

MARVEL MANIFESTOR

Chapter 401 401: His Misgivings About His Hands

After receiving confirmation from the Ancient One, Wanda was now allowed to read the second volume of the Darkhold—including learning all the spells recorded within it.

In the Ancient One's view, the only remaining factor that could cause Wanda's Chaos Magic to spiral out of control was Karl. He was both her greatest weakness and her most untouchable reverse scale.

The three of them sat quietly, each absorbed in their books, as time slipped by unnoticed.

—

New York, inside an unnamed church.

Several figures in mage robes stood atop the platform. Not far from them lay a man dressed as a priest, blood pooling beneath him.

Standing at the pulpit, Kaecilius casually tossed aside a Bible from the shelf and unfurled a scroll in his hands.

Several pages were attached to it, filled with ancient script, intricate magic circles, and a symbol composed of multiple interlocking arcs.

Kaecilius raised his hand and used magic to recreate the symbol in midair. Then, together with the others, he began chanting according to the instructions on the page.

Soon, a miniature version of that symbol appeared on each of their foreheads. Their eyes began to glow with a strange light, and the whites of their eyes gradually turned gray.

Suddenly, Dormammu's face appeared in Kaecilius's mind—a shifting, wave-like visage as deep as endless darkness, with only a pair of cold, gleaming eyes visible within it.

It was clear that Dormammu had noticed Kaecilius's summons—and had granted them his dark power.

Kaecilius smiled faintly. With a casual wave of his hand, the entire church began to disassemble and reconstruct itself—twisting and folding like building blocks, just as the Ancient One had once done.

Previously, this had been beyond Kaecilius's ability.

Now, it was as effortless as breathing.

—

Back at Kamar-Taj, in the courtyard.

After a period of adjustment, Strange was finally able to study magic with a calm mind.

He practiced alongside the other apprentices, attempting to construct spells. But another flaw soon revealed itself—his lack of confidence in his own hands.

Whenever he tried to form magic, he would unconsciously hesitate, worrying that his hands might fail him, might disrupt the spell. Because of this, he couldn't even form the most basic magical runes—let alone anything more advanced.

The Ancient One saw everything but did nothing.

This was a step Strange had to go through. He had already changed his understanding of the world and magic—now, all he lacked was confidence.

In recent days, Strange had become a regular in the library. He borrowed books constantly, reading everything he could get his hands on. By now, he had even picked up several languages—not enough to converse fluently, but more than enough to read and write.

—

"The Sling Ring is essential to daily life in Kamar-Taj. It allows us to travel freely across space—and even across universes."

That day, Mordo stood in the courtyard, teaching everyone how to open portals with Sling Rings. Each apprentice had been given one—including Strange.

"What you need to do is focus. Visualize your destination clearly in your mind. Then render it as an image. Don't limit yourself to what you see before you—imagine the details. The more vivid the image, the easier it will be to open a portal."

Mordo paced among the apprentices, hands behind his back.

Most of them could already produce the initial sparks that formed the circular gateway—except for a few.

Strange was one of those exceptions.

In front of him, only a few scattered sparks flickered. He couldn't even sustain them, let alone form a ring. The more he failed, the more anxious he became—and the more anxious he became, the less he succeeded.

Mordo saw everything—but under the Ancient One's orders, he couldn't help. He could only watch as Strange grew increasingly frustrated.

—

In a corner of the courtyard, the Ancient One stood beside Karl, both observing Strange.

"Karl, do you think the time has come?"

She turned to him, as if seeking his opinion.

Karl considered for a moment. After observing Strange over these past days, he had indeed changed significantly. He had become calmer, more composed. His former arrogance and flippancy had faded.

Only a trace of impatience remained.

"Aside from being a bit anxious—and his fixation on his hands—he's reached the level of an average mage."

Karl spoke with unusual seriousness, his usual laid-back demeanor nowhere to be seen.

"I see."

The Ancient One nodded. She too had noticed that Strange still fixated on his hands. There was nothing wrong with caring—but it had become a barrier.

If he couldn't overcome this inner demon, his magic would never progress beyond theory. No amount of reading would help.

"Master Camille, please come here."

With a casual wave, the Ancient One formed a spell and spoke into it.

Soon, Master Camille arrived.

"Ancient One."

He stood with his hands tucked within his wide sleeves.

The moment Karl saw him, he understood—this was the mage from the movie who had lost his hands. It seemed the Ancient One believed Strange was ready.

Karl sighed softly but said nothing more. He knew she had made her decision.

The Ancient One heard his sigh, but only smiled. This was her choice—and she had no regrets.

Seeing her arrive, Mordo immediately halted the training.

"Ancient One."

He bowed slightly.

"Mordo, I need to speak with Mr. Strange alone."

The Ancient One stepped forward. The other apprentices quickly dispersed, leaving Strange behind.

"You see, Ancient One... because of my hands, I can barely construct any magic. I can't even manage the simplest spells."

Strange spoke dejectedly. His hands trembled visibly—though they had improved over the past months, the shaking remained uncontrollable. The nerves had been severed and reconnected; the tendons could heal, but the nerves would never fully recover.

"This has nothing to do with your hands, Mr. Strange."

The Ancient One replied immediately. She knew—this was his inner demon.

"How can it have nothing to do with them?! Look at the others—their hands are fine. They form spells effortlessly. But me..."

He raised his hands. They shook uncontrollably, scars clearly visible.

"Master Camille."

The Ancient One turned toward the robed mage.

Camille stepped forward and extended his arms.

His wrists ended abruptly—he had no hands at all.

Strange stared in shock.

And then, right before his eyes, Master Camille began to construct a magical rune.

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## Chapter 402 402: Mount Everest

In just a few seconds, a complex yet profound magic circle appeared out of thin air before Strange.

Seeing the stunned look on his face, the Ancient One knew the effect had been achieved.

"Thank you, Master Camille."

Camille nodded and left the courtyard.

Karl leaned against a pillar, watching the scene between teacher and student. It felt completely different from what he had seen in the movies—proof that films were, after all, just films.

"Mr. Strange, you must learn to go with the flow. Power has always existed within you. What you need to do is find order within chaos—and then control it."

The Ancient One spoke earnestly. She understood the issue with Strange's hands, but to her, it was no real obstacle. Magic could compensate, even enhance one's control over the body.

"If I go with the flow, how can I control anything? Those two ideas contradict each other."

Strange replied helplessly. To him, "going with the flow" meant not interfering—completely opposite to control.

"You must understand that everything in this world has its own logic. You've achieved success through your intelligence, but that is not your true self. What you need is to find your true self—only then can you control everything."

As she spoke, the Ancient One traced a circle with her hands. A man-sized portal immediately appeared before them.

"Come with me."

She stepped through first. Though confused, Strange followed.

On the other side was a frozen wasteland—towering peaks, blanketed in snow, the sky a dull gray. A raging blizzard swept across the land, the only movement in an otherwise still world.

The portal remained open. Curious, Karl stepped through as well.

"This is... Mount Everest?!"

Though Strange had never been here, he recognized it instantly.

"It's... breathtaking~~"

He gazed into the distance. Below the peaks lay a sea of clouds and endless mountain ranges. Even under the dim sky, Everest's grandeur was undeniable—like a colossal beast sprawled across the horizon.

"In this temperature, without proper protection, a human can survive for about thirty minutes. Beyond that, organ failure and irreversible damage will occur."

The Ancient One seemed unaffected by the cold, even reaching out to catch snowflakes in the storm.

"Great. I'm a doctor—I know that~~"

Strange hugged himself tightly. He wore only a thin short-sleeved shirt, his arms fully exposed to the freezing air.

Karl immediately saw what was coming and quietly moved closer to the portal, ready to leave at any moment.

"In these conditions, you might not even last five minutes before losing consciousness."

As soon as she said that, the Ancient One stepped back through the portal. Karl quickly followed.

"Whether you overcome yourself or succumb to yourself—that choice is yours."

The portal snapped shut.

Only then did Strange react. He lunged forward—but too late. The portal vanished before his eyes, and he collapsed face-first into the snow.

—

Back in Kamar-Taj's courtyard, the Ancient One and Karl stood side by side in silence, both staring ahead—waiting.

Waiting for that familiar spark of orange light.

"How long do you think it will take him?"

The Ancient One asked, her gaze unwavering as she idly fanned herself behind her back.

"Not long. When people are pushed to their limits, they unleash incredible potential. And he's a natural at magic."

Karl wasn't worried. He knew Strange would succeed—he'd seen it before.

Hearing this, the Ancient One relaxed slightly. She trusted her judgment.

"If Strange fails... then the position of Sorcerer Supreme will have to be yours~~"

She said it casually—but she meant it.

Karl froze. "I... choose to believe in Strange. And in your judgment."

The Ancient One smiled faintly. She knew he was deflecting. If Karl agreed, there would be no need for Strange at all.

The two stood there for nearly five minutes.

Still no portal.

"Five minutes..."

Karl glanced at his wristband—a Stark Industries device with holographic projection, a substitute for a phone. Tony had given one to each member of his family, all custom-made.

Just as he finished speaking—

A burst of sparks suddenly appeared.

A circular portal slowly opened.

With a thud, Strange tumbled out, collapsing onto the ground, shivering uncontrollably. His hair and beard were coated in frost, his skin pale and frozen.

Suddenly—

A bright golden flame erupted from his body.

Warmth flooded through him, as if he had been submerged in a hot spring. The cold vanished instantly, replaced by waves of heat from within.

Karl waved his hand, extinguishing the flame.

It was his first time using the Phoenix's Flame of Rebirth to heal someone. Before acquiring Ifrit, he had used it primarily for combat—but its true nature was restoration and healing.

"Your frostbite is gone. You can stand now."

Strange realized the pain was gone, replaced by warmth.

"This... this is...!"

He quickly stood, staring at where his skin had once been red and darkened—it was now completely normal.

"This is magic too?"

He looked at Karl. He had never seen Kamar-Taj's magic used for healing—most spells he had read about were for combat.

"Of course. But it's not Kamar-Taj's magic—and you can't learn it."

Karl himself couldn't learn Kamar-Taj's magic either. His abilities were fixed—everything came from summoned beings.

Strange looked briefly disappointed, but quickly let it go.

Being able to learn Kamar-Taj's magic was already more than enough.

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Chapter 403 403: A Shift in Mindset

After successfully casting magic, Strange was in high spirits. He had finally taken his first step toward becoming a mage. He no longer rejected magic, and he had gradually come to terms with the condition of his hands.

Just as Palmer had once said, life had many meanings—and it seemed he had found a new one.

Back in his room, he stood before a mirror for the first time in a long while. Even he was startled—he had become utterly haggard. The once polished elite now looked like a street vagrant, unshaven and disheveled. With his newfound state of mind, even he frowned at his own appearance.

Knock, knock, knock.

A sudden knock sounded at the door.

When he opened it, Wanda stood outside, holding a bag.

"This is from Karl. He said you look like a junkie beggar and told you to clean yourself up."

She shoved the bag into his hands and left without another word.

Opening it, Strange found a full set of shaving and grooming tools. He couldn't help but smile.

After tidying himself up, Strange adopted the familiar look of Doctor Strange—his hair neatly styled, a signature goatee framing his face. The streaks of gray at his temples gave him an air of maturity and composure.

Dressed in a dark red sorcerer's robe, he finally felt like he truly belonged in Kamar-Taj.

—

In the library, Wong was still the librarian, sitting and reading as usual.

"Stephen~~"

Wong looked up to see Strange standing before him.

"I'd like to borrow some books on astral projection."

Strange looked refreshed, his entire demeanor calm and steady. Even Wong couldn't help but be impressed.

"Look at you now, Stephen—you're completely different from when you first arrived. But... you're not ready yet."

Wong abruptly refused him.

"Come on~~ I'm completely ready. Just let me read them—I promise I won't practice recklessly."

"No."

Still no room for negotiation.

With no other choice, Strange left dejectedly—but he already had a plan.

If he couldn't borrow them... he'd just sneak a look.

—

Late that night, Wong sat reading.

Suddenly, a glowing ring appeared behind him. A hand shot out, snatched a book—and the portal vanished instantly.

"...?"

Wong spun around but saw nothing. Still, he was certain he had sensed magical fluctuations.

He turned back to his book.

The portal appeared again—another book vanished.

Wong turned again. This time, he was sure of it. But still, nothing.

Just as he turned back—

The book he had been reading disappeared right out of his hands.

"—What the hell?!"

Wong shot to his feet and scanned the room. The library was empty.

Then, as if realizing something, he chuckled and casually picked up another book.

"Clever brat. Just like Karl predicted..."

he muttered.

—

In Strange's room, his physical body lay asleep on the bed.

But beside the desk stood a translucent figure—his astral form—completely focused on reading.

It seemed he had already mastered astral projection.

—

The next day, the Ancient One summoned Strange to the meditation room where they had first met. Karl was there as well.

"Once, in this very room, you begged me to teach you magic. And now you tell me you've been teaching yourself?"

The Ancient One poured him a cup of tea, her tone calm. She had been fully aware of everything he had done.

"My talent is exceptional. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call me a master."

Now that his mindset had shifted, Strange's personality had begun to resemble his old self again.

The Ancient One and Karl both smiled.

His talent was indeed remarkable—but calling himself a "master" was a stretch. Even Wong or Mordo could easily defeat him right now, let alone Karl or Wanda.

"You learn spells quickly—but Kamar-Taj's rules still apply."

The Ancient One set down the teapot and pushed a plate of pastries toward him.

"Wong snitched on me?"

Strange immediately caught on—his little "borrowing" habit had been exposed.

The Ancient One only smiled.

"What you need now is a safe place to practice magic."

With a wave of her hand, the space three meters ahead shattered like glass. The fragments folded and overlapped, forming a wall of fractured reflections.

She stood and stepped inside.

Strange glanced at Karl, who simply gestured for him to go ahead. Curious, he followed.

Inside, everything fell silent.

The surroundings looked like a patchwork of glass shards, the space clearly segmented.

"This is the Mirror Dimension. It exists alongside reality, but ordinary people cannot perceive it. It's an independent space—anything that happens here won't affect the real world."

Strange's curiosity surged. He looked around—outside, everything continued normally. Karl was still sitting, calmly eating and drinking tea.

Strange waved a hand in front of Karl's face. Outside, Karl frowned slightly—he couldn't see it, but he could sense the magic.

"The Mirror Dimension is often used for training and surveillance. Sometimes, it's used to contain danger. But remember—without a Sling Ring, you'll be trapped here."

Strange suddenly interrupted.

"Wait—what kind of danger are you talking about?"

The space seemed empty—what danger could there be?

The Ancient One smiled mysteriously.

Suddenly, she pressed her hands downward.

The ground beneath Strange began to fold and twist. The floor and ceiling shifted constantly, the space expanding rapidly—from a small room to the size of a basketball court.

"To understand the wonders of magic, you must also understand its dangers. Now do you see?"

She waved her hand, dissolving the Mirror Dimension.

Meanwhile, Karl continued eating as if nothing had happened. At this point, he was practically freeloading at Kamar-Taj—Wanda still helped out, but he did nothing but eat and lounge around.

—
Beyond magic, the mages of Kamar-Taj also trained in combat.

Karl didn't quite understand why mages insisted on fighting in close quarters—but then again, he wasn't exactly one to talk. He used a sword himself.

—
At that moment, Mordo and Strange faced each other in a sparring stance.

They slowly circled, closing the distance—ready to strike at any moment.

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## Chapter 404 404: Time Magic

Suddenly, Mordo lashed out with a kick toward Strange's face. Strange ducked low to evade it, then lunged forward, wrapping his arms around Mordo's waist like a wrestler, trying to restrain him.

Mordo immediately reacted—he twisted his body, drove a knee into Strange's midsection, and locked both arms tightly around his neck.

Strange struck hard at Mordo's ribs with his elbow—the simplest and most effective way to break a chokehold.

The two separated almost instantly, each resetting their stance. Not far away, the Ancient One and Karl watched calmly.

"This Mordo... looks like kids play-fighting~~"

Karl commented idly, clearly enjoying the show. The Ancient One fanned herself serenely.

"Strange has no foundation in martial arts. Naturally, he must start with the basics. With magic enhancement later, it will improve greatly."

As expected, everything was within her control. For Kamar-Taj's mages, learning combat wasn't difficult—magic allowed them to grasp techniques quickly. What remained was practical application.

On the field, Mordo now held a short staff—about three feet long, black in color, with spiral engravings.

"This is a magical artifact. Some spells cannot be cast with bare hands, so artifacts are used as tools. They generally fall into two categories—offensive and supportive."

He raised the staff slightly.

"This one is an offensive artifact—the Staff of the Living Tribunal."

With a flick of his wrist, the staff transformed into a segmented whip. Magical energy surged through it, sparks flying as it sliced through the air.

Then, just as quickly, it snapped back into a staff.

"Artifacts vary. For example—these boots."

Mordo tapped his foot. A small magic circle appeared beneath him.

"The Boots of Valtorr. They allow me to leap through the air—and survive high falls."

"Yeah... your artifact names are really a mouthful. When do I get one?"

Strange shrugged, clearly unimpressed by the naming conventions.

"When you're truly ready, an artifact will choose you."

"I'm already ready~~!"

Strange insisted.

"That's not for you to decide. The artifact decides whether you're ready."

Without warning, Mordo struck.

Caught off guard, Strange hastily conjured a magical whip, barely managing to block the incoming attack.

"Remember—your enemies won't play fair. They won't give you warnings. Always be on guard."

Mordo's attacks grew sharper, faster. Strange struggled just to defend.

"Don't lose focus in battle. Don't rely on luck. There are only two words you need—fight. The moment you relax, your life is at risk!"

Suddenly, Mordo stomped the air, launching himself upward. In an instant, he passed over Strange's head and struck him down with a punch before he could react.

Strange rolled several meters, grimacing in pain as he slumped onto the ground.

Mordo's staff was at his throat in an instant.

"Remember—no one wins forever. In battle, you must give everything."

Nearby, Karl and the Ancient One watched calmly. The Ancient One even casually gave pointers to two other sparring mages.

"Oof... Mordo didn't hold back at all~~"

Karl remarked, thoroughly entertained.

The Ancient One glanced at Mordo but said nothing—though something flickered in her eyes.

—

That night, Strange sat in front of his tablet, staring blankly at an email draft.

The recipient: Palmer.

He had been sitting there for nearly an hour, unable to write a single word.

Frustrated, he went to the library. It was late—Wong wasn't there.

He picked up the same book on time he had seen earlier.

As he read, biting into an apple, an illustration caught his eye—a design resembling an eye, with intricate intersecting lines.

Strange suddenly remembered—he had seen this before.

The Eye of Agamotto.

Without hesitation, he went to the chamber, retrieved it, and hung it around his neck.

"Alright... let's try this..."

Following the instructions in the book, he formed the proper hand seal.

The Eye opened—

A beam of green light burst forth.

Startled, Strange flinched. He hadn't expected it to work on the first try.

Continuing with the instructions, he began manipulating the flow of time around him.

Forming a bud-like shape with his hands, he rotated them clockwise. A green magical aura wrapped around his right hand and forearm.

With a wave—

The half-eaten apple on the table began to restore itself.

Strange stared in shock.

He waved his hand again—

The restored apple began to decay, chunks disappearing as if being eaten in reverse, until only a rotten core remained.

His worldview shattered once more.

Time... could actually be controlled.

"Stop right there!!"

A crystalline barrier suddenly appeared, separating Strange from the table and the book.

Mordo and Wong rushed in.

"How dare you tamper with the boundaries of time?!"

Mordo demanded angrily, the Staff of the Living Tribunal strapped to his back.

"I—I was just following the book!"

Strange quickly tried to explain.

"Did the book not mention how dangerous that is?!"

Wong snatched the book and slammed it shut.

"I didn't get that far..."

Strange admitted quietly.

"Do you realize manipulating time creates unstable timelines?! Do you want to be trapped in a time loop forever?!"

Mordo roared, furious.

"Shouldn't the warning come before the spell~~?"

"Your curiosity will get you killed," Wong said coldly. "What you just did wasn't controlling time—it was damaging it. We don't disrupt natural laws—we protect them."

He returned the book to its place.

"How did you do that just now?"

Mordo suddenly asked.

"...What?"

Strange blinked, confused. Honestly, he didn't know either—it had just... happened.

"Where did you learn that spell? It's incredibly complex and lengthy—how did you even read it?"

"I have a photographic memory. That's how I got my PhDs in medicine and physics~~"

Strange replied matter-of-factly.

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Chapter 405 405: The Sanctum Destroyed

"But what you just did—that wasn't something intelligence alone could accomplish. Strange, you were born to be a sorcerer."

Mordo looked at him in astonishment.

"But my hands still don't obey me."

Strange stared at his trembling fingers.

"When are you going to tell me the truth?"

he asked, looking directly at Mordo.

Mordo exchanged a glance with Wong.

"Come with me."

He turned and walked out. Strange and Wong followed.

—

The three arrived at the stone chamber. Mordo personally placed the Eye of Agamotto back onto its pedestal.

"This world is full of dangers—and it needs protection. Heroes like the Avengers defend it from physical threats. But we, the sorcerers of Kamar-Taj, defend it from magic and other dimensions."

Mordo slowly rotated the circular base beneath the Eye. A projection of Earth made entirely of magic appeared before them.

"The title of Sorcerer Supreme is passed down through generations. The Ancient One is the current holder. And before her—Agamotto, the Sorcerer Supreme who created the Eye you just used."

Wong added, looking at the artifact.

"Agamotto also established three powerful Sanctums across the world. Together, they form the core nodes of a protective barrier against interdimensional invasion."

He pointed to one of the doors.

"This leads to the Hong Kong Sanctum."

Then to the others.

"One leads to New York. The other—to London."

As Mordo turned the disk, the projection of Earth became encircled by an immense and intricate magical formation.

"The three Sanctums form a protective network for Earth," Wong continued. "They are the anchors. The Sanctums protect the planet—and the duty of sorcerers is to protect the Sanctums and eliminate interdimensional threats."

"Does anyone actually come to attack?"

Strange asked immediately. Until now, he had thought of Kamar-Taj as merely a place for scholars of magic.

"That's hard to say. Creatures from other realms, for instance."

"Like Dormammu?"

The name dropped like a bomb.

Mordo and Wong both froze.

"...How do you know that name?"

Mordo demanded, frowning deeply.

Strange was caught off guard by the reaction.

"I saw it in that book just now... What's wrong?"

Wong stepped in to explain.

"Dormammu is the ruler of the Dark Dimension. He exists beyond time. His greatest desire is to consume worlds. He possesses limitless power and ambition—he refuses to remain confined to his own dimension. He seeks to invade all universes... and plunge everything into darkness."

As the projection shifted, the Dark Dimension appeared—a vast abyss filled with dim, lifeless planets, all swallowed by shadow.

"And the pages Kaecilius stole..."

Strange began, already piecing it together.

"...are part of a ritual to summon Dormammu—and draw power from him," Wong confirmed.

Before they could say more—

One of the glowing nodes on the Earth projection suddenly dimmed.

"The London Sanctum!"

Mordo exclaimed.

At the same time, the stone door leading to London burst open. A guardian stepped through—

—and was instantly impaled through the back by an invisible blade.

He collapsed, dead.

"KAECILIUS!!"

Mordo shouted.

At the far end of the corridor beyond the door stood a figure—

Kaecilius, now infused with dark power.

For the first time, Strange saw the man everyone had been talking about.

Kaecilius raised both hands, forming a massive sphere of magical energy.

"Stop!!"

Mordo shouted.

Too late.

Kaecilius slammed his hands down.

BOOM—!!

A violent explosion erupted. The shockwave blasted Mordo backward, tearing through the chamber. The door to the London Sanctum collapsed completely, leaving only a ruined stone wall behind it.

Strange was thrown off his feet.

Dazed, he staggered upright—

—and realized something had changed.

He was no longer in the stone chamber.

Instead, he stood inside a grand, classical-style building.

The explosion had hurled him straight into a Sanctum.

But he didn't yet know which one.

Stumbling forward, he entered a large hall with a wide staircase and antique furnishings.

Still disoriented, he pushed open a door and stepped outside.

The sight froze him in place.

The towering skyscrapers... the familiar skyline...

And in the distance—a massive letter "A."

New York.

He was back in New York.

Looking up at the building he had just exited, he spotted the mystical sigil at its highest point.

This... was the New York Sanctum.

He turned and stepped back inside, curiosity overtaking him as he began to explore.

—

Meanwhile, back at Kamar-Taj—

The attack had thrown everything into chaos.

The stone chamber had collapsed, and rebuilding it would take time.

Karl was the first to arrive. The entrance was blocked by rubble—but a few wind blades reduced it to fragments.

With a snap of his fingers, a fireball appeared, illuminating the interior.

The damage inside wasn't too severe—but the three doors leading to the Sanctums had all been destroyed.

At the center, however, the pedestal holding the Eye of Agamotto remained intact.

Mordo and Wong lay unconscious on either side.

A gust of wind lifted them gently.

Karl carried both of them—and the Eye—out of the chamber.

By then, the Ancient One, Wanda, and a group of sorcerers had arrived.

"How are they?"

the Ancient One asked immediately. To her, lives mattered far more than structures.

"They should be fine."

Karl shrugged. They were still breathing—likely just knocked unconscious.

Other sorcerers quickly took Mordo and Wong away for treatment.

Karl then handed the Eye of Agamotto to the Ancient One.

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Chapter 406 406: Target – The New York Sanctum

The Ancient One shook her head. "Keep it with you for now. You'll hand it to Strange yourself when the time comes."

Karl didn't argue. He understood her intention and simply stored the Eye of Agamotto in his system inventory. There was no safer place—anything placed inside was completely isolated, even from detection or connection.

Before long, Wong and Mordo regained consciousness.

"It was Kaecilius—he destroyed the London Sanctum."

Mordo spoke immediately, having witnessed it firsthand.

The Ancient One showed no reaction. She had already expected this.

"Focus on recovering. The Sanctum can be rebuilt."

"And Kaecilius...?"

Mordo's voice carried urgency. He valued Kamar-Taj's mission deeply—he wanted to personally deal with the traitor.

The Ancient One waved her hand lightly.

"That will be handled. Your priority is to heal."

In truth, Kaecilius's attack was also a test—for Strange.

The final test.

If he passed, he would naturally become the next Sorcerer Supreme. If he failed... Karl would be there as a safeguard.

The Ancient One had already told Karl everything.

Before Strange—and even before Karl—her original choice had been Kaecilius. He had possessed the same innate affinity for magic as Strange, mastering it with incredible speed. But in the end, he succumbed to the lure of power and fell into darkness.

Only then did she turn to Strange.

At the time, however, Strange had been nothing more than a skeptical doctor, dismissive of magic entirely.

Later, when Karl appeared, she realized he was, in many ways, the ideal successor—his mastery of magic, his perspective on Earth... everything aligned.

But Karl refused outright.

And so, she chose Strange.

Fortunately, Strange had not disappointed her. After his transformation, he now possessed the essential sense of responsibility required of a sorcerer.

All that remained... was this test.

Mordo still looked unwilling to let it go, but the Ancient One stopped him. She understood him well—his dedication was admirable, but his rigid mindset could easily turn extreme. That was why she never considered him suitable to inherit the title.

"Recover first. The rest can wait. I've already sent people to London. We'll have news soon."

—

Meanwhile, Karl and Wanda had already left Kamar-Taj.

A group of sorcerers had been dispatched to handle the aftermath in London, while Karl and Wanda headed toward New York—to support Strange.

If Kaecilius intended to summon Dormammu, he would first need to dismantle Earth's magical defenses.

And the three Sanctums were the foundation of that defense.

According to what Karl remembered—

After London, the next target would be New York.

And Strange... was already there.

—

Inside the New York Sanctum—

Strange wandered through the building, exploring.

From the outside, it looked modest—but inside, it was vast.

He soon found himself before three transparent doors. Each revealed a completely different scene:

Behind the first—an eerie, silent forest.

Behind the second—an endless, raging ocean.

Behind the third—a barren desert stretching to the horizon.

Curious, Strange opened one.

The wind, the scent in the air—it was all real.

Each door had a dial beside it. When he turned one, the scenery beyond shifted instantly.

After a while, he moved on to the second floor—where magical artifacts were stored.

The moment he entered, a blue cloak in the corner began to float inside its glass case, as if it had sensed something.

It looked around... almost like it was observing.

Strange noticed it immediately.

After all, it was the only thing in the room that moved.

He walked over, studying it curiously.

The cloak seemed to study him in return.

They stared at each other for a moment—then Strange turned and left.

—

Just then, he sensed a surge of magic.

He rushed to the staircase and looked down.

At the base of the stairs stood Daniel, the guardian of the New York Sanctum, holding a magical artifact and standing ready.

He already knew—the London Sanctum had fallen.

The front door of the Sanctum began to fold and distort, then slowly opened.

Kaecilius stepped inside—accompanied by two followers.

"Daniel... I didn't expect you to be the guardian now."

His eyes were gray and cracked, his appearance almost corpse-like.

"Then you should know what I stand for."

Daniel assumed a defensive stance.

"I do. You'll turn to ash along with this Sanctum."

Without warning, Kaecilius's two followers lunged forward, blades of translucent energy forming in their hands.

Daniel blocked with his artifact, and the three immediately clashed.

But one against two—

He was quickly overwhelmed.

Within moments, he was covered in wounds.

Exhausted, he dropped to one knee.

Kaecilius stepped forward, raising his blade.

"You should have known."

The blade plunged down—

"STOP!!"

Strange leapt from the second floor.

Too late.

The blade pierced Daniel's chest.

"You... how long have you been at Kamar-Taj?"

Kaecilius glanced at Strange's robes and recognized him as a sorcerer—but not one he had seen before.

Strange didn't answer.

He lashed out immediately, conjuring a magical whip.

Kaecilius leapt into the air, stepping off the wall and closing the distance in an instant. His blade drove straight toward Strange's chest.

Strange snapped his whip around Kaecilius's wrist—but Kaecilius, being a sorcerer himself, easily shook it off.

At the same time, his two followers attacked from behind.

Strange spun quickly, striking one away with his whip.

As the other two blades came down, he jumped from the stairs, narrowly dodging the fatal strike.

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Chapter 407 407: Don't Know How to Use It, Do You?

Seeing this, Kaecilius flicked his wrist, sending an invisible blade slicing through the air straight toward Strange. Forced to react, Strange hastily deflected it with his whip, then turned and ran toward the three doors he had seen earlier.

Kaecilius followed at an unhurried pace. Forming a seal with his hands, he twisted the air—and the entire corridor began folding and rotating. To Strange, the hallway seemed endless; no matter how fast he ran, the end never came any closer. Meanwhile, Kaecilius rapidly closed the distance, even sprinting along the walls and ceiling as he gave chase.

Caught in a panic, Strange conjured two shield-like magic circles in front of him, barely managing to fend off the attacks from Kaecilius and his two followers.

Suddenly, the corridor began spinning. Caught off guard, Strange slammed into the wall, his head cracking against a glass window.

As Kaecilius kept rotating his hands, Strange spun wildly like clothes in a washing machine, while the surrounding walls became the drum.

Then, with another motion from Kaecilius, the corridor flipped upright. Strange immediately fell toward the three glass doors at the far end.

He knew those doors were made of glass—if he crashed into them, they would shatter instantly, and he'd fall into whatever unknown place lay beyond.

At the very last moment, just before impact, Strange desperately grabbed the doorframe, stopping himself from falling through. But Kaecilius's female follower wasn't so lucky—she plunged straight through the doorway into the desert on the other side.

The corridor returned to normal. Strange scrambled back inside and immediately spun the knob beside the door. Just as the woman tried to charge back, the scene beyond the door suddenly changed—and in the desert, the door itself vanished.

A sudden gust of wind came from behind. Strange dodged instinctively as Kaecilius's male follower lashed out with a kick.

Strange grabbed the man's leg and hurled him into a doorway leading to a dense jungle. With a quick twist of the knob, the scene shifted again—this time into a canyon.

Kaecilius charged forward with his invisible blade. Strange dodged and blocked as best he could, but his combat skills were no match. Seizing an opening, he fled again, with Kaecilius close behind.

The two rushed up to the second floor. Strange spun his hands, summoning a golden energy whip. With nowhere left to run, he was forced to engage Kaecilius once more.

Driven back step by step, Strange suddenly grabbed a nearby object that looked like a trophy. Inside it, a thick golden light swirled like liquid.

Kaecilius abruptly stopped, staring at the object with clear wariness. But Strange just held it there, making no further move.

"You don't know how to use it, do you?"

Kaecilius instantly saw through him and relaxed.

Strange hurled the "trophy" at him. Kaecilius dodged effortlessly and immediately thrust his blade toward Strange's chest.

Strange blocked with his whip, then snapped it forward, wrapping it around the blade. With a sharp pull, the weapon flew out of Kaecilius's hand and embedded itself in the wall nearby.

But Kaecilius followed up instantly, driving a punch straight into Strange's chest. Caught off guard, Strange slammed backward into a glass display case and collapsed to the ground.

Kaecilius seized the opportunity, stepping forward to deliver a killing blow. Strange rolled aside just in time—only to be met with a brutal kick.

The impact sent him flying.

With a crash, Strange smashed into another glass case—this one containing a blue cloak.

He lay sprawled on the ground as Kaecilius approached again, blade poised to strike.

Suddenly, a strip of blue fabric shot out, wrapping tightly around Kaecilius's wrist. No matter how hard he pushed, he couldn't advance an inch.

Frustrated, Kaecilius grabbed Strange by the hair, his other hand reaching for his throat.

In an instant, the cloak lashed out again, binding his arm. Enraged, Kaecilius flung Strange aside before calmly stepping toward him once more.

Strange staggered to his feet, blocking the blade with both hands—but Kaecilius kicked him again, sending him crashing through the stair railing and tumbling down from the second floor.

At that moment, a streak of blue flashed past Kaecilius—it was the very cloak that had helped Strange twice.

Kaecilius moved to leap down after him—

—but suddenly, a surge of crimson energy burst forth like a shockwave, slamming into him midair. The force hurled him back up to the second floor, where he crashed into a glass cabinet with a loud shatter.

Wanda stood before him, having appeared out of nowhere. Her eyes glowed scarlet, chaos energy swirling around her hands.

"Kaecilius. I didn't expect you to betray Kamar-Taj—and even destroy the London Sanctum."

Her voice was icy cold.

She had deep ties to Kamar-Taj. Anyone who tried to destroy it was her enemy.

The moment Kaecilius saw her, his pupils shrank. He knew exactly how powerful Wanda was—she was practically unmatched in Kamar-Taj. Neither he nor Wong could stand against her, sometimes not even managing to fight back at all. Chaos Magic far surpassed the sorcery they had learned.

As Kaecilius tried to rise, crimson energy suddenly wrapped around his throat. A crushing sense of suffocation hit him—like an iron grip tightening around his neck.

With a lift of Wanda's hand, his entire body rose into the air, struggling helplessly.

Just then, a figure slowly floated up from the staircase below.

It was Strange—now draped in the blue cloak. The Cloak of Levitation billowed behind him, spreading wide as if to cover the massive skylight.

At that same moment, a burst of flame flared—

A red cloak swept through the air as Karl appeared beside Wanda.

"It's been a while, Kaecilius."

Karl looked at the struggling man, a playful smile on his face.

Only when Kaecilius saw Karl did his expression finally change—

for the first time, a trace of guilt appeared.

He remembered what Karl had once said to him.

And in the end... he had still walked this path—embracing the darkness, becoming its servant.

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## **Chapter 408 408: Strange Critically Injured**

"So in the end... you still took that step." Karl sighed softly. "There's nothing wrong with craving power—but your mistake was accepting a power you can't control, only to be controlled by it instead."

He gestured to Wanda, signaling her to release Kaecilius.

At the same time, Strange slowly descended to Karl's side, the red and blue cloaks contrasting sharply against each other.

"All things live and die by fate. Look at this world—look at the Earth we depend on. What has it become?" Kaecilius said, almost fervently. "Only in the Dark Dimension can time be eternal. Only there will Earth stop being destroyed. I'm protecting this planet."

Whether he had been brainwashed or truly believed it himself—it was hard to tell.

"I think I should just shut him up," Strange muttered, stepping forward, clearly fed up. "Listen to what he's saying—does that even sound human?"

"Only by embracing the darkness can Earth, like countless other worlds, achieve eternity. And we... will embrace life."

Kaecilius continued, unwavering in his conviction.

"Is that so?" Karl asked calmly. "Then what do you actually gain from this so-called utopia?"

"Eternity," Kaecilius replied without hesitation. "Eternal life. Eternal time. Eternal everything."

His face was filled with longing, and as he spoke, the Dormammu sigil on his forehead glowed faintly red.

"Look at this world, Karl. Nearly everyone longs for immortality. Everyone fears death. But now—by embracing the darkness, by embracing Dormammu—they can have eternal life. Humanity will no longer fear time, no longer grieve loss. Death... will become the greatest disgrace."

He turned to Karl. "I don't want to rule the world. I want to save it. Our world should be protected by the Lord of Darkness—Dormammu. Only he can lead us to eternity."

Karl remained expressionless.

He had seen enough—Kaecilius was completely gone. Like a cultist whose mind had been reshaped, his thoughts now belonged entirely to Dormammu.

"I don't understand what you're saying," Karl said flatly. "I only know this—Earth, the world we live in, isn't for some outsider to rule. Earth belongs to itself."

He exhaled lightly before continuing:

"Come back to Kamar-Taj with me. The Ancient One will decide your punishment."

He motioned for Wanda to restrain Kaecilius again and prepare a portal.

Crimson Chaos Magic surged out, wrapping around Kaecilius once more. The suffocating pressure returned—

But suddenly, a surge of dark energy burst from within him, clashing head-on with Wanda's power. The two forces locked in a tense stalemate.

Seizing the moment, Kaecilius pulled out his Sling Ring and opened a portal before anyone could react.

"Karl, we'll meet again. Next time... I think you'll agree with me."

At the same time, he flicked his hand—sending a transparent blade straight at Strange.

Karl's eyes narrowed. Two wind blades instantly shot out from behind him.

Clang!

The wind blades shattered Kaecilius's attack—but a fragment still slipped through and lodged deep into Strange's chest.

Strange collapsed instantly, gasping for breath as his body trembled.

Kaecilius, meanwhile, vanished through the portal.

"Damn it!!"

Karl rushed to Strange's side, lifting him up.

"Can you move? If you can, open a portal to a hospital—now!"

Karl could clearly feel Strange's life slipping away. All he could do was freeze the wound with ice to slow the bleeding.

The fragment had pierced dangerously close to the heart. Blood had been pouring out—if not for the ice sealing it, Strange would have already bled out.

Strange weakly raised his arm. A portal flickered open.

Karl and Wanda each supported him as they stepped through.

On the other side was a storage room. Karl didn't bother looking around—he kicked the door open and dragged Strange into the hallway.

"Dr. Palmer! Dr. Palmer!!"

Strange was growing weaker by the second. His breathing turned ragged, almost gurgling.

Christine Palmer rounded the corner, holding a chart—and froze when she saw him.

"Stephen! Oh my God—what happened to you?!"

She rushed over, catching him as he sagged.

"Dr. Palmer, we need an operating room—now. Any delay and he's dead," Karl said urgently.

"Right—okay, follow me!"

Christine immediately led them toward surgery, pulling out her phone to call for help—

"Don't call anyone," Karl stopped her.

She stared at him, confused. Strange clearly needed immediate surgery—if she didn't call for a team, who would operate?

"Quick... Christine... I don't have time..." Strange rasped, his voice barely audible.

They reached the operating room. Karl laid Strange on the table without hesitation—sterilization didn't matter anymore.

He had already lost consciousness.

"What happened to him?!" Christine demanded, already pulling on gloves, not even bothering with a surgical gown as she tore open his shirt.

"He was stabbed in the chest—close to the heart. I don't know the exact details. He'll tell you himself," Karl replied.

"He'll tell me himself? He's unconscious! How is he supposed to tell me anything? And what is he even wearing? Who are you people?!"

Her questions came rapid-fire as she attached a heart monitor. The numbers were dropping fast.

"You should focus on saving him," Karl cut in, glancing at the declining vitals. "At this rate, he's not going to make it."

Christine quickly began examining the wound, tapping lightly around it while listening with a stethoscope.

"His chest cavity seems normal... I—I don't see—"

Beep... beep... beeeeeeeep—

The monitor flatlined.

Strange's hand fell limp off the table.

"No... no—NO!"

Tears welled in Christine's eyes, but she forced herself to stay steady. Grabbing the defibrillator, she began resuscitation immediately.

At that exact moment—

Strange suddenly slipped out of his body.

He turned back, staring at himself lying on the table.

He knew this wasn't death—

—but he was right on its edge.

Because passive astral projection only happens when the body can no longer sustain the soul.

In other words—

he was dying.

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Chapter 409 409: Emergency Rescue

Strange hurriedly floated back to his body. Just as Palmer was about to place the defibrillator on his chest, he immediately exited his astral form and stopped her.

"Don't rush."

"Ah—!!!"

Palmer screamed the moment she saw Strange suddenly appear in front of her, startling even Karl, who stood nearby.

"Relax, Christine—be careful not to shock yourself with the defibrillator."

Strange tried his best to calm her. He knew that anyone seeing this would be frightened.

"Stephen?! You... oh my God—what am I seeing?!"

Palmer held the defibrillator in both hands, completely frozen. Her mind had effectively stopped working—she was scared stiff.

"This is my soul."

Palmer glanced at Strange lying motionless on the operating table, then at the Strange floating in midair. For a moment, her brain simply couldn't process it.

"You... are you dead?"

she asked cautiously.

"That's a good question. Not yet—but if you keep delaying, that might change."

Strange pointed at his body, then at the heart monitor, which had already flatlined into a straight line.

"Oh... oh... right..."

Palmer steadied herself and quickly stepped forward, raising the defibrillator to shock him—but Strange stopped her again.

"No need for that right now. Go get a large syringe. My body is in cardiac tamponade—you need to drain the fluid first."

Strange began guiding Palmer through saving his own life. Although she had assisted him in several surgeries, acting as the lead surgeon was still a bit too soon for her.

Palmer prepared the equipment and held the syringe over Strange's chest, hesitating as she tried to figure out where to insert it.

"Start here—then a little higher."

Strange reached into his own body and indicated the spot for insertion.

Sure enough, under Strange's astral guidance, a faint glow spread across his chest cavity, while one spot remained dark—the accumulated fluid was there.

Following that spot, Palmer inserted the needle in one decisive motion. At the same time, she glanced at Strange's wound and asked,

"I've never seen a wound like this. It looks like it was caused by a sharp object, but not quite the same... what stabbed you?"

"I'm not sure. Probably some kind of fragment. I didn't even have time to react before I was hit."

Strange actually knew the answer, but he wasn't sure how to explain it yet. He would have to tell Palmer everything later.

Meanwhile, Kacilius's male subordinate had somehow crawled out through the glass door—but only his soul emerged, not his body.

He glanced at the still-active portal and, without hesitation, passed through it, arriving at the hospital.

Inside the operating room, Palmer was focused on draining the fluid from Strange's chest, while the subordinate quietly peeked inside. He assumed that in his astral state, no one could detect him—but his plan was completely flawed.

Strange, who was guiding Palmer, as well as Karl and Wanda, who were watching from the side, all saw him clearly. The only one unaware was Palmer, an ordinary human.

"Focus on guiding her. Leave this one to me," Karl said, glancing at Strange.

"I'll leave it to you."

With that, Strange stopped paying attention to the intruder and continued guiding Palmer.

Bang—!

A gunshot suddenly rang out, deafening in the operating room. Karl held the Judgment Breaker, smoke still curling from its barrel.

The subordinate's arm exploded instantly—blasted clean off by a single shot. Panic-stricken, he tried to flee, but Karl wasn't about to let him escape.

"Wanda, seal the area."

Wanda nodded. Scarlet energy surged outward, enveloping the entire operating room before pulling it into the Mirror Dimension.

Clearly, Wanda's Mirror Dimension was different from the Ancient One's. The fractured, glass-like edges glowed dark red, and the space itself was dimmer, tinged with an ominous crimson hue that added an air of mystery.

The subordinate attempted to force his way out, but two green wind blades were already flying toward him.

With a sharp whoosh, he dodged the first—but the second cleanly severed his other arm.

"Ah—!!! I'll kill you!!!"

The man lunged at Karl, his entire body erupting in blinding light.

"Not good! He's about to detonate his soul!" Strange shouted.

This was a suicidal technique—detonating one's soul released massive spiritual energy that would surge into others, triggering their souls into violent instability and ultimately causing a chain explosion.

"Tch."

Karl scoffed. A move like this was nothing more than suicide.

In an instant, flames tinged with yellow and blue burst from Karl's body, engulfing the subordinate's swelling soul.

"Ah—!!!"

The blazing fire mercilessly burned his soul. He writhed in place, desperate to lunge at Karl, but the searing pain left him unable to take even a single step. The agony, striking directly at his soul, gradually stripped away his consciousness, until his screams faded and he dissolved into nothingness.

The Flames of Rebirth of the Undying Bird were especially devastating to souls—capable of healing, yet equally capable of reducing them to ash.

Palmer heard the screams but saw nothing. All she witnessed was Karl firing into empty air, followed by flashes of green and yellow.

Once the subordinate was utterly destroyed, Wanda dispelled the Mirror Dimension.

Meanwhile, under Strange's guidance, Palmer had successfully drained the fluid and begun suturing the wound.

"Nicely done, Christine. You're a qualified cardiothoracic surgeon now—you might even be due for a promotion," Strange said half-jokingly.

Palmer rolled her eyes without responding, though her hands pressed a bit harder as she stitched him up.

After finishing the sutures, Strange returned to his body and regained consciousness.

"I can't believe you disappeared for months, then suddenly show up again—and can even fly out of your own body!"

Palmer muttered as she bandaged his wound.

"Ahem... Wanda and I will go take a walk. You two talk..."

Karl coughed awkwardly, then quickly dragged Wanda out of the operating room, unwilling to play third wheel between Strange and Palmer.

Inside the operating room, Strange gave Karl a silent thumbs-up before turning to Palmer.

"I've missed you too, Christine. I sent you a lot of emails, but you never replied."

"Why should I reply? You disappeared without a word, left me behind for months—I searched everywhere and couldn't find you. And you think a few emails are enough to brush me off?"

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## **Chapter 410 410: Return to the Sanctum**

Palmer poured out far more disinfectant than necessary and slapped it directly onto Strange's wound with a sharp smack.

The intense pain twisted Strange's face, but he didn't dare cry out. He could only grit his teeth and breathe heavily.

"I know I was a bastard. I broke your heart. Back then, I really felt hopeless—like the whole world had abandoned me. I couldn't find any purpose in life. And I even thought... you deserved someone better..."

The moment those last words left his mouth, Strange regretted them. He saw the look in Palmer's eyes—cold, yet brimming with tears. That warmth instantly melted his heart.

"Oh really? Then I want to know what exactly happened over these past few months."

After securing the bandage, Palmer gave his wound another firm smack.

"This goes back to when I realized Western medicine had no answers left. At the time..."

Strange began recounting everything—from his journey to Kathmandu, to his training, all the way to being blasted into the New York Sanctum and suffering the injuries that brought him here. He held nothing back as he told Palmer the full story.

"So... you're a sorcerer now? And those two who came with you—they're sorcerers too?"

Palmer could hardly believe what she'd heard. She would've thought Strange had lost his mind, if not for everything she had just witnessed proving otherwise.

"That's right. I'm now a full-fledged sorcerer of Kamar-Taj."

Strange gently reached out and caressed Palmer's face.

"But your hands..."

Palmer grabbed his hands, noticing they were still trembling just as badly as before—no improvement at all.

"This was my choice, Christine. Like you said, life shouldn't stand still. There are many meanings to life—and now, I've found a new one."

Palmer already understood what he meant. It also meant he would never return to being a doctor.

Once the bandaging was done, Strange immediately tried to get up, but Palmer stopped him.

"Wait. Where are you going? Your wound was just treated—you need rest."

Strange ignored her and insisted on standing. His movements were smooth, giving no sign that he had been critically injured just moments ago.

"Saving the world."

He knew his own condition. Though he appeared fine on the surface, he was still extremely weak—his steps slightly unsteady.

Palmer supported him as they walked toward the storage room.

"I must be crazy, Stephen. I can't believe I'm actually believing all this."

She said it out loud, yet continued to help him without hesitation.

"Yeah. I guess we're both crazy."

Strange replied softly, never slowing his pace.

"Where are you going?"

Palmer quickly asked.

"Actually, I need to return to the Sanctum. And the best way is through the portal in the storage room."

By the time he finished speaking, they had reached the door. Seeing Palmer's disbelief, Strange politely opened it and gestured for her to enter.

As the door swung open, golden light spilled out, illuminating Palmer's stunned face. She stepped inside, and Strange closed the door behind them.

In the center of the room floated a circular portal crackling with golden sparks. On the other side was an ancient-looking corridor. Beside the portal hovered a blue cloak, which immediately flew over and wrapped itself around Strange the moment he entered.

Palmer felt her entire worldview collapse. Like Strange once was, she had been a staunch materialist, never believing in gods or spirits. But witnessing this scene firsthand left her no choice.

Before her shocked eyes, Strange—now draped in the blue cloak—stepped through the portal and stood in the corridor beyond.

"I have to go, Christine. Wait for me—I'll come back."

His voice was calm. The portal slowly closed, and his figure vanished from her sight.

Palmer stood there blankly, staring at the fading sparks in midair. Her mind drifted—perhaps thinking of something, or perhaps completely empty.

Back at the New York Sanctum, Mordo had just arrived.

"Strange! Thank goodness you're alright!"

When Mordo first reached the Sanctum, all he saw was devastation—and the corpse of its guardian. He had assumed Strange had met the same fate. Seeing both Strange and the Sanctum intact, he couldn't help but feel relieved.

"You could say that. I'm... mostly fine."

Strange replied casually. Having just brushed against death, calling it "fine" wasn't entirely inaccurate.

"That Cloak of Levitation..."

Mordo pointed at the blue cloak draped over Strange, surprise evident on his face.

"I can tell—it likes you."

"That's right. And not just anyone can obtain a cloak like this."

The Ancient One's voice suddenly rang out as she stepped out from the shadows.

"There were originally two Cloaks of Levitation. This blue one chose you. As for the red one—you've already seen it. It's with Karl."

Strange nodded. He had already wondered about this—the two cloaks were identical in every way except for their color.

"This cloak..."

Just as he was about to ask, the Ancient One continued,

"Like the one Karl has, this cloak was crafted by the same master. Aside from their colors, the only difference is their personalities."

"Personalities? Cloaks have personalities?"

Strange couldn't help but touch the cloak.

"That's right. Every magical artifact is unique. Like humans, they each have their own temperament. You'll come to understand that in time."

The Ancient One said no more. Any magical artifact required its wielder to explore and bond with it gradually.

Strange nodded, then said, "Sorry—I let him escape."

"Kacilius?"

the Ancient One asked.

"Yes. He can fold space at will, and open portals extremely quickly."

"You're saying he can manipulate space outside the Mirror Dimension? In the real world?"

A slight change crossed the Ancient One's expression—she hadn't expected Kacilius to reach that level.

"That's right."

Strange nodded.

"How many people does he have?"

she continued.

"Two. One was trapped by me in the desert. The other had his soul burned away by Karl."

Strange didn't hide anything, his gaze drifting downstairs.

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