

# Marvel Manifestor

## Chapter 41: Touring the Chocobo Space

Skye chimed in, "I think so. I haven't seen anything special online lately. Social media's all just full of dumb pranks from kids. Guess it's really quiet these days."

"You've got some nerve calling others kids," Natasha shot back. "You are one. Girls your age are all dressing up, going out, having fun. You're the only one who holes up in here all day."

Skye crossed her arms and huffed. "What's so great about going out? You just run into sleazy punks. They all dress like peacocks and practically invite trouble from creeps."

Natasha smirked, leaning closer. "So... instead of letting random punks have their fun, you'd rather let your boss have it?"

Skye's cheeks turned bright red. She glared at Natasha and refused to answer, pretending to focus on her cake instead.

You had to hand it to Natasha—her social skills were top-tier. In just a few days, she'd gotten along with Skye and Gwen as if they'd been friends for years. There wasn't even the slightest trace of a generation gap between them.

"Ahem—alright, enough nonsense," Lucas interrupted awkwardly, trying to steer the conversation back to safer ground.

"By the way, what's Coulson been up to lately? Haven't seen him around in a while."

Lucas mentally did the math. According to the original timeline, Tony Stark's Middle East weapons demo was right around the corner—which meant the Marvel Universe was about to officially begin.

"The Director sent him on an assignment overseas," Natasha said casually. "He'll be back in a few days."

She was still technically on vacation. When Nick Fury had tried to call her in, she'd brushed him off under the excuse of 'keeping an eye on Lucas.' So the job had gone to Coulson and Hawkeye instead.

"What kind of assignment? Come on, give me the gossip." Lucas perked up immediately. His curiosity seal had been broken.

"Can't tell you. If I do, that egg-headed boss of mine will dock my pay for leaking classified info." Natasha replied between bites of cake, her tone firm.

"Tch, so secretive. Sounds like nothing good." Lucas rolled his eyes and resealed his curiosity.

The three of them continued chatting idly, half-bored, half-relaxed, until Peter and Gwen showed up—and Felicia tagged along as well.

Within moments, the girls had completely taken over the sofa, leaving Lucas and Peter exiled to a lonely corner, shivering in silence.

Defeated, the two men retreated to Lucas's room for a true test of masculine skill—video games.

The "battle" raged until well past ten that night. Natasha had already retired to her room under the pretense of getting her beauty sleep.

Lucas and Peter, however, were still going at it, totally losing track of time—until Skye came upstairs to call them down.

Back in the office, Lucas handed over the blue crystals to Gwen and Peter, explaining how they worked.

When the group heard that the crystals could send them into an independent space, everyone but Lucas looked completely dumbfounded.

Gwen even thought Lucas had lost his mind. She kept checking his forehead and whispering to Skye about getting him a psychological evaluation.

With a helpless sigh, Lucas decided to let proof speak for itself. "Just focus your mind on the crystal. You'll feel the connection, then you can teleport."

Since Felicia wasn't an official employee of DevilMayCry, she couldn't go in. Lucas left her in charge of watching the office while they were gone.

A flash of white light filled the room—then Felicia was left alone, staring in shock.

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"Whoa!!!"

As soon as their eyes adjusted, the other three gasped in awe.

"This place... it's straight out of a fairy tale!"

Gwen and Skye bolted out the door, dazzled by the lush scenery around them.

Peter, meanwhile, immediately spotted Onion in the chocobo stable. His eyes lit up as he rushed over, hand outstretched to pet it.

Big mistake.

Onion might look cute, but it was as volatile as a mini nuke. With one mighty flap, it sent Peter flying backward, then actually lifted a taloned foot as if to stomp him.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa—!" Lucas ran forward and quickly calmed the chocobo down. Onion instantly went from raging beast to clingy bird the moment it saw him.

Good thing that kick hadn't landed—because while chocobos looked harmless, they were trained for combat. If Onion had stepped down with full force, Peter's guts would've been splattered across the floor.

And where would Lucas find another Spider-Man after that? Not to mention Felicia's boyfriend would've been very single again.

"Don't tease Onion," Lucas warned, patting the bird's fluffy head. "It only recognizes me. Anyone else gets too close, it'll attack. Be careful."

"Man, that thing's strong! It actually flipped me!" Peter muttered, rubbing his back. As Spider-Man, his physical strength was insane—yet a bird had tossed him aside like a rag doll. Humiliating didn't even begin to cover it.

Gwen and Skye returned after circling the area, excitedly sharing what they'd discovered—something Lucas hadn't noticed before.

"This whole place is a floating island!" Skye said breathlessly.

At the island's edge, the ground simply ended. Their house sat perfectly in the middle.

"How'd you figure that out?" Lucas asked, curious.

"Gwen used her webs to swing out there," Skye replied with a grin. "She burned through an entire web shooter in the process."

Both girls had, of course, met Onion on their return—and, just like Peter, they'd been promptly smacked away when they tried to pet it.

Only Lucas could get close.

And Peter, for his trouble, now sported two new lumps on his head courtesy of Gwen and Skye—punishment for laughing at them while clutching his stomach.

Skye later discovered the open-air hot spring behind the house but refused to bathe in it since there was no gender separation. "No way I'm giving those two idiots a free show," she'd said, dragging Gwen away.

The sky above was bright and sunny, though Lucas knew it was already night outside. That inconsistency made him pause.

"Hey, A-Tong," he said, calling to his system, "last time I forgot to ask—if the time flow here is the same as the outside world, then why is it daytime here?"

[Ding~ The time flow is synchronized, but the time cycle itself is independent. The Chocobo Space has its own daylight, nighttime, and seasonal rotation.]

"Ohhh, got it~" Lucas nodded, pretending to understand. He didn't really, but as long as the time ratio matched the real world, that was good enough for him.

After exploring, Gwen and Skye picked their rooms on the second floor. Peter tried to claim one too—but Lucas flatly refused.

"You've got a home of your own," Lucas said firmly. "Why are you freeloading in mine? What happens when you spend every night here and leave Felicia alone, huh? Am I supposed to keep her company for you?"

Rejected.

Still, Peter understood what it meant. By giving him a Chocobo Crystal, Lucas was trusting him completely—treating him as family.

Peter didn't have many real friends. Hell, he barely had acquaintances.

When it came down to it, the only ones who truly counted were Lucas and Harry.

And that made this strange, magical new world feel just a little bit like home.

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**Chapter 42: The Gears of Fate Begin to Turn**

Peter wasn't the kind of person to overstep boundaries. He knew this place was Lucas's home after all, and even though he now had a key, he had no intention of coming by all the time.

Lucas, however, got a chill down his spine when he saw the pitiful, heartbroken look on Peter's face—as if he were watching his dog get taken away.

"Uh... could you not look at me like that? I never said you couldn't come over, you know~"

The moment Peter heard that, his mood flipped instantly. He threw an arm around Lucas's shoulder and laughed like he'd just won the lottery.

"I knew it! You're not that cold-blooded after all! You're my bro—Peter Parker's one and only best brother! Wahahaha!"

Lucas almost couldn't resist the urge to kick him across the room. The guy was so damn annoying.

A flash of light later, the four of them returned to the DevilMayCry Office, startling Felicia, who had been left to guard the place. Gwen and Skye immediately pulled her into a whirlwind of chatter, leaving Lucas and Peter completely forgotten in the background.

They talked for a while longer before realizing it was nearly midnight. Peter and Felicia finally decided to head home, while Gwen planned to stay overnight—after all, she already had her own room upstairs.

After calling her dad, George, Gwen went upstairs hand in hand with Skye, while Lucas silently followed behind them.

Time, as always, passed like a paycheck—just when you started to enjoy it, it was gone in a blink.

Soon, Gwen and the others were off to start the new semester. George drove them, along with Peter's Aunt May, all the way to Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The once lively DevilMayCry Office suddenly became quiet and almost empty. Now it was just Lucas and Skye most days, with Natasha dropping by occasionally since she practically lived there.

Then one afternoon, as they sat lazily at their desks, Skye suddenly cried out in alarm.

"Boss! Come look at this!! That narcissistic playboy just got kidnapped by terrorists!!"

Lucas shot upright like he'd been hit by lightning and zipped over to her side in an instant.

"What?! Let me see!!"

He pushed Skye slightly to the side and fixed his gaze on the monitor.

On-screen, a newscaster was speaking rapidly, covering the shocking headline. The footage switched to a video clip—Tony Stark, captured and surrounded by armed men.

"Finally!! This is it!! This is my chance!!"

Lucas threw his fists in the air, grinning like a madman, as if he had been waiting for Tony Stark to get kidnapped.

"Skye, listen carefully—buy as many Stark Industries shares as you can! Throw in everything! Every cent I have, and mortgage this whole building too! Put everything into Stark stock!!"

Skye stared at him in disbelief. "Boss, have you lost your mind?! Do you even know how much Stark Industries has crashed these past few days? Buying now is financial suicide!!"

Lucas waved his hand dismissively. "Trust me! Just buy! You'll thank me later! This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!"

No matter how much Skye protested, Lucas wouldn't budge. In the end, she gave in and did as he said—investing all of his savings, even mortgaging the building to the bank.

"Boss, if this backfires, we'll be sleeping on the streets..." Skye pouted miserably. She'd just gotten used to living a peaceful life, and now they were about to lose everything again.

"Don't worry, Skye. Trust me on this."

Lucas said it with utter confidence. After all, he knew how the story went—Tony Stark would be rescued soon enough.

"Oh right—keep a close eye on the stock prices. The moment Tony Stark gets rescued, sell everything. Don't keep a single share."

Skye felt her brain short-circuit. She blinked and reached out to touch his forehead.

"Boss, please don't scare me like that... Did something happen to you? You're not having a breakdown, are you?"

Her voice trembled. Over the past few months, she'd grown closer to Lucas—without realizing that what she felt for him had long gone beyond simple friendship.

Lucas smiled faintly and gently squeezed her hand. "Just trust me, Skye. When Tony Stark is saved, that's when we'll really make a fortune."

He tilted his head up at a dramatic forty-five degrees, looking every bit the strategic mastermind—completely unaware that he was still holding Skye's hand.

Skye didn't pull away. Worst-case scenario, they'd go back to living on the streets like before. It wasn't anything new to her.

She sighed softly and decided to let him do as he pleased. For now, the best she could do was keep an eye on the market. Maybe, just maybe, they'd minimize the damage. Though it really was a shame about the office—they'd put the entire place up as collateral.

"By the way," Lucas said suddenly, "where's Natasha been lately? Her vacation over already?"

Skye frowned, thinking for a moment. "Not sure. I haven't seen her in days. Her lease isn't up yet, though."

Lucas nodded. "Hmm. Probably got called back by S.H.I.E.L.D. Tony Stark's kidnapping isn't a small deal. The son of one of their founding members being taken by terrorists? There's no way they'll sit this one out."

He considered whether to take the initiative and reach out to S.H.I.E.L.D.—maybe help them locate Tony's whereabouts in exchange for a fat payout.

But then he shook his head. Nah, better not. Showing up out of nowhere might make him look suspicious, maybe even like one of the kidnapppers. Better to wait.

They'd come to him eventually. And if not—no big deal. Tony would still be rescued, and Lucas would still get rich either way.

The day passed in their usual routine—Lucas goofing off, Skye glued to the stock tracker.

By evening, Skye had gone upstairs early, exhausted from staring at numbers all day.

Lucas was about to head up himself when a sudden orange light bloomed behind him, sparkling like embers in the air.

He didn't even need to look to know who it was. That bald figure—so different from Nick Fury—could only be one person: the Sorcerer Supreme, the Ancient One.

He turned around, and sure enough, there she stood in her yellow robes, serene as ever.

"It seems you're not at all surprised by my arrival."

Her voice was calm, tranquil—a tone that made Lucas feel like he was floating on a quiet lake, peaceful and still.

He smiled politely and gestured toward the couch. "Master Ancient One, please, have a seat."

She smiled softly. "Anything to drink?"

Lucas nodded, walked over to the fridge, and took out two steaming cups of rooibos tea.

"Please—try some."

He placed the cups carefully on the table between them, the rising steam curling in the warm office light.

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Chapter 43: The Ancient One Arrives

The Ancient One didn't stand on ceremony—she picked up the teacup and took a small sip.

"This tea is quite good. There's... magical energy within it."

Her eyes brightened slightly. She could feel a faint increase in her own mana—minute, but distinct.

"I'm glad you like it, Master Ancient One," Lucas said, sipping his own tea. Of course it was special—this was tea from the Final Fantasy world, infused with buff effects. What did she expect, Lipton?

"You may call me Master Ancient One. May I call you Lucas?"

Lucas nodded.

"Lucas," she continued with her usual calm smile, her eyes deep and all-seeing, "can you tell me how you came to know of my existence?"

Lucas knew he couldn't tell her the truth, so he trotted out the same story he'd once used to bluff S.H.I.E.L.D.

"I learned of you from my teacher—Hydaelyn."

"Hydaelyn..." The Ancient One frowned slightly, the name unfamiliar to her. "I've never heard of such an entity. Could she be one of the gods from another branch of the multiverse?"

Lucas stayed silent, pretending to ponder. The Ancient One's expression hardened slightly; vigilance flashed through her eyes.

"Lucas," she said gravely, "I must know more about your teacher. I cannot allow Earth to fall under threat from any extraplanar deity."

Her tone was serious, though she made no move to attack him.

Lucas nodded solemnly, spinning the lie further. "I don't know much either. My master—like you—is a woman. She first appeared to me in a dream.

"She told me that Earth would soon face great danger, and that only great power could avert it. So she began teaching me magic—and to listen for the presence of the Summoned Beasts."

He paused, mentally giving himself a pat on the back. Not bad. Sounds convincing enough.

The Ancient One sank into thoughtful silence, her expression unreadable. Lucas wisely kept his mouth shut and focused on sipping his tea.

"Does your teacher have any other disciples here on Earth?" she asked at last.

Lucas shook his head. "No. She told me that across all universes, I'm her only disciple—her sole successor."

Hearing that, the Ancient One unconsciously relaxed a little. From what she could tell, this Hydaelyn didn't seem intent on invading Earth.

Entities like Dormammu couldn't simply enter another plane at will; they had to gather believers within it, building power through worship until they could manifest an avatar or fragment of themselves.

From what Lucas described, Hydaelyn had no such following—only one disciple. That alone lessened the threat considerably.

Still, the Ancient One had already used subtle spells to probe him for deception... and sensed none.

Of course, she had no idea that none of her mental probes would ever work. Not with the System inside Lucas—no one in the Marvel Universe could read or control his mind.

"You mentioned Summoned Beasts," she said after a moment. "Was the entity you called forth before—what some took for a demon—one of them?"

Lucas nodded. "Yes. Her name is Garuda—the Summoned Beast of Wind and Storm."

"I see."

The Ancient One inclined her head slightly, but she didn't press further on Garuda. Instead, her tone shifted, the air around her becoming still and heavy.

"Lucas, I once used the Eye of Agamotto to observe your timeline. Since you acquired your powers, not only your personal thread, but the entire world's temporal stream has become... chaotic.

"You are the greatest unknown in this universe."

Her voice was solemn now—more serious than when she had questioned him about Hydaelyn.

"This concerns the safety of Earth and all humanity," she said. "So please—answer truthfully."

"Will you bring harm to this planet?"

Lucas didn't hesitate for even a second. "Master Ancient One, Earth is my home. Who would destroy their own home? Besides, I have people I care about here. For their sake, I'll protect this planet."

The Ancient One stared at him silently for several moments, searching his face. Then, finally, a small smile returned to her lips.

"You pass, Lucas. I believe you."

Lucas merely nodded, saying nothing more. Of course I won't destroy the Earth—what, money's not fun to spend anymore? Women not pretty enough? The internet gone? No way.

"I've asked what I needed to ask," she said at last, draining her cup in one elegant motion. She could feel a faint surge of power within her, subtle but real.

"Well then, I should be going."

"Wait a moment, Master Ancient One."

Lucas stood, went to the counter, and retrieved a brown cloth bag—plump and fragrant.

"These are some rooibos tea leaves. You seemed to enjoy it, so please take some with you."

Before she could refuse, he pressed the bag into her hands.

"...Very well, I'll accept it. And you're welcome to visit Kamar-Taj sometime. You should know where the New York Sanctum is—through its portal, you can reach us easily."

The Ancient One inclined her head slightly, as courteous as an old-world noble. Then she traced a glowing circle in the air; a golden portal bloomed open.

"Farewell for now, Lucas."

"Safe travels, Master Ancient One."

The portal closed behind her, and Lucas finally exhaled, collapsing onto the couch.

That had been the most stressful bit of improvising he'd ever done. Fooling Nick Fury was one thing—but bluffing the Ancient One? That was playing with fire.

"System," he muttered. "That was your doing, wasn't it?"

[Ding~ The System did nothing. The host is naturally immune to all mental and psychic interference.]

"...Right. Figures."

Lucas lay back, trying to calm his racing heart.

"Koo~ Koo~"

A small voice chirped. His moogles fluttered over from its cushion and landed on his chest, waving its tiny wand.

"You're saying she noticed you?"

"Koo~"

The moogles nodded, miming a few gestures with its little paws.

Lucas smiled and stroked its soft, plush head. "It's fine. She didn't mean any harm. Probably just curious."

The moogles purred happily under his touch—the softness was addictive. No wonder Skye loved cuddling it all the time.

Later, Lucas took a long bath. Without a proper bathhouse in New York, soaking never quite felt satisfying. After forty minutes in the tub, he still didn't feel as relaxed as he would've in a proper hot spring.

"Wait... why the hell didn't I just use the hot spring in the Chocobo Space?" he muttered, smacking his forehead.

With that brilliant realization and a sigh, Lucas flopped onto his bed—and drifted into sleep.

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## Chapter 44: S.H.I.E.L.D.'s Commission

Early the next morning, Lucas woke up far earlier than usual. After a quick wash, he headed downstairs to the office—only to find that Skye had beaten him to it. She was already at her desk, fingers flying across the keyboard.

"Skye, what are you always tinkering with on that computer? Let me take a look."

Lucas dragged a chair beside her and leaned in. The screen was filled with dense streams of code—lines and symbols that made his brain feel like it had just blue-screened.

"So, understand any of it?" Skye asked, not even pausing her furious typing.

Lucas nodded solemnly. "Yeah. A little. It's like... these codes recognize me—but I don't recognize them."

Skye shot him a side-eye. "...Right. I'm upgrading the security system for our building. S.H.I.E.L.D. just rolled out a new batch of tech, and our defenses are lagging behind."

Her hands blurred across the keyboard, almost leaving afterimages. Lucas half expected the laptop to burst into flames.

"How do you even know S.H.I.E.L.D. updated their equipment?" he asked, baffled. That kind of thing should've been top secret.

"I watched," she said flatly.

Lucas blinked. "You... watched?"

"Yeah. I left a backdoor in their surveillance network ages ago. I can peek for five minutes at a time before they kick me out. But it was enough to see them upgrading their hardware and backend systems. So I'm just... leveling up ours too, in case they get nosy."

Her tone was calm, almost robotic—but Lucas's blood ran cold.

That was S.H.I.E.L.D. she was talking about, not some mom-and-pop security firm. And the craziest part? She'd been caught once already, yet somehow still managed

to leave a backdoor behind. Either Skye was an absolute genius... or S.H.I.E.L.D.'s IT department was made of cardboard.

"Oh, by the way," Skye said suddenly, switching screens. "Stark Industries stock dropped again. Everyone's dumping it."

The monitor flashed bright red—so red that Lucas instinctively shielded his eyes. The graph looked tragic, like a wilted eggplant, or a soggy day-old dough stick—completely lifeless.

"Perfect!" Lucas exclaimed. "We're going to make a killing!"

Skye choked on her berry tea. "Boss... are you seriously okay? Should I call a doctor? This sounds like a full-on delusional episode."

"Who's delusional? You are! Listen, once Tony Stark gets rescued, the stock's going to skyrocket. When that happens, we sell everything."

"...Whatever you say, boss."

Skye sighed in resignation. She was done arguing.

By noon, the two of them were tearing into their lunch—pan-seared leopard steak with wine sauce—when Natasha suddenly burst in, looking exhausted and covered in dust.

"What are you two eating?" she blurted out, instantly forgetting whatever she'd come to say. Her eyes were locked on the food like a starving wolf.

"Uh... where have you been?" Lucas asked, surprised. She looked like she'd just come back from a survival show.

"Don't ask. Just feed me. I haven't had a proper meal in days."

She collapsed onto the couch, grabbed Skye's half-finished berry tea, and downed it in one gulp. The icy sweetness made her shiver with bliss.

Lucas handed her a plate of leopard steak. She devoured it like someone who hadn't seen civilization in weeks.

After polishing it off and refilling herself with more tea, Natasha finally sighed in relief, slumping back against the sofa.

"So?" Skye asked. "What happened to you? You look like you've been living in the wild."

Natasha groaned. "You know Tony Stark got kidnapped, right?"

"I think all of New York knows," Skye replied dryly.

"The Director sent us to find him—in the middle of a desert. Do you have any idea how hard it is to locate a terrorist base in all that sand?"

She looked genuinely pitiful.

Days of fruitless searching, no proper food, no progress—she might as well have been on a fool's errand.

"You still haven't found him?" Skye asked anxiously—after all, her financial future literally depended on it.

Lucas, meanwhile, didn't look worried at all. "Relax. Those terrorists have plans for Stark. They won't kill him. Not yet."

Knowing the future had its perks—Lucas was perfectly aware Tony would survive and make his dramatic comeback.

"Oh, right," Natasha said, smacking her forehead. "That's actually why I'm here. The Director wants to hire you to find Tony Stark. Think you can do it?"

Lucas's smile turned sly as he rubbed his fingers together meaningfully.

Natasha rolled her eyes but nodded. "Money's not a problem. As long as you can locate him, S.H.I.E.L.D. will pay whatever it takes. Just don't get greedy."

Lucas grinned like a cat that had just found a canary. "Pleasure doing business. Give me a day to prepare—I'll call you tomorrow."

Natasha shook her head helplessly. "Fine. Oh, and—you didn't rent out my apartment, right?"

"Nope," Skye said. "Your lease is still good."

"Perfect. I'm taking a shower and sleeping for twelve hours. You two do whatever."

And with that, she disappeared upstairs.

Lucas sat in thought for a while. This rescue mission could be a golden opportunity. After a moment, he turned to Skye.

She noticed his stare and blinked. "What? Do I have something on my face?"

"Skye," Lucas said seriously, "if you had a chance to awaken superpowers... what would you do?"

Her eyes widened. "Wait, what? You're joking, right?"

Lucas didn't answer. He just smiled faintly.

Skye was, after all, Inhuman by birth. Her genes carried latent power—she just hadn't been exposed to Terrigen to trigger it.

And this upcoming mission might be his chance to get a certain obelisk—the very thing that could awaken her abilities.

"Wait a sec..." Skye gasped. "Boss, are you saying... you're going to teach me magic?"

Her eyes sparkled like a kid seeing her first lightsaber.

Lucas just grinned mysteriously. "Something like that."

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## Chapter 45: Skye's Decision

"Wait—Boss, are you saying... you're going to teach me magic?!"

Lucas shook his head. "Not magic. I mean awakening your superpower. I have a way to make it happen."

Skye's eyes widened in disbelief. She didn't speak for a long moment—the concept was so far beyond what she'd expected that she needed time to process it.

"You mean... I can actually awaken superpowers?" she repeated mechanically, as if her brain couldn't keep up.

"Yes," Lucas said calmly. "You can. But think carefully. The process is extremely dangerous. There's a real chance of failure—and if that happens, you'll turn into stone. Forever. So, make sure you're certain before you answer."

"Stone? Turn into stone?!" Skye was stunned. She'd seen people with powers before—Marko the Killer, Peter, Gwen, even Lucas himself—but she had never heard of someone turning to stone because they failed to awaken.

Of course, she didn't know the truth about the Obelisk. Ordinary people who touched it would instantly turn to stone, while Inhumans faced a chance of the same fate if their transformation failed.

"Go back to your apartment and think it over," Lucas said. "Tell me your decision before midnight."

Skye left in a daze. She couldn't even remember how she made it back to her apartment. Once inside, she sat on the edge of her bed, lost in thought the entire day—didn't eat, didn't drink, didn't move.

Lucas, meanwhile, stayed in the office, quietly waiting. He was curious about her choice. The power of vibration—quake—was immense, potentially strong enough to shatter the planet if fully unleashed.

But regardless of her decision, he would respect it. Even if she chose to stay a hacker, as long as she remained in the apartment, she'd be safe. All he wanted was for Skye to never regret her choice.

Night fell, the sky ink-black and moonless. Heavy clouds swallowed the stars, and the streets below were empty save for the glow of neon signs and flickering streetlights.

It was then that Skye pushed open the office door.

"Have you decided?" Lucas asked, smiling as he sipped his pineapple juice.

Skye looked perfectly calm. Her first words were, "I'm starving."

Watching her tear into a plate of grilled fish, Lucas relaxed a little—seemed she'd worked things out.

After devouring the food, Skye gulped down a glass of peach juice and let out an unladylike burp.

"Burp~! I've decided. I'm ready—I want to awaken."

Her eyes gleamed with resolve. It was clear she had thought this through carefully.

Lucas didn't press her. Whatever she chose, he'd support her. But he also knew her power came with risks. The Quake ability was overwhelming in raw strength—but the vibrations also tore through the user's own body. If she lost control, she could end up hurting herself before even touching the enemy.

Still, there were ways to mitigate it. If he could get her a pair of vibranium gauntlets, they could absorb most of the backlash. Not perfectly—but enough.

The problem was getting vibranium. Outside of S.H.I.E.L.D., only Tony Stark and a certain black-market dealer had any. The man's name escaped Lucas—he couldn't even remember it.

Probably because Black Panther was the one Marvel movie Lucas had utterly hated. In his words, "I didn't pay good money to watch a black-and-white movie full of dudes in cat suits."

So, remembering who that arms dealer was—or how to find Wakanda—was hopeless. All he knew was that it was "somewhere in Africa," which didn't exactly narrow it down.

That left two options: S.H.I.E.L.D. or Tony Stark.

But Stark's vibranium reserves were tiny—just traces mixed into his armor alloys. Definitely not enough to craft gauntlets.

So... S.H.I.E.L.D. again. Somehow everything always led back to them.

Lucas sighed in irritation. He hated dealing with that organization—always scheming, always digging traps, never the kind you'd trust to watch your back.

Forget it, he thought. One thing at a time. Let's get Skye awakened first.

"Alright," he said finally. "Since you've made up your mind, wait a bit. I'll get what we need and find a safe place for the ritual."

"What do we need?" Skye asked curiously. "I thought you were just going to use your magic or something."

Lucas chuckled. "No, it requires a specific item. It looks like a tall, stone pillar."

"'Looks like'?" she repeated, catching the wording. "What is it really?"

"Actually..." Lucas grinned faintly. "It's a crystal. A crystal that holds strange, ancient power."

He didn't bother hiding the truth—she'd see the Obelisk soon enough.

"A crystal? Like the one you gave me before?" she asked, referring to the crystal key to his Chocobo Space.

"Not even close. You'll see when the time comes."

Lucas said no more. His next step was clear: somehow get the Obelisk from S.H.I.E.L.D.

The next morning, Natasha arrived early at the office. When she pushed open the door, only Skye was there, sitting idly at her desk.

"Where's Lucas? He's not here?" Natasha asked, scanning the room.

"He's still asleep," Skye replied without even looking up. "Unless there's an emergency, he never wakes up before noon."

She was long used to his lazy schedule. Mornings were her shift. If Lucas happened to be in a good mood, he might show up early—otherwise, not a chance.

"That guy can really sleep!" Natasha grumbled. "Fine, I'll wake him myself."

She pulled out her phone and started hammering Lucas with call after call—no mercy, no pauses.

After almost twenty calls, Lucas finally picked up, his voice groggy and half-asleep.

"Hellooo~ who's haunting me this early..."

"Ha! You've got nerve, little boss—daring to stand me up!" Natasha's voice oozed sultry menace, the kind that made your spine tingle.

Lucas shot up from bed instantly. One glance at the clock—and he remembered what he'd promised her yesterday.

"Twenty minutes," he said flatly, and hung up.

Downstairs, Natasha nearly crushed her phone in rage. Grinding her teeth, she stormed to the bar counter and began rummaging around.

Skye didn't bother stopping her—there was no reason to. The bar had nothing but snacks and drinks anyway. And Natasha wouldn't dare plant a bug—Skye's system would detect it instantly.

After a minute of furious searching, Natasha pulled out a slice of Starlight Cake Roll and a cup of Ishgard Milk Tea, biting into them like they were Lucas himself.

Half an hour later, Lucas finally strolled in through the office door—completely unbothered.

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## Chapter 46: Nick Fury Arrives

"Well, well—if it isn't the legendary owner of the Devil May Cry Detective Agency himself! For a big shot like you to grace a little woman like me with your presence... truly, what an honor!"

Natasha smiled sweetly, her tone all honey and charm.

But Lucas could feel the killing intent hidden beneath that warmth. Behind that gentle smile lurked a predator ready to devour him whole. For a split second, he almost pulled out Judgment and fired just to be safe.

"Uh... I mean, here I am, right?" Lucas said nervously, trying to sound casual. He immediately scooted his chair farther away from her, terrified that if she snapped, he'd end up as lunch.

Natasha rolled her eyes. "Come with me."

"??"

Lucas blinked in confusion. "Go? Go where? We haven't even talked about the terms yet!"

The effort it took Natasha not to punch him right there could've powered a city.

"Our Director wants to see you. I'm taking you to him."

Her voice was taut with irritation, her jaw clenched.

"Wait—you mean your shiny bald director? You want me to go all the way to S.H.I.E.L.D. HQ? That's in Washington, isn't it? That's kinda far, don't you think?"

"The Director's here in New York," Natasha said curtly. "He's waiting for you in a secure safehouse."

Without another word, she stood and strode toward the door.

Lucas sighed helplessly, turned to Skye, and said, "Watch the place, I'll be back soon." Then he followed Natasha out.

---

As they drove, Lucas couldn't help himself.

"You know," he began, "your Director really has a persecution complex. Dude acts like the entire world's out to kill him. Hiding in safehouses, jumping at shadows—what does he think he is, made of gold?"

"Thank you, Mr. Norman," a deep, calm voice suddenly rumbled from the back seat, "for your insightful psychological evaluation. But I assure you, I don't suffer from any persecution delusions."

"AHHH—WHAT THE HELL!"

Lucas nearly jumped out of his skin. He slammed his head against the car roof and almost fell right into Natasha's lap.

Instinctively, he whipped out Judgment, ready to unload a few rounds into the mysterious voice.

"Lucas, what the hell are you doing?!" Natasha yelled, stomping on the brakes so hard that the car screeched to a stop. She grabbed Lucas's wrist just in time to keep him from firing.

"You sneaky, shady, one-eyed eggplant! Do you have any idea how close I was to dying of a heart attack? I've lived through demons, gods, and worse—and I was almost scared to death by you!"

Lucas shouted at the top of his lungs, the barrel of his gun nearly pressed against Nick Fury's forehead.

Fury, meanwhile, sat there as calm as ever, leaning back casually like it was a Sunday drive.

"Mr. Norman," he said dryly, "I've been in the car the whole time. You simply failed to notice me. Also, I'd appreciate it if you removed the gun. I don't believe I pose any real threat to you."

Lucas scowled but lowered his weapon. "Not my fault! You blend right into the seat! Maybe next time try some white upholstery or something. Then people might actually see you instead of dying of fright!"

"Mr. Norman," Fury replied, his expression even darker than usual, "let's refrain from personal attacks and focus on the mission."

If his face got any darker, he'd merge with the seat entirely.

"Weren't you supposed to be in a safehouse?" Lucas said, eyeing him suspiciously.  
"Why are you in the car? Is this your so-called safehouse?"

Natasha just shrugged, saying nothing.

"There's no safer place than this car," Fury replied evenly.

"Oh, really? You were about two seconds away from being shot in the face. Real secure, Director."

Lucas scoffed. He hadn't actually meant to shoot him—Judgment couldn't even harm regular humans—but Fury didn't need to know that.

A vein pulsed on Fury's forehead. He'd met talkative people before, but this kid's mouth was lethal.

"Enough. Let's talk about the mission—Stark's rescue." Fury clasped his hands together. "Agent Romanoff's already briefed you, I assume. You claim you can find Tony Stark?"

Lucas nodded casually. "Sure can. And I can bring him back alive. But..."

He rubbed his fingers together meaningfully.

"Money isn't an issue," Fury said. "Half a million dollars. Just bring Stark back safely."

Lucas stared at him like he'd just heard a bad joke. "Half a million? Are you serious? For that price, I'll bring you back one of his fingers—maybe this much." He held up his index finger for emphasis.

Fury's face went from dark to pitch-black. He'd known this guy would gouge him, but he hadn't expected him to bite this hard. He'd barely managed to squeeze ten million out of the World Security Council—half a million was generous!

"How much do you want?" Fury asked through gritted teeth, as if every word cost him blood.

Lucas raised one finger again. "Ten million. Not a cent less."

"WHAT?!"

Fury nearly exploded. Ten million?! That's literally the entire damn budget!

Lucas leaned back, feigning innocence. "Oh, so you do eat people, huh? Judging by that look, you're about to take a bite outta me."

"Forget it," Fury snapped. "Ten million? Not happening."

Lucas shrugged. "Fine, then let's change the payment. I don't need cash—just give me something from your inventory. You know what I mean."

He grinned, eyes glinting.

Fury's instincts kicked in immediately. "What item?"

"Item 084," Lucas said simply.

The words hit Fury like a bullet. His brow furrowed deeply. "How do you even know about o84?"

Lucas didn't answer. He just smiled faintly. "Doesn't matter. Are you giving it to me or not?"

Fury's single eye locked on him for a long, tense moment. The air in the car thickened, heavy with unspoken threats. Natasha's hand drifted toward her waist on reflex, fingers brushing the hidden weapon there.

"Absolutely not," Fury said at last, his tone sharp as a blade. "That object is classified. You can forget about it."

Lucas sighed dramatically. "Fine. I'll compromise then. Lend it to me for three days—and throw in a million cash. In return, I'll bring Tony Stark back safe and sound."

Fury narrowed his eye, considering it. "...Alright. But if I lend you o84, one of my agents goes with you. No exceptions."

The money didn't even seem to bother him anymore. What he really wanted to know was—what the hell did Lucas want with that thing?

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**Chapter 47: Departure to the Middle East**

The moment Nick Fury secured the item, he ordered a full analysis.

It was a crystal—constantly radiating intense energy waves. According to S.H.I.E.L.D.'s data, anyone who wasn't special would instantly turn to stone the moment they touched it. Fury was dying to understand what its true purpose was.

"Fine," Lucas said, pointing at Natasha. "Let her come along. She already lives at the apartment anyway."

"That works," Fury nodded. "Then, Mr. Norman, we have a deal."

He extended his hand. Lucas shook it lazily.

"By the way," Fury added, his tone shifting to something more diplomatic, "you really won't consider joining us? And no, I don't mean S.H.I.E.L.D.—I mean a team composed entirely of extraordinary individuals."

He was, of course, talking about the Avengers Initiative. Ever since he'd witnessed Lucas transform into that golden-winged Garuda, that godlike being capable of leveling mountains, Fury had been obsessed. That raw power had burned itself into his memory.

Aside from her—the woman who claimed to carry the weight of the universe—no one else he knew could rival Lucas.

If someone like him could be recruited into the Avengers, there would be no mission too dangerous, no threat too great.

But Lucas just smirked. "Sorry, not interested in joining your little Bad Boys Club. I'm just a small business owner, remember? I run a detective agency. If you've got a job, you can hire me—just make sure the pay's good."

Same line, same attitude. Lucas wasn't one to fight for free, and he certainly wasn't about to abandon his office for some world-saving PR stunt.

Fury sighed. "Fine. I won't press the issue. Just... I hope that one day, you don't find yourself standing on the opposite side of that team."

"Relax," Lucas said, shrugging. "I'm human too, you know."

Inwardly, though, he couldn't help thinking: Yup, definitely persecution complex.

"So," Fury asked, "when do you plan to depart for the Middle East?"

"S.H.I.E.L.D.'s jet is fueled and waiting on standby."

"Whenever," Lucas replied casually. "I can leave right now."

He didn't need to pack—food, water, even lodging weren't an issue. Thanks to the Chocobo Space he had access to, Lucas could teleport back to his office at any time. It worked like his own personal interdimensional hub.

"Then let's head to the airport," Fury said. "The sooner you leave, the better. Every hour Stark stays missing, the risk grows."

Lucas waved his hand dismissively. "No need for the jet. Coulson's still stationed in the Middle East, right? I'll contact him when I get there."

Fury's brow arched. "You're not taking a plane? Then how exactly are you planning to get there?"

"You'll see," Lucas said with a smirk. "Don't worry about it. I'll call Coulson once I've arrived—tell him to stay put at the base."

He wasn't about to explain his methods.

Fury exhaled through his nose. "...Fine. Natasha, take him back to his office."

---

Back at the Devil May Cry Detective Agency, Lucas didn't bother hiding anything.

He told Skye directly that he was heading to the Middle East to rescue Tony Stark, and if all went smoothly, he'd be back within a few days.

"Oh, and when Stark's back," he added, "sell all the stocks. Every last one."

Skye just sighed and nodded. "Got it..."

Then Lucas pulled out the Chocobo Whistle and gave it a sharp blow.

"Wark! Wark!!"

Space twisted and shimmered, and with a gust of wind, Onion the Chocobo appeared, honking excitedly and nearly knocking Lucas over with its beak.

"I'm heading out. Hold down the fort while I'm gone, yeah?"

Lucas vaulted onto Onion's back.

"Alright, Onion—let's roll! Next stop, the Middle East!"

"Wark!!"

With a powerful kick, Onion launched itself skyward, breaking the sound barrier in seconds. The shockwave rattled windows for blocks as they vanished into the clouds.

---

In a S.H.I.E.L.D. safehouse, Fury watched the feed from one of his external surveillance drones.

"Where the hell did he get that thing?" Fury growled, staring at the footage of Onion rocketing into the sky. "And how the hell does it fly that fast?!"

Yes—S.H.I.E.L.D. still had its usual habits.

Even though they couldn't plant bugs inside Lucas's apartment or office, they had surrounded the entire block with hidden cameras, giving them a 360-degree view of his building.

Natasha smiled faintly. "No clue. First time I've seen that bird myself. Guess the boss still has a few surprises left."

Every time Fury looked frustrated, it lifted her mood.

"Tell Coulson to be on standby," Fury ordered, his face dark as night. "I want eyes on everything that kid does over there."

---

Meanwhile, Lucas streaked across the sky, leaving a sonic boom trailing behind him.

He didn't know exactly where Tony Stark was being held, but that didn't bother him. Onion had an ability—scent tracking. As long as it had something that carried Tony's scent, it could find him anywhere.

In less than two hours, Lucas reached the Middle East. He landed in a quiet stretch of desert, pulled out the phone Natasha had given him, and called Coulson.

"Yo, Agent Coulson! Guess what? I'm here."

The desert sun was brutal. Within minutes, Lucas was sweating and questioning all his life choices. But he'd made a promise—to Fury, and more importantly, to Skye—so there was no backing out now.

He sat in Onion's shadow, sipping an icy melon juice while his bird happily scratched at the sand, seemingly immune to the heat.

"I've sent you the coordinates," Coulson's voice crackled through the comm, nearly drowned out by background noise.

Lucas checked the screen—sure enough, a red dot appeared on the map.

"Alright, Onion. Let's move."

One flap of those massive wings, and they were gone in a golden blur.

Minutes later, they arrived over a U.S. military base.

"Enemy attack!!!"

Someone below shouted the moment they saw Onion's silhouette. Within seconds, anti-air turrets and missile launchers locked onto Lucas's position.

"Hey! Are you blind?! What the hell do you think I'm attacking you with, feathers? I'm friendly, damn it!"

Lucas ignored the weapons and landed smoothly in the middle of the base. Coulson hurried out just in time to wave the soldiers down.

"Stand down! He's an ally!"

The troops hesitated, then slowly lowered their weapons.

"You made good time," Coulson said, adjusting his tie as he approached. "And I assume this is your flying... creature?"

He eyed Onion cautiously, though he was smart enough not to touch it like Peter once had.

"Oh? So you already knew I'd be arriving this way?" Lucas asked, raising a brow.

Coulson gave a small smile. "The Director briefed me. Said you took off on a giant bird. He told me not to be too surprised when you landed."

Lucas smirked. "Yeah... something tells me those weren't exactly his words."

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## Chapter 48: Operation Rescue

"You sure your boss didn't tell you to pump me for information... or maybe sneak a blood sample from Onion while you're at it?"

Lucas asked flatly, not even bothering to look up. He knew S.H.I.E.L.D. and Nick Fury far too well—their paranoia was legendary. The moment they saw something new, their first instinct was to dissect it, analyze it, and lock it away under the label of 'classified.'

Classic persecution complex. They always thought the whole world was out to get them.

Then again, considering all the crap the United States had pulled over the years, who wouldn't want to mess with them? The only reason no one had nuked them yet was because no one wanted to start World War III.

Coulson's cheeks flushed slightly—an extremely rare sight.

Because Lucas was exactly right. Fury's orders had been very specific: get the kid talking and find a way to extract some of that bird's blood for analysis. Onion's existence defied every known biological model, and its flight speed was faster than any modern jet. S.H.I.E.L.D. had to know how.

Since they were already at the base, Lucas decided to send Onion away. The bird's presence drew too much attention—every soldier in camp was staring at it like they'd just seen an alien spaceship. It was only a matter of time before Onion got annoyed enough to start a fight.

"So," Lucas asked, sipping on an icy melon juice inside a shaded tent, "got any leads on Stark?"

Coulson, also clutching a dripping cold drink like it was liquid gold, sighed. "None. Those terrorists vanished into thin air. Every tracker we've deployed came up empty. We've practically wiped out every major cell in the region, and still no sign of Tony Stark."

Lucas leaned back. "I need something that belongs to Stark—something he's used recently. You got anything like that?"

Coulson shook his head. "Not here. But I can have someone send it over immediately."

"No need," Lucas said, waving him off. "Have them deliver it to my office. I'll get it myself."

If he waited for S.H.I.E.L.D.'s bureaucracy, Stark would probably rescue himself before the item even arrived. Lucas didn't have that kind of patience—this was a race against time.

"Got it. I'll contact Natasha."

Coulson didn't ask questions. He simply grabbed the satellite phone and relayed the order back to New York.

Less than an hour later, Natasha called back—she had the item in hand and was already at the Devil May Cry office.

"Wait here," Lucas said, standing up. "I'll be right back."

Before Coulson could ask what he meant, Lucas pulled out the Chocobo Whistle, blew twice—

—and vanished.

Coulson froze mid-blink.

---

In the office, a swirl of light appeared out of nowhere, and Lucas stepped out of thin air.

"Wow," Natasha said with a grin. "The boss has teleportation magic now? Impressive."

Her companion, a red-haired woman in a gray suit, nearly dropped her teacup in shock.

"Allow me to introduce you," Natasha said. "This is Pepper Potts—executive assistant to the CEO of Stark Industries."

She nodded toward Lucas. "And this is the one who's going to find Tony Stark."

Pepper immediately stood, eyes wide and desperate. "Mr. Norman, please—do you have any news about him? Whatever the cost, Stark Industries will pay it!"

Her tone was resolute—she meant it. In Tony's absence, Pepper held near-total control of the company. Stark had always left business matters to her and Obadiah, while he spent his days drinking, partying, and tinkering in his lab.

Lucas smiled. "Don't worry, Ms. Potts. I'll bring Tony Stark back in one piece. Now—did you bring what I asked for?"

"I did," she said quickly. "I wasn't sure what you'd need, so I brought several of Mr. Stark's personal items."

She opened a travel case beside her—inside were a dozen objects: watches, glasses, pens, even an arc reactor prototype fragment.

Lucas picked up a wristwatch. "This'll do."

He turned to leave. "Every minute counts. The longer we wait, the greater the danger."

He gave Skye a brief wave before vanishing again through the Chocobo Space portal.

---

Back in the desert base, Coulson was in the middle of briefing his team when Lucas suddenly materialized right beside him.

Everyone froze. Guns immediately snapped up, aimed straight at his head.

"Easy! Easy, guys!" Coulson raised both hands. "He's friendly!"

Once the soldiers lowered their weapons, Lucas said curtly, "I'm heading out. Get your team ready. Once I find Tony Stark, I'll contact you—just trace my signal when the time comes."

Without waiting for a response, he summoned Onion. The massive bird materialized in a swirl of sand and wind.

Lucas held the wristwatch out to it. Onion sniffed lightly, let out a confident "Wark," and nodded.

"Good boy."

Moments later, they were airborne again.

Within minutes, they'd reached a hidden compound tucked between rocky cliffs—a secret base large enough to be invisible to radar. Lucas guessed the tech shielding it had come straight from Stark Industries. And considering who was pulling the strings behind the scenes—Obadiah Stane—it made perfect sense.

"Find us a spot to land," Lucas murmured.

Onion descended to a narrow plateau overlooking the base. The vantage point gave Lucas a clear view without exposing him.

He dismissed Onion, sending the bird back into the Chocobo Space, and began sneaking toward the facility on foot.

Carefully avoiding the patrols, Lucas eventually reached the mouth of a cave guarded by two armed men. The cave was sealed, but the faint echo of metal clanging came from within. Stark was inside.

Lucas crouched low, picked up a pebble, and flicked it.

Plink!

It hit one guard on the helmet. The man looked around, saw nothing, and grunted.

Plink!

Another pebble—slightly larger this time. The guard frowned, rubbing the sore spot.

Still nothing.

Then—

THUD!

A rock the size of a bowling ball crashed down, splattering the man's skull open like a watermelon.

"F\*\*k!"

The other guard stumbled back, eyes darting upward.

Too late. Lucas had already rolled a boulder down from his perch above.

But before he could move on to phase two, a drone suddenly swooped into view. Its lens swiveled, locking right onto his face.

"Ah, hell—!"

So much for stealth.

Abandoning subtlety, Lucas leapt off the ridge, landing in front of the cave. The Judgment Blade materialized in his hands in a flash of golden light.

With a single swing, he cleaved the second guard in half.

An alarm blared through the base—sirens wailing, red lights flashing. Dozens of gunmen poured out from every direction, rifles raised.

Lucas swung his blade once. A wave of wind slashes burst outward, deflecting the incoming bullets like a steel wall before slicing through the attackers.

Bodies fell in two neat lines.

The rescue had begun.

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## Chapter 49: Tony “Stark” You!

Lucas's sword flashed in a brilliant arc—more than a dozen terrorists were cleaved cleanly in half. The cuts were so smooth they looked as if a master craftsman had polished them.

Without pause, he invoked Garuda's Embrace.

Emerald talons of energy materialized out of thin air, seizing Lucas and hurling him straight into the midst of the enemy ranks.

"Wind Rend!"

He swung again—green power converged before him, forming countless razor-sharp eagle claws that tore into the gunmen like a storm of blades.

Screams filled the air. Flesh shredded. Blood burst out in crimson fountains, spraying across the sand. In an instant, the yellow earth turned scarlet, the ground littered with severed limbs and mangled corpses. What moments ago was a bare desert outpost now resembled a slaughterhouse from hell.

The noise was deafening. So much for stealth—there was no sneaking around after this.

Lucas sighed inwardly. "Well, guess we're doing this the loud way."

More and more enemies poured in. The air filled with gunfire—metal slugs zipping past from all directions. Lucas ducked behind a massive rock, bullets chipping away at the stone.

"Damn it! What kind of firepower is this?!" he growled, glaring up at the sky. "Screw you, Stark Industries! Screw you too, Obadiah!"

He sent out a quick signal to Coulson—reinforcements would probably arrive in fifteen minutes.

"Whatever," Lucas muttered, gripping his sword tighter. "As long as Stark's alive, that's all that matters."

He stepped out from behind cover, green energy swirling violently around him. His eyes gleamed like twin emeralds.

"Atmospheric Burst!"

He slashed downward—and the world roared.

A tremendous gust erupted from his blade, winds converging wildly from every direction. Within seconds, a colossal tornado materialized at the center of the base, devouring everything in its path.

---

Inside the cave, Tony Stark and Yinsen were busy fine-tuning their crude, bulky machine—a rough, welded mess of metal plates and spare parts: the prototype Mark I armor.

Beep! Beep! Beep!

Suddenly, the base alarm blared. Shouts echoed outside in a language Tony couldn't understand.

"They've found us!" Tony hissed, fingers flying across the keyboard, code flooding the monitor.

Yinsen listened closely, then frowned. "Wait, no—they're shouting that the base is under attack!"

"Under attack?" Tony froze. Then his eyes lit up. "Someone's attacking them?! You think someone came to rescue me?"

Hope reignited in his chest. He doubled his pace, hands blurring over the controls.

"Doesn't matter who it is," he said. "If they're keeping these guys busy, it's our chance to escape!"

He made final adjustments and climbed into the armor. The progress bar on the computer ticked forward slowly—painfully slowly.

Yinsen hesitated, glancing toward the entrance as the sounds of chaos grew louder. Then he made his choice.

"Tony," he said quietly, "I'll buy you some time. Promise me you'll make it out alive."

Before Tony could respond, Yinsen ran out of the cave.

"Yinsen! No! Get back here! Damn it, YINSEN!"

Tony shouted until his voice cracked, eyes flicking to the screen.

"Come on, come on! Hurry up, you piece of—!"

At last, the system chimed—Power Systems Online. The Mark I's limbs came alive. The once-heavy armor now moved easily under his control.

"Yinsen!" Tony roared, charging out of the cave.

He found him almost immediately—Yinsen standing frozen at the cave mouth, staring into the storm with wide, terrified eyes.

A howling wind tore through the cave, whipping their clothes violently. Tony stepped beside him, following his gaze—

—and his jaw dropped.

"Holy crab sticks!"

Before them, an enormous sand-colored tornado towered into the heavens, tearing the entire base apart. Buildings, vehicles, even missile launchers weighing several tons were hurled around like toys. Rockets that could level cities were shredded into fragments, scattering like paper scraps in the wind.

The terrorists were gone—every last one swallowed by the storm.

"What the hell...?" Tony murmured. "This is supposed to be an attack? Where's the enemy?!"

Yinsen could only shake his head, his face pale with disbelief.

"Back into the cave!" Tony shouted suddenly. "That thing will tear us apart!"

They turned to retreat—but before the tornado could reach them, it suddenly stopped. The winds slowed, dust settling to the ground.

From within the storm's eye, a man strolled casually into view, brushing sand off his coat.

"Excuse me!" Lucas called out cheerfully. "I've got a delivery for a Mr. Tony Stark!"

He flicked his wrist. The towering tornado unraveled and faded away. Limbs, debris, and weapons rained down around him, painting the desert red.

Tony blinked, dumbfounded inside his armor. Then he erupted.

"WHAT THE HELL DID YOU JUST CALL ME, YOU MANGLED-TONGUED LITTLE FREAK?!" he shouted, nearly firing his flamethrower out of sheer rage.

Lucas grinned. "Ohhh, so you're Tony 'Stark,' huh? My mistake! Real pleasure to meet you, Mr. Stark. Gotta say, that name of yours rolls right off the tongue! Quite... relatable, don't you think?"

"Someone hired me to pick up a man named Tony Stark," Lucas continued, still smirking. "They said payment's no issue—whatever I charge, they'll pay. So, Mr. Stark, what do you say?"

Tony tensed, flamethrower nozzle aimed squarely at Lucas. "Yinsen, get behind me. This guy doesn't look like a good Samaritan. Could be one of the terrorists."

Yinsen immediately ducked behind him. After all they'd been through, Tony was the only person he could trust.

Lucas sighed and lifted his free hand. "Relax, Mr. Stark. I'm working under official authorization—from your government. And your lovely assistant insisted I bring you back safely."

The massive sword on Lucas's back gleamed under the sunlight, giving him the air of a knight from another age.

Tony hesitated, suspicion still in his eyes. But when Lucas pulled out a familiar object—a sleek wristwatch—Tony froze.

"That..." he murmured.

It was his father's watch. One he only wore at formal events. Pepper had been the last person to handle it.

He let out a long breath, tension easing.

"Alright," Tony said at last, lowering his weapon. "Guess you're not one of them after all."

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## Chapter 50: Safe Return

"How did you do that?"

Tony asked while pulling off his dented metal helmet, his face covered in soot and sweat.

"Do what?" Lucas looked at him blankly, sitting atop a weapons crate with his greatsword resting across his knees.

"That tornado." Tony pointed outside the cave. "I saw it with my own eyes — you waved your hand and the whole thing just... vanished."

For something so wildly unscientific, Tony Stark's curiosity burned hotter than the desert sun.

"Oh, that?" Lucas shrugged. "Just magic. Nothing special."

"What the hell?! Say that again — magic? You're telling me that kind of nonsense actually exists in this world?"

Tony's voice cracked with disbelief. To a man who worshiped science, "magic" was like claiming gravity took weekends off.

Lucas rolled his eyes. "What's so unbelievable about it? A thousand years ago, who could imagine humans would travel thousands of miles in a single day? Or talk to each other across continents? Or fly in the sky – hell, even walk in space?"

Science is just another kind of magic, and magic is simply science with a different power source. Take that glowing thing in your chest – who'd believe someone could build a miniature, stable fusion reactor out of scrap metal? Sounds like magic to me."

Tony paused, then gave a slow nod. For once, he didn't have a snarky comeback.

"Heh," he chuckled. "You're an arrogant little brat. I like it. What's your name?"

"Lucas," he said simply, "owner of the Devil May Cry Agency. It's in New York. You should drop by when you're back."

He handed Tony a sleek black business card. Surprisingly, Tony took it, slipping it carefully into a gap in his armor.

"You plan to keep wearing that tin can forever?" Lucas asked, eyeing the bulky, uneven armor.

Tony sighed. "I'd love to take it off, but without proper tools, no chance. Once I get home, I'm melting this junk heap down and starting fresh. Right now it's like wearing an oven — with nails inside."

Seeing Tony drenched in sweat, Lucas rummaged through his bag-space and pulled out two chilled bottles of peach soda, handing one to Tony and one to Yinsen.

"Whoa, ice cold? Where'd you pull this from, kid? Don't tell me that's magic too — or some kind of pocket-dimension tech?"

Tony twisted off the cap and chugged half the bottle. The cold fizz spread through him like heaven itself.

"Thanks," Yinsen said softly, sipping his own drink. Being held captive for weeks, he hadn't had anything remotely refreshing.

Suddenly, the rhythmic thumping of helicopter blades echoed from above. Sunlight spilled into the cave as armed soldiers appeared at the entrance.

"Well, looks like your ride's here," Lucas said, stretching lazily.

Coulson and a man in uniform stepped in – the latter a tall, broad-shouldered Black man with a warm grin.

"Wanna ride in my fun little jeep again, pal?" said Colonel James Rhodes, Tony's best friend and future War Machine – though right now, he was just the concerned soldier version.

Rhodey threw his arms around Tony but immediately winced. "Damn, man! What is this thing you're wearing? You trying to cook yourself alive?"

Tony shrugged with a wry smile, then gestured to Yinsen.

"Rhodey, this is Dr. Yinsen – my savior. If it weren't for him, you'd be collecting pieces of me right now."

Rhodey embraced Yinsen warmly. "Then I owe you my friend's life, Doctor. Thank you."

"Come with me to New York," Tony urged. "Stark Industries will always have a place for you."

Yinsen smiled faintly and shook his head. "No, Tony. I'll stay. My people need me here."

His tone was final. Tony didn't press further. Instead, he handed Yinsen a military satellite phone.

"If anything happens — anything — call me. I'll come running."

The two men hugged tightly, neither hiding the emotion in their eyes.

Across the cave, Coulson finished reporting in to Nick Fury. The director's voice over the comm finally eased — Tony Stark, the son of one of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s founders, was alive. If he hadn't been... Fury would've had to answer for it personally.

"Coulson, looks like your job's done," Lucas said casually, waving as he started toward the exit. "I'm heading out."

He stopped at the mouth of the cave and added over his shoulder, "Oh — tell Fury not to stiff me on the payment. Otherwise, I might just drop by your S.H.I.E.L.D. HQ for a... friendly visit."

"Hey! Kid!" Tony called out. "You're not coming with us?"

Lucas looked back with a grin. "Nah, you guys are too slow. I'll take my own route. Oh, and Tony – swing by my office sometime."

He raised a small whistle to his lips – the Chocobo Whistle – and blew. Space around him warped like rippling glass, and within a blink, he was gone.

Tony froze, eyes wide. "That... that was quantum teleportation! Unreal..."

He stared at the empty space where Lucas had stood, muttering, "Devil May Cry, huh? What kind of lunatic names his business that?"

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Tony boarded the military plane bound for New York, already planning how to rebuild his armor.

Meanwhile, Lucas lounged in the steaming hot springs of his Chocobo Space, washing away the desert's grit. Even his hair had sand in it – that place was hell.

After a long soak and a fresh change of clothes, he stepped back into his office. Only Skye was there.

"Just you?" he asked, dropping onto the couch. "Where's Natasha and Pepper?"

"Natasha got a call and took Pepper with her," Skye replied without looking up. She was busy brushing the fluffy Mog creature sprawled across her lap, which purred contentedly.

The floor around her was a shrine to pet care — toys, treats, and brushes everywhere.

"Huh. Guess S.H.I.E.L.D. isn't as slow as I thought." Lucas stretched, finding the comfiest angle on the couch.

"So," Skye said, glancing over, "you actually rescued that Tony Stark guy?"

"Of course," Lucas said smugly. "When I step in, there's no such thing as failure."

Then he suddenly sat up, face serious. "Oh, right — keep an eye on Stark Industries' stock. It's about to spike in a day or two. Sell everything at the peak. Then, when it crashes again, buy it all back. As much as you can."

Skye blinked. "And then?"

Lucas smirked, folding his arms behind his head. "Then we sit back and count the money."

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