suddenly with a faint smile, his tone calm, as if chatting with a friend. "You should take the stairs on the left."

The monster glanced back at Loki, then followed his advice and headed toward the left staircase.

By now, a large number of prisoners had escaped, and Asgard's guard units rushed to the prison, weapons drawn, engaging the rioters in battle.

In the palace gardens, Frigga and Jane looked toward the source of the disturbance. Jane's face was filled with confusion.

"That's the prison," Frigga said gravely. "Come with me."

Sensing danger, she immediately took Jane by the hand and led her back into the palace.

At the Observatory, Thor heard a furious roar and turned toward the palace.

"There's a prison riot," Heimdall said calmly. "You should go and see."

He made no move himself. His duty was to guard the Rainbow Bridge, and without orders, he could not leave his post.

"Loki," Thor said, his expression darkening.

He hurled Mjolnir and shot off toward the prison.

At that moment, the Warriors Three were leading the guard forces against the escaped prisoners. The inmates were no match for Asgard's regular army and were being pushed back toward the prison gates.

Boom—!

Thunder rolled across the sky above the prison as Thor slammed down onto the battlefield. Lightning surged outward, instantly paralyzing every prisoner within a five-meter radius.

Hammer in hand, Thor stepped forward. His arrival froze the chaos; the fighting halted as all eyes turned toward him.

"Return to your cells," Thor commanded sternly. "End this now, and I give you my word."

Suddenly, a prisoner lunged at him. Thor swung Mjolnir and struck him down in a single blow, lightning blasting through the man's skull.

"Very well," Thor said coldly. "I take that back."

Lightning flared in his eyes, electricity crackling violently around Mjolnir.

"Kill him! Kill Thor!" the prisoners roared.

Most of them had been captured by Thor himself. Now that they had broken free, they had no intention of backing down because of a few words.

Thor raised Mjolnir high and smashed it into the ground.

Boom—!!

A torrent of lightning surged forward, ripping through the prisoners. One after another, they collapsed like wheat before a scythe. The prison grounds looked as though they had been plowed over by divine fury.

In the palace, Odin had already been informed of the prison break. He knew this was no ordinary riot—Asgard's prison was not something inmates could escape from so easily. There had to be a deeper plot.

Odin moved swiftly through the palace with a detachment of guards.

"Send a unit to secure the armory," he ordered. "Hold it at all costs."

A captain nodded and departed at once.

"Odin."

Frigga arrived with Jane, worry written across her face.

"It's only a minor disturbance," Odin said evenly. "Nothing to be concerned about."

"You've never been good at lying, Odin," Frigga replied softly.

Odin smiled faintly. "Take her to your chambers. Once things are secure, I'll come find you."

At that moment, Sif passed by with a unit of soldiers. She noticed Jane—and Jane noticed her as well—as they crossed paths.

"Be careful, Odin," Frigga said in a low voice. "I have a bad feeling."

"My queen," Odin laughed lightly, "after all these years, you still worry."

"That's exactly why you always survive," Frigga said.

Odin departed with his guards, while Frigga led Jane toward her own palace chambers, which were protected by powerful wards—completely impenetrable from the outside.

All of Asgard entered a state of high alert. Patrols filled the streets, and civilians were ordered to remain indoors.

At the Observatory, Heimdall gazed toward the palace. He could clearly see the prison riot and Thor leading the suppression.

Suddenly, a ripple formed behind him. Two figures emerged—Karl and Tony.

Heimdall turned at once, his golden eyes fixing on them.

"You are the guests from Midgard?" he asked, his expression solemn—especially as he looked at Karl.

Karl nodded, while Tony looked around with unconcealed curiosity.

"That's right. You must be Heimdall," Karl said. "Impressive—tall and imposing."

"I cannot see through you," Heimdall replied. "In all the Nine Realms, there are very few beings I cannot perceive."

"The universe is bigger than the Nine Realms," Karl said with a casual wave of his hand. "There's plenty you can't see."

Tony had already taken a full lap around the Observatory. The architecture was unlike anything he'd ever seen, and the entire structure was made of gold—extravagant beyond belief.

"Is your armor made of gold too?" Tony asked, eyes fixed on Heimdall's armor and sword. "What kind of process did you use?"

Gold, after all, was famously soft—even biteable. It was hardly suitable for armor.

Heimdall turned toward Tony, about to respond, when a sudden sense of unease washed over him. He immediately moved to the massive observation window.

Though he could not see it, he could clearly feel something approaching—slowly, silently.

Karl followed his gaze. He felt it too.

He knew exactly what it was.

A Dark Elf Razor Ship.

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Chapter 278 - 278 – Assault on Asgard

In an instant, a green wind blade shot out from Karl's side and slammed into the empty air ahead. The blade exploded on impact, and a jet-black aircraft with a crimson engine at its center gradually revealed itself.

It was indeed a Dark Elf vessel. The only mystery was how the Dark Elves had managed to slip into Asgard without anyone noticing.

Karl's gaze sharpened. He casually flicked his hand, releasing a bolt of lightning. The purple lightning, crackling with violent energy, struck the Razor Ship dead center. A gaping hole was blown through its engine, and the vessel detonated, its wreckage plunging into the sea below.

But then, the Dark Elves' mothership slowly emerged.

The colossal, sword-shaped black vessel blotted out the sky, eclipsing the Observatory and the Rainbow Bridge behind it. Under the blazing sun, it looked like a massive black blade hanging upside down over Asgard.

Moments later, dozens of Razor Ships detached from the mothership and streaked toward the royal palace.

Karl, Tony, and Heimdall all looked up at the invading fleet. Heimdall immediately relayed the situation to Odin. In response, Odin's divine awareness spread across all of Asgard, instantly confirming Heimdall's report.

"Alert everyone. Enter full combat readiness immediately," Odin commanded.

"Activate the anti-air batteries. Launch all ships and intercept the enemy!"

At the same time, he summoned his two ravens and sent them skyward to survey the entire realm.

At the Observatory, Karl and Tony exchanged a glance. Heimdall stood firm at the head of the Rainbow Bridge, sword in hand—his sole duty was to protect it and ensure it remained intact.

"Let's go. We'll help," Karl said.

His cloak flared open as he rose straight into the air.

Tony tapped the arc reactor in his chest twice. Nano-armor flowed over his body in an instant, and he shot into the sky alongside Karl, heading for the golden palace.

The Razor Ships were fast—but Karl and Tony were faster.

Each of them intercepted a ship from above. Tony's floating cannons unfolded behind him, firing brilliant blue beams that sliced cleanly through a Razor Ship from top to bottom. The vessel split apart and exploded midair.

Karl, meanwhile, was wreathed in crackling purple lightning. He spread his hand, and thunder roared across the sky. A bolt as thick as a bowl smashed into a Razor Ship, then arced outward, chaining into three more nearby vessels.

Boom!

The ships detonated one after another. The lightning showed no sign of weakening—in fact, it grew even more violent, tearing through over a dozen Razor Ships in rapid succession.

Tony's blue beams flashed repeatedly through the air, each flash marking the destruction of another enemy craft. If Tony's attacks were like a razor-sharp sword, precisely cleaving through targets, then Karl's lightning was a colossal hammer, pulverizing everything it struck into fragments.

Together, the two of them held back the first wave of the assault, buying precious time for Asgard's defenses to react. Massive anti-air cannons lit up with golden light, firing dense barrages that tore into the second wave of incoming Razor Ships.

At the same time, Asgardian vessels lifted off to engage the enemy. Notably, Asgard's "ships" were exactly that—actual ships, soaring through the sky.

For a moment, Asgard's skies erupted into a spectacular and deadly aerial battle. Both sides fought without restraint, unleashing everything they had in a brutal struggle to annihilate one another.

Back at the Observatory, Heimdall returned to the high platform and slowly drove his sword into a hidden mechanism. With a powerful twist, he activated it.

The entire Observatory began to rotate. Rune after rune ignited in sequence. Deep beneath the palace, golden energy surged forth, spinning rapidly. A shimmering golden barrier rose up around the royal palace, enclosing it completely in a massive protective shield.

Inside the palace, the escaped monster reached the depths beneath the structure and stood before the swirling golden energy core. Along the path it had taken, more than a hundred Asgardian guards lay dead, their bodies strewn across the floor.

The creature raised both fists and smashed them down.

Boom!

The golden energy erupted violently, engulfing the monster in a blinding explosion.

Outside, the newly formed golden barrier shattered instantly, dissolving like melting ice cream. At the same time, a Razor Ship broke through the defenses and slammed directly into the palace platform, its blade-like hull carving straight into the palace interior.

Karl turned toward the palace. He knew Malekith was aboard that ship—and he knew Frigga was fated to die at Malekith's hands.

"Tony, with me! Get to the palace—this place won't hold!" Karl shouted.

He immediately sped toward the palace. Tony glanced back once, then followed. They both knew that the two of them alone couldn't clear all the enemy ships. Falling back to defend the palace was the only viable option.

Inside the palace, the guards formed up in tight ranks, swords raised and pointed at the Razor Ship's hatch.

The anticipated sudden charge didn't come.

Instead, the hatch slowly opened, and Dark Elves poured out, weapons raised, unleashing a storm of gunfire. The Asgardian soldiers were caught off guard—none of them expected such shameless reliance on firearms.

But Asgard's shields were no mere decoration. Recovering quickly, the soldiers raised their enchanted shields, easily blocking the Dark Elves' energy rounds.

Then a Dark Elf hurled a grenade.

It detonated in the middle of the formation, creating something like a miniature black hole. Three soldiers were instantly dragged in and swallowed, vanishing without a trace.

It was the Dark Elves' secret weapon—the singularity grenade. Each one generated a small black hole upon detonation, devouring everything nearby.

With sustained gunfire and the support of the singularity grenades, the Asgardians were gradually pushed back, casualties mounting by the second.

But the situation didn't last.

As reinforcements arrived, the Asgardians launched a countercharge. In close combat, the Dark Elves' firearms were far less effective, and once blades met blades, they were no match for Asgard's battle-hardened warriors.

The fight devolved into a brutal stalemate, neither side able to decisively overpower the other.

At that moment, Malekith stepped calmly out of the Razor Ship, flanked by several guards wielding long spears.

He casually plucked a singularity grenade from a fallen soldier's back and tossed it toward Odin's throne.

A black hole bloomed, swallowing the throne whole.

Without a second glance, Malekith turned and walked in another direction.

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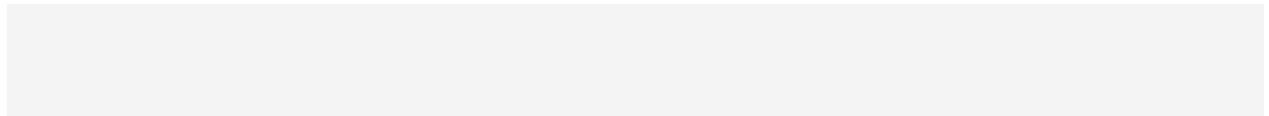
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Chapter 279 - 279 – Saving Frigga



By the time Odin arrived, there were no living souls left in the palace hall. Whether Dark Elf or Asgardian, both sides had fought to the very last man.

Odin strode forward. Suddenly, a Dark Elf who was not quite dead yet struggled to his feet and attempted to attack him.

A streak of golden light flashed past. Gungnir, the Spear of Eternity, released a brilliant beam that instantly annihilated the Dark Elf. Under the searing golden radiance, even the corpse was reduced to ash.

Odin surveyed the battlefield, his expression unreadable as he looked upon the fallen Asgardian soldiers. Then, as if a thought struck him, his face changed.

"Frigga!"

He immediately led his guards at speed toward Frigga's chambers.

Meanwhile, Malekith had already arrived alone at the entrance to Frigga's quarters. He pushed open the door effortlessly. With the palace barrier destroyed, the protective enchantments around Frigga's chambers had vanished as well.

Frigga stood motionless before Jane, a short blade in hand, shielding her with her body. She knew Malekith had come for Jane—or rather, for the Aether within her. That power could never be allowed to fall into the hands of the Dark Elves, or the Nine Realms would be plunged into catastrophe and endless darkness.

"Leave this place, Dark Elf," Frigga said calmly. "I may yet spare your life."

She showed no fear. In her youth, she had been a formidable sorceress, once fighting alongside Odin in the conquest of the Nine Realms.

"My life is far too resilient for you to take," Malekith replied coldly as he advanced.

"Your name, Dark Elf," Frigga demanded.

This was an Asgardian tradition—before a duel, one asked the opponent's name.

"Malekith," he answered, turning his gaze toward Jane. "I have come to reclaim what rightfully belongs to the Dark Elves."

He could clearly sense the Aether within Jane's body. It was the Aether itself that had guided him here.

Frigga ran her hand along the blade. A blue glow spread across its edge. In the next instant, she lunged at Malekith.

Malekith drew his curved blade, and the two clashed.

Though known primarily as a sorceress, Frigga was no stranger to close combat. In this world, mages who could not fight at close range rarely survived—Loki himself favored daggers over a staff, and the sorcerers of Kamar-Taj were masters of both magic and martial skill.

Frigga's strikes were precise and lethal. Her enchanted blade was razor-sharp, and within moments she severed Malekith's curved weapon cleanly in two.

Without hesitation, Malekith discarded the broken blade and swung a punch at her. But Frigga had once fought across the Nine Realms at Odin's side. Though she had not fought in many years, her experience and technique far surpassed that of Malekith, who had been exiled for millennia.

In just a few exchanges, Malekith was driven back against the wall, weaponless, Frigga's blade pressed against his throat.

Before she could speak, a massive figure smashed through the wall and stormed in.

The creature was towering, horned, and covered in jagged spikes—the Dark Elf monster that had destroyed Asgard's defensive core.

It seized Frigga by the throat and lifted her into the air, finally giving Malekith room to breathe.

Rubbing his neck, Malekith turned his attention toward Jane, who was hiding nearby.

"You took something from me, human," he said coldly. "It is time to return it."

He stepped toward Jane. Frozen with fear, she trembled in place, unable even to flee.

Malekith reached out, intending to draw the Aether from her body—but his hand passed straight through her.

A flash of green light erupted, and Jane vanished from before his eyes.

"Witch!" Malekith roared as he spun around.

Only then did he remember that Frigga had once been the greatest sorceress of Asgard. Creating an illusionary duplicate was effortless for her.

As the most powerful mage of the Vanir, Frigga's mastery of magic had once been unrivaled. Even Loki's skills had been taught by her own hand.

The monster holding Frigga suddenly tightened its grip, pressing a short blade against her lower back.

"Where is the Aether, witch?" Malekith demanded, his black eyes fixed on her.

"You will never know," Frigga said hoarsely, struggling for breath.

"I believe you," Malekith replied calmly.

He gestured, and the monster raised its blade, preparing to strike.

Boom!

A gunshot rang out. A blue magical projectile slammed into the monster's arm with pinpoint accuracy, breaking its grip on Frigga.

"RAAAH—!"

The creature roared in pain, hurling the short blade toward the source of the attack.

At that instant, purple lightning tore through the air, shattering the blade and striking the monster head-on. The immense force sent it crashing into a nearby wall.

A red cloak and a suit of gold-and-red armor flew in through the shattered opening.

Karl and Tony had arrived.

"So that's Malekith?" Tony scoffed as his faceplate retracted. "Doesn't look like much."

To be honest, the Dark Elves were nothing like the elegant image of elves in Tony's imagination. To him, elves were supposed to be tall, graceful, sharp-eared, and beautiful. This one was just plain ugly.

Frigga looked at Karl and Tony, instantly recognizing them as Midgardians. From Karl in particular, she sensed a wild, untamed magic—raw, primal, and unrefined, the very essence of magic in its original form.

"You've come for the girl from Earth?" Frigga asked.

Karl helped her to her feet. "You could say that."

He did not say they had come to save her. If Frigga believed they were here for Jane, that was close enough.

"Humans," Malekith snarled. "Lowly creatures, wielding weapons so primitive."

"Primitive?" Tony snapped. "You're calling my tech primitive?"

That was the fastest way to provoke him.

The floating cannons behind Tony unfolded instantly, firing two brilliant blue beams straight at Malekith.

Malekith sprinted toward the balcony as a transparent barrier flared to life behind him, blocking the blasts—but shattering in the process.

Karl unleashed a bolt of lightning. The purple arc slammed directly into Malekith's face with ferocious force.

A scream rang out.

Half of Malekith's face was charred black, the flesh melted away to reveal stark white bone beneath.

Howling in agony, Malekith tumbled over the balcony.

The monster burst out after him, leaping down as well and grabbing hold of Malekith, carrying him away in its arms.

Tony immediately took to the air, pursuing them and raining fire down relentlessly. Yet the creature shielded Malekith with its own body, and the floating cannons could barely pierce its hide.

Suddenly, a hammer wreathed in blue lightning streaked past Tony at blinding speed, slamming into the monster's body.

The impact sent it flying even faster.

At that moment, a sword-shaped vessel materialized out of thin air. A red beam shot out, pulling both the monster and Malekith into the ship's interior. The vessel vanished instantly.

Mjolnir, having lost its target, arced back through the sky and returned to Thor's waiting hand.

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Odin came to Frigga's side and pulled her into his arms. He knew she had narrowly escaped death, and he also knew that it was Karl and Tony who had saved her.

"You must be the two Midgardians the Ancient One spoke of," Odin said, turning his gaze toward them.

Tony was still wearing his armor. Odin glanced at the arc reactor embedded in his chest.

"Yes," Karl replied, nodding.

Thor had also noticed Karl and Tony. He strode forward and pulled both of them into a crushing embrace, his brute strength nearly squeezing the air out of Tony.

"I'm truly glad to see you here in Asgard!" Thor laughed heartily.

After the Battle of New York, the original Avengers had forged genuine bonds of friendship. When Heimdall had mentioned that Thor's friends from Midgard had arrived, Thor hadn't even considered Karl and Tony at first—yet it really was them.

At that moment, Jane emerged from a hidden chamber nearby. Upon seeing Karl and Tony, she froze in surprise as well. She hadn't expected them to come to Asgard either.

On Earth, Tony Stark was known by everyone. Iron Man's fame had spread across the entire world. Jane also recognized Karl—after all, he was the man who had single-handedly fought the Destroyer in New Mexico, and later transformed into a colossal humanoid monster during the Battle of New York, wiping out the alien invasion in one decisive blow. If not for Karl's deliberately low profile, his popularity might well have surpassed Iron Man's.

That night, all of Asgard gathered by the sea. The realm glittered like a field of stars, as countless people stood along the shore holding torches and glowing orbs that shone like starlight.

Upon the water floated thousands of small boats, each carrying a single body. They were the Asgardian warriors who had fallen in the war.

At the very front, Odin struck the butt of Gungnir against the ground. A surge of energy rippled across the sea, reaching every boat at once. Slowly, the vessels began to drift out toward the open waters.

As they watched the boats recede into the distance, solemn expressions filled every face. These were Asgard's heroes—their souls were destined for Valhalla.

Behind Odin, countless flaming arrows were loosed. Each one struck its target precisely, igniting the boats. As they burned, the vessels continued drifting toward the edge of Asgard. Once they crossed the boundary, they vanished abruptly, dissolving into countless points of light that merged with the star-filled sky above.

At the same time, innumerable glowing orbs were released, rising gently into the heavens like brilliant stars.

"May your souls reach Valhalla," Odin murmured softly, lifting his gaze to the radiant sky.

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In the depths of the unknown cosmos, a sword-shaped vessel drifted aimlessly through space. Inside, Malekith lay unconscious within a medical pod.

"Recover," the monster standing nearby said in a low voice. "Reclaim the Aether, and lead the Dark Elves back to glory."

It looked down at Malekith.

"When you awaken, we will wipe them all out."

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Back in Asgard, inside a chamber, Jane stared at her hand. A faint red energy flowed beneath her skin.

Suddenly, her vision turned crimson. Everything around her—decorations, food, even the sky—was dyed a deep, blood-red hue.

Jane hurried to the balcony. All of Asgard now looked as though it were submerged in blood. Even the once-golden palace had become scarlet.

Her eyes abruptly turned pitch black. Her vision sharpened unnaturally, allowing her to see all the way to the distant Rainbow Bridge. In her sight, the bridge had lost its former brilliance, appearing decayed and corroded, with many sections already weathering away.

"Jane Foster!"

A loud shout rang out behind her.

Jane's eyes instantly returned to normal. She snapped back to her senses, looking around in confusion.

A squad of soldiers entered through the doorway.

"Jane Foster," one of them announced coldly, "by order of His Majesty, from this moment on, you are not permitted to leave this room."

Without waiting for her response, he waved his hand. The soldiers took their positions outside the chamber, standing guard at the door.

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Elsewhere, Karl and Tony stood before a shimmering light screen. Odin and Thor were present as well.

"At present, we still cannot restore the palace barrier," one of the Three Warriors said as he manipulated the display. "Nor can we track the Dark Elves' whereabouts. Even Heimdall is unable to see them."

The light screen showed the current state of the palace. Without the barrier, the once-radiant golden halls now looked dim and lifeless. The dense runes covering the display made Karl's head ache just looking at them.

"I understand. You may withdraw," Odin said quietly.

The others bowed and departed, leaving only Karl, Tony, and Thor behind.

Odin turned his gaze to Karl. Within him, Odin sensed a presence that felt strangely familiar—faint, elusive, yet undeniably real.

"You are the Midgardian who once lifted Mjolnir, aren't you?" Odin asked, seated on the steps where his throne once stood, now destroyed by Malekith.

Karl nodded. There was no point denying it. Odin had placed enchantments on Mjolnir—anyone who lifted it would be known to him instantly.

Seeing Karl's confirmation, Odin suddenly hurled Gungnir toward him without the slightest hesitation.

Caught off guard, Karl instinctively reached out and caught the spear. To his astonishment, Gungnir felt weightless in his grasp. Not only that, he vaguely sensed a resonance between the weapon and his own will.

This left Karl deeply puzzled. According to Norse legend, Gungnir was a weapon that only the All-Father could wield—yet here he was, holding it with ease.

Before he could think further, purple lightning surged through the air. Mjolnir flew from Thor's hand and slammed directly into Karl's palm.

Now Karl stood there, utterly bewildered, holding Gungnir in one hand and Mjolnir in the other. Tony stared at him, equally stunned.

"T-That's impossible!" Thor exclaimed. "How can you wield Gungnir?!"

Thor was completely dumbfounded. Karl being able to lift Mjolnir was one thing—Thor had seen that before. But a Midgardian wielding Gungnir? In all his life, Thor had seen only one being capable of that: Odin himself. And Karl wasn't even an Asgardian.

"Karl—Karl! Let me try it too!" Tony blurted out eagerly. "I've never seen the legendary Spear of Eternity up close!"

Without waiting for permission, Tony grabbed for Gungnir.

A burst of golden light erupted, blasting him backward. His armor's stabilizers kicked in instantly, catching him midair and bringing him to a steady halt.

"What the hell?! Why?!" Tony shouted. "Why can you hold it, but I can't?!"

Unwilling to give up, he lunged for Gungnir again—only for Karl to swat his hand away.

"I don't really understand it either," Karl said, looking at the radiant spear. "But Gungnir is said to be wielded only by the King of Asgard."

He quickly returned the spear to Odin and tossed Mjolnir back to Thor.

The moment Thor grasped his hammer again, a wave of dejection suddenly surged into his heart. His face darkened instantly.

Mjolnir... didn't seem as close to him as before.

It had betrayed him.

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