

MARVEL MANIFESTOR

Chapter 451 451: Something Happened

Karl had never been one to hide his thoughts. To him, his priority had always been protecting the people around him—everything else could burn for all he cared.

He was never cut out to be some so-called superhero, nor did he want to be one. All he wanted was to live in this world with the people he cared about—eating, drinking, messing around, and enjoying life.

Tony seemed to be swayed by Karl's words. He let out a long breath.

"Thanks, Karl. If you hadn't been here today, I might've spiraled."

He smiled, visibly relieved.

"You're right—we're not gods. We can't save everyone. But we did save the world. Like you said, without us, half the planet would already be in ruins. That woman wouldn't even have had the chance to come question me."

Once he worked it out, everything felt clearer. Tony stood up and stretched. Before, he had always wanted to save more people—all people—and had even blamed himself for those who died. But now, he saw it differently. The ones he couldn't save might resent him—but those he did save would be grateful.

"All I can do... is give back as much as I can. Help those who've lost their families live better lives."

Karl stood up too, slinging an arm around Tony's shoulders.

"That's more like it. We can't save everyone—but we can save the world."

The two stood side by side, looking up at the starry sky. The stars seemed brighter somehow, the Milky Way stretching across the heavens—just like the clarity in their minds.

Early the next morning, Karl was still fast asleep, holding Gwen in his arms, when bang—Skye kicked the door open.

Karl and Gwen shot upright instantly, eyes unfocused, clearly still half-asleep. Their bodies had reacted on instinct—Gwen even raised her hand as if to shoot a web.

"Something's happened!"

Skye pointed at them, sending out a faint vibration. In an instant, Karl and Gwen were forcibly jolted awake.

"Something happened? Who—what—huh?"

Karl looked completely confused. Anyone would be, getting forcefully rebooted out of deep sleep.

"Something's happened to Wanda."

Skye's expression was serious. She tossed their clothes at them—only now did they realize they hadn't even gotten dressed.

"Meet me at the office."

With that, Skye turned and left.

"Maniac..."

Karl muttered, though he was already pulling on his clothes.

Ten minutes later, Karl and Gwen arrived at the office. Skye was already there, staring grimly at her computer.

"What happened to Wanda?"

Gwen dropped into the chair beside her.

"Take a look at this."

Skye projected the screen onto the TV. A news broadcast appeared, with the headline: "Avengers Sued — Global Anti-Violence Movement Rises."

"On the 15th of this month, in Lagos, Nigeria, eleven Wakandan citizens were killed during a conflict between the Avengers and mercenaries. The cause—an explosion that destroyed four floors of a hospital, allegedly triggered by the Avengers."

The female anchor spoke rapidly as footage played—showing that the direct cause of the explosion was Wanda.

"The Avenger known as the Scarlet Witch can be seen redirecting a self-destructing mercenary toward the hospital, resulting in casualties on floors ten through fourteen. According to reports, the victims were in Nigeria providing humanitarian aid."

Her tone grew sharper.

"This raises an important question—are the Avengers truly necessary? Are they saviors, or are they the root cause of escalating global violence? Are they heroes—or an unchecked extremist force?"

She spoke fluently and confidently—but truthfully? Reporters like her were becoming rare. Most didn't care about facts anymore. They cared about attention, about traffic, about profit.

Did the truth matter in this case? Not to them.

The footage cut to Wakanda's former king, T'Chaka, standing at the United Nations podium, surrounded by reporters.

"The blood of our people was spilled on foreign soil—not only because of criminals, but because of those who claim to stop them. Their disregard for life led to this tragedy. A victory achieved through the sacrifice of innocents is no victory at all."

Below the stage stood T'Challa, the new king, and Prince Erik.

"Erik, stay here and watch over Father. I need to find someone."

T'Challa glanced at his father before turning to leave.

"Got it."

Erik knew exactly who T'Challa was going to find—Karl.

He, T'Challa, and the Wakandan council had already reviewed the footage. It was clear: Wanda had been trying to save people.

When the Hydra agent triggered the explosion, Wanda had already wrapped him in her chaos magic, trying to send him skyward. But she had been distracted—Steve's fight with another Hydra agent had interfered.

More precisely, a bullet deflected by Steve's shield had veered unexpectedly toward Wanda. She blocked it—but that split-second interruption caused her magic to falter. The explosion detonated early.

Then the broadcast returned to the anchor, still talking endlessly.

"They operate outside international law—outside any law. If we don't act now, the entire world will become their playground. They can use violence at will, endanger civilians at will. What legal authority do they even have to operate in Nigeria? And—"

Skye couldn't take it anymore. She shut off the TV.

"How can they say this?! Without Wanda, more people would've died! She saved them—and now they're blaming her?! No, I'm going to find her!"

Skye was furious, practically ready to vibrate that anchor into dust.

Gwen looked just as angry—but beneath it, there was worry. Wanda had always been emotionally fragile.

And now—

No one knew what state she was in.

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Chapter 452 452: The Beginning

This all traced back to over ten days ago.

At the time, Natasha had come to the office, saying there was a particularly tricky mission and she wanted to borrow someone from Karl.

Originally, she wanted Karl himself to go. But he refused—he and Gwen were heading to the airport that day to pick up George's family. Skye, meanwhile, had taken on a major job: maintaining the Avengers' base systems.

That left only Wanda.

Karl hadn't wanted her to go. Every time that "black brined egg" Nick Fury came looking for him, nothing good followed. Sure, Karl could squeeze a hefty payment out of him—but Fury had a habit of dragging people into trouble.

But Wanda wanted to go.

So Karl didn't stop her.

And now—something had gone wrong.

At this point, Karl had already mentally cursed out Fury's entire ancestral line several times over.

"I'm going to find that black brined egg. Wanda should still be at the Avengers base—I'll bring her back. You two stay here."

Without hesitation, Karl blew the chocobo whistle and entered the chocobo space.

In the blink of an eye, Karl appeared at the entrance of the Avengers base.

The next second, flames erupted from his body, instantly blasting the main gate to pieces.

"Nick Fury! Get your ass out here!!"

His voice was amplified, laced with violent pressure. Instantly, alarms blared throughout the base. Agents swarmed in from all directions, surrounding him—led by Coulson.

"Karl... calm down... this is the Avengers base. Whatever it is, we can talk."

The moment Coulson recognized him, he ordered everyone to lower their weapons and stand down.

Soon, the flood of agents receded. The wrecked lobby was left with only Karl and Coulson.

At the same time, Steve and the others rushed out from their rooms—they had all recognized Karl's voice, and more importantly, the fury within it.

"Karl!!"

The moment Wanda saw him, she ran forward and threw herself into his arms, tears streaming down her face.

"I'm sorry, Karl—I messed up—I didn't notice in time—it's all my fault—"

Clearly, she had already seen the news. The entire world was blaming her.

"It's okay. You were trying to save people. It was an accident," Karl said, pulling her close, his flames completely gone. "You saved more lives. No one has the right to blame you."

"Karl, let's go upstairs and talk. Something about this isn't right."

Steve stepped forward. He had a bad feeling.

After every mission, they always wiped any footage of their operations. But this time, somehow, the video had still made it online.

It felt like someone was pulling strings behind the scenes.

Karl didn't respond. He simply took Wanda's hand and walked toward the elevator.

Inside Wanda's room, everyone gathered.

Steve, Natasha, Coulson, Sam, Barton, Hill—

And Nick Fury.

"Nick Fury," Karl said coldly, still holding Wanda's hand, "you owe me an explanation. If I'm not satisfied, I'll tear this entire base apart—and then I'll blow up every media company in the United States."

"Uh..."

Even Fury looked exhausted.

The mission itself had gone smoothly. Natasha had retrieved the target item without issue. But somehow, someone had leaked the footage.

He knew he had ordered all agents to delete every recording.

Yet somehow—it still got out.

The truth was, Fury could only erase data from connected devices. Offline recordings? Without prior access or planted malware, even he couldn't touch those.

Most likely, someone had recorded the footage and deliberately released it over ten days later.

This wasn't an accident.

It was targeted.

"Karl, no matter how thorough a mission plan is, there are always unexpected variables," Fury said, though his explanation felt weak. "And this time, I'm certain someone is manipulating things behind the scenes. The mission happened over ten days ago—yet the footage is only surfacing now. That's not normal."

Steve and Natasha both picked up on that detail as well.

Most people who recorded something shocking would upload it immediately—for attention, for clout.

Waiting over ten days—and sending it directly to media outlets?

That wasn't normal behavior.

"I'm taking Wanda home. We'll deal with the rest later."

Karl stood, pulling Wanda up with him, already taking out the chocobo whistle.

"Oh—and the payment. Not a single cent less."

He shot Fury a glance before blowing the whistle.

Back in the chocobo space, Gwen and Skye were already waiting.

The moment they saw Wanda, they rushed over, surrounding her with comfort and concern—completely ignoring Karl.

With nothing to do, Karl wandered off to the stables to find Onion for some emotional support.

At least Onion never ignored him.

After soaking in the hot springs and relaxing, the four finally returned to the office.

But the moment they arrived, they found someone waiting outside.

T'Challa.

Dressed in a black suit, he stood by the door. Gwen and Skye had locked up before leaving, and Karl hadn't answered his phone—so he had no choice but to wait.

"Why didn't you pick up?"

That was the first thing T'Challa said as he walked in.

"Uh..."

Karl patted all his pockets—nothing.

Then it hit him.

He'd left his phone on the bed that morning.

"You saw the video?"

Karl asked as T'Challa sat down. Skye handed him a cup of tea.

"Yes. My father, the council—we've all seen it."

As he spoke, T'Challa looked toward Wanda.

Wanda happened to glance up at the same moment. Their eyes met.

Then she lowered her head, guilt written all over her face.

"...It's not entirely her fault," T'Challa said calmly. "We reviewed the footage. It was that bullet—it interfered with her."

Wanda froze.

Her head snapped up, eyes filled with shock.

Karl, too, hadn't expected T'Challa to say that.

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Chapter 453 453: Ross Arrives

Hearing T'Challa's words, Wanda suddenly lifted her head, her eyes filled with shock. Not just her—even Carl hadn't expected T'Challa to say something like that.

"Shuri analyzed the trajectory of that bullet in the footage," T'Challa continued. "She determined that the bullet didn't actually come from where we thought. The one Steve blocked shattered the moment it hit the vibranium shield."

He swiped his bracelet, projecting a trajectory reconstruction analyzed by Shuri. Sure enough, based on the video replay, although the bullet appeared to ricochet off Steve's shield, its origin wasn't the Hydra agent at all—it came from another direction.

Unfortunately, the footage didn't capture the shooter's location. Everything was derived from Shuri's calculations.

Clearly, while Shuri's conclusion had been accepted by the council elders, King T'Chaka couldn't publicly reveal this truth. To the outside world, Wakanda was still a backward agricultural nation—how could they possibly possess the technology to reconstruct bullet trajectories?

So publicly, T'Chaka could only issue condemnation. Privately, however, he sent T'Challa to Carl, asking for help in finding the real culprit and bringing them to justice. And he wasn't worried Carl would refuse—after all, the girl at the center of the incident was one of Carl's people. No matter how you looked at it, Carl had every reason to help.

"No problem. I'm in."

As expected, Carl agreed without hesitation. This wasn't even manipulation on T'Chaka's part—the reality was that Wanda had accidentally caused those deaths. Morally speaking, Carl couldn't ignore it.

"Did only you and King T'Chaka come this time?" Carl asked.

A thought had just crossed his mind—something resembling a movie from his previous life: *Captain America: Civil War*. He hadn't actually watched it back then; *Batman v Superman* had overshadowed it, and he never got around to it. He only vaguely remembered that the United Nations meeting was bombed, killing T'Chaka and allowing T'Challa to become king.

There was also a mastermind behind it—but Carl couldn't even recall the name, let alone the full plot. He just knew the Avengers split into factions and fought each other before eventually breaking apart.

So now he needed to confirm something important—if only T'Challa and T'Chaka were here, then T'Challa needed to return immediately. The UN headquarters was right here in New York.

"Erik came too. He's with my father right now," T'Challa replied.

Carl nodded, relieved. Erik Killmonger, as a former elite soldier, would definitely be far more vigilant than T'Chaka alone.

Afterward, Carl shared everything he knew with T'Challa—especially the possibility that the mastermind might target the UN meeting.

T'Challa's expression grew serious. Attacking a UN summit would be outrageously bold. Concerned for his father's safety, he gave a few instructions before leaving, also asking Carl to contact Tony and Steve to see if they had any leads.

While Carl and T'Challa were talking, an uninvited guest arrived at the Avengers Base.

A helicopter landed on the rooftop. An elderly man in a suit stepped out, accompanied by several burly bodyguards.

Nick Fury had already received a call from the Security Council, instructing him to welcome the U.S. Secretary of State, whose aircraft was about to arrive.

Fury knew exactly who that was.

So instead of going himself, he sent Coulson—while he stayed comfortably in his office. The last thing he wanted was to see that man's face.

When Coulson arrived at the rooftop, he froze for a moment upon seeing the visitor.

"Welcome, Secretary Ross," he said with a polite smile.

No wonder Fury had sent him instead.

That's right—this Secretary of State Ross was none other than General Ross, the same man obsessed with capturing the Hulk.

"Well, this isn't good..." Coulson thought to himself.

Back in the day, S.H.I.E.L.D. had constantly clashed with Ross and his faction within the military. Later, Ross had been sidelined after the Hulk incident—but who would've thought he'd climb his way back up to become Secretary of State—the second most powerful man in the United States?

"Agent Coulson. You haven't changed a bit all these years," Ross said perfunctorily before getting straight to the point.

"Gather all the Avengers immediately. And tell Fury to meet me in the conference room."

With that, Ross pushed open the door and strode inside.

Coulson gave a wry smile and followed, subtly tapping twice on his earpiece.

He'd been connected to comms the entire time—Fury had heard everything.

The two taps were a silent question: What now?

"Call everyone in," Fury replied. "He's here for trouble."

Fury didn't have many options. Rank mattered—and Ross, as Secretary of State, was technically above him.

Soon, Steve and the other Avengers still present at the base gathered in the conference room.

After taking his seat, Ross swept his gaze across the room.

"Where's Tony Stark? And that brat Carl—why isn't he here? And his three little girlfriends too—get them over here!"

His tone was domineering.

After all, he was no longer the general constantly checked by the Avengers. Now he was the U.S. Secretary of State—second only to the president.

"Stark's on his way," Fury replied calmly. "But are you sure you want Carl here? Aren't you afraid he'll cut your head off the moment he sees you?"

Ross froze.

Fury wasn't wrong. Carl had nearly killed him during the Hulk incident. If that guy showed up now...

"...Forget it. We'll talk when Stark gets here."

Ross sat down stiffly, clearly deflated.

Around the room, several Avengers suppressed their amusement. Ross might be powerful—but even he had people he feared. Carl was one of them.

About ten minutes later, Tony walked in wearing a suit. He scanned the room—and immediately spotted Ross seated at the head of the table.

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Chapter 454 454: Calling Them to Account

"Oh? Isn't this the Secretary of State?" Tony drawled as he walked in. "What's the matter—got bored of bossing people around in your big office today?"

He didn't give Ross an inch of face. At Tony's current status, even the U.S. President greeted him with a smile. He'd personally saved the President before, and as the owner of the nation's largest clean energy company, Ross really couldn't do much to him.

"Hmph. Since you're here, sit down. I have something important to inform you."

Ross deliberately used the word inform. That meant the decision had already been made—this was just a formality.

Tony frowned slightly. He already had a bad feeling. The Secretary of State showing up in person could only mean one thing—the incident from the morning news. And the victims... were Wakandans.

He was in a difficult position. After all, among everyone present, his relationship with T'Challa was the closest.

Seeing that everyone had arrived, Ross stood and faced the group.

"A few years ago, I came to realize something that forty years in the military never taught me—foresight."

He began with his usual preamble. As expected, politicians never got straight to the point—they always started with a long-winded introduction.

"The world owes the Avengers an unpayable debt. That is an undeniable fact. The Battle of New York—you were instrumental. You held back an alien invasion. You fought for us."

More fluff. The room collectively rolled their eyes inwardly. Even Ross, once a decisive military man, had become long-winded after entering politics.

"But—" Ross shifted tone, "while many still see you as heroes, there are others who prefer to call you something else... a potential threat."

Classic political maneuver: praise first, then pivot.

"And what word would you use to describe us, Secretary?" Natasha asked coolly. She could already tell—Ross hadn't come in good faith.

"Dangerous," Ross replied without hesitation. "How does that sound?"

The room fell silent. As Secretary of State, his stance effectively represented the U.S. government.

"What would you call a group of enhanced individuals stationed in your country—who routinely ignore national sovereignty, go wherever they want, do whatever they want, and show little regard for the consequences? What would you call them?"

Ross's gaze swept across everyone—including Nick Fury.

Fury remained silent. He had long anticipated that this day would come.

Ross picked up a remote and activated the display. A world map appeared, marked with several highlighted locations.

"New York."

He tapped the red dot.

The screen switched to footage from the Battle of New York—Hulk smashing a Leviathan, Tony firing countermeasures, Thor summoning lightning... and finally, a massive purple figure cloaking Manhattan in storm clouds and violet thunder.

Every scene showed not just the battle—but the destruction left behind. Especially under Ram's lightning—almost no structure remained intact.

"We were saving the world!" Steve shot back. "If it weren't for us, New York—hell, the entire world—would've been overrun!"

He knew the situation better than anyone. Civilians had been evacuated, and those who couldn't be were protected by Wanda and Skye—under his direct orders.

Rhodey and Sam hadn't participated in that battle, so they exchanged uncertain glances.

Ross ignored Steve and continued.

"Washington, D.C."

The footage changed—clouds swirling, yellow and blue energy forming. Meteor-like projectiles rained down, obliterating buildings.

Everyone recognized it immediately—Carl's doing. He'd dropped fireballs onto the Senate building.

No one could argue that—but it also wasn't their action. Yet Ross had lumped it in anyway.

The screen shifted again—another meteor strike, this time destroying the Triskelion, former S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters. Also Carl's work—Zodiac Meteor.

No one spoke. Natasha pressed her lips together. Even Steve stayed silent this time—he'd been directly involved in that incident.

"Sokovia."

The footage changed once more. Amid screams and chaos, the landmass of Sokovia rose into the sky, blue anti-gravity engines glowing beneath it.

Then—a colossal yellow stone titan appeared, tentacles piercing into the city above while its massive arms held the falling landmass aloft.

Carl again—in his Demon Titan form.

Everyone subconsciously held their breath. Whether then or now, that overwhelming presence felt like a mountain pressing down on their chests—even Ross himself had trembled the first time he saw it.

Tony stared at the screen in silence. He remembered the woman from MIT—the one who said her son died in Sokovia.

"Lagos."

The screen shifted to the hospital explosion—and Wanda standing below, frozen in shock.

"That's enough."

Fury finally spoke. It was obvious now—Ross had come prepared. And Fury already knew where this was going. But this wasn't something the U.S. alone could decide.

Ross shut off the display.

"For the past several years, your operations have had unlimited authority—and no oversight. Governments around the world can no longer tolerate this situation. So, we've come up with a solution."

He gestured to a bodyguard, who stepped forward with a briefcase and pulled out a thick document—nearly an inch thick.

Ross took it... and handed it directly to Nick Fury.

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Chapter 455 455: The Sokovia Accords

Nick Fury glanced at the cover—The Sokovia Accords—and his expression immediately turned grave. Just as he had suspected. His face darkened as he flipped through the document.

"The Sokovia Accords have already been ratified by 117 countries," Ross stated concisely. "They stipulate that the Avengers will no longer operate as a private organization, but instead act under the supervision of a United Nations panel. Any action taken must be approved by this panel. The Avengers are no longer permitted to act independently."

Ross made it very clear: this was about control—bringing the Avengers under political authority and turning them into a weapon held firmly in the hands of world leaders.

Fury's concern lay precisely there. Steve shared it as well. Once the Avengers fell under political control, they would inevitably become tools—sent wherever those in power wished. The justice they upheld would be twisted into something unrecognizable.

"The Avengers were formed to protect the world—to ensure global security," Steve said firmly. "And we've done exactly that. We're not here to become weapons for any individual or organization."

"Captain, can you guarantee everyone will stick to that ideal?" Ross shot back immediately. "That Asgardian, Banner, and especially that most dangerous one—Karl—and the people around him. Can you guarantee none of them will cross the line? If I lost track of a few weapons capable of destroying the world, do you think I'd sleep well at night?"

To politicians like Ross—and frankly, most of the world's governments—anything beyond their control was a threat.

"Compromise. Assurance. That's how the world works," Ross continued. "Trust me, this Accord is the best outcome. Otherwise, you may find yourselves standing against the entire world."

His stance couldn't have been clearer. Refuse to sign, and they'd be treated as enemies. And the United States had never been kind to its enemies.

"This agreement doesn't take effect until it passes a UN vote. Right now, it's just paper," Fury said coldly, tossing the thick document back onto the table.

"Correct. In three days, the United Nations will convene in Vienna to vote on it," Ross replied, completely unfazed.

"You should think it over carefully."

With that, Ross turned to leave, his bodyguards following close behind. His purpose today had simply been to deliver the message.

But just as he reached the door, Natasha spoke.

"And what if our decision isn't the one you're hoping for?"

She phrased it diplomatically, but the meaning was obvious.

"Then I'm afraid you'll all be forced into retirement," Ross shrugged. "Or worse."

The implication was clear.

For some, retirement meant little. Steve and Sam had long since left military life, and Tony was a billionaire—he didn't need the Avengers.

But for others, it was a different story.

Rhodey would simply lose his rank and his War Machine armor—he'd return to being an ordinary man.

Natasha, however, had no such luxury. If she lost the Avengers' protection, both the United States and Russia would come after her. That was the curse of a former double agent. Without protection, her only choices would be constant flight—or hiding somewhere remote for the rest of her life.

Far away in Siberia, amidst endless snowfields, a lone figure trudged across the frozen wilderness.

A backpack hung from his shoulders, and in his hand was a worn map, marked with a single X—his destination.

Guided by a compass, he finally arrived at a half-buried military bunker. It looked ancient, but intact.

At the entrance, the man pulled out a red notebook and flipped to a page containing a password.

To his surprise, the facility still had power.

After entering the correct code, the heavy steel door creaked open, and he stepped inside.

As he moved forward, old incandescent lights flickered on one by one, illuminating the interior.

Rows of glass chambers lined the room.

Inside each one floated a human body—men and women alike—suspended in an unknown liquid.

All of them were alive.

The man approached a central control console and brushed away the dust, revealing a metal plaque:

Winter Soldier Program Roster

Below it, a screen displayed a list of names—each belonging to one of the soldiers.

He skimmed through them before walking toward the chambers.

The first three pods stood open and empty.

Their occupants had long since been awakened.

He glanced at the display beneath them.

Bucky Barnes.

Clearly, one of those empty pods had belonged to Steve's former comrade.

But Bucky—and two others—had already been reduced to ashes by Karl.

The man paid it no mind.

He pulled out a handgun and began firing at the remaining chambers.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Gunshots echoed through the bunker.

Each bullet pierced through glass and struck its target—either through the heart or the head.

He killed them all.

All except one.

Taking out the red notebook again, he carefully followed the instructions to awaken the final Winter Soldier.

This man was the mastermind behind everything to come—

Helmut Zemo.

Originally, Zemo's plan had been to awaken Bucky, manipulate him, and use him to drive a wedge between Steve and Tony.

But Bucky had already been turned to ashes by Karl.

With his key piece gone, Zemo had no choice but to improvise.

He would awaken another Winter Soldier.

Then implant Bucky's memories into him.

Disfigure his face.

And create a perfect impostor.

Zemo didn't know Bucky was dead.

In fact, aside from Karl, no one knew.

So when he couldn't find the original—

He decided to make a replacement.

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Chapter 456 456: The Argument

Following the procedure, Zemo easily awakened the Winter Soldier and completed the brainwashing. Using the equipment in the base, he implanted Bucky Barnes' memories into the man's mind.

Finally, a bottle of acid was poured down.

Amid the Winter Soldier's agonized screams, his face was completely disfigured—no longer recognizable. Zemo casually picked up a mask and placed it over what remained.

"From today onward, you are Bucky Barnes—the most trusted comrade of Captain America, Steve Rogers," Zemo said coldly.

"Yes, Master. I am Bucky Barnes."

The Winter Soldier's voice was hoarse; the acid had damaged part of his vocal cords.

"Let's assume we sign it. Then the government will track us like criminals. Our movements will be completely exposed. Think about our families and friends—they'll become targets for retaliation."

Sam and Rhodey were debating whether to sign the Sokovia Accords.

"117 countries have already agreed to it. One hundred and seventeen, Sam. Can you really pretend nothing's happening?"

Rhodey's stance was clear. Under pressure from that many nations, no one could truly resist. Even if forced, they would have to sign.

The two couldn't reach an agreement. Sam insisted they shouldn't sign—once their identities and movements were exposed, their loved ones would be vulnerable. And when that happened, who would protect them? The government? The slow-moving police?

Just then, JARVIS' voice sounded.

"I have compiled a set of statistical data."

A projection appeared before them.

"I analyzed data from the time Mr. Stark became Iron Man to the present. The results show that the number of enhanced individuals has been increasing linearly. At the same time, incidents involving crime or global threats have also risen."

As JARVIS explained, the charts kept changing.

"You're saying this is our fault?" Steve asked, looking up from the Accords in his hands.

"Not exactly, Mr. Rogers. I am merely presenting data. However, I do believe there is a causal relationship. Individuals like you and Mr. Stark may attract challenges. Challenges lead to conflict, and conflict leads to disaster. Based on my calculations, accepting oversight is something we should seriously consider."

JARVIS' conclusion immediately earned Rhodey's approval.

"Finally, someone said it right."

"Tony, you've been awfully quiet. What do you think?" Natasha asked, looking at him sprawled on the couch.

"Because he's already made up his mind," Steve said without even looking up.

He knew Tony well—if he hadn't decided yet, he'd already be arguing nonstop.

"Cap, you really do know me. You're starting to rival Pepper," Tony muttered as he stood up and walked to the bar, pouring himself a drink.

"I've thought about it a lot. We don't have a decision-making system. Even Nick Fury just throws problems at us and hides behind the scenes. Sure, he cleans up afterward, but clearly, that hasn't earned recognition from the world."

Tony set down his glass.

"I think we need oversight. No matter the form, I can accept it. Without limits, sooner or later we'll cross a line—and when that happens, we won't be any better than the criminals we put away."

He crossed his arms and let out a long breath after finishing.

Several people's expressions turned serious.

"Tony, people dying in front of us is something we can't always prevent. But you can't give up because of that," Steve said, finally putting down the Accords.

"I'm not giving up, Steve. Who said we are?"

"If we can't take responsibility for our actions, that is giving up. These so-called agreements are just a way to shift responsibility."

Steve had carefully read much of the document. It was full of empty political language—nothing concrete.

"Steve, this is a United Nations resolution," Rhodey countered. "Not S.H.I.E.L.D., not HYDRA—this is the entire world."

"Exactly—the UN. But in the end, it's still run by people. And people have agendas. If they order us to kill innocent people, would you do it?"

Steve's question cut straight to the core flaw.

The Accords required the Avengers to act under orders—but what if those giving the orders had ulterior motives?

"If we sign, we give up our right to choose. Right now, we decide who's right and wrong. After this, we won't have that choice anymore."

Steve continued, pointing out the traps hidden throughout the document.

"We may not be perfect, but we trust each other. We know what's right."

"And if we don't sign, they'll force us to," Tony replied. "And when that happens, our families and friends will be dragged into it. Don't argue—it's the truth. You think only criminals use loved ones as leverage? You're being naïve, Steve. When it comes to that, things will get ugly."

Tony wasn't wrong. Politicians could be just as ruthless.

"I agree with Tony."

Natasha spoke up, drawing everyone's attention.

"If we compromise a little, there's still room to maneuver. But if we completely break away, it'll only end in total confrontation."

"Natasha... are you still the same person who used to stand against the government?" Sam asked in disbelief.

"I'm trying to protect us," she replied calmly. "We made mistakes in the public eye. We need to earn their trust back."

"Wait—hold on," Tony blinked, surprised. "Did I hear that right? Are you actually agreeing with me?"

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Chapter 457 457: Explosion at the Conference

"Wait—hold on. Did I hear that wrong? Are you actually agreeing with me?"

Tony blinked in disbelief, staring at Natasha as if she'd just been possessed.

"Well, that's a first..."

As everyone continued arguing, Steve suddenly received a message.

Peggy had passed away.

"I have to go."

He stood up immediately, his mind in turmoil—not just because of Peggy, but also the Sokovia Accords weighing on him.

At the church, nearly all the Avengers were present for Peggy Carter's funeral.

As one of the founders of S.H.I.E.L.D., she had laid the foundation for everything the Avengers stood on.

Steve carried her coffin, his eyes red as memories of the past flooded back—every moment he'd shared with her.

Afterward, Sharon Carter stepped forward to give a eulogy. She repeated something Peggy had once said—a line Steve had heard before, but now it struck him with renewed clarity.

"When the world tells you to move, you plant yourself like a tree beside the river of truth, and say—'No. You move.'"

Whether it was Sharon speaking or Peggy's will echoing through her, Steve understood.

His decision was made.

After the funeral, everyone gradually left, leaving only Natasha behind.

"Who's agreed to sign?" Steve asked.

He'd been occupied with Peggy's funeral and hadn't kept up.

"Tony and Rhodey. They're firmly on board."

"Clint?"

"Undecided."

"I'm heading to Vienna to sign. There are still a few seats left on the plane."

The invitation was obvious.

Steve shook his head.

"Sorry, Natasha. I won't sign it."

"I figured."

She smiled lightly. She knew him too well to expect otherwise.

A few days later, Vienna.

Outside the United Nations conference building, reporters crowded the streets, broadcasting live.

Today, 117 countries would officially vote on and sign the Sokovia Accords.

Inside the chamber, King T'Chaka stood by the window with T'Challa and Erik.

Natasha entered and signed her name in the guest registry.

"Agent Natasha, it's good to see you again," T'Challa greeted her.

Erik stood behind him, as arrogant as ever.

"You here on behalf of the Avengers?" he asked.

"You don't support the Accords?" Natasha countered, sensing T'Challa's hesitation.

"I support the agreement," T'Challa said calmly. "But when it comes to politics, I have my reservations. Two people can accomplish something efficiently. A crowd—especially a political one—rarely can."

The session began, and everyone took their seats.

Several chairs beside Natasha remained empty—reserved for the Avengers who never showed.

"Looks like diplomacy really falls to you," T'Challa muttered, feeling the weight of it all.

"Simple solution," Erik shrugged. "Make me king."

T'Challa snorted. "Perfect. You've seen how exhausted I am. I'd gladly trade."

They took their seats as King T'Chaka stepped up to speak.

After all, the Accords were born from the deaths of Wakandan citizens.

Meanwhile, T'Challa and Erik hadn't forgotten Karl's warning.

Invisible drones hovered around the building, feeding live surveillance back to Shuri in Wakanda.

"Brother, there's a suspicious news van directly beneath you," Shuri's voice came through. "The police dogs won't stop barking at it. Be careful."

The two exchanged a glance.

Erik quietly moved to the window.

One look—and he knew.

A car bomb.

He turned back and nodded.

"Everyone, get down!!" T'Challa shouted.

Natasha reacted instantly, dragging those nearby under the table.

At the same moment, Erik flicked a coin-sized device toward T'Chaka.

It expanded into a golden energy barrier just as—

BOOM!!!

The van exploded.

The entire conference chamber was torn apart. Smoke billowed upward as debris flew everywhere.

Thanks to the barrier, King T'Chaka remained unharmed—not even knocked unconscious.

Others weren't so lucky.

Some were caught in the blast. Others were severely injured.

Natasha and those near her escaped with only minor scrapes, their quick reactions saving them.

"According to reports, the explosion was caused by a news van carrying high-yield plastic explosives..."

Back in New York, Karl and the others watched the breaking news.

"...over seventy injured, at least twelve confirmed dead, including several high-ranking officials. Authorities have released an image of the suspected perpetrator—"

Karl frowned.

The face on the screen—

Looked exactly like Bucky Barnes.

A perfect match.

But Karl knew better.

He had personally turned Bucky into ashes.

That couldn't be him.

Unless...

"A clone? No... HYDRA didn't have that tech."

That left only one possibility.

"A disguise."

Holographic masks weren't uncommon—Natasha had used them before.

Someone was impersonating Bucky.

At a temporary shelter in Vienna, Natasha sat beside T'Challa and Erik, watching medics rush back and forth.

"If Karl hadn't warned us," T'Challa said quietly, glancing at his father being examined nearby, "my father would be among them."

Relief lingered in his voice—

Along with gratitude.

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Chapter 458 458: Moves on Both Sides

"If it weren't for Karl's warning, I think my father would be lying there with them right now."

T'Challa looked toward T'Chaka, who was undergoing examination not far away. He felt both relieved that they had prepared in advance and grateful for Karl's reminder.

"In Wakanda, people believe death isn't the end. They return to the embrace of the Panther God and run there forever."

Erik spoke up, then suddenly let out a short laugh.

"But I'm not my uncle, and I'm not a typical Wakandan either. That car bomb was clearly aimed at my uncle—which means it was aimed at Wakanda. I'll make whoever's behind this pay."

Erik was no saint. He was a ruthless killer, and an attack so blatantly targeting his people was something he wouldn't tolerate.

"Erik, a task force will be sent to track down and apprehend Bucky Barnes."

Natasha quickly interjected—she knew exactly what kind of man Erik was.

"No need. I'll rip his guts out myself."

Erik and T'Challa stood up at the same time. Their goal was the same—if someone dared target Wakanda, then Wakanda would strike back.

At this moment, the Black Panther and the Golden Jaguar truly joined forces.

Just as Natasha was about to get up, her phone rang.

"Are you okay?"

It was Steve. Though he hadn't been at the scene, he was also in Vienna.

"I'm fine. The blast didn't reach me. Guess I got lucky."

Natasha replied, glancing around cautiously before moving to a secluded corner.

"I know you've seen the news. I also know you're worried about Bucky, but right now, stay somewhere safe and don't show yourself. If you appear, it'll only make things worse. Everyone knows your connection to him—don't make this harder for us. Please."

Natasha did her best to persuade him. She knew that the moment Steve showed up, he'd become a prime suspect and be hunted by everyone.

"So, Natasha... are you going to arrest me?"

Steve's voice came from the other end.

"If you show yourself, someone will. That's just how things are now."

Natasha answered helplessly.

"If he really has become like this, then I should be the one to bring him in. I'm the safest person to face him."

With that, Steve hung up and lowered his binoculars. Though he wasn't inside, he had been observing the temporary shelter from a distance—and had seen Natasha cautiously standing in the corner.

In a restaurant, Sam sat eating, wearing a cap and sunglasses. Steve appeared beside him without a sound.

"You've decided? You're really going to get involved in this?"

Before Steve could speak, a blonde woman sat down beside him—it was Peggy's niece, Sharon Carter.

"Since the footage was released, we've received a lot of intel. Most of it's useless—except for one."

Sharon slid a document over to Steve.

"My supervisor is waiting for a briefing, so this is all I can give you."

"Thanks."

Steve pressed his hand over the file.

"You'd better hurry. Our orders are to shoot on sight."

With that, Sharon stood up and left.

Meanwhile, in a hotel room, Zemo sat quietly reading a book. On the TV not far away, news about the United Nations bombing was playing.

But Zemo paid it no attention. He remained focused on his book.

In the corner of the room, however, stood a strange-looking machine.

At the same time, in a secure location, Nick Fury, Coulson, and Maria Hill sat at a desk, surrounded by five large screens.

"I'm afraid, Fury—the Accords have already come into effect the moment the Vienna building was bombed. All Avengers are now required to sign. There's nothing we can do to stop it."

A white-haired elder on one of the screens spoke first. The five figures were Fury's superiors—the Security Council.

"This Accords is complete nonsense. It'll concentrate the Avengers' power into the hands of a few individuals—that goes completely against our original purpose!"

Fury's tone was sharp. The Avengers were meant to protect the world from disaster—but now that power would be controlled by a handful of people. That was a disaster waiting to happen.

"We're powerless to stop it. We can only try to secure some degree of control—but it won't change much."

Another council member added.

"Fury, we know this goes against our original intent. But this time, the Avengers made too big a mistake—more importantly, someone exploited it. Right now, the only way forward is to help yourselves. Find the one behind the bombing. That's your only chance."

The white-haired elder spoke again, clearly hinting at their only option.

Of course, his motives weren't entirely altruistic. Previously, the Avengers had been under the Security Council's influence. Now, a new oversight committee was about to take control—effectively stripping them of power.

They had no intention of letting that happen.

"Fury, we'll grant you full Security Council access. You'll be able to review global intelligence resources. Find the one behind this. Only then can public trust in the Avengers be restored—and those driven by greed be undermined."

Fury raised an eyebrow. He wasn't fooled—this wasn't generosity. The Council was panicking over losing power.

But that didn't matter to him.

What mattered was the Avengers. That power couldn't fall into anyone's hands—not even the Council's.

"Don't worry. I'll find the one responsible."

With that, Fury cut the connection. Hill immediately confirmed that Security Council-level access had been granted.

"Sir, what do we do now?"

Coulson asked. It was clear—they were isolated. The Avengers had split into factions, and their agents had either been put on leave or reassigned.

"No choice. We go find him. Motherf—"

Fury's face darkened. At this point, there was only one person completely outside the situation—and also the strongest.

Karl.

"Understood. I'll leave immediately."

Coulson stood at once, ready to head to New York. Since all this began, Karl hadn't shown his face even once, completely removing himself from the situation. Even the U.S. government hadn't mentioned him—as if they'd deliberately avoided it.

That gave Fury an opportunity.

Still, Karl wouldn't come cheap.

"I'll go with you. You alone won't convince that kid."

Fury sighed and stood up. If they wanted Karl's cooperation, he had to go in person.

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Chapter 459 459: The Bald Egg Seeks Help

"Hill, stay here. Use your clearance to locate that Bucky. I want to dig out whoever's behind him."

"Yes, sir."

Maria Hill nodded and sat down in front of a computer.

In New York, as the news coverage intensified and public opinion grew louder, the situation kept escalating. It all seemed a bit too smooth—almost as if someone behind the scenes was pushing everything forward. Any obstacles that might have existed appeared to have been quietly removed.

"This is definitely a conspiracy."

Skye declared with certainty as she watched the report on TV.

"Agreed. I think their goal is to divide the Avengers and then dismantle them. From the list that's been revealed so far, Tony seems to be leading the charge in supporting the agreement and has already signed it. But Steve and a few others haven't shown up—they must be against it."

Gwen nodded. She also felt that something was off, though she couldn't quite pinpoint what. The Avengers used to have their own personalities but were united overall. Now, they were clearly splitting into two factions. If there wasn't something fishy going on, no one would believe it.

"Why worry so much? It's none of our business. Let them fight it out—nothing serious is going to happen anyway."

Karl, on the other hand, was quite relaxed. He knew no one would die in this conflict, so what was there to worry about?

"You're not worried about yourself?"

Skye asked.

"Why would I be?"

Karl blinked in confusion.

"If even Tony and the others are being forced to sign the Sokovia Accords, what makes you think those people won't come after you and pressure you into signing too?"

Clearly, Skye had already connected the dots from Tony and Steve's situation to their own. After all, they had been involved with the Avengers more than once—who knew whether those people would come knocking on Karl's door?

"They won't come to me so easily, because they simply can't deal with me. When your strength stands above everyone else, people won't dare provoke you—unless they have a death wish."

Karl was confident, and he had the strength to back it up. When even nuclear weapons couldn't kill you, everyone would keep their distance, choosing to ignore you no matter the situation.

"Sure, you're powerful, you're invincible—but what about us? What about George and the others? If they use us to threaten you, what will you do then?"

Skye had already thought that far ahead. Sometimes, those people's methods were even dirtier than criminals'. At least some criminals had a code of honor—but those people were purely self-serving, always trying to seize everything and control it completely.

Karl frowned. Skye was absolutely right. He wasn't worried about the three of them—they had the strength to fight back—but George's family were ordinary people. And George's records were all on file at the NYPD. Finding them would be as easy as drinking water.

Gwen's expression turned grim as well. George's family was a weakness for both her and Karl. If those people really used them as leverage, what could they do?

"If they dare, I don't mind overturning the entire United States and forcing a regime change."

Karl's gaze turned icy. With his current strength, a single energy blast from Bahamut could flatten all the government facilities in Washington, D.C. Wiping out the entire city wouldn't even be difficult.

"No, I need to call my dad. They should leave the country for a while."

Gwen immediately picked up her phone and called George. But George had already thought of this. Having watched all the related news and being well aware of the darkness of politics, he had anticipated this possibility long ago.

Gwen had wanted them to stay at the apartment, but George felt hiding forever wasn't a solution. Even if they stayed inside, they'd still have to go out eventually—what then? They'd be caught just the same.

So he simply bought plane tickets to China, planning to travel there instead.

He knew that no matter how far-reaching the United States' influence was, it couldn't extend there—and that place had no fear of American hegemony.

Karl and Gwen both felt somewhat relieved. As long as George's family wasn't captured, no one could use them as leverage.

In truth, Karl was just like Steve—he would never sign that ridiculous agreement. They were superpowered individuals; even if they didn't become some kind of "Homelander," they certainly wouldn't become obedient dogs. All that talk about regulation and protection ultimately boiled down to restriction and control—seizing this world-level power and keeping it firmly in their own hands. And anyone who dared to object would be crushed. It was all about power.

Just as they were gathered together condemning those people, the bell above the door jingled. A black "bald egg" and a smiling middle-aged man walked in.

"Didn't expect our Mr. Norman to still be sitting here so leisurely. Do you even know the outside world is already in chaos?"

Nick Fury's irritating voice rang out. As always, he wore his signature leather coat, never taking it off no matter how hot it was—you'd think he had built-in air conditioning.

"Well, well—if it isn't the famous Director himself. What brings you to my humble abode? Couldn't stay at the Avengers base anymore?"

Karl teased. By now, everyone knew the Avengers were Avengers in name only. Internally, they had already split into factions—exactly what certain people wanted. If they couldn't control them all, they'd divide them and take hold of the key individuals.

"So you already know..."

Nick Fury dropped the banter and sat down, his expression serious.

"Turn on any news channel these days—this is all they're talking about."

Karl shrugged.

"The Avengers can't belong to anyone. That would go against our original purpose. Some people have overstepped their authority."

Nick Fury's face darkened. His original intention in forming the Avengers was to counter potential threats to the world. They had to remain independent—not controlled by anyone. But now, it was obvious to anyone paying attention that politicians wanted to take control of them.

"And what does that have to do with me?"

Karl didn't bother with small talk.

"You're not worried about yourself? Or your family?"

Nick Fury said. As a seasoned political operator, he didn't even need to think to know this was the most basic tactic.

"What's there to worry about? If anyone dares touch them, I'll blow up the White House and the Pentagon. I'll pin it on the U.S. government no matter who did it. So there's nothing to worry about."

Earlier, Karl had been concerned about George's family, but now that they were safe, nothing else mattered. The three women at home could protect themselves—and even fight back.

Nick Fury's face darkened further at Karl's words. No matter who kidnapped them, it would be blamed on the United States... If anything really happened to George's family, the U.S. government might very well be blasted into the sky the next day.

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Chapter 460 460: Steve Finds Bucky

"Karl, if you do that, it'll only make things even more tense."

Nick Fury was worried, because he knew Karl wasn't just talking—he would actually do it. The Capitol building had already been sent flying once before, and the newly rebuilt one probably still hadn't finished airing out the formaldehyde.

"That tension isn't my problem. Besides, the strongest forces they can mobilize are just a few Avengers. Do you really think they're a match for me? Or that they'd even be willing to become my enemy?"

Fury was speechless again. Just as Karl said, no one in the Avengers was his opponent—not even Thor or Hulk. And right now, Thor was still in Asgard, while Bruce had disappeared somewhere to study how to control the Hulk.

"Fine. I came today to ask for your help—help me find the mastermind behind all of this. Once we catch him, the Avengers won't be controlled anymore."

Nick Fury finally revealed his true purpose. He was already prepared for Karl to name an outrageous price. Money? If he didn't have it, the Security Council certainly would.

But this time, Karl did something unexpected—he didn't take the opportunity to extort him.

"Alright. I'll help you this time—for free."

Fury froze for a moment, but instead of feeling relieved, he became uneasy. He couldn't understand why Karl had suddenly changed his behavior, not even trying to take advantage of him.

And the more it was like this, the more uneasy he felt—because he understood one thing very well: the most expensive things were often the ones that came for free.

Karl's reasoning was actually simple. In his previous life, he hadn't watched *Captain America: Civil War*, so he didn't know who was really behind everything. Now that even a fake Bucky had appeared, he was curious—who could possibly manipulate the entire Avengers team like this?

They say the more a person has, the more easily they grow bored. At this point, Fury had nothing Karl was interested in. He wasn't short on money either—the dividends from Stark Industries alone could support his family for generations. Aside from something new and unknown, nothing really caught his interest anymore. Being rich could be surprisingly dull.

Now, finally, there was something he didn't know—and it piqued his curiosity.

"R-Really?!"

Fury looked incredulous.

"Of course. I want to see who this mastermind really is too."

Following the lead provided by Sharon, Steve arrived at an apartment. With a kick, he broke the door open.

Inside, he found peeling walls, worn-out furniture, and even windows covered with newspapers. It looked more like a temporary shelter for a drifter than a proper home.

Steve scanned the room, searching for useful clues. There were indeed signs that someone had been living here.

He casually picked up a black notebook from the top of the refrigerator and began flipping through it.

"Be careful, Cap. A special forces team is approaching your location."

Sam's voice came through the earpiece.

Steve knew he had found the right place.

As he was reading the notebook, he suddenly sensed someone approaching from behind and quickly turned around.

A man stood there wearing a cap, dressed plainly, with medium-length hair and a scruffy beard. It was a face Steve would never forget.

"Do you know me?"

Steve asked. He knew the real Bucky would never carry out such attacks. He suspected Bucky had lost his memory.

"Steve, I learned about you in the museum."

This "Bucky" had been implanted with the real Bucky's memories, so of course he recognized Steve. But by saying he'd learned about him in a museum, he was clearly trying to make Steve believe he had amnesia—so he could get closer.

"You don't need to be nervous."

Steve noticed the tension in Bucky's demeanor. This only reinforced his belief that Bucky had lost his memory.

"I didn't go to Vienna. I wouldn't do something like that."

In reality, he had planted the bomb. But to maintain the illusion of amnesia, he couldn't admit to being there.

"Cap, the special forces team has entered the building."

Sam's voice came again just as Steve was about to speak.

"They're not planning to take you alive."

Steve looked at Bucky.

"Cap, they're coming up. You need to leave now."

But Bucky showed no urgency at all. Instead, he calmly removed the glove from his left hand, revealing a fully metallic arm.

"Cap, they're here!"

As Sam's words fell, the window behind Steve shattered, and a flashbang was thrown inside.

Reacting instantly, Steve covered it with his shield. The explosion was muffled beneath it, producing only a dull thud—completely ineffective against him.

At the same time, the door was blasted open, and the special forces team rushed in, opening fire on both Steve and Bucky.

Bucky raised his metal arm, blocking all incoming bullets, and launched a brutal counterattack. Every punch from that metal arm took a life.

Like Steve, all Winter Soldiers had been injected with the Super Soldier Serum—including this fake Bucky. The special forces stood no chance.

"Bucky, stop! You're going to kill them!"

Steve tried to stop him.

But unexpectedly, Bucky turned and slammed Steve to the ground, punching straight through the floor.

"They all deserve to die!"

After all, he was a fake. He didn't value human life at all. The implanted memories couldn't truly make him Bucky—he was still just an anonymous Winter Soldier.

As more special forces flooded in, Bucky decisively charged out of the apartment and began slaughtering them in the stairwell. No one could withstand even a single blow. He cut through them like a force of nature.

He fought his way downward. Steve followed closely, rushing out just in time to see a surviving soldier reporting Bucky's position over the radio. Steve snatched it away and crushed it in his hand before sprinting downstairs.

By then, Bucky had already descended several floors. Steve leapt down, landing in front of him and blocking a downward punch with his shield, saving a soldier's life.

But Bucky didn't care at all. He jumped straight down through the stairwell's central gap, burst out through a side exit, and leapt from a balcony onto the rooftop of a neighboring building.

Steve followed with a leap of his own, landing on the roof and immediately giving chase.

Suddenly, a figure dropped from the sky, tackling the sprinting Bucky to the ground.

The figure landed gracefully—a sleek black-and-gold suit clung to his body, and sharp claws extended from his fingers.

It was none other than Wakanda's current prince—Killmonger, Erik.

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