

Chapter 28 - Home again

It didn't take long for Agent Coulson and his cadre of Shield agents to arrive at the Bifrost site. He tried to cart off Jane and her friends for a debriefing but she refused to leave, forcing him to debrief us there. It took a while for everyone to talk about what had happened, but eventually we finished. By the time we were done Shield agents had already set up a much smaller quarantine area around the Bifrost site, already putting up a temporary fence. Jane still refused to leave, even as the sun started to set and another strange storm filled the sky above us. When it completely dissipated Ema and I decided it was time to go. We shook hands with the three scientists before climbing into the truck. Before we could pull away Coulson got closer and leaned on the driver side door.

"I don't suppose you know what happened to the right arm of the Destroyer construct we found not far from here?" He asked.

"Hmmm nope?" I said with a smile. "But if I did, I think it would be a great way to compensate a consultant for their time. I would then point out that the better resources and more interesting things that consultant had access to would mean better things for the agents they might be making things for."

"Relax, Fury already signed off on it." He said with a smirk, getting a chuckle out of Ema. "The other quarantine site is already downsizing, but Jane volunteered the garage she is renting as a place you could stay for the night."

"Yeah, that's fine, we will just sleep in the truck bed again."

"Alright, We have a flight back to New York for you scheduled tomorrow afternoon. Is there anything you need in the meantime?"

"Not right now, but when you have some free time I need to talk to you about me getting my hands on certain resources and how Shield can help me, but that can wait until tomorrow."

"I'll set aside some time, probably tomorrow morning."

"We will wait for you at the dinner, assuming it's open" I said before slowly pulling away, sedately driving back to town.

"How is your hand?" Ema asked, reaching over and delicately pulling it from the steering wheel, leaving me to drive one handed.

"It's pretty much already healed, though it's sore as hell." I admitted, letting her examine it.

"I was shocked that you actually did that." She admitted back. "Both with the Destroyer's cannon and Thors lightning."

"Let's keep talking about it to a minimum" I said. "The trucks fine but they already probably have the garage bugged. I'm already worried about them wondering why I bothered to card Thors lightning and the beams."

"At least no one noticed the Bifrost. Can't explain that one away as trying to mitigate damage." Ema pointed out.

"Yeah. Either way let's keep it to a minimum until we are home."

Ema nodded and we drove the rest of the way in companionable silence. When we got to the garage I parked inside one of the garage bays, closing it behind us. Quickly I pushed out the duffel bag full of cash and clothes, quickly adding the pistol, box of bullets, my lighter and my bolt cutters to the bag and recarding it. The Deck was the most full it had ever been, with only nine free cards, with one of those reserved for the truck. It made me nervous to have access to so little of the Deck. I would need to use some of these cards, and quickly. Unfortunately, even if I hadn't been too tired to really think clearly I wouldn't be able to do that here, I needed to get home first.

Ema set up the bed rolls as I was taking stock of the Deck, so after I was done I climbed into the back of the truck and drifted off almost immediately, my last coherent thought about how thankful I was that my healing amulet got rid of soreness.

----- *The Next Morning* -----

The next morning started off slowly and didn't really pick up that much. Ema and I ate an early breakfast at Isabela's Diner, the only place in town still open. The rest of the town seemed to be a hive of Shield activity as everyone needed to be debriefed about what they had seen and what they were allowed to say. I was pretty sure the topics included me, especially with all the strange looks I had gotten. Ema and I spent our breakfast putting together a list of things we needed from Shield for when I talked to Coulson. Lo and behold the list was hardly done when Agent Coulson entered the dinner.

"Morning Maker, Ema, I hope you slept well?" He asked, motioning one of the waiters for a cup of coffee.

"Yeah, surprisingly well all things considered." I was beginning to think that something might be up with that, two of the best night's sleep I had ever had was in the bed of my truck.

"That's good." He answered with a smile as the waiter poured him a cup of coffee, waiting for them to finish and leave before continuing. "Before we start I need to ask you something that

didn't occur to Agent Sitwell when he debriefed you. Do you know why you couldn't put the Destroyer into one of your cards?"

"I have a theory." I said, internally debating on what I should reveal, deciding to mostly lie. "It's possible that the construct was just too magically dense to be contained in a card. It could also be possible that there is some sort of soul based shenanigans going on, and the Deck considered it alive enough to not be cardable."

In truth, I didn't think it was that at all. Looking back I hadn't felt even the slightest twinge when pulling on the Destroyer. When I was approaching my limit on mass I could feel it, like a tug on my soul. The fact that it hadn't felt like anything, that it just flat out failed made me think it was some sort of limitation the people that dumped me here set. It could have been that a failure stops before it even tries to keep me from hurting myself, but my gut was telling me otherwise. Which meant I needed to be on the lookout for other things that my abilities would refuse to hold.

"Soul based shenanigans?" Agent Coulson asked skeptically. "Really?"

"Hey, you asked if I had any ideas. Those are my ideas."

"Alright, fair enough. I suppose I should get used to those kinds of answers." He admitted before taking a sip of coffee and continuing. "Now what did you want to talk about?"

"I assume your agents are going to be asking for weapons eventually?" I asked, taking a sip of coffee.

"That depends, are you okay with making them weapons?"

"Yes, as long as they pass my questionnaire I don't mind making weapons. Both basic melee weapons and more advanced ranged weapons." I answered. "The problem is that I need to experiment. And to do that I need actual guns, gun parts, spare mags, bullets..."

"Which getting in New York City is like pulling teeth." Coulson finished, nodding slowly. "So you want us to get you guns?"

"Yes. I have a list of what I would like, you could consider it as compensation for what this fiasco turned into."

I slid the list Ema and I had compiled, watching Coulson's reaction as he went through the list. When he was finally done he put the list back down on the table.

"That's quite a list." He said diplomatically. "You realize just handing over so many firearms to someone without a license would be illegal right?"

"I do. But if you want me to make guns that do impossible things then I'm going to need to experiment with them." I explained. "Even if I went through the process of getting a firearms license for New York, I would still be massively restricted."

Coulson looked at me for a moment before nodding.

"I will call Director Fury, have him put it through." He agreed. "Some of this stuff might be hard to find."

"I can give you a few days to get it all together and pick them up when delivering Clint's glasses." I offered. "Is four days enough?"

"That should be enough. You're going to have to come into the headquarters for this, Director Fury won't want to take something like this off site."

"If you manage to find most of the stuff on that list I will consider it half payment for the second half of Clint's equipment."

After we reached an agreement Coulson, Ema and I chatted for another few minutes, Coulson ordering his own breakfast as we did. As Ema and I prepared to leave we all shook hands.

"It was good working with you Maker. Though this turned into a bit of a fiasco it could have been a lot worse. Just your instinct to go out and meet the Destroyer rather than let it come to you probably saved a lot of people."

"I'm always happy to consult for interesting things like this." I said with a smile. "Think I learned enough to make a few advancements I've been stuck on for a while. And after I crack new things..."

"Our agents get to reap the benefits as well." Coulson finished with a smirk. "We understand the implication Maker. Safe trip home."

When we were done we made our way back to the garage, finding that Jane, Darcy and Selvig had returned. The latter two looked wide-eyed and shell-shocked, their world view soundly shattered. Jane on the other hand looked heartbroken, doing her best to stay strong by burying herself in her work, setting up her instruments and computers again after Shield returned them, with the help of two Shield agents. Eric noticed me first and walked out of the garage, Darcy waving but not moving from her seat.

"When did you guys get back?" I asked once the doors were shut behind the older man.

"Not too long ago." He answered. "She didn't want to leave the circle. We ended up camped around it as Shield set up a quarantine zone."

“No change?”

“The second storm above the mark faded not long after you left. After that, nothing.”

I shook my head, watching Jane wipe her eyes as she read through some documents. She turned to scold the nearest agent before returning to her work.

“Dammit. I can't see Thor not coming back, something must have happened.”

“You don't think that-”

“No, I think something must have happened that is keeping him away.” I responded. “I have a feeling he will turn up eventually.”

“Let's hope it's sooner rather than later.” He said with a shaking head.

“Listen, Shield knows how to get in touch with me. If you, Jane or Darcy ever need anything, leave a message with them. If it's an emergency they will contact me directly, if not they will pass it on next time I'm in contact with them.”

Erik nodded and we shook hands before saying our goodbyes, getting another wave from Darcy. Ema and I climbed into the truck and headed out for the airport, getting there after another boring two hour drive. From there we boarded the same private jet we took to get here, a five hour flight ahead of us. I couldn't help but smile when we finally got back to New York City.

----- *The Next Morning... Again* -----

I woke up the next morning in my own bed, the familiar sounds of the city greeting me through the thin walls of my apartment. I went through my morning routine at a leisurely pace, enjoying the chance to relax in my own home. When I was finally done with breakfast, a shower and everything else I sat back on my couch and smiled. Ema was floating around again, free from her exosuit the moment we were sure that no one was following us.

“I enjoy having a body to interact with everyone and everything.” She had said the night before. “But I constantly missed the ability to fly.”

“It's already on the list Ema, I really want to fly as well.” I had assured her.

Now that it was morning again and I was finally awake it was time to do what I had been desperately resisting the urge to do since the Asgardians had left, namely to examine the concepts of the cards I collected. The first one I inspected was the blasts of energy from the Destroyer's head cannon. The beam was powerful and contained a massive amount of energy. Destruction was its primary component, but there were others, like heat, explosion, energy.

Potentially most exciting was the inclusion of magic as a concept. I already had a plan for this, and I could see it working pretty well.

Next up was the Destroyer's right arm. It was filled with a massive amount of toughness, strength, magic again, metal and interestingly enough, control. Unfortunately all of that was eclipsed by the concepts of broken and damaged.

"Anything I add this too will absolutely cease to function with how powerful these two concepts are." I explained before flicking the card back into the deck. "I'm going to have to see if I can't pull it apart and salvage some of the metal."

"How are you going to do that?" She asked dubiously. "It took Thor a dozen angry blows to do that amount of damage, then a lightning bolt to separate it completely."

"I have no idea, you managed to damage it slightly with the tank killers so it's possible, but that's not what we need." I admitted. "Figuring it out is a top priority. I want to add some to my under armor, my shield, and some to your exosuit, if working with it doesn't make it lose its control concept."

Next was Thor's lightning. It was a massive concept of lightning, electricity and magic, with a slight glowing concept that seemed to me to be some sort of divinity, maybe an aspect of immortality. While it was a very exciting concept to find, it was so small and so far back in the background that I would need to heavily enforce it for it to make a noticeable presence. Which would mean I would need another source of divinity or immortality or whatever it was to bring it forward, as stacking the lightning on top of each other would just bring forward the more powerful concepts it held.

On a whim I grabbed one of our new stun guns and combined a few capacitors with it, an octuple combined rechargeable AA battery and finally a single bolt of Thor's lightning. The result C ranked device looked similar to the original stun gun but was now a burnished metallic color, felt weightier and more sturdy, and had runes carved along the business end. It felt strong, the non lethal aspect of it faded quite a bit. It would also slowly regenerate its capacity, an interaction with the rechargeable batteries and Thor's electricity.

When I pulled the stun gun's trigger it filled the living room with the angry noise of electricity and the smell of ozone. The electricity had swirled and sparked around the end, but hadn't hurt me at all, despite the now metal construction of the stun gun.

"This is no longer for non lethal takedowns." I said with wide eyes, staring at the stun gun.

Despite my misgivings I activated it again and slowly stuck my finger in, constantly trying to pull into a card until I felt the massive zap, my hand seizing up immediately and dropping the new card to the ground. I shook out my now singed and tingling hand, relatively sure that would have

been much worse if I hadn't been paranoid about tasers and made my under armor electrically resistant.

When feeling had come back to my now sore hand I reached down and grabbed the card off the floor, examining it closely, nodding happily.

"It shares a lot of the same concepts as the original spark, just weaker." I explained to Ema as she floated over my shoulder. "It lost the glowing concept, whatever that is. Still has magic though."

I added in another bolt of Thor's electricity to the stun gun and attempted the experiment again, this time my fingers getting a painful electrical burn from the single split second it was in contact with the electricity. I struggled to keep from cursing, the pain seemingly worse than it had been gathering the original bolts from Thor.

"Fuck that hurt! How does it hurt worse than before?" I cursed, my hand slowly beginning to heal. "God we can not use this on anyone we don't want dead."

"You're not high on adrenaline, of course it hurts more!" She explained. "Now will you stop hurting yourself?"

"Yeah, I was just eager to have a source of Thor's lightning on tap." I explained, examining the card of new electricity before adding them both back into the taser. "That second charge was even more powerful, maybe half the original power?"

Two sparks for a new weapon and a source of magical lightning wasn't a bad trade at all, even if testing it hurt like an fucking bastard. I quickly combined the remaining twelve bolts of electricity down to six cards. The only reason I was keeping them at all was the small glowing concept I couldn't really accurately name.

My last new card was the Bifrost energy. It too had a strong magical concept, this time even stronger than the lighting or the Destroyer's beam. Sadly, its other strongest concept was not teleportation as I had hoped. Instead it was another concept, something related to travel between two places, a bridging energy that connected places together. Remembering what Jane had talked about when discussing her research during the debriefing, I smiled at the potential. Sure I was no closer to making a Deadpool style teleporting device, or the ability to bamf like Nightcrawler, but there was plenty of potential. Happy with what I was already planning I combined the Bifrost energies down, taking fourteen and combining them into seven doubles. The result was two sets of seven, one set about twice as potent as the other.

"Alright, I reduced the clutter by combining things, now I'm ready to do some making." I said with a smirk, standing and stretching slowly. "Ema, do me a favor and look up the nearest store that sells reclaimed stone. I need a dozen or more slabs of old hearthstone."

“On it. Are you making what I think you're making?”

“If you’re thinking that I'm going to make a teleporting system to spread out all around the state and country, finally making something that will get me out of danger and make it all the harder to pin me down? Then yes, yes I am.”