Harry and company have succeeded in their goal of making a viable space program so they can move all the wizards to their own world. Even with magic, moving an entire civilization takes time and effort. Will they succeed in taking the wizards to the stars before SHIELD or HYDRA find them and stop them? Only time will tell.
"Alright, settle in you lot. We'll be in ruddy new France in two shakes." Mad-Eye barked, before heading up out of the hold to the cockpit.

The kids sighed and transfigured themselves stools, beanbag chairs or sofas depending on their inclinations, skill with transfiguration and what materials they had handy and settled in for the ride.

"I wish there were windows down here. I wanted to see what the Frenchies have done with their place." Seamus grumbled.

"Probably not much. They've mostly just been marking off areas for different things. They're going to bring their whole province over and then spread out from there and green the areas around whatever they've moved once they're all in place. Some of it's already green of course, but that was from the terraforming bombs, not so much from them. They've mostly been working on the lakes, streams, rivers and oceans while they've been here this summer." Tom replied.

"I guess whatever works for them."

"Eet makes perfect sense. Ze province is already beautiful, and weel serve everyone just fine as eet iz. We deed not want too much in zhe way of things when everyone spreads out, so zhat eet can be made beautiful and aesthetically pleasing in 'armony with whatever structures are put nearby." Fleur objected. "Eet iz a good plan." Fleur protested.

"We weren't criticizing, just, you know, commenting. It's kind of the complete opposite of how we've been doing things." Seamus assured her.

"Where are we going to set up anyway? If the whole country hasn't even been set up yet..." Olivia Moon wondered.

"Some of the country is green, remember. We'll probably set up camp there for tonight. That's where the French are staying while they're here." Tom answered.

"WE'RE HERE!" They heard Cecil call from up above.

"That was pretty quick." Dean said with some surprise.

"We didn't have to go all that far, remember... or did you forget? You do seem to be suffering memory problems this summer." Tracey said coldly before stalking away. Dean winced and said nothing further as she walked away.

The kids undid their transfigurations, gathered their stuff and packed away whatever games they'd been playing to pass the time, before heading to the center of the hold to exit.

"Fleur! Thomas! 'arry! Welcome to new France!"

Fleur smiled brightly and hurried to greet her sister.

"Gabrielle! What the hell is she doing here?" Ginny hissed to Hermione indignanty.

"She's here with a group from Beauxbatons. It's all the NEWT students--those heading into fifth through seventh year." Hermione explained absently. "They take their OWLs at the end of fourth
year, so she's done that already, unlike you. Apparently they often take trips as a group during the summers." She frowned then and looked at Ginny suspiciously. "What concern is it of yours though? Given everything that's happened, I thought you'd finally given up...though I can't say I approve of how you moved on."

Ginny wasn't listening, she was glaring at Harry who had just greeted Gabrielle with a hug.

"Hey, Trouble! How's it going? You brat, you never said a word about being here!"

"I deed not wish to ruin zhe surprise!"

The two of them, Fleur and Tom headed together towards the French encampment. Ginny suddenly went staggering as someone knocked her shoulder as they passed. Ginny righted herself and pulled her wand, only to find a group of flinty-eyed Slytherin girls in her way with their wands already drawn.

"Alright, that's quite enough." Remus said firmly.

He got between the two hostile groups and sent the Slytherin girls on their way. Once they were clear he frowned at Ginny in disappointment and followed after.

Ginny glared after the man, and then glared at Hermione when she left right afterwards without a word to her. With a huff she gathered her stuff and stomped out of the ship. She looked around for Dean but he was following Tracey, who was striding ahead of him, obviously unwilling to talk. Her eyes narrowed and she scowled, before pasting a smile on her face and striding off into the heart of the French encampment.

"Watch out below!"

"AAH!"

"Ron, you jerk!"

"Bleagh!"

There was much laughter as those swamped in the wave created by Ron's cannonball from the top of the cliff ten feet above flailed around and wiped the water out of their eyes and noses.

"Idiots. They should have gone to the other end of the lake. That's what, the third time he's done that?" Mandy Brocklehurst said with a snort.

"Gryffindors. What are you going to do?" Lisa Turpin said philosophically, concentrating on evening out her tan a bit while she still had the chance.

"Is there any food still?" Hannah Abbot asked curiously as she and Susan Bones wandered closer.

"I think there's a few sandwiches left." Terry Boot answered absently from beneath the book he had across his face to block the sun. He wanted to take a nap, but the squealing and yelling of the rest of the group kept him from falling asleep.

A cheer went up across the way from the group that had decided a pick-up quidditch game was the order of the day. The Garden group had just beaten the Beauxbatons group, making them the first international quidditch champions on the new world. Further out a group on brooms could be seen flying along a pre-decided route in a race. The remainder of the kids were either in the lake swimming, lying in the sun, looking for food, or in the case of their newlyweds, had snuck off earlier for some alone time while everyone else was occupied.
Susan and Hannah returned a few minutes later with the last sandwich split between them to settle nearby.

"We really lucked out on the weather, didn't we?" Susan noted. "It's perfect."

They all watched a lone bird go winging by. Even though it was happening more often lately, it was still somewhat startling after getting used to the unnatural silence of the new planet in the first two weeks or so.

"I'm going to miss this place, I think." Mandy sighed.

"We all are. Even with working every day this summer's been great. It's going to be weird to go back to Hogwarts and regular life after this." Lisa agreed.

"When are we going to move?" Terry wondered.

"You've got me. Of course, we only just finished greening up the last of the place a few days ago. You really gotta give the Chinese, and all the rest of them with big areas, some props. We only had a few relatively small areas to work on and it took us the whole summer. They've had a lot a more to do, and got a lot more done." Mandy sighed

"They have larger populations than we do, and sent a lot more people along to help. Their individual groups each probably did about as much as we did in a similar time frame." Lisa disagreed.

"Now that our local oceans and countries have all been finished, I don't see why we can't just start moving immediately." Susan noted.

"And while all the excitement is happening, once more we'll all be stuck at Hogwarts." Mandy grumbled. "And we won't even have upcoming OWLs to distract us."

"We'll be starting our first NEWT classes." Terry pointed out. "That should be distraction enough. We'll be taking fewer classes, but each one will be a lot more work."

"It's going to be so weird. Half our crew is going to be gone. The Garden is going to seem empty."

"Yeah, that's right, isn't it? That is going to be weird." Susan added glumly.

"These next few months or years or whatever are going to drive us all crazy aren't they? All this time we've been super busy all the time, always working towards something... We're done that now. All that's left is to get everyone transitioned and who knows how long that's going to take?" Mandy groaned in frustration. "And the whole time we're going to be off at Hogwarts, stuck in limbo."

"It might not be as bad as you fear. I heard from some of the old guys that a whole bunch of small wizarding communities have already fully transitioned." Susan consoled her.

"Yeah? Like who?"

"Tasmania. I heard they all just packed up and came across as soon as the Chinese gateway was opened. There were only 300 of them altogether. They've been in hiding for a long time, and didn't really mingle with the muggle side of their peninsula at all. They used to, even with being hidden because of secrecy. The place got colonized and one day a few of them went out of their hidden area to see how the neighbors were and discovered they'd all been killed. They were the only native Tasmanians left."
"Merlin! Who killed them?"

"Other muggles who wanted their land. English muggles, sadly enough. The Tasmanian wizards had to stay hidden. They, and their muggle neighbors that had been killed, were all black, and the colonizers were all white. They couldn't really blend in even to just look around. They jumped on the chance to leave."

"I can imagine. How awful. I can't blame them for just taking off once they had someplace new to go. Gods."

"Yeah. Other than them there was small groups from different islands and small countries that had really small populations-- the Virgin Islands, Caribbean Netherlands, Montserrat, St. Helena, Caicos, the Falklands… Uh… There was some other places mentioned, but that's the only ones I can remember." Susan listed.

"Huh. So this place is filling right up, slowly but surely. Hopefully it won't take too long till we can all come across too." Mandy said, somewhat cheered.

"Slowly but surely." Hannah agreed, remembering the sight that greeted them as they flew over New Albion just a few hours ago as opposed to when they'd first arrived. Several houses now dotted the landscape here and there.

When most of them told their parents they were going to lay down ward stones so they could secure places they liked before the Ministry came across, said parents had decided to help out by securing any extra properties the family had that weren't in use for transport, and then had given advice for the sort of place they'd most like to put the family home when they eventually came across.

When not working on greening the planet and readying the oceans, lakes and rivers, the whole Garden, just about, had found themselves looking for nice spots to stow vacation houses, and inherited houses that were currently unoccupied but that the family didn't want to leave behind.

There was now a scattering of such places over New Albion, New Alba, New Eire and New Cymru alike, as well as a few on Founder's Isle, where Hogwarts and Hogsmeade would eventually be settled. A few had secured vacation homes in what would eventually be the new French territories, or Spain, Italy, Greece…

Houses were not all that had been packed and brought along. Several stone circles that had been secured and hidden from muggles-- unlike Stonehenge which had to be abandoned by wizards because there were always too many muggles around poking at it to properly secure it, or so it had been decided-- had been brought along and set up in different spots that had a nice node created by the two or more ley lines meeting beneath it. There were whispers that a group was planning on stealing back Stonehenge as well during the final phase of the transition, as there were many who didn't like the idea of continuing to leave it in muggle hands.

Tombs, old temples, lost treasure troves, old cities and such that had been abandoned, only to be recovered by Gringott's curse breakers, had been secured and brought over by whichever country the place had been found in--both to keep such pieces of their history out of muggle hands, and to create ambiance in the new country. These places were now scattered across the landscape in various out the way corners that weren't wanted for new construction or farmland.

Here and there, sheep, pig and cattle farms had sprung up in the last few weeks. There was now plenty of grass for all of them to eat. Some vegetable farms had been set up in late spring, and were now thriving. A few poultry farms were scattered in among the rest. So far, only a few of each--the rest were back on the old world, supplying the populace there.
With so much brought over already, one would think the world would have become to seem crowded. The truth was, it was only all these things that kept it from seeming scarily empty and vast.

All of them were so used to being crammed into all the small, odd, unwanted corners of the old world, they really hadn't quite appreciated how little of the old world was actually theirs, until now. The new world was similar in size, had a similar amount of landmass and oceans. The lack of muggles left them with seemingly endless miles and miles of land as far as the eye could see--to fly across, to spread out in, to explore, without any worry about looking over your shoulder constantly to see if anyone was watching.

Not a one of them truly appreciated how stressful that constant, nagging worry that was always in the back of everyone's minds truly was until they'd come here. A few weeks of true freedom had done all of them a world of good. As much as they were all looking forward to finishing Hogwarts, seeing their families again, seeing through the rest of the move, getting back to any projects any of them still had in the works….

There was a part of all of them that just didn't want to go back, even if only for a few short months or years. They had a new home now, and they wanted to stay there.

"We'll be heading out early tomorrow." Susan noted.

"Yeah." Hannah agreed without particular enthusiasm.

"I guess we'd best enjoy this place while we can." Mandy agreed.

She glanced at the lake and saw Ron was floating a short distance from the cliff he'd jumped off earlier. The rest of the swimmers, who'd gotten tired of being repeatedly splashed, were all out further. She pointed this out to Susan and Hannah, and the three girls shared a grin, before hurrying to the cliff top and checking to be sure that Ron was both still in range, but not in danger of one of them landing on him.

"On three." Susan giggled quietly.
"One…two…three…CANNONBALL!"
"OH BLOODY HELL , YOU WENCHES!"

"Welcome home….WHOAH!"

The kids all laughed as Sirius and the other parents and guardians that had come to meet their train all ducked to escape the flock of owls that took that moment to escape the confines of the train.

"What the…"

"Hogwarts owls. They brought our OWL and NEWT results to all of us, but the portals are one-way unless reconfigured to reverse the trip. They were stuck on the new planet until we came back. The Unspeakables were furious. They had to scramble to recalculate the food chains to account for them being there to be sure the ecosystem didn't collapse from the sudden influx of owls." Tom explained with a laugh.
"Why didn't they just send them back through?"

"Our return was scheduled and accounted for. The gateways are all in use bringing people and materials across the rest of the time. They can only be open for so long at any one time to keep them from overloading. That's why they send everyone through on brooms and what have you--to lessen the amount of time the gateway needs to be open. They decided a bit of tweaking to the ecosystem was going to be more cost-effective than an unscheduled gateway reversal." Harry replied. "So, how was your summer?"

"Busy. Not as much fun as yours was, by the look of things."

At Tom, Harry and Fleur's curious looks, Sirius grinned in amusement. "Did all of you forget that those flying eyes are roaming all over the planet and broadcasting back here? We watched whenever any of you were on, to see how you were progressing."

"Oh, right. We should have realized. We all spent enough time watching the broadcasts at Hogwarts." Harry chuckled. "I hope none of us did anything too embarrassing."

"Well, we all got a good laugh out of your little impromptu dance party when you first arrived." Sirius teased, ruffling his hair. "And how are our newlyweds?"

"Doing well." Fleur smiled. "Indeed, and a bit conflicted over being back." Tom said at the same time. "We all grew rather attached to the new planet and were sorry to leave…but we realized we probably would have gotten rather bored after everyone else left." he explained at Sirius' curious look. "Hopefully it won't be too much longer until we transition."

"Shouldn't be too, too long. I wouldn't think, now that the place has been all tidied up and readied for us to move in." Sirius agreed cheerfully. "But we'll see. Let's get home so you can unpack and settle in. We also need to get you to Diagon Alley so you can do your school shopping, don't forget. You all cut it pretty close, didn't you? Hogwarts starts the day after tomorrow."

"We need to set the tent up so everyone can get their stuff out first."

"Alright, let's do that then."

While everyone was busy unloading their things from the tents, which they pitched on the village green, Sirius got impatient with all of them.

"So? How did you all do? You obviously have had your results for at least a week now! It's been driving all of us crazy!"

"O's across the board." Tom said simply.

"Expected. Harry?"

"Same."

"What, really?"

"Gee, thanks." Harry scoffed.

"Twelve O's? That's amazing!"

"Not really. Hermione did it too. So did Theo and Draco and Millie. Ron almost managed it. He got
an A in divination. I told the examiner the only method I had success with was fire omens and rune stones, so they let me test on those rather than the crystal ball, which is what Ron got stuck with."

"They let you pick your own exam?"

"Only in divination since it's accepted that it's something you need a talent for, and not everyone's talent lie with crystal balls." Tom clarified.

"Yeah, they don't advertise it either. We only knew because Tom found out and told us." Harry agreed.

"So Ron could have probably gotten a higher grade if he'd spoken up, but he didn't. It's his own fault." Tom concluded.

"Don't be so hard on him. There's a reason for that."

"What possible reason could there be?"

"The method he had the most success with was reading entrails. He preferred the A to admitting to that." Harry explained. "Hermione tested on tea leaves, Millie with reading cards, Theo with knuckle bones, Draco did the crystal ball, but he actually had some success with it. Ron's squicked by his own divinatory talent, and it kind of turned him off the whole branch of magic to be honest."

"I don't blame him. Ugh." Sirius agreed. "So what are you going to take for NEWTs?"

"Charms, Transfigurations, DADA, Potions, I guess. I'd like to continue Runes and Arithmancy too, but I was also hoping there was enough interest in Alchemy that Dumbledore would agree to a class. All of it together might be too much."

"Seven NEWTs, yikes. Yeah, that might be a bit of a job, that." Sirius grimaced.

"I'm sure you can manage if you really want it." Tom objected. "You'll just have to continue managing your time effectively. I did." he added pointedly.

"I'll have company through all or most of it if I go for it. I think Hermione's planning on doing the same."

"Not Ron?" Sirius asked.

"It'll probably be a struggle to get him to take a full complement of NEWTs. He wants to take it easy now that he's actually managed twelve OWLs."

"What about Neville?"

"Potions, even if only to stick it to Snape, Herbology definitely. Beyond that I'm not sure."

"I didn't do at all badly in school, but damn if you kids don't make me feel like a slacker." Sirius joked.

"Looks like everyone has gotten their stuff." Tom pointed out. "You want us to take this home while you head to Diagon?"

"That'd be a help." Sirius agreed.

"Kreacher." Tom called. When the house elf appeared he gestured vaguely to the tent and their three
trunks. He and Fleur disappeared a moment later. Sirius huffed and rolled his eyes, before grabbing Harry and apparating them away to Diagon Alley.

"It's so weird being back here." Hannah remarked as she and Susan took their seats on the Hogwarts Express.

"It was so strange being back with all the muggles again. It feels so crowded." Susan agreed. "Was it weird for you too?"

"Actually all the muggles are gone from Godric's Hollow. I heard tell they're just waiting on a last family leaving and Mould-on-the-Wold will be muggle free as well."

"Yeah? Wow. How long has that been going on?"

"Pretty much since the ministry started making all wizard villages again. Talk about the move just made everyone step up their efforts to drive them off." Hannah shrugged. "My mum feels bad about it, but what was everyone supposed to do? It would have been cruel to just leave them to wake up one day and find the whole village gone but for them."

"Yeah. Can you imagine?"

"Oh, hey Justin! Um...why the long face?"

"My parents made their decision. They're going to stay here. They don't want to come with us."

"Gosh. I'm sorry. I'm kind of surprised though...I'd have thought your brother..."

"I was forbidden from bringing up the possibility until after my parents discussed it and decided. I feel bad for my brother. He's been rather resentful since he realized he didn't have magic too. I'm sure he'd have jumped on the chance to possibly get it, but my parents decided to stay and so I can't say anything to him."

"You won't be alone. You've got all of us." Susan reminded him. Justin nodded and gave a wan smile in response, before turning to stare blankly out the window.

"Hey man! Why so glum?" Seamus asked Dean curiously as he stowed his trunk away. He'd last seen him two days ago when they'd all returned from the other planet, and he'd been in good spirits then.

"I got word yesterday. My mum, my step-dad and all my sisters are muggles, not squibs. I talked to mum anyway... They're not coming. She said it really wouldn't be fair any of them, but to my sisters especially, to be the only ones without magic in a world of wizards. She's right, of course. They wouldn't be able to so much as floo... a lot of folks would resent them being there. I'm almost of age, so I'd have been moving out eventually and all, but..."

"I'm sorry, man."

"I was expecting it, but"

"It doesn't make it any easier now it's official."
"Yeah."

"I'm not sure if my news is better or worse. Turns out my da is actually a squib…"

"I'm sensing a but in there"

"He found out about Terry and is not best pleased with me."

"Ah."

"So, he's coming, but doesn't really want to see much of me. Mum's trying to talk him around, but…"

"I'm sorry."

"Yeah. Yeah, so am I. Ruddy bastard." Seamus laughed bitterly.

"What are you going to do?"

"We'll both be of age by summer."

"I guess we're finding a place?"

"Looks that way."

"Tracy speaking to you yet?" Seamus asked after a bit of silence.

"Nope. The rest of them pretty much closed ranks. I tried to get Daphne to put in a good word for me, but she pulled her wand and started counting."

"Ouch. Though to be fair…"

"Yeah. I know, all right? I was an idiot."

"Insane is the word you're looking for. Certifiable, even."

"What was I supposed to do?"

"Are you shitting me, mate? Try stay away from the crazy redhead. Seems simple, yeah?"

"Look, I know, all right? What was I gonna do though? She showed up being all cute like she does…"

"Still not worth it." Seamus scoffed.

"Ginny's a lot more…adventurous than Tracy."

"I'm sure. I remember her bloody octopus impression from before. What was she even doing cornering you? I thought she was still stalking Harry these days."

"She was. Apparently the other girls took exception and kept hexing her to keep her away from him."

"They did? Damn. Still doesn't explain how she ended up with you."

"She was lonely and one thing led to another."
"Should have told her to stuff it. She ruined your thing with your girl, and then didn't even bother to stick around. You did see her with those Frenchies, right?"

"Uh…no. I was still trying to get Tracy to stand still long enough to talk to me when we ran into them. What was she doing?"

"Prancing around, mostly, bat her eyes at any that gave her a second look…occasionally checking to see if you or Harry were watching. You weren't. Either of you. She didn't seem to appreciate it. Slipped off with at least one of them, from what I heard."

Dean scowled and crossed his arms.

"So, what? Tracy hates me, the rest of the girls think I'm pond scum and bloody Ginny just pranced off to go snog some Beauxbatons prat? Well that's just perfect."

"Sorry, mate, but you should have known better."

"Just bloody perfect."

"It's completely unfair. Bill and Charlie are both gonna be living on the new world before any of us are." Ron grumbled. "Mum's in a right state about it. She wasn't best pleased that me and Ginny were gone all summer. When she found out the two of them would be leaving and not coming back she had a bit of a meltdown to hear dad tell it."

"Why are they both going so early?" Hermione wondered.

"All the lost tombs and old ruins and all have been packed up and sent across already, remember? Well, the goblins got their cursebreaking teams sent across with them so it wouldn't interrupt their operations. Made a big stink about it till everyone decided it was just easier to give them their way. So, Bill's in new Egypt still raiding tombs like he's always been. Charlie will be heading out sometime in the next few weeks as they send the dragons across. They're gonna put most of them all on that one big island that they were sending all those herds of cows, deer and goats to. We'll be stuck here till everyone else goes."

"Oh well. It is what it is." Neville shrugged. "We'll be busy at school in any case. It's not like we're going to notice much if we're here or there."

"It won't be just them. Some of the corporation is going across early. The train factory and its workers, specifically. A lot of countries put in orders for trains, and it was agreed it would just be simpler to make them and have them ready for transport over there, otherwise we'd have to either send them across early or take them with us, and we've got enough stuff to send across as is. There's also a bunch of Unspeakables that are across for good already, mostly the folks that are overseeing the teams monitoring the ecosystems and the oceans to make sure they stay viable as more people are settling. The rest are here, spread out and helping with the move. I think they commandeered a good portion of the local ministries to help them out." Harry explained.

"My parents have been getting their affairs in order, and they're going to start magic lessons soon. All the squibs they've gathered are. They've both been studying hard. I think they're worried about finding jobs once we move, but I told them, they're already trained medical professionals. If they can learn medical magic they could easily get jobs with the hospital or as medi-wizards for one of the sports teams or something. That made mum happy, but dad… I think he wants to be a cursebreaker or something. He seems to be treating this whole thing as a big adventure game or something."
Hermione complained.

"And what's wrong with that? Your parents are still young enough to try something new if they want to. You should encourage them to embrace the possibilities." Luna chided.

"What's your dad going to do long-term?" Hermione suddenly asked Ron. "I doubt the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office is going to continue once we leave."

"He's already been campaigning to be made the head of the new Office of Passports and Travel they're going to be setting up to oversee all the passengers traveling back and forth once all the new trains are set up in the new world. Right now we only have the one train and only so many folks travelling back and forth, so it's all being overseen by a couple of guys right there in the train station. As it expands, there was talk of having a main office in the Ministry to keep an eye on all the offices that'll be opening up as more train stations do. It's going to be a sub-department of International Relations. He figures he's got a good shot. He's a Department Head already, so it would be a sideways shuffle for him, and still under the DMLE. He's not too worried, really." Ron replied with a casual shrug. "He might have had some competition from the Head of the Muggle Liaison office, but he went to work for the company, as did a lot of others when they started talking about downsizing their office. They figured they'd get out before they lost their jobs."

"What has your dad been doing then? If they were getting rid of all the muggle liaisons, or at least talking about it…"

"Oh, well, remember when Professor Sprout was leading groups out to search for magical plants and stuff that were in muggle areas? They had people looking for animals too, and for magical stuff. His office just got roped in to that. He was out wandering around wearing funky looking sunglasses that let you see magic and looking for stuff that shouldn't have been out in muggle areas. Anything they found they gathered up and brought back to the Ministry, or to a magical creature reserve, or a greenhouse somewhere, depending on what it was."

"Yeah. I made a pretty penny on that." Harry laughed. "The company made those glasses based on my headgear and sold them to the Ministry for use during that operation. Not just ours, either, a whole bunch of Ministries."

"How did that happen? I think there are already things like that out on the market." Neville asked in surprise.

"Lucius Malfoy is very good at what he does and is very quick to spot opportunities to exploit. The company co-owns the patents on my headgear, so the company made a lot on the sales as well. Since we were in the know about things, he was able to get the contract before anyone else knew there was an opportunity there."

"He did the same with the universal translators. We've been selling boatloads of them to all the different countries as they sent folks to the new planet, to help foster international cooperation." Luna agreed. "Up until then, they were mostly just being sold to tourists who used the trains."

"Like I said, he's good." Harry nodded. "He's also sold computer systems to the Ministry, a bunch of different guilds. I think all the aurors are being issued PDAs. The ones they had testing them out in the field seem to really like them. Tonks said it makes doing reports easier, and she can take care of a lot of it on-site and just send it in, rather than having to go back to her cubicle at the end of the day to write a bunch of reports from memory guided by her notes."

"Lee and them said they've been working on slowly building an infrastructure so that the different networks can eventually send messages outside their local groups, but that's still in the works. Right
now the Ministry, the company, each of the guilds is their own separate network." Luna agreed. "They're very excited about it…and not only because they've been making money on all the sales."

"Hey, where's Loki and Sigyn at anyway? They weren't there when we got back from Valinor, and they weren't here today." Ron suddenly wondered.

"They're with Hela. She had her baby."

"She did? Oh! What was it?"

"A boy. His name's Zurg, which apparently means 'firstborn son' in Gurg's language."

"What does Gurg mean?" Hermione wondered.

"Third son, I think."

"I wonder who he takes after?" Neville mused.

"Well, he doesn't have horns. I guess we'll see whether or not he grows any later." Harry shrugged.
"You know, when I started this place, I never expected it to become a school." Sirius remarked with a wry grin.

"I don't understand why they didn't just send them off to Hogwarts. Hogwarts is already a school, and you can't say they don't have the room for all the extra people." Penny replied.

"It's a school for kids though. I know if I were in their place I'd feel a right fool if I was in class with a bunch of eleven year olds." Barty disagreed.

"Well, there is that. I still don't know why they were brought here though."

"Why not? We've got the room."

"Yeah, but now we can't use any of our conference rooms." Penny objected. "We had to put the viewscreen in the cafeteria so everyone could still watch the progress on the other planet, but that means everyone's been taking extra-long lunch breaks."

"We'll manage. Who knew there were so many squibs though?" Sirius said without worry.

"Most of this lot had no idea. Been something of a shock. "Oh, hey, your child has weird powers and they're going off to school to help train those up, oh and hey, if you drink this odd potion, you might have them too! See, you're a lost descendant of a wizard line and you never knew it...oh, and by the way, we're all moving to another planet and you have to come along or you might end up getting experimented on and endangering all of us!" Barty concluded cheerfully. "Must have been rather a lot to take in. Most of them seem to be settling in well for all that."

"Well, these are all the ones that found the whole thing sort of exciting, bit of an adventure to spice up their boring lives. There were others that didn't take it well at all." Sirius said with a grimace.

"What happened to them?"

"Sterilized so they can't produce any more children with magical genes, obliviated. A few were violent and abusive to their 'freaky kids'. The kids were taken and settled with a family, the parents were dealt with."

"Dealt with how?"

"Sterilized, sent to prison in a few extreme cases."

"Oh. That bad, huh?"

"Yeah. Latest reports are that the kids are doing fine. Two of them went off to Hogwarts with this year's first years. There's a couple of younger kids that aren't old enough for Hogwarts yet. They were just put with the rest in the village schools alongside their new foster-siblings."

"I guess that's something good that's come of all this."

"Yeah. Until all this we didn't really have anything in place for kids like that, as Harry and Tom both know all too well. They both lucked out with Loki. The rest of them would have been screwed. I heard that things were already getting bad enough that there was a good chance none of those kids might have lived long enough to make it to Hogwarts if not for our intervention."
"It's terrible to think anyone would be so cruel to a child." Penny said in horror.

"It would be nice if we could say we were above such things, it isn't true though. Maybe implementing some kind of foster-care system on the new world is something we should look into long term."

"Probably not a bad idea. I myself knew a few that could have benefitted…though to be fair, they were all halfbloods, and it was usually the muggle doing the abusing." Barty remarked.

"It happens in pureblood families too." Sirius said heavily. "Though looking back, I wonder if my mother actually had something wrong with her, rather than just being a vindictive, racist hag."

"If she did, I wouldn't doubt dear old Bellatrix had the same thing." Barty snorted.

"No doubt."

"So…how many people did we add to our numbers with all this anyway?"

"About seven hundred if you can believe it. They were just going to leave the old squibs behind, reasoning that they couldn't have more magical children and have lived as muggles their whole lives. The thing is though, once they talked to the descendants, they called up mum and dad, who in some cases called their mum and dad, and the next thing anyone knew there was a whole crowd of lost magical descendants waiting when next the ministry came calling."

"Seven hundred? Wow. I mean, I can see there's a lot of people here…"

"Yeah, I think it was a surprise to everyone. And don't forget the other conference rooms are full too, and the kids are all elsewhere."

"How are they handling this on the muggle side? This many people just up and disappearing is going to cause some waves, I'd think." Penny said worriedly.

"A lot of them just spread the word that one or the other had a new job waiting, and pretended to move. A couple faked their deaths. A few got thrown in prison for child abuse… I think the ones left have just been continuing their regular lives and getting their affairs in order while they wait for Ministry go-ahead to disappear. They're trying to stagger things to prevent just that problem."

"Oh, well good. Where are we going to put them all when we move?"

"I think they've been warding up some of the houses to take with us, a few have moved into the empty houses in Godric's Hollow and Mould-on-the-Wold as the muggles moved out, a few moved into flats or one of the cottages in Wild Rumpus. I even heard a couple found a place on Knockturn alley and got themselves jobs down there. Think it's delightful--real, genuine vampires, hags and goblins just wandering the streets, weird shops selling odd things like shrunken heads. Think they're on a ruddy vacation or something." Sirius scoffed with some disbelief.

"Well…it's all exciting enough when you're eleven. Maybe it's just that much more so as an adult? Lived your boring, mundane life for years, long for an adventure and one day BOOM! Magic powers! Hidden places! Mythical beings and creatures as neighbors! It might actually seem like a vacation to a lot of them." Penny laughed.

"You haven't told her the most interesting thing to have come out of all of this." Barty interjected.

"Oh? What's that?" Penny demanded in interest.
"There's McClivert and MacBoon descendants in there that escaped either being massacred or getting turned into quintapeds because they were born without magic. Wanna know the best part? The lines met and crossed after two generations."

Penny laughed in disbelief. "So you're telling me the feud for the ages was resolved off-screen on the muggle side generations ago and no one knew it?"

"Yup. How's that for irony?"

"Oh goodness! How do they feel about all this?"

"Eh, they seem to think all their ancestors on both sides were idiots. They're happy enough to let it rest. They're all MacDuffys these days in any case."

"You're not seriously gonna take seven NEWTs, right mate? We did the twelve OWL thing, we'll be moving any day now. We can take it easy!"

"Ron, if I actually thought I could manage it, I might have considered taking more." Harry apologized. "Have you decided what you're taking?"

"There you are, Mr. Longbottom, Charms, Potions, Herbology, DADA, History, Alchemy. Miss Granger?" Professor McGonagall asked.

"Transfiguration, Charms, Runes, Arithimancy, Potions, History, Alchemy."

"That should be no problem. Mr. Potter?"

"Transfiguration, Charms, Runes, Arithimancy, Potions, DADA, Alchemy." Harry replied.

"Very well. Mr. Weasley?"

Ron looked mournfully between the other three and let out a sigh that seemed to travel up straight from his toes.

"Give me what Harry's got."

McGonagall smirked and marked off his new schedule before handing it to him.

"I'm sure your mother will be pleased. I was told to not let you take less than five classes." she quipped before moving to the next in line.

"Cheer up, mate. We've still only got seven classes instead of twelve, we won't be trying to get a space program off the ground at the same time, and we only need to take muggle classes if we really want to. We'll still have loads of free time compared to the last few years."

"Yeah, I guess."

"Ron…if you weren't planning to take so many classes, won't you still have to get books?"

Hermione asked worriedly.

"No. We had copies of everything except the DADA book, and the alchemy book. Mum packed all the rest "just in case" and we bought the other two," he admitted.

"We'd best go grab your "just in case then". We've got Charms in twenty and potions right after."
Harry laughed.

"Bloody hell."

"Oi, firsties, if any of you forgot the way back to Gryffindor, come along!" Harry called down the table.

"Ah, what are you bringing the midgets for?"

"Because I remember how often we got lost the first week." Harry laughed. They were soon surrounded by chattering first years who were all just about pissing themselves in excitement and all talking at once.

Ron glanced at his friend as they all made their way back to the tower and shook his head. It was sort of surreal how well Harry took to the younger students, considering he'd been practically an only child most of his life. The kids seemed to take to him too. For all that he was always running them through boot camps and torturing them in various ways, he'd swear he was all the midgets favorite prefect.

"Prolly because he's one of the only ones that pays attention to them even when they're not getting in trouble. Eh. Better him than me."

They were most of the way back to Gryffindor when Ron suddenly cursed a blue streak that had all the midgets giggling in shock.

"Ronald! There are little ears listening!" Hermione gasped.

"Better they learn such things here rather than out on the streets," Neville said sagely.

"Neville! You're not helping!"

"Problem, Ron?" Harry inquired.

"Yeah, I'd say so! I have to work quidditch practices around seven bloody NEWTs! Bloody hell! I knew I should have taken it easy!"

Harry just laughed at him.

"Everyone ready?"

"Fire it up!"

The gateway came to life, and immediately a line of very tense witches and wizards and their sleeping charges, who were all in floating cages linked to one another, started through. Those at the back of the line started getting nervous when it seemed the deep thrum of the gateway was disturbing their charges enough that some of them appeared to be trying to throw off the sleeping potions they'd been dosed with.

"Hurry it up!"

"We're moving as fast as we can!"

"Move faster!"
One by one the line of cages vanished into the gate and the line crept forward.

"Here we go! Move out!"

"Quickly, now!"

Upon reaching the other side, the dragon tamers unlatched the nearest cage and flew off to safety on their brooms. The dragons were all waking, and they were rather annoyed.

"Bloody hell."

"Alright, mate?"

"The latch was stuck. I took too long getting it open and dear old Hellspawn Bessie got me before I could get clear." Charlie Weasley admitted, patting out his smoldering trouser leg and dabbing the skin underneath with some burn cream with the ease of long practice.

The dragon tamers hunkered down in the rocks and watched with smiles on their faces as the dragons shook off the last of the effects of the sleeping draughts, and lumbered out of their cages, snorting and covering the nearby areas in fire to show their displeasure. One of the smaller dragons, who had lumbered away from the rest to inspect the strange new place they'd all suddenly found themselves in, gave off a delighted trumpet and charged towards the end of the cliff, leaping out into the open air beyond and soaring down into the valley that would be their new home.

"Looks like Jehoshaphat found the herds."

One by one the rest of the dragons followed, and the snap of dozens of leathery wings catching the wind sounded on the breeze.

Charlie and his buddy Dumitru grinned at each other and turned back to watch the dragons soar free across their new home, faces shining.

Charlie let out a content sigh and made himself comfortable. "When I decided to work with dragons this" he gestured to the soaring reptiles "this is what I wanted. I wanted to see them, majestic and free and soaring high in the clouds without care. I didn't want to be a jailor, which is essentially what we all were."

"None of us did, my friend, but we did what we must to insure that they were able to continue living and did not disappear from the world. And now, look! We have succeeded, and now they are free. We can let them roam as they please, and fly high as they wish without care."

"As they were always meant to. It's beautiful, isn't it?"

"Indeed, my friend, indeed. This is a good day."

They all had other things to do--they had homes to set up, a visitor's center to build--but all of them agreed without words that this was more important. All of them had decided to work with dragons because they had caught their imaginations. They all loved their jobs--getting to work with their favorite creatures up close and personal every day was all any of them had ever wanted--but the day in day out struggle to keep them contained and hidden wore on all of them. That long struggle was over at long last. For now, they all just wanted to sit back and enjoy watching their charges explore their new home and fly free.
"The Minister is here. He wants to talk to you." Unspeakable Bode told Head Unspeakable Lovegood wryly.

Lovegood looked up from where she was buried behind a pile of paperwork and grimaced.

"What does that old fusspot want now?"

"Didn't ask. I figured it was your problem. That's why they pay you the big bucks, right?"

Lovegood glowered and then smirked and dug through the piles of paper for a moment and pulled several free.

"Well, in that case, let me go talk to our dear Minister. In the meantime you can go wrangle the trolls and make sure they're going to be ready to go when it's their turn."

"I hate trolls." Bode said glumly.

"Shouldn't have sassed me then." Lovegood replied cheerfully, before grimacing again. "I'd best go see what the chief idiot wants."

Minister Fudge was standing in the circular room that served at the gateway to the Department of Mysteries, looking ill at ease and twisting his signature lime-green bowler hat in his hands. He brightened when he spotted Lovegood and immediately puffed himself up in importance.

"I say, you there, what's all this nonsense I've been hearing?" he demanded. (Sigh) "And what nonsense would that be, Minister?"

"I've heard no people will be moving to the new planet until sometime in winter, if not spring!! What sort of nonsense is this? You're going to let trolls go, and hags and… what about me? I'm the Minister of Magic!"

"You don't have to be." Lovegood replied dryly. Fudge spluttered in affront and puffed himself up further. "I demand to go sooner!"

"We already have a schedule worked out. We're evacuating the non-humans first. That's non-negotiable. We began this whole process because of worries that secrecy was no longer going to be viable long term. Witches and wizards can blend with the muggle population should it prove necessary before the transition is finished. The non-humans don't have that assurance. It is they who have been most constrained by secrecy, and they who would also be in the most danger should it fail. We have the next two weeks slated for dragons. I think you'll agree that getting them to the new planet is important. We'll be sending giants and then the trolls through next. That will take another few weeks. We cannot keep the gateways open for too long at any one time, so we have to do everything in batches. Changing the schedule now will just make a mess of everything, and in the long run would probably delay everyone getting off planet…not to mention it would increase the likelihood of some groups or individuals getting left behind, which is something none of us is willing to chance. There is also the fact that, at the moment, there's nowhere for the Ministry to go once in the new world. It's currently anchored to a muggle building, but is not actually part of the building--it just serves as a landmark so everyone can find it. We're not taking the muggle building with us. A new building is in the midst of being constructed as we speak. A building is also being built to house St. Mungo's, as it has kind of the same problem. It too is anchored to a muggle building but not truly part of it. We need someplace new to anchor everything once we get across, or it will either be inaccessible, or everyone will find their desks in a field somewhere. You're just going to have to wait a bit, as will we all. Now…the good news is that, once we've transitioned large groups like the
dragons, giants, trolls, hags, banshee, goblins, dwarves, centaurs, and what have you, the rest of the magical beings and creatures should transition much quicker, as most of them are currently in reserves that can be carried over wholesale. After that's done though, we're going to need a few weeks to start transferring all the merfolk and aquatic magical creatures. That's going to be tricky, as we'll need to construct water tanks to get them across and to the nearest oceans and lakes. We'll manage, but it will still be a bit of a job, to say the least. After that, we're hopeful that we can transition the infrastructure and the villages in one fell swoop--the Ministry, St. Mungo's, the guilds, the Alleys, Hogwarts, etc. In between, we'll have groups going out to double check for stragglers.

"That's all very well and good, but China and India are already sending their people through! Why aren't we?"

"The Chinese have fifteen million witches and wizards they need to transition. India has thirteen million. In the time the rest of the gateways have evacuated the magical beings and creatures, they'll likely have transitioned half to three quarters of their population. By the time we start sending witches and wizards across, they'll be sending the last of their people. It was decided that the rest of the gateways would focus on evacuating the rest of the magical population so that they could use theirs exclusively for their human population once all the terraforming teams were done. We also have one gateway that's been travelling from place to place focusing on very small populations, as usually transitioning their whole populace and all their belongings took a single day at most.

Everything was scheduled and decided and doled out months ago to make best use of all the gateways so we could make the transition as quick and smooth for all involved as we could make it. We'll be sending out updates as we finish with each group, to let everyone know what's happening. If all goes well, and things move more swiftly than we thought they would, everyone will be moving sooner than expected, if not, later. If we're lucky, and all continues to go well, by this time next year we might all be in the new world. Think on that, Minister. When we first started planning this years ago, our earliest projections had us beginning to move in twenty years or so. The children who headed the space program didn't think we'd start moving until they were all out of school. Our current projections have our entire world off-planet by this time next year. This is not the unreasonable delay you're painting it as, this is speedy beyond all our wildest dreams. Just be patient for a while longer. Now, if you'll excuse me, I am very busy trying to oversee the transition. Every time you come down here to harangue me means a delay. If you want to move sooner rather than later, stop bothering me. We'll be in touch."

Having said her piece, Lovegood vanished back into the bowels of the Department of Mysteries. Fudge spluttered again and stomped off to go yell at some underlings and make himself feel better. He was getting tired of everyone disrespecting him.

"Alright there, Nev?" Harry asked as they were packing up to leave their first potions class of the year.

"Huh? Oh, it's nothing. I'm probably wrong…"

"What's the problem?"

As they were heading out to the hall, Neville showed him the potion he'd been given to research and then brew during the next class meeting.

"It's this here. The rest of the ingredients seem to indicate it's some kind of sleeping draught… this though kind of acts like caffeine. There's another plant with a similar name that's a soporific…"

"Then you were probably meant to discover it was wrong and correct it before brewing next week.
There's no one I trust more when it comes to plant knowledge. If you think it's wrong, it probably is. I mean, think about it. We were told to research the potion he gave us. Why would we need to do that unless there's some trick involved? Usually we just have a set recipe and brew it. I found a similar mistake in mine." Harry explained, digging out the potion he'd been assigned. "I think the order of stirs is mixed up. If I did it the way it's written, it would probably explode."

"So you think that's actually the point? See if we either realize on our own or through research that the recipe is wrong?"

"Probably. You saw how irritated Snape was when he saw us in class. I bet something nasty will happen with all our potions if we don't fix the recipe properly. He's probably just looking for an excuse to kick us out."

"I'm sure he is, but this is actually typical for his NEWT classes. Sometimes recipes are written down incorrectly in old journals as a way of keeping work secret. Anyone who isn't of a similar skill level to the inventor will just make a mess, or possibly die. Or, you might be working somewhere and someone in a hurry gives you a hastily written recipe to make and they make a mistake in what they write down, or you're working at an apothecary and someone comes in with a list of ingredients but they wrote down the wrong thing because there are plants with similar names… The difference between a potions master and a hobby brewer is that you can spot the problems and work around them." Draco disagreed.

"We're not potions masters, we're in our first NEWT year." Neville objected.

"And he only takes O students. If you actually deserved the O you got you would realize there was a problem and fix it. If you didn't, you'd make the recipe as is and have it explode in your face."

"Everything he gives us this year is going to be wrong or missing something, isn't it?" Neville realized. "The potion we brewed today…"

"Half the class had light blue and runny instead of dark blue and syrupy." Draco nodded.

"He left out the steps to activate the thickening agent that was the last ingredient." Harry agreed. "I recognized the potion and realized it was missing. I made it before."

"You did? Why?" Draco asked curiously.

"I was doing experiments on different alloys and adding potions to them to see if they had any beneficial effects or if they just messed them up."

"Did they?"

"Sometimes. I haven't quite figured out why some were beneficial and others weren't. I'm still working on it."

"Do you have any of the alloys you made like that still around?"

"Yeah. I only made small amounts for study purposes. They're in our office at HQ."

"Oh! All those little blocks that are piled up on the corner table? I thought that was some sort of art project or something." Draco realized.

"Right… because I'm so artistic."

"Everyone has hobbies."
"Yeah, I forgot I was talking to the king of origami."

"It's relaxing!"

"I didn't say anything!"

"Hmmm…"

"That sounds like a 'strange but interesting' sort of 'hmmm'. Did you find something?" Peggy asked curiously.

The summer had been rather horrific; HYDRA seemed to be popping out of the woodwork every time they turned around. Things had been quiet the last few days, and they finally had a chance to start going through some of the files their inside people had been sending to Tony. Tony himself was working on something else, though he'd been sort of vague about what it was.

"It might be, I don't know. I've been having JARVIS looking for patterns worldwide. He's found some."

"Really? Like what?" Coulson asked absently.

"New islands and a land bridge seemingly appeared overnight."

"New islands appear all the time."

"Yeah, but not this quickly. They're formed from lava oozing up from the ocean floor, it cools and hardens and congeals until you've got an island. It takes a while for it to happen. The folks in the area know it's happening and know to avoid the area. Fully formed islands don't just suddenly appear in the middle of what was, the day before, a safe passageway for small boats and ships. The coast guard has been busy all summer rescuing boats that ran aground on an island they didn't know was there. Not tourists, either, locals and cruise ships that sail those waters regularly."

"Didn't they see the island before running aground?"

"That's another thing that's weird. Each and every one of them was just beneath the surface. A lot of them were also in areas with extensive coral reefs, but the new islands not only suddenly appeared, down below there's no coral. It's a big blank spot in an otherwise continuous system that the locals swear wasn't like that before. Also, the locals have all complained that there seem to be fewer birds, animals and fish in the area than there should be."

He brought up another screen and pointed. "There's also been some wacky weather in the areas this happened. Violent storms that whipped up out of nowhere and caught all the weather folks by surprise."

He pulled up another screen. "In the month preceding all this strangeness, a whole bunch of jobs opened up. A whole bunch of high and mid-level bureaucrats upped and quit their jobs. Most of them had been there ten, fifteen, twenty years. The sorts of folks that stick around between administrations. A bunch of administrators and similar functionaries upped and left their jobs at different research facilities in the area, as did a bunch of folks who worked for different news companies and law enforcement."

"I assume there's more. People change jobs all the time."
"They all went to one of the same two schools --Jesuit schools running the international baccalaureate curriculum, who have an excellent language program, a high rate of college attendance… does this sound familiar?"

"Grey Friars" Agent May remarked.

"Give the lady a gold star." Tony exclaimed.

"So…what does this all mean?" Steve wondered.

"That's the question isn't it? I'm beginning to wonder if we've got more aliens slumming it here on good old Earth-gard than our old friends the Odinsons."

"We don't actually know that they're aliens." Steve objected.

"There's something weird there, I guarantee it." Tony disagreed. "But back to this other thing…some of these folks had security clearances. So many of them up and leaving at once should have raised some flags-except the folks who normally would have raised such flags were among the group that vanished. None of them has reappeared elsewhere either. We're talking a few thousand people altogether that all just vanished into thin air with little to no warning and vamoosed. Houses cleared out and sold, bank accounts closed out, gone without a trace. Their co-workers were all taken by surprise. None of them had any clue they were leaving."

"So, it's a HYDRA thing, do you think? They were taken out to be replaced, or they were paranoid they were going to be discovered?" Steve wondered.

"Could be. This bears watching." Peggy said uneasily. "Put a tag on Grey Friars. If their graduates start vanishing I want to know about it."

"Already done." Tony said smugly. "I also have JARVIS watching all the rest of the international baccalaureate schools, just in case."

"Good work, Tony."
"I can't believe it's only October. This year seems to be dragging on a bit, doesn't it?" Ron mused.

"It's because we have so much free time. You have to admit, always being busy does make the days go by faster." Dean laughed.

"First quidditch game of the year isn't for another few weeks." Ron moaned.

"First Hogsmeade same thing." Seamus agreed.

The sound of laughter rippling through the great hall caught their attention and they all turned to look at the viewscreen when they saw that's where everyone was looking. On screen a bunch of trolls were halted in front of the gateway bashing each other on the head with their clubs. As more trolls came through, some of them got knocked on the head instead, which they naturally took objection to. A bunch of people were trying to knock the trolls away from the gateway so the rest could come through and it could be shut down.

"It's probably a good thing we're watching the other end. They probably halted the next group coming through so they could clear the area." Neville noted.

"Even so, did you see how nervous everyone was getting? I bet the gateway started to overload." Hermione agreed.

"They should probably knock the rest of the trolls out and send them through in big boxes or something, or it'll probably just keep happening. I hope the gateways are both alright. That's going to set us back quite a bit if they aren't." Harry mused.

"Stupid trolls. Why're we sending them through first anyway? What about us?" Ron wondered.

"Secrecy. All the non-humans and the magical creatures are being sent through first, just in case. They can't blend like the rest of us." Parvati sighed.

"Well, yeah, I guess. Still seems unfair we gotta wait till a bunch of trolls that are too dumb to move away from the gateway go through." Ron griped in reply.

"Everything in its time. I'd rather wait and be sure we all get through. Think about it, it's much higher stakes for say a troll or a goblin that gets left behind than it is for a human. It would suck either way, but the human could at least go outside and walk around without worrying someone would see them and cart them off to experiment on them." Harry pointed out.

"Yeah, Ron, just be patient. We're all in the same boat here." Dean agreed.

"I heard Olivander got to go already. Why's he get special treatment?" Ron demanded next.

"It wasn't just Ollivander, it was all the wand makers. Once all the former squibs were fitted and school was in session, all the wand makers headed over so they'd be there when the non-humans started coming through. All the ones that used to have wand rights but got them taken away because of secrecy concerns are going to get them back on the new planet. The wand makers are over there so they can get wands when they land. They'll need them to help them set up their homes and all." Harry explained.

"What? The goblins and hags and all are gonna have wands?" Ron squeaked. Harry just looked at
him. "Yes. What of it?"

"But they've got magic already! They don't need wands!"

"Actually, that's a misconception. They're not like house elves. Apparently the bond gives house elves the ability to just use their magic with the snap of their fingers. Goblins have to forge something to do a particular feat. Like, say they want a tea service that automatically pours tea. They have to forge a set that will do that. The thing is, once they've made something like that, because they externalized the power to do that, they can't make it again, which is why they want the goblin-forged stuff back. The more stuff they have, the more they're able to do. These days, because they're all busy working in the bank forging coins, most of them don't have the time to forge useful stuff for themselves. They need wands same as wizards do if they just want to do magic whenever. I asked one about that. Apparently they've gotten really irritated by the fact that wizards don't seem to quite grasp what an inconvenience it was for them to lose their wand rights. Same for the hags. They apparently have a knack for potions, but for anything else they need a wand same as humans do. I still don't really understand why they lost them over secrecy concerns in the first place, none of the history books really explains that. The non-humans never really leave the wizarding areas or interact with muggles at all if they can help it. In any case, they only lost them supposedly because of secrecy concerns, which means that an end to secrecy means an end to their loss of wand rights. It wouldn't be fair otherwise."

"Oh, hey, looks like the gateway is okay. They're sending through another batch of trolls." Dean noted.

"Knocked out, in a big box. For the best, really." Neville snorted.

The great hall was reduced to laughter once more when the trolls in the boxes woke up. The boxes exploded as they were all trying to club each other, as each had seemingly having decided that one of the others was responsible for them being in such a situation.

After a while, various trolls started wandering off to explore, once those there to meet them were able to get it into their heads that the place they were in was their new home.

"Aren't there any female trolls?" Hermione suddenly asked. "Or do the males and females all look alike?"

"There are females, and they look female though they're still rather brutish looking. All the females and children were sent through first so they had first dibs on places to live and were able to get themselves settled safely before the males came through. Apparently the males spend all their time wandering around either looking for food, or for females. They figured the males would be too distracted if there were females in the group and they'd never get them through as they'd all be too busy trying to mate." Lavender explained, wrinkling her nose.

"Oi, Ron, do Weasleys have troll blood by any chance?" Seamus asked innocently.

Ron glowered in response. His mouth was full, one hand occupied by a massive sandwich and the other arm was wrapped around Lavender's shoulders. The rest of them snickered.

"Hey, there's something new up. Oh, it somewhere in New Africa now. What are they doing to those mountains?" Seamus wondered.

"Trimming them down. They're too tall. Rain that comes in from the coast can't make it over the mountains so it's all desert on the other side. They're trimming the mountains down so the rain can make it over. I think that's where they're going to put the reserve with the nundus and stuff. It's a
jungle region, I guess they're just making sure it'll have a chance to stay alive once it's in place."
Neville replied. "They've been doing a lot of work like that. Apparently large swaths of the African
continent here are all desert. I guess they're trying to keep it from happening there."

"They're keeping the nundus with them?" Dean said with some shock.

"Not really with them. It's a whole continent, remember, not just a single country. They're putting all
the reserves with the dangerous creatures in the center, but that area is all desert now, so they're
working on it so it won't be and the jungles won't die off once they're moved. All the different
African wizards are going to have their own countries all around that area." Neville explained.

"They'll be safe enough, really. Nundus are really dangerous, but they're not going to travel hundreds
of miles looking for people if there's food to be had where they are. They're still animals. As long as
they're left alone to do their own thing for the most part it'll be fine."

Lavender assured everyone.

The view changed again, to another part of Africa. The students all gasped in wonder at the sight of
all the animals. Large flocks of birds soared through the sky, down below herds of swift antelope
bounded across the grassy plains. Further out, a pride of lions were laid out in the sun, gazing around
themselves with content, lazy arrogance, certain they were masters of all they surveyed.

The view changed again, showing another gateway atop a snowy mountain. A line of yeti were
shambling out, looking vaguely disgruntled.

The next view was someplace in new India, which was slowly shaping up to be quite the beautiful
place. Lavender squealed when she spotted a tiger briefly, stalking through the dense green jungle,
and Parvati clapped in excitement at the sight of all the elephants, many of whom were helping out
with construction.

The view swung out over the ocean and the children cheered at the sight of a pod of whales leaping
from the waves. As the view traveled, they could see vast swarms of fish down below, dolphins
playing, sea otters frolicking.

The view changed to show south America. There was a huge rainstorm covering the area, but the
people there seemed content. They could see them there, gathered under cover and watching the rain
fall.

As the view travelled north, they could see various villages being constructed, a vast endless forest,
and beyond that endless, rolling plains where herds of buffalo and wild horses roamed.

The view changed again and they could see Founder's Isle. A huge area to the north was marked off
for Hogwarts and Hogsmeade. Towards the center, buildings were being constructed for the Ministry
and St. Mungo's, and a new station for the international trains. At the southernmost end, a large
wharf, and several piers for boats were being constructed, as was a new train station for the
Hogwart's Express.

"There's China again. I swear, that place looks different every time we see it."

"There's so many people there, that's why."

"Two million at last count. That's more than double our whole wizarding population, and they've
only barely scratched the surface." Hermione agreed. "Oh, what are those?"

"Vertical farms in giant greenhouses, it looks like. I've heard they've been thinking long term. They
want to maximize their food growing regions as much as possible so they have plenty of room to
spread out as their population increases. I've heard they've a baby boom in the works. They think
they'll have added another couple million to their population by next year." Neville noted.

"We've had a baby boom going on for a while too. It started once the villages were set up, and seems to have continued. There's a whole bunch of families that now have two, three and four children, and a lot more that didn't have any who are starting families. Between that and all the squibs we're bringing on board, our population might actually meet the million point by the time we move." Lavender pointed out. "With all this going on, the world wizarding population might actually double soon after we've all transitioned."

"You know, it's really a good thing that we've made travel easier. With everyone spreading out and having more children, with the ease of travel, a lot more international matches will probably start happening. At the rate things are going, the wizarding population will be healthier and more robust than it's probably been in centuries." Hermione mused.

The bell rang, signaling the end of lunch.

"Is the Garden clear yet, do you think?" Parvati wondered.

"Probably not. There were several different meetings supposed to take place today. If they broke for lunch, they're probably all back in there again." Harry replied.

"I don't understand, why are they having meetings in the Garden? They have conference rooms for that!"

"They're all being filled by the adult education classes for the former squibs."

"Why didn't they just send the squibs to the Garden?"

"I don't know, but if they had we'd never be able to get in there, because it would be in use all the time, instead of once in a while for meetings like it is now."

"That's a good point. Still, it's damned inconvenient. I like doing my homework in there. Even when it's full it's still quieter than it is up in Gryffindor most days." Parvati sighed.

"Well... we were all complaining about how much free time we have. We could set up some quiet study rooms in some of the empty classrooms around the library or something for us to use when the Garden is full of corporate bigwigs having meetings."

"You know, that's not a bad idea. I'll send out a message and see who wants to help."

"Have everyone meet in classroom one. It's big enough to hold everyone. We can have a meeting first, set up working groups and decide how what we're going to do with the spaces we clean up."

"Sounds good."

"How'd you get all the midgets to help out?" Ron wondered, watching the long line of dusty first years that were helping haul extra furniture out of one of the rooms they'd chosen.

"Told them if they helped out, we'd help them set up a first years' only clubhouse, and I'd put in a good word for them with Flitwick on how good they've gotten at using their levitation charms and
they'd all get points."

"So bribery then."

"Pretty much."

"Where're we gonna get enough furniture to set up a clubhouse for the first years? I doubt they want student desks and tables like we're putting in the study rooms."

"Olaf told me he and Brunhild knew a place we could find all kinds of stuff. They're gonna take me there to show me once we've finished this room."

"Oh. Okay then."

"Ah, firsties, you're all back. Guess what? You all get to learn a new spell. Everyone repeat after me. Scourgify."

"Scourgify."

"Excellent. Wand movement goes like this. A little looser there, Arnie. A little tighter there Beth. Again. Good. Everyone spread out around the room, face the wall. All together now."

"Scourgify."

"Hey cool!"

"Okay, look around for any more grime and do it again. Geez, George, good work there. You practically did the whole wall yourself. As a reward, you get to clean the windows! Come along then."

"All right!"

"That's the spirit!"

"This the stretch of wall here?" Harry asked.

"Yes. This is being the come and go room. It cans become anything you needs it to be. Right now, we is wanting the room of lost and broken things." Olaf decreed.

"It can become anything? Is this the only entrance?"

"No, there is being entrances close to all the houses, but there is being only one room. Now, you is walking back and forth three times and thinking you wants the room of lost and broken things, and a door is appearing for you." Brunhild instructed.

"Just walk, huh. Alright, here goes."

Harry paced, and on the third pass a door appeared. He hesitantly stepped inside and then stopped
dead to gape at the sheer, mind-boggling amount of stuff in there.

"Sweet Merlin on a stick! I should have brought a broom with me! How am I going to find anything in here?" he wondered. He blinked when he spotted there was now a broom, an old one, leaning against the wall next to him that hadn't been there before. There were towering shelves that reached towards the far distant ceiling, and there were a lot of them, heading back into the dim recesses of what seemed to be an endless storehouse of junk, all of it thrown together rather haphazardly. There were piles of old newspaper, empty sherry bottles, old rugs, furniture, trunks, piles of moldering old cloth that might have been old tapestries or rugs or curtains stuffed in here and there… the list went on and on.

"Silly. It becomes what you needs it to be. If you needs the room to be a sorting room, it can be that." Brunhild scolded.

"So…if I need somewhat comfy furniture that's not too badly in disrepair…Whoah! That is handy!" Harry laughed.

The room had warped so that the nearest shelves now started back several feet, leaving a clear spot by the door. There was now a pile of armchairs, sofas and loveseats in an untidy pile in front of them.

With the elves help, he got to sorting through it, cleaning off dust and grime, repairing rips and tears, buffing out scratches, pushing stuffing back in. As each piece was finished, one of the elves sent it to the first years' (and second years'—they'd heard what was going on and called foul, so they were getting their own as well) clubhouses to be arranged later.

They found a couple of nice sized tables and a dozen chairs to go with them, a couple of book cases, a few rugs that weren't in too bad of condition, a couple of tapestries that just needed a good cleaning and a bit of brightening up, a stuffed troll, a stuffed gryphon, and a couple of stuffed dragon heads for ambiance. Once the furniture and decorations were gone, he asked for old games, books and cards. He found several old gobstones, and chess sets with all the pieces that still seemed to work, a couple of old muggle board games, a dozen decks of cards, tiny quidditch players that would play a game on a miniature field, toy soldiers, a bunch of tiny action figure animals, and a whole pile of old fiction books, which they sorted through for something age appropriate, as well as two sets of fancy bookends to hold them on the shelves.

The elves took the games and books with them and promised to have the rooms set up in no time and to charm the door to keep out all but the intended year groups, staff and prefects.

Once they were gone, Harry looked around, smiled and rubbed his hands together. "Now…what shall I look for first?"

Harry played around with the room for the rest of the weekend, testing out its limits and finding stuff that caught his fancy which he stuffed away in trunks he found and sent home. On Sunday afternoon he sent out an alert to the Garden students still at Hogwarts that they had a new, better study room for all of them, and could leave the ones they'd just set up for everyone else.
"Harry! Why would we go set up somewhere else when we already went to all the trouble of setting up all those study rooms?" Hermione demanded. "And why are we here anyway? There's nothing down here!"

"Hey…where'd the door come from?" Ron demanded.

"That's what I've been trying to tell you. This is a special room that can do stuff. If I had known about it before I would have just suggested we come here, but I didn't find out about it until after we'd already cleaned up all those other rooms. Anyway, what's the big deal? It isn't like our work will go to waste. It'll just get used by non-Garden folks."

Neville opened the door, halting any further arguing by Ron and Hermione. Inside were several tables and chairs, and around all the walls were a number of bookcases. Hermione, naturally, went right for the books.

"Oh…look at them all. Just what we'll need for our homework! Oh…these are from the restricted section."

"Well, we've just lost Hermione for the count." Dean laughed. Hermione sniffed at him disdainfully and went back to eagerly perusing the shelves.

The door opened again, letting in all their Ravenclaw members. A moment later doors opened to either side, letting in the Slytherins and Hufflepuffs.

"Hey…the walls out there… Where'd you just come from?" Neville demanded.

"There's an entrance near each of the houses. The wall across from the dancing trolls is just Gryffindor's entrance." Harry explained.

"Not bad, for studying at least. It won't be much fun to hang out here otherwise--no comfortable seats anywhere." Draco complained.

A couch and two love seats appeared in a square before the fire, and a comfortable armchair appeared in each of the four corners.

"You were saying?" Harry laughed.

"I take it back. This place is perfect."

Hermione had already parked herself at one of the tables with a whole stack of books and was cheerfully unpacking the homework she still needed to do.

"It's really a shame we didn't know about this place when we were starting the space program. It would have save us a lot of trips to the restricted section." Neville said wryly.

"Yeah, tell me about it. On the downside, we probably would have been found and operations shut down if we had. Things worked out fine. Now we just have a cool study room."

"Can this room be made big enough to fly around in?" Ron asked curiously.

The room stretched and became cavernous.

"Brilliant!"

"HOMEWORK FIRST!" Hermione barked.
"Trolls are finally through. We did a sweep. We seem to have all of them. Thank goodness that's over." Bode said tiredly. "From what I heard, the Yeti weren't nearly so much trouble."

"They were all put under imperius and marched through." Lovegood said wryly.

"Wish we'd thought of that. It would have saved us all a lot of trouble."

"Yeti can be vicious. Trolls, while dangerous are mostly just rather stupid. Those left in charge of the Yeti weren't willing to take any chances. They got them through in one fell swoop, and they seem to have settled in fine. I think they were happy for a chance to spread out a bit. Much like giants, yeti are rather solitary creatures. Secrecy has been hard on them."

"How did the transfer of the giants go anyway?"

"Surprisingly pain free, all things considered. Once they understood what we were trying to tell them, a new big place where they could spread out and no one would bother them--they lined up and marched through docile as you please. It was getting them to understand, and convincing them it wasn't some sort of trick, that was the hard part. Now that we've got all our problem children through, all the rest should seem rather simple in comparison."

"Are the vampires going to cooperate?"

"Yes, surprisingly. We have potions and treats to quell the blood thirst, and many vampires have found muggle blood distasteful in recent decades. Apparently all the chemicals they put in their food these days, and many of the medications so many of them seem to be on all the time give them indigestion. Had it been a few decades ago, we likely would have had a fight on our hands."

"Hooray for muggle preservatives then." Bode laughed.

"We didn't quite appreciate the long-term build-up of such things." Lovegood said seriously. "We've been running the different groups through one of those screens that remove muggle pollutants as we sent them through. We weren't expecting there to be very much, considering most of those we've been sending through recently have all stayed in strictly magical areas, but we were wrong. We removed quite a lot of stuff from all of them. It was nothing compared to our former squibs who have always lived in the heart of the muggle world, but it was still far more substantial than we ever dared believe. It seems we really couldn't hide anymore--not just from cameras, but from their whole society and its side-effects."

"I guess it's a good thing we're leaving then."

"I would say so."

"So, what's next?"

"There's the list. We'll be busy for a while, as you can see."

"Looks like the Americas have made a good start in clearing out."

"Hopefully it continues to go swiftly. North and South America have both gotten slightly smaller
over the last few weeks as different groups have been leaving. The muggles haven't noticed yet, but it's only a matter of time. They've already noticed the extra islands in the Caribbean, and that Tasmania is now a peninsula not an island."

"Yeah, it's going to start getting dicey. Luxembourg was a little annoyed that we couldn't just move their whole province. We told them though, if your country triples in size overnight the muggles aren't going to be able to ignore it. We had to empty them out manually. The Luxembourg bubble will pop eventually now that it's empty and there's no one inside to sustain it, but that few weeks, months or years that it takes to do so will help obscure what's going on for a little longer."

"We've been doing much the same with the creature reserves--we made a second wizard space around the first and have been packing up the reserves themselves to send through. The muggles are in enough of a tizzy about the extra islands. If extra forests and mountain ranges start appearing, let alone small countries tripling in size, they'll muster every available hand to search high and low until they find us."

"Poor things. They're going to be rather confused when everything unravels."

"Won't be our problem anymore. Well, enough chit-chat. We've got work to do."

"Can I trade you the hags for the veela?" Bode asked hopefully.

"No."

"Great game today. Ginny Weasley's going to be in a strop though." Susan noted.

"I heard she plans to go professional if she can manage it. You lose sometimes, even when you personally play a great game. Malfoy just happened to be where the snitch was. That's something she's going to have to learn to deal with." Hannah scoffed.

She noticed Sally-Anne was primping a bit in a mirror as they headed down out of the stands.

"Hot date for Hogsmeade?" she asked curiously. Sally Anne blushed a bit, and her gaze darted to Susan for just a moment.

"A date. I don't know how hot it'll be" she laughed nervously. "He seems sweet though, so I figured I'd give him a chance."

"Oh? Who's the lucky boy?" Susan asked suspiciously.

"Gregory Goyle." Sally answered after a moment. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm supposed to meet him by Hagrid's."

Sally Anne hurried off, but Hannah was busy watching Susan fume. "You have a date with Ernie, remember?"

"I know." Susan huffed.
Hannah giggled suddenly. "Back in first year I never would have pictured Goyle of all people as someone girls were ready to go to blows over."

"I wasn't planning to hit her!" Susan gasped, mortified.

"Look like you wanted to." Hannah sing-songed. "Oh, look. Viktor Krum is here."

"Hermione's so lucky."

"Yeah. Poor Malfoy'll be disappointed."

"That jerk. I'm glad Pansy finally dumped him."

"I think he dumped her. It's okay though. Theo Nott's apparently had a thing for her for a while now, but didn't want to make any moves while Malfoy and her were still an item. She agreed to go to Hogsmeade with him."

"Theo's a nice boy. I'm sure he'll treat her right."

The two girls stopped dead and stared at the couple that had just passed by.

"Blaise Zabini…"

"…and Cho Chang?"

"Damn."

"I didn't see that coming."

"I guess she and Cedric are quits for good then." Susan noted.

"I heard Tracey Davis has been writing to him. They hung out for a bit during that 'last day on Valinor' party we had with the French. They were commiserating over their stupid exes or something. I heard a rumor he might be dropping by to see her."

"Dean's an idiot. He and Tracey were really good together and he blew it."

"The way I heard it, Ginny pretty much leapt on him and stuck her hand down his pants. I think a lot of guys would have blown it under those circumstances. Quite literally, in fact."

"Hannah!"

"Hee hee. Anyway, Dean seems to have gotten over it. He's going with Romilda Vane these days."

"Who's she?"

"One of Ginny's roommates. I'm sure that had nothing to do with it at all." Hannah replied dryly.

"Serves her right. Oh, hey, is that Harry?"

"With Daphne Greengrass. I guess the rumors he's been dating Gabrielle Delacour were wrong."

"Maybe not. She's all the way in France though. I can see him wanting someone closer to home. It was different for Tom and Fleur; she was living here for a year."

"I guess. Daphne's a good choice. She's already pissed at Ginny on Tracey's behalf. If she tries anything she'll probably put her in the hospital for a few a while."
"You're so bloodthirsty these days."

"I'm just saying, sometimes a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do."

"Still pissed at Marietta Edgecomb, huh? Have they gotten rid of those pimplies you hexed her with yet?"

"Not last I heard." Hannah said innocently. "She's got nobody to blame but herself. Neville's taken. She should learn to keep her hands to herself."

"I never even knew this was back here. I guess I never came this way. I thought it was just houses over this side." Harry remarked. He windmilled his arms a bit until he steadied himself and smiled at Daphne sheepishly.

"Ice skating not your thing?" she laughed. Unlike himself she seemed perfectly at home on the ice.

"I guess not. Believe it or not this is an improvement. The first time I tried it I kept falling down. I had bruises on top of bruises."

"You've gone skating before?"

"Yeah. Loki took us out a couple of times over winter break. He loves winter sports, and has always enjoyed the cold. I guess, looking back, it really shouldn't have been such a shock that he was part ice giant."

"You'd think he'd be taller if he was half-giant. I mean, he's tall, but he's not Hagrid tall."

"From what he's said, most of the Jotuns don't get quite as big as our giants. He said some do, and then there's some that are really only a bit taller than the average human. He said most of them average about twelve to fifteen feet, then there's some that get to be twenty or so, and some that are human sized or nearly. There's apparently a lot of variation. Most of the humanish-sized ones are females. People call them "ice maidens". They were apparently always a hot commodity. Other races tended to kidnap them and carry them off as brides. Apparently his grandmum, Besla was like that. She got stolen from her wedding, I believe, and was just carried off to marry the then-king of Asgard."

"Geez. Sucks to be them." Daphne opined, wrinkling her nose. "You seem steadier on your feet when you're not paying attention."

Harry glanced down and nearly lost his balance again. "WHOA!"

"Alright, no more looking at your feet. Pay attention to me, not to what you're doing. We'll have you skating properly in no time."

"If you insist." Harry replied with a roguish grin. Daphne rolled her eyes, but she was smiling.

"How have your classes been going?"

"Pretty good. Even Snape's class hasn't been too awful."
"I've noticed he seems to have backed off a bit on you and Neville. He still looks like Christmas was cancelled any time the work you turn in is acceptable though."

"I used to just hate him, now I think I kind of pity him. I think he's probably the most desperately unhappy person I've ever met. He needs to see a mind-healer, learn to let go of the past, and find someone new in his life. He's apparently been carrying a torch for my mom all these years. I mean, I'm sure she was awesome and all…but they stopped being friends while they were still in school, she married someone else, and she's been dead for fifteen years. I dunno. Maybe some folks would think that was romantic or something…"

"It's not. It's sad and a little creepy, really. He really does need to move on." Daphne sighed thoughtfully. "I hope he does, for his own sake, as well as the sake of future students.

He's not a terrible person. From what I've heard of the other houses, he's actually a better head than the rest of them are, even if they're nicer people. He knows everything that goes on in Slytherin house, he makes sure everyone keeps their grades up and don't fall behind, he stays on top of bullying and stuff in house, does careers counselling for anyone without family to advise them before they choose their electives, and then again after OWLs for everyone."

"The older I get, the more I think I probably would have been very happy in Slytherin…if not for the fact that he was head and hates my father and therefore me. Oh well."

"You've been happy in Gryffindor, haven't you?"

"Yeah, I have, and I made good friends there. McGonagall has always been spread too thin to really look after the house though. I think if we hadn't of had the Garden I'd have failed all my classes trying to do homework in there. It's a madhouse at the best of times."

"Well, we always did think Gryffindors were crazy. I guess that's why." Daphne joked.

"Ha, ha."

"Well, look at this. We've made it around the rink twice without you wobbling. Want to pick things up a notch?"

"Let's go for it."

"Ah, Viktor, could I speak with you a moment?"

Hermione raised an eyebrow when Draco Malfoy approached them.

"What do you need, Malfoy?"

"Oh, just a few questions about quidditch." Draco said vaguely. Hermione looked annoyed and glanced at the bookstore they'd been heading for longingly. Viktor, by contrast, narrowed his eyes at the blonde with suspicion.

"Why don't you run along ahead. I'll be with you in a moment."
Hermione bit her lip and nodded. "Aright. Don't talk quidditch all day." she warned before heading off.

Draco quailed a bit when Viktor glowered at him the moment Hermione was out of sight.

"What is this really about?" he demanded.

Draco took a deep breath, straightened his shoulders and looked Viktor dead in the eye.

"I wish to challenge you… for the hand of Hermione Granger."

The last thing Draco saw was Viktor's fist impacting his face.

"That didn't take long. Is something wrong with your hand?"
"Banged it on the door coming in. Is nothing. Did you get the book you were waiting for?"
"Somebody nailed you pretty good. What happened?"

Draco cringed a bit and muttered too quietly to be heard.

"I didn't quite catch that." Daphne said airily.

"I said Viktor Krum punched me when I tried to challenge him for Granger's hand." Draco sighed, before leaning tiredly against the wall.

All three were rather taken aback.

"Huh. I didn't realize you were serious. I just thought you liked looking at her boobs like the rest of us. OW." he added to Daphne, who had punched him in the arm. "I like looking at yours too."

"Thanks, but you're really not helping yourself here." Daphne replied dryly.

"Yeah, real smooth, Potter. Can we just chalk all this up to temporary insanity and never speak of it again?"

The other three traded and glance and nodded.

"Yeah. We can do that." Harry nodded.

Draco's gaze got caught on something in the distance and he looked wistful for a second before shaking it off. Daphne followed his gaze and saw Pansy and Theo walking together and laughing. They seemed to be rather cozy.

"So, anyone hungry?" Draco asked, aiming for cheerful.

Harry glanced at Daphne, letting her decide.

"We were just headed for the Three Broomsticks." Daphne nodded.

"Wow, it's crowded."

"Oh, look. Nev and Hannah have room at their table." Harry pointed, before leading them back. "Hey, mind if we join you?"

"Go right ahead. You'll have to find one more seat though." Draco got one from a nearby table and held it out for Astoria as Harry did the same for Daphne.

"Double date?" Hannah asked curiously.

"Yep." Harry nodded, while Astoria patted Draco on the knee under the table.

"You know what they say--the family that plays together stays together." Daphne added brightly.

"Seamus was in earlier and said you got into a fight with Viktor Krum." Neville said curiously.

"There was a heated exchange. I told him the rest of his team sucked." Draco lied without missing a beat. "He just misunderstood whatever he saw."
Neither one looked like they quite believed him, but they let the subject drop.

"You know… I was going to swing by HQ tomorrow and help out. Want to come with? You did say you were looking for a distraction." Harry offered.

"What, helping make trains or something?" Draco asked.

"Actually, they sent the train factory on ahead to the new world. They figured it was less bother that way—otherwise they would have had to use up gateway time shipping trains off to the new planet. It only just happened. They just had to wait for a structure to be built to house it, and re-route some of the mining shipments to head directly there instead of here."

"Why not re-route all of it? I mean, yeah, it sort of sucks for us, but if they need it you'd think they'd just re-route everything." Daphne wondered.

"They're making a second ship. That's what I was going to go help out with. They still need the metal for that." Harry explained.

"What do they need another ship for? We've got the gateways." Hannah asked.

"And someone has to stay behind to pack up the last gateway once everyone else goes through. No one wants to leave one behind. It would give the muggles a direct access route to the new planet. There was some talk of setting off a self-destruct, but the things are pretty sturdy. They don't want to chance leaving anything behind to study. Packing it up and leaving by ship seemed the best option." Harry explained. "I also wanted to pick up my vibranium. A couple shipments came over the summer that I never collected. They commandeered the vibranium miners and added the to the regular rotation for ship metals, so what I've got is all I'm going to have for the foreseeable future. I wanted to test out some alloys, plus I have a few other ideas I wanted to try. Should be fun."

"Those alloy blocks with the potions in them are there still, aren't they? I wanted to look at those." Draco admitted. "And who knows, working on the ship might be fun."

"Tomorrow then. Sounds good."

"We'll be there tomorrow too. Now that all the terraforming on Valinor is done, we want to start in on the next planet out. We've been making more terraforming bombs, this time just with heartier stock and a lot of alpine and cold weather breeds." Neville spoke up.

"You're terraforming a second planet?" Astoria said in surprise.

"There's two in the habitable zone in the new solar system. It's further out, so it won't be quite as welcoming. It's about the same distance as between the Earth and Mars. Surface temperatures won't ever get higher than about 70 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit even at the equator at high noon in summertime. It's of a similar size to Valinor, so we think the atmosphere we've been helping build up should hold steady and heat the place pretty nicely. It's got water, so we're going to start pelting it with terraforming bombs and see how they do. We're going to just watch this one and see how things progress on their own, rather than interfere directly like we did on Valinor. We've got plenty of room right now, but in a few generations that might not be the case. It would be nice if we already had someplace ready and waiting when the time comes." Hannah explained cheerfully.

"Or, you know, we could put the prisons there or something. That would certainly make them secure." Neville added with an evil grin.

"That it would." Astoria said wide-eyed.
"Holy… Who the heck is that with Millie?" Daphne suddenly hissed in excitement.

"Oh, that's Areseniy Orlov, he's the son of a friend of her dad's. They used to play together when they were kids. I vaguely remember meeting him once." Draco explained. "He just graduated from Durmstrang, I believe."

The two of them stepped up to the bar. While Arseniy was ordering drinks for both of them, Millie glanced around and saw all of them. Hannah, Daphne and Astoria grinned and pretended to be fanning themselves. Millie waved her arm at them to make them stop, and she was red-faced when he turned back to her.

"I really thought Millie and Vince were going to go the distance. Shows what I know, I guess." Harry mused.

"A lot of us thought that, but they just decided they worked best as buds and went their separate ways. I think he's around here with Olivia somewhere." Daphne told him.

The sound of a scraping chair drew everyone's attention to the end of the table where a very disgruntled Blaise Zabini had just flopped down.

"Where's Cho?" Astoria wondered. "I saw you two heading in to Madame Puddifoot's earlier."

"I told her I had something else to do. I was hoping she was the hot-to-trot-I'll-show-him kind of rebound, instead, she's the I-want-to-blubber-on-your-shoulder-and-bitch-about-my-ex kind of rebound. I don't have time for that."

"Geez Blaise." Daphne huffed. "You are such an arse."

"I prefer discriminating gentleman who knows what he wants." Blaise riposted calmly. "And I'm looking for a bit of a fire and passion, not recriminations and tears. There's nothing wrong with that."

He seemed to see something outside that caught his attention and he smirked a bit, before patting at his hair and primping his clothes a bit. Whatever or whomever he'd seen was already passed by the time the rest of them looked.

"In fact, I just saw opportunity knocking. If you'll all excuse me, I've a hot-to-trot rebound to go rustle up." He swung his cloak back over his shoulders and strode off without another word.

"You all ready to order, kids?" Madame Rosmerta asked.

"Oh, just in time. I'm starving." Ron said cheerfully. "I'll take a butterbeer and a shepherd's pie." he announced as he grabbed a second seat and he and Lavender joined them.

"You've a real talent for showing up in time for food." Harry noted.

"I know, right? It's a gift." Ron agreed.

"Alright, I've got my shopping done. Food next?" Hermione asked.

"Sounds good. Maybe we go skating before you have to go back."
"I'm not great on skates."

"I'll help you. It will be fun."

"I suppose it wouldn't hurt to try. Maybe after we…"

"Hermione!"

Hermione glanced up the street and her face went slack in shock.

"Mum? Dad?"

"Hi, sweetie! Oh, this is so exciting. Goodness! Is that Hogwarts? I feel a bit gypped. We're all just stuffed in a conference room. I mean, it's rather nice, and it is quite comfortable, but it doesn't quite measure up to a castle." Emma gushed, as she hugged her daughter.

"Ugh. Bit of a rough ride, that Knight Bus. Damn. That is some castle." Dan said as he joined them. He seemed to spot Viktor for the first time. "Oi! I thought you were in Bulgaria!"

"DAD!"

"I come to visit when I don't have games and she is allowed out of the castle." Viktor replied patiently.

Emma swatted Dan on the arm. "Don't listen to him. He's still grumpy from the ride. It's nice to see you again, Viktor. How have you been? And how is your family? Please thank your mother for that moussaka recipe. It was a big hit when I made it."

"We are all doing well, thank you. I'm sure mother will be pleased to hear it, though I hope you realize you will now be plied with recipes whenever you see her."

"That's fine. If they all taste as good as the last one, I'll be very appreciative."

"We were about to go get something to eat." Hermione interjected.

"Sounds good. What else is there to do around here?" Dan asked.

"Shopping mostly. Oh…and we were going to go ice skating later."

"Oh! I haven't been skating in years. We used to be quite good. We never could get her out on the ice after the first time. We only managed to get her on skis when we didn't give her a choice in the matter."

"I guess you just have more effective means of persuasion." Dan said unhappily, glowering at Viktor once more.

Hermione went red and started sputtering, Emma cackled, and Viktor just smiled blandly at Dan.

"Germany, Sweden, and Russia have all gotten smaller. North and South America have gotten slightly bigger. There might be more. JARVIS is still poking around." Tony Stark said with a manic
"That's ridiculous." Fury said flatly.

"Satellite photos do not lie. It's not a huge amount in each case, but the world has changed. Trust the technology, baby, it will never lead you astray." Tony chided in return.

"Countries don't just get bigger or shrink overnight, unless there's a volcanic eruption or a sizeable earthquake or something. I don't recall hearing about anything like that."

Coulson objected.

"Nonetheless"

"Do something useful and help us go through these damned files." Fury huffed.

"Aren't you even curious? There's something big going on. I can feel it!"

"I'm more interested in putting the last of those HYDRA bastards into an early grave. Weird landmasses can wait."

"I think I've found another cover operation. It's one we haven't hit yet." Agent May spoke up.

"What's this one?"

"A drill company. They were probably able to order a lot of exotic materials without raising any alarms."

"I think I've got one too." Peggy added.

"Same here." Coulson agreed.

"I might have a possibility. I'm still going through the files here." Steve said right after.

"Excellent. We might actually see an end to these bastards someday." Fury said with satisfaction.

"That would be nice. I've been doing this job far too long." Peggy sighed.

"It's probably going to be weeks, if not months until we can move on any of these. We have so many teams out, only some of which are mostly our people, SHIELD is spread pretty thin these days." May sighed.

"Doesn't mean we can't start investigating so we know what we're heading into once we've personnel available. The usual--investigate the public face, look for any building projects connected to the locations, study the before and after Zola satellite photos. SHIELD being spread thin means that for the moment Pierce is spread thin, so we can take our time on these side investigations and just keep an eye on the ongoing HYDRA war." Peggy said firmly.

"Since he called me up to oversee the ongoing HYDRA war, it really means I'm spread thin." Fury griped. "Each place we investigate seems to spawn two or three more locations that we, and apparently Pierce had no clue existed until we took a look through the internal records. I know we don't have the whole database yet, but I'm beginning to wonder if even Zola knew about half these places. We've gone through manually and data-mined a shit-ton…"

"Language. There are ladies present." Steve scolded.
"Oh, pardon me, Mr. Delicate. We've gone through a fucking shit-ton of records and still haven't come across even tangential info on half these places." Fury griped.

"It's possible a lot of records were lost when Zola was taken out. If he was constantly shuffling information and covering people out on HYDRA missions, altering satellite photos, and constantly keeping an eye on things so he could react faster than anyone could look for new information he hadn't already covered, it might be a lot of the records were just with him, or in the process of being shuffled when he was hit. Internal records at hidden bases might be the only clues we'll ever get about whatever else is hidden. We've got mostly our folks on most of the missions these days, with a few traitors here and there taking point and the brunt of any resistance, so I'm pretty sure we're getting the records first before Pierce or any of his lackeys get them most times…it's those few where that doesn't happen I worry about. They're like an infection. If we don't burn it all out, it'll come creeping back to haunt us again and again." Coulson mused.

"All we can do is keep working." May sighed. "We all know that even if we do wipe out every trace of HYDRA, there'll just be another group of wealthy entitled bastards to set up a new operation and do the same or similar all over again. It's the way of the world."

"Wow. Thank you Ms. Pessimist. At least allow for the possibility of lasting victory." Tony complained.

"In this world, a lasting victory is a week when you win every round, and all your people come home." May replied, voice mild. "Even on the easiest missions that happens all too rarely. You take what you can get and keep fighting."
"Ugh. Tell me again that taking seven bloody NEWTs was a good idea. If my hands are permanently crippled by the time school is over, I'm putting it all on you, mate." Ron groaned, throwing himself onto one of the loveseats by the fire.

"Yeah, yeah." Harry sighed, rolling his eyes. He and Daphne were cozied up on the second loveseat, relaxing after the last of their exams.

"Anyone have anything interesting planned for the holidays?" Pansy asked curiously. She and Padma were camped out on the couch designing clothing. It had occurred to them that with no muggles about, all bets were off for the fashion industry once they got to the new world. No more having to worry if stuff passed the 'muggle friendly' test. They could design, and wear, clothing as fanciful as they liked, in whatever exotic materials they wanted without having to worry.

"We're going to have a full house, from what I've heard. A bunch of the former squibs are Black descendants from Marius the squib, Phinneas Junior the muggle-lover, and of course Hermione and I and her family from Isla Black and Bob Hitchens. We'll probably be packed to the rafters with all of them." Harry replied. "Should be interesting."

"Did Sirius tell you he gave my parents a house? We were going to take our house, but dad got real excited about having a proper 'magic house'. He let them pick one they liked and helped them pack up and move. Last I heard they had a possible buyer for the old house," Hermione said cheerfully.

"He just gave them a house?" Pansy said in surprise.

"Yes. He gave one to all the descendants. He has a whole bunch of them since most of the family died off. It isn't like he was ever going to use most of them. Even with giving a bunch of them away to be used by former squibs, he still has a couple. I think he, and his heirs, still retain ownership, but still, free house, right?"

"Lucky. I'm gonna have to find my own place when I wanna move out. All we've got is the Burrow," Ron sighed gloomily.

"Look at it this way--with a whole new world to spread out in, you could have a place built to order, pick out a place you like to set it up." Lavender said brightly from where she was perched on the back of the couch, watching Pansy and Padma at work. "I could help you design it if you want." she added innocently.

"Sounds expensive."

"You could always study up and do the work yourself if you don't want to hire professionals." Hermione suggested.

"Yeah, Ron, you've got mad engineering skills." Harry agreed.

Ron looked thoughtful. "I do, don't I? I could probably make myself a pretty sweet bachelor pad, and add on to it as I need more space. That could be brilliant."

"That's the spirit, Won-Won!"
"You know, it really sucks that we don't get apparation lessons until after the holiday. We all could've just apparated instead of having to ride the train." Ron complained as the Express chugged along.

"I could have." Hermione corrected. "I'm the only one in here that's already of age."

Harry glanced up at her, debated on whether to tell anyone he already knew how to appaerate, because Tom showed him over the summer, before finally deciding not to as he didn't want to hear the Hermione lecture that would inevitably follow.

"Don't rub it in. I won't be of age until midsummer." Neville griped good-naturedly. "Hannah's been razzing me already about how she feels sort of naughty, dating such a "young fellow". Her birthday is in January, so she's going to be of age more than half the year before I am."

"I'm shameless." Hannah agreed, prompting a laugh from the rest of them.

"It's a long ride, but think about it; we won't be doing this too many more times. We're already halfway through our sixth year. Time flies." Harry mused.

"It really does. This time next year we'll be almost done with Hogwarts. Hard to believe." Daphne agreed.

"What time is it?" Hermione asked.

"Nearly three. Yay. Prefect rounds." Harry grunted, climbing to his feet, after giving Daphne a quick kiss goodbye.

After Harry and Hermione were gone, Hannah and Lavender both grinned at Daphne. "So, still going strong?" Hannah asked.

"Looks that way. I've been invited to the 'wow, there sure are a lot of Blacks again all of a sudden' party over the holidays. Seems like a good sign." Daphne agreed.

"Is Ginny still bothering you?" Lavender wondered.

"No. She really only did the once."

"Yeah and you all ganged up on her." Ron grumbled.

"She was hiding behind a suit of armor waiting to ambush me. I don't even know what goes through her head. I mean, honestly! Did she think Harry was just going to suddenly be all 'gosh, I should totally be with Ginny' if she put me in the hospital?" Daphne grumbled right back. "The rest of the girls saw her aiming at my back and took action. In any case, she's been too preoccupied with Blaise lately to bother me."

Ron grimaced sourly at the reminder. Every time he turned around, Ginny and Blaise were either all over each other and making a spectacle of themselves, or they were screaming and trying to hex each other. They kept getting detention for improper behavior and losing points for fighting, but they didn't seem to be able to stay away from each other, even though both seemed to agree the other was an awful prat. It was maddening. He'd found more than once he wished the twins and Percy were still around. Trying to rein in Ginny by himself was a thankless task.

"Uh-huh. We've seen them. Against the walls, against the stairs, in the doorway of the great hall… and then hexing each other in the halls and the classrooms right after." Hannah snorted.
"Yeah, what is with those two anyway?" Neville shook his head.

"I think the problem is mostly that they're too much alike. They both like to be the center of attention, they both treat their love interests like toys... and they're both really indignant over the idea of someone doing it to them, instead of them doing it to someone else." Daphne sighed. "I love Blaise dearly, but I wouldn't date him. As a friend he's fine. I just hope they're being careful. At the rate they've been going, they're either going to kill each other or end up with an unexpected addition, at which point Blaise will end up murdered by the combined Weasley clan when he tries to run for the hills... or if they manage to truss him up for a shotgun wedding, those two will be chained together for life and are responsible for taking care of a helpless baby."

"Poor baby." Lavender said in horror.

"Mum would kill her.... Well... actually... as long as they got married... She might run off with the baby. Might be for the best." Ron mused.

"Good lord." Hannah groaned.

"Hello children. Good term?" Loki greeted them as they stepped off the train.

"Can't complain." Harry said cheerfully.

"Miss Granger, you'll be coming with us. Your parents are already at the house. I offered to grab you and save them the trip."

"Oh. Alright then."

Olaf and Brunhild took their trunks while they said goodbye to everyone. Loki put a hand on each of their shoulders once they were done, and they reappeared on the doorstep of no. 12 moments later.

Harry was a little taken aback by how noisy it seemed to be as they headed inside. Sirius and Tom and Fleur and Sigyn were all there, so was Barty, as well as Hermione's parents, Dan and Emma, and some folks that were probably their parents plus an additional dozen or so people he didn't know.

"Ah, there you are! Come on in. Harry, Hermione, this is Castor Black, this over here is Leo, that's Delphini over there, and those three are Rasalas, Rigel, and Mark."

"Rasalas, Rigel... and Mark?" Harry asked, bemused.

"My father was a bit annoyed that none of our kids had normal names." a woman who had yet to be introduced laughed. "Mark's named after my father. I'm Kathy, by the way."

"Charmed. And you are?"

"Elizabeth, my daughters Anne and Mary. I'm married to Castor. I named the children."

"Lovely to meet you. How about you?"

"Deneb"

"Altair"

"Vega"

"Really? So many of you with star names. I'd have thought at least some of that would have
disappeared once the line was muggle for a bit." Hermione said in surprise.

"You'd think so." Vega grumbled, tossing her hair.

"Have to admit it made us unique." Altair shrugged.

"Targets you mean." Deneb scoffed.

"You loved your names when you were little. You used to like looking for the summer triangle in the sky whenever we were in a good spot to see it." Delphini, their mother, objected.

"Yeah, and then we started school." Deneb reminded her.

"You don't have to be named after a star to get mocked in school."

"I don't think we got your name." Hermione interjected.

"Thorn." the man sighed. "Thorn Bush. I'm their father."

"So…I'm guessing you bonded over both having diabolical parents?" Harry asked he and Delphini.

"Something like that." Delphini agreed with a laugh.

Petunia Dursley peeked out the window and checked the time.

"Must be caught in traffic."

She jumped when the phone suddenly rang. Frowning, and wondering who was calling so late, she strode over to the phone, ready to harangue whoever it was.

"Hello? Dursley residence. If this is a salesman it's really rather late..."

"Mum? Did you and dad forget about me?"

"Dudley? What... Where are you?"

"Still at the ruddy train station."

"But...your father was supposed to pick you up after work! He's not home and he hasn't called..."

"You think something happened to him? It's just... I've been waiting here two hours already. I would have called sooner, but I didn't realize it had been quite so long. I just figured it felt that way because he was running late. I tried calling the car, but there was no answer."

"But..." she looked at the time again. "Get a cab. Wherever your father is, the car is with him. I'll try his work and the car again and see what's going on."

"Yeah, alright. I'll see you in a bit." Dudley agreed before hanging up.

Petunia called Grunnings, called the car phone, called Grunnings again. There was no answer. Beginning to feel quite uneasy, she dug out the phone book.

"Carl, you rat bastard, is that you? I swear to god if you're drunk calling me again..."
"Susan?"

"Ah. Not Carl. Who's this?"

"It's Petunia Dursley. Carl isn't home either?"

"That's not unusual. Wait, Vernon isn't either?"

"No. My son just called me. Vernon was supposed to pick him up at the train station on his way home, but he never showed up. There's no answer at Grunnings or the car. He's usually really good about telling me if he's going to be late."

"Plus I doubt he would have left your boy stranded." Susan agreed. "I didn't really think anything of it. Carl likes to go out for a few pints with the boys most nights, but Vernon's missing too? And there was no answer at the office... the night watchman should be around. Did you call the booth?"

"Yes, I did. I mean, he might have been doing his rounds, but I called back a little while later and there was still no answer."

"I'll tell you what, I'll call Jim and Shultzy and Bob and see if any of them made it home. Why don't you try the bobbies, or the fire department or both even, see if there was an accident or something. Call me back in an hour and we'll trade info."

"Alright, I'll do that." Petunia agreed.

When a car pulled up in the drive some time later, Petunia looked out hopefully, but it was a taxi. Dudley was in the process of hauling his bag out. Petunia winced at the price as she paid the cabbie. She was going to have to run to the bank now; the fare had taken all her available cash. Dudley noted the conspicuous absence of the car and his father.

"Still no sign of him?" he asked as they headed inside.

"Some people named SHIELD have him. I've been calling people all night, and it took me nearly that whole time to just find out what happened." Petunia fretted. She busied herself bustling around the kitchen, re-heating the dinner she'd made for all of them earlier that had gone uneaten.

"SHIELD? As in the black ops guys with the big guns we keep seeing on the news fighting HYDRA?" Dudley asked uneasily.

He'd never told his parents about SHIELD interrogating him before. His parents would have called anyone and everyone they could think of to lambast them for harassing their son. They would have wanted to know what they'd been asking about, and if he said they wanted to know about Harry and a friend of his from school, they both would have blown their tops. It was really just better for everyone that he keep his mouth shut...except here they were bothering his family again.

"Did they say why?"

"Delores, that's daddy's secretary, you remember her, right?"

"They grey-haired bint that's always pinching my cheeks at the company picnic?"

"Yes, that's her, Delores was missing too. Her husband Tim had more luck getting answers than I did. Daddy's job was supposedly a HYDRA front company or something, so they rounded up
everyone and took them in for questioning. I called the bobbies myself after hearing from Susan, Carl's wife, she was the one that heard from Tim, or rather Shultzzy's wife did, she and Delores play bridge together on Sundays, and she called Susan who told me when I called back. The bobbies said Scotland Yard didn't tell them much, and they didn't even hear about the raid until it was already over. They couldn't even tell me how long daddy would be gone, or anything! I told that inspector that this whole thing was ridiculous and I wanted Vernon released right now. He doesn't hold with that sort of nonsense, no decent Brit would, I mean, we fought the Nazis when that Hitler fellow was off running amok years ago, so it's just plain ridiculous that a good, upstanding British citizen like my Vernon is working for them, but he said he'd likely be held till the investigation was done with and I'd just have to be patient. It's almost Christmas! And what are the neighbors going to think with Vernon just up and disappearing for the holidays? I just know Mrs. No.7 is going to have something to say about it. She's been a rather bitter shrew since her husband left her, but why she thought he'd stick around when she can't properly clean her house I don't know….”

"They think dad was working for HYDRA?" Dudley cut her off before she could start ranting.

Petunia and Mrs. No.7 had a bit of a feud going on since the divorce, and she could go on for hours if she wasn't redirected.

"That's what they said. And what's going to happen to daddy's job when this is all over? Is Grunnings still going to be in business or is he going to have to look for another job? Your father isn't as young as he used to be, and jobs like his don't grow on trees. What'll become of us?"

"Calm down, mum. No sense borrowing trouble. I'm sure everything will be fine. They'll probably just ask him a few questions and send him home before you know it."

They ate their dinner in fretful silence. Petunia, exhausted from hours of worrying and frantic phone calls, headed up to bed when she saw how late it was.

Dudley finished eating, though the food sat like lead in his stomach.

"This is some party." Daphne remarked. Sirius had gone all out this year. The prospect of re-constituting the whole House of Black with former squibs with muggle sensibilities seemed to have lit a bit of a fire in him. All the portraits seemed torn between joy that the house lived on, and horror at what it was becoming. It was like a dream come true for Sirius. The Christmas tree looked like a glittering void of stars with all the new constellation ornaments that had been added. The ballroom was decorated in high style, and was actually being used as a ballroom for once.

"Ooh. That looks like trouble."

"What? Where?" Harry asked. He looked around, but didn't see anything.

"Over there. Tonks seems to have sparked with…which one was he again?"

"Rasalas Black. He's Leo's oldest son. They descend from Phinneas the younger and actually kept the name all these years. The other bunch from his line didn't."

"The Bushes, right?"

"Yeah. Castor's lot are all from Marius the squib, and then me and Hermione are from Isla, Phinneas the elder's younger sister, though on my dad's side it's from Dorea, Marius' younger sister."
"Right. Well, however it came down, Rasalas and Nymphadora seem to have sparked, and Remus seems to have noticed. I honestly never knew how those two got together in the first place. He's fourteen years older than her, and for all that I like him and all, he's a passive aggressive, quiet, scholarly type, and she's a goofy modern girl, if a clingy one. They don't really seem to fit." Daphne explained.

"If this had happened while he was still a werewolf, he probably would have just sighed, quietly exited stage left, and then gone off someplace to drink himself into a stupor and brood on his wretched lot in life. He's not a werewolf anymore, he has a steady job and has for years now, and has his confidence and self-respect back. I wonder if he'll try to fight to keep her, or if he'll let her go and just look for someone else." Harry said thoughtfully.

"Huh, yeah. That could be interesting. Oh. 'Stori might be out of luck. Draco seems to have taken a shine to Vega Bush."

"So we introduce her to Vega's brothers."

"I guess. She's going to be pretty bummed for a while first. She thought the field was finally clear now that Pansy and he are quits and the whole thing with Hermione was shut down. She was feeling pretty optimistic about things. He's been chatting with her more since all that business with Viktor Krum, and they hung out a few times."

"Well, I guess if it's meant to be it will still work out."

"I suppose. You know, I'm a little surprised the Weasleys aren't here. Yeah, they were disowned, but so was everyone else that everyone here descends from. Sirius seems to be going out of his way to scandalize all the ancestors."

"He might have done so, but from what I heard their mum packed them all off to go descend on a similar party taking place at her great-aunt's place."

"Oh, right, there's more Prewitts than just Mafalda now."

"Yeah, Ron and the rest are all pretty annoyed they're getting drug along. None of them care for their aunt Muriel, and they resent being made to suck up to her, especially now when she's got other options."

"I guess their mum is hoping her kids will spark with the newbies. It's really rather vulgar, especially as so many of her children are already poised to be successful and well off on their own merits without need for all this desperate scrambling. " Daphne decided, wrinkling her nose in distaste.

"Should we go back to mingling? We've been kind of holed up in the corner for a while."

"I guess." Harry grumbled a bit. "But if Rigel leers at you again I'm gonna punch him."

"If Rigel leers at me again, I'll punch him." Daphne assured him.

Harry brightened, suddenly much more cheerful.

"I'd enjoy that. Let's go find him."

"Let's dance instead."

"Oh, fine, if you insist."
"This is Big D" Dudley answered his ringing phone smoothly. The sound of a cheerful guffaw exploded in his ear. He recognized that mocking laughter…

"Harry?"

"Hey there, Big D." Harry continued snickering.

"Oh, shut it you!"

"Anything you say, Big D. Don't worry though, you'll always be Dinky Diddums to me, man."

"Harry, I swear to god…"

"Fine, fine." Harry agreed, still cheerful. "So, I got a message that you called."

"Yeah, like three days ago."

"I wasn't here, I was at my godfather's place for the holidays. Big party with all the extended family. I'm exhausted. I mean, don't get me wrong, it was fun and all, but the whole place was packed to the rafters all week. You could barely walk down the hall without tripping over someone, and then of course there was all the drama… In any case, I'm calling you now, so what's up?"

"Nothing now. Dad got arrested. Grunnings was a HYDRA front or something. Those berks from SHIELD raided the place and just grabbed everyone. Mum was in a right state. She didn't know anything had happened till I called from the train station 'cause no one came to pick me up. They held him for a few days and let him go. At the time I called, he'd been missing for a few days and we didn't know if he was coming home or not. I was hoping you knew somebody who could get him out. He showed up a few hours after I called you."

"As far as I know no one here had anything to do with that. I didn't even know any of it happened. He's all clear now though?"

"Yeah. Still ruined the holidays though. If I'd known, I'd have stayed at school."

"Why, what happened?"

"He got roughed up when they were taking everyone in. He's got a big lump on his head, a shiner that's just starting to fade. He had a heart attack too."

"He alright?"

"Yeah. They were able to stop it. He spent most of the time he was gone in the infirmary rather than a cell with everyone else. You know dad though, he's been working himself into a tizzy, ranting about the government, and HYDRA, and high taxes and…"

"So the usual then. What's the problem? That sounds like SOP for casa de Dursley to me."

"He's been sort of psycho about it, you know? Not just with the yelling and posturing, he's been really unhinged about the whole thing. I don't know. Maybe he's heard Grunnings is gonna be shut down and he's gonna have to look for another job or something. I know mum was worried about that when he first disappeared. Then to top it off, he and mum went to the Grunnings New Year's party last night. Half the folks didn't show up to hear them tell it, and I guess the ones that did are all worried about their jobs, so he was all ticked off again this morning. He'd been starting to calm
down. I've been avoiding this place as much as possible."

"Sorry to hear that, man. Look at it this way, you'll be back to school soon, and he's sure to have calmed down somewhat by summer hols."

"I hope so. I…"

"Dud?"

"Hang on a sec. That sounds like mum."

Harry could dimly hear the sound of Dudley tromping across the room, the sound of a door opening, and faintly in the distance the sound of Petunia arguing with someone. "Ah fuck." Dudley said quietly but with feeling. Harry heard Dudley's hurried footsteps and the sound of a door shutting again.

"What's going on?"

"Those berks from SHIELD are back. They seemed to be trying to push their way into the house but mum wasn't having it. I can hear dad flipping out. Cripes. I hope he doesn't give himself another ruddy heart attack. What the hell do those berks want anyway? They already ruined Christmas. Do they just want to make sure they ruin my entire winter break or what?" A loud crack sounded in the distance "Oh shit…"

"Dud? What was that noise?"

Dudley didn't answer, but he could hear the sound of his footsteps running, and the creaking of footsteps on the stairs, and hear Vernon shouting and Petunia shrieking hysterically as he got closer.

"Oh shit…bloody hell"

"Dud? What's going on?"

"Dad just killed the SHIELD berk in the living room and… Oh fuck."

"What now?"

"More of them are coming and….DAD! NO!"

"YOU GET OFF MY LAWN, YOU FREAKS! I AM A LAW ABIDING CITIZEN! I WON'T STAND FOR ANY MORE OF THIS NONSENSE!"

"VERNON! THEY'VE GOT GUNS! PLEASE STOP!"

"I GOT ONE TOO!"

In a loft in London, Harry Potter flinched at the sound of gunfire echoing through the phone. "LOKI!"

"You bellowed?"

"SHIELD is at Dudley's house. Vernon killed one of them and there was gunfire and…"

Loki took the phone from Harry's hand, hung it back up, and patted him lightly on the head.

"Olaf?"
"Yes sir?"

"Please go retrieve young Mr. Dursley and bring him here," once Olaf popped away, he turned back to Harry. "Call the police and send them to the Dursley house. Tell them what you heard."

"Okay." Harry nodded jerkily and mechanically moved to do as he was told. While he was talking to the police, Loki himself vanished.

Harry hung the phone back up and started pacing, hands sweaty and feeling sick to his stomach. He wasn't sure how much time had passed before a hysterical Dudley was deposited in the middle of the room.

"What the bloody…!"

"Dud?"

"Harry?"

"Yeah, it's me. I asked Loki to help when I heard what was going on. What happened?"

"They killed them. They're dead." he choked out.

He drew a great shuddering breath and his chest heaved several times as though it were straining under some terrible force that it could no longer contain.

"They…they k-killed them and I-I just ran away like a coward and hid in my room!"

He sunk down into a quivering heap as great, gasping sobs shook his whole frame.

"They're dead. My parents are dead. They killed them. They killed them!"

Harry numbly stumbled over to sit beside him and pat gently at his back while he cried.
"Head Unspeakable."

"Loki Odinson. I assume you're here to discuss that mess with the Dursley family?"

"You would assume correctly." Loki agreed, taking the seat she offered.

"Damned hot-headed fool…though I can't entirely blame him. A lot of SHIELD's people are condescending at the best of times. They love throwing their weight around, and love rubbing in that you have no choice but to comply with whatever they say or it will go badly for you. Sadly, you get ones like that all over. I know we've a few in our own Auror corps that are much the same. Give them a badge and the power goes to their head." she shook off her musings and went back to the topic at hand.

"Vernon Dursley was a narrow-minded, entitled hothead with delusions of his own importance in the greater scheme of things. He prided himself on being a "normal upstanding citizen of good character". He took being brought in for questioning, manhandled and talked down to badly. I suppose if you add in the brief brush with his own mortality… Whatever the cause, he took it badly, and he wasn't a fellow that knew how to let things go or roll with the punches. He was brooding on the injustice of it all for the whole holiday, seething at being accused of being a terrorist, indignant at anyone questioning his character and morals, so on and so forth. It all likely would have come to nothing in the usual scheme of things. Time would have lessened his ire and he would have just gotten on with his life. Unfortunately, he had another run-in with SHIELD while he was still seething." Lovegood sighed, settling back in her seat tiredly.

"Such a mess. We really don't need all this sort of nonsense right now. We're spread thin as it is, trying to be a hundred places at once…”

"Why did SHIELD come back? That's the part I don't understand. From what I got out of young Mr. Dursley his father was questioned and released. Further poking revealed that there were only a few HYDRA agents in the facility, and they were all captured. Dursley and the rest of the employees were cleared of suspected wrongdoing."

"Ah. Yes. It seems one of the actual HYDRA agents has been collecting damning information on all the higher-ups in HYDRA that he knows about and hiding it at Dursley's house in "souvenirs" he brought back from overseas business trips and handed off to be given as presents to Mrs. Dursley and the boy. He got nervous when HYDRA bases started being regularly raided, and decided if he was going down he was taking everyone he could with him, if he couldn't use it to bargain for clemency for himself. He asked to speak to Captain America as he was certain he wasn't HYDRA. The Captain passed word of things to one of the agents that's been vetted. The man was supposed to just go, explain the situation and retrieve the souvenirs so they could get their hands on whatever files he'd hidden. Sadly, Vernon Dursley has been a bear since being released and made the holidays very stressful for his family. Petunia, upon opening the door and seeing another SHIELD agent, tried to get him to go away, knowing it wasn't going to end well. The agent got louder, more forceful and more condescending, which ignited Mrs. Dursley's temper, which was already frayed from a tense week. Vernon heard the altercation, and had already been brooding on various injustices he'd been subjected to. He went down with a gun, a service pistol that belonged to his father, I'm given to understand, and went down to confront the man, and shot him."

She sighed again as she continued. "However, it seems that the fellow who showed up at the Dursleys was not the one sent by Captain America. That fellow was stuck in traffic behind a sudden accident. He called it in, and the timing made Captain America suspicious. He gathered up a team to head to the Dursleys to counter any HYDRA resistance that might be in place."
"So the fellow Dursley killed was actually a HYDRA agent then?" Loki said in surprise.
"So it would seem, as were the ones that killed them who came forward to speed things along when they didn't cooperate. Vernon saw the guns and charged out, waving his service pistol and ranting. He was shot when he refused to stand down or surrender the pistol. Petunia retrieved a shotgun while all this was going on. Whether she was planning to help Vernon shoot them all or was planning to try to protect herself and Dudley, no one knows. She saw her husband go down and ran out, shotgun still in hand, hysterical. I guess she made the boys nervous the way she was waving the gun around. She was shot in the leg to try to stop her. She swung the gun around to face them. I guess they thought she wanted to go out in a blaze of glory. The next shot killed her. Vernon had another heart attack after being shot. That's actually what killed him as far as we've been able to determine. You retrieved young Mr. Dursley?"

"Yes. He's at my flat in London for the moment."

"Keep him out of sight. SHIELD has an APB out for him, as do the local police forces. They know he was in the house when they arrived. Cap saw him in the moments before he ran upstairs after his parents fell. He and the rest got there just a little too late. I hope you made it look good."

"I put a portable escape ladder out the back window, left a sparse trail of footprints, as well as a scent trail to follow them to the creek that winds through the wood there. That will hold them for a little while."

"Good. We have people in place now as part of the team sorting through the Dursleys house to make sure there's nothing questionable, and we have someone in place to make sure there's nothing we don't want in the coroner's report or any samples that make it into SHIELD hands. They were both squibs. We didn't go to all this trouble to let them get the drop on us at this late date. Of course, diverting so many people to deal with this mess means there's a delay in our ongoing transition efforts. Bother." Lovegood rubbed her face tiredly and dug around in her desk, withdrawing a vial of shimmering serum. "Here. Give the boy this when you see him again. He'll be going with us, it seems. I'm not sure where we'll find him a wand…"

"I believe there are old family wands in the Black and Potter vaults. I'm sure we'll find something that will suit until he can get a better match."

"Oh, good. I guess we'll just put him in magic classes with the rest of the former squibs. If you could get him up to speed before he joins the class that would be a help. If nothing else it will give him something else to focus on while he grieves."

"So…you went and killed the Dursleys. Nice job." Tony said sarcastically.

"How the hell'd you hear about that already?" Nick Fury demanded.

Tony smirked and waved a hand to indicate the computer recesses that housed JARVIS and the SHIELD files that had been funneled to him.

"Please. I'm the smartest person you're ever likely to encounter. I know everything." he scoffed.

"If you know everything you'd know guy Dursley died of a heart attack after killing two of our number…well, one. The other was a HYDRA infiltrator that seems to have been overlooked. She-Dursley decided to avenge her lard-assed hubby or something." Fury scoffed in return.

"And there's now a country-wide manhunt for kid-Dursley, who somehow managed to slip past all your highly trained agents while you were mowing down his parents. Nothing like making a kid an
orphans and destroying his home for the holidays. It's that extra attention to detail that really shows you care."

"Holidays are over, Stark."

"Nu-uh. Still the Christmas season. The Three Kings haven't even made it to Bethlehem yet. Still counts. It's Christmas till it's not... then it's Halloween, then it's Christmas again. It's a rule." Tony said officiously.

"Spare me the workings of your twisted little mind, Stark. I'm not in the mood." Fury growled. "And what about Easter, huh? Is there no Easter Bunny in Stark land?"

"Wow... Nicholas Fury, defender of small, furry magical animals. Who knew?" Tony laughed. Being Tony, he immediately set about editing photos of Nick Fury-- on an airplane, with every seat but his filled with bunnies, holding a shotgun and glaring at the snakes that are also on the plane. Heroically ripping his coat off to show a colorful Easter Egg on his chest ala Superman's "S". With paws and big ears and a fluffy tail, holding a shotgun with the inscription "HAPPY EASTER MOTHER F*****!"

Nick himself felt vaguely uneasy when he heard Tony chortling to himself so gleefully in the corner, but he chose to ignore him while looking through the latest batches of files to see if anything new had come up.

"Hello Nicholas." Peggy greeted as she came in. "Anthony."

"Hey Aunt Peggy. Have you heard the news? The Dursleys are dead. I guess we better hope I'm wrong about the alien thing or we might have to deal with a baby godling on a rampage you realize." Tony replied.

"Yes, that was unfortunate. I doubt there will be any rampages by the cousin over the matter though. As far as we've been able to determine there was no love lost there."

"Still his blood. I know if a bunch of government heavies came and blew away my auntie and uncle blowhard and sent my pudgy cousin fleeing into the night, I'd likely be a bit peeved over the matter, even if I couldn't stand them. Believe me, I know all about strained relations. I had that in spades with my parents. It doesn't mean I didn't care when they died. When one adds in that as far as anyone was concerned those two were cleared of being anything other than irritating but harmless and not involved with HYDRA at all before they got blown away on their own front lawn in Suburban hell, England, well, I can imagine our portal-opening alien friends aren't going to take it well."

"Well you can relax then, Anthony. From what I've heard of the initial reports both of the elder Dursleys were perfectly ordinary in every way, thoroughly human and not aliens or half-gods or anything else. What's more, young Mr. Dursley was apparently on the phone with his cousin when the altercation started. The cousin's response was not to unleash eldritch powers and go on a rampage, he called their local police district and told them he'd been on the phone with his cousin and heard an armed man had just forced his way into their home and that someone had been shot and could they please check it out. I think you were way off base on all of that." Peggy sighed.

"Well of course he did. His pops probably told him we were on to them. He's just laying low. No, I'm right about all of it." Tony said stubbornly.

"Make yourself useful doing something about actual threats, Stark, or get out of the way." Fury griped.
Tony glared at him and went back to manipulating photos.

"So where're we at anyway?"

"Headquarters. SHIELD is still looking for you, so you won't be going back to Smeltings. You're going to be joining lessons here. I'm heading back to school tomorrow, so we need to get this done. We'll head over to Sirius' place after. You'll be living there until we all move."

"You keep saying we're going to move. Move where?" Dudley wondered as he followed Harry glumly across the grounds.

"What's this place?"

"Metalworking shop. My friend Ron and I built this. I'll show you what it's been making parts for in a bit. You'll understand about the move when you see it."

Dudley followed him into the elevator hidden in the back corner, looking around at the tropical hut they'd apparently stepped out into.

"We go to Tahiti or something?"

"No, this is my office. Now, come on. Tom said the cabinet was at the end of the hall…yes, there it is. Alright, step in and shut the door, open it and step out once you hear the ding. I'll be right behind you. Don't go anywhere."

Dudley rolled his eyes and did as he was told. He stepped out again and looked around in interest at the murals on the walls.

"Alright, this way." Harry called as he stepped out. He followed him into a room with space-themed murals and then into another cabinet, this one yellow rather than brown, and found himself in an old classroom behind a towering pile of dusty student desks and chairs.

"Where are we now, and why did we come here?" Dudley demanded, wrinkling his nose at all the dust.

"Hogwarts. The cabinet's wedged back here to keep people from just stumbling across it and getting into what used to be all our workspaces for the company." Harry explained as he started walking. Dudley started in surprise and hurried after him.

"Hog… That's your school, right? Magic school."

Dudley nearly jumped out of his skin when he realized the portraits they were passing were not only moving, they were talking, drinking, dancing around, moving from frame to frame…and they could apparently see them, as many of them were both calling out to them and commenting on them as they passed.

"Yep. We're going to see if we can find you a wand."

Dudley was quite distracted by his surroundings but he tuned back in when he heard that.

"What for? I'm not like you."

"I knew you hadn't been listening. That sparkly stuff Loki gave you to drink? It's a special serum."
"I got that much. I got taller and I got an eight-pack. The birds are gonna be all over me once I'm allowed outside again."

"Yeah, it has nice side effects. For people like you it has another side-effect. You and your mum… I'm actually not sure about your dad…but anyway, you're what's known as a squib."

"A what now?!"

"Someone with magical heritage that doesn't seem to have the ability to use magic themselves. It turns out our mums come from a long line of squibs. Mum got active magic, as did I, but you and your mum didn't. Now that you've taken the serum you have active magic. It unlocks it or something. Hang on a sec."

Dudley watched, mystified as Harry paced back and forth in front of a blank wall and a door suddenly appeared.

"Where'd that come from?"

"Magic. The room only appears when you need something. We need to find you a matching wand and all the wand makers have already left." Harry explained as he pulled open the door.

Dudley stepped inside warily and looked around. It was a fairly plain room with stone walls, much like the rest of the place from what he'd seen. In the center of the room was a table that seemed to be piled high with sticks of various lengths. He edged closer and realized that they were all magic wands like Harry had, though made of different woods and in different lengths.

"Just pick them up one by one and give them a wave. You'll know if you've found a compatible match if you feel sort of warm and tingly. The wand might shoot out sparks and stuff too. Any that aren't a match put in the box here. Any that get a reaction set aside. You can go through them again after you've narrowed it down and find the best match."

Dudley stared at the pile of wands without moving for a long time before oh so hesitantly reaching out to take one.

"Just feels like a stick of wood. You're having me on, aren't you?"

"Put it in the box and try the next one. I went through about thirty before I found a match."

Not getting any weird reactions the first time seemed to have cured his reticence. He picked up the wands one by one and tossed them into the box with a bored smirk on his face.

Harry noticed the pile of wands was changing as he worked his way through. About half the types of wood disappeared already, and the number of types got fewer with every one he tried.

Growing noticeably bored, Dudley grabbed the next in line and froze as he gave it a half-hearted wave. A shower of silver sparks erupted from the end.

"How's it feel?"

"Like part of me was missing till now." Dudley answered slowly, still staring at the wand.

"Let's take a look. Sounds like a match to me. Alder, unicorn hair, fourteen inches. Not bad."

"Let's see yours." Dudley demanded.

Harry eyed him suspiciously and drew out his own. "You don't even know magic yet if you're
looking to duel."

"Who cares about that? Yours is puny!" Dudley laughed delightedly. "Not surprised I got a such a big one. They don't call me big D for nothing."

"There's no correlation." Harry said sourly.

"I'm sure." Dudley kept cackling.

"You know, we can still dump you off somewhere for SHIELD to find."

Dudley seemed to not be at all worried by his threat, and was in fact ignoring him in favor of waving his new magic wand around.

"So am I coming here with you?" he demanded.

"No, by age you should be in sixth year with me, but you don't know anything yet, which means you'd have to be in classes with the firsties, who are eleven. Most of the former squibs are adults, or older teens like you. They figured it was easier and less embarrassing for all involved to hold classes just for all of you. You'll be with the rest of the former squibs at Headquarters like I said earlier." Harry grumbled as he led them back to the cabinet and on to HQ.

"Why didn't mum get some of the sparkly stuff? For all her talk, I bet she'd have been pretty jazzed." Dudley asked, subdued once more.

"It's a new invention. It used to be if you were born without active magic, that was that. The guy who made it discovered the effect on squibs while testing it. He was just expecting it to make you taller, stronger and healthier. Once the effect was known they started gathering up squibs to dose them. There's a lot of them, like seven hundred and something. I guess they just hadn't gotten around to dealing with you yet, or they were trying to decide whether to even approach considering how hostile your family has been to magic and wizards in the past." Harry explained with just a trace of bitterness.

"If they'd gotten sparkly stuff they might still be alive."

"Don't do that. I learned the hard way that 'what if' was a fool's game. Yeah, maybe they'd still be alive…or maybe they'd have been rounded up by SHIELD before we left to be held captive and experimented on. There's no way to know. It's already done."

"If there's magic, can't somebody go back in time or…"

"It doesn't work like that. If anyone had gone back in time to save them and fake their deaths, it already happened and we'd know it happened, and so someone would go back to make sure it happened or the universe goes funny or something. No one did, and so no one can…See?"

"You mean like paradoxes and stuff?"

"Yeah. No one was expecting something like this to happen. That's kind of the problem with time travel. It's pretty useless, and anyone that tries making it useful just makes a mess. It's frustrating, but we're wizards, not gods. Some things are beyond even magic to fix. You think I wouldn't have saved my parents if I could have done it?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I guess." Dudley nodded.

He could feel himself sinking down into a depression again, and cast around desperately for
something to distract him. The last four days he'd done nothing much but lay around being miserable, barely eating or sleeping. He wanted to set aside the big ball of misery that seemed to have set up camp in his chest for at least a little while.

"You keep saying we're moving and we're leaving. You still haven't said where to."

"We're leaving Earth. We've got our own planet to live on, just magic folks and creatures and plants and stuff."

"Seriously? You got spaceships?"

"A space ship. We sent some guys off with stuff to build a gateway. Once they did that, other folks went through with stuff to make more gateways. We've been slowly clearing out over the last few months. There's another space ship in the middle of getting built in the simulator. They're going to dismantle the last gateway and leave by ship once everyone else is through."

"You're shitting me!"

"No, I'm dead serious. Come on, I'll show you."

Harry led them to the lift and up to mission control. Dudley walked forward in a trance when he saw the deep space void beyond the force field, and the half-built space ship hovering out in the center.

"You weren't kidding."

"Nope. I've actually been on the new planet already. I spent the summer there helping get it ready for when the populace started coming through. We were planting grass and trees, crops, seeding the place with bugs and microbes, helping test the waters to make sure things could live in there, dispersing animals evenly through ecological niches where they would thrive. All kinds of crap. We were really busy but it was fun. Most of us didn't really want to come back."

"Damn. All this time I thought you lot just sat around dressing funny and shooting sparks at each other or something. This is..." he waved his hand at the ship, seemingly at a loss for words.

"Yeah. It's been a while and I'm still fairly giddy at all we've accomplished in fairly short order. The main point is though that we're leaving. Living here...it's not fair to us that we can't just live safely and openly and do stuff we can do and just you know, exist. That said, it's not fair to all the regular folks who are regularly getting their brains zapped because they see something they shouldn't or happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. I don't like the mass obliviations, but I agree they're necessary so long as we're here. It's part of the reason I was so much in favor of us leaving."

"Right. You lot find normal people distasteful." Dudley agreed with a sneer.

"Some do. I'm not going to lie about it. Some find them annoying, some are curious, some fearful, many never think of them at all. We're all just people in the end. If the normal folks knew about us, there'd probably be the same range of reactions towards us. Some would be afraid, some would be resentful because obviously they themselves deserve to have weird powers more than the folks that actually have them... Some, I'm sure, would find it all fascinating. The thing is, no matter how the feelings of the general public fall out, it's organizations like SHIELD and HYDRA that will be the deciding factor. We've watched them enough that we know exactly where they'll fall; namely somewhere between fear and greed and their response will be contain, study and weaponize. Not a one of us intends to live our lives in cages being studied like animals, or living under 24 hour surveillance and having SHIELD goons stop by once a week to hassle us. We're certainly not going
to allow ourselves to be used as parts in a new super soldier program. The world keeps getting smaller every day. Eventually we'd have had to try to make nice with Big Brother and hope for the best. We decided to find a new home and a future of our own choosing instead. You're one of us, so you'll be coming along. We don't dare leave you behind. SHIELD is already looking for you. It wouldn't end well."

"It's not like I've got much left to stick around for. What the hell am I going to do once we get there though? What'll become of me. I've got nothing."

"Wrong. You've got me. We're still family. You'll have a home as long as you need until you find your feet and a place in the new world. When my parents died, your family took me in, however grudgingly. I'll repay that now that your parents are gone. Don't worry, Diddums. It'll be alright. Eventually."

Dudley got choked up and had to look away. Harry pretended not to notice.

Once Dudley had gotten hold of himself, Harry grinned at him.

"So…wanna go in the simulator?"

Dudley just looked at him like he was crazy.

"Are you kidding me? Hell yeah!"

"Harry! There you are! What happened? You sort of dropped off the face of the Earth for the remainder of the holidays!" Hermione scolded as soon as she stepped into the compartment. She kept her gaze firmly on him even as an absent flick of her wand sent her trunk to be neatly stowed overhead.

"A lot happened. I went with Loki to his place for a bit after everyone left. Brunhild had taken a message from Dudley asking me to call him back. He didn't say it was an emergency or anything, so Loki figured it could wait till after the holidays and all. Anyway, I called him and it turns out uncle Vernon had been arrested by SHIELD for working for a HYDRA front…" Harry explained. "And they showed up again while we were on the phone. Uncle Vernon freaked out at the guy getting shirty with my aunt and trying to push his way in, so he shot him. Killed him too."

Hermione and all the rest gasped. "Well, it turns out that guy was actually a HYDRA agent. One of them that worked at Grunnings had been storing blackmail material and hiding it in stuff…"

The whole compartment was both enthralled and horrified by the story, and aghast on Dudley's behalf at the sudden demise of his parents.

"So, I snuck him to the Room at Hogwarts and found him a wand that matches. He'll be starting classes with your parents and the rest once Loki gets him somewhat up to speed with the rest of them."

"Oh my goodness. Poor Dudley." Hermione said with sympathy.

"At least it happened after the holidays were over." Ron mused. "We know what Harry's like with Halloween. Imagine having Christmas ruined."
"The time of year will still be enough. But yeah, at least it wasn't the day itself. New Year's day is a bust though." Harry grimaced.

"What about you, Harry? How are you dealing with all this?"

"Mostly just shocked at the sudden pointlessness of it all. I wasn't there, I didn't see them get gunned down, which helps. Mostly I feel bad for Dudley, and wonder how my mum and dad are dealing with them."

"You think they went to Valhalla?" Ron asked, mystified "But they were jerks, not heroes."

"They died in battle. That's the only requirement as far as I know. That means they're there." Harry shrugged, before grinning somewhat vindictively "My aunt hated messes, now she'll be surrounded by gung-ho warrior types sweating and bleeding all over the place all day, and quaffing ale all night. Vernon hates wizards, me and my parents especially, and hates and envies athlete types, and he'll be surrounded by them all around. Not to mention I'm sure my dad has been planning pranks galore to pay them back for their treatment of me. They're going to be absolutely miserable for a while at least. Couldn't have happened to nicer people." he concluded cheerfully.

Hermione frowned at Harry, certain he wasn't as okay as he insisted. She was making tentative plans to corner and interrogate him until he spilled his guts later, but Daphne's cool arctic gaze seemed to divine her intentions and warn of hell to pay if she went through with them. Hermione huffed a bit, but Daphne just glared a bit harder, before tightening her possessive grip on Harry's arm rather pointedly.

Hermione seemed ready to make an issue of it, but she caught Ron's knock it off you barmy bint look as well as Luna, Neville and Hannah's just let it go look and finally subsided and sulked a bit. If Harry noticed any of the byplay he made no sign of it. He just gazed out the window at the passing scenery and rubbed his thumb over the back of Daphne's hand.

"Bloody hell. Look at Snape. Do you think he's possessed or something?" Ron whispered fearfully. Everyone else immediately craned their heads around to look. Snape's hair seemed to be less greasy than normal. He also seemed surprisingly relaxed and cheerful.

"You don't think he's planning to blow up Hogwarts and kill us all, do you?" Neville wondered, voice shaking. "I can't think of anything else that would make him that happy."

"I think he got laid." Seamus decided. "Probably a first for him too."

"Who would be brave enough?" Neville demanded, horrified.

"Must be someone fits the bill…and you know what they say about blokes with big noses…"

"What do they say?" Ron wondered.

"Probably the same thing they supposedly say about men with big feet. Or big ears. What is it with men? Somehow it always ends up coming back to that…" Hermione huffed, rolling her eyes.

"I've got big feet and big ears. My nose ain't big, but it is pretty long I've been told. What do they say?" Ron asked.

"Don't worry about it Won-Won…just know that it's all true." Lavender said a bit smugly.

"Must you?" Parvati asked waspishly "I am trying to eat here."
Dean, Seamus and Neville all gaped at Ron in astonishment.

"No way." all three insisted.

"I'm with Parvati. I'd rather not discuss Ron's willy while I'm trying to eat." Harry complained.

Ron's face went scarlet. Parvati groaned and pushed her plate away.

"Remus looks a bit down." Hermione noted, hoping to change the subject.

"Well I'm sure you saw Rasalas and Nymphadora making eyes at each other at the party." Harry pointed out.

"They seemed to hit it off, but that doesn't mean she's going to run off with him."

"I know that, the question is does Remus? If he goes all passive aggressive and suspicious on her he might end up driving her off even if she's not actually inclined to go."

"That would be so sad. They're so good together." Lavender said mournfully.

"Are they? No, that's a serious question." Harry insisted when the girls looked offended on Remus' behalf. "I mean, they don't seem to have much in common. I haven't really been around them all that much as a couple, so I don't know if there's something I haven't seen."

"Well…it's true. They don't actually seem to have much in common, but they seemed happy enough together and surely that's enough."

"Enough for dating. How would it work long term? If they're different enough, that might not be enough to keep them together even if they want it to."

"Listen to you. Mr. relationship expert after one girlfriend." Dean laughed.

"I waited till I was good and ready to head in to the dating pool. I used a lot of friend time before that to evaluate what it was I wanted and what I was looking for."

"And what are you looking for?" Hermione demanded.

"My own Sigyn, pretty much."

"And is Daphne that girl?"

"Results are still inconclusive. She's passed a lot of the tests already. I guess we'll see."

"Tests? That's so…cold and cynical!" Hermione protested.

"You think she hasn't been doing the same to me?" Harry laughed. "In this world, marriage isn't just some words you say. When they say till death do you part, they really mean it. I don't want to rush into things with someone that, however much I might personally like them or find them attractive or whatever, is otherwise completely unsuitable to be the person I share the rest of my life with. She doesn't either."

"Do you even like her or are you just compiling a check list?"

"Of course I like her. I'm crazy about her. Why wouldn't I be? That's kind of a necessary prerequisite in my books. Why do you have such a problem with this? That's what dating is: trying on different people till you find the one that fits. We already know we like each other, it's all the rest we're still
"Poor bastard. Why're they pulling him out anyway?"

"Pierce was getting suspicious about things, has been for a while. His loyal HYDRA agents have been getting killed off at an alarming rate on missions, all of HYDRA seems to be in revolt against him… For a long time he seemed convinced it was just other HYDRA folks trying to get where he was and put their own people in place so they'd be secure when they took over. Now he knows otherwise. Team Peggy was seen together by someone with Pierce's ear."

"Who?"

"Obadiah Stane."

"The guy running Stark Industries?"

"Yes. He's part of the Ten Rings, which is ultimately HYDRA. He's been funneling Stark tech to terrorists, selling stuff on the black market, doctoring the books and skimming off the top. He's been getting nervous because of the ongoing HYDRA war, and decided to step up once he realized Tony Stark either was or would soon be on to him. He told Pierce, who was already sweating because of the whole Dursley business. His people haven't found the souvenirs or the hidden files, and he doesn't know who has them or what's on them and whether or not it will implicate him. Now that he realizes Peggy and company are on to him and probably always have been, he's decided to go for broke and hope this fellow gets them before they have a chance to tell anyone else. He's certain that once he's gotten them all out of the way he can just re-secure SHIELD and go back to business as usual."

"And we're here to interfere with that?"

"Of course. Things are getting down to the wire now. The more chaos we can swing their way the better…and ultimately, we don't want HYDRA to win. SHIELD isn't much better, but it is the lesser of two evils. Beyond even that, this poor fellow deserves a break. It always bothered me that we just left him here…but it would have caused too many problems if we'd just tried to make him vanish. We've been given the go-ahead to intervene somewhat now, so I'll take what I can get."

"Looks like they're getting ready to prep him."

"You know what to do."

As the techs got their machinery into place, one of watching Unspeakables cast spells to block most of the effects, while the other apologized silently and hit him with a pain curse so he would still react properly.

When the man sagged back into his seat, panting, the techs kept a wary eye on him. He seemed docile and blank-eyed enough that they deemed their procedure effective.

"The Asset is primed, sir."

Said Asset hooded his eyes, so none of the techs saw the wary confusion, or the angry watchfulness in his gaze, but the Unspeakables saw it and smiled.
Their smiles died when a series of words were read off, one after another, and the confusion and watchfulness vanished, leaving only a blank and ready gaze that promised death.

"Can't we fix this?"

"Too complicated to do at a distance. What we did was hard enough. That stuff's embedded too deeply. It won't matter long term. He wasn't properly primed, so his memory will come back and he'll be able to throw it off at some point. We made sure the others got the files, though they've not looked at them yet. When they do, they'll understand he needs careful handling. Hopefully they'll contact that nosy bald guy to poke at his brain and remove his triggers at some point. We've done all we could. The rest is up to them."
"What are you two doing?" Neville asked curiously as he sat down.

"Continuing our epic quest to make Alchemical gibberish more relatable." Harry answered absently.

Hermione decided to explain further. "Some of the substances described in alchemical texts are clearly known and understood, but a lot of them are still rather vague. That might just be here though. I'm rather curious now to have a long talk with someone who attended Uagadou academy. Alchemy and transformational magics are their specialties, and there's also an Egyptian center for alchemy…it's quite possible they already have charts like this. I mean, it's bad enough that alchemists of old used poetic terminology in place of commonly understood terms so they could keep their work secret, but they don't all use the same terminology consistently!"

"We should go visit one day." Harry nodded. "The place in Egypt. We probably wouldn't be allowed to just wander around a school."

"We should. We could make a class field trip of it! That could be amazing. I wonder how many would go? Do you think Dumbledore would go with us?"

"He probably would. Wouldn't hurt to ask."

"So it's not just me that gets a headache going through the old alchemists journals?" Neville said with some relief. "I was kind of wondering about that. I do fine so long as we're in class, but once I try to do homework I end up just sitting there like a lump, turning my book sideways and upside down to see if it makes more sense that way."

"Sadly enough, sometimes that works." Harry laughed. "We've got the periodic table of the elements all worked out, including the elements muggles still don't know about but wizards do. We're still working on some of the less common terms and cross-referencing to see what other folks think they mean."

Harry dug out a large color-coded chart filled with small, neat handwriting--obviously Hermione's work--and made a copy of it for him. "It will help a lot, believe me. In fact…you're plant guy…some of these we think are referring to plants. We've been spending a lot of time trolling through plant encyclopedias looking for things we think might match, but you might have more luck with it if you want to give it a try."

"I'll give it a whirl, but I'm not promising anything."

Hermione smiled at him and flipped through the rather thick notebook she had with her that seemed to be filled with pages upon pages of densely-written notes, diagrams and lists. She made a copy of a couple of the pages and handed them over.

His eyebrows climbed into his hairline as he looked over what was written. Each page was filled front and back with writing. She had the term or phrase they were looking for, cross-reference with other terms she thought might be the same thing under a different name and why, a listing of works consulted with notes on what contemporaries of the author thought it meant, what modern writers thought it meant, what qualities the item would need to possess, a list of possibilities they'd considered and why it had been eliminated, and notes on people who claimed to have made something using the named term and whether they were successful, or left any hints as to what it might be. It made his head hurt just imagining the sheer amount of research that had to have gone in
to every single entry.

Neville laughed to himself. He didn't know why he was surprised; everyone knew when it came to her education and to schoolwork that Hermione Granger didn't play around. He looked up when Harry suddenly sat up straight and copied a page from the book he was reading. He circled several things on the copy, drew red arrows and exclamation points next to others and wrote a big sloppy note across the rest, then folded it up into a crane and sent it winging across the room to fly smack dab into Draco Malfoy's forehead. Draco glared at him, but Harry was already looking through another book and taking notes.

"What was that all about?"

"Huh? Oh, I found something that might answer a question we had about the alloys with potions in them. He's taken over poking at them, so…"

"Ah." Neville nodded. He noted Malfoy had wandered off, muttering to himself, note in hand.

"Have you been working on anything new lately?" Neville wondered.

"Couple of things. I've been playing with my vibranium, and have found some useful stuff, but I'm not sure it's a good idea for general consumption…I'll have to work on it more. I'm also working on a solar-powered hot tub for my place when I move. I got it to gather and store solar energy, I've gotten it to convert it to magical energy, but I haven't managed to get it to regulate properly yet. It'd be pretty embarrassing to die because I cooked myself in my hot tub, right?"

"Only you, Harry. Why add in the solar power at all though? Why not just charm it up?"

"Well, charms and transfigurations break down over time, right? Well, the sun's just out there, pumping out all this free energy, and I was thinking, why not take advantage of it, right? So, convert it to energy that the charms and transfigurations can use to keep themselves going strong. I was also thinking it could be a good back-up power source for wards and stuff. You know, have them anchored like normal, but if someone comes by to bust them down, the solar back-up kicks in and pumps them up to the max, so you have time to call the aurors and have them waiting if they manage to get through, or just have them show up outside to get whoever it is while they're still trying to batter down the wards. I'm sure I could find other uses. We already have a solar-powered oven that gets used in the mining operations during processing."

"Huh. Cool."

Harry just smiled and nodded.

"Let's see what we've got today. Leviathan, huh? HYDRA makes sea monsters? Inquiring minds want to know." Tony Stark laughed to himself as he poked through the latest batch of files the folks at SHIELD had sent along. "Anything of interest there, JARVIS?"

"I found something about your father, I believe, sir."

"Dad? Bring it up." Tony said in interest.

He frowned in confusion as a slightly grainy black and white video showing an empty stretch of road began to play.
"Mr. Stark? I have some papers Mr. Stane sent over that need your… Mr. Stark?" Pepper said carefully as she slowly walked closer.

She could see Tony's face clearly, but not what was on the screen that had put that look on his face. His face was bloodless and pale as a ghost, and his eyes glassy and too large for his face.

"No… NO! MOM! DAD… STOP…NO! BASTARD!" Tony suddenly screamed in anguish, stumbling out of his seat and tearing at his hair.

Pepper hurried around the desk and watched in horror as the video replayed from the beginning. She covered her mouth and her eyes filled with tears as she saw Howard Stark and his wife forced off the road and drug from their crashed car, only to be beaten to death by a young, scruffy man with a metal arm and dead eyes. With shaking hands, she reached for the mouse and closed the video down.

"Mr. Stark?" she asked carefully, moving closer to Tony, who was crouched down on the ground, pulling at his hair as tears rolled down his face unheeded. She reached towards him slowly and rested a hand on his shaking shoulder. Tony let out a whine like a wounded animal.

"Anthony?"

"We're in here Ms. Carter!"

Peggy rounded the corner, a smile on her face, which quickly died when she took in the sight of the two of them.

"Good lord! What's happened?"

Tony was staring into the middle distance, and didn't seem to quite be registering the world around him. Pepper looked at him helplessly and then turned to Peggy, her eyes still shiny with tears.

"Mr. Stark's parents didn't die in a car crash. They were murdered. There was a video." she explained.

Peggy gasped and leaned against the doorway for a moment in horror for the fate of her old friend and his wife, before steeling herself to comfort their son.

Peggy sat back and rubbed her eyes tiredly, feeling exhausted and sick at heart. She'd stayed with Tony until he'd drunk himself into a stupor. He was currently passed out on the couch with a blanket tucked over him. Once he was settled, she'd gone back to look through the rest of the files to see what other horrors might be lying in wait. There were plenty.

"Good lord. How am I supposed to tell Steve about any of this?" she asked herself quietly.

"Tell me about what?"

Peggy froze and then slowly turned around to see him standing there looking confused and somewhat worried.

"Did something happen? It's just…Tony's passed out and smells like a brewery. Pepper looks spooked and you… you look like you just lost your best friend."

"Two years ago. Now…I feel rather like I've lost him all over again." she admitted, before steeling herself to tell him the rest.
"Steve… Sergeant Barnes didn't die that day on the train."

"He fell a hundred feet at least. Probably a few hundred."

"He was given something before you rescued him and the others the first time. It allowed him to survive…though he did lose one of his arms."

A fragile, terrible hope began to break across Steve's face.

"Are you telling me Bucky is still alive?" The smile that had started to form died a quick death when Peggy's face creased in anguish.

"The man who was Sergeant Barnes still lives but… I don't know that it's really him anymore. He… He was recaptured after his fall. The Russian equivalent to the SSR, which seems to have just become HYDRA post war… They called themselves Leviathan. They recaptured him and healed him, but we were never told they had him, even though they were our allies at the time. He ended up in the hands of the HYDRA infiltrators it seems. They continued to experiment on him. They brainwashed him, Steve. They completely over-wrote his personality and stripped him of his humanity until all that was left was 'the asset'. They made him their weapon. He's kept on ice except when they have a mission…an assassination, really--for him. He's wiped clean each time he wakes, so all that's left is his programming. He's let out long enough to complete his mission, then he's frozen until they need him again. They've used him to shape the century. The Winter Soldier is what we in the community called him. He was believed to be a myth. So many assassinations over so many decades that seemed to have been done by the same hand. No one really believed it was the same man, of course…except it was. You know" she laughed bitterly "Part of me always wondered why Howard always got authorization to use SHIELD personnel and equipment to search for you decade after decade. They knew! They knew you were still alive, because he was! That's why they allowed it. All this time they've had him and they've done terrible things to him, Steve. Anthony is out there right now smelling like a brewery because one of the targets of the Winter Soldier was Howard and his wife. They filmed it and kept it on file. Anthony saw it. Howard recognized him. He said "Sergeant Barnes?" Right before he was beaten to death, along with his wife, Maria. It seems Howard thought he'd rediscovered the super soldier serum, so they killed him. They used it on four more of their operatives, but they were unstable. They were violent and couldn't be controlled. They only planned to let them out if no one cared how big a mess was made. The recommendation was to continue using 'the asset' for everything else."

Steve sank down on to the nearest seat, all strength gone from his legs, reeling from both shock and horror. However, through it all, underneath was a slowly growing feeling of hope.

Bucky was alive. All the rest was just details.

"Careful there. We cannot risk any rupture of the expanded space. All the water will run out and all the merfolk counting on us to see them safely to the other side might die before we can get them safely into the new ocean. Be very, very careful. The weight of all the water in there means a jolt that wouldn't normally be a problem could be."

"We know, chief, we're keeping watch."

"Are we ready? Are the shields powered up? This is going to be a lengthy transfer. I don't want to risk being interrupted."

"Shields are at max, we're good to go."
"Shame we're here. This area is just getting over the last set of storms."

"Can't be helped. Even with shielding, two planets interacting with one another has widespread effects, even if the interactions are being funneled through the gateway. The storms would have been far worse had we not been taking care to lessen the effects."

"Remember, remove the outer casing once they're submerged, but leave the inner bubble intact, but permeable to oxygen from the surrounding waters. We want the water in the bubble to gradually match the temperature of the surrounding ocean so they don't go into shock. Remind the receiving team not to breach the bubbles until then!"

"Will do!"

"All systems are go! Move out!"

What followed was a strange parade of containers, guided by witches and wizards under the effects of gilly-weed, slowly trundling out of the ocean and bobbing in a long line towards the open gateway, while the gill-bearing guides disappeared down below again and again to retrieve more containers.

One of the Unspeakables watching over the gateway was alerted to an incoming message. She signalled her co-worker that she was stepping away for a moment. She flipped open the compact that was buzzing around in her pocket and addressed the fellow whose worried face was in the mirror rather than her own reflection.

"Cole? What is it? We're mid-transfer! This better be important."

"Can you divert anyone? We just got a containment breach alarm from St. Mungo's"

"No. Most of the folks here are stuck in gills till the gilly-weed wears off, and beyond that, all the mer-folk might end up suffocating in their pods if we delay too long. There has to be hitwizards sitting around waiting for something to do. Send them."

"They can contain the maniacs shooting up the anchor point, but none of them have any idea how to contain the hospital itself!"

"So call Hogwarts and get Flitwick."

"You know you can only call the headmaster's office, and it usually takes a while to get a message anywhere!"

"Call Explorer's Inc. Ask them to send some of their enchanters. Tell them what the problem is. I'm sure you'll get plenty of volunteers, just move before we lose it!"

"Right!"

Bode raised an eyebrow in question when Skeeter rejoined him. "Problem?"

"Containment breach alarm at St. Mungo's. Someone's shooting up the place."

Bode cursed worriedly and looked at the long line of containers that were slowly oozing up out of the ocean and trundling towards the gate.

"Damn HYDRA anyway! Another week or so and we'd have been sending them across!"

"I know. I just hope Cole gets help in time. That's all we need, a bunch of sick and injured wizards
"Don't worry about remaining unseen! We need to save St. Mungo's and everyone in it from being massacred by those damned muggles! Just go in and mow down every gun-toting sonofabitch you see with extreme prejudice! MOVE! MOVE! MOVE!"

Both SHIELD's STRIKE team, and the HYDRA agents that were trying to fend them off, froze for a moment when the sound of a hundred firecrackers going off at once seemed to fill the air around them. Well-trained or not, all of them hesitated for a critical moment when what appeared to be several-dozen pissed off looking men and women in black hide bodysuits that looked to be made from some sort of very large snake or lizard suddenly appeared out of nowhere all around them.

The world was suddenly filled with colored lights, guns were torn from the hands holding them and either disappeared or turned into birds and flew away. Men and women fell to the ground unconscious one after another. Those left scrambled over one another, trying to escape and getting in one another's way, making them easy pickings for the new arrivals. Agent Coulson heard more cracks and saw several people in long robes appear just outside the edge of the conflict. They ignored HYDRA, SHIELD and the newcomers equally, though the newcomers moved to shield them from any return fire. He moved just a little too slowly and was impacted by one of the colored lights. As he tumbled to the ground, his last thoughts were "Why are they so interested in a dirty old shop window…and what's with the sticks?"

"They must've called for back-up! We've got incoming!"
"Inside. Get any of the vermin that tried to scurry away and hold the building till the retrieval team is done. GO!"

The hitwizards vanished into the depths of the building, checking for human presences.
"Downstairs is clear. We've got eighteen humans on the upper floor though."
"Proceed carefully. You and you, I want you at the windows. You two, cover the door. Keep an eye out in case they decide to blow the place."
"Ah crap! Chief, get the retrieval team in here! I found the containment breach! We've got half of pediatrics already spilled out onto the floor, and more keep tumbling out!"
"Are you clear of any hostiles?"
"Yes sir. One of the healers took care of the folks that climbed inside. She found them prodding at a comatose child and didn't take it well. Bits of them are smeared on the wall up here."
"Good for her. Retrieval team incoming."
"Tell them to make it quick. Another ward just started falling out!"

Tom, Fleur, Barty, Sirius and Penny darted past and up the stairs at a run as soon as they were given the all-clear, wands at the ready.
"The welcoming party's here, chief. They've got a small army with very big guns all pointed our way."

"Reinforce windows and ward the walls. Quick now. We have to give the folks upstairs time to work. Are they watching the back?"

"Creeping around that way as we speak."

"You four go guard our rear. The rest of you, get out there and get behind them, front and back. You two get by any upstairs windows and cover them."

"Sir, yes, sir!"

"Remember, no mercy!"

"Don't know the meaning of the word, sir!"

"That's what I like to hear! Move out!"

Loki stepped out of thin air onto the roof of a nearby building. He had a finely honed sense for when any of his children--born to him or claimed--was in danger. It made him rather peevish. He looked around and realized they were at the anchor point for St. Mungo's, which had already been breached and was slowly unravelling. There was a heap of unconscious people scattered across the street below, and a whole lot more that were awake and pointing a variety of very large guns at the place.

"Oh my. Endanger my children and all bets are off." Loki tsked, smiling gleefully. "It has been a while since I last let loose. Sorry, mortals. You brought this on yourselves."

The twitchy STRIKE team down below descended into chaos as their vehicles all turned into horses, tigers, bears, lions and pigs and scattered in all directions squealing, neighing and roaring as was their inclination. Their heavy-duty body armor vanished, leaving tutus, clown suits and ballgowns in their place.

The hitwizards were busy as well. All weapons within their reach disintegrated in their holder's hands, turned into birds and flew away, or turned into feral kittens and attacked the one holding them.

A trio of helicopters converged on their location, but they turned into giant albatross, who promptly turned around and headed out to sea, carrying the now confused and terrified passengers on their backs and blithely ignoring the screaming and clutching, as well as all attempts to turn them around or land.

Loki sensed the breach stabilizing, and felt the wizards vanish one by one. He smiled one last time at his handiwork and disappeared once more between one step and the next.

Charles Xavier sat, eyes closed, scanning the world with his mind. He felt a large number of the 'presences' he'd long been searching for appear en masse on the other side of the world, and it piqued his interest. He adjusted CEREBRO's controls slightly, allowing him to focus the full, and greatly enhanced, power of his mind on the far distant location. As always, he was unable to grasp hold of the presences directly. He concentrated on skimming through the minds of the surrounding humans and watching through their eyes.
"Wands…robes…armor made of a large reptile. Dragons? There are always stories of dragons in old children's tales of wizards."

The wizards, as he'd dubbed them, were making short work of the humans. He flitted from mind to mind, sometimes barely a step ahead of encroaching unconsciousness.

"What is this? Most of these minds are confused…frightened… Why such glee in the midst of a fire fight? Where are you?"

His search brought him to a man nearby, who was watching his comrade through what seemed to be a tear in space. His comrade straightened after climbing through the breach and looked around, licking his lips greedily. Xavier reached for the other man's mind. It was a stretch, as he was not in quite the same space as the rest of them were. He wanted to see what had excited such glee in men like those.

He managed to latch on to the man's mind for just an instant, and see what he saw, just as a door at the far end of the new space opened up, and a kindly-faced woman in a long green robe, with a caduceus badge on one shoulder came in and froze at the sight of him. He felt the man begin to reach for the gun at his side, but she was faster, as well as furious and puffed up like a mama bear protecting her cubs. Charles withdrew from the man's mind as he was sent flying back through the breach. He popped back to the second man's mind in time to see the first impact the wall and slide down, glassy eyed and leaving a wide trail of blood smeared upon the wall. He pulled free of his newest host moments before he met a similar fate. The last sight he saw was the woman cushioning her charges as the lot of them tumbled free into the dusty store room as the breach widened and spewed them forth.

"No wonder they appeared so suddenly, so furiously and with no care for their usual stealth and swiftness. A hospital, filled with sick and vulnerable children. What else could arouse the protective ire of a people so secretive --enough to make them abandon their usual tactics? Only something precious and dear--and what could be more precious and dear than the children?"

"Pierce here."

"We've lost the asset."

Had the fellow on the other end of the phone been able to see Pierce's face at the moment, he likely would have dropped the phone and ran for the hills.

"What do you mean you lost it?"

"We lost contact with its handlers en route to the mission. We sent the back-up team to investigate. It killed them all and took all the weapons it could carry. We set up a wide-area cordon, but it's been twenty-four hours. It's gone to ground somewhere, sir."

"Why am I just hearing about this now?"

"We were confident we could re-acquire the asset and recalibrate in time for the mission."

"You obviously thought wrong. Find it. NOW."

"Yes, sir."

Pierce dropped the phone back in its cradle and sunk back into his seat.
"It's her fault. All of it. Uppity old bitch."

Pierce's eyes narrowed in hatred. He had worked too long and too hard to get where he was today. He would be damned if one shriveled up old grandma who should have been put to pasture years ago was going to ruin it for him.

One way or another, Peggy Carter was going to die. Winter Soldier or no Winter Soldier.
"Nice arm."

The man being addressed stiffened and looked to the speaker with dead, wary eyes. His gaze flitted over him, cataloguing everything automatically. He frowned in confusion for a moment before speaking. His voice was soft, tentative even, and rather out of keeping with his otherwise fierce, militaristic demeanor.

"Lucky Jim?"

The first man stepped closer, though slowly and unthreateningly. Though he was calm at the moment, he could tell the other man was poised to destroy everything in his path should he feel it necessary. He had an instinct for these things.

"So I've been told. I don't actually remember that. I know your face, even if I don't know you. It was in files I was given that were supposed to tell me about some of my past, a small part of it at least. You might know the fellow that gave them to me. Steve Rogers."

"Steve," the man repeated, his brow creasing, though out of pain or confusion he couldn't tell. "I remember Steve."

"Where're ya headed, kid?"

"Brooklyn."

"Yeah? Why's that?"

"It's home." His hands twitched in unease and he corrected himself. "I think it's home. Used to be. Maybe."

"What happened to you kid? Do you know?"

The man's restless gaze darted around, looking for threats. He was poised and ready--though if he'd choose fight or flight, he didn't know.

"They hurt me." he said quietly. "Those men. I don't… They took it away."

"Took what away?" he asked quietly.

"Everything. Everyone. Steve. They took me away. All that was left was the cold."

His gaze sharpened once more and he looked at him measuringly. His eyes dropped to his hands and creased in thought.

"You were in the paper. You fight HYDRA. But you're different."

"Ah. You mean these?"

Long adamantine claws erupted from the knuckles on each hand. He scraped them together, spilling sparks onto the floor of the alley they were stopped in, and made a ringing 'SHING' that echoed
across the walls.

"I don't remember being Lucky Jim. They call me Wolverine these days. Logan to my friends."

"I think I had a name once." the other man said quietly.

"You did. Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes. Folks called you Bucky. According to Steve, anyway."

"Bucky." he repeated. "I don't remember Bucky."

"Don't sweat it kid. I can't remember anything past the day I woke up in a pile of rubble. I get by alright. Just take it a day at a time. Do you know who had you?"

"Men. Bad men. Maybe HYDRA. I don't... They took everything away."

"Probably. From what I'm told it was some asshole from HYDRA did me too. I've been hunting. Following the stink of those rats back to their lairs and cleaning house. Wanna come along? You look like you could kick some serious ass if you wanted to."

The warm, wary confusion in his gaze seeped away until all that was left was cold, implacable death.

"Yes. Let's go hunting."

Wolverine grinned around his smelly cigar. The Winter Soldier gazed calmly back.

Nicholas Fury stalked into the STRIKE base that had become impromptu headquarters after what was quickly dubbed "the day weird shit happened that we're just not gonna talk about anymore", pissed off, frustrated, and looking for answers.

"YOU. Tell me what's going on." he barked at the first person of rank he came across.

"We're still not sure, sir. The hazmat team has been over the premises. They said there are no traces of any gases, liquids or solids with any hallucinogenic properties. The eggheads went over the place too, ran every test they know how to run, but they can't find anything either. Word is we've got photographic evidence of the weirdness, which would seem to suggest it actually happened."

Fury frowned. He didn't like things he couldn't explain, but he moved past that to focus on essentials.

"How many did we lose?"

"Two. Not ours. HYDRA. Everyone else was just knocked out."

"I was told there were bodies stacked two high all over the street."

"There were. They were just knocked out. The only dead guys were inside on the upper floor in a storeroom. We're not sure why they were killed."

"Anything odd about the place?"

"Well, sir, some of the storage crates were drug out to the center of the floor and stacked up like
stairs. You could see the trails in the dust where they were moved. The eggheads said they couldn't find anything, so I can't tell you more than that…. Oh, wait. They weren't shot. They seemed to be sliced up. Both men had guns, but they hadn't been fired. No defensive wounds, just deep slices on their necks and torsos. They probably bled out pretty quickly."

"The helicopter crews?"

"The albatross landed on Sealand and reverted to helicopters. The folks there saw what happened and offered them some brandy. They got soused and called it in."

Fury sighed and rubbed his face. It was against regulation, but he found he couldn't fault them.

"What else?"

"The, uh, vehicles that turned into animals and ran off were tracked to an empty field on the edge of town. The vehicles were found stacked on top of each other."

Fury grimaced and grit his teeth.

"Anything else?"

"The, um, guns that flew away were found piled up on top of a high-rise a few blocks away. The feral kittens were found wherever they were when they reverted."

"How are the teams that were affected?"

"Uh well…most aren't dealing well, sir. We don't usually deal with um, stuff like this. Need someone shot? We're your guys. We prefer the weird stuff be left for the eggheads."

"Anyone that was on site I can get a coherent report from?"

"Coulson is here. He's pretty unflappable."

"Point me to him."

"Agent Coulson."

"Commander Fury."

"Report."

Coulson told him what he could, up to the moment he was knocked out. Fury told him what he'd gotten from the STRIKE agent.

"Thoughts?" Fury asked curiously.

"I was surprised to wake up. At the time I was certain I was dead." Coulson mused as he leaned against the wall and stared out into the distance. "They all appeared so suddenly and they were angry and focused. They just mowed both our groups down indiscriminately. Looking back now, I realize I was mistaken. They didn't care about us, except that we were in their way. There was something in the building they were desperate to protect. The other group that showed up after the first—they didn't even pay attention to any of us. It was like we were beyond their notice. All they cared about was the
dirty window and the mannequin. Whatever they found there upset them. The dead men in the upper floor seems to add credence to it. Whatever it was they were after, they killed to protect. The rest of us were just brushed aside so they could get to whatever it was."

"I don't like this. A third faction with strange powers and teleportation on top of it. Who are they? What do they want? Why haven't we seen any sign of them before this?"

"We don't know that we haven't. Don't forget Tony's portal-making alien baby godling." Coulson pointed out. "Speaking of which...has anyone found kid Dursley yet?"

"Disappeared into thin air. No sign of him. They lost the trail at the creek in the woods nearby."

"What about the cousin?"

"Off at school, so says his watchers, going to class and doing homework."

"No signs of distress?"

"Cool as a cucumber."

"That seems odd, doesn't it? He was reportedly on the phone with kid Dursley when everything went down, was worried enough to call the police to the scene. Aunt and Uncle are dead and the cousin vanished into the thin air and he doesn't care?"

"People deal with things differently. He might be a work till he forgets type."

"Could be."

"We don't have eyes on him 24-7, he's not high priority. Could be he's sulking when no one's looking."

"Perhaps." Coulson agreed. "You realize our techs might not have been able to find anything because there's no longer anything to find?"

"Considered it, yeah. These people, whoever they are, must realize we're going to keep looking and keep poking until we get the answers we want. We can't have a bunch of weirdos like this just popping around wherever they please, turning stuff into other stuff, interfering with our investigations, killing people and just walking away. I won't stand for it."

"None of us will. We'll find them. It might take us a while, but we'll find them."

"And when we do, they will submit, or they will be eliminated. There's no place in our world for freaks and weirdos who think they can just do whatever the hell they want, whenever they want to."

Coulson just nodded. The day's events had shaken them both badly. The mutants, weird as they were, had nothing on these guys, and they were quite bad enough.

"This is Carl."
"J. Jonah Jameson here. Kolchak, have I got a scoop for you. Sorry I ever doubted you, friend, water under the bridge, all in the past, and what have you…"

"What is this about?"

"I just heard from a friend of mine in the business. He was lucky to stumble across a recently raided HYDRA base before those thugs from SHIELD had a chance to clean house and hush everyone up. Bunch of scientist types, said their boss-man had a freak out, because "Weapon X" and "The Asset" had come calling. That freak with the big claws that's been running around with that other freak in the helmet is Weapon X."

"I'm listening."

"He was asking them what they'd done to his friend, another freak with a metal arm, "The Asset", I'm guessing. We've got a photograph, some of the old crowd think it's the Winter Soldier…who is also Bucky Barnes, tragic KIA from the Howling Commandos. I'm gathering the old crowd for poker night. Bring your old files and we'll talk."

"I'll be there."

"I thought you would be."

"We're all just going to go tumbling into the street…!"

"It's not that bad, dear, do calm down."

"I will not calm down! Muggle guns might just destroy all our homes and we'll all be murdered in our beds!"

"The Minister said it was a one in a million accident. It was contained, and all is well."

"The Minister's a damned liar! Sick children were tumbling out of the hole they made! Mad muggles were right there, ready to carry them off and do unspeakable things to them!"

"Arthur, dear, you really need to calm down."

"Why aren't you more upset, Molly?"

"Well, one of us has to keep a level head. You were already ranting when you came through the floo."

"Ah…yes. Well, you may have a point." Arthur agreed sheepishly.

"Have a seat dear. I'll get your dinner."

Arthur nodded and sunk into a chair while Molly bustled to the stove to start dishing up dinner for them both.

"Did you know before this that muggles could do this? Just ruin a magical place by breaking something?"
"No. It never came up. Most of the things I gathered as part of my job were small things, like tea sets. I was usually more concerned with getting it to stop biting the muggle's nose, obliterating them and getting away. None of them ever managed to break anything that I know of. I always had a rather light-hearted view of secrecy. I just figured we were protecting the poor dears from things they couldn't handle. I was never actually worried about coming to harm at the hands of a muggle. I was always solidly behind Albus when he said secrecy should end and we should rejoin our non-magical brothers."

He noted Molly's wrinkled nose and pursed lips.

"I'm aware I was something of a minority in this family. I was quite pleased when it looked as though Ron inherited my liking for muggle things. Now though…"

Molly joined him at the table and they both dug in. They were about halfway through their dinner when the Evening Prophet was delivered. Molly paid the owl and flipped it open huffing a bit at the front page headline: "NO NEED TO PANIC!"

"The Unspeakables seem to agree with the Minister that it was a one-in-a-million accident. Several bullets from their guns impacted a single area on the anchor point. Gunfire is usually spread out more, so the chances of them normally wasting bullets on something like a mannequin are very slim and not likely to be repeated. There were enough impacts that there was some damage to the anchor point which cause a chain reaction that made the space containment charms begin to slowly unravel." she read. "St. Mungo's was secured and moved to its place in the new world already. None of the patients, healers or visitors were injured or taken and all is well."

"I'm glad." Arthur sighed.

"There were a couple of muggles who were there when the breach happened. The healer in charge of the children's ward killed them both. Said she walked in and saw them standing over the children and leering, ready to carry them off and she just reacted. Thank goodness she did! Can you imagine! She's getting a commendation for Valor in Extreme Circumstances. Oh, that's nice."

"So what happens now? Do they say?"

"They said that St. Mungo's was always planned to be moved at the end of the week. All this business with the muggles just means it happened a bit earlier than planned. They warn everyone to stay in wizarding places and not venture into the muggle world at all for any reason. They're going to be emptying out the oceans of all the aquatic magicals for the rest of the week, and then they'll start sending the rest of us through after that. They say we should take the time to go over our properties and make sure anything we want to take with us is in our houses. We should be getting a notice sometime over the next few weeks letting us know when to be ready."

"It's hard to believe." Arthur laughed nervously. "All of us on a new world of our own, no more muggles. It's…"

"Exciting…a little scary. A bit sad. Earth is our home too. It looks like the muggles won in the end."
"It's alright. He's friendly…ish."

Bucky flicked a brief glance Wolverine's way and saw him still sitting quite relaxed and unconcerned, and went back to watching the fellow in the helmet slowly descending on them from the heavens, his red cape flaring around him like wings.

"Wolverine. I thought I recognized your work. Lovely bit of carnage, that."

"Magneto." Wolverine nodded. He kicked the cooler towards him. "Pull up a stump."

Magneto sniffed and fastidiously flicked bit of detritus from the log before taking a seat and fetching himself a beer from the cooler.

"Canadian?"

"What of it?" Wolverine demanded, suddenly hostile "I happen to like Canadian beer."

"Just remarking, dear boy, don't choke on a hairball"

"That's cats, you…!"

"Sergeant Barnes. Fancy meeting you here."

"Who the hell are you?"

"We only met quite briefly during the war. I was in one of the camps. I was quite a bit younger then. You're looking remarkably well-preserved for a supposedly dead war-hero."

"Preserved is right. Those HYDRA freaks have been keeping him in a freezer for years at a time." Wolverine snarled.

"I see." Magneto sighed. "Once again humanity shows there are no depths to which it will not sink. How typical."

"Fucking HYDRA." Bucky agreed. Wolverine just snarled and got himself another beer.

"So…you found where he was stashed?"

"Nah. According to the Prof some wizards messed with the stuff that was supposed to fry his brain, though they tortured him so the HYDRA freaks wouldn't notice it didn't work. They were there intangibly or some shit. Said he'd noticed what was going on 'cause he sensed some of his 'fuzzy headed mysteries' and looked to see why they were there."

"Always meddling. I told him… They obviously just want to be left alone." Magneto huffed. "Wizards though? Solved the mystery did he?"

"Not then. A whole bunch of them suddenly appeared in England and knocked out a whole SHIELD team and the HYDRA goons they were fighting."

"I had heard rumors of strange goings-on. Does he know why they suddenly decided to show themselves so openly? They've kept rather a low profile up until now."

"There was a hospital hidden there in some folded space or some shit. It got disrupted and sick kids were tumbling out. Some HYDRA goons found the tear and climbed in to look around, and were apparently acting like they'd found the end of the damned rainbow. Some doctor lady came in to check on the kids and saw the goons standing over them acting like major creeps and killed them
"Good for her…though it seems out of character for a healer of any sort."

"Don't creep on a kid when a dame's nearby. They don't like it." Bucky interjected quietly. "They'll nail your ass even if all they got is a frying pan."

Magneto chuckled quietly. "You must have known some rather remarkable women in your life." he chuckled a bit more and turned back to Wolverine. "So, he finally got a look at his mysteries, even after I told him to leave them be."

"Robes, magic wands, the whole shebang." Wolverine nodded. "All we can figure is they must be close enough to whatever their end game is that they don't care as much about hiding anymore. Wish I knew what it was. How do you fight someone that can turn your weapon into a feral kitten that'll maul your ass and run away?"

"Shoot them first." Bucky scoffed.

"I don't believe they're planning to fight anyone, or trying to take over the world, whatever SHIELD and HYDRA likely think. I believe they're in the process of leaving. That's why they were suddenly out in force all over the world and then seemingly vanished until now. You might have noted the storms all over the world lately?"

"Yeah." Wolverine snorted "Storm's been PMSing for months now. She doesn't like it when people other than her mess with the weather."

"I've been noting strange deformations in the electro-magnetic field for some time now. I believe they're opening gateways to another planet. It has to be something that large to cause the disruptions I've felt. Thankfully it's never for very long at any one time, but it's happening all over the world and has been for some time now."

"And you didn't think to mention it to anyone?"

"Why would I?" Magneto scoffed. "They obviously want to be left to their own devices, and leave in peace. HYDRA would be out in force looking for them to exploit in some way, and honestly SHIELD would as well. Neither group really has the best track record with anyone deemed even slightly out of the ordinary. I believe that those with powers should be free to live their lives as they please, use those powers and abilities they have at their own discretion, without having to constantly look over their shoulders in case condescending thugs with guns show up to throw their weight around and punish them for simply being as they are. Honestly, I think they might have the right idea. A war against humanity sounds all very well and good in theory, but not all mutants are created equal. There are not many like ourselves that can hold off the likes of SHIELD and force them to treat us as equals. I want no part of Charles' desire to live meekly and pretend we're ordinary powerless humans in the hopes they'll leave us be. It may be these wizards, or whatever they are, have the right idea. Maybe gathering everyone up and looking for a place of our own is the answer."

"Sign me up." Wolverine nodded. "I can't say I care for the Big Brother attitude that seems to be the thing around here." he admitted, draining the last of his beer and tossing the bottle into the cooler. "And you can't tell me all the evil crap HYDRA's been getting up to is just gonna disappear once SHIELD cleans house. They'll just gather it all up and have their people doing it…if they haven't already."

"Indeed." Magneto agreed heavily. "So…what are your plans now?"
"Was gonna take the Buckster here to see the Prof, see if he could jiggle some more of his memory loose."

"Hmm, were I you, I would probably give it time and see how much comes back on its own before taking such a step. You let him in there once and he takes it as permission to poke around whenever he pleases. He's one of my oldest and dearest friends…but I wear this helmet for a reason."

Bucky frowned, nonplussed. "I'll keep that in mind."

"It might still be the lesser of two evils. They've got some trigger sequence hidden in his brain that makes him psycho." Wolverine pointed out.

"Ah. In that case… I can give you the specs for my helmet if you like. Not till after Charles pokes around though. He'll immediately start looking for ways to counter it. Always meddling, that one, doesn't think anyone but him should have secrets, or a private brain. Maddening. Always has been."

"Status?"

"We just sent the last aquatics through, other than the scout teams who were doing a final sweep to double check for stragglers. We're not expecting any. The merfolk organized themselves pretty well, and have been doing regular roll-calls all through the process. Once we've gathered up the last of the scouts and send them through that should be that."

"Excellent. Good work everyone." Lovegood nodded, checking it off her list. "Once that's done with, the next step is all the quidditch stadiums."

"Why are they going through first?" Croaker asked in surprise.

"Are you kidding me? Gods help us all if we unduly impact the quidditch season. We'd have a riot on our hands. After that, the Ministry, then the villages, barring Hogsmeade, and individual homes and farms, Explorer's Inc--make sure you get the ship clear first. Once they're done, the Alleys, and other shopping districts. After that, the guild halls, the museums, concert halls, libraries and assorted extras. Hopefully by that point China will be making their final crossovers. Then will be the final sweep. Each country will be expected to call in their all clear. At that point, all the gateways will be dismantled and sent through, and the last will travel to Hogsmeade. We'll send them and the school through, dismantle the gateway, and the final exit team will do a quick sweep of the grounds and take the ship to join the rest of us."

"Gods willing." Bode said fervently.
"Gods willing." The rest of the Unspeakables echoed in unison.

"We have done good work here, people, of which we can be justly proud. This is the final stage. Should all go well, we'll be able to celebrate the birth of spring together on the new world. Be vigilant. The debacle with St. Mungo's was a setback, but it couldn't be helped. We know they don't have the capabilities of finding us just yet, but we also know they're like a dog with a bone when they want something. It would be just our luck that in a fit of frustrated desperation they make a sudden breakthrough just in time to make a mess of our final push, so don't take any chances. That
said, be careful, be thorough, don't cut any corners. We don't want to leave anyone or anything behind just because we got sloppy during the final push. Get some rest. We start bright and early again in the morning."

Chapter End Notes

We're getting close to the end here, though there's still a few more chapters to go, plus a brief epilogue.

Before anyone asks, no, SHIELD hasn't been spying on Hogwarts. They've been sending someone to check up on "Harry" at Grey Friars Academy. Sometimes "Harry" is an Auror doing their undercover training, sometimes someone just puts the watcher to sleep for a bit and alters their memories. The Unspeakables and the Aurors are both a bit irritated with SHIELD over the whole thing.

Night Stalker and J. Jonah Jameson won't be appearing again, it was just a glimpse of what's going on in the background while our heroes, SHIELD and HYDRA are running around. I'm sure the wizard rampage to save St. Mungo's will provide much fuel for future poker nights.
"Mr. Stark?"


"JARVIS was getting concerned. What have you been doing in here all this time?" Pepper suddenly stopped and stared at the metal monstrosity that was slowly being assembled on the far side of the room.

"What is that?"

"My mecha power suit." Tony mumbled around an exhausted yawn.

"Why are you making a mecha power suit? Is it a special order from the military?"

"No. It's for me. I'm going to go find that punk-ass with the metal arm and kill him."

Pepper sighed. "You need to eat something, drink some water and get some sleep. Promise me you won't go anywhere or do anything until we talk further."

"I don't make promises."

"Do it this time. There's some stuff you really need to see before you decide to go on a rampage. You might very well end up hating yourself if you don't. Promise me. Please."

Tony glared at her, bleary-eyed and let out a long-suffering sigh. "Fine. I won't go on a rampage until we talk further. Happy?"

"Yes. Get some sleep."

He almost threw out a mocking "Yes, mom" but after what he'd seen, he just couldn't do it. He just hoped he was exhausted enough to keep the nightmares away.

"Loki? What are you doing?" Thor asked curiously. He walked around until he stood behind him and saw him peering into what looked to be a window hanging in midair in front of him.

"Just checking in on my pet mortals to see how they fare." Loki replied absently. He would wave his hand across the image every so often and the view would change. Thor watched in interest as an entire village was swallowed up and disappeared into a large box, which was then loaded into a hovering conveyance. The groups of mortals that were nearby watching this began to disappear in groups one after the other.

"Who were they?"

"Mortal wizards and witches. Families that lived in the village called 'Calico'."

"Calico?"

"The rather…odd…woman who named the villages had a bizarre obsession with the color pink and
with cats. When the villages were built she named them all after cat breeds. The villagers wanted to rename it, but she had such a fit that their Minister forbade it rather than have to listen to her any longer. She has since gone to prison, but the villagers never renamed it as they wished, though the other villages were quick to do so once she was out of the way."

"I see." said Thor.

As the view changed, he saw other villages disappear into boxes and the villagers vanish. The view changed again, and now there were long lines of villagers hovering on strange stick-like conveyances with bristled backs. Pregnant women, the elderly and small children were being settled in rows on carpets lying on the grass. As each filled, it would rise and fly over to hover in line in front of the large arch waiting at the end of the field.

"Where are your children? Are they there?"

"No. Harry is at school." The view changed and showed Harry sitting in class, concentrating as he turned his seat mate's arm into that of an orangutan.

"Why is he turning that boy into a beast? Has he slighted him in some way?" Thor wondered.

"No. He's just practicing. That way if the boy ever does slight him he'll be ready to do something about it."

"I see." said Thor. "And the other?"

"He's newly wed. Best not to chance it." Loki laughed. Thor grinned and laughed as well.

Loki changed the view again and leaned in in interest. "Oh. What's this? What are the odds of them all crossing paths this way?"

"What base, treacherous warriors are these? To bend the full force of so many upon a helpless old woman?!" Thor thundered in dismay.

"Old woman she may be, but she still has a bit of fire in her yet. I'm rather fond of that one. She's tenacious and has a true warrior's heart."

Thor chortled in delight when the old woman, rather than panic or getting scared when set upon by many thugs trying to drive herself and her vehicle off the road, simply rolled her eyes, and started firing back.

"Ah, and look, a worthy knight has come to the distressed damsel's rescue." Loki pointed out. A motorcycle came racing onto the scene. The young man upon it somehow managing to keep it upright and headed in the right direction while firing a bow and arrow at the attacking thugs.

"A skilled warrior! He could well give Fandral a run for his money, and he was once famed upon Midgard when he wore the guise of Robin Hood, known far and wide as an acclaimed archer without peer in all the realms!"

"Indeed. He's very skilled. They call him the hawk or something, both for his keenness of eye and his tendency to always get his prey. It is impressive--all the moreso when one considers that he did not have the benefit of the number of years Fandral did to perfect the art."

"Quite. These mortals are curious beings. So puny and petty, with such brief lives, and yet they are surprisingly capable at times, are they not?"
"They are." Loki agreed. "We of Asgard see their brief span of years, note how backwards they are compared to the other realms of the nine and find it easy to disregard them. Strangely enough it is their fleeting lives that make them dangerous. They feel the weight of their own mortality from the moment they are born, and know, always, that they have but a brief time to do something meaningful with their lives. We ourselves have such a span of years that we simply cannot feel the same sense of urgency they do. We ignore that to our detriment, Thor." Loki said seriously.

Thor stared back, but then he grinned, guffawed and pounded him on the back.

"I will admit, you had me going for a moment there!"

"I was being serious!"

"You and your jests! You are far too skilled at twisting truth, brother!"

"Twas no jest, Thor!"

Thor just laughed some more and went back to watching.

Loki huffed in frustration and did so as well.

"Is that a man or a beast? Do Midgardians often have claws these days?"

"He is a mutant. He was also experimented on. My, this was a lucky accident, wasn't it? It must nearly be time for the final act. All the players seem to be converging."

"Such strange Midgardian sorcery! Is that one a man or a construct like the Destroyer? Parts of him seem to be made of metal!"

"Just his arm. He lost it long ago in an accident."

"I did not realize they had artificers of such skill on Midgard."

"I think most of our people would be quite surprised at how much Midgard has changed since our people were last there."

"That warrior seems to have lost his weapon."

"His shield is his weapon. I begin to see the shape of it now. He must have been running all over searching for his shield brother once word began to spread he had been spotted. Meanwhile, the lost boys must have been heading towards his last known location. I guess the unstoppable Ms. Carter and her knight in bulging biceps just happened to cross their paths during their own battle against her would-be assassins. How fortuitous."

"Did you plan that?" Thor asked suspiciously.

"I might have nudged a bit here and there." Loki said innocently.

"Loki..." Thor said warningly.

"What? It's quite difficult to wrap up the play if half the actors are missing." Loki sniffed.

They watched a bit longer as two of the assailants were dragged out and threatened. They each made a phone call, then they and the rest of their comrades living and dead were trussed up and tossed in the back of a van. Cap, Bucky, Peggy, Wolverine, and Hawkeye went back to the wreck of her car. Bucky punched the trunk till it opened. Peggy dug out a box, dug around for a bit and handed them
each something.

"Oh, how delightful. They'll never see them coming." Loki chortled.

The all conferred and went their separate ways, looking ready for battle.

Nick Fury glanced up when an agent approached him with a clipboard in hand.

"You need to sign these, sir."

Nick looked over the top page, signed the bottom, flipped to the next and froze for a half a second before signing it as well. He handed the clipboard back and nodded to the agent, who nodded back.

He went back to what he was doing. An hour later he went and got some coffee, checked his phone for messages, and made a phone call.

"Hercules"

He drank some more coffee, refilled his mug, and went back to his post.

Hawkeye crept along the heating ducts with the ease of long practice. He slipped out of a grate high in the ceiling, above a series of criss-crossed metal grating. Sure-footed and swift, he found a good vantage point and settled in to wait. At twelve noon on the dot, Alexander Pierce ambled out of the Triskelion. He pressed the button on the device Peggy had given him and then got comfortable after checking that his arrows were within easy reach.

Wolverine ambled down the hallway, flicking his gaze at the people he passed and then back down to the high-tech Starkphone he'd been given.

"Excuse me! You can't smoke in here. Put that smelly thing out!"

Wolverine glanced up at him, back at his phone, back up at the man, who was now bristling indignantly at being ignored.

Wolverine tapped a corner of the screen and turned it to face the man. "Is that you?"

The man peered at the screen suspiciously.

"Yes. Why?"

"Yeah? Good." Wolverine said cheerfully. The man gurgled as he slid off his claws and fell to the floor, whimpering and thrashing in a quickly growing pool of blood. He glanced up when another agent came around the corner, froze at the sight of the carnage and started fumbling for his gun.

Wolverine tapped the phone, glanced at the pictures and grinned.

"Hey." he said cheerfully, mostly ignoring the bullet that had just torn through his arm (He was already healing. Small caliber. Pfh!) "Is this you?"
Agent May checked her pager when it beeped. She checked the message and went back to what she was doing, though she was a tiny bit more tense than she'd been a moment before. The other records clerks tensed and all looked towards the door at the sound of distant gunfire. Two were dead before the third was able to half draw his gun. He died moments later. May went to the door of the office and locked it and took up position to watch for any visitors...after replacing the three bullets she'd already used. She pulled her phone and made a call.

"Records room is clear."

Agent Coulson stepped out, closing the door behind him. He brushed some lint from his lapel and straightened his tie. As he began walking, he pulled his phone.

"Hangar B is clear."

He turned his head as a door ahead of him was suddenly flung open.

"Don't let him get away!"

Coulson shot him, stepped over his body, peeked in the door and kept walking.

"So is the Pit."

Captain America and the Winter Soldier strode into the STRIKE force briefing room. Cap shut the door behind him. The soldiers glanced up curiously. Cap smiled and sent his shield flying. It bounced back and forth, knocking HYDRA goons down like bowling pins. Bucky was already shooting, a gun in each hand, as he began striding further into the room, taking out a target on each side of himself with every step. Cap caught his shield, smashed a few guys in the face as he followed, and sent several bullets back at their shooters.

Cap pulled a phone. "STRIKE is..."

Bucky shot three that had been playing possum one after another.

"...down for the count."

Peggy clicked the phone off and put a red x through the STRIKEFORCE briefing room, and smiled.

Alexander Pierce strolled towards the Triskelion, hands in his pockets and whistling. He'd gotten confirmation just before lunch that Peggy Carter was dead and the Asset had been reacquired and was being prepped for service. His daily hotdog had been especially tasty that day.

His smile widened as he saw his old pal Nick Fury striding towards him with a trio of agents marching alongside him. He looked grimmer than usual.
"Hmm. I wonder if he's heard the good news already?"

"Alexander Pierce, you are under arrest." Fury said without preamble.

"No. I don't think so." Pierce said cheerfully.

"I do believe you are quite mistaken, Mr. Pierce." said the agent to Fury's right. He didn't recognize the agent herself...but that voice.

Pierce stiffened and the smile drained off his face. She smiled pulled the mask and wig off. The guise of the middle-aged agent tore away to become granny hag herself.

"Peggy Carter."

"I do not appreciate having people try to kill me, Mr. Pierce."

If Peggy Carter's appearance had thrown him, the guys with her chilled him far worse. One after the other their own disguises were torn away.

"You're not supposed to treat ladies like that." Bucky Barnes said flatly.

Captain America said nothing, but the grim fury on his face and the way he hovered protectively over Peggy's back, shoulder to shoulder with his old friend said far more than words ever could.

"You gonna come quietly, Pierce?" Fury asked curiously.

"Please don't." said Captain America.

"It's been kind of inspiring, watching the new planet take shape, hasn't it? You can hardly believe it's the same place we all were just this summer. I mean, just look at it!" Lavender gushed excitedly.

"Yeah, it's almost starting to look crowded." Ron agreed.

"I wouldn't go that far. Remember the seeing eyes are focused on places where there are people. I'm sure even if everyone spreads out quite a bit, there are still going to be huge empty tracks of land everywhere. Keep in mind, there are 50 million or so muggles in the United Kingdom. Last I heard, we had about half a million total."

"Might be getting close to the three quarter mark, if we add in Ireland and account for the recent baby boom." Dean added.

"It'll be nice to go to a quidditch game and not having to worry about muggles wandering around nearby wondering where all the noise is coming from. Even when they stick the stadiums out in empty spots with nothing around, there was always a couple of them. It kind of ruins the momentum of the game, you know?" Seamus mused.

"I'm gonna fly all over all summer. Go to the beach, visit everyone. It'll be great." Ron said dreamily.

"What the hell is that?" Neville suddenly laughed. Up on screen a line of battered wagons suddenly took flight and bobbed away off screen.

"Oh, hey, I know that guy driving the blue wagon there. Well, not like know him know him, I know
who he is. That's Stan Shunpike. He was one of the folks at the serum trials when me and Hermione went." Dean pointed.  

"Hermione and I." Hermione corrected absently. "It is, isn't it? Oh, yes…there's Lerleen. She was an…interesting person."  

"Interesting how?" Parvati wondered.  

"Well, when she got a look at herself post serum she let out a loud whoop, said she needed to get some of them 'fancy schmancy mini skirt robes' because there was no way she wasn't going to find herself a man now that she had, um, mondo titties." Hermione said reluctantly.  

The boys all cackled.  

"Stan was no better. When we all met up again he was all like "damn, Lerleen, them's some fine teats ya got now! I'll have you know I did not get left behind as I'm pretty sure my willy got bigger! We're gonna be having some fine times from here on out!"

The girls all groaned and the boys cackled again.  

"So when are we going?" Neville suddenly asked. "I have to admit it's making me a bit nervous that the whole world seems to be clearing out and we haven't heard yet."  

"We're apparently going last." Harry offered.  

"That's so unfair!"

"Well…Hogwarts is so big. They might have to make special arrangements." Lavender said thoughtfully.  

"We're also the most isolated and under the heaviest wards. They probably want to focus on the more vulnerable areas first." Hermione pointed out.  

"Especially after all that business with St. Mungo's." Neville said darkly.  

Neither he nor his gran had taken the near debacle at all well. It would have been beyond horrible if his parents had tumbled out into the middle of a SHIELD versus HYDRA gunfight just when they'd been offered the only hope they'd had in his lifetime that his parents might actually be able to leave the hospital one day. The Unspeakables had tentatively hypothesized that the serum might heal their bodies enough that they could function independently, and might be enough to bring them back to themselves somewhat. They had decided to put it off till they were in the new world, as there were so many other things to deal with first, both to allow those who were already functional first chance at the serum, and so they'd have the leisure to focus on their rehabilitation if things worked as they hoped.  

"In a way, it's really just as well we're going last. I mean, think about it, we're all stuck here till June regardless. It'll be kind of annoying, knowing we're in the new world and can't even go look around to see what everyone's doing." Dean decided.  

"That's true, isn't it?" Parvati agreed glumly.  

The kids all sighed.
Tony relaxed slightly as she gently ran her fingers through his hair and then patted him lightly on the shoulder.

"How are you?" she asked as she moved to take a seat nearby.

"Been better. I'm going to have to run Stark Inc. since dear old Obie was a traitor."

"They've arrested him then?"

"Two days ago. Where've you been? I haven't seen any of you for a while."

"Pierce cottoned on to our rebellion. We've been cleaning house. Pierce is currently awaiting trial as well."

"So, that's it? HYDRA is gone?"

"I highly doubt it, much as I would like to think otherwise. However, it's Nicholas' problem now. Between he, May and Coulson I'm sure the place will be in good hands."

"Where's your big blonde shadow?"

"He and Sergeant Barnes took a few days to see their old haunts in Brooklyn."

"Sergeant Psycho, I think you mean." Tony scoffed with distaste.

Peggy frowned, but her eyes were sympathetic. "He's been through a lot." she reminded him.

"I know, and that's the bitch of things, isn't it? He killed my parents, viciously, sadistically and without remorse. I saw it. I've had nightmares about it." he let out a broken laugh "and every time I try to build up a good head of steam about it...every time I'm this close " he held up his thumb and forefinger with a small space between them "to getting in the suit I built and tearing him limb from limb for daring..." He blinked eyes suddenly gone shiny and continued, voice hoarse "I see that asshole strapped to that chair and screaming, then just sitting there while those evil HYDRA freaks stand around and talk about him like he's not even human. It. They referred to the guy as "it"."

"I know." Peggy agreed quietly. "And sadly, Sergeant Barnes was not the only such horror story, and we still don't know for sure how many more hidden horror shows are out there that aren't in the records."

She smiled half-heartedly and tried to move them away from such heavy subjects.

"Been keeping up on your search for aliens and portal-making baby godlings?"

"Not lately." he admitted. "I've just been sort of wandering the halls like a ghost. Damned storms. I would have appreciated a nice walk on my lovely, private beachfront property, but the weather's been so miserable it didn't seem worth it."

"It has been an oddly stormy year. I know they've been wreaking havoc on SHIELD's operations all
this time. They keep putting off the launch of the helicarrier because of them."

"I want to be on the maiden voyage."

"You can come as my guest if you like. If Nicholas complains I'll just remind him that I'm not as young as I used to be and need a strong arm to help me along if we hit turbulence. If he still complains, Steve will give him his wounded puppy dog look…and if Sergeant Barnes agrees to join, he'll likely give him his much sadder wounded puppy face. I dare even Nicholas to hold up for long under such an assault." she laughed.

Tony grinned and found himself laughing as well.

"Hey, JARVIS old buddy, you got anything new on those searches I had you running?"

He and Peggy both blinked in shock at the number of windows that popped up.

"Wow. Looks like I picked a bad time to go off the grid for a few days." Tony laughed nervously.

"Lots of complaints about unseasonably stormy weather. Seems to be a problem everywhere." He flicked those boxes away and started reading through the rest.

"Something of interest?"

"Remember the sudden influx of folks quitting their jobs in certain sectors? All went to the same schools?"

"Yes?"

"Well, a couple of million such folks just vanished throughout Asia. Same sectors, same types of jobs. Twenty five different schools…but they're the same type as the others, and considering how many people we're talking about…"

He began flicking through the rest of the windows.

"This is getting spooky. Millions up and gone--North and South America, Asia, Middle East, Europe… everywhere. Same story--handful of schools, similar job sectors, just up and vanished without a trace."

"What about Grey Friars?"

"Them too. Europe. There seems to be at least one such school in every country. Boom. Our old friend baby godling with the missing cousin is gone too. Apparently SHIELD has been watching Grey Friar's school, keeping an eye on him. He upped and vanished one day. It took a few days for SHIELD to notice because they weren't watching him all the time. Folks at the school said he'd been transferred out, and they hadn't yet gotten a forwarding address to send his records to and asked them politely to vacate the premises. Whoah! Why didn't I hear about this?"

"What?"

"Wizards in London. They turned some helicopters into Albatross. There were hundreds of witnesses, and a bunch of people took pictures. Cars into animals… HA! Look at all the SHIELD guys!"

Peggy gaped at the somewhat blurry photo of a STRIKE team huddled together, wearing tutus, clown suits and ball gowns.
"I didn't hear about this either… of course I was busy trying not to be assassinated at the time."

"Wait, what?!"

"It's fine." Peggy said dismissively. "Nicholas set a nice young man named Hawkeye to shadow me. We took care of it."

"Killed them?"

"Yes."

"Oh. I totally would have avenged you in my awesome mecha warrior suit." Tony grumbled. "It says here they all just suddenly appeared out of nowhere and then things got weird. To teleport, you need a portal. I was right. Portal-making baby godling." he added smugly.

"I'm going to hazard a guess that Nicholas and the others didn't want to hear any "I told you so's""

"Still gonna. Forever." Tony cackled. "Hey JARVIS, have you been plotting storms like I asked you?"

"Of course, Sir."

"What are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking something is causing all this bad weather. Maybe if we can find the epicenters we can figure out what, and then I'm going to find them."

"Them?"

"Baby godlings, aliens, millions of missing people. Tony Stark is on the case. They're not getting away without answering all my questions."

"Ah, Molly, there you are! This is so exciting, isn't it?"

"I guess. We're are we supposed to go again?"

"The nice lady at the desk said to head through here. She said there'd be a sign."

"I wonder why we all had to come here?" Molly wondered as they headed down the hall through Explorer's Club, Inc.

"Space, I'd guess. The Ministry is gone already. I'd expect normally we'd have been sent to the Wizengamot chambers or one of the larger courtrooms if they needed space. That's not possible till we all move."

"I guess." she agreed. "There's the sign."

They stepped into a huge, cavernous room and looked around.

"I remember this. They were building trains here. They sent that part on already." Arthur noted. "Guess we check in."
There was a long table with several Ministry workers seated at it just inside the door. There were several lines formed up already. They joined the nearest queue and settled in to wait their turn. In surprisingly little time they were at the front.

"Names?"

"Arthur and Molly Weasley."

The man tapped the book in front of him with this wand and the pages flipped then settled. "Ottery St. Catchpole?"

"Yes, that's us."

"Single homestead, The Burrow?"

"Correct."

"Have you scoured your grounds and surrounding area?"

"Yes. We followed the instructions in the booklet we received."

"Has someone come out to secure your homestead for transport?"

"Yes. Just yesterday."

"You've received your transition time and location?"

"Yes."

"Alright, sign here. You too, ma'am. Okay, that's sorted. Take these." He handed each of them a vial of serum. "Do not drink it yet. Proceed to the end of the hall there and wait for a booth, lads to the left and ladies to the right. The folks there will direct you to the nearest available. Once in the booth you will want to remove your clothing and shoes, and any jewelry just to be safe. There is a shelf provided. Take a seat, drink the serum. Wait till any warmth or tingling stops. Resize your clothing and shoes as needed. If you're in need of assistance in this, you can pull the cord in there and someone will come help you. Do you understand?"

"Well, yes. Seems pretty straightforward."

"It does, but you'd be surprised the number of folks had to be cut out of their shoes, or shredded their robes right off because of a sudden growth spurt." he said disgustedly. "Go on then. You know what to do."

Molly was in the middle of resizing her robes when she heard Arthur's ecstatic shout echoing through the room.

"WOO HOO! I GOT MY HAIR BACK!"

"NO ONE CARES, ARTHUR." she heard Lucius Malfoy's bored drawl a moment later.

She sighed and hurried at what she was doing. She really hoped Arthur had already resized his robes before he decided to go charging out to fight. That would be embarrassing.
Tony stepped out of the car, patted his hair down, straightened his tie as he ambled around to the passenger side to offer a gentlemanly hand to Peggy as she climbed out. He offered an arm, which she took with a grin.

"So, we ready to go?"

"Ready and willing. It should be quite the adventure."

"So, where are we headed, anyway?"

"Just through here. Nicholas is going to have someone meet us so we can get around the security check and head right to the helicarrier. Hopefully the good weather will hold. I must say I've had quite enough of freak storms."

"I'm pretty sure it will." Tony said cheerfully.

"Oh?"

"Yup." he agreed, popping the 'p'. He smirked at her when she made a frustrated huff at him.

"Are we going anywhere in particular on the flight?"

"I don't know. It's just a test flight, so I imagine we won't go too far. It's mostly just supposed to be so they can do a thorough systems check."

"How amenable do you think cap'n eyepatch will be to a location I suggest?"

"Probably not very. You irritate him."

"Moi? I happen to be very charming. Some people just have no appreciation for quality." Tony sniffed indignantly.

"That looks like our escort."

"Geez. What do they feed these guys?"

The two very tall, buff warrior guys in STRIKE force body armor stood at attention as they approached. One stepped ahead of them to lead the way, while the other fell into place behind them.

"Geez. I feel like I'm being marched to the gallows." Tony complained.

"Nicholas is allowing us to bypass the usual security, but he wouldn't be Nicholas if he just let us in. Two armed escorts and a sharp shooter above is lenient for him." Peggy laughed lightly.

"Wait...what?!" Tony demanded, craning his head around wildly as they started towards the glass elevator. Peggy glanced up and gave a little finger wave to someone half-hidden in the shadows, that he only noticed because they moved slightly to acknowledge her.

"Wha...how?"

"I know Nicholas, and that happens to be the best spot to cover this whole area from. I worked here a long time." Peggy chuckled as the elevator began its descent.
Tony whistled as he got his first look at the helicarrier. It now had a complement of quinjets on the
deck, ready to take off at a moment's notice.

"It's an aircraft carrier."

"Essentially. One that is both seaworthy and can fly. It will have a full flight crew, food service and
sanitation workers, scientists compiling data and doing experiments in the labs and taking readings
from the scientific instruments on board, it will also have a full complement of agents and STRIKE
force on board, an armory, jets ready to take off at a moment's notice, and I believe there are several
boats as well. It will be receiving real-time updates from all the bases around the world so that a swift
response can be launched right from central command should it be necessary. Your father designed
this for me when I told him how isolated I felt as I rose higher through SHIELD and was no longer
in the field directly calling the shots."

The deck clanged underfoot as they made their way to the door. It opened automatically as they
approached with a hydraulic 'whoosh'. Their escort marched them down a series of long hallways,
through various doorways and finally into a large room that seemed to be at the heart of the whole
massive vehicle. They saw Nick Fury at the center of the sunken room, standing amidst several
computer screens, and monitoring them. All around the edges of the room were more computer
banks, large screens covering the walls. All the stations around the room were staffed by techs and a
large number of people seemed to be coming and going, carrying out various tasks.

May, Coulson, Hawkeye, Steve and Bucky were seated at a table set up near where Fury was
stationed. Coulson and May were tapping at the table, which seemed to be a computer of some sort,
while Bucky and Steve were talking quietly, both looking slightly ill at ease, and watching all the
hustle and bustle.

"Lucky Jim decided not to join us?" Peggy asked once they'd descended the stairs and joined the rest
of them. Their escort took up station at the top of the stairway leading down.

"Yeah. He said he had other stuff to do, and couldn't be bothered to go on a day trip with SHIELD."
Steve agreed ruefully. He darted a glance at Tony, who had stiffened and began to look fidgety and
unhappy the moment he'd spotted Bucky. As he always did when he was uncomfortable, he got
twitchy and restless. The moment he was done escorting Peggy to her seat, he began pacing around,
poking at everything and chattering a mile a minute to anyone who stood still half a second, or who
was seated and busy working and couldn't get away.

"STARK! Leave my agents alone. They're running the pre-flight checks on this bucket of bolts. I do
not intend to fall out of the damn sky because you can't stop talking!" Fury barked. He turned back
around and saw Peggy had dug a flask out of her jacket pocket and was having herself a drink.

"Bit early, isn't it?" he asked.

"I'm retired, remember? If I feel like having a drink, it's my prerogative." Peggy quipped back. "So,
when is this bucket of bolts going to take off?"

"Should be any time now. I'm just waiting for the last of the all-clears." Fury replied, deciding not to
argue.

"Where are we going, anyway?" Tony demanded, wandering away from the techs along the walls,
who had been rudely ignoring him.

"Just a short jaunt up the coast."

"Can this thing make it to Europe?" Tony wondered.

"It would take a while, not to mention it's a bit ambitious for the first flight with a green crew who are still figuring out where everything is."

"We need to go to England." Tony complained.

"Why? What's there?" Bucky asked quietly.

Tony acted as though he hadn't spoken and addressed Fury instead.

"That's where the aliens are. I want to tackle one of them and sit on them until they answer my questions."

"Not this again." Coulson sighed.

"Hey! I have very good reasons!" Tony immediately defended himself. "Your work saved?" he nodded towards the open files on the table.

"Yes…Tony!" May complained when the files she and Coulson had been going over disappeared and were replaced by a world map covering the whole table.

"I've had JARVIS tracking patterns and we've been plotting the data we've compiled and made timelines and stuff. Item. There were distortions seen all over Asia which showed up on radar. I found all the data I could on when, where and what direction. If they all continued in the direction they were going, they all would have ended up about here."

Several red arrows converged on a point in the mountains of China.

"There was also some reports I saw about groups of people in matching sunglasses wandering the streets for a couple of months."

Different areas of the map started getting covered with a grey grid section by section. "Even places where there weren't specific reports, there were some of them caught in pictures in the paper, in the background of news reports, that sort of thing."

"It's methodical."

"Yeah. Places I have good data for, you can see that." Tony nodded. "After our weird sunglass people disappear, a few weeks later more stuff starts happening--the storms and suddenly appearing islands, I had JARVIS tracking all the worldwide weather data. There's also the sudden explosion of available jobs. It's pretty interesting stuff when you put it all together. The blue dots are the schools that all our sudden job openings are alumni of, the white dots are jobs opening up. New landmasses will be highlighted in yellow. The red dots are the epicenters of the weird storms. Now watch."

The grids vanished and the arrows showing the distortions reappeared, converging on the mountains of China. A storm appeared a few days later. Another set of arrows converged on a spot in India. A storm appeared a few days later. As time ticked by on the map, groups of red and blue dots would appear, a few days later a storm, then a number of islands that hadn't been there before began dotting the map, outlined in yellow. The image jerked as different countries seemed to shrink a bit. Dots erupted in groups across sections of the map, followed by storms, followed by small distortions in the
landscape, followed by storm after storm for several months. White dots showing the likely epicenters of the ongoing storm systems appeared, dotted over the landscape. Bit by bit the storms began to die down, on the edges of the map, and seemed to start erupting in bursts that all seemed to be converging on Europe.

"Sir? We're ready for launch on your say-so."

"Do it. And call ahead. We're taking these nice folks here to England." Fury decided.

"Um…sir? This was just supposed to…"

"Did I stutter? This is meant to be a swift-response mobile command unit. Let's see a swift response. All hands on deck. Let's get this thing flying."

"Reports, everyone?" Lovegood demanded.

"We did a last sweep, shire by shire. If anything of ours has been left behind it's too small to get picked up by the detectors." Croaker announced.

"Excellent. All that's left is our crown jewel and we're done. Is the gateway ready?"

"Yes. It was moved to Hogsmeade after the last transfer. The containment and transport teams should be there as we speak." Bode nodded.

"Then, by all means, let us not keep everyone waiting. Final exit crew, are you ready?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"The ship has been inspected, the coordinates double-checked?" Lovegood fretted.

"Yes, ma'am."

"You accounted for the starting point being in Hogsmeade rather than the…"

"Ma'am. We're ready." He told her with firm certainty.

"Very well then. Take a last look around, everyone. This is it."

The Unspeakables, who at the moment were all perched on a building in the heart of London, did exactly that.

"Farewell, Earth. It's been real." one of them said quietly.

A moment later they were gone.
The great hall quieted down as the headmaster stood to address the students.

"Today is going to be a very special, if rather bittersweet moment in wizarding history. Hogwarts, Hogsmeade and all their respective denizens will be joining the rest of our people on the new world."

The great hall echoed with the gleeful shouts of the whole student body. Dumbledore smiled indulgently and let them continue for a bit.

"Now, as to what we'll be doing today, it will, I'm told, consist mostly of all us standing around waiting our turn." he said wryly. "The weather, while slowly edging towards spring, is still rather brisk and we may be outside for an extended period. Once you are dismissed from breakfast, everyone needs to get their cloaks and scarves etc. and dress warmly. We will be reassembling here in the great hall and proceeding to Hogsmeade together. Prefects, make sure you take careful note that your entire house is present. Once through, there will be no turning back or returning. Do not bring anything but your brooms, those that have them, and your pets in their carriers. The first years, as well as anyone who either does not have a broom or who does not feel comfortable flying themselves through the gateway will be transported by carpet. Unfortunately, all the thestrals that normally pull the carriages have already been sent through, so we had to find alternate means to transport everyone. All your belongings will be brought along with the castle when it is transported. I have been informed that the people of Hogsmeade and their village have already begun their journey. By the time all of us have reached the gateway they should be ready to start sending us through. Meet back here in thirty minutes. Dismissed."

"Alright, Rosmerta?"

Madame Rosmerta, proprietress of the Three Broomsticks, gave Aberforth a watery smile and dabbed at her eyes.

"I've lived here my whole life. Every tree, every mountain, is as familiar to me as my own hand. It just suddenly all hit me that this is it. I'll never walk these lands again. I'll never see the highlands bloom this spring…never curse another long winter buried under several feet of snow. It's enough to break your heart."

Aberforth gave a stiff nod and gripped her shoulder for a moment in commiseration.

"Best join the queue. Don't want to be left behind." he said gruffly. She nodded, pulling herself together, and they moved to join the rest of the villagers. It was a rather subdued group, and more than one seemed to remain grimly stoic only through sheer force of will. Others, not as worried about presenting a strong façade were looking around through eyes shiny with tears as they huddled with their families and waited their turn.

"It looks so grim and bare without the village here. I'm glad we'll already be gone when they gather up Hogwarts. Not seeing it here, where it's stood for a thousand years is like enough to set me to weeping." Madame Puddifoot said tremulously. "I'm sure the excitement will all catch back up with me once we're through, but right now I'm a mass of nerves, and I feel like a great stone weight has wedged itself into my chest."

"MOUNT UP, EVERYONE!"
"Looks like this is it." Aberforth said heavily as he mounted his broom. Rosmerta and Madame Puddifoot took their places on the carpet that was waiting.

"MOVE OUT!"

"Are we there yet?"

"Anthony!"
"Tony…"
"I swear to god, Stark…"

"What? It's a simple question." Tony pouted.

"That you have asked far too many times." May growled.

"Yes," Coulson replied absently.

"Oooh! Let me see!" Tony demanded, suddenly excited.

Coulson was standing over the table where they'd all been seated at the start of their journey and was watching several displays that were arrayed across the screen there.

"Huh. What the hell am I looking at?"

"Well this" he tapped the screen and made it a bit larger "shows our relative position, and these are the readouts from all the different scanning equipment we have on board. They've been collecting meteorological data, as well as scanning for different wavelengths of energy. We're also scanning and doing in depth topological surveys as we travel overhead, to see if we can spot any anomalies that might be folded space. They're not going to be able to hide from us for much longer." Coulson said with some satisfaction.

"Hey, at our current heading we should pass right over Stonehenge. I was always curious about it. People go trooping from all over the world to look at a bunch of big rocks. I don't see the attraction, personally. Give me a beach, a lounge chair, a mai tai and a Swedish bikini model. Now, that's a vacation."

"They're a monolithic construction made by humans with little to no technology and for unknown purpose. It stirs people's imaginations...makes them proud as well. Much like other great ancient constructions around the world, they're a timeless monument to human ingenuity and determination." Peggy replied. "I'd think, after the speech you gave me about human progress, that you of all people would understand that."

"They're still a bunch of big rocks. You want to wowed by human ingenuity, go gawk at a skyscraper. It's much more impressive...plus, there's likely to be shops, restaurants, theatres and other markings of civilization nearby, or right inside even. More bang for your sightseeing buck, and it doesn't require you to go traipsing through any muddy fields."

"I hope you didn't have your heart set on seeing it." Coulson interjected before anyone else could speak.
"Why's that?" Tony wondered.

"Well…Stonehenge appears to be missing."

"Keep order! There will be no shenanigans, do you hear me?"
"Prefects, head counts please. Everyone, stay in your places and keep silent until we're sure we have everyone."
"Idiot dunderheads! What do you think you're doing?"
"Are all the first years secured?"

"Are all of you warm enough?" Dumbledore asked the carpet filled with house elves kindly.
"Oh yes, professor whiskers, sir, we are being very cozy."
"It does look comfortable. Makes me wish I'd opted for that rather than a broom." Dumbledore laughed.
The house elves had brought several blankets along to make up for their lack of clothing and were bundled up, snug as you please across several carpets.

"Are you sure, Harry? I'm a prefect. I should be helping keep order."

"You hate flying. No, you and Neville should cross on the carpet; just sit one in front and one behind the first years. I put a sticking charm on all of them, so none of them should fall off or anything…"

"You put sticking charms on all of them?" Hermione huffed, sounding exasperated.

"Damned right I did. If I didn't, one of them would get the bright idea to start doing something stupid just as we enter the gateway, and boom! First years tumbling into the void between planets, never to be seen again. If you really think about it, I'm a hero." Harry said seriously.

Hermione threw her hands into the air and stomped off towards the carpet, where she could now see all the first years were glumly sitting and trying their damnedest to wriggle about. She saw one was trying to stealthily draw his wand. She halted and glared at him fiercely till he stopped.

"Maybe Harry was right to stick them all to the carpet. Not that I'm ever going to tell him so."

Dumbledore, who was at the head of the long line of students, teachers and house elves, rose up on his broom. He had forgone his usual quirky fashion sense for once, and was arrayed in a plain grey cloak and a grey-blue hat. It seemed to reflect the solemnity of the occasion, though there were many who wondered if, given what they'd named their planet, it was a little nod to Tolkien. It seemed like casting himself in the role of Gandalf to lead the last of the wizards to Valinor was the sort of thing that would appeal to his sense of humor.

"Let us all take a moment to say goodbye to our mother, Earth. She has been our home since time immemorial; sheltered and nurtured us all the days of our lives. Alas, all children must leave their
mothers at some point, and make their own way in the wider world. Let this moment be a glad, if
bittersweet parting."

The students earlier giddy cheer died down as the weight of the moment pressed down on them.
More than one found themselves with stinging eyes and a lump in their throats as they looked around
the familiar grounds, and peered out over the highlands, still dotted with snow, mist shrouding the
valleys between the peaks.
It was beautiful, and they would never see it again.

With great solemnity, the houses rose one by one, and fell into place behind the headmaster to begin
their journey to the stars.

"Who just absconds with dozens of giant stones, each weighing several tons, no less…” Peggy said
in disbelief as she stared at the field where Stonehenge once stood. She had visited the place in her
youth. To have it simply not be there…

"A better question is why? What's special about the stones?” Tony wondered.

"It's a national monument, and it has been stolen. It's an act of terrorism, is what it is." Coulson said
in his usual unflappable manner.

"I think a better question is how. I mean, they were really big stones. How do you just abscond with
something like that?” Steve wondered.

"It's well within our capabilities.” Tony scoffed "Though, granted, this whole place would be full of
tread marks from all the trucks, and the crane that would be needed to move everything."

"What do we know about the place?” May asked "Beyond the obvious that it was full of big stones,
I mean."

"It was believed to be an ancient ritual and burial site. It may have also been used as a calendar of
sorts. The placement of the stones was believed to be significant. It allowed the marking of the
solstices.” Peggy replied.

"Have any of you found anything?” Coulson asked the tech crew that had come with them.

"If there's anything here, it's nothing that we can pick up."

"I see."

"Have you finished all your scans?” Peggy asked.

"Yes ma'am."

"Very well. Let's all return to the helicarrier. Perhaps the topological survey is having more luck."

Feeling rather disheartened by the whole affair, the group trudged back to the waiting quinjet.
Once back in the air, May frowned and put a new heading into the guidance system.

"Fury wants us to check out another anomaly"

"Oh? Is Buckingham palace missing as well?"

"No. That still seems to be there. It's a place in Wales. Our data says it's a toxic waste dump. In fact, I believe it earned the moniker 'the most polluted place in Britain.' A records search said it was recently purchased by a corporation, Explorer's Club Inc., but we can't seem to find any more information on this company except that they bought this place and several defunct landfills."

"I'm not actually too keen to go tooling around in a toxic waste dump." Tony objected.

"That's the thing though. The scans didn't find anything to indicate that there's a toxic waste dump there at all."

"Well then. I guess we'll see, won't we?"

"A whole lot of hurry-up and wait. Wish I'd brought a hat." Ron grumbled irritably.

"Slytherin's through. They're just giving the gateway a chance to rest and letting everyone on the other side get sorted before sending more through." Neville chided.

"WHOAH!"

Everyone turned to look at Colin's shout. High atop the mountain, Hogwarts was in the process of warping into a pocket of space.

"That's…kind of nauseating to watch, actually." Seamus said, looking faintly green.

"This whole area looks kind of sad and abandoned now, doesn't it?" Lavender said mournfully.

"It won't be for long. I can guarantee this whole place'll be swarming with muggles five minutes after we leave." Ron scoffed. "They're nosy buggers, muggles are."

"Looks like Ravenclaw's starting. Who was the genius who decided we'd go in the order of our tables in the great hall?"

"Does it really matter? We'll all get there eventually." Harry commented.

"Yeah, and we'll all be dying of hunger once we do. The house elves are all here with us, and the kitchen's in a pocket dimension!" Ron moaned.

"I hope Hogwarts is alright." Parvati mused. "It's been here so long. What if moving it breaks something?"

"Then we'll fix it, that's all. But I'm sure it's fine. The Unspeakables seem to know what they're doing." Hermione assured her.
"Oh come on! The gate needs another rest already?"

"Perhaps, but more likely it's so the very large group of people that just went through has a chance to get out of the way. You remember how disorienting it is going through. I'm sure they're concerned about everyone colliding on the other side if they just keep sending too many through at once." Hermione scolded.

"It looks like there were structures down there that are gone now." Hawkeye noted.

May was instead staring at the sky. "I put the quinjet down a distance from here because it looked like it was solid trees and there was nowhere to land. This whole area is open."

"There's a lot of animals in this area." A squirrel scampered near and looked at all of them hopefully. Hawkeye dug around in his pocket and pulled out a granola bar which he broke up and scattered on the ground. The squirrel grabbed a piece and settled down to start nibbling, and others came creeping out to get the rest.

"They have no fear of humans. There were people here for long enough who both fed them and left them alone that they're not wary of approaching and looking for food." Steve noted.

"Anything of note?" Coulson asked the techs.

"No weird energy signatures, but…"

"Yes?"

"This place was supposed to be a toxic waste dump? Are you sure?"

"Quite certain. We have photographs from before. It was pretty nasty, actually. Why?"

"There's no sign that this place was ever anything of the sort. In fact…this is the cleanest place I've ever been."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, even in nice, affluent places far from farming and manufacturing and what have you, that weren't ever toxic waste dumps, there are pollutants in the soil, the water, the air. This place is pristine…though now that whoever was here is gone, I imagine that will change. It's really no wonder there are so many animals sheltering here."

When they got back to the helicarrier, Nick Fury looked irritated.

"Nicholas?" Peggy prompted.

"It's the same as you all reported at all the supposed landfills. It looks like there were a bunch of structures that are not there any longer, and the places are all super clean--to the point where no one quite believes they were ever actually landfills. No signs of who, or how, or why."
"So…environmentally conscious elves or something? Show up, clean house, abscond in the night?"
Tony suggested brightly.

"Sir? We just got some anomalous readings from central Scotland."

"Finally. Go get them."

"We've got SHIELD incoming."

"Won't matter in a moment. Just keep packing."

"The bubble around this area is going to pop when we launch."

"And by then we'll already be out of their reach."

"Gateway's stored."

"Good. Area sweep?"

"We found a couple of fairies, a bowtruckle and a jarvey. We did a second sweep after collecting them. We're clear."

"Kids pets and all the owls secure?"

"Secure but impatient."

"The phoenix?"

"Left with Dumbledore."

"Alright then, let's load up."

"Come on. Let's get out of here before our gift goes off."

"Was it really necessary? Seems a bit childish…"

"They're coming here to make us 'submit or be eliminated'. The way I see it, it was the very least we could do."

"Well, when you put it that way…"
"Are we even in the right place? There's nothing….WHOA!"

"What was that?!"

"Sudden change in air pressure…wait…there's something there now. Hang on, I'm taking us…in…"

"What is it now?

"Look." May pointed, setting the quinjet to hover in place.

A massive fireworks show had suddenly lit up the night, a dazzling display of mythical beasts and monsters seemed to soar through the air, screaming defiance. It ended with a massive hand, flipping them off (American style as most of the SHIELD personnel there to witness it were Americans) with the words "Too late, SHIELD. Bye Bye" scrawled across the sky beneath it.

"Well. I'm going to hazard a guess we're in the right place." Hawkeye joked.

"What do they mean 'bye bye'? I didn't get to tackle one and ask any questions yet!" Tony wailed at the same time.

"Hah. Did you see their faces?"

An international team of Unspeakables were busy each working remotely on Earth through a globe interface to remove the wizarding spaces left behind.

"Yeah. That was great. Keep scrubbing though. They'll be landing in a moment. We don't want to leave any traces for them to find. We already almost dropped the ball once, leaving that illusion in place where Explorer's Inc. was to hide it from planes and satellites overhead. I only just vanished the last traces of magic as they were pointing their machines at it."

"Hah! I was running around just ahead of them at the former Stonehenge site too. I wasn't expecting them to show up so quickly."

"Do you think they've noticed all the hidden places popping up yet?"

"I'm sure they have. It'll take time for word to spread and for them to realize the whole world was affected."

"You know…it might actually take a few days for word to even start spreading."

"Why?"

"Well…the Earth is going to be larger when we're done. Not hugely so, but enough that it might very well make a difference to their satellites."

"Oh well. They'll manage."

"How are the folks on the exit crew?"
"Launch went off without a hitch. It'll be twelve hours till they get here."

"Okay, that should do it. They can wander Hogwarts and Hogsmeade's former grounds all they want and they shouldn't find anything to pick up on their scanners. Let's go join the party, eh?"

"Sounds like a plan."

All across Founder's Isle, the people of New Britain and Ireland celebrated as the children of Hogwarts were reunited with their families on the other side. A great cheer went up as Hogwarts settled into place in her new home. The house elves whipped up a great feast, and a party raged long into the night. In fact, among the adults, it was still going on when the exit crew arrived.
"Hey, Fury? You know how you've been cursing and ranting and kicking things for the last two hours, complaining that those wizards skedaddled before you could interrogate them and show them who's boss, and now we'll never know who they were, and what they wanted, and so on and so forth?" Tony said, looking up from the files he'd been perusing since they'd gotten all the way to Scotland only to discover they were too late.

"Yeah? What of it, Stark?"

"I don't think that's actually true. I think there are people we can ask for answers."

"Oh? And who is that?" Fury demanded.

"Dr. Strange?" Peggy suggested.

"No…but good thinking. We should totally sit him down and make him spill. He's the one that mentioned the Norse gods and all right? He's got to know something about all this. No, I actually meant the Prime Minister of Great Britain."

"This seems to be a worldwide phenomenon. Why him?" May asked curiously.

"Because of this." Tony replied, bringing up the map with all his data plotted that he'd showed them earlier. "Specifically this small, supposedly quite uninteresting island in the North Sea."

"What's there?" Steve asked curiously.

"That is the question, isn't it? I was going back through my data, hoping something more on these wizards would pop out at me, and something did-- namely that the first island to suddenly appear overnight happened a good year or more before all the rest of the stuff started happening. I had JARVIS poke around some more. SHIELD went to go examine a strange energy blip out in the North Sea. From what it says here, the agents flew all over the area and couldn't find anything, but it made someone nervous that you were poking, because it's noted that several world leaders contacted SHIELD and told them to stand down. It looks like this pricked someone's curiosity, because there are later notes that a second group of warnings from some world leaders came down, along with a vague threat of removing funding from SHIELD if you didn't comply. Now, SHIELD's records indicate there were no further missions to poke around after the first time. I'm going to guess that HYDRA kept poking anyway."

"I remember that." Peggy agreed. "It took me a while to even track down what mission we were being reprimanded about. In fact, it was around that time, after poking around for information that I started missing meetings and rumors started going around that I was losing my faculties and was being forced to retire, and Pierce would be stepping in as the new director of SHIELD."

"See? The Prime Minister of Great Britain was one of the reprimanders. He has to know something of interest, and we're already here, so why not?"

"Thank you for agreeing to see us so quickly, Prime Minister."
"Not at all, Ms. Carter. I'll admit I was a bit curious when I heard who was coming to see me. I was under the impression you'd retired."

"I was still somewhat involved in several ongoing investigations with SHIELD, though that's technically correct. In fact, this here is my successor, Nicholas Fury."

"Ah, pleasure to meet you, Director Fury."

"Prime Minister. Can we cut to the chase here? Wizards. What do you know?"

"Please do excuse Nicholas. He's been under a great deal of stress lately, what with all that business with HYDRA." Peggy quickly interjected, pasting a smile on her face. Unseen by the Prime Minister she also pinched Fury in the ass to make him behave. The only sign of this on Fury's face was the rather embarrassed, impatient grimace on his face, but as he was usually grimacing neither of them really noticed.

"Why don't you both have a seat." the PM said after a beat.

Once the three of them were settled, the PM fixed them both with a curious gaze.

"Dare I ask what brings SHIELD here asking after wizards?"

"Well…after all the business in the North sea a few years ago, we realized that you must have known about them." Peggy began.

"And we wanted to know why you did not see fit to share your information with the class." Fury interjected.

The PM sat back. A raised eyebrow was the only indication that he didn't care for Fury's manners.

"Simple. You weren't authorized to know."

"The hell we're not! SHIELD…"

"Is an international peacekeeping organization on OUR side of things. The signatory countries that fund and staff your efforts all have…had pre-existing treaties with the wizards that pre-date the existence of SHIELD by centuries. You had no jurisdiction over them."

"They infiltrated my organization!"

"They had authorization to do so by the countries that formed the World Security Council. Part of our treaties with them guarantees separation of our people and non-interference in each other's activities, except where it concerned keeping the weird under wraps. They were in SHIELD to do just that, piggybacking on your wide surveillance network to do so. They were policing their own, and actually cleaning up a lot of stuff that apparently wasn't their doing. They've left now, so I guess it will simply be left to SHIELD now to do it without them."

"What sort of weird are we talking about?" Fury asked warily.

"Vampires, werewolves. They took theirs with them, the vampires at least. They managed to fix their werewolves, so they don't have those anymore. The ones left behind, I've been told, they can do nothing for as an elder god is responsible for their creation, not one of them. Mutants having a violent awakening of their powers, they ran across quite a few of those. Super soldier experiments gone wrong. They cleaned up quite a few of those, I'm led to believe. Some other things. I'm sure you'll discover what in time as you run across them yourselves."
Peggy got them refocused. "What can you tell us about the wizards themselves?"

"Not that much, I'm afraid. I only ever spoke to their Minister a handful of times. He stopped by a week, week and a half or so ago to let me know they'd gotten most of their people off planet and should be done soon. He took the portrait off the wall and the carpet before he left."

"Why?"

"They're the ones that put them there. The carpet they put in to rescue me in case of emergency." he laughed. "It was apparently a flying carpet of all things. The portrait was how they gave warning they were coming to visit. Gave me quite a turn the first time the thing talked to me. It was just a few days after I'd gotten in office. I wondered if I'd made a terrible mistake if the stress was already getting to me so badly."

"A portrait talked to you?" Fury repeated.

"Like I said, gave me quite a turn. It looked like a normal enough old oil painting of a fellow in old-fashioned clothing sleeping in a chair. Yes, he spoke to me one day, said the Minister of Magic was coming. My heart was pounding and I was all in a lather, wondering if I'd lost my mind, when the fire there" he pointed to the fireplace "turns green and a fellow steps right out of it to introduce himself. I was quite agog, I can tell you. Could barely speak, I was so taken aback. He just explained that magic was real, that they'd separated from us because of the witch burnings--mostly to save us from ourselves, to hear him tell it. It was apparently our own people that were being burned at the stake, not theirs. He said their women put their foot down when the witch craze grew to the point that whole villages were being wiped out all over Europe by fanatics looking for them. They figured it was best to just separate and make us forget they ever existed so all the frenzy and paranoia would just die down. He said it was a longstanding problem, our folks demanding we give them magic, something they couldn't do as they're simply born that way, but when they'd tell us that we'd just get mad and try to kill them, and they were getting fed up with it. Apparently the Enlightenment happened right on the heels of them enacting their secrecy. We stopped looking to them for answers and found our own strengths. They were apparently hoping for a long time that we'd simply catch up to them, be able to do the things they're simply born able to do with science, and we could all simply get on with our lives. They were rather excited when there were rumors that someone had nearly figured out how to make a flying car back in the forties, and were quite disappointed when nothing ever came of it, as being able to fly around outside their communities is something they miss. However, they realized they couldn't do so until we could, or they'd be bombarded once more by people demanding to know how they did it, and from their experience it never ended well. It seems, sometime between then and now, they decided they didn't like what we were doing with our scientific revolution. I got a bit of an earful about how we'd all need to be more mindful of things once they were gone. They seem to have been spending quite a lot of time cleaning up toxic waste dumps, oil spills, oversaturated landfills, as well as "piles of garbage larger than many small countries" that seem to be forming in our oceans. I was also warned that nuclear war was actually possible now that they're gone."

"Come again?" Fury demanded.

"Yes. They weren't impressed with the onset of the atomic age. There were apparently communities of their people living in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Being hidden didn't keep them from perishing with all the rest. Any nuclear bombs meant for testing were left alone, but it seems all the ones that would have been launched in the event of a nuclear war wouldn't have gone off unless they allowed them to. They agreed to non-interference, but apparently drew the line when it endangered them. however, now that they're gone we're free to destroy all life on Earth should we choose to, as they've already rescued all the parts of it they care about."
"All the vanished people, all the missing animals…" Peggy realized.

"Dragons, centaurs, unicorns, trolls and goblins, fairies, and mermaids….and themselves, of course." the PM nodded.

"The hell you say." was Nick Fury's summation.

Fury and Peggy were both rather subdued when they returned to the helicarrier. When they arrived back on deck, they were informed that Doctor Strange would be arriving soon for debriefing as requested.

They gathered the others and headed for one of the conference rooms, where Fury requested he be sent when he arrived. They had no sooner arrayed themselves around the table when Strange was suddenly there as well, sitting in the remaining seat.

"Jesus Christ! Don't do shit like that!" Fury cursed, putting his gun back in its holster. Bucky, Peggy, Coulson and May slowly lowered their own guns, Steve his shield, and Hawkeye his bow. Tony slowly untensed as all the very dangerous people turned off their "kill mode" and relaxed back into their seats. Strange just cocked an eyebrow at all of them, sniffed, and flicked a bit of lint off one of his cuffs. Tony quite admired his aplomb.

"Do you always greet your guests thus?" he asked curiously.

"Not if they're expected and walk through the damned door." Fury grated. "Wizards. What do you know?"

"I know several things. What is it you want to know?"

"What planet are they from?" Tony asked immediately.

"Earth."

"No, I mean originally."

"Earth. They've always been here. In fact some of them, their species that is, predate humans."

"What are they?" May asked. "And don't just say wizards."

"Fairies. Like in the old stories. They were here before humans were. Some of the humanoid species seem to have crossbred with Neanderthals at some point…"

Tony snickered.

"I wouldn't laugh. In spite of the current usage of "Neanderthal" to depict someone mentally deficient, they actually had larger brains and much denser bones and musculature than modern humans do. Once the Neanderthals died out, they crossbred occasionally with humans. What you ended up with was essentially a human, with a larger brain, denser, sturdier bodies than is the norm, and with an inborn ability to do magic. They were rather annoyed when they found out about me, and discovered that our people can in fact learn magic and do the things they do."

"Afraid of the competition, are they?" Tony snorted.
"No. The basis of their conflict with our people was essentially that ordinary humans would demand to be given powers, and they would explain they were simply born with those abilities and had no way to give them to someone else. The witch burning craze that swept across Europe was the result of their refusal. If they had known it could be learned by some, they would have directed those people to someone who could teach them so they themselves would be left alone."

"Did you know they were the ones that stole all the animals?" Peggy asked curiously.

"I was aware, yes. Not at first. I actually saw where they were keeping them when I was investigating the portals opening. They’d made a large habitat for all of them inside a dome that was larger inside than out. There were levels, each with a different climate and ecosystem. They were all shrunk down to miniscule size and living in there. It was rather fascinating actually."

"And you didn't think to mention this to anyone?" Coulson asked mildly.

"I was asked not to discuss their existence until they were gone. They were already preparing to move off planet and didn't want to waste time or resources fending off SHIELD when they were trying find any of their plants, animals or things that had gotten out of their communities through various means to be sure nothing was left behind when they left."

"They stole those animals and a national monument and…" Fury began, but Strange held up a hand to halt his indignant tirade.

"I assume you are speaking of Stonehenge? National monument or not, the fact is their people built it long ago, not ours, so they took it with them. As for the animals, when one considers that they were wild animals, they didn't technically belong to anyone—or conversely, I suppose, you could say they belonged to everyone. Let's be honest here. They were all endangered species. While there are many thousands, if not millions, of people, who love animals and have worked tirelessly to preserve the species and their habitats, there were hundreds of wealthy land developers and corporations who were fighting back to rid the world of the wild places those animals need to survive so those places could be exploited for resources and then developed. They are the ones with the money, well-funded lobbyists, and personal contacts among lawmakers. Every year volunteers work to preserve all those places, and every year a little more of them disappear as the land developers and corporations get their way. Those species likely would have disappeared in our lifetime, except for whatever specimens were in zoos and rescue centers, and if not in our lifetime, certainly our children's. Frankly, they're probably better off with them, even with them opening up all their hidden spaces as they left. The only species they took wholesale were those that had only enough for a viable breeding population but no more, or of which there were simply not enough of them left for even that. All others, they took enough for breeding and left us enough to do the same. They weren't originally planning on doing that, but they saw the anguish of those who have been working to protect those animals and decided to give them a second chance. Those animals left behind now have enough room to roam for a while longer, and may actually build their numbers back up if we don't destroy what they've left us. With careful husbandry, those animals may still be around for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren to enjoy. It's all rather up to us now."

"They didn't leave any, what are you…"

"They did. They left enough for a viable species in their hidden communities, in the wild parts that were left behind. They removed any tags or trackers the things had been burdened with, decontaminated them, healed their hurts and set them loose to roam free. I believe a lot of those animals increased their numbers significantly while under their care. The sea life they gathered they simply took with them. I believe there was some talk of trying to clear out the oceans, but the logistics of such a thing were daunting even for them."
He raised an eyebrow at the angry muttering from Fury and the displeased frowns on the rest of their faces.

"You have to see it from their point of view. They gathered them up, and then had to spend several weeks decontaminating them, healing deformities caused by fishing lines and the plastic loops that hold cans together. They had to remove a frankly disturbing amount of trash--metal cans and the like, from the bellies of a number of sea birds that eat fish. Apparently when they told the merfolk they were leaving, they sang praise be, hallelujah, because they were tired of how filthy the oceans were getting between garbage, ship wrecks, oil spills, fertilizer and pesticide runoff, etc. They felt immensely guilty that they couldn't save everything."

"Wait…what was that about hidden spaces?" Fury suddenly remarked, going back to an earlier comment.

"Ah. You haven't heard yet?" Strange asked, with a small smirk.

"Heard what?"

"I'll tell you what… I think I'll let you discover it for yourselves."

He started to become opaque, as though he were about to vanish. He halted for a moment and glanced at Tony. "Oh, Mr. Stark, before I forget… I was given a message for you: You data was incomplete, so your calculations were wrong. You need the trees. Nothing can live in a world made only of concrete and steel." A moment later he was gone.

Fury and Coulson left soon after Dr. Strange did, presumably to go find answers about the 'hidden places' he was surprised they'd not heard about yet. Tony was playing with his phone, presumably looking for answers as well.

"Did the PM have anything to add to Dr. Strange's information?" May asked curiously. Peggy sighed and told them all what they'd learned earlier during their meeting.

"They're killable then, and their folded spaces are no barrier to us doing so. That's good to know."

"Nothing we've learned about these people indicates they ever considered themselves unkillable godlike beings. They wanted us to catch up and be able to do what they do so we'd leave them alone and stop trying to burn them at the stake. They were excited we almost figured out flying cars, and were waiting for us to develop and mass market them so they could fly around in view of others once more. That never happened. When we did develop the ultimate flying car" she gestured at the surrounding helicarrier wryly "we mounted weapons on it, made it big enough to carry numerous vehicles that also have weapons on them, to carry people, who have yet more weapons. On top of that, they've seemingly been spending all their free time trying to clean the mess we've made of the Earth--toxic waste dumps, landfills, oil spills, not to mention they apparently cleared and cleaned up a number of car, train, plane and tire graveyards, decontaminated numerous land and sea animals… put controls of some sort on bombs to prevent nuclear war…they got fed up, and left. Frankly, when one thinks about it you can hardly blame them."

Steve winced and looked despondent. "Put like that…it makes humans sound terrible, doesn't it?"

"They seemed to think that murdering each other was our hobby. It does seem to be the first use we
"Put any new scientific breakthroughs to, doesn't it?" Peggy said, equally despondent. May sighed and began looking rather morose as well.

"What about their super weapon? The one they came out to retrieve?" May asked. "That doesn't sound like something a group of hippie pacifists would have."

"There was no super weapon." Peggy said tiredly. "There was a hospital of all things hidden there. It wasn't as securely anchored or protected as it normally would have been as they were readying it to be moved when the battle broke out. The space ruptured or something and sick children were about to start tumbling out into the midst of it. They were already in the process of leaving, so they didn't care if anyone saw them. One of their doctors saw some HYDRA goons lurking around the children and preparing to abscond with them and killed them. Their minister apparently had words about the whole business for the PM. He suggested we find another hobby, because all this running about and murdering each other all the time was really just quite beyond the pale. When they have maniacs with such hobbies, they lock them away where they can't hurt anyone. We put them in charge. He thinks we really need to reexamine our priorities, or deal with our pollution as it is obviously making us crazy--especially as they won't be around anymore to deal with it for us."

"I think this bucket of bolts is broken. I can't get a signal." Tony complained.

"Let's rejoin the others. They might be using all the bandwidth for something else." Peggy suggested.

Fury was in, well, a fury, once more when they rejoined he and Coulson in central command.

"Problem?" May wondered.

"We've lost contact with the satellites. We've not been receiving any updates for a while now."

"We've got one, sir. We just need to find out what's wrong and get it to send a signal to get back in contact with the rest of them."

Fury grunted in acknowledgment and continued pacing.

"That's why there's no internet? Lame. Sounds like you need better satellites."

"They're state of the art, and normally very reliable." Coulson objected.

"Here we go. It's recalibrating. It'll be a little while till the whole network is reset."

Tony wandered over to the table they'd been at before and began poking through files again to keep himself occupied. Steve and Bucky decided to wander the halls for a bit. The rest took seats to wait for the information flow to correct itself.

"So...wizards, huh?" Steve commented when the silence went on too long.

"You ever wish it was still the forties?" Bucky asked curiously.

"Yeah. The world made sense back then. At least, it seemed to."

They both sighed.
Magneto slowly descended through the air and came to a stop before the line of boats, stopping them in their tracks by the simple expedient of lifting them from the water.

"Hey, what's your problem, bub?"
"He's holding us up in the air with his mind! Shut up Bob."

"I see you seem to be heading for the new island that just appeared. It's off limits." Magneto announced, ignoring the byplay.

"The hell it is, buddy. US coast guard. You need to get out of the way."
"Bob..."

"Does this island appear on any official map of the United States of America?" Magneto asked.

"We ain't got time for..."

"It is a simple question, one with a simple answer. No, it does not, therefore it is not part of the United States of America, ergo, it is private property, namely mine." Magneto said. "This is now Mutopia, home to all mutants, and you are not welcome."

He spun the boats so they were facing the other way and dropped them. Their motors had still been running, so they immediately shot off back towards the coast. Dismissing them from his mind, he floated forward to examine his new domain.

"Excellent, and such perfect timing." he mused.

After all, he was going to need the space if he were to begin an all-mutant space program.
Epilogue: 20 years later (or 500, but who's counting?)

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

"Loki fucking Odinson. I knew we hadn't seen the last of that sonofabitch. Still think your wizards are really peaceful, kindly hippies that just want to frolic with bunnies or whatever the hell they got up to in those damned forests they hid all over? Hell no. Infiltrators and spies, keeping an eye on us, learning our secrets so they could invade. Think we're ants? I don't think so. We'll see who's the ant and who is the goddamned boot…"

"So, yeah, old Nick's in rare form. What's the sitch?" Tony asked as he sauntered into the conference room. As he shut the door, the sound of Fury's angry diatribe was cut off. He looked around at the rest of the group curiously. Coulson, Steve, Bucky, Black Widow, and Bruce Banner aka the Hulk.

"Wow, the gang's all here, all the big guns lined up in a row. Something big must have happened. And what was this about Loki Odinson?"

"The situation" Coulson explained as he stood at the head of the table "is that Loki Odinson has reappeared. He wandered out of a portal that opened in one of SHIELD's facilities and stole the tesseract, as well agent Barton…Hawkeye, and one of our scientists who was working with the tesseract. He seems to have put them under some form of mind control. We know from past experience that wizards and their ilk are not to be underestimated. To this end, Director Fury has called forth the Avengers Initiative to once more deal with a threat beyond the norm."

The door opened and Maria Hill, Fury's second in command peeked in. "We've got a sighting in Germany. Time to head out."

"Did I hear right? Loki's alive?" Neville asked.

"That's what Frigga said." Harry agreed.

"Where's he been all this time?"

"He seems to have ended up somewhere after tumbling through the void for a while. He's got an army or something and seems to be about to invade and conquer Earth."

"Uh…"

"Yeah. That's what I said. Tom's making a helicarrier in a globe so we can monitor things."

"I thought we already had one?"

"They've made a new model since then."

"Are they going to go get him? Asgard I mean."

"They're sending Thor to do so."

"You must be relieved."

"You have no idea. It was my fault he, I thought, actually died. Finding out he's still alive was a gift I
never expected."

"You didn't shatter the bifrost. That was the dark elves fault. We keep telling you this."

"They went to Asgard because we put that thing I found on Svartalfheim in Odin's vault once I realized there was a timer on it and someone was likely to come looking when whatever it was woke up. They only went to Asgard because of me."

"They were planning on tearing apart all of reality, and were stopped before they had a chance to because Asgard knew about the threat as soon as it became one. Heimdall sees a lot, but he has to be looking. Svartalfheim is a dead, abandoned world and has been for millennia. No one goes there, which means he might not have seen them showing up to get that aether stuff when the vault opened, and they might have had a chance to enact their plan before anyone knew there was a problem."

"Weren't you the one that told me 'what if' was a fool's game? Neville's right. You should let it go already." Dudley chided as he strode into the room. "Asgard dealt with the problem, Loki's alive. Focus on the positives, oh broody one."

"I can't help it. He gave me everything, and for the last year I thought I repaid that by getting him killed. I know, in theory, that I wasn't directly responsible, but knowing that didn't actually help."

"Well, it's all over now. I wonder why he went to Earth though?"

"He's got an army and is planning on conquering it, apparently." Neville answered.

"Wait...what? Why the hell would he do that?"

"He wouldn't. Something was obviously done to him, or he lost his memory or something. Thor's headed there. He'll either take him back to Asgard or bring him directly here and we'll fix whatever it is. Oh, good. I just got a message from Tom. Globe's done."

"Loki, Lokes, what is with you, huh? Invading the earth, making people kneel...you used to be such a clean cut guy, kept his nose clean, didn't watch tv...what happened, huh? Fall in with a bad crowd, did you?" Tony asked.

Loki wasn't paying attention to him. Instead he seemed to be nervously listening to the storm that had whipped up outside. It was a big one by the sound of it, they could see flashes of lightning and hear the thunder rumbling overhead.

"What's the matter? Afraid of a bit of rain?" Cap mocked.

"I'm not fond of what comes after."

The quinjet shook a bit as the sound of something heavy landing on it sounded overhead.

"What the hell was that?" Bucky wondered, gun in hand.

All of them froze for a half second as the door of the quinjet was suddenly torn off and a very large blonde man suddenly entered, broke Loki out of his restraints by simply grabbing him by the front of his shirt and tossing him out the open door before leaping after him.

"Damn it, Steve!" Bucky grumbled. "And who the hell was that?" he demanded, before leaning
carefully out of the plane to see if he could spot where they'd landed.

"That's the question, isn't it? It seems our fears of a possible wizard invasion aren't so farfetched after all."

"That him?" Bruce Banner asked curiously as he watched the tall man with the wild eyes and rictus grin march by, escorted by a team of armored STRIKE agents. He shivered slightly when the man turned to look at him and his grin widened.

He turned to face the Avengers who had gone to Germany as part of the retrieval team, and studied the very tall, muscled blonde that came in with them.

"Who's this?" Fury asked, though he'd been briefed on all they knew just moments before by Coulson.

"I AM THOR, SON OF ODIN."

"Yeah? Well, what are you doing on my planet, Thor son of Odin?"

"I WAS SENT HERE BY MY FATHER TO RETRIEVE LOKI. WE HAD BELIEVED HIM TO BE DEAD AFTER TUMBLING OFF THE BIFROST AND INTO THE VOID. MOTHER DID NOT BELIEVE IT AND SHE CONTINUED TO SEARCH FOR HIM MOST DILIGENCELY. SHE FOUND HIM JUST RECENTLY AND INFORMED US HE HAD BEEN GIVEN A SCEPTER AND AN ARMY WITH WHICH TO CONQUER THE EARTH. I WAS INSTRUCTED TO RETURN HIM TO ASGARD TO ANSWER FOR HIS ACTIONS."

"And where's his army at? Where are the wizards hiding?"

"WIZARDS? WHAT WIZARDS? HIS ARMY IS A PEOPLE CALLED THE CHITAURI. THEY ARE OUT IN SPACE SOMEWHERE. THAT'S WHY HE NEEDS THE TESSERACT."

"What about the wizards?" Coulson repeated.

"THE MIDGARDIAN SORCERERS? IS IT THEM OF WHOM YOU INQUIRE? THEY ARE ON THEIR PLANET, VALINOR, EAGERLY AWAITING WORD OF LOKI. THEY TOO HAVE BEEN MOST GRIEVED BY HIS LOSS."

"He broke into a secure facility, mind-controlled one of my agents and a scientist, left a mess in his wake, oh and yeah, he tore out some guy's eyeball!!" Fury snarled.

"The guy's a bag of cats. You can smell the crazy on him." Bruce Banner interjected, shivering just a bit.

"THAT IS ENOUGH! LOKI MAY BE CONFUSED RIGHT NOW, BUT HE IS MY BROTHER AND HE IS OF ASGARD AND YOU WILL SPEAK OF HIM WITH RESPECT!"

"He killed eighty people in two days." Black widow interjected, frowning at him with great moral outrage.

"HE'S ADOPTED."

Thor suddenly yelped and started in place before turning wildly to look around.
"WHO DID THAT? WHO DARES STRIKE UPON THE BUTTOCKS OF THE SON OF ODIN? SHOW YOURSELVES!"

While everyone stiffened and looked at him warily, Thor brandished his hammer and looked around, face creased in outrage.

"Seriously, can you believe him? Yeah, nice job uncle Thor, just throw your brother under the bus at the word of the quasi-immortal Russian assassin lady and her friends the jack booted thugs in their Big Brother mobile. Not even a single question, not a 'Gee, that sounds strangely out of character for my fun-loving little bro', just 'he's adopted'. Really feeling the love here. He is so off the Yule card list, that's all I'm saying." Harry grumbled.

"He had it coming. Enough of that, where'd you get this thing?" Dudley asked.

"Oh. Heh. Accident in my lab. Something weird happened. I still haven't figured out what, and it's really been driving me crazy. I still don't know what the random element was. Oh well, I'll get it eventually. In the meantime, I have an awesome floaty couch that may or may not have psychic powers, so it's all good, right?"

"Damn it. I think more of those stupid Kree are coming." Neville sighed in annoyance.

"Geez. Those guys again?" Harry complained.

"Oh well. Send them home." Dudley shrugged.

"No. Send them to the Chitauri. They're trying to invade Earth, which was our home once upon a time. Also, they kidnapped and mind controlled my dad. They can't do that and think they're going to get away with it. Plus, the Kree are annoying." Harry decided.

"On it. When are the velociraptor intercept modules going to be done? It's obvious just sending them home isn't getting the message across. Maybe being eaten by formerly extinct dinosaurs will." Neville asked irritably.

"Dunno. Millie and Lavender are still working on it."

The see-through teenagers that had suddenly appeared in their midst-- seated upon a fluffy cushion of some sort that seemed to warp and change shape slightly to accommodate them every time they shifted their weight--all halted their conversation and turned to stare bemusedly at Tony, who had suddenly jumped through them, and stumbled before crashing face-first into a wall.

"Geez, what's with him?" Dudley laughed.

"You know…I think that's drunk billionaire guy. I guess he's gotten into the eggnog again." Harry mused.

"Drunk billionaire guy? That's bhat you call be? I mean yeah, it fits, but geez! There's so buch bore to be!"

"NEPHEW! WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON MIDGARD?"

The teens on the floaty cushion glanced up and their gazes darted across the whole of the room in confusion.

"I think the muggles can see us."
Harry's gaze darted around. The muggles all looked spooked, so it probably wasn't their doing. His eyes fell on Thor's hammer, and he remembered one of its inconvenient powers.

"Fucking Mjolnir." he muttered resentfully.

Thor looked at him reproachfully and gathered the hammer to his chest as though to shield it from Harry's harsh words.

"Off on their own planet and not planning to invade, huh?" Fury scoffed.

"We are off on our own planet. We're just keeping watch so we can find out what's going on with Loki." he turned to Thor "And for the record, those 'eighty people in two days' were mostly killed by angry pirate guy there when he blew up the building Loki appeared in and didn't give the staff enough time to escape. The rest of the casualties were at the hands of archer guy."

"Who your buddy Odinson is mind-controlling! That makes him responsible!"

"No, it makes whoever is controlling Loki responsible."

"He came here to conquer! He is not getting off on some crazy story…"

"What crazy story? He's already king of a solar system, he doesn't need to conquer earth. Plus, there's obviously something wrong with him. Also, what color eyes does he have?"

"GREEN. MUCH LIKE YOUR OWN, NEPHEW."

"Funny, 'cause when we saw him just a few minutes ago his eyes were blue."

"It's been twenty years. You've hardly changed at all." Steve interjected.

The three teens turned to look at him. Harry eyed him a moment and then a look of enlightenment crossed his face.

"Oh! Awkward soldier guy is here too! How are you!" Harry chirped. Steve sighed, while beside him Bucky had to turn away before he started cackling.

"Twenty years is it? Huh. It's been longer for us." Neville noted.

"How could it be longer?" Steve asked.

Dudley shrugged, seemingly unconcerned. "Time dilation, something weird happen. Who knows?"

"There's definitely something weird with that scepter Loki was carrying. There was a jewel inside the jewel casing beneath the blade that has the same sort of energy signature the tesseract does. I think it's another one of those things." Tom announced as he, to the SHIELD people's eyes at least, seemed to walk out of a wall.

"How the hell many of you damned people are wandering around here? Goddamn it!" Fury snarled.

"Another one? Geez. After all that business with the dark elves and now this, I'm not keen to bring either of them home with us." Neville complained.

"Can we put them under fidelis?" Hermione asked as she wandered into the room.
"Excuse me rude aliens who are not authorized to be here!"

"I don't think so. Whoever is controlling Loki is monitoring everyone through it. He might be able to get around that." Tom disagreed.

"We could ask Dr. Strange to send them to the end of time." Harry suggested.

"We could. In the meantime we'll take them home, till we know if he will, and if not we can try something else." Tom suggested.

"Maybe a fidelis inside a fidelis? Has anyone ever tried that?" Dudley wondered.

"It's something to consider. In the meantime, I believe the controls on Loki can be disrupted if he's hit very hard in the head." Hermione announced.

"Now wait just a damned minute!" Fury bellowed. He was not going to be ignored on his own damned helicarrier.

"The tesseract team's been successful." Luna said in her usual dreamy manner as she wandered into the room as well. "There's a rather confused woman setting up a machine on top of Stark tower. We swapped out the tesseract for the fake we made. She won't be able to open any portals with that." She glanced at Tony and saw him prodding at his nose gingerly and wincing while mopping up the blood seeping out. She tapped him on the bridge of his nose before wandering off once more out of sight.

"Excellent. I'll grab the stone and the scepter." Tom said cheerfully as he vanished through the wall once more.

Tony glanced around and took off towards the lab where the scepter was being held. They had to show up to grab it right? He could tackle one of them then!

"Perfect. All we need is Loki and we can all get back to our lives. Hey, Thor, can you go whack Loki in the head for us and bring him home? We've already got a big party planned."

"CERTAINLY, NEPHEW! I MUST ADMIT I AM RELIEVED THAT LOKI HAS NOT FALLEN INTO TREACHERY AND EVIL. I WAS SORE VEXED INDEED TO THINK IT. I AM SURE MOTHER AND FATHER ARE BOTH RELIEVED AS WELL THAT THINGS WERE NOT AS THEY SEEMED. HEIMDALL WILL TELL THEM OF ALL THAT TRANSPRIRED HERE"

"Someone else is watching us? What the hell is it with these goddamned aliens on my goddamned helicarrier!"

"I'M SURE THEY WILL UNDERSTAND IF I CHOOSE TO CELEBRATE LOKI'S RETURN BEFORE REPORTING."

"Don't forget to dispel illusions as you get close to where he is. You know how tricky he can be."

"AH, GOOD POINT. I DO TEND TO FORGET THAT!"

"You do not have permission to remove that would-be-conquering, mind-controlling murderous maniac from SHIELD's custody! He committed crimes on Earth, therefore we have jurisdiction!"

"Would you shut up already?! Murderous maniac?! YOU and your agent are the ones that
killed all those people, remember? I wonder how many other kids you orphaned today? Just shut up and get out of the way!" Dudley suddenly growled.

The teens suddenly vanished as Thor, and his hammer, got out of range.

Fury cursed, and he took off after him, as did the rest of the Avengers. He sent STRIKE teams to scatter throughout the helicarrier with orders to shoot to kill any aliens that came calling, and to stand guard over the scepter.

Thor brandished his hammer once more as he drew close to where Loki was being held. The SHIELD agents, and the guards that were supposed to be standing watch, all cursed and scrambled for their guns when the Loki that was in the cell, grinning at all of them, vanished, and another Loki appeared seated comfortably outside the cell and cooling his heels, looking slightly bored—until his illusions vanished. He started looking a bit perturbed then.

"BROTHER! GOOD NEWS! YOU HAVE BEEN MIND CONTROLLED!" Thor bellowed cheerfully.

Loki jumped from his seat and seemed ready to flee, but two strides brought Thor close enough to catch him. The SHIELD agents winced in spite of themselves when his hammer impacted Loki's skull with a resounding 'thunk' and he went down like a felled tree. Thor caught him by the front of his shirt before he hit the ground and tossed all six-foot-four inches of him over his shoulder with the ease of a sack of potatoes.

Thor turned to face all of them, smiling cheerfully until he realized the entire group all had their weapons trained on him.

"FEAR NOT, FRIENDS! LOKI HAS BEEN FREED OF THE CONTROLS HE WAS UNDER AND WILL LIKELY MAKE A FULL RECOVERY IN TIME! YOU NEED NOT FEAR FURTHER FOR YOUR PLANET! MY NEPHEWS AND THEIR FRIENDS HAVE TAKEN CARE OF EVERYTHING! IT IS A SHAME THERE WAS NO BATTLE, BUT ONE CANNOT HAVE EVERYTHING! IN TIME PERHAPS I WILL RETURN AND WE WILL HAVE A FEW DRINKS IN FRIENDSHIP! FAREWELL!"

Thor gave them all one last sunny smile, whirled his hammer around in front of him, took a step forward and vanished.

The agents all tensed, looking around wildly, until one grabbed a fire extinguisher and sprayed the area, hoping it would reveal any invisible people.

"He's…gone?"

"He didn't go past us. We're blocking the only doorway."

Nick Fury began cursing a blue streak and kicking the walls, then he stiffened, and took off running for where the scepter was.

The group staggered to a halt when they reached the lab. Tony was there, clad in his mechanized, flying armor—it was a much sleeker design than the giant 'mecha power suit' he'd put together twenty years ago, painted in a vibrant red and gold color scheme.
His face mask rose when they ran in. "What's up?"

"The scepter is still here? No aliens came calling?"

"Yes and no, more's the pity."

Fury relaxed some and strode forward to take possession of it, only to have it vanish like smoke in his hand, leaving a note behind.

Fury grabbed the note and nearly had an aneurysm. It was written in obnoxious purple ink, that was bad enough. The letters i were all dotted with happy faces. The text of the note left a lot to be desired as well.

Submit or be eliminated?
As if.

Lots of love,
The sons of Loki

Mischief Managed

Beneath the note was drawn a chibi cartoon image of Harry and Tom, arms over each other's shoulders, both grinning and giving him a thumbs up.

"Analyze this." Fury said grimly, slapping it against Bruce Banner's chest as he stalked back to central command. It wasn't enough for all the crap he'd been through that day, but at least it was something.

As he neared central command, he saw a clerk rummaging around at their work station.

"Did someone take my purple pen?"

He stopped dead for a moment, gritted his teeth hard enough to crack them and kept walking.

As he neared his station his second, Maria Hill, approached him, with a frown on her face.

"What is it now?" he asked.

"We just received word that a space ship was seen leaving Mutopia."

He could feel another aneurysm building.

"We then received word that Mutopia has been ceded to the kingdom of Latvaria. It has now been renamed Doomtopia."

Nick Fury turned and stalked off without another word. He was going to lock himself in the bathroom for an hour and cry like a baby. He'd deal with everything once that was out of the way.
"Reports!" Nick Fury barked when he returned, no sign of his earlier distress to be seen.

"We have reacquired Agent Barton and Doctor Foster and they've received cognitive recalibration." Coulson was quick to assure him.

Hawkeye was seated with the rest of the Avengers, looking pissed off at the world and fondling his arrows with a grim sense of purpose. Jane Foster, astrophysicist, shifted the ice pack she was holding to her head and glared at Black Widow, who had punched her quite firmly in the head when she'd been escorted aboard. Black Widow gazed calmly back and gave her a one shoulder shrug in return, as if to say 'yeah, what of it?'

"We also solved the mystery of where Thor disappeared to." Maria Hill informed him.

"Big screen. I want to see every detail." Fury decided.

"We caught everything on the security cameras that were behind him when he disappeared." she explained as she set the security feed to playing.

They could all see Thor's back, with Loki draped unconscious over his shoulder. He gestured expansively and then set his hammer to whirling in front of him. A disk formed in midair, widened until it was large enough for a man to step through and then there was suddenly a hole leading to another place. Thor stepped inside and strode forward, and looked to be calling out and gesturing to someone off screen. He laid Loki out on the ground and they could see people running forward from the distance as the portal closed.

"Back it up and freeze the frame when he crouches down. I want to get a good look around."

Hill did as asked.

"Twee little cottages on the hillsides." Tony noted.

"Are…those flowers singing?" Steve asked hesitantly.

"OH MY GOD! A UNICORN!" Black widow suddenly shouted in glee. She stiffened and glared at everyone, her eyes promising protracted, excruciating death "What? I like unicorns."

"There appears to be a wagon train flying through the air back there." Hawkeye offered, wanting to move past the awkward moment before Tasha decided to start shooting.

"Small child flying on a broomstick." Hill pointed.

"That woman back there seems to be wearing a dress made of fire." Bucky offered.

"The bush there is full of tiny Tinkerbells." Tony said with an amazed laugh. "Hey, can you zoom in? I think that's a little tiny village over there."

"I can try. Hang on."

"Oh my god it is! It's a village of little tiny people!" Jane squealed.

"I think there's writing on that obelisk there. Can anyone read it?"

"Hang on. "In memory of those fallen in the other mining disaster of '97 on "the one that has scandium"." Hawkeye read off slowly. "Can you zoom in over there? There's posters on some of the
buildings."

"What's that say? Looking for Adventure? Join the Mining Corps and mine asteroids for fun and profit!" Tony read, laughing. "Yeah, good plan that. It would take a one inch person forever to mine an asteroid!" he scoffed.

"If they're only an inch tall, mining a square foot would probably be all they'd need for their use." Bruce Banner pointed out. "What's the other one say?"


"There's a little tiny mountain in the back with a house on it. What does the sign at the base say?" Jane asked.

"Let's see… Searching for answers? Come meditate with Guru Pathik."

"Enough of the freaky little people. Zoom out and advance the frame till the folks running show up." Fury ordered.

When she'd done so, they studied the picture some more.

"Those are the kids that were here." Bruce Banner said in disbelief.

"On the floaty couch with psychic powers." Tony reminded him.

"Psychic powers?" Jane repeated.

"It looks like a rainbow is shooting down from the sky over there." Hawkeye pointed.

"In other words, our would-be-earth-conquering-maniac lives in a goddamned Disney movie. Is that what you're telling me?"

"Looks that way." Tony agreed cheerfully.

"It's wonderful." Jane agreed with a giddy smile. "Maybe I'll be able to visit someday." she added wistfully. "I still remember all the stuff about portals that got stuffed into my head along with all the blue. I just have to figure out how to account for the tesseract not being part of the set-up, but that should be easy enough…I understand Einstein-Rosen bridges to a degree I'd never imagined before. It might have been my specialty, but I was barely scratching the surface…"

Fury's head came up and he turned to look at Jane, eyes gleaming. He looked and saw Coulson was looking at her the same way. Their eyes met, and they both smiled triumphantly.

It might take a year or twenty, but neither Asgard nor those goddamn wizards would be able to hide from them anymore.

Dr. Strange sighed and just looked at Fury, Coulson, Black Widow and Hawkeye as they slowly lowered the weapons they'd trained on him when he'd appeared in the conference room.

"Don't give me that. I have absolutely no patience for anymore goddamn wizard bullshit right now." Fury growled. "Care to share with the class why you didn't mention you'd been in contact with those damned wizards all this time?" he then demanded.
Strange raised an eyebrow and settled back in his seat, quite relaxed and seemingly quite put out by their reception.

"That would be because I haven't been. They haven't been trying to open any more portals to dangerous dimensions, so I had no reason to get in contact with them."

"Bull shit. They said they were going to ask you to send MY tesseract, and the damned jeweled scepter we quite lawfully confiscated from that goddamn Loki Odinson when he came here to conquer, to the end of time! Try again."

"Loki Odinson came here to… Excuse me a moment. Ah. I see that is a problem."

The SHIELD agents just stared at him perplexed.

"I took a moment to appraise myself of the situation. It would seem you simply misunderstood. I assume they plan to contact me to ask me to do such a thing, but they have not yet."

"When they do, you will turn those items over to SHIELD."

Strange studied Fury and the rest of them for several moments and shook his head.

"No. I don't believe I will. Take a moment and consider this: the wizards that have all of you quaking in your boots because they "outclass and outgun you to a ridiculous degree" don't wish to have these items in their keeping because they simply consider it too dangerous. What's more, your Doctor Foster's specialty is space, and portal travel through it. She learned from it, enough that you don't actually need the tesseract anymore. It's proper designation is actually the space gem. It is one of a set of items known collectively as the Infinity Gems. Each of them controls one aspect of reality. Your tesseract could control space, create portals, allow travel to any point in the universe. I'm sure you can see how troublesome such an item would be in the wrong hands."

It went unsaid, but the SHIELD agents all quietly bristled at the silent implication that included them.

"What's more, from what I learned of the scepter and its gem, it could only have contained the mind gem. Someone got hold of it, and mastered it well enough that they were not only able to subdue Loki Odinson and subsume his will, they were then able to send him off with the gem and remain in control of not only him, but all those he then used the gem to control in turn. That he was sent off with instructions to gather the tesseract as well is troubling in the extreme. There are six gems in total. Anyone who gathers and masters all six essentially becomes capital G god, with control of all time, space, minds, souls, reality and power in the universe at their fingertips, able to rewrite all that is to cater to their whims."

Strange noted that they all seemed, if anything, more determined to get the two back, not less.

"Usually the gems are left on a primitive world to hide them from those who would seek to unite them and control all of reality. If they are found, and studied, and understood, they can allow those primitive people to advance significantly in some aspect. Usually by the time they have advanced enough to understand it and what it is and what it can do, they then take steps themselves to hide it on a primitive world to keep it out of the hands of those who would seek it not for knowledge, but for power--someone like whoever planned to invade and conquer the Earth. No, if I am contacted, I will try to do as they ask, and if I cannot, I will attempt to find another hiding place for each of them so they will not be reunited if at all possible."

He fixed them all with a compassionate gaze that once again left them bristling.

"If I were you, I would let go of this vendetta you are all building against Asgard and the wizards."
Asgard has been protecting the Earth for millennia untold and fending off alien invasions until we were advanced enough to do it ourselves. They may be a bit high handed, but they are not the enemy, neither are the wizards. The only thing they wanted was Loki's safe return, and they did not trust that would happen if he fell into your hands...with good reason, you must admit. They also through their interference spared the Earth from an alien invasion that, even if defeated by us, would still have led to widespread death and property damage. Be grateful for that, even if you don't care for their methods. They are not our enemy. They are quite content to live on their new planet in peace, and just want to be left alone. If you persist in your enmity that will change. Let it go. That's my advice to you."

Between one moment and the next Strange was gone.

"I'm getting really damned tired of all these wizards and their high-handed shit." Fury commented as he sat back, hands steepled in front of himself.

"As are we all." Hawkeye agreed darkly.

"I regret to inform you that I have lost contact with Loki. The portal did not open. While we were waiting for the invasion to commence, the Kree Empire sent an armada against the Chitauri. They have been decimated." he was quick to assure.

The one known only as the Other trembled in place as he reported their failure.

Thanos, the Mad Titan, gazed out into the immensity of space and did not react for several long moments.

"The Kree have defied me, have they? To defy me is to court death. They shall be the next gift I send to my beloved. Earth can wait. For a little while at least. Let us give the Kree a visit, shall we? Let them know the folly of defying my will."

He smiled, his mouth a terrifying rictus, visions of the blasted rubble and space debris that would be all that was left of the Kree empire once he was done with them already dancing before his eyes.

The Other trembled, bowing his head in both acquiescence and relief.

"It shall be so."

Chapter End Notes

And there you have it.

The grand conclusion of my sweeping space wizard saga.

It's been a wild ride. Much love to everyone who stuck it out with me. Thank you, as always, everyone who took the time to leave comments and kudos.

At the moment, I'm not certain what my next saga will be. I'll just have to wait till the muse strikes, I guess.
Thanks again!

End Notes

Well, here we are for another installment of my ongoing space-wizards saga. This will be the final story in this series, though I won’t rule out further stories in this universe. Enjoy!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!