Frozen Heart

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Summary

As the war between Jotunheim and Asgard reaches its head, Laufey hears word of how Odin intends to change the tide in the realm eternal’s favor by thievery of both item and soul. Desperate to save his child and his home from a terrible fate, Laufey has no other choice but to send both of Odin's targets into hiding. Surviving in a completely different world while hiding from the all-seeing eye of Asgard, bounty hunters, and natives is no easy feat as Loki struggles to find a way to help his people while protecting both himself and the Casket.

At the same time, Tony Stark knows he is living on borrowed time as the device that was meant to keep him alive slowly poisons him. As strange things start to occur around Malibu, it seems that life was offering him one last mystery to solve before he kicks the bucket. Becoming obsessed with finding the answers, his search has him crossing paths with many interesting individuals, but one mysterious beauty of a man is seen both
everywhere and nowhere.

Being pulled into a planet threatening game of cat and mouse with a splash of secret agents, scientists as crazy as himself, magic, and aliens was not what Tony signed up for.
Blood red eyes looked out towards the dark horizon, the land was stark; existing in shades of white, black, and grey.

It was a seemingly barren expanse of unforgiving winter made of snow, ice, stone, and very few bare-boned trees. Jotunheim seemed to be a place no creature would be able to survive, let alone flourish in. Yet to the trained eye, the planet of cold was not the lifeless shell it appeared. No, animals both large and small blended in with the environment. They slipped under and over the banks of snow, quick and nimble to either catch or flee from becoming prey. Plant life existed underneath the frozen crystals and could be scrapped off of rocks in the early morning when Jotunheim was at its warmest.

The Jötunn were predators, they did not need much vegetation to sustain their diet. Preferring meat to fuel their large bodies. They were, however, light boned and able to cross over thick layers of snow without sinking in.

There was also the fact that what was seen on the surface of their world was far different from what laid several meters deeper, far from the sight of prying eyes. Cities sat in giant caverns illuminated by both naturally glowing stones and lanterns of cool burning flames that existed in a cascade of different colors that danced upon the ice. Tunnels that spanned throughout the planet provided ways for travel between place without ever breaking the surface. This led those not of Jotunheim to assume that the Jötunn population was far smaller than it was and that they existed in isolated tribes that could not reach each other in time if aid was needed.

Another assumption was that the Jötunn were trapped in their realm. That they could not travel under the watchful eye of Asgard.

This too, was false.

There were powerful sorcerers among the giant race. Many beings of the Nine Realms had the ability to perform some acts of seidr: of magic. However, the Jötunn had a particular affinity for it and were taught from a young age to hone their gift. All were taught to wield their seidr as well as any blade. Still, the number of Jötunn that were magically gifted and strong enough to use the hidden paths that stretched through the branches of Yggdrasil weren’t many.

These Jötunn were the ones tasked with slipping into other realms, establishing secret trade deals and exchanging knowledge with those that were accepting of their company. That number had unfortunately grown ever smaller with the passing centuries as pressure from Asgard grew. Demanding others to avoid any contact with the blue skinned race.

Now, there was only one Jötunn that remained able to cross between the realms without the use of the Bifrost.
Crown Prince Loptr Laufeyson. The eldest son of the king, whom gazed out of the windows of the towering castle of ice towards a spot in the distance. The air was so thick with the scent of blood that Laufey felt that it was coating his very tongue.

Blood. That of both Jötunn and Æsir.

This war, it had been waged for centuries now. Odin attempting to bring Jotunheim to heel through multiple different methods. He declared a ban on their travel to other realms citing them as a danger to the residents of the foreign lands. Citing their frostbite inducing touch and viciously carnivorous nature. He demonized the Jötunn character as being those of savages, living in underdeveloped tribes that had little organization or propensity towards advancing themselves intellectually. Their magic was only used to trick others and the word of a Jötunn carried as much weight as a bilgesnipe’s.

In simpler terms, it was worthless.

Now, it seemed that the war was reaching its head. Odin free to act as he wished with the rest of the realms having turned a mostly blind eye to the happenings of Jotunheim. However, for them to truly fall, all beings knew two things must occur.

Laufey was not about to let either happen. Not while he still bore breath.

“Bearer.”

The king finally turned away from the far distant battle waging, though it was inching ever closer, to face the one that spoke.

“Loki,” Laufey greeted, his voice reminiscent of a mountain rumbling before an avalanche. While his child’s birth name was Loptr, he was known as Loki to the people of Jotunheim. A nickname that had been given to the prince when he was young and that had stuck with him even now. The origin of the name coming from the Jötunn word leug, meaning ‘to break’ with ki being added meaning ‘small’.

Indeed, that was what the other was meant for, destroying expectations. When the small babe was still suckling, Laufey had placed him to lay against a loyal wolf to be guarded and kept warm while the king attended to some duties.

When Laufey returned however, his child was nowhere to be found. The castle had almost been torn apart as the king, his mate, and staff searched for the prince. It was only when Laufey was close to crumbling that he noticed a small pup whimpering beside the wolf. Curious and confused as he knew that there was not a pup there before, Laufey lifted the small creature only to be startled as it shifted before his eyes back into Loptr.

While some Jötunn were gifted in the ability to shapeshift in some capacity, it was unheard of for one so young to be able to do so, nor in such a complete way. The stronger in sedir that a Jötunn was, typically the smaller they were to their counterparts. Loptr had been so incredibly tiny, many feared for his survival for decades, but the prince only continued to flourish. The origin of the name Loptr was from their word for ‘air’. When Laufey had been handed his child, he had thought that he was holding air. Something so delicate and weightless compared to other Jötunn young.

Now, the prince at over a thousand, he was strong, capable, and the most powerful sorcerer Jotunheim had ever seen. He was cunning, clever, and delighted in causing mischief that brought smiles to the faces of even the Jötunn that were at the receiving end of the pranks. Loptr’s spells had also greatly advanced their own lives. Bringing knowledge of different magicks and
technologies from other realms back to Jotunheim from his ability to transverse the hidden paths.

These advancements however, where only able to be seen far beneath the surface of the planet. Through his adventures and trades, Loptr had become well known and liked by many different races. Unfortunately, not all enjoyed the Jötunn. Over time he was accidentally mentioned in passing more and more by others whom were too close to listening ears that led back to the Æsir.

As Loptr’s skills, exploits, heritage, seidr, and beauty became known the tensions between Asgard and Jotunheim finally boiled over.

No one outside of the Jötunn knew of Loptr’s other name, which was spoken more often than his given. Never was it used outside of their realm. The prince himself had told his family that he referred to himself by both Loptr and Loki, to him they were both one and the same. Perhaps, though, he was more partial to the nickname for the fact that there was both love and affection associated with it. It was without any of the political boundaries or responsibility like Crown Prince Loptr.

“I’m glad that you arrived safely, my child.” Laufey extended a hand and with a few quick strides his son was before him, setting a cheek against the offered palm and feeling large fingers slide into his long dark hair as he closed his eyes. Laufey used the time that Loki relaxed into his touch to let his gaze wander over his precious heir.

By the fates, he was beautiful. Long limbs of lean muscle that were covered by royal blue skin with raised lighter colored symmetrical lines that declared his lineage that was as old as the Jötunn people. Fine, narrow nose and bright, clever red eyes like rubies. A pair of elegant horns sprouted just behind his temples and reached up towards the heavens before the tips arched gracefully back towards the ground, as though they could pierce through the ice and stone to the very center of Jotunheim. Black claws tipped the fingers and the toes that decorated arched feet which aided his speed and ability to climb slippery slopes.

Long black hair that hung to his waist was pulled into a single thick braid that held multiple smaller braids decorated with strands of golden chains and jewels weaved into them. They were not just for a show of power and wealth, but held enchantments in the form of small runes carved into each small stone. Bangles and bracelets caught the light, but currently had charms in place to make them silent instead of twinkling together. There were other pieces of jewelry that the prince wore, earrings and cuffs lined his ears which were tipped into points. For Jötunn their ears were not as large or dramatic as those of the elves, which suited them fine in their cold environment. Multitudes of necklaces hung from his neck of various thickness, material, and length, many of which were presents he had received from companions he had met across the realms.

A gold circlet sat upon the prince’s brow that curved around the base of his horns, it too was dotted in jewels.

Wrapped around his hips was a long loincloth made of rich silk which was covered in intricate patterns that were embellishments of the royal family. There was no fur cloak upon his shoulders, such a thing was unnecessary on the battlefield he had just come from.

Loki’s eyes fluttered open once more as he felt his bearer draw his thumb over his cheekbone. Brought back to the present, he straightened up as he knew that they did not have time for these sentiments. Not with the decimation that was spreading towards the castle.

“Why have you called me away from the field, the warriors need me. My brothers, my shier, need me.”
“They will have to persist without you. For now, all they can do is buy time,” Laufey answered striding towards the throne and to the pedestal that stood beside it. He knew that his eldest would take offense and misunderstand his words. Before he could protest, the king continued, “I do not doubt your abilities, little one. That would be a fatal mistake that only our enemies have the misfortune of making. However, something has happened.”

Loki narrowed his eyes as he spoke, not liking what was going unsaid. It was that Laufey no longer believed that winning the war at this time was possible. The king of Jotunheim was as iron willed as that bastard Odin, what could have shaken him to his core in such a way?

“You believe we are fated to fall.”

“No!” Laufey’s answer was sharp, voice rattling the bones of any that listened. “No, I will not allow Asgard to have the victory they seek. We may bow, but they shall not break us. We will not kneel. They have failed in the past and they will fail again.”

The certainty and vitriol that his bearer spoke with soothed the worry that had begun to bubble within Loki. Only for it to raise again with the next words.

“The Norns have granted me a whisper. I have an inkling on that which Odin plans. We know that he does not wish to simply wipe us out or they would have done so millenniums ago. They want to subjugate us, reduce us to what they believe and proclaim we are.” Laufey’s voice dropped to a whisper despite knowing that all the castle was cloaked from any spying. His face for once showed the many thousands of years he had lived, “He means to take the very heart of Jotunheim.”

Immediately Loki’s eyes shifted to the pedestal where the artifact sat proud. “The Casket of Ancient Winters, without it our world will slowly warm.”

Drawing his lips back in a snarl, the prince hissed as he puzzled out this new knowledge, “Genocide is still Odin’s goal then, but this way it will be seen as a slow, natural decline. We will be pushed to starvation and grow weak from the heat. The other realms could not blame this on Asgard as it would happen over centuries.”

“Yes, the Casket is the physical heart of Jotunheim, but Odin will not content himself with the theft of only it.” Laufey muttered while placing a hand upon the artifact, sighing as he felt the old magicks sing through his very veins and briefly the heritage lines etched across his skin flashed white with the power of past kings.

“Of course he will not be satisfied with the dissemination of so many of our kind. What more could he want?” Loki cursed as he came closer. His eyes flickering over the set of five thrones sat upon the dais. Laufey, Farbauti, Loptr, Helblindi, and Býleistr. How many of them would be left empty at the end of this? He had seen the viciousness of the warriors on both sides, each meaning to kill if able. One fighting for freedom and survival, the other wishing to conquer.

“He wants not only the physical, but the incorporeal heart of our people.” Laufey finally answered, the utterance was soft, like it pained him. Then, he was kneeling, pulling Loki into his tree trunk thick arms in an embrace. Cold lips pressed briefly to the crown of the prince’s head, “He means to steal you, my Loki.”

“What?” Was the only thing that he could say as he stiffened in his bearer’s embrace. Mind stuttering at the admission. An element that Loki had not prepared for in his vast collection of contingency plans to see his home stay standing.

“You are the hope of our people, your abilities to skywalk, manipulation of seidr, and mastery of
wit. They all promise a greater future for us. Your antics bring bright smiles and laughter that threatens avalanches of mirth in dark times. You show what it means to ascend against the odds. The Jötunn, I, would do anything if it means keeping you safe.” Laufey swore into the soft locks, squeezing his first born closer to himself knowing that despite his small size, Loki could withstand the hold.

“You have made connections across the realms as well. Those both in power and not would rebel at the idea of your light being extinguished. For that reason, Odin may not be able to kill you, but he can bind you.”

“He thinks he can keep me locked away in the dungeons of Asgard?” Loki demanded, arms wrapping themselves around the neck of the king. He had not clung to Laufey since he was a child, but now he felt that he could not get enough contact. It felt like red hot needles of flame were threatening to dissolve his heart.

“No, you will be put in a far more gilded cage than that.” He answered, fury howling inside of him like a wolf to the moon. “The Norns, they told me he means to tie you to that imbecilic son of his.”

“Thor,” Loki spat out the name, a flash of lightning shone through the windows of the throne room making Loki curl his lip in distaste.

The God of Thunder was little more than a bloodthirsty beast, whom believed that all problems could be solved if he struck it hard enough with his precious hammer. The two princes had only seen each other from a distance when they were far younger, but more recently Loki had observed the young god on the icy wastes. He did not believe that Thor had seen him on the battlefield as Loki was in the habit to cloak himself in invisibility. Using the skill to kill several of the Æsir commanders in the melee. The tactic was terribly energy consuming so Loki could only perform it for a short time. Just enough to get close enough to assassinate key figures in Odin’s army when they were distracted by other Jötunn warriors. Often the Æsir were crossing blades with either Helblindi or Býleistr, none the wiser that the eldest prince was creeping closer unseen.

“He will try to use us as ransom against you as well, Loki. Our safety for your obedience.” Laufey shook his head as he muttered, “But we will suffer regardless knowing what fate will meet you in whatever chambers the Thunderer keeps.”

“The people of Asgard would not stand to see their golden prince lying with a Jötunn.” Loki reasoned, denying the obvious way for Odin to force the pair together. One that Loki would be helpless to stop.

The Jötunn were a race of one gender, but two dynamics. Omegas and Betas, sorcerers were typically the former with being also small, graced with locks of silken hair, and increased fertility. Laufey and Loptr were both Omegas, while the rest of the royal family were Betas. Betas were mostly warriors with larger, bulkier frames and sharper senses to aid in hunting. Both dynamics worked in harmony and respected each other, this was not the case in the rest of the Nine Realms. Æsir were a race of almost exclusively Alphas and Omegas. The former looked down upon all the rest as weaker, inferior beings.

Jötunn also mated for life, though Æsir were known to sully each other’s beds and then breed chaos inside of the ranks when it was discovered. Yet they all continued to do so, or at least, the Alphas did. If Loki was in heat and Thor was able to knot him, then indeed, they would be tied together in many ways and make escape far more difficult or nearly impossible for the Jötunn.

“How like you to discard your usual vanity to hide from the truth,” Laufey grumbled, a hint of amusement coming through as he ran his fingers over the long braid, “You are beautiful and you
know this. You are also aware that even the Æsir have admitted so amongst themselves.”

“What is it you wish for me to do?” Loki needed answers, he always did. He wasn’t one to take directions well, but now he was eagerly, desperately, grasping for them as Laufey stood and released him.

“You-,” A pained shriek, filled with heartbreaking grief, cut off Laufey’s words as his hand flew to the circular scar that sat in the junction of his left shoulder and neck. The scars were lines left behind by sharp teeth.

Laufey’s mating mark.

They both knew what this violent reaction meant, Farbuati was dead.

Laufey’s breath was shuddering, but he forced himself to speak as he lifted the Casket from the pedestal with surprisingly steady hands, “You must go with the Casket, far from here, a different realm, a different galaxy. Hide until we might be able to find some way to take back what is ours. Without both of these things, Odin will not truly have won.”

“Forgive me.”

The last part was uttered as a prayer before a long, complex flow of words of a spell followed them as Laufey pressed the Casket to his son’s chest. There was a whimper of pain and surprise from Loki, but Laufey forged ahead. It had to be done, the Casket appeared to be growing small, but in truth it was sinking into the prince’s very flesh. Then it was gone, with a new set of raised lighter colored lines that spanned Loki’s chest and wound their way to the prince’s hips. They echoed the pattern that had been upon the artifact. To anyone outside of the Jötunn, the new scars would appear to be of little importance as they seemed the same as any other heritage line that traced their skin.

As Loki gasped, standing only by the hold Laufey had upon him, the king apologized, “I’m sorry, I could think of no other way to keep the Casket safe and within your possession. They would have to cut it out of you using magic to obtain it once more.”

“You did what you thought was necessary, but a little warning would not have gone amiss, bearer.” Loki answered shakily, but he steadily gained his bearings once more as his system hummed with the new powerful source of magic within himself. It demanded to be used, released as it built up inside of him. For now though, he tried to ignore it, focusing on Laufey’s words as the king reluctantly released him.

“You must go now. I love you and I know you do not want to leave us, but you must go.”

Before Loki could answer a strangled call sounded in the hall, giving Loki and Laufey just enough warning to throw a shield of magic before them as the doors to the throne room were blasted apart. Stone was sent scattering through the air with enough force to break bone if it had not been for the spell. As the dust cleared, there stood Odin the Allfather, God of War, with his most powerful guards at his back.

“And so, we finally stand face to face. There will be no more hiding.” Odin announced proudly before letting the barest hint of what could’ve been benevolence from any other coat his words as poison would a dagger. “There could also be no more war, no more death or bloodshed.” The Asgardian king moved forward, confident in his standing and in the Jötunn royalty’s constricting options. “Put an end to these wasteful battles, Laufey. Kneel and we can be at peace. Your people can be at peace!”
“And by what terms would you label your peace, Odin. You, whose son has just killed my mate?!”

Laufey’s voice boomed in the hollow of the throne room. His fists curled at his sides, but standing
tall and immovable as a mountain. His seidr swirled thick through the cavernous room of ancient
stone and ice, flakes of snow stung the faces of the Æsir as they looked upon the king.

Unafraid stood Laufey of the numerous enemies before him. Loki on the other hand, had a wild
look in his eyes as he realized who was the murderer of his shier. He cupped his hands over his
mouth in what appeared to be agonizing dismay.

It was only partly an act.

Odin shook his head in disbelief, at the announced death as well as at his son’s unknown blunder,
but remained firm, “Many lives were lost. I cannot imagine the pain of losing your mate, but their
death does not have to be in vain.” The king pleaded with the other, it almost seemed honest if
the Jötunn did not recognize the faintest trace of smug Alpha. The scent would have been lost to
any other race. “I cannot bring your mate back to you, but if you lay down your arms and
surrender; I can assure your son does not suffer needlessly.”

“Which son?” Laufey asked, head cocked slightly as he sneered at the other ruler. “You do know I
have three? All of them now without one of their parents.”

“Three, yes. But only one who is your heir, and only one who I hope will unite us.” The Asgardian
glanced at Loki meaningfully before continuing to speak towards Laufey. Dismissing the prince as
no great threat in this spar, while with just words it could be as deadly as with blades. “You asked
what my terms are. I simply ask to have your heir be bonded to mine, a union to solidify our treaty
of peace… Once you’ve been discerned as benign by offering us the Casket of Ancient Winters.”

“I cannot offer you that which I do not have to give.” Laufey answered flippantly, stepping to the
side to reveal that the Casket was indeed missing from where it once sat. He paced the line before
the thrones, red eyes glaring at the invaders.

“You ask for an object which can be likened to the fury and vitality of winter. Who can truly own
such a thing? The Casket is far from both your hands and mine, now. I do not know exactly where
it has gone, nor where it will go.” It was not a lie, Laufey did not know where exactly in his child’s
body that the artifact had sequestered itself. Could not afford to know where Loki planned to flee.

A frown crossed Odin’s face before being replaced by a look of feigned calm. “Fortunate for us,
then, that your son remains quite within our grasps… and that Gods have been known to own
many things.” The last remains of any amiability gave way as Odin turned to his men.

“Seize the Prince!”

“My son is not some relic that you may place in your vault, Odin!” Laufey roared, a large staff and
shield of ice appearing in his hands as a short wall of spikes rose from the floor to block the way of
the Æsir from his child. He would leave it up to Loki to decide how the events would play out.
Truly the prince was a skilled puppet master that he even played the strings of his own family if he
thought it might benefit them.

Unseen by all, a long needle of ice formed between Loki’s fingers, kept at his side out of sight.

“Allfather!” The call was made in a voice heavy with panic, fear, and desperation, it was a plea.
Odin lifted a hand to stop his men’s approach before turning his gaze towards where the Jötunn
prince stood. Loki kept his head bowed towards the floor, his shoulders visibly trembling.
The perfect picture of a creature that had been turned meek and broken by trauma after heartbreaking trauma. Internally he grimaced as he scented the air with terrified Omega. Once he was sure that he had all’s attention, which wasn’t hard as he noted that some of the younger guards’ eyes had clouded with lust at the almost sickly sweet scent that drifted from him. Loki continued, “Please, this must end.”

“And it shall. You have nothing to fear in Asgard, Loptr. Thor may be brutish at times, but I am certain you will learn to adjust.” Odin assured.

Loki could have rolled his eyes, of course Odin did not have the gall to say they could grow to love each other. The Æsir could never imagine themselves loving a monster, after all. No, the relationship on Thor’s side would no doubt be one of lust and desire to dominate the slender prince.

“I am to remain faithful only to Prince Thor. Allow only him inside my bed and bear his children?” Loki questioned, noting the way that Laufey tensed at the mere idea of such.

“Of course.” the Allfather confirmed, he seemed pleased that Loptr was considering the arrangement that was already settled in his mind. So he tried to shift the conversation to what he saw as of more importance, “Now, where is the Casket? Surely you know where your father has hidden it.”

“And will Thor have the same expectations upon him as myself?” It was an innocent enough question, but oh so heavily loaded. The silence after told the obvious answer as well. Thor was not expected to be faithful or limited to sharing his pleasures with Loptr. Asgard would not accept having a despicable hybrid sat on its throne. Any child that the Jötunn prince had would be carefully groomed to be a puppet king to rule over Jotunheim for their ‘grandfather’, of this neither Laufey or his son had no doubt. After such a child was established, there would be no more need for the former king nor any others that were currently in line for the icy throne. Loki suspected that he would be the only one allowed to live as the Æsir were greedy, not liking to give up what they considered theirs.

A soft laugh escaped Loki as he shook his head, “I see, so I am to be reduced to some mewling quim waiting for him to be the slightest bit attentive with me? My, my...”

“It is the best solution for both of our realms.” Odin reminded sharply, it was obvious that his patience was starting to fray as the conversation moved away from the whereabouts of the casket. The warriors at his back were shifting as well. They probably did not see the need to speak or debate with savages, nor Jötunn Omegas at that.

“No, it is the best for ASGARD, I will not be submissive to a realm built on lies. Now, Odin, I will give you your answer.” Loki’s declaration was made as a light birthed from magic flared to the hypocritical king’s left. As the Æsir turned to face what they presumed to be an approaching attack...

Loki let the needle fly.

It struck true, burying itself deep into Odin’s right eye, quickly spreading frostbite across his blackening skin. It would not be enough to kill the Æsir or even stall him for long, but he was certain that the eye would never be functioning again. Loki did not stay to relish in the look upon the bastard’s face, nor savor his cry of agony. As the prince stole through a hidden passage that sat behind the thrones, he called back, voice filled with malicious glee.

“No longer shall you be known as the All-Seeing King!”
Laufey’s rumbling laughter followed Loki out of the palace, it was the only parting gift that he could give his bearer before he disappeared. Not a final present, no, Loki would return one day and see that vengeance was wrought against the Æsir for what they had done to his home and people.

Notes:

In original Norse mythology Odin lost his eye at a different time and way, but this felt like it worked better in my opinion. Much more satisfying.

There's the end, there are plenty of plans that I have for this fic, and the next two chapters are written out but will be posted right away because of my schedule. I don't know when I will get back to writing on this since my attention will be devoted to Only in the Dark, Stars Shine(Harry Potter fic with a dark twist) and Lineage of Frost and Magic(an Avengers and Harry Potter crossover with Draco being raised by Loki).

What do you think will happen next, how will Earth handle a runaway prince?
As Loki flitted through the halls, servants handed him different things. Many of which he slipped into his pocket space, but the thick fur cloak he slipped over his shoulders and drew the hood over his head.

He could not risk teleporting to where he could access the hidden pathway he had in mind in fear that he might leave a magical trail that may be followed.

There was shouting behind him. Some of the Æsir giving chase and cutting down any Jötunn that tried to slow them to buy more time for their beloved prince. Loki grimaced, but he could not afford to pause to lament their deaths. It was their own choice to lay down their lives for him without Loki, nor any the royal family, asking for them to do so. These were not soldiers, but servants and hand-attendants that threw themselves upon the blades of the self-proclaimed gods.

Loki heard more than a few curses from the Æsir as they slipped upon the new slick sheets of ice that formed from the puddles of blood seeping out of Jötunn corpses.

As Loki entered the castle grounds, he whistled never pausing in his sprint knowing the creature would come. A black furred wolf, larger than a horse, fell in pace beside him.

The beast lowered its head for Loki to grab hold of before the prince was deposited upon its great back. Paws flew almost soundlessly across the snow, barely leaving a print behind.

“To the west, Fenris.” Loki called over the howl of the wind. There were hooves pounding through the snow, but they were far behind him. Asgardian warhorses were not meant for the terrain of Jotunheim. Their heavy bodies sinking deep into the snow that was up to their chests. The rocky terrain bruising the soles of their hooves and the shoes they wore making traction harder to obtain on slick ground.

Honestly, Loki felt pity for the creatures that were brought here by no will of their own to suffer in a land not meant for their kind. He had no such sympathy for their riders though.

There was a crackling in his right ear, his hairs started to rise, and the smell of ozone assaulted Loki’s nose. It was just enough warning for Loki to drive his heel hard into Fenris’ right side to make the wolf change course. The path they would have been on exploding before their eyes as lightning rained down.
Thor, Loki realized with a grimace. Attacking like that, the idiot seemed to be intent to kill them. A harsh gust was whipped up by the next blast as the Æsir followed them by means of flying with that infernal hammer.

He threw up a shield of magic to block the next sizzling blast.

“Ice giant! Stop and fight me like a warrior or,” There was a dark laugh that echoed the deep timber of thunder, “-are you nothing more than a beast given into instincts when faced with a greater force?!” The golden prince taunted as he sent another barrage of lightning down towards his target with a war-cry.

Loki clicked his tongue as he realized that the great oaf did not even know who he was trying to fry. Perhaps that was a good thing, Loki did not know if Thor was aware or not that he had just maimed the Allfather.

The wolf continued to dodge the strikes as best he could with Loki providing cover with shields. The onslaught only continued on, something would have to give with how fast and far they were being pressed.

Unfortunately, it was not Thor that faltered first. It was a combination of things that culminated into utter disaster.

Instead of remaining a single strand of lightning when it struck Loki’s magic, it spider-webbed across it before hooking back in to deliver, albeit tempered, a still powerful shock to both Fenris and the Jötunn. It caused the animal to stumble, and going at the speed that they were the momentum sent Loki flying off of his steed’s back despite his attempt to hold tight to the thick fur.

The rocks hidden under the snow bit and scraped at blue skin that was not covered by the cloak as Loki was sent rolling several meters away from the wolf. Dark purple blood sluggishly dripped out of the small wounds. The life supporting liquid quick to freeze and trickle to the ground like tiny marbles. The world was spinning, but his mind cried out for him to rise.

There was another crackle and a whimper followed shortly after, prompting Loki to struggle to his feet.

Just in time to see the large figure in a billowing red cape stood before the massive wolf. No, that wasn’t right. As Loki’s vision righted he could see that the Asgardian prince had one booted foot pressed down upon Fenris’ throat. Fenris was snarling, frothing at the mouth as his airway was constricted, gnashing his teeth in vain to sink into any part of the Æsir that was just out of reach. His muscles spasming too much from the jolts of lightning for him to pull his legs back under himself.

“Fenris,” The wolf’s ears perked at the sound of his name giving a strangled howl in answer to Loki’s weak call.

Thor lifted Mjolnir high above his head.

“No! Sto-” Loki’s words were ignored as the hammer was brought down upon the great wolf’s head. A sickening crunch heard as bone and flesh gave way to metal. The wolf finally went limp as the snow was stained ever more red. It reminded Loki of a crimson blossom slowly opening larger and larger. Only it was born with the death of Loki’s dearest friend, a companion that had been by his side for centuries that he had raised from a pup.

“There now, no more of this fleeing nonsense. Though I do enjoy a good hunt.” The words held
equal parts annoyance and amusement as the god turned towards his true prey. The golden locks swayed as Thor visibly startled as he took in the Jötunn picking itself from the ground. His eyes roamed across the jewelry that decorated the other's body, could sense the magic that radiated from not only the Jötunn's core but from the trinkets he wore. Then the most obvious clues which had been carefully transcribed in the texts in the great library of Asgard that he could read upon both skin and cloth of his target.

“Loptr? Crown Prince Loptr? You must be, I have never seen one so beautiful that is an ice giant.” Thor mused as he stepped closer. Pausing with a pathetically open expression of confusion upon his face as he noticed that the other had moved a step back and dark lips were peeled slightly to reveal sharp teeth in warning. A clear disregard for the compliment that Thor had graced him with.

Ice giant, again the Odinson called him that. It was a derogatory term used for Loki’s species. The absolute bumbling bastard. The scent of blood from the hammer Thor still held assaulted the Jotunheim prince’s nose. Two familiar smells that he never wanted to recognize through the fashion that he was.

Those were not the only scents being tangled in the air however, the smell of blood was accompanied with the heady scent of ALPHA. Odin and his men carried it, but theirs was controlled, being bound to mates or multiple whores back in Asgard. Thor’s however was overbearing and predatory. Most likely enhanced by the blood lust the battle had awoken in the Æsir along with tasting the pheromones of an unclaimed Omega.

“Why did you not declare who you were? I could have accidentally killed you!” Thor pressed on. Another step and Loptr shifted back again, red eyes tracking each move the Æsir made.

“You dare say these words to me whilst I can smell the blood of my shier upon your hammer? After witnessing you murder my closest companion?” Loki asked, voice cold and expression a blank mask as he stared at the other prince.

Thor looked on as if tickled by the prince’s silly sentiment. “You speak as if their worth somehow matches yours. The blood of warriors is meant to flow across battlefields. Alphas thrive on feats such as this; conquering,” he spares a glance towards the remains of the wolf, “hunting, asserting one’s dominance,” Those blue eyes shifted back to the Jötunn that was all long, elegant limbs as he spoke the next words, “claiming spoils.”

A growl bubbled out of Loki’s chest his voice dropping to something gravely. A more feral sound. If Thor wanted him to play the part of a savage that needed to be tamed. Then Loki would give him all that and more as he spoke, “I know of Odin’s plan. That he means for you to sweetly kiss my brow, to weigh me down with your brood. I will not, so abandon this fool’s errand and take your leave unscathed while you can.”

It was only partly a bluff, surely he had the power to harm Thor, though the Thunderer wouldn’t recognize the fact that Loki could kill him. But as much as Loki wished to separate that thick head from wide shoulders, doing so would be a death sentence for all of Jotunheim. Odin would seek vengeance upon the entire Realm.

No, the only option that Loki had was to flee.

A rumble reverberates as the Thunderer chuckled. Thor reached out a hand, quickly grasping onto the thick fur protecting the Jötunn Prince’s neck as the other attempted to escape with the last word. What a spirited thing, amusingly mouthy, “You have a sharp tongue and a fire I would not expect from your kind.”
The Asgardian leaned towards the back of Loptr’s head carefully bringing his nose to scent the Jötunn’s hair while the other remained frozen in shock at his actions. Perhaps, Loptr did not think Thor to be so bold. Well, it would be his honor to rectify that assumption. His warm breath created a fog as he spoke into one tipped ear. “I will thoroughly enjoy feeling you come undone under me.”

“Never, I shall rejoice when Asgard burns.” Loki swore, but it only brought another laugh from the Alpha behind him. The hold around the fur tightening to a point that it was almost choking Loki. That large gloved fist, charmed to resist the freeze of his kind, moved to sit under his chin keeping him from speaking. The lack of air and the fact that when he did get a breath through his nose was all Alpha. Alpha and blood. It made Loki’s knees knock together as his body tried to convince him that standing was a wasted effort.

That, as an Omega, the easiest way he was going to survive was to allow himself to be mounted and the ground was a far better place for that.

“So biting, but doth protest too much.” Thor murmurred, breathing in the scent of the slighter prince. Loptr smelled of winter, of freshly cut pine, and yet also something spicy that called for him to taste. So he did, his hot tongue running up the column of the Jötunn’s throat feeling Loptr’s pulse pounding under cold azure skin.

He was rewarded with a strangled gasp and more of that delicious scent wafting into the air.

“You are an exquisite creature, far more than what I thought was promised to me.” Thor mused, “You gasping in my furs every night will be a fair sight.” Perhaps he would add the fur of the wolf to the pile, surely that would bring a little comfort to the desperate thing.

The Æsir’s tongue and lips felt as hot as a branding iron fresh from the fire as they worked over the scent gland on the right side of Loptr’s throat. Rumbling in satisfaction as the skin started to bead up and then leak with the flood of pheromones that his actions roughly coaxed out.

The taste of Jotunheim’s crown prince was delicious, addicting, and Thor wanted every drop.

When he had heard of his father’s plan for his son and the crown prince of monsters, Thor had been incensed. To take a Jötunn of all creatures to his bed, to try to find pleasure in their cold flesh, Thor had been disgusted at the very thought. Then Odin had told him more about Loptr. Weaving the tales that Asgard had heard about the strange Omega that sat by Laufey’s side and had gathered allies across the realms. Had gained the affections of those that were enemies to the Asgardian royal family.

The banished sorceress, Amora the Enchantress, was apparently fond of this Jötunn. There was great fear among the people of what the two might be able to do together with Amora knowing so many of the secrets of the Golden Realm. Having met the prince now, Thor could easily see why Amora had taken Loptr to her bosom.

They were both wicked snakes, with highly venomous fangs hidden behind their beautiful scales.

He was dangerous, clever both on and off the battlefield, a wordsmith, and stubborn as the most wild mare. Thor had become only more fascinated the more he heard about Loptr Laufeyson.

Perhaps he could have eased some of this messy bout of sentiments by not striking down Farbuati. But in the end Thor had grown bored of the fight with the huge Jotun. Had simply miscalculated the strength of his attack that caved in the king’s mate’s chest.

No matter how it came about, it didn’t matter now. Thor had his prize in his grasp and he was
considering whether or not to go against his father’s word. Rejecting the order to wait on taking the pretty creature to tumble in the snow and blood. Surely it was better to bind the slippery Omega to him as soon as possible? Rather than waiting for the annoying politics to settle the matter before tying them together with his knot.

Æsir didn’t scar their mates with marks left from teeth over the scent glands like Jötunn did. Their teeth were not equipped to do such. For this reason, Thor was not expecting the violence that Loptr displayed when he teasingly scrapped his teeth across the frozen prince’s throat.

The feeling of threatening teeth shocked Loki out of his stupor, rebelling at the idea of being linked to this insufferable cur till death do they part. It wasn’t quite panic, maybe a smidgen of it existed in him, but more than anything fury had gripped Loki and his magic caught onto the tails of the Casket inside of him and... exploded.

From the ground they stood, a thick pillar of ice rocketed forth, spikes sprouting from it like branches. Thor had let go and leaped back just in time to prevent himself from being impaled, which honestly was a pity as Loki felt the Æsir’s saliva chilling on his neck.

The pillar continued to grow, wider and wider like it was chasing the golden prince who had to keep leaping further back to avoid the ice. In a matter of seconds the pillar had grown to a height and width of a castle spire. Deadly glinting needles of ice that ranged from the thickness of Thor’s thigh to a sewing pin covered its surface. The creation of such a thing should have left Loki exhausted, but he only felt a pleasant buzz of energy as more of the Casket’s magic demanded an outlet. It was as if the physical heart of Jotunheim seemed to be able to sense that the threat to her was near.

The Casket was acting out on its own, using Loki as a conduit. It was a rather frightening realization. Neither Loki nor Laufey knew what effect the artifact might have on the prince and vice versa. Testing it more was not something he could afford to do right now.

The more something of this nature was produced, the easier it would be for others to put the pieces together that the Casket was somehow in Loptr’s possession.

So his feet pelted across the snow and rocks, diving into the thicket of barren thorny trees that seemed to part the way for the prince. Letting him slither through as gracefully as a serpent through branches. Thor however was not so lucky in his pursuit. He sunk into the snow, his armor scrapped against the rough bark, his face lacerated by low hanging limbs, and cape caught by the grasping fingers of thorns to hinder him.

The Æsir’s vicious curses, made a smirk flick across Loki’s face as he rushed on.

The hidden path was just a few meters ahead, Loki could hear it sing ever so sweetly to him, only for him, as he was a Skywalker. One not meant to be bound in one place for too long and heart yearning to learn more from all corners of the universe.

He was oh so close, then he was stopped abruptly by a hand wrapped tight around the braid of his hair.

“I tire of these games, Loptr. Give into your nature and submit,” Thor commanded as he twisted his fist dragging the Jötunn a few inches nearer as the blue skinned prince yowled like a furious cat as his hair was painfully pulled.

Some of the strands more than likely had been ripped from their anchors in his scalp. His nose was assaulted with the smell of dominating and angry Alpha. The thick scent made his insides quiver
and he fought back the instinct to go limp again. That ancient survival tactic Loki had always scorned and worked tirelessly to overcome.

Loki never was one that could still his tongue as he tried to claw at the hand holding him, but Thor held the end of the braid high into the air so the Jötunn could not reach him and inflict his frostbite inducing touch.

“You Alphas always are such sore losers.”

“Do not speak as if you have bested me, hen!” Came the snarl and Mjolnir sparked in the hand not holding the raven locks. The small bolt of electricity rocked up Loptr’s frame and caused his knees to give out, but he could not fall completely because of the hold on his braid.

“I did not wish for my hand to be forced, but you leave me no choice. If this is the only way to bring a Jötunn bitch to heel, then so be it.” Thor grumbled, exasperated by what he saw as a mindless and meaningless struggle. There was the clinking of metal as the God of Thunder fumbled for something that had been hanging on his belt.

Loki had to twist his head painfully to see what the other prince was fiddling with. Eyes widening in horror as he took in the collar and heavy chain Thor held. The collar was thick, made of unyielding metal and covered with runes. He could recognize most of the carved symbols and knew that the collar would not only bind his magic, but also halt his body from dropping to a temperature that was harmful to Æsir.

It would trap him.

With the Casket inside of himself already producing so much magic that he felt he was about to pop, Loki did not wish to know what would happen if he couldn’t release the buildup of energy.

If he didn’t escape now, the chances that he ever would were terribly slim. Hoping the Casket would obey him without fault this time, Loki summoned a small blade of ice into his palm. Thor thankfully seemed just as blind as his father, or more accurately half blind, to Loki’s actions until it was far too late.

Loki’s arm swung up in one violent stroke.

Then he was free as Thor stumbled as he found himself now only holding more than half of the long braid and mass of small woven chains that had been weaved into it.

“Your lovely hair, you would rather maim yourself than obey?” Thor asked incredulous as he looked from the tresses in his hand to the Jötunn that was scrambling to his feet.

“I would do far more than that if it meant I never had to see your repugnant face again! Know this, Thunderer. I shall never be lain in your bed nor any Æsir that treats the word of Odin as that of the Norns’!” With the declaration, Loki’s now shoulder length hair blew freely in the violent wind of Jotunhiem which seemed to howl in agreement.

He did not wait for Thor’s response as he darted once more through the trees.

One bound.

Two bounds.

Three bounds.
Thor’s boots were stamping through the snow behind him, his calls were not just threats, but promises.

Leap.

Practically flying through the crack between two boulders, Loki found himself falling briefly before landing heavily on one of the branches of the Tree of Life. He would not be followed, the path would not open for any other than a Skywalker.

For a brief moment, Loki continued to lay there, gasping for breath as a laugh was forced out of his lungs. He had escaped, perhaps barely, but he managed it. His giggling was slightly hysterical as he scrubbed at his neck. Wanting to claw away the scent and sensations that stuck onto him from the grotesque Alpha.

Still while he was now safe, he did not remain there for long.

The vivid colors whirled by Loki, trying to sweetly tempt him to look upon the shifting scenes of the many worlds connected by the branches of Yggdrasil, but Loki climbed on. Leaping from one path to another as he attempted to put as much distance between himself and the place that he called home. The small cuts that littered his body oozed blood and stung in the vicious winds of the universe passing him by. While he had little time to prepare, he had already devised where he would seek sanctuary.

Midgard.

Besides Muspelheim, the land of Eldjötnar whom were beings of fire and the natural enemies of Loki’s kind. Midgard was an unexpected destination for the fact that it was declared to be under the heavy protection of Asgard and branded off limits to any other realm. But Asgard only spared passing glances at the world of mortals, whom by now had long forgotten and doubted the existence of any outside of themselves. Weak, short lived creatures as they were, there was said to be little of interest on the planet covered in mass by undrinkable water.

The Jötunn race had once explored Midgard. Long before Loki had ever been born, but it was not to freeze the entire planet like Asgard suspected and declared.

No, they had been interested in the northern and southern tips as the environment was similar enough to their own. Something that was rare across the realms. They were driven out by the Æsir whom claimed that they were saving Midgard and the Midgardians from a horrible fate devised by monsters. They were said to have even believed that the Jötunn were considering the main inhabitants of the realm as a possible food source.

The thought made any Jötunn in their right mind scoff. Who wanted to eat something that could talk back to you? It tended to ruin one’s appetite.

Loki had never been to Midgard, but surely it was similar to at least one of the other realms he had visited. He was a quick learner and with his magic he doubted that there was nothing on the plane of mortals that could truly harm him. He long ago perfected his spells to hide from unwanted eyes of all calibers.

While Asgard would hunt tirelessly for him, Loki knew as long as he didn’t create too significant of a stir or used too powerful of a spell he would remain unnoticed.

For now, all the fleeing prince could do was bide his time until he might be able to return to his homeland to provide some form of aid to throw off the yolk of Asgard. Jotunheim would slowly
warm without the presence of the Casket, but it would be at a slow rate. If the need arose, Loki would try to return to his realm briefly to chill the planet before escaping once more. Such action would come at great risk however as he did not doubt that some Æsir would remain on Jotunheim just waiting for Loptr to show his face once more.

He did not fear much for his bearer’s fate, Laufey needed to remain on the throne in all the realms’ eyes to keep stability across the ‘savages’. For his brothers, Loki did hold some trepidation. Helblindi and Byleistr were both Betas, unsuited for taking Loki’s place in Thor’s bed. They also held the looks and size more common among Jötunn warriors that would not strike the fancy of Æsir. Odin may choose to take one or both of his brothers as political hostages and keep them locked up in Asgard. Perhaps Odin may even kill one of his younger siblings as they could be seen as an unneeded spare.

Loki believed that the later would not happen. The other realms would no doubt be critical over the slaying of Farbuati. While royals commonly engaged in battle with each other, to cause death by one’s own hand was seen as an overreach of power as it prevented peace talks to ever being made. It caused chaos across the different realms as the balance of one royal family affected all others.

However, with the disregard the other realms had been forced to show Jotunheim as of late, Loki could only hope for their minor influence.

In the end, there was little he could do, so he tried to push the thoughts out of his mind. Thankfully, as he came to a stop at the very end of one branch, he found his goal.

Midgard. It had been thousands of years since anyone from a different realm had reportedly stepped foot upon it. The last he had heard was that they had just figured out how to create fire and shape iron into weapons and tools as they crawled out of the mud.

A backwater realm that he should have no problem hiding in.

This…

This was far from what Loki expected as he emerged from the pathway.

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Chapter End Notes

Glad to see how much interest this fic has already drawn in, wanted to post another chapter, but don't know when the next will come because this is a side fic compared to my two current focus fics Only in the Dark, Stars Shine and Lineage of Frost and Magic.

What do you think of your glances of Jötunn culture so far? What about this arrogant Thor that is more similar to how he was in the beginning of the first movie?

As always hope to hear your comments and thoughts~
He exited out into a short, narrowed, paved street lined between two buildings made of red stone blocks. Loki’s eyes were greeted with artificial light, the sources of which were held aloft by tall metal poles and other features encased in glass that drove away the dark of the night. Many towering structures reached desperately towards the sky, like they craved to pierce the heavens above.

Loki could not help but to stop and stare.

Then all the lights went out as the entrance of the magical pathway collapsed in on itself without any more energy from Loki feeding it. The burst of leftover magic from the portal hooked into the excess that overflowed from the prince’s reserves since melding with the Casket. The result was a long reaching, but thankfully invisible, burst of magic rushing out and frying any other sources of energy that were nearby.

There was a cascade of screeching metal, harsh barking sounds of varying pitches, and then confused angry yells from multiple voices.

Well, that was rather unexpected.

As was the fact that the brick, mortar, and rock around Loki was covered with a thick layer of frost from his entrance. The chill being brought from Jotunheim and the Casket’s power as it had briefly escaped his control. The artifact seemed to have settled for the moment. As he ran his hand down the new lines down his chest that the Casket had imparted him with, Loki could just barely feel the hum of its power. It had been a roar inside of him when he had been fleeing the Odinson.

Loki was always one to be able to adapt quickly and he made his way carefully forward, maneuvering around what seemed to be piles and containers of foul smelling rubbish. While all of the lights had winked out, he had no problem seeing in the dark. Pupils widening to catch what was provided by the stars and the single moon orbiting the planet. Peeking around the edge of one of the buildings, he observed what he assumed was the source of the crashing earlier. Vehicles of metal and glass that had lost control from the burst had either crashed into each other or into some of the tasteful landscaping of trees or flowerbeds.

There were mortals wandering about, looked disheveled and unnerved as they stared from small devices in their hands to the wrecks. The humans snipped back and forth at each other in a variety of tones and differing accents, but they all were asking the same question:

‘What happened?’

Well, Loki wasn’t about to offer an explanation as he focused his attention on the fashion of the
realm. It wasn’t too impressive compared to what he had seen on other planets, but it would do. They weren’t wandering about in still bloody and fresh skins like some species that Loki had crossed paths with.

With a flick of his fingers he cast a glamour he carefully crafted onto himself. It took effort to not sneer at the sight of his skin losing its azure hue. It was replaced with pale milky skin that had an absence of any mark. It was far from the bronzed gleam that the Æsir had to their skin at least.

Running a now clawless finger over his wrist, Loki was assured as he felt the heritage lines that were now hidden from sight. Gone from view too were the numerous cuts and bruises he had received from the battle and then his escape from Thor. With each shift though, he could feel them, but he didn’t want to waste time in healing them. He used his affinity for shapeshifting to remove his claws, reshape his ears, horns and change the hue of his eyes, these were things that may be touched accidentally or more attention was paid towards.

It was better to be safe than sorry to physically change these attributes rather than rely on maintaining a constant glamour.

Then he focused on fixing his attire, summoning a long bolt of cloth from his pocket dimension, he shaped it quickly through magic. He was left with an outfit that echoed what the man that seemed to be of the highest status among the grumbling mortals. A buttoned collared white shirt, a black vest, jacket, long pants, and polished strangely shaped shoes that offered no support or defense for the wearer. It was better to create a physical set of clothing that he could use as a basis for future wardrobe procuring.

He added his own little flourishes to the garments. Had the pants hug him tighter for better movement. A scarf of flowing emerald fabric across his shoulders as some of the humans appeared to be dressing warmly. Finally, he changed the little pieces of metal at the ends of the sleeves into gold with the head of a wolf carved into them.

He could honor Fenris in this small way, even worlds apart.

With reluctance, he removed all of the jewelry he had worn. Tugging the chains of gold and jewels with difficulty from his tousled, shorter hair. He would eventually have to trim more to fix the uneven, haphazard cut he had given it.

He paused as he held the circlet in his hand, the marker of his status as a prince, as the heir to the throne of Laufey.

Running a thumb over one of the emeralds upon it, he nodded to himself before sending it to join the rest of the wealth into his portable pocket. He would don it again one day, when he stood once more with his people and chased Asgard out of his home. Gazing into a disgusting puddle of questionable contents, Loki concentrated on exchanging the rubies in his eyes for another precious stone.

Yes, green suited this new form well it seemed.

Pleased with his appearance, he stepped out of the alley and into the walkway which surrounded what appeared to be a main street. He drifted a little closer to the mortals, hoping to hear something that may help him understand the world he had entered. These Midgardians were already far more advanced than Loki had earlier suspected with his first glance, but he did not know how much that stretched in other aspects such as social or dynamic factors.

Every realm was different on how they viewed science, magic, gender, dynamics, and age.
All was dim and dark with the absence of artificial light in this world. However, Loki could easily see how some of the mortals around him stumbled headlong into each other, then let out delightful shrieks of surprise and fear as they then tried to apologize or accuse. It was vastly amusing. The perfect setting to conduct a bit of mischief if Loki was not aching, lost, and out of his depths as he was.

Then something caught his attention from the corner of his eye, head turning to see that it was a flash of light in the distance. It flickered twice more before the light became steady, revealing the beautiful massive though strangely designed dwelling it was inside of. A, perhaps, home that sat quite a distance away from the city that Loki found himself at the edge of.

“Fuckin’ typical, the whole city goes out and Stark’s back up an’ runnin’ in just a minute or two.” One of the gathered men grumbled as they glared up at the same structure that had caught Loki’s interest.

“Think he’s the reason for this?” A female voice was the one that spoke next as she curled a long strand of hair between her fingers, most likely a nervous tick.

“Either him, the military, or some new hotshot villain.” Another man grunted, he was grizzled with age and his beard was sparse as he scratched at it, “Ya know, all we had to worry about in my day was-”

“Pardon my intrusion.” The prince cut in as he stepped closer to the mortals, some of them startling at his sudden appearance from the darkness. Something which he would no doubt have to work on. His kind were predators and moved far more silently than these tromping about beings. He scraped his shoe against the street for good measure as he shifted with his hands crossed behind his back, trying to appear as a harmless soul that was out of luck. “I was hoping you could offer me a bit of assistance.”

“Y-Yeah?” An older woman twittered, one hand over her heart, or at least that was where Loki assumed the vital organ was placed, she was obviously still flustered by his unseen approach. All of the collected mortals smelled of Beta and Loki was unsure if their sense of smell was strong enough to know his own dynamic or if he smelled any differently to them. He had heard that Midgard was a world that consisted of all three dynamics, which was rather rare.

“It seems that I am suddenly out of means for transportation,” He gestured to the long line of stalled and smashed vehicles behind him, before continuing, “Is there a place nearby that I might acquire lodging?”

“Well, there’s a hotel down the road away’s. Beachfront, real pricey, but it’s the closest. You can’t miss it, big white building.” One man offered with a shrug, still glaring down at the device that seemed to be made of glass, metal, and another material. It stubbornly stayed dark no matter how long or how hard he pressed at the buttons upon it.

“They might not allow you to check-in if their computers are down. Damn, seriously?! The, like, battery of my watch is dead too. How’d it get so late? My mom is going to kill me!” Another young woman whined as she tapped at the small piece of jewelry wrapped around her wrist.

This close he could see that many of the mortals wore little trinkets from their ears, fingers, necks, and some even upon their eyebrows and noses. He could easily piece together a generational gap on what accessories were appropriate for who with a look around those gathered. Perhaps he did not have to part with as many of his treasures as he first believed.

With a tilt of his head, Loki was able to read the numbers printed upon the little thing the young
woman was toying with: 2:33. The numbers by themselves had almost no meaning to Loki at this
time without the knowledge of how mortals sectioned their time and how long the sun or moon was
present in the sky.

For now though, these musings had little importance.

“I’ll take my chances, many thanks.” Loki answered with a small incline of his head before turning
on his heel and heading the way he had been pointed. As he walked, he caught a voice grumbling
about ‘lost fuckin’ foreign tourists’. The fact that this person fell face first into the street when he
tried to take a step was not at all Loki’s fault. Nor was the fact that he found his shoelaces
inexplicably tangled together.

Loki smirked to himself. He needed a little levity after what he had just been through. By this point
he should be exhausted, but the Casket’s support had him going physically strong. Mentally, well
at the moment all Loki wished was for a relatively safe place to lay his head and ignore the
universe for a time.

The building was indeed easy to find and it was reminiscent to other inns across the galaxies he
had visited. Their technology was a tad different as they seemed to be relying heavily on stagnant,
cumbersome screens. If he wasn’t so exhausted, Loki would have delighted at the prospect of
researching something new. As it was, he tired of the reluctance of the flustered and sleepy
receptionist to allow him to stay when it was far past the time they usually allowed people to
check-in, their systems being offline, and the electricity being out. There was also the fact that
Loki didn’t have any form of identification on him nor a means for payment.

The lobby was also noisy with other mortals dressed in some form of sleeping underclothes
clambering for a piece of the woman. Demanding solutions for the multiple problems the loss of
power had brought. With the scents of so many Alphas, Betas, and Omegas cramming together
with emotions thickening the many different smells, Loki’s head was starting to throb.

Very much done with it all, he brushed his magic onto the woman. She blinked slowly before
writing a memo on a piece of paper declaring a room on the sixth floor taken and paid for well in
advance by a Mr. Loki Vikjast. Then handed over a thin card with a logo on it.

There was a mumble from her that he would not be able to access his room until the power was
back on. Loki brushed her advice aside, taking the clearly marked stairs that the bickering mortals
seemed to have forgotten the existence of. Finding his room and unlocking the door with magic, he
slipped inside of the obviously expensively furnished living quarters.

He set a few protection and privacy wards about his new surroundings before collapsing face-first
into the mattress. His magic scanning for any spying tools before he let himself relatively relax. He
also released a chill into the air to make himself more comfortable. He had previous felt that he
was melting in the lobby of the hotel. He was unused to the softness of the bedding and almost felt
like it was trying to swallow him. His bed back home was typical of his kind, a bowl shaped deep
indent in the floor made of ice and filled with furs. These smooth blankets whisked and moved
over his skin in unfamiliar ways.

He had barely been on this world for nary an hour and already Loki had quite a bit of information
to dissect from the few interactions he had witnessed. As he stayed lax upon the oddly flat cushion,
Loki tried to put off sleep. He knew only nightmares of what he had witnessed on the battlefield,
his sire’s death, and the memory of Thor’s scent and touch would greet him the moment he closed
his new emerald green eyes.

From what he had observed so far, the three dynamics were in plentiful supply, though perhaps
there were more Betas than the others. There seemed to be no economic or social distinction between them either, he had seen all in various types and quality of clothing. Gender, he still was uncertain if it held any significance in Midgardian society.

In Asgard where there was more than one gender, Loki knew that male Omegas were looked upon with scorn as they would never be considered real warriors. There was no shame on Alpha males lying with male Omegas, but the Omegas in question were not free from hypocritical ridicule. Female Alphas were likewise seen as an abomination, no woman belonged on the battlefield in Asgard’s eyes. There was only one exception to this rule, a friend of Thor’s known as Lady Sif. Loki was certain that it was because of this political connection that the woman was allowed to murder and plunder with the rest of the lot.

Nidavellir, the Land of the Dwarves, had two genders with the dynamics of Betas and Alphas, but men always held higher positions in society. Vanheim, the home of the Vanir, were a race of Betas and Alphas as well, but all that mattered was who was the greatest hunter regardless of anything else. Loki mused that the Migardians he had encountered were far more advanced than the Vanir now with the tools they seem to have at their fingertips. The Vanir were mainly a nomadic, hunting and gathering race in their densely forested world and relied on the protection of Asgardian warriors from outside attacks.

Swartalfheim, Land of the Dark Elves, was a secretive land and Loki knew mostly comprised of Alphas. Contrastly, Alfheim, the Land of the Light Elves, was a race mostly comprised of Omegas. In both cases of these realms, it was a matter of both bloodline and strength one had in their sedir on whom was the most respected.

Muspelheim, Land of Fire Giants and Demons, were of one gender and with mostly Alphas and Omegas. Physical strength, magic, and oddly appetite were of the most prized characteristics. The beings stayed in their own realm, not quite by choice. The different races of fire needed oxygen rich environments, too much or too light could have dire consequences for both the individual and those in range of the possible explosion. However, like flames, the beings were hungry and eager to spread if they ever could upon other worlds for resources or battle.

Niflheim was the Land of the Dead, but not only that; they were those that had died dishonorably. It was said if one was cursed to join that realm, their dynamic was also stripped from them. The process was described as having yet more of their already tormented souls torn further apart and the abrupt removal of half of the senses. There was only one ruler and that was the queen, whom was absent of any known dynamic as well.

Loki had been to many worlds and interacted with many different species. Integrated himself into cultures with relish to learn history and skills that each offered.

In all the former cases, Loki had been able to read about or observe the world and their people before engaging with them.

In the case of Midgard, the prince found himself without that luxury.

Everything that he thought that he knew about the realm was proven false within his first moments out of the pathway. It was a conundrum that so much had changed in just a few centuries. Compared to other realms where most of daily life, politics, and advancement were stagnant. It seemed that Midgard embraced the chaos that was brought about by rapid growth.

Jotunheim was growing as well, but it was a much more recent development that they tried to hide under the ice. Unfortunately, Asgard had managed to see some of it when the spell that cloaked the going-ons under the surface of the planet had fluctuated when Asgard had opened the Bifrost upon
the planet for a time longer than necessary for a ‘visit’.

Perhaps it would be wise to leave this area and find sanctuary somewhere else in Midgard where he would never cross paths with any mortals. The planet was large, there must be a place that was inhabitable to the natives, but would be comfortable for one such as himself. Perhaps he could even take residence in one of the frigid poles that had attracted Loki’s species to begin with. These humans were reportedly unable to thrive in the warmest days of Jotunheim’s summers.

The thought had him clicking his tongue, though it was muffled by the blankets his face was still pressed into.

To give up the opportunity to learn, obtain new knowledge that he could exploit. That was not in Loki’s nature. He doubted that he would keep sane for long in complete isolation and prevented from conducting just a little bit of mischief while in hiding.

Already he had been given one more mystery to unravel, to keep himself occupied from the fears of what he had left behind and what laid ahead.

Stark.

Who was this man that seemed to inspire so many different emotions from the mortals that Loki had overheard? There was awe, distrust, adoration, disgust, curiosity, exasperation. If he was going to learn more about this realm, it was best that he examined whom held such sway with the public.

For now though, as Loki rolled himself onto his side and tried to get comfortable on the strange bedding, he reluctantly gave himself over to the nightmares.

The Casket a cold, comforting thrum inside of him that assured him even in sleep that he had purpose despite everything falling out underneath him.

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Malibu Mansion
2:34 A.M.

With a pained grunt and a twist of metal on metal, light flooded the pitch dark lab.

Notes:

From the Norman dialect of Old Norse, Vikjast (to slip away) and translates to Wicket (door beside a door or door INSIDE a door) in English.

The gif isn't of the Malibu, California skyline, but it works well enough.

Chapter End Notes
Hello everyone, sorry for the long wait, this is the next chapter obviously. I've unfortunately been busy with my other two fics and now my job is about to pick up in speed again.

As always I'd love to hear what you think will happen next, what do you think of this new take on the Nine Realms, how might Tony and Loki cross paths first. I'll try to respond to comments when I can, they always put a smile on my face and make me eager to write more~
Malibu Stark Mansion 2:34 A.M.

With a pained grunt and a twist of metal on metal, light flooded the pitch dark lab.

The ring of light from the arc reactor he had just replaced into his chest revealing the man’s way through the many half finished projects. They were on the floor, tables, and other surfaces that were not meant to be used as they were. Even in the pale blue glow, the dark veins that looked like crawling spider webs across his chest could be seen just enough to make Tony feel ill. Seemed he couldn't escape them even in this bout of excitement.

“JARV, you there?”

Silence greeted Anthony Edward Stark and it honestly unnerved him. His brow furrowed as he waited for backup power protocols to initiate. As the seconds passed and they didn’t, he grew more concerned as he called while tapping at his Starkphone only to discover that it too was dead.

“The fuck? Butterfingers, U, DUM-E, calling all dumb bots!” No whirl of gears or beeps answered and Tony swore colorfully while running the possibilities through his head as he scrambled down the secret stairs that led to the room that held not just a single small arc reactor to power his mansion, but several waiting ones.

Was it some kind of advanced form of EMP? A normal EMP wouldn’t effect most batteries since they were usually made of relatively thick plates of metal. But if that same battery was connected to the power grid when the EMP struck then they would take some damage. Whether your little pack of A4 or AA batteries were okay was of little consequence, since all electronics that were run off of those batteries would likely be fried.

Advanced products like smartphones, tablets, and laptops had internal EMP shielding. As long as they were not connected to the power grid when it hit, they should have been relatively fine. Communication antennas would have been knocked out, meaning calls and google searches wouldn’t be available.

Tony had thought that he had fortified his home and equipment to withstand EMPs that were stronger than the ones currently used by the American military. There was also the fact that the arc reactors didn’t exactly run on normal electricity and were not at all connected to any other grid. The mansion was completely self-sufficient on Tony’s own inventions.

All the pieces he was gathering, well, they just weren’t fitting into any discernible picture.

A solar storm could affect magnetic fields as well, but he didn’t believe that it was that either. Solar storms were easily spotted on the surface of the sun by scientists. So there would have been warnings issued in advance. Hell, space weather was more predictable than some hurricanes.
He needed coffee. If his favorite, new several thousand dollar machine was fried, oh someone was going to pay.

Still he worked quickly, despite the lack of his usual caffeine buzz. Once he finished rewiring anything that had been fried that he could find that would immediately impair the spread of power, he removed the blackened reactor from its casing and replaced it with a new one. As it whirled to life without issue, Tony wasn’t about to let go of the breath he held until a voice came through the speakers.

“Power restored to 94.6%, circulatory failures in sections three, unit four, and bypass line one hundred eighty-seven.” JARVIS’ voice reported other issues, that Tony made note of and tackled as fast as he could. As the wrench secured the last bolt and the personal grid was back to one hundred percent, Tony finally spoke, “Good to have you back, buddy.”

“It’s good to be back, sir. Do forgive the 95.039 seconds that I was offline.” Ever since the incident with Obie tearing the arc reactor out of his creator’s chest, JARVIS had become more protective.

“I have run tests to discern the cause of the partial meltdown, along with continuing the scans we had in progress before the loss of power.”

“Good man, my assumption is that it was some form of specialized EMP, but gotta feelin' the answer isn’t that easy.” Tony called as he climbed his way back into his lab, it took a lot of grunting and cursing to replace the batteries of each of the bots then forcing them to go to their charging ports against their wishes. That was where JARVIS could conduct more thorough scans on his ‘big brothers’ though.

While he hid it well, the inventor was unnerved by the silence that had descended around him when both JARVIS and his bots went offline. They were his creations, DUM-E had saved his life and Tony was never going to forget that. JARVIS was his closest friend, knew more about Tony than any human did. Shit, he could admit it to himself, they were like his kids and them going dark made what happened all the more personal.

It had the Alpha inside of him howl and his senses shift into overdrive as he was determined to protect what was his. No one, and nothing, touched his stuff and got away with it.

DUM-E whirred sadly as Tony set a wedge under his wheels so he wouldn’t leave his spot, but he knew that if left to his own devices DUM-E would have been more a hindrance than a help as Tony continued to try to figure out what had happened.

The next order of business was replacing and examining the damage to the rest of his equipment, starting with his Starkphone. Replacing the battery and running diagnostics to make sure everything was in working order. It was as he finished twisting the last tiny screw back into place that the screen lit up with a buzz, the same time JARVIS reported.

“Incoming calls from both Colonel Rhodes, Mr. Hogan, and Ms. Potts. How do you wish to proceed, sir?”

“Group call, better to get this straightened out as soon as possible.” Also Tony didn’t like having to repeat himself. Ever.

“Very well.” JARVIS answered and after a short tone the connection was made. Several holographic screens came to life before Tony’s eyes. The first most front and center showing three faces with varying expressions. The husky vistage of Happy showed the bristles of a beard that would no doubt be shaved in the morning and a confused squint to his eyes that were probably still
heavy with sleep. However, before either of the three closest people in his life could speak, Tony declared.

“It wasn’t me, I’m innocent this time!”

There was a lengthy pause, the others obviously absorbing his words and reorganizing their thoughts away from their current assumptions.

“Well, that’s both good and terrifying to hear.” Rhodey finally muttered, the man didn’t live in Malibu and Jarvis had already reported that the blast had only encompassed the city, spanning just several miles outside of it to have reached the mansion.

Placing the call through his Starkphone also meant that Rhodey was able to contact him because Tony had his own communication tower which he had already repaired remotely during the climb back to the lab. Happy and Pepper must have replaced the batteries of their phones with the spares that Tony had given them. It was ridiculously early, but there was no doubt growing panic outside which probably awoke the two civilians.

Tony never slept, because he had too many ideas in his head and crippling insomnia from a young age. Oh, also those cheery little nightmares from his time in Afghanistan that had him jerking out of bed drenched in sweat, body shaking, and scream stuck in his throat.

“Any idea what it was then?” Happy finally bridged the silence, the Alpha bodyguard staring into the screen with a frown.

“Nope.” Tony answered with a distinct pop to the ‘P’ as he started to walk away from the display and towards the bionic arms ready to encase him in his armor. “But I’m going to take a fly around to see if I can find out. Rhodey, you going to be able to clear the skies for me or at least give those assholes in the choppers a heads up that their going to be sharing their airspace with something expensive and shiny?”

There was a sigh from his best friend from college, a more muted muttering of him probably making a call with his step-up from childhood walkie-talkie, “You’re good to go Tones, but please do not flip off the pilot of Number 34. He’s just trying to do his job.”

“Well, I’m just doing something useful and actual legwork… thruster work? Oh, that sounds fun. JARVIS, take a not—”

“Tony.” Pepper cut in, Rhodey and Happy both were biting the inside of their cheeks to keep from laughing as the redhead Beta put a stop to whatever scheme the inventor was planning.

“Right, finding the anomaly that could knock even an arc reactor offline.” Tony answered, pulling up schematics to make sure his suit was ready to go, not noticing the stricken expression that the three behind him gained. They were the only ones that knew the true purpose of the device lodged in his sternum, the thing that was keeping metal shrapnel from tearing his heart into a macerated mess that would look more appropriate in a Sloppy Joe than a chest cavity.

Delicious… or not. Probably not, Chef Ramsay would most likely have words for the presentation at the very least.

“Ton—”

“Call you back when I got some answers, JARVIS, hang up.” Tony dismissed as he stepped onto the platform. However, there was no movement and Tony let out a deep sigh as he looked towards the ceiling. It might not be where one of the many cameras in the workshop were hidden, but it
gave the same impression.

“JARVIS, suit up, now.”

“My apologies, but my programming is such that your health is my primary objective. My calculations predict a significant increase in the toxicity levels in your body for every minute that you are using the Mark V.” The AI answered, his creator could override the protocol, but it was obvious that JARVIS was honestly hoping that that would not be the case. “Perhaps it would be best if you drove in one of your many vehicles. Might I suggest the hot rod Ferrari, you only imported it from Italy three weeks ago.”

“The scans of the city show that most cars have been stalled and crashed by whatever this shit is, I won’t be able to get far on a set of wheels.”

Silence greeted Tony, pinching the bridge of his nose and trying to force his growl back down his throat, the Alpha spoke, “Okay, let’s compromise here. Boots, gauntlets, and helmet, that’s it, they have individual motors inside of them that don’t have to be directly linked to the reactor. I also won’t be flying too high with trying to see what’s all going on down there.”

The arms whirled into life at last as Tony praised, “Hallelujah, praise be to Lord JARVIS.”

“If I was a saint, I feel you would actually listen to me more often.”

“Don’t take it personally, buddy, I would jump in a volcano just because I was told that it was a terrible idea.” He flexed his fingers in the gauntlets, sure already of their fit.

“The nearest active volcano is Mount Shasta, sir.”

Tony laughed at the audacity of the AI, he loved it and as the hud flicked to life over his eyes, he was off. The garage door opening just wide enough in time that he did not smack into them as he flew into the cool night time air. Well, early morning might be better as the sky was starting to pink on the horizon, the city below him in contrast, stayed dark. Seeing the lights of the major hospital also out did not fill Tony with a great feeling as he asked JARVIS to send him a report later when he found out the damage that had been wrought on the medical devices that were critical in keeping people alive. If that burst took out a reactor, what did that mean for someone with a pacemaker?

Tony grimaced, trying to be optimistic and hopeful that the small devices weren’t affected at all. Something told him not to hold his breath as he flew over the crowded streets, weaving between the tall palm trees that were planted along the sides of the road and in the mediums. A few sleepy kids waved up at Iron Man as he zoomed over their heads, their parents and most adults looked towards him in a mixture of suspicion and hope.

Really, Tony couldn’t blame them for the first reaction, hell his own friends thought he was behind this too.

So, yeah, it was concerning that he wasn’t.

Despite only flying for an hour, Tony felt his breath coming up short. JARVIS was offering reassurances in his ear that the palladium poisoning was not progressing at too great a pace with the limited use of the suit functions. Winded, this was fucking ridiculous, the freedom he had fought out of the cave for and then clawed Obidah out of the sky and his life for. All of it was lost or for nothing.

Well, not nothing. He had changed Stark Industries for the better, hadn’t he? Privatize world peace, that was what he’d declared to the public. Made a promise that the weapons’ department would
never see the light of day again to take the lives of innocents that may be caught in the crossfire. He wasn’t meant to run a company though, didn’t have the patience for these assholes in suits, money over people policies for the bottom dollar, and being politically correct or proper in his speech.

There was a solution in the works for that.

Pepper, she was the one that was made for the job. She would keep the company running and holding to the values that they now shared. Trust was something that he very rarely handed out, but Pepper, he never doubted her. She had literally held his heart in her hands before when he asked her to aid him in replacing the reactor. Again, she chose the right thing with pressing the self destruct button to take down Obie when it might take Tony out with the same blast.

There was just how he was going to break that news to her to consider. Didn’t really have a plan for that, probably would just end up with spitting it out at some random moment, assuring her she was the only one for the job and then peacing out to his lab to hide from her rage. That’d work, it was how Tony handled most things in his life at least.

“Closing in on the location of the epicenter of where the phenomena originated from, Sir.”

Something more interesting to focus on, Tony was down for that.

Literally, as his boots touched the sidewalk leading into the typical, nondescript alleyway. It would have been if not for the apparent visit from Jack Frost. A thick layer of ice and frost covered the bricks of the ground and the walls of the surrounding buildings. It was summer in Malibu, California, last time he checked it never got close to freezing even in the dead of winter here.

“JARV, you’re recording this, right?”

“Of course, sir, the temperature of the ice is…” There was a pause that told Tony that the AI was once more running the scan and numbers.

“Come on, J. You’re scaring me here, just what am I looking at?” Tony groused as the information started to shuffle across the screens. Information coming fast and whirling by with references that the program was using to make sense of this anomaly.

“Ice, however it is not like any that I can find information on.”

“Obviously, temperature shows that this stuff is colder than dry ice.” The fun stuff that kids used to make their volcanoes smoke for their science fair projects or introduce them to the joys of chemistry. The brats would scream though when they found out that touching the fog producing ice was a terrible idea. Tony had a fuzzy memory of himself doing exactly that and doing it again a few moments later to make sure it wasn’t a fluke. Yes, a five year old testing his new hypothesis at the risk of his own body, was it any surprise that he was still self destructive to this day?

Tony hummed as he scraped the tip of one metal covered finger over a section of the right wall. The cold bit through him the moment that he made contact, hand jerking away on instinct. Then he poked it with the tip of one boot.

“Fuck, that’s chilly!”

“The temperature is reading at -200 degrees Fahrenheit or approximately -128.889 degrees Celsius.” JARVIS’ voice was dry, unimpressed with his creator’s choice in testing the temperature when he had clearly in bright red flashing numbers and letters expressed how much Tony should
not attempt what he had.

“Neat.”

“Yes, very neat, Sir. What do you plan on doing now, shall I make a call to Colonel Rhodes about this discovery?” It was a fair inquiry, but Tony had no desire to share in his findings just yet, especially when he still didn’t know what exactly he was even finding right now. He ran a finger over an inner edge panel of his left gauntlet, the piece opening to reveal a set of glass vials and a small set of tools.

“Let’s not ring the entire US military just yet, after all, we don’t know for sure that this ice was from whatever caused the burst. Do we?” The chances that the two occurred separately…. Was very slim, yet it was still a possibility. That was what he was going to say if the Feds came pounding on his door. God, he hoped that they sent Rhodey if they did. They probably would since his friend was the only one that could stand to trade barbs and knew how to twist the conversation to actually get answers from Tony.

Taking the equipment out, Tony stepped closer to a different patch of ice, wanting an unsullied section to take his samples from.

“Take a memo: ice is only minutely causing water vapor to appear. Volume does not seem to be decreasing, so no sublimation. What’s up with that, ignoring the laws of mass, Charles’, and thermodynamics? There seemed to be no puddles. This stuff isn’t melting even in California.”

Taking the sterilized flat-head from his set of tools, he pressed the rim of a vial underneath where he assumed his shavings would fall. He waited a few moments for the glass to grow cold before actually chipping at the ice, he didn’t need the vial shattering from a sudden change in temperature.

The reason that he started carrying these things was that apparently the police wouldn’t take a publicly proclaimed superhero’s word about what he found at a crime scene when stopping a major or minor baddie. No, they wanted pesky evidence that usually was destroyed in the battle.

Well, all of those late nights watching CSI and true crime shows was certainly helpful now. As was the harassment of the local police station until they agreed to have a detective teach him how to collect and preserve evidence with a series of classes to give him a special certification. They didn’t want to, tried to fail Tony and give him impossible questions and tasks. He did them all and had Rhodey call in a general of some sort when he finally lost his patience with all the hoops he had to jump through. So much of the military, government, and police force were Alphas trying to throw their weight around, all of them wanting to claim that they were able to hold one over or dominate such a well known Alpha like Tony.

Never ended well for them.

One vial filled from the left wall, another from the right wall, a couple more from different areas of the ground. The chemical composition that JARVIS reported said that the ice was only made from hydrogen and oxygen, but really Tony couldn’t believe that.

Magic never melting ice? That wasn’t a thing, if it was then sea levels around the globe wouldn’t be rising and predictions of many states and countries being under water in a few years would be treated like the words of hysteria instead of fact.

The samples were cold in his hand, seeping through the glass, metal, insulation, skin, flesh, and bone.

Within the few minutes of him standing in the alleyway, Tony found himself to be shivering. No
big deal, everyone could deal with a little muscle twitching.

However, if you talked to anyone with anything... sensitive pierced, they would tell you there was a different problem that occurred with the cold.

The metal conducted the cold even more, almost made the skin feel like it was blistering with the onslaught of nerve endings rapidly firing and causing pain. Imagine that, then add on top of it a hunk of metal larger than your fist in the center of your chest. Tony swore that each rib and vertebrae of his spine was threatening to splinter. No more skiing, snowboarding, ice skating, or any of that shit for him. Fuck the cold, it was basically against his biology to deal with it after that hack job surgery. Yinsen did his best with what he got to work with, but it certainly wasn’t pleasant.

As he walked the alley, looking for any other clues that could fit into this new mystery, Tony froze, eyes locked onto the ground before him.

“Image captured, sir.” JARVIS reported, Tony nodding his head slightly in understanding before slowly lowering himself into a crouch over the strange footprints. While the rest of the alley had a layer of more white, frosty snow, inside of these imprints was perfectly clear ice, without imperfections it looked like glass. Tony would have thought it was if not for the temperature that the suit was reporting it as being.

The footprints were like nothing he had seen before.

There was an obvious heel, but it was narrower than typical, then there was a patch of frosty ice before it was back to the clear glass-like one in the shape of a ball of the foot and weirdly long toes that had him wondering if there might even be extra joints and bones in them to reach such a length.

That broken print meant that this thing, mutant, person? Tony didn’t know. Whatever they were, they must have ridiculously high arches in their feet that made his own feet twitch in sympathy. Custom orthopedics must be a bitch to order for them… Then again, it didn’t look like they were too into footwear in general. Maybe they couldn’t wear them as he noticed the little dots in the ice before the ends of the toes.

Claws?

Okay, leaning definitely towards this being a possible mutant. Beast and a few others that Tony had encountered had interesting features, the physical makeup differing from other humans. If it was a mutant on the loose, then Tony knew who he needed to contact. Professor X may be missing one of his students or it might be that he needed to be pointed towards obtaining a new one before they could do more damage either by accident or on purpose.

It would be better for everyone if this new guy was folded into the X-Men, before they were snatched up by Magneto and his crew.

Still, something didn’t quite feel right. Mutant was too simple of an answer, too boring for Tony. So mutants had multiple powers, but usually these powers were related to each other in some way. Take for example, Toad, he was like his namesake, long tongue, powerful jumps, and froggy biology.

How could ice relate to taking out most of the power in a huge city like Malibu? It didn’t look like there were any other signs of them having company either. Most likely if there were, they would have gotten instant frostbite that needed immediate medical attention.
“Sir, there is another imprint on the ice.” Yup, Tony could see that too. There was… something on the ground sat right behind that one set of footprints. It looked more like a picture to be honest, two fancy looking capital L’s that were interlocking into a diagonal rectangle. Then again, if Tony stood this way it wasn’t diagonal anymore was it? Just a matter of perspective. Modern art, never understood that shit, but this looked old fashioned, like it belonged to some ancient writing system.

“Any cross references available or we got a hipster wanting to be obscure?” Tony asked as he looked at the symbol that was around the size of a dumpster lid. It too was made of ice, but this was different than the others, it held a green shine to it like luminescence brought forth from paints or shells that may look one color in a certain light and a completely new one when turned a certain way.

Not only that, but this icy design apparently dented the asphalt it was on, like decades of erosion had taken place in a moment as there was no cracks around the pattern so it was not created by something of significant weight either. Very interesting.

“No current matches in my databases, I have also searched any known artist and graffiti signatures. I will continue to explore other sources.”

So maybe it was not mutant. Sure, some of them could probably be artsy like anyone else, but in his experience when they were out and about mutants didn't have the time or patience to be fancy when they had to constantly be looking over their shoulders in fear of being caught.

Growling low in his throat, he felt edgy with no direction or enemy to face despite his search. Dammit, he needed answers, was he not supposed to protect these people, how many hundreds, or maybe even thousands had died tonight with that burst taking out medical equipment, cars, or other dangerous factors? He had no clue if this had any malicious intent or what.

Tony didn’t have answers, and he hated that.

“Your heart rate has elevated to 105 beats per minute, blood toxicity level has risen to 18.79 percent.” JARVIS informed, “It is highly recommended that you even out your breathing and calm yourself, sir.”

“Shit.” Yeah, it was time to wrap this up and deal with things he actually could. First things first, taking a few more samples of the ice that was inside of the footprints. If he was lucky there might just be some skin cells that he could isolate and get an idea of what he was dealing with.

It was worth a shot. He also took samples of the shiny green ice, blinking as it remained that strange color. Once that was done, it was time to get rid of the evidence, he didn’t need the public to go into a panic by stumbling into a winter wonderland.

“Give me a low, controlled beam, JARVIS.” Tony muttered as he leveled his arms straight, repulsors pointed outwards. The AI knew his warning would fall on deaf ears and silently diverted the power in the gauntlets the way he was ordered. It took a much higher temperature and longer time for Tony to get the ice melted away, taking yet more samples from the puddles before he deemed he gathered what he could from the scene. There was a lack of the typical runoff from his attempts at melting it, the ice evaporating more often than changing in the typical order of states.

“What’d you find?” While Tony worked he had Jarvis running every possible scan he could with their limited resources away from the lab.

“The majority of the ice is the same composition of that which is common across the world, besides its temperature and lack of an average melting point. Something to note,” The report
continued as Tony lifted off from the ground and into the air once more, heading for home with his collection of vials that chilled his hands and gauntlet where he held them. “The samples are radiating high levels of Gamma radiation.”

That information almost knocked Tony right out of the sky. Radiation? The ice was radioactive, why the hell would radiation get into ice, let alone ice that appeared in the middle of a city that wasn’t known for playing with nuclear and radioactive things... well outside of Tony’s mansion with the disassembling of the weapons department in his factories years earlier. He knew his people, knew that anything dangerous had been disposed of properly.

Or, they should have been.

“There is 30 percent more Gamma radiation in the ice from the marking as well.” JARVIS’ voice broke Tony out of his shocked stand-still, no, wait, hover-still. He hurried back to the mansion, eager to shed the vials away from his body and put them into an area with adequate shielding. He already had one form of poisoning, he did not need another.

Landing back in his lab and removing his armor, he hurried to set up a containment area. While he might have the perfect set up already at one of the many labs at the Stark Industry buildings, he had learned to have distrust towards, well, everyone and everything. His board members might say he has trust issues, Tony would answer that he had a healthy disgust towards humanity’s natural greed and many people’s grabby hands. Justin Hammer was a good example of that kind of asshole, the dickwad was constantly trying to copy Stark designs and products. They were going to court at least twice a month for that shit.

He let himself fall eagerly into the frenzy that was brought about by a new discovery, unaware of the time that was passing.

“Shall I make a call to Colonel Rhodes now, Sir?”

“And tell him what? We don’t exactly have much to report yet do we?” Tony asked as he pulled up his screens, running tests on the ice that was in the largest supply from the site first. “Platypus, we found an ice covered alleyway, a weird symbol and footprints, also the whole place was reeking of Gamma radiation? Other than that we have no definitive clues as to what caused the burst that was more powerful than military grade EMPs?”

“Radiation?! Tones, that’s a big deal.”

Tony flinched as the familiar voice echoed in the lab.

“Heeey, Honey Bear. Didn’t hear you come in, JARVIS, you’re fired.” Lifting the binocular like device on his head that acted like a high powered microscope up to his forehead, Tony looked at his best friend standing at the entrance of the lab.

“I shall pack my things immediately.” The AI answered, that learning program for sass was more advanced than Tony ever anticipated.

“So, uh, when did you get here? I thought the roads would still be backed up for a while yet.”

Tony asked, trying not to squirm as he watched Rhodney glancing at the multiple screens that he had left up as he jumped from one theory to the next along with his notes and readings.

“It’s 2 in the afternoon, Tony. I would have been here even earlier if you had actually told us that you were out of our airspace so we didn’t have to move with such caution” Rhodney explained, crossed arms over his chest and looking quite spiffy in his new blue military uniform from his
recent promotions.

“Oops, ya know, science, distractions, all that.” Tony answered helpfully.

“Yeah, all that.” Rhodey repeated while pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers. He was used to the younger Alpha’s sporadic behavior, and hyper focus towards things that he actually wanted to do. When they had been put in the same dorm room at MIT he’d learned that Tony’s personality was either something you adapted to or that steamrolled you, with the energetic Stark leaving you in the dust with possible bruises.

Rhodey was an Alpha himself, while Pepper was a Beta. Omegas weren’t common in Tony’s life. He had a policy of avoiding them as according to Tony they were ticking time-bombs with too much sentiment that wanted more than Tony was comfortable giving anyone. They were walking shackles ready to snap around his wrists apparently and nothing that Rhodey, Pepper, or Happy said could convince him otherwise.

No, most of his one night stands were Betas or even other Alphas.

Knowing Tony for as long as he did though, Rhodey thought it was for a completely different reason he stayed away from that dynamic. Tying back to Tony’s childhood and to, of course, Howard Stark. He knew better than to say this and the Rhodes had practically adopted the young billionaire into their family since Rhodey had brought the awkward teen to their home for a summer. Mamma Rhodes had melted when she saw the poor boy that did not know how to act around or in a family situation.

“You really got nothing to offer me? The boys upstairs aren’t gonna be happy.” Rhodey mumbled. Tony wasn’t surprised by the speed at which the other took in all the information from the multiple different screens. That ability to think fast, shift focus, calculate, and react had Tony thinking that if anyone else could command an Iron Man suit, it would be Rhodey.

Actually, he had a suit he planned on giving him, but Tony wasn’t sure if he should yet. He didn’t want the other to just hand over his technology to the government and military. It was dangerous knowledge and Tony had seen war up-close, he didn’t want his inventions to be the cause of more innocent deaths on either side. He knew his name was still synonymous with the Grim Reaper’s in much of the world, even within America.

Rhodey was his friend, but he was also a soldier bound by what he saw as his duty to his country. It was a problem to think more on later… but that later was rapidly approaching as Tony felt a small pang in his chest, sore still from the cold exposure and the poison coursing through his veins.

“I don’t know what else to tell you, man. That’s all I got, and no, I’m not sharing my samples.” Tony answered while slipping the ridiculous headgear back over his eyes.

“Tony…”

“Mine.” The inventor growled as he examined the weirdly tinged ice. “Tell your people that I found a symbol and some ice, but it evaporated before I could collect a sample that could reveal anything of value. That’s an acceptable abridged version you’d see in a college course.”

“You want me to lie.” Rhodey grumbled.

“Lie is such a harsh word, like I said, abridged version of the truth.” His nose twitched and his head moved to the side to finally see the paper bag that was sitting on the edge of his desk. The bright
red marking on the bag familiar, but instead of rumbling his stomach turned at the thought of food. His appetite, it was increasingly escaping him.

“Tony, you’re a civilian, yo–”

“If you say that I shouldn’t get involved I will tell you to stuff it someplace very uncomfortable.” Tony interrupted with a lip lifting in a silent snarl. It wasn’t very intimidating to Rhodey, they had been through too much together for it to be. They were more like brothers though neither would admit to it. Tony was definitely bratty enough to be a younger sibling.

“I haven’t been a civilian since a guy in scrubs cut my umbilical cord, a Stark isn’t a simple civilian.” He shook his head while ordering JARVIS under his breath to refocus on the sample’s molecular structure once more, before he continued, “What’s the count?”

Rhodey didn’t need to ask for clarification or bother to remind Tony that that was classified information.

“Two hundred and twelve. The number might still rise in the coming hours. A lot of people still missing and home-checks being made.”

“Fuck.” There might have been natural disasters that have claimed more lives in the past and even in the recent decades in America, but this was nothing to shake a stick at. The population of Malibu was just under 13,000 people too. Some of these deaths might be natural causes, people conveniently deciding to give up the ghost at the same time that this happened.

“This is my city, how the hell did this happen when Iron Man is supposed to be just up the road?!” Tony felt like blowing something up, probably would once Rhodey left.

“You can’t always be there, none of us knew this was coming.” The words were meant to be comforting, like the hand that the older man set on his shoulder, but instead they felt like a knife to the gut.

No, Tony wasn’t going to always be there. He wasn’t going to be here at all in a few months’ time if he didn’t figure out an alternative to his shitty reactor poisoning him from the inside out. He was going to blow up several things and get scolded by JARVIS, but he couldn’t find it in himself to care.

“Just give me some time to figure this out, alright?” Was he saying this about this new mystery or was it a prayer to the gods he didn’t believe in to cling once more to the life he had pried from the jaws of death so many times already?

“Fine, but if this comes back to bite me in the ass, I’m gonna kick yours.” Rhodey finally answered as he moved towards the entrance of the lab, “I’d stay longer, but…”

“I get it, got a lot of shit on your plate. Same boat here.”

“Yeah well, keep me in the loop, JARVIS make sure you feed and water your creator.”

“Hey!”

“I shall do my best, Colonel Rhodes.” The AI answered and DUM-E, the traitor, pushed the paper bag of burgers closer to Tony with his claw. The engineer barely heard his friend leave, trying to keep his stomach where it belonged as the smell of food grew closer. He managed to choke one and a half down before calling it a lost cause, returning his attention to the samples. Blinking as he thought he saw something almost swirling in the ice, a blink and it was gone. A trick of the light?
He’d have to make that call to Professor Xavier, later, when he remembered or took a break. If the mutant didn’t have any answers, then he might just have to find a different kind of expert to bounce ideas off of. There had to be someone out there that could give him just a few more pieces to this puzzle.

Loki had kept his head down the next few days in this new world, mostly keeping to his new accommodations in the interesting inn as the Casket and his body acclimated to each other. He practiced his magic, strengthening his wards and ingraining the illusion of this altered appearance into his mind. Calling the glamour over his skin had to come second nature to him before he ventured out among these mortals, he could not afford to slip up.

Did not know how these mortals would react to one that was literally otherworldly.

When he did finally leave his lodging, Loki set about learning about the place he had taken shelter in. Stole a few wallets to learn of the currency they used and replicate it with magic. It was easy enough to do, child’s play really. Leaves were in plentiful supply and it was simple to transfigure them into the paper that somehow represented wealth here, down to every last dot printed upon the greenish bill. Just to be safe, he studied the chemical structure of the money and endeavored to implement that into his copies as well. Replicating the coins was a more difficult venture as the metal didn’t seem to be in ready supply, or at least not in a way he could stumble on when going for a walk.

So, when he did get coins in exchange for his bills, Loki hoarded them; uncertain when they may be needed or useful.

Walking among the Midgardians, Loki found himself more confused than anything else by the way they talked, acted, and conducted their business. Loki could smell the different dynamics, but it seemed that the humans themselves could not. He’d observed a hot tempered Omega arguing with a submissive acting Alpha. Two Alphas engaging in some sort of tongue ritual that Loki had seen Æsir conduct among themselves. So many other strange interactions.

It seemed that on Midgard, dynamic held little weight in personality, standing, or any daily aspects of life. He didn’t see or smell any Omegas in heat or Alphas strutting around in rut. Perhaps those times were the only ones when they were affected and had to isolate themselves for protection and social stipulations.

It was freeing compared to many of the worlds that Loki had visited before.

There was one matter that was becoming an increasing problem however, that was food. The Jotnar were carnivores, needed to devour a large amount of meat in a day. The cooked variety that he got at eating establishments made him gag as it tasted practically incinerated to him. Disgusting.

He ended up following his nose to a butcher-shop, yes, he could obtain relatively fresh meat in bulk now, but the expression on the owner and workers’ faces when he made his request for two entire pans of steaks that they had behind a plane of glass told Loki that this may be a future problem as well. He could claim to be a chef, but it still might be seen as odd enough that the mortals may try to dig deeper if their curiosity won over greed.
Or perhaps that was just what Loki would do.

Again his bearer’s parting conversation with him reminded him that it would be better to be cautious, even if he still doubted that these creatures could be a threat to him. There was a nearby mountain range and large salty body of water he could use to hunt his own food. Break up the visits to the peddler.

He had only been here a total of seven moon and sun cycles, this passage of time they called a week here. His first purchase from the butcher would keep him fed for at least another week, the meat kept fresh in his pocket space and under stasis spells.

Much of his time was spent in the large library once he discovered they had one, advanced past the belief in only oral tradition or writing on rocks. He dove into the tomes that were amassed there, read all he could get his hands on as he examined how Midgard had progressed in the thousands of years since the last reported visit from the Æsir or any other of the realms.

Some of their thinking’s were still primitive, this bloodshed over differing beliefs of a higher power. The other reasons for war, well they were seen across the universe as they squabbled for land, resources, power, and what they perceived as wealth. No, Loki admitted that these people were just like those across the scattered planets that existed in the ether. More advanced than some and behind others in different ways.

Loki felt that he had yet to scratch past the surface, wished to interact with these mortals and ask the questions that itched in his mind. Yet, the risk was great. Already, he found that the natives were staring at him more often than not when he moved beside them.

His dress was not too unusual from their own, his manners were received well enough, and he kept to himself. Yet so many eyes were watching him, it took him some time to realize that the form he had taken, while not so different from his Jötunn form, was seen as attractive to quite a number.

It was shocking that he had been approached by not only Alphas and Betas, but also other Omegas. From his reading, it seemed that humans, as they called themselves, could only truly smell the dynamics of other people when they were in heat or rut. Both the people experiencing the condition and those within a certain distance of that person would pick up and be affected by those pheromones. As such, it did not matter the dynamic of their partners outside of that specific period.

Interesting, but oh so jarring a concept for Loki to wrap his head around. It made him uncomfortable as his own biology only welcomed the advances of Betas or Alphas, held no desire towards those that were like himself.

So, without knowing how to act and holding his question behind his lips, Loki decided one night to change his pattern. Going out in the late evening after he grew restless with his sorcery practice in his limited space in the inn in the hopes that there’d be less people out and about. He gravitated towards the lesser traveled narrow streets behind the large buildings, knew in the back of his mind that he was being pulled back towards where he had first stepped onto Midgard because of the residual magic his entrance had left behind, carefully side stepping the exact location. He was not foolish enough to return after having heard the side effects of his arrival.

As he turned down another little, narrow street, thoughts distracted, he barely heard the screeching of the tires of the vehicles the humans were fond of. The flash of a light too bright to be natural, and then something slammed into him from the right. He was propelled by the impact into another wall with enough force that he felt the brick under his body crumple before he slid down to the ground. His ears were ringing, but he still could make out a few voices as frantic footsteps approached.
“Oh. My. God. Jane! Did you seriously just hit someone with the van?!”

Chapter End Notes

Eeeh, so new chapter, End Game hurt me so much, I loved it, but owwww. I just had to write more Marvel even though my writing schedule was demanding Only in the Dark. So, here we are. I hope that my explanation about how dynamics work on Midgard was understood, but we'll go deeper into it later when Loki can finally ask his burning/freezing questions.

I hope you all enjoyed this new chapter, more characters are coming in and new threats on the horizon. How will Loki and Tony cross paths? How can they keep their secrets, I'll say that the clocks are ticking for both of them in different ways.

I am curious, what were your favorite lines in this chapter, like there were a lot of zingers, but which made you react more than the typical interest stare one has when reading fic?

Please leave a comment, they always make my day and get me writing despite how busy I'm slowly becoming again.
The first thing that Loki registers was noise, the second: that it was voices. Growing more hysterical, but hushed voices being hissed back and forth. He counted as he tried to figure out what had happened before he opened his eyes.

Two female voices, one male, his nose told him that one of the women was an Alpha, while the others were Betas. They were also simply human, which eased the escaped prince slightly. While typical mortals weren’t much of a threat to him, he had found in his research that there were tools and people on this plane that might cause even him some considerable damage. Those weapons were not widely produced and those that could wield them a smaller number than that.

The likelihood of Loki crossing their path was low as long as he kept his head down.

Speaking of head, his was aching like he had been struck with that damned Thunderer’s hammer.

“Okay, so like, I’m pretty sure you’re not supposed to move someone if they have possible back or neck injuries.” The Alpha female spoke, her words quick and concerned. Her scent carried on her breath.

“I wasn’t going to leave him out on the street!” Another woman hissed.

“No, we should have called an ambulance.” The male muttered softly, the second woman speaking over him, “I, we, can’t afford to get sued. We barely have enough money from the research grants to cover our daily expenses. Especially if Darcy keeps visiting every Starbucks we come across.”

“I need my quality caffeine, a girl can only survive on dollar store grounds for so long, Jane!” The apparent Darcy answered, a mouthy Alpha, not really surprising.

“You don’t even get coffee you get frappuccinos. We didn’t have that problem in the deserts of New Mexico.” The man agreed, “None of those out there, now in California…”

“This is where the readings came from and with what happened just a few days ago-” Jane, that sounded like a feminine human name at least, argued.

“Getting off track here, we have an unconscious, possibly critically injured man in our van,” The man cut in again.

“Erik-” Both women whined. Loki felt that now would be a good time to make himself known. He was tempted to listen longer, the bouncing conversation was incredibly amusing. Still, he pushed himself up slowly from what appeared to be a long lounging seat that had seen better days, calling, “Not so unconscious, I believe.”

The trio gave a yelp all turning to face Loki and allowing him his first good look at not only his company, but also his surroundings. The male was older in age, with pale hair revealing much of his forehead. One small, thin woman, Darcy he’d come to know, had dark hair past her shoulders and thick frame glasses perched on her narrow nose. The last woman had long brown hair and was clutching one of the devices known as a tablet to her chest. All the mortals had the same eye color,
blue, but the difference in their scents had Loki believing that they weren’t related to each other. It seemed that they were inside of a strange mix of house and vehicle, a faint vibration humming through the entire space as the engine remained running.

The lighter haired female spoke when she noticed his wandering gaze, flushing slightly “Sorry about the mess, we don’t usually have guests. Actually we never have guests.”

The shorter girl, the Alpha, was the first of them to truly move. Coming closer to half crouch by Loki, “How ya feelin’, Dark Horse? A little short of breath? Are you sure you don’t need mouth to mouth, I’m totally licensed in CPR.”

“Darcy!” Jane admonished. Why? Loki did not know, the nickname and terms that the other spoke held little meaning to the Jötunn. Ever since arriving on Midgard, Loki had found that Allspeak was fallible. So many of the words that he heard used in daily conversation and in his research did not immediately translate. If they did, then they held a completely different meaning than what Loki had assumed. This slang, differences in vernacular, and lack of context made Loki shy away from engaging with the humans.

Loose lips could be more dangerous than a misstep on the edge of a cliff. It was rather painful for Loki, he loved to flyte and to exchange knowledge. Here he hadn’t been able to do so without fear. For this reason he knew it was better to make his escape as quickly as possible, “That won’t be necessary, though it is a kind offer.” Dracy’s cheeks reddened, a strange high pitched sound leaving the back of her throat as Loki continued, “I think it best to be on my way.”

“Leave?! Just like that? We hit you with our van,” Jane’s eyes wide with disbelief.

“Yes, son, I think it might be best if you stay down for a little while.” The man, Erik, finally spoke, pushing it into Loki’s hands, the chill of it against his skin further righting his senses.

Unable to see anyway to politely refuse, the prince twisted the cap and after confirming with a subtle sniff that it was only water he took a sip.

“Though…” Erik mused as his eyes scanned over their guest, “The van was dented and you don’t seem to be.”

“You’re right!” Jane agreed, eyes widening as she glanced at her companions before forcing the tablet into Erik’s hands and pulling out a smaller device from her pocket as she walked closer. A phone, the invention that seemed to be in the possession of almost every human Loki had come across. She tapped upon the screen a few times before a light shined from a small hole on the other side.

She held the phone half an arm’s length away from Loki’s face, while ordering, “Follow the light with just your eyes, please.”

He did so, though it stung to look at it for so long. Jötunheimr was a realm with naturally dim surroundings, a normal day of sun for Midgard usually had Loki’s eyes feeling sore by the end of the day.

“Huh, none of the typical signs of a concussion.” Jane muttered under her breath before grabbing the edge of the raven’s simple, long sleeved dark green shirt and jerking it upwards.

It took everything in Loki not to lash out at the unexpected touch and action, either with magic or
physically. Mortals were terribly fragile, one wrong move and Loki was certain that he might accidentally extinguish their short lives. With his Skywalking across the other realms, Loki had learned how to temper his strength and reactions around weaker beings. The rest of the Jotunar would not know how to be so gentle. The way that they communicated was very physical, constantly touching in some way.

When Loki had fled the palace so many of the servants that he passed had ran their hands down his arms, neck, hair, and heritage lines to express their hope and remorse that couldn’t be voiced in words.

Living the last few days with almost no physical contact made him feel strange, lonely. Perhaps that is why he didn’t react when Jane ran her warm, not hot like an Æsir’s, hand down his chest and his left side.

“No bruises, not even a bit of redness, but we hit you with a well over a thousand pound van going forty miles per hour.” Jane shook her head in disbelief, a shiver running up her arm at how cool the man was to the touch. Was he perhaps sick? See him have a cold, but no broken bones.

“Why were you going that fast in an alleyway, anyway?” Darcy whispered, though to Loki it might as well have been shouting with his senses compared to theirs.

“Because we were approaching the source of the signal!” Jane answered, then Erik cleared his throat and looked pointedly at the hand that Jane was still pressing to the stranger’s sternum. Flushing, Jane snatched her hand back, but seemed to need something to do with them as she quickly took back the tablet from the man. Trying to hide her embarrassment at getting caught in the moment of a possible new discovery… again.

Loki raised a brow at them all, such a strange lot. Amusing though. He fixed his shirt before trying to stand up. He was met with more fussing and protest when he did. Loki felt a little sore, but from the way they acted he assumed that if he was human he might be knocking on Hel’s door.

“I assure you, I’m quite alright. If you need compensation for the damage please let me know of the amount.” Loki offered, wishing to retreat back to the inn and forget this bizarre encounter.

“You compensate us?” Erik repeated, both brows rising towards his receding hairline. Darcy shushed him, muttering something about ‘not ruining their get out of jail free card’. The man ignored her, an action that disregarded her dynamic in a way that still baffled Loki, “You sure you didn’t hit your head…?”

Realizing what Erik was after, the prince didn’t see the harm in telling him, “Loki, Loki Vikjast.”

“Well, Mr. Vikjast, you’re not exactly from around here are you?” Jane asked, her eyes darting from the tablet in her hand and some of the constantly beeping, blinking devices haphazardly perched on the counter that was typically used to prepare food. These humans didn’t seem to deem that purpose enough for the cramped space in the van.

“Not with that accent.” Darcy joked before falling silent as the atmosphere grew tense, Erik leaning over the tablet, his own eyes widening from whatever he saw there. The dark haired girl laughed nervously, “Come on guys, we’re waiting for the punchline here?”

Loki felt his heart quicken, though his expression remained calm as he spoke, “I’m Scandinavian if that helps.”

“Which country?” Jane asked, tapping a writing utensil against the screen of the tablet, her eyes not
leaving Loki’s as he answered, “Norway.”

“Å, det er mitt hjemland. Hvilken by kommer du fra?” Erik asked, beaming as he slipped into his native tongue. Something he did not have a chance to do in his daily life, particularly away from the university setting.

“Oslo,” Loki answered simply, knowing he ran the risk of discovery if he was pushed to have a full conversation in a different language. While the Allspeak was a blessing that allowed Loki to understand any language native to the Nine Realms, it would serve as a nail in the coffin for Loki’s ploy at humanity. For if Loki were to attempt a full conversation with someone who was more fluent in one language than another in the presence of those who spoke a different language, some would hear one language while some would hear something different. Loki’s words being translated fluently into whatever language the listeners preferred.

“I really should be on my way though,” Loki ventured, this time staying standing once he was on his feet when they tried to urge him back to the lounge, “Peace, I assure you that I’ll seek no compensation from you.”

“I…” Jane began, her brows furrowing as she looked between her companions. “Well, we’re still worried about you, could we maybe meet you tomorrow? Just for coffee.”

“We wanna make sure that you didn’t, like, die,” Darcy explained, continuing before Loki could brush away their concerns, “Then we’ll be completely out of your hair, but if you don’t come we’ll totally wonder for ever if you didn’t wake up after maybe going to sleep with a concussion.”

“I-,” Loki began, but the dark haired Alpha’s words ran over him like a rampaging bulgesnipe, “The Starbucks on Main Street, you know where that is, right?” At his reluctant nod, Darcy grinned, “Sweet, 9:30 A.M., be there. You have a phone?”

“No, unfortunately mine recently broke and I’m not savey on how to go about obtaining a new one.” Loki offered.

“Ah, that sucks, we can totally help you with that after coffee, it’s the least we can do after, ya know, almost turning you into roadkill.” Darcy spoke with finality as she walked over to the door of the van and opened it to reveal the dark alley that Loki assumed he’d never left since he lost consciousness.

Loki blinked as he was waved out the door, his feet touching the worn brick with a sense of disbelief. The trio of humans called their goodbyes and then the door to the mobile home slammed shut. Unsure of what had just happened, the runaway prince started down the alley. He could ignore their meeting, simply not show up and lay low for a few days, wait for them to move on before continuing his exploration of this Midgardian city in peace.

But what was the fun in that? It would be in poor taste if he didn’t come to assuage their fears. Loki chuckled softly to himself as he turned the corner, and once he knew he was out of sight, teleported back to his room at the inn. He was a prince, it would be terrible for him to start shirking his lessons in decorum already.

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“So… he was weird. Hot, but weird.” Darcy exclaimed once she shut the door after Loki. She’d never heard the name before, but maybe it was common for his country? She shouldn’t judge when her name was so plain. Well, not as plain as Jane’s, literally Plain Jane.
“No one should have been able to walk away from that without a mark.” Erik muttered, it wasn’t often that the two women saw the old professor truly baffled. Jane asked as she took the bottle their guest had left and tossed it into the slightly overflowing bin for plastics, “What did you say to him, when you were speaking Norwegian?”

“I told him that’s where I’m from and asked him where he was from. He answered the capital, Oslo, but,” Erik trailed off before admitting, “Well, I’ve never heard of anyone naming their child ‘Loki’ before. That last name too, it’s strange.”

“Why?” Darcy asked, moving the curtain from a window to peek out into the alley, the young man was nowhere in sight now. She hoped that he got home safe enough, she’d heard that Malibu had some petty crime now and again. Not much in the form of anything major as most criminals weren’t dumb enough to want to pound on Iron Man’s front door.

“Vikjast and Loki, they are both old Norse, very old.” Erik explained with a shrug, “Though maybe I shouldn’t be surprised, people nowadays seem to be trying to name their kids the most unique things they can think of. All without considering how that name might look on a job application. You wouldn’t want to see a doctor with a name that didn’t inspire confidence would you? Loki can be roughly translated to mean ‘break’.”

“I can see your point,” Jane agreed, though she and Erik shared a long glance at the tablet in her hands. Noise erupted from one device on the table, the screeching and flashing light had all of them jumping with enough force to rock the van.

Examining the paper that one machine spat out and stabbing at the keyboard of the connected computer, Jane called, “Erik, you got to take a look at this!”

“Another fluctuation.” The man muttered as he looked over the data, “Smaller than the one recorded from a couple of days ago, but similar spikes. According to the coordinates, it’s from—”

Jane was already out the door and running down the alleyway, but after sliding on a plastic bag when she took the corner too fast… She found nothing, no sign of any disturbance on cosmic levels that should in theory be there. Using the light from the flashlight function on her phone she looked around, still nothing. Erik and Darcy soon joined her, yet at the shake of her head they bundled back into the van once more and drove on. With the early hours approaching they stopped by the epicenter they were originally heading towards.

Upon the ground there, they had found a mark, but little else of interest. Disappointed, though Jane and Darcy took pictures of the possible graffiti or sign from every possible angle, they eventually had to call it quits. Erik looked at the symbol with a deep frown, but held onto the belief that it was merely someone with an odd taste in art and how to express it.

They returned to a spot in the city that allowed over-sized cars to park. Jane could have sworn that she had just closed her eyes when she was being shaken awake by Darcy and the smell of coffee.

“Wakey, wakey,” Darcy called as she shoved a mug of coffee into the scientist’s hands, it sloshed dangerous as the van went over a bump. Jane wondered how in the world the younger woman was already buzzing about… and keeping her balance in the moving vehicle as Erik drove.

“Humans how evolved past the limitations of being diurnal or nocturnal as a species, why am I awake?” Jane groaned as she sucked down as much caffeine as she could, felt it scalding the roof of her mouth and threatening to go up her nose as Erik tapped the breaks suddenly. She could hear the man grumbling about jackass drivers before it switched into Erik’s native tongue.
“Because we got a breakfast date with a mysterious hunk.” the intern answered, already dressed and ready while Jane was still in her pajamas.

“Mysterious? I mean he is a stranger, but -” Jane did not protest the attractive part, Loki was indeed that and her face flushed as she remembered her impromptu, physical examination of his body.

“You don’t get it, after you passed out last night, I did some digging.” Darcy explained, waving her phone in front of Jane’s face, “I looked him up, got Erik to write it in the other alphabet too. In English or Norwiegian, zilch, nah dah, nothin’! No Instagram, FaceBook, WhatsApp, Twitter, or YouTube. Heck, I even checked MySpace and Tumblr, and google searched for any references: this guy doesn’t exist. At least according to the internet, but everything and everyone is on the internet, Jane!”

It was too early in the morning for this, Jane thought, but nonetheless started to get dressed behind the curtain of her bed built into the wall of the van. She brushed her hair out as Darcy continued to protest the logistics of Loki not using any of the social media that most of society did. Even Jane had a FaceBook account, even if she rarely used it.

As she finished brushing out her hair, she felt the van coming to a stop. How Erik managed to parallel park the beast would never cease to amaze her. Peeking out the windshield revealed that they were parked in front of a Starbucks. Through the large panes of glass, she could even see what she assumed to be the back of Loki’s head. He was punctual, they were not. A check to her phone showed they were a few minutes late.

“If it’s rude to keep a lady waiting, it should work the other way too.” Darcy called as she opened the door, “Equality, bitches.”

“I’m not sure where she’s getting her energy, usually it’s like we need a crowbar to get her out of bed.” Erik mumbled as he set the emergency brake, both of the scientists greeted to the sight of Darcy waiting in line at the counter, her bag on one of the chairs at the raven’s table.

Loki stood as they approached, giving them each a small nod of his head and giving a pleasant ‘good morning’ before reseating himself.

“Uh good morning, glad to see you are still among the land of the living.” Jane greeted, sitting down on a chair across the table from their late-night victim. Selvig took the seat to the right, Darcy’s bag was on the left. Loki had a steaming cup and saucer in front of him, but she was surprised to see that it wasn’t coffee.

It seemed that Loki preferred tea.

“I assure you, it takes much more than that to kill me.” Loki answered with a smile, it wasn’t mean natured, but it was sharp.

Jane wasn’t sure how to respond to that declaration, so she settled for just laughing awkwardly. Getting hit by a van… really most people should not have been able to walk away like he had. Thankfully she was saved when Darcy returned, almost slamming the tray down on the table, “Breakfast time!”

Darcy quickly dished out what she had bought, the amount of stuff made Jane’s wallet twinge in pain. Treating Loki to breakfast was a price they’d have to pay instead of rotting in jail for possible vehicular manslaughter. Coffee for Jane and Selvig, some sugary half frozen thing for Darcy and scones for everyone, including Loki.
When the pastry was put in front of him though, Loki’s expression shuttered for a moment.

“Don’t like white chocolate or raspberry?” Erik asked, Darcy chimed in as well, “I could get you something else, it’s our treat. I mean you already got a drink before we could get you one and we kinda made you go out of your way to meet us.”

“Ah, that’s very kind of you, but I already ate before I came. It was no trouble, I am currently residing in an inn only a short walk from here.” Loki answered with a smile that could be considered bashful. While his kind could stomach a bit of plant matter, it wasn’t something they particularly enjoyed. Anything that had been introduced to heat for a moderate period of time also tasted charred. Tea was oddly delightful he had found, it reminded him of a drink he had been introduced to on Alfheim by the Light Elves.

“Well I can get you a bag then.” Darcy mused and Loki decided not to fight the Alpha on the offer. He would either discard it later or, most probably, put it in his pocket dimension and forget about it for potential decades. It had happened before.

“I don’t believe that I ever got your names.” Loki was delighted by the abashed expressions that bloomed across his companions’ faces.

“Oh, wow, I guess we completely forgot with everything last night! I’m Darcy,” She had offered to give him mouth to mouth and she hadn’t even told him her name?! What a faux pas, “I’m a political science student from Culver University. Currently slaving away as an intern under Dr. Selvig here. He’s an expert in Theoretical Astrophysics. I’m also Jane’s assistant.”

“Please, call me Erik.” The older man suggested, offering a hand and shaking Loki’s. His brows pinching as the man overextended and wrapped his long fingers around his wrist instead. Loki quickly corrected his grip, so Erik shrugged it off as a simple mistake.

“I’m Dr. Jane Foster, astronomer and researcher. All of us are from Culver University.” Jane introduced, if they were coming clean then it might best to lay it all out, “I’m the one that actually hit you.”

“Well as long as it does not become a habit, then I think we can put it behind us.” Loki answered, it was amusing, riveting to have a conversation with someone after days alone.

“So, what brings you out to the States and, ya know, Malibu?” Darcy asked between bites of her own sweet.

Loki hummed softly; he had already composed a list of answers for possible questions on his walk to the café. “My family thought a change in scenery would be good for me. I’m fluent in English so I thought, why not visit a different country? This is a beautiful city, the beach, a bit of nature, relaxation.”

“Yeah, relaxing except for what happened a couple days ago,” Erik agreed, “The official report says that it was a random power surge that caused that massive blackout that knocked out most of the city.”

“You speak as if you have doubts about this.” Loki mused; it wasn’t surprising that the topic would come up. The aftermath of his arrival was never far from the natives of the area’s lips. It was unfortunate, but Loki had no way of knowing such a thing would happen. Having witnessed so much death and slaughter through his life, Loki was rather numb to the casualties of those he did not know. Could not afford to mourn each of the fallen or he would be swallowed by it like an avalanche.
“I don’t completely believe anything the government says.” Darcy quipped in.

“Our research grant comes from the university, not the government.” Jane added between a few sips of yet more coffee, “But no, we don’t think that is what happened. Our devices picked up an atmospheric anomaly from that time all the way from New Mexico. That’s why we’re here, trying to figure out the true cause.”

Well, that was rather inconvenient for Loki. Perhaps it was best that he cut off contact with these people as soon as possible. At the same time, he was so curious to know what they had found. If they could unravel the mystery, unaware that the answer was breaking their morning fast with them.

“It’s too early for science talk.” Darcy whined, getting a roll of the eyes from Jane, “There’s no such thing, Lewis.”

“There is when you’re around normal brained people, right Loki?” she asked bumping her shoulder against the prince to pull him into the conversation and hopefully her side.

“I think it would be fascinating to hear your theories.” Loki smiled as the dark-haired Alpha groaned louder. “However, I fear that I might not have the context or vocabulary to follow everything you say.”

“I could translate, but your English is very good.” Erik offered, in the end, they did not speak of the incident as Darcy changed the subject towards getting a phone for Loki. It was agreed that they would give Loki a lift to the hell that was the cellular mobile store. Darcy would take Loki in to help him, she continued to gush about Loki getting the newest model of StarkPhone. While Jane and Erik would remain in the van to keep running through the numbers of the data they had collected the night before. Tweaking the sensitivity of certain machines as they found that there was a possible second spike that happened at the same time as the one last night. It was just buried under the first and occurred further away from their location. A couple miles, not too far. They debated if the reason for it all centering around Malibu was because of possible fault lines within the city limits.

The scientists lifted their heads in confusion as after only half an hour Darcy returned to the van, her lips pursed.

“Uh, that was fast?” Erik asked, peeking past Darcy to see that Loki was nowhere to be found.

“Well, we couldn’t exactly get him a phone because Loki’s apparently bad at being in the 21st century.” Darcy’s words escaped her like a popped balloon as she threw her hands into the air, “It’s pretty fucking difficult to get a phone if you don’t have a credit card, passport, any form of identification, or a goddamn email!”

“Wha-?” Jane and Erik both started, but Darcy wasn’t close to being done. “He had a perfect excuse for everything, but if you really looked, you could see it in his eyes. He had no idea what we were talking about! Like not in a lost in translation kind of way, but truly zero previous experience on the resume kind of way.”

“That is… strange.” Jane admitted, but did they have the right to judge? Should they be jumping to conclusions? What conclusions were there even to jump to?

“So where is he now?” Erik asked still looking out from the door.

“He said he was going to walk back to the hotel, get some exercise. He told me to pass on the
message that it was,” Darcy lifted her fingers to give air quotes, “‘A pleasure to make our acquaintance’. Guy speaks like he’s from a Shakespearean play, at least it’s sexy instead of funny.”

The scanner screamed from the table, startling them all. Jane pounced on the computer, checking the coordinates before glancing to the door. “No way.”

Grabbing her own phone she punched in the coordinates into google maps slipping out of the van, watching the distance between her location and the destination quickly decrease as she walked. She turned down an alley two stores down from the mobile one. Once the area around her darkened with the shadows of the towering brick, she was standing on top of the origin point. There was nothing of note or out of place around her and with a frown she turned on her heel to return quickly to the van.

She called for Erik to take the wheel once she was sat before the computer, checking to see if there was a second buried signal. There was, but it was from clear across town and it would take half an hour to drive there. Curious she called out directions as Erik started off, Darcy settling herself in the passenger seat quickly.

When the tires stopped, they found themselves behind a run of the mill butcher shop. Confused when their search around the area came up with nothing and no new pings appeared, they decided to call it a day in terms of driving around the city and settled in an overpriced RV park. The fees were exuberant, but everything was in California. Jane felt like kissing Selvig when he managed to smooth over the costs of the rental in the university over the phone. It literally paid to have such a senior staff member on the team, as well as a quasi uncle figure.

It was three days before they got another hit from the scanners. The origin point near a strip of hotels along the beach and the second appearing near the public library. Again, nothing out of the ordinary was found, though it did set the confirmed trend that the blips always appeared in pairs and in two different locations. The distance between them though could vary greatly, sometimes it was the distance of a block, others it was from the center of Malibu to the edge of a nature reserve over thirty-five miles away.

After two weeks of continued observation from that point of reemergence, they noticed two other trends. By scientific law, if something happened in experiments and observation consistently, then the theory you develop around it can be considered confirmed and truth.

First, the location that had the most pings was around a certain beachfront hotel. Originating from just outside, behind, to somewhere inside the building. The anomalies always appeared near it. The second most common place was the library, though the frequency of its ping was continually dropping over the days.

The second regular occurrence: they more often than not found Loki nearby the pings.

The second time they crossed paths was again when the new pings began. Darcy had spotted him first, sitting just outside of the library, a Starkphone balanced on one knee and a book he was reading intently from perched on the other. Before she had gotten within calling distance, the man lifted his head to look in her direction. When she waved, he returned the action after a few seconds. Weird, obviously he had seen her but didn’t extend the greeting til she did. Was he just not sure if it was her?

While Erik and Jane did their thing, she chatted with Loki. Was told that it was simply a mistake in his paperwork and translation that he figured out on his own. He paid for her drink when they went into the cafe that existed in a corner of the library. Darcy took that opportunity to spy on his wallet,
now it held the typical things you’d expect to see. A few credit cards, what she guessed was a Norwegian driver’s license, coins, and oddly enough a huge stack of bills. She’d later note that whenever Loki paid for anything it was always in bills, not cards or coins.

The book he was reading was on astrophysics.

Darcy invited Loki to join them for lunch and pestered him for his phone number. He resisted at first, but when she took hold of his wrist to physically tug him back towards the van he melted. While Loki played at being aloof, he seemed to crave touch. His arms brushed against theirs, he touched them while they spoke at weird times, and always had this reluctant, pained look when he did let go or leave.

The others might not have noticed, but Darcy did.

In the past week, they had run into Loki multiple times while following the pings. It always ended with them inviting or forcing the young man out with them. He was smart, astoundingly so as he eagerly got pulled into debates between Erik and Jane about aspects of the cosmos along with other fields of science. He became Darcy’s sassy banter partner, eagerly listened to her explain social trends, politics, and people watching. She even managed to convince Loki into getting an Instagram.

Still, though he adapted quickly, there was something off about their new friend. The trio all agreed on this. With evidence piling and then lining up, they knew they had to do something, or the questions would eventually drive them insane.

Erik wished to debunk it all as happenstance, Malibu wasn’t that terribly big.

Jane wanted to to know that she wasn’t going crazy.

Darcy just wanted something proven or disproven so she didn’t have to listen to Jane and Erik’s constant back and forth on the subject. They’d move onto a new topic, but at least they’d be over this one. Also, she wanted to hang out with her new friend with whatever he was possibly hiding behind the curtain revealed.

So, under their agreement, Darcy messaged Loki to join them for dinner. They picked him up from his hotel for the first time. Jane biting her lip and sharing a glance with Erik when it was that hotel in particular. One and the same with where the highest source of the hits originated.

They picked up some pizza, Loki simply asking for the toppings to be meat after he was given options. Really, they knew he would barely touch any food they got. Loki never ate more than a few bites in their presence and he always played it off. He had already eaten, his stomach hurt, he was allergic to something. It was a mix of expected and concerning for them all.

They parked the van back at the RV park and dove into their food, the little team with obviously more gusto than their guest. While Erik and Jane fiddled with their devices, Darcy introduced Loki to Twitter. He seemed absolutely fascinated by the concept and little app.

“I mean, sorry if this is harsh, but you’re kind of failing at being a modern human.” Darcy finally blurted out.

“Well, you could say that I was sheltered.” Loki quipped back, grinning in a way that had them thinking they were missing the punchline. “I do believe I have a fantastic teacher now though.”

“Aww~ thanks, Shakespear.” Darcy teased, she had started a collection of nicknames for the mysterious young man.
“I was referring to Google.” Loki answered, prompting a shriek from Darcy as she smacked him with a pillow. The group descended into laughter, Loki delighting in the sound and humor. Darcy leaping on him came as a surprise, but he held himself back from falling into the roughhousing his brothers and he often fell into. Instead simply flipping them and landing the young Alpha onto the couch in a way that knocked the breath out of her. She gasped for a few seconds, before groaning about Loki being a cheater somehow.

Darcy never could stay mad at him for long, she often referred back to google herself and introduced him to the wonder that was memes. Loki loved the satire he found, the Midgardians’ sense of humor and sarcasm reflecting much of his own even if he was still missing much of the context associated with the pictures he came across.

“You said you were from Norway, right?” Jane asked while Darcy recovered, her question seemed innocent enough, but there was a tone to it that had Loki’s inner ear twitching. Doubt. He made a sound of confirmation nonetheless.

“So, what’s the name of the nearest city to Norway’s capital?” Erik asked and… just like that, Loki drew a blank, cursing himself as he hadn’t devoted himself to deeply researching the country he decided to claim as his own. Had only obtained a gloss-over of knowledge as he was much more interested in learning about how to blend in as a whole within the society he had landed himself in. The lies he had crafted for his supposed history left no excuse for such a lack of knowledge.

The mortals’ expressions changing as the seconds ticked by without Loki’s answer.

He could kill them; it would take only a little effort to do the deed but hiding the evidence would not be so easy. The Casket inside of him fluctuated from time to time and too large of a burst of magic would act as a beacon for Asgard to come hunt him down with a vengeance. This realm was the safest and most obscured from Heimdall’s gaze, to leave would be foolish.

Then there was also the fact that he had grown exuberantly fond of the trio, considered them as perhaps friends despite the secrets he kept.

So instead Loki ventured while leaning back against the couch, his curiosity winning over his caution. “Oh, very well then, you could say I’m from far further away than that.”

Jane let out a muted squeak at that, one hand patting against Erik’s shoulder like she needed something to physically ground her. Raising a brow, Loki asked while crossing one knee over the other, curious to know how many times he went wrong, “Humor this wandering soul. This Skywalker, how did you figure it out, then?”

“Did you just make a StarWar’s reference, did a maybe alien make a StarWar’s reference?” Darcy asked the room at large, getting shushed by Erik and receiving a baffled look from Loki, who muttered, “I don’t believe that stars have the sentience to fight each other? The dwarves are the only ones that have been able to harness and relatively control a star for their furnaces.”

“Space Gimli?” Darcy tried, her laughter taking a slightly hysterical tone. She hadn’t thought that Jane’s wild theory could be true. Kept waiting for Loki to laugh at their wild imaginations and assumptions.

It never came.

“Well we came to that conclusion because you’re, uh,” Erik was cut off as Jane stepped closer to Loki, she was brave certainly. Even though he relatively revealed little, facing the unknown was
still frightening to many a being. Loki had always admired the Beta for that, she had built her life chasing what had yet to be found.

“On Earth we have a saying: "you scratch my back, I scratch yours".”

“A favor for a favor, information for information,” Loki mused, lips quirked up as he extended one hand out to Jane. He lifted the glamor upon it, revealing black claws, azure skin that steamed in the warmth of the van, and the lighter, raised lines that swiped down each finger and circled the back of his palm. “I doubt you’d appreciate it if I actually scratched you.”

Jane’s eyes widened as she looked at the alien hand, reaching out hesitantly feeling the chill in the air that surrounded it.

“I do not wish to harm you or your companions, I have come to greatly enjoy the days in your company. I hope that you all feel the same.” He glanced around the van meeting the eyes of each mortal, he would miss them if he was rejected.

“I think you and I could come to an agreement.” Loki had watched them interact, been on the receiving end of their concern and care, and had learned so much from them already. Moreover, Loki was in need of allies that could teach him about this world. Breaking Asgard’s rule of no contact with the race made it all the more satisfying.

Her blue eyes met his, unwavering as she finally closed the distance between them, her warm hand gripping his frigid one as she agreed, “I believe we can, I have to ask though, what do you really go by?”

“Just continue to refer to me as Loki, I have other titles such as mage….” For now, Loki decided that he could… omit some of his titles. For the moment they were unimportant, probably. Still, he decided he might as well reveal what he was since he was certain he would be soon asked. He dropped the entirety of his glamor as he tacked on, “Jötunn.”

There was a loud thump as Erik fell to the floor.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the... four month long wait, lots of stuff happened and I was working on other fics. I really do want to get back into this fic and the next chapter should include Tony as we have things finally start to roll.

Thanks for waiting and being patient, if you could leave a comment, tell me your ideas for the future of this fic, or are just happy to see it updated, please do so~

It really makes my day to know the hard work of me and my beta is appreciated(this chapter became two when they didn't like the pacing so I ended up writing 13 more pages for character building stuff).
There was a loud thump as Erik’s body hit the floor.

“Well then... perhaps, it’s best we move him to the lounge,” Loki mused as he stood up. Not sure how the women would take to him touching the Beta with his new skin, he used a bit of magic to lift Erik from the floor and onto the worn cushions he had just vacated.

For a few moments the two mortal women gaped at him, reminding Loki that magic was not commonplace in this realm any longer. At least, not that Loki was aware of according to his research. Then Jane busied herself with gently slapping Erik’s face, trying to rouse the man from his apparent faint.

There was movement from the corner of his eye and Loki caught Darcy’s wrist to prevent her from reaching for his horns.

“Darcy, I believe you know better than to touch what doesn’t belong to you, though-” Loki cracked a smirk. It was perhaps a bit more off putting with the sight of his real teeth. “I suppose that hasn’t stopped you before.”

She only huffed in disappointment, but didn’t try to touch Loki again, instead she rubbed over the skin that the blue fingers had grasped once he released her. Most likely trying to get feeling back into it from the numbing cold. She looked absolutely fascinated though, peering closer as she mused, “Didn’t think six college credits would land me the chance to meet a-, what did you call yourself again?”

“A Jötunn from Jötunheimr.” Loki supplied.

“Gesundheit!” She answered with a grin, which made Loki all the more confused, unsure why Darcy had switched into another language saying what the Allspeak translated as meaning ‘Health!’.

“Darcy, that’s rude.” Jane muttered as she helped Erik sit back up, though he was still visibly pale and shaky as he stared at the creature in their presence. Never before had Jane seen her long time friend, teacher, and colleague act the way he was, “Erik, are you alright?”

“Oh right as rain, just dealing with the mental combustion that is our new friend here claiming that all of the childhood stories I grew up with are possibly real.” Erik answered, tone sharper and tense as he gazed at Lok.

The Jötunn drew himself straighter in response inquiring, “Now just what stories were those?”

“Of Asgard, the Nine Realms, the Norse gods, Odin, Thor, and the monsters they fought against.” The way the Beta said the word ‘monsters’ had Loki’s hackles rising. His red eyes glare back and ice started to crawl across the floor of the van from where his shoes touched.

Normally, Loki was very skilled in not letting his true emotions be seen. He would not have garnered the title ‘Silver Tongue’ if his expressions and body language were not harmonized with his words and the whispers he’d intone in the ears of royals, commoners, and different skillsmen in places of power across the Nine Realms. Loki had many masks that he could don. Unfortunately,
the casket inside of him refused to truly settle. The winter of his home creeping out at every
time, emotions providing a pathway as much as the branches of Yggdrasill were for Loki.

Loki’s voice was perfectly even, holding just an undertone of curiosity as he crossed one leg over
the other, “I assume that your ancestors were only familiar with the Æsir’s version of events,
relying on a single source for information is not the most accurate means of finding the truth. As a
scholar, wouldn’t you agree?”

“As a scholar… My sources all claim the Norse gods’ enemies were the Ice Giants, also called
Jotunar. Which I can safely assume is what you are.” Erik answered, tacking on as he looked
increasingly uncomfortable, “They were described as beasts, tricksters, dishonorable. They were
said to have invaded Midgard, Earth, thousands of years ago to conquer it for themselves by
freezing it solid.”

“First of all, I would ask that you never refer to me or my kind as ‘Frost Giants’ again. It is an
appalling slur to my race.” Loki cut in, he couldn’t help his lips peeling back in a snarl, revealing
his many sharp, pointed teeth.

“Second,” He moved his hands before him, grasping his magic tight and shaping it into images.
The van around them disappeared, replaced with visions of worlds that existed billions of lightyears
away, “the Æsir are not gods, merely proclaim themselves so and make those they deem lesser
regal them as such. To an Asgardian, everyone who isn’t of the Golden Realm is beneath them.”

Loki recalled the images his bearer had shown him when he was young and recreated them. The
golden halls and buildings swirled into existence under their feet, allowing the mortals to look
down upon the planetoid.

They gasped as they watched the Æsir go about their lives, dressed in finery, drinking, and stuffing
themselves. The picture of gluttony. They glanced upon the training grounds and on the Einherjar
warriors in their matching helmets, armor, and heavy weaponry marching the palace and streets. Of
the observatory connected by the rainbow road that held the controls for the bifrost and the
guardian who spied upon the other realms, “Suffice to say, Asgard has many enemies, my kin are
one of the remaining few whom simply refuse to kneel and grovel under their heel.”

The scene changed, instead showing Jötunheimr, showed first the grandeur of it hidden deep in the
icy underground, before driving the vision upwards. Up to the surface that was covered in
destruction, blood, and fighting between golden clad warriors and those of azure skin. The laughter
of the Æsir when they managed to cut down a foe so much larger than themselves.

The scent of blood washing over the humans so strongly that Jane and Erik gagged.

“Asgard is not a planet, but a planetoid. It does not have the resources to support itself, so instead
they conquer, tax, and rule the other realms to fatten themselves. Any opposition a call for war to
their ears.” Loki showed the scenes from battles he was in, of course not showing himself.

“You’re pretty tiny compared to the rest of them, I was kinda wondering on the gia-, ‘big people’
part,” Darcy noted her shoulders still raised like she was spoiling for a fight from the artificial
scents Loki’s show brought. Seeing the mortals’ discomfort and that the point was made, the
prince banished the smells of battle, faint as they were to the limited senses the humans had.

“The smaller the Jötunn, typically the more powerful in seiðr they are. I am the most powerful of
my people in many thousands of years.” Loki explained as he summoned a physical manifestation
of his power, green and constantly moving over the entirety of his body.
“Seiðr, it’s what we call magic.” Erik explained at the lost expressions of his companions and getting a nod of approval from Loki, he continued. “It was said in the Nine Realms, magic was appreciated differently everywhere. In Asgard it was seen as only a woman’s skill and dishonorable if used in battle or by men.”

“Wait, so that’s where your Instagram username comes from, ‘Seidrmenn’!” Darcy gaped and Erik grimaced as it was the first time he had heard this information.

“Indeed.” Loki grinned, “Though the Asgardians use the word as an insult, it simply means ‘a man whom uses Seiðr’.”

“I have a question,” Jane said while raising her hand, blushing as she lowered it quickly when she realized that she wasn’t in a lecture, though it had felt like it while listening to the two… men? “Your people, they all look to have around the same anatomical built externally. Sorry if this is rude, but why is that?”

“Knowledge for knowledge, I don’t take offense to your inquiry.” Loki actually let himself truly smile for the first time in days. It was nice, speaking with someone that craved information like him, “My people are of only one gender, but two dynamics. What you know as Betas and Omegas. Omegas have long been associated with being more skilled in Seiðr, hence they typically end up being smaller in size. While Betas often become warriors. However, all of us have some aptitude in the use of ice. An ancient survival tactic is to drop our temperature enough to inflict frostbite on our enemies.”

The scenes of battle shifted to those of daily life, of the Jötunn using and manipulating ice in everyday situations to aid them. Then eventually, Loki’s mind drifted back to the fate of his home and the scenes of battle returned without his conscious effort. He continued to explain, “Betas and Betas commonly become mates, Omegas with Betas as well. An Omega with another Omega is practically unheard of, we simply are not attracted to each other by nature.”

Remembering a few of his past encounters with mortals, he looked chagrin, “I have learned that it is not the case with you Midgardians.”

“Mid-what now?” Darcy asked, before Erik provided an explanation, “The Nine Realms: Niflheim, Muspelheim, Asgard, Midgard, Jotunheim, Vanahem, Alfheim, Svartalfheim, and Helheim. Midgardians would be the equivalent of earthlings.”

“Indeed,” Loki affirmed as he pulled them from the icy tundra, instead taking them into the cold darkness of space. Jane gasped as they appeared to be standing on nothing, threatening to plummet into the void under them. Her attention was stolen back to the impossible sight before them as Loki showed his version of universal understanding, “These are the Nine Realms, they are-”

“Those are spiral galaxies.” Jane interrupted, looking to her colleague in astrophysics for confirmation. Erik was slack jawed as he muttered, “Each of them, the realms, they’re an individual galaxy with their own moons, stars, and planets!”

“Very good and they are all connected by the branches of Yggdrasill, known as the World Tree.” Loki summoned forth a tree like figure to prove his point as the figure slowly spun before their eyes each galaxy in the branches turning on themselves at differing rates.

“They’re all orbiting each other, I-” Jane fumbled around her, trying to figure out where things were in the van in relation to herself if they hadn’t physically left it. Giving a small cry of victory when she pulled forth a small, overstuffed black journal that she thumbed through quickly. Erik, stunned as he was, shuffled to her side as she pointed at something upon the page, “My theory is
that Yggdr-, Ygddr-, the tree! It’s a cosmic nimbus that’s connecting them all together.”

She continued as Erik nodded in agreement, Darcy looked lost as her boss rambled on, “Which means there has to be a way for Asgard to police the other realms, right? They have to be able to get between them quickly if they are to enforce their control. Unless they have insanely fast spaceships, that opens the door for Einstein-Rosen bridges to be real, not just a theoretical concept!”

Jane’s breaths were quick as she took the pencil from behind her ear and started to jot down note after note and drafting diagrams of the star systems around them. Asking which galaxy held each realm and Erik confirming the mythos after Loki happily pointed them out and described the flora and fauna on each.

In return, Jane explained what her beloved theory was; Loki appeared enamored by the passion with which she spoke. Smiling out at the artificial, spectacular, view that no other mortals besides her small team had ever witnessed, she mused, “I always thought that, well, if there is an Einstein-Rosen bridge, then there’s something on the other side. And by extension advanced beings could have crossed it!”

“What you describe sounds similar to the Bifrost, it is even called the Rainbow Bridge for its color.” Loki produced a series of lines spiraling out of Asgard and to the different planets. The sound of the Bifrost, it was something that haunted Loki’s nightmares. He knew it only brought bloodshed with it, the terrible sound played into their ears each time the trails he made flashed.

His claws dug into his palms to ground himself, reminding himself this was all an illusion. Once he was steady, Loki continued under Darcy and Jane’s curious looks, Erik’s stare was more… blank. “It is a tool which is used by the Asgardians to move instantaneously between the Nine Realms. They are the only ones with the knowledge on how to use it, another way for them to keep the rest of the Nine in subjugation.”

“There are some races that have ships that can travel the vast harshness of space, but they do not have nearly the same speed. On the other hand, Odin the Allfather would have no quam sending hundreds upon hundreds of ships and warriors to a different realm and have them delivered within seconds.” Loki tried not to flinch each time the Bifrost sounded, but he could not help it, even knowing that this construct around them was his own creation.

Looking to the side he caught Darcy staring at him, but the young woman’s words surprised him, “That’s not fair.”

Loki blinked at the declaration, the Alpha continued, “It’s like…, kind of on the scale of only one country holding a nuclear bomb over the heads of all the other countries in the world. Either obey or get wiped out! There’s at least the nuclear arms pact here on Earth where we mostly agree not to blow each other up. To not have that security of duel destruction though…”

“Oh, I like you,” Loki grinned, the mortal smiled back and raised her hand towards him, showing her palm.

When the alien didn’t act the way she wanted him to, she used her other hand to grab his wrist and flatten his fingers, careful of his claws, before putting his hand against her’s in a short, light slap.

All the while she was shouting, “High-five!”

She then curled his cold fingers in a fist and with her hand in the same position, she knocked the knuckles together saying, “Fist-Bump! Humanity 101, lessons by Dr. Lewis. You’re welcome.”
“Not many speak openly against Asgard, it’s rather bold particularly since you are a mortal,” Loki explained as he examined his hand looking for any change after she gave him possession of his limb once more. The smile on his face wide and sharp, “Asgard is not opposed to genocide. The Dark Elves are almost completely extinct. I believe ninety percent of their small surviving population has put themselves into hibernation to escape from the reality of their existence on their ravaged planet.”

“Mortal, does that mean you’re im mortal?” Jane asked, side-eyeing him even as she continued to sketch the cosmos.

“I meant no offense, more that the term refers to how fragile your species is as a whole and the shortness of your life spans compared to the rest of the Nine’s inhabitants. I would be thought to be in my late teens or very early twenties if put in your terms of physical maturity, but I am around 800 of your years old.” Loki chuckled at the expressions the humans pulled before adding, “My Bearer and Shier were both just past their adolescent years by the time humanity was discovering fire.”

The thought of Farbuati struck him like a physical blow and the illusions around them splintered and then vanished. They were now stood in the van once more, not a hint of the vision that had turned their idea of reality on its head.

“My apologies,” Loki did not need to explain himself, didn’t plan to as he sucked his bottom lip worrying it between his teeth. A familiar tactic, a little pain to recenter himself and bury a different kind of pain underneath the surface. Then warmth, a hand on his arm that drew his gaze upwards. Jane, her concern open and true, “Are you alright?”

Were all humans so… earnest towards strangers when they had not known each other very long? Loki doubted it, most beings put their own survival above those of others. Yet a glance at Darcy and Erik showed they too were looking at him with worry. For Loki, not about what he could or would do.

“I’m sure you are curious as to why I am here, in your realm, to begin with.” Loki started, debating on what to share and what he should keep silent.

Oddly enough, he found himself wanting to bare it all. He was no fool, Loki was raised in the politics of the palace. Not just that of Jötunheimr, but in the halls of other royalty. Then within guilds, trading markets, and the common masses across different worlds. He was known as being a skilled weaver of words, would continue to be so, he could lie in a way that had all swearing it to be the truth even in their dying breaths.

The best lies were woven with threads of truth, this tapestry of words would have to be strong enough to hold Loki in high esteem in the trio’s eyes…. Or Loki would have to take a far more permanent form of action to protect himself.

“I had to leave my home or face a fate that I and many of my people believe to be worse than death,” Loki sat in one of the chairs, hands folded neatly in his lap when he noticed the slight shake in his fingers. The display only furthered his not quite ploy.

“Asgard and Jötunheimr have had strained relationships since their creations, falling into war easily and never truly at peace. Each time, my realm is stumped deeper into the ground when we do not cave. The most recent war began three hundred years ago. Asgard seemed to be desperate to bring us to heel once and for all.”
He locked eyes with those of Erik, the man had spoken of Asgard with reverence before. Knew that the man had been raised with stories worshipping and glorifying the Asgardians, “Asgard dabbles in taking slaves of various natures, especially if they are Omegas.”

He knew they understood his meaning by the looks of disgust they pulled, yet he continued, “Asgard is a society of mainly Alphas who are revered above all others for their strength and ability to spill blood on the battlefield. The only other dynamic they have are Omegas. The only role they hold is to be bedded and swollen with child, to serve their mates or depending on their class, any Alpha that demands it.”

“Barbaric.” Jane whispered.

“I garnered the attention of some particularly high ranking Aesir that wished to shackle and tame me as theirs.” It was not a lie, but not the whole truth, “My Bearer, he discovered the plan to take me. While I did not wish to leave, would rather have stayed and fought beside my kin… He convinced me to flee, though not before my Shier was killed by Asgard’s prince.”

“Thor, son of Odin the Allfather and Frigga the Allmother,” Erik whispered, surprising Loki. He supposed that he should not have been, more than likely Odin had brought his son to Midgard centuries ago.

They must have dazzled the Vikings, told so many tales of grandeur, performed different feats common to the abilities of the Aesir. It must have been wondrous, to be worshiped by the mortals who had no thought to question the perceived gods.

“The Thunderer, Wielder of Mjølnir,” Loki nodded, expression twisting into one of disgust as he remembered the feeling of the other’s searing tongue upon his skin and the promises he gave, “An arrogant, brutish oaf of an Alpha that laughs as loud as thunder when he crushes his enemies and uses the lightning he was born with an affinity for to cinder anything that stands in his way.”

Darcy tapped away on her phone, softly cursing under her breath for not recording the show that Loki had given them about the cosmos. Her eyes were wide as she turned the screen to them, showing off a drawing of a muscular man adorned with a beard and helmet with small wings upon its sides wielding a large hammer.

“Story checks out for Spaceman Viking asshole.”

Loki couldn’t help but snort, “I can assure you that he does not have red hair. His hair is golden in the same matter their realm is.”

“Wait, wait,” Jane cut in, “You said that only Asgard has access to the Bifrost, right? Then how did you get to Earth?”

“I said before that I am a Skywalker.” Loki reminded, before pulling up a smaller illusion that sat between his now extended hands.

A tiny version of himself appeared leaping through little portals and reappearing on the opposite hand. Each time the figure appeared it would look around itself before changing its features to that of a different race, yet still looking similar enough to himself.

“With my skill in seiðr, I learned how to access the hidden pathways that exist between each of the realms, Portals, short-cuts, secret passages between the fabric of reality, they have many names.” Darcy leaned in with her phone, recording as Loki continued unperturbed.

“In essence, I can walk the branches of Yggdrasill to reach a different world almost as effectively
as the Bifrost. I am limited on the number of people I can bring through and where I might land. It’s a rare trait, but it’s gotten me out of many a tricky situation.” he curled his fingers into his palms dissipating the illusions.

“That means, yes, that makes sense with the readings we have,” Jane muttered as she walked over to one of the devices on the small counter that was beginning to print a long scroll of paper with markings in various colors.

Loki and the rest of the group was curious about them, but remained silent as the Beta ripped the paper free and placed it on the narrow strip of floor between the couch Erik laid and the chair Loki sat on.

“You’re a walking Einstein-Rosen Bridge! Maybe it’s something in your molecular makeup or perhaps there is a special alignment in your sed- magic that is uncannily similar to the structure of the Bifrost.” Jane rambled, starting to shorthand notes across the strip of paper.

“My seiðr, is possibly like that of an ancient construct’s?” Loki echoed, fascinating, truly the idea had never crossed his mind. Why were Skywalkers so rare? They were not limited to a single species, Amora the Enchantress, a few elves, and others particularly gifted with magic had the ability. Was there something that made them different from other mages?

“We could come up with some tests, li-”

Jane was cut off as Selvig cleared his throat, all three turned to him and instantly Loki felt his stomach sink.

Loki silently admonished himself, he was foolish to think that it would be so simple. The man grew up with tales of the glories of Asgard, knew better than to trust a predator and one of the villains.

“Loki, would you, uh, give us a moment alone?” The man continued, not quelling under the glares that Jane and Darcy were leveling on him.

“Of course.” the prince answered, not allowing his voice to waver or his expression to falter as he stood up from the chair. Loki wrapped himself in his glamor and false skin once more. Felt the air in the van become warmer, more stifling as he suppressed just a bit of his chill. That was why his chest felt tight, nothing more.

Gracefully, he stepped over the paper along the carpet and towards the door. Darcy stood the closest to it and, against his better judgement, Loki allowed her to catch his wrist in her hand. Still she did not flinch from touching his skin after all he had shown them, it was truly a wonder.

Her green eyes were imploring, unflinching as they met his own, “Don’t run off, Snape… Please. Just give us a bit?”

How did these mortals come to have such sway over him in their short time together? Loki felt his shoulders sag, something his bearer would have teased and lightly scolded him for. Now, he cared not a wit for princely decorum as he turned his hand so he could run a thumb over the Alpha’s wrist in a hopefully calming gesture, “If you wish to banish me from your delightful company, you’ll have to try much harder than that.”

“Promise, Loki?” She asked, well it still came out as more of a demand, but that was who he had learned Darcy was.

“Unless you specifically tell me to part ways. I will not. I have grown… fond of you all,” He assured, the words felt heavy on his tongue. While these humans could give him knowledge, they
had little means to protect themselves. A liability, the warrior and tactician in his mind whispered.

He imagined burying the thoughts in an avalanche before turning the handle of the door and stepping out into the night.

When it closed behind him, Loki was tempted to break his promise and cut his losses as they were. To teleport far from Malibu and never come back. They had revealed a little on how they were able to track him, with far enough jumps the trio would never be able to catch up to him, crossing land, sea, and continents whenever he thought they were drawing close.

Instead, a sigh escaped him as he moved to sit on one of the flimsy white plastic chairs that sat beside a table used to eat outdoors just a few feet from the van. While his shapeshifting had changed the design of his ears, it did not affect his far superior ability to hear.

Gazing up at the still unfamiliar star system above, the prince listened to the conversation happening inside of the vehicle. Needed to know if they were now a threat to him, though he hoped the opposite.

“How could you push Loki out like that!” Darcy hissed, didn’t shriek, her anger quick to surface once the door closed behind the Jo-Yo-, Loki.

“I asked him.” the older man countered before rubbing his hands down his face. It was terrifying, disturbing, what they had just been shown; yet Darcy and Jane were relatively unflustered by the reveal. “You two don’t have the context that I do, I grew up with stories about the Nine Realms and Norse mythology. To find out that it’s real. It’s-”

“Not all of it.” Jane butted in, “You just saw what Loki’s people and Asgard are truly like.”

“How do we know he’s not lying, how do we know anything about that magic show is true?!” Erik demanded, “I grew up with the belief that the Jötunn were the boogeyman and would devour misbehaving children! The Æsir were the gods I was taught to respect even if I only thought them to be fairytales as I grew older.”

“Does Loki seem like a monster to you?!” Darcy snapped back, “You know how racist that sounds? He’s still our friend, it doesn’t matter what he looks like. Well, biologically and internally he’s probably very different than us, but externally he’s just got a different paint job and uh, extra pointy bits.”

Jane jumped in next, “This reveal doesn’t change the time we’ve all spent together, even if Loki was omitting some very important details. Besides, Erik, you were the one always pushing me to chase down every lead, every possibility, every alternative. Loki practically embodies that.” She loved the man like an uncle and she had never seen him so shaken before in her life.

Even so, she couldn’t let this opportunity slip through their fingers.

“I was talking about science, not magic.” he grumbled back.

“Well ‘magic’s just science that we don’t understand yet’, Arthur C. Clarke,” Jane quoted.

“Who wrote science fiction,” Erik reminded as Dracy’s eyes bounced between the two battling intelects like she was watching a tennis match.

“And a precursor to scientific fact!” the younger astrophysicist struck back.

“In some cases, yes.” Erik admitted, it was a break in his walls that he knew Jane would leap on.
“If there is an Einstein-Rosen Bridge then there’s something on the other side and advanced beings could have crossed it or even learned how to control it.” Jane continued to argue.

Erik looked exhausted as Darcy added while taking off her glasses, “After what we just saw, I think I can see how a primitive culture like the Vikings might have worshipped them like deities or feared them.”

“Yes, exactly, thank you.” Jane smiled at her intern before they both looked back at the male Beta. “Erik it was scientific theory that led us to Loki over and over again, he then proved our hypothesis correct.”

“If he is to be believed.” Erik muttered, under the twin glares he sighed, “If he’s telling the truth, then I feel sorry for him. Ending up in a different place, literally a different planet, galaxy. Running away from becoming less than a slave and losing his family. So far I like Loki, he’s a good kid and a smart cookie. I also don’t remember his name from any of the legends. I just don’t want either of you two to get hurt.”

A beat passed before he tacked on, “I don’t want him to get hurt either, but we’re just humans.”

“Huh?” Darcy asked, Jane’s expression echoing the sentiment which made Erik sigh.

“You are so focused on the big picture out in space you’re forgetting what it means to be here on Earth. Loki’s existence, if anyone here or out there finds out about him, he could be in danger.” Erik stressed before pointing at the machines scattered across the table, “We might be a liability for him.”

“I doubt that anything on our rock could be that big of a threat or contain him if he can just poof away.” Darcy pointed out, making a poofing gesture with her hands.

“Listen, just because you don’t know about any dangers, doesn’t mean they aren’t out there.” The older man warned, before finally sighing. “What we just learned, there are forces out there that don’t want us to know it. We can’t publish or share this knowledge either without putting ourselves or Loki at risk.”

Jane’s shoulders fell as she realized the truth in her colleague’s words. This incredible scientific discovery that could make her career and finally stop her from being the laughingstock of the astrophysics’ community… she couldn’t share it. It was not worth the risk to themselves and their friend. Maybe one day, but for now it was a secret that had to be kept.

“Wow, I mean there are probably hundreds of conspiracy theories about gods actually being aliens. Who would have thunk that they were real.” Darcy mumbled as she tapped at her phone, deleting the pictures and video she had just taken with a pained expression. She would have to be sure to purge from the cloud on her laptop as well since it was synced to her phone.

Jane sighed as she nodded, speaking as she met eyes with Erik, “Alright, we won’t publish anything. That doesn’t mean that we still can’t learn from him or help him. Loki’s in a new world, he needs friends and guides so a slip up like this won’t happen again with people who will want to lock him up in Area 51. Everyone agreed?”

Darcy was already bobbing her head and both women focused on Erik who, eventually, nodded as well as he reminded sternly, “Remember, we have to protect him and ourselves. History has shown that humanity isn’t the most friendly towards different races, even our own.”

“Noted. So, now that that’s settled.” Darcy declared as she moved to the door of the van, calling
out as she swung it open, “Loki, you’re off trial, come on back in.”

As he stepped back inside, Loki bowed his head. He had been able to hear every word that had been said through his advanced hearing. Internally, Loki found himself honestly humbled by the concern and regard that all three seemed to have come to hold for him within the short time that they had known him. He did not blame the man for being wary, Erik was in the position of protector and was raised on lies about whom Loki and his people were.

Given that context, Loki was shocked that Erik was still allowing him in their presence, let alone caring for Loki’s wellbeing.

“My friends.” Loki said softly, surprised at his own sentiment.

“Oh don’t go mushy or slushy on us now,” Darcy teased, lightly pushing the alien back into his seat.

Just like that, it was like nothing had changed between them at all, even if their conversations now extended to new universal understanding, magic, and Midgardia- Earthling explanations, expressions, knowledge and inventions.

The last few weeks had been absolute hell for Tony Stark. He’d made little to no… Okay, honestly, he had made zero, zip, zilch, nada, hell, not even zero but into the negatives in progress with the ice samples and researching the strange symbol he had found in the alley. Jarvis was still conducting cross references for the doodle, but had yet to find something similar in anything recent and was starting to delve into past records.

The rest of the world wasn’t exactly giving Tony a break either. The government was breathing down his neck for answers about the strange power outage, while also ticking him off with that farce of a trial. It was such a poorly veiled threat and grab for Tony’s technology by the military and government that it made his blood boil and heart rate soar. He’d probably lost a few more days off of his limited supply of “days left to bless the world with his presence” from that time spent in the courtroom.

Idiots and jackoffs, all of them, they had the gall to assume that Tony didn’t know about the other countries’ attempts to replicate Iron Man.

Of course, he knew, none of them had succeeded and none would. Not without JARVIS’ interface and a genius intellect like Tony’s to react to and control the beyond numerous parts at once. If some random smuck got into his suit, they wouldn’t even make it off the ground. Not just because of all the security protocols he had installed, but the thief would most likely have a seizure from sensory overload with all of the information, lights, and images that constantly flashed upon the hud.

Iron Man wasn’t a weapon, Tony didn’t make those anymore. He wasn’t going to let his technology take more innocent lives that got caught in the crossfire from any side. Being called un-American was hardly the worst that he’d been called in his life. Merchant of Death was a title that Tony was trying to shelve like the Christmas decorations that hadn’t seen the light of day since his parents’ had died in that damn car crash.

Then there was Rhodey being stuck right in the middle of things. Divided between his loyalty, logic, and devotion to his country. It wasn’t a fair position to put his friend in, but Tony refused to be moved. Doubting now if he really should tell the soldier about the suit that he had made for
him. If it was just going to be desecrated and torn apart in an attempt to copy it, then Tony should turn it to scrap himself.

He didn’t though, the black and grey suit continued to sit in its case untouched.

The taste in his mouth when he thought about what to possibly do about his possessions and inventions in the case he was… gone, was worse than the constant aftertaste of what Tony only described as ‘death’ from the palladium that was running through his bloodstream.

JARVIS’ and his own attention was stretched thin, but the strange pings of energy spikes throughout the city didn’t go unnoticed. Being on the radar of so many looking for a window of opportunity or weakness as he was though, Tony couldn’t go out himself to investigate each blip.

The public was always looking for a celebrity, him showing up in person just spelled trouble. It would kick up a media frenzy if just one person got a photo of him and could tempt the authorities to hound him to reveal what the inventor was up to. More pressing was the possibility that the person or thing Tony was trying to track down would get tipped off too.

Instead, Tony had been sending Happy out to investigate the locations of the pings. The bodyguard never found anything of interest though and Tony watched through the other’s StarkPhone to search for any tidbit as well. Never did and Tony was frustrated that his current morals and need to stay under the radar were keeping him from completely hacking into every security and video system in the city… Probably wouldn’t stay that way for much longer though if he still couldn’t find something after today’s plans.

That trial was biting Tony in the ass different ways more than any one night stand. It had resulted in a fall in Stark Industries reputation, even if it was relatively slight. Which had Pepper on his back and he knew he was putting off the inevitable by claiming he was on an inventing binge. Eventually, Pepper would get into his lab and hell hath no fury like a red head who’d been sent to voicemail over ten times. He needed to keep her in the dark about his… ya know, dying thing. At least for now, or forever, yeah.

That wasn’t the problem that Tony wanted to focus on now though as he stood beside Happy in front of a large, sleek, SUV on the landing strip of the airport. Waiting for a certain jet to touch down. After exhausting a majority of obvious avenues on his own, he decided to reach out to the only person that could check off another possibility on Tony’s rapidly shortening list of what could have caused the massive blackout and visit from Frosty the Snowman.

The jet was almost silent as it descended from the cloud cover, the black aircraft touching down on the tarmac with hardly a bounce. The sight made Tony proud, he had, after all, designed it himself. As the ramp opened, the billionaire stepped forward to greet his guest as he was wheeled down to the runway.

“Charles! How’s my favorite egghead doing?”

Chapter End Notes

So, this is not quite an apology, but it is an explanation. To those that have subscribed to me as an author, I feel that I owe them an update as to why I have not updated in a while. I know a lot of you have been worried about me. With the virus outbreak I had to make the difficult decision to return to the USA from
my job in Japan. I was supposed to end my contract in late summer, but worried if I would be able to get out of the country if I waited any longer. So after living in Japan for 4 years, I left. I had to uproot my life in 10 days and then quarantine for 2 weeks once I returned home to my parents' house. I am fine, safe and healthy. Things have finally settled enough for me (it's been just over 2 months since I returned) to somewhat get a handle on things.

I am posting another fic, Into the Unknown, that is a FrostIron meets Frozen 2 AU that IS FINISHED so it will be updated every few days or so. It will be close to 15-20 chapters probably, with the word count being near 72,000 words. (4 chapters up already)

I now have time and hopefully have the motivation to work on my 3 ongoing fics: Only in the Dark, Stars Shine, Frozen Heart, and (eventually) Lineage of Frost and Magic.

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed the first chapter of this fic.

It would certainly make my day if you left a comment to know you still love this fic despite the long wait...

I'd love to hear your thoughts, what you think might happen!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!